

Chapter 6

Features of Best Practice from Country Examples

Although no single model of recognition is universally transferrable, successful aspects of different systems can be usefully transmitted between countries. This chapter illustrates where this can occur, describing experiences ranging from countries with established practices of recognition to those which are still in the process of establishing systems of recognition.

This section spans the fields of standards and methods of assessment, the delivery of recognition practices, and quality assurance. The first field of enquiry highlights a variety of standards and methods used in different sectors (education and training sectors, employment and enterprise sectors, non-governmental organisations and community-based learning voluntary sectors, etc.) within the countries examined in this study. Consideration is also given to how assessment methods meet the given standards and the type of learning outcomes and competences used by countries as reference points for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The second field of inquiry concerns the delivery of recognition, particularly the role of education and training providers in recognition, as well as the professional development of trainers, assessors, advisors and counsellors. Finally, consideration is also given to the theme of quality assurance – an issue which cuts across all of the previous topics. Here, we examine the arrangements put in place by countries to support the recognition of non-formal and informal learning by way of developing policy guidelines, quality criteria, coordinating delivery, and strengthening the credibility of the recognition process. Quality is greatly influenced by how terms are defined and who sets the criteria by which each term is understood. Often those who create the policies also set the definitions and create the assessment standards (Werquin 2012). Moreover, there is a difference between standards set by stakeholders in the education sector and those in industry, and often, adult learners are not taken into account in decisions about assessment standards (Smith and Clayton 2011). There are also questions of who is given the authority to determine quality. This section deals with some of these issues.

6.1 Developed Countries

6.1.1 *New Zealand*

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) originates in the 1980s and is very much dominated by the NQF discourse. In New Zealand, RPL is also known as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL and credit transfer).

Scope of RVA

In New Zealand, RPL takes into account formal, non-formal and informal learning. In the case of informal learning, recognition of existing competences may lead to an increased willingness among employees to take part in workplace training or learning. Depending on the workplace or education environment, the RPL procedure may be determined by the entry requirements of the provider or, in the case of the validation of employment skills, by employers. In all cases, a clear rationale for RPL is necessary. For example, when the qualification requirements for early childhood education teachers changed, teachers without tertiary qualifications were able to be assessed for competences gained in their role as a teacher. Assessment is generally conducted at the admissions stage. Constraints arise from the cost of RPL activities, which are met by the individual and the respective (tertiary) education organisation, and which vary according to the level of assessment required.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

In New Zealand, learning outcome statements reflecting the standards of qualifications dominate the discourse on the recognition of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning. Learning outcomes approaches provide the basis for the final assessment, regardless of whether the learning outcomes result from formal, non-formal or informal learning.

An outcomes-based framework allows for flexibility in learning pathways, and supports the portability of qualifications across education and employment jurisdictions. Each outcome statement must include information on the expected learning outcomes of a qualification, or identify other potential qualifications following completion of a given qualification. Where qualifications are standalone, and do not prepare graduates for further study, the outcome statement must clarify this. Finally, outcome statements must specify areas in which a graduate may be qualified to work, or the contributions possible to their community (Keller 2013). In New Zealand no differentiation is made between RPL and assessment against the designated learning outcomes or standards which make up qualifications.

There are a number of approaches to assessing workplace learning and/or competences. These range from ongoing assessment towards qualification for entry level learners, to a process of Recognition of Current Competence (RCC), usually

across a range of qualifications accounting for experience and performance history in the workplace. Experience may be supported by formal off-job training. The latter is focused on actual performance/competence in a role or function in relation to specified standards or learning outcomes (Bowen-Clewley et al. 2012; Competency International 2011).

Some learners are assessed on the basis of attested prior performance, for example using evidence from previous jobs. Others are assessed on the basis of a portfolio of evidence or by challenge assessment without completing a programme of learning.

Validation in both the labour market and the education system occurs through expert facilitators following a process of profiling, facilitation and assessment. Recognition is carried out by: interviewing potential candidates to find out the qualifications, or parts of qualifications, that best reflect personal comprehension; taking a holistic approach to a candidate's understandings, ensuring they are explored and expressed; valuing the insights that each learner brings; and providing expert facilitation to extract the candidate's learning, and to enable them to understand the level of presentation they need to achieve. During the profiling procedure, each candidate is interviewed about their experiences, understandings and goals. This is to ensure that the candidate is suitable for the RPL process and to help the candidate select the qualification or part of a qualification that best reflects their learning from experience. Facilitation refers to the support provided to candidates in preparation for their assessment.

Delivery of RVA

Expert facilitators enable each candidate to express their understandings appropriately and to understand the requirements of the qualification. The facilitators take a holistic approach to ensure that all of a candidate's understandings are valued, explored and expressed. Facilitation can be at a distance or face-to-face, on an individual basis or including group work. Expert facilitators are used to measure and validate informal learning against outcomes of qualifications listed on the NZQF and learning outcomes of standards on the *Directory of Assessment Standards*.

The form of assessment will vary depending upon the qualification sought. If the qualification is at level 5 of the NZQF, the assessment will be conducted by a panel of two or three expert assessors. In the case of level 6 or 7 (degree level) qualifications, a larger panel comprised of both academic staff and outside experts will be convened.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance occurs within the assessment phase leading to a recognised qualification. Qualification developers must meet NZQA's listing requirements, which comprise six components: qualification definition; qualification type and level; outcome statement; credit value; subject area classification; and qualification status.

The Credit Recognition and Transfer Policy (New Zealand Qualifications Authority 2002), which is used by tertiary education organisations, recommends that education providers have their own administrative and practical arrangements in place for RPL/APL. This policy relates to individual learners, employing organisations, industry and professional bodies, and educational organisations, including a number of institutes of technology and polytechnics in New Zealand which have been designated Centres for Assessment of Prior Learning. This policy states as a key outcome that “credit will be granted for recorded success, whether or not it forms part or all of a complete qualification”.

The following overarching and operational principles apply across the education sectors in consideration of RPL and credit transfer:

- The qualification, course, and programme development and design should promote and facilitate credit recognition and transfer.
- The key focus of credit transfer decisions should be on the benefit for learners and supporting effective learning pathways.
- Transparency in credit recognition and transfer decision-making across the education system is a critical factor for supporting and encouraging the on-going involvement of learners in education and training.
- The credit transfer and recognition should be able to operate across different cultures and national borders, and robust policies and procedures must be implemented to support this.
- The credit award as a result of either RPL or recognition of current competency is of equal standing to credit awarded through other forms of assessment and should be transferrable once awarded.

Both the industry and education sectors follow the same governing policy for recognition (Keller 2013).

The NZQF and the NZQA have not been without criticism in New Zealand. While its introduction into the TVET sector has been mostly accepted, RPL has faced resistance from schools and especially within the higher education sectors (Govers 2010).

6.1.2 Australia

The focus on recognition in the Australian context is on the VET sector rather than on the higher education sector. In Australia, VET is the overarching term for technical and further education colleges, private colleges and community-based provision.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

As in New Zealand, qualifications can be awarded directly through assessments against the unit standard, and can take place in the workplace, provided they are conducted by qualified assessors and are supported by relevant evidence.

While RPL continues to be a part of assessment against all accredited qualifications, it now also includes assessment that is oriented towards credit processes along with credit transfer and programme articulation arrangements (Cameron 2011).

RPL in Australia normally comprises five identifiable elements:

- the provision of information and support to individuals who may seek to have an RPL assessment, and the planning and development of RPL processes and practices, including determining assessment strategies and evidence requirements;
- interpreting and understanding units of competence and determining quality assurance mechanisms and feedback arrangements;
- identifying and assessing background, experiences, learning, skills and competences, and the quality and reliability of the evidence provided;
- review and appeal mechanisms; and
- certification of recognised competences (Australia. DEEWR 2008).

E-portfolios to support RPL have been found to be useful in diverse contexts, such as recognising the business and administration skills of rural women and supporting assessment in fabrication and welding, with a strong focus on photo and image evidence. Boyle (2008) carried out research into the use of e-portfolios for skills recognition with indigenous arts workers using *Skillsbook* to upload MP3 files, videos, photos and a range of text documents. Eagles et al. (2005) suggest that indigenous learners transfer knowledge more easily through oral processes such as storytelling, speech, song and dance. In higher education, e-portfolios are used to capture and present professional standards, graduate attributes and students' reflective skills. Perry (2009) and Boyle (2008) have highlighted the increase in the use of e-portfolios for gaining recognition or credit towards a formal VET qualification.

These authors also note that these forms of RPL are more effective after enrolment than the “traditional methodology of RPL assessment conducted up-front and prior to training” (Bowman et al. 2003, p. 47). Cameron (2011) makes a distinction between “up-front” enrolment-recorded RPL and RPL that occurs through forms of early progression, accelerated learning, or challenge testing after enrolment (Bowman et al. 2003; Bateman 2006; Hargreaves 2006).

Delivery of RVA

As in New Zealand, qualifications can be awarded directly through assessments against the unit standard, and can take place in the workplace, provided they are conducted by qualified assessors and are supported by evidence for assessment purposes. There are however concerns about the credibility of some industry-based assessors' capacity to make valid judgements about the attainment of learning outcomes. Self-reflection, including reflections in group settings is seen by adult learners to be a powerful process for identifying and validating learning outcomes (Smith and Clayton 2011, pp. 457–458).

Work-based action research in Australia (Mitchell and Gronold 2009) reports on a project designed to help assessors see their own strengths as advanced practitioners (particularly in their case studies) rather than focus on personal deficits.

Quality Assurance

Australia has a strong focus on the reliability and transparency of its processes. It is able to ensure this by establishing a national framework for the recognition of competences, delegating the oversight mechanisms to the states and territories and giving the responsibility for accreditation and certification to registered agencies. This diverse system highlights the strengths of a well-established government role in managing and overseeing the stakeholders' participation in recognition.

In Australia, the Australian Qualifications Framework has adopted the National Policy and Guidelines on Credit Arrangements adopted by the government in 2009 (Australian Qualifications Framework Council (AQFC) 2013). In Australia, RPL policy development has been a dynamic process. There is a tendency towards summative assessment and credit processes within VET and higher education sectors (Cameron 2011). However, developmental approaches continue to exist in small pockets of activity, particularly in relation to indigenous Australians.

Taking into account the insights and perspectives of adults is a critically important process for the quality of the validation of learning outcomes in the vocational education sector. Smith and Clayton (2011) note that adults are concerned that current processes for validating learning outcomes address quantity rather than quality of the evidence collected. The extensive use of written tests and examinations disadvantages learners with inadequate literacy skills and second language speakers, who are excluded by the structure of assessment processes. Moreover, adult learners are concerned about the inconsistent assessment standards and processes across providers. Ultimately, competency-based standards are not regarded as better than the grade system because the former does not promote a motivation for achieving excellence.

6.1.3 Republic of Korea

The Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS) was established in 1998. The Korean approach to RVA is heavily oriented towards academic qualifications, and is embedded in education and training. It represents a 'provider model' of RVA and relies on the accumulation of credits through a variety of educational provider types, both public and private. ACBS comprises formal, non-formal and informal elements.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

The ACBS documents and recognises outcomes from various non-formal learning activities by granting credits and conferring degrees when certain numbers of credits are accumulated. At the moment, six sources of credits are recognised by the ACBS:

- Credits from traditional higher education institutions.
- Credits from non-formal education and training institutions accredited by the ACBS division of the National Institute of Lifelong Education (NILE).
- Credits recognised for “Accredited important intangible cultural properties” curriculum. ACBS accredits master craftsmen and their apprentices engaged in artistic activities regarded as traditional and cultural heritage.
- Credits from part-time courses in traditional higher education institutions.
- Credits recognised for vocational qualifications by the ACBS (above the level of industrial technician)
- Credits transferred from the Bachelor’s Degree Examination for Self-Education (BDES) under the Law of Bachelor’s Degree. It is possible to obtain a bachelor’s degree without attending a regular college or university by passing the examination operated by NILE. There are four exams for obtaining a bachelor’s degree, all held once a year.

The ACBS is a summative process that includes *counselling, documentary evidence and degree conferment* (NILE 2013). Learners obtain assistance from advisors in each educational institution, or through the ACBS counselling teams, who help in planning the course, assigning the appropriate subject, or choosing the most appropriate forms of assessment. Individuals who have accumulated diverse learning experiences in informal or non-formal learning settings have to submit documentary evidence to obtain credits. The type of document varies according to the type of institution conferring the degree (Baik 2013). The degree conferred through the ACBS is equivalent to a bachelor’s or associate degree under the Higher Education Act, and is conferred by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, or the president of the university or college. There is no legal discrimination between university graduates and ACBS degree holders. There are however some concerns expressed about the quality of education in the ACBS and differences in social prestige.

In addition to the ACBS, the Republic of Korea has an e-portfolio and curriculum vitae called the Lifelong Learning Account System (LLAS), containing an individual’s lifelong learning activities. Individuals’ diverse learning experiences are accumulated and managed within an online learning account. Unlike the ACBS, the learning results include not only those attained at the higher education levels, but also various other kinds of learning experiences that can be used as educational credits towards degrees or skills qualifications. The LLAS is like a savings account for lifelong education. Individuals can set up their own account, deposit different lifelong learning experiences, and plan ahead about how to “invest” their learning experiences in moving up the career ladder. The LLAS incorporates information from both the academic qualifications system and the vocational qualifications

system. *Learning records* can be used to review learning activities, check fields previously studied, and plan further. Learning records can be used to obtain a primary school certificate, exemption from secondary school courses, and for public and private employment purposes.

Quality Assurance

To maintain and control the quality of the ACBS, the Korean government's approach relies upon the quality of accreditation of various types of non-formal education institutions (Republic of Korea. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2008). Accreditation determines whether the quality of their programmes and courses is equivalent to those of universities or colleges. Accreditation criteria include the requirement that instructors hold at least the same qualifications as a full-time professor at a junior college; classroom environments and equipment must be adequate for teaching and learning; and programmes must comply with the standardised curriculum and syllabus for each subject.

The Korean government, together with the National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE) and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, evaluates curricula provided by all non-formal education institutions twice annually, as well as the credits earned, learning experiences and activities of individuals.

The accreditation of non-credit courses within so-called Lifelong Learning Centres is undertaken by NILE. Lifelong Learning Centres have a wider scope than the degree-centred ACBS. They are considered to be better equipped to take account of informal learning and establish a lifelong learning career management system assessing the results of non-formal and informal learning from accredited institutions (Republic of Korea. NILE/Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 2011). There is a well-defined procedure of assessment-accreditation (Baik 2013).

6.1.4 Japan

Japan's system of recognition comprises three parts, which relate to higher education, social education and work-related learning opportunities.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

The national high school equivalency examination is a certification system under the School Education Act of 2007 to enable people who have learnt mostly in informal or non-formal settings and who have not graduated from high school to access a higher education institution such as a university, specialised training college, or vocational school. This programme is directed at persons aged 16 years and older, including young unemployed school leavers, older workers, and women who have left their jobs to concentrate on child-rearing or due to illness.

In addition to the above recognition system allowing access to higher education, Japan utilises and recognises learning achievements of adults in the context of volunteer work. The Social Education Act of 1949 (amended in 2006) clearly sets out that government should utilise adults' learning achievements for adult volunteer activities. More broadly, as the 2006 amendment states, "society shall be made to allow all citizens to continue to learn throughout their lives and to apply all the outcomes of lifelong learning appropriately to refine themselves and lead a fulfilling life" (Japan. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) 2008, p. 3). In some cases, a certificate is issued by a third party agency to acknowledge knowledge, skills and competences gained through volunteer service. Practical learning activities that encompass volunteer work play a major role in promoting community development in Japan.

In the context of non-formal learning and vocational training in the workplace, Japan has introduced proficiency tests for the certification of vocational skills. These tests and standards serve as a mechanism to measure vocational knowledge and skills gained by workers.

Professional organisations and companies are expected to take advantage of the certification system in the coming years to assess the level of vocational capabilities and award qualifications. Many adult education activities are also increasingly valued by private-sector companies (Japan. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) 2008).

A portfolio system called the Job Card System was established in April 2007 to enable people with limited opportunities for vocational skills development, such as women or single mothers finished raising their children, to enhance their capabilities and find stable jobs. Clients are initially made aware of employment opportunities and are then guided in identifying appropriate areas of activity through career counselling. This is followed by practical job training that combines workplace practice and classroom lectures. The evaluation of this training and work experience is noted on their cards for use in their search for employment.

6.1.5 United States of America

Referred to in the USA as Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), RVA is located almost exclusively within the higher education sector, and is used not for access, but to assign academic credit towards a degree for learners who have been admitted through other means. Over the last 40 years, PLA has been applied for adult learners, and PLA opportunities for students have increased (Bamford-Rees 2008). Leading organisations include the American Council on Education (ACE) and community college boards (the latter are non-profit associations of colleges). Key partners in this area include the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), employers, labour organisations and regional accreditation commissions. US institutions primarily target adult learners returning to school and employed, unemployed and under-employed workers.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

In the USA, there are formalised and less formalised methods of assessing non-formal and informal learning.

Formal, standardised means of evaluating non-formal and informal learning include tests that are designed to measure the general academic skills and knowledge normally acquired through a 4-year programme of high school. Nearly 15 % of all high school diplomas issued each year in the USA are acquired through this testing process. These tests were designed in 1945, when ACE, through its Office on Educational Credit and Credentials, developed the high school equivalency General Education Development (GED) Programme, and, through its Commission on Accreditation of Service Experiences, began evaluating military experience for college learning (American Council on Education (ACE) 1981). For decades, colleges and universities have trusted ACE to provide reliable course equivalency information to facilitate credit award decisions. Participating organisations include corporations, professional and volunteer associations, schools, training suppliers, labour unions and government agencies, assessing courses from Arabic to Waste Management.

ACE also operates a Credit by Examination Programme that compares and evaluates the results of examinations used for granting professional licences and certificates to assess whether the results reflect the same level of achievement as traditional college classwork. Credit recommendations are published in a Guide to Educational Credit by Examination. The guide is distributed to college and university officials on a regular basis and can be used to grant academic credit. The American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service (CREDIT) connects workplace learning with colleges and universities by helping adults gain access to academic credit for formal courses and examinations taken outside traditional degree programmes.

The College Entrance Examinations Board (founded in 1900) began using exams to assess university-level learning as far back as the 1930s, and created the College Level Examinations Programme (CLEP) in 1967. CLEP is a collection of five examinations in English Composition, Humanities, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences and History. CLEP is used to validate non-formal learning by determining its equivalence to what is usually taught during the first year or two of college. About 30 additional subject examinations correspond to specific college courses taught across the country. Many colleges and universities accept CLEP credits.

Other standardised examinations that assess dozens of subjects and are acknowledged by colleges and universities include the Thomas Edison College Examination Program, the Defence Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support, the New York University Language Examinations and the Advanced Placement Program exams administered by the College Entrance Examinations Board.

Less formalised PLA methods include individualised student portfolios and programme evaluations of non-credit instruction. The expectations for RPL applications, especially written portfolios, are substantial (Michelson 2012). In most

RPL institutions, students must frame their learning within the content or learning outcomes of a particular module or course. Some flexibility is an inherent characteristic of a module, and some institutions grant students credit for interdisciplinary clusters of knowledge rather than specific content of a module (ibid., 14). Because of the academic demand of the process, one approach is for portfolio-development to be taught by lecturers in academic development, thus building competences of academic writing into RPL. The pedagogical frame of RPL typically combines methods of credit transfer and accumulation with a broadly developmental and liberal-humanist focus in which students are encouraged to gain not only credit toward a degree, but greater intellectual self-confidence, heightened self-knowledge, insight into academic norms and communication skills. Many community colleges, for example, offer non-credit training programmes with content that may be comparable to some college-level courses. Some states are working to identify the credit equivalences of these programmes so that the students earn some college credit (Van Noy et al. 2008).

Delivery of PLA

There are a number of higher education institutions that have been serving the adult learner population for many years, and they have developed their own brand of PLA methodologies. These new “adult learner friendly” colleges (including the Community College of Vermont and the Thomas A. Edison State College of New Jersey) adopted this “cause”, and became leaders in establishing PLA policies and practices. According to Travers (2011), their PLA programmes embraced the philosophy that an adult could acquire college-level learning outside the formal classroom setting; an individual could have college-level learning that was not part of the curriculum; and an individual could have a capacity that formal testing cannot assess. These institutions gave birth to the work on how outcomes from non-formal and informal learning could be assessed at an individual level. Funding for PLA services is generally the responsibility of individual educational institutions. Assessment fees are normally charged to the individuals undertaking assessment.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance in higher education remains a top priority as resources continue to diminish and demands for excellence increase. In the USA, accreditation is granted to higher education institutions through non-profit agencies that are structured and operated independently from federal or state governing bodies. Regional accrediting bodies such as Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges provide specific overarching frameworks and catalogues of critical questions that enable institutions to assess their programmes. For example, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (2005) states that each of its standards articulates a dimension of institutional quality, and that by examining the efforts of an institution to address

these dimensions “the Commission assesses and makes a determination about the effectiveness of the institution as a whole” (p. 1) (Travers and Evans 2011).

Regional accreditation bodies also set PLA guidelines for institutions; depending on the particular PLA principle to which an institution subscribes, the guidelines allow for varying degrees of institutional flexibility. For example, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (2005) restricts individualised PLA to the undergraduate level, but allows flexibility in programme structure. The philosophy, policy and practice for accepting Prior Learning Assessment credits, established by individual institutions, must reflect local faculty agreements (Travers 2011, p. 251). However, as Travers and Evans (2011) argue, prior learning assessment programmes have unique qualities compared to other academic programmes, and therefore require their own set of protocols for programme evaluation. And yet, by using similar types of evaluative structures, the effectiveness of the programmes using PLA and those not using PLA can be compared to each other.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has, for over 30 years, promoted a set of ten voluntary quality standards to ensure that PLA programmes are consistent with academic integrity. The Ten Standards for Assessing Learning are as follows:

- Credit should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
- Assessment should be based on agreed and publicised criteria for the level of acceptable learning and made public.
- Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on a comprehension of learning processes.
- The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
- Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.
- If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe the type of learning being recognised, and should be monitored to avoid redundant credit for the same learning.
- Policies, procedures and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
- Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process, and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
- All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for their functions.
- Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, and the purposes being met (Fiddler et al. 2006).

The question of quality assurance in terms of competence-based education and assessment as an alternative to course-based assessment has been the subject of recent research in the USA (Wilbur et al. 2012). Their findings, which have implications for the quality of delivery of PLA by assessors, suggest that the

descriptive criteria in competence-based education and assessment serve as a guide for students and for assessors; while there is a need for clarity and specificity, there must also be flexibility within the standards and criteria that allows assessors to represent the diversity in learning through experiences, and not merely through prescriptive assessments; the assessment of portfolios was enhanced in those cases where assessors were able to discern the development of students' ideas and reflections on their learning processes; and, finally, that the expertise of evaluators is an important factor in judging whether the outcomes of PLA processes merit the allocation of credits (Wilbur et al. 2012).

Research on authentic assessment has also been highlighted as an integral part of learning, and therefore the characteristics of PLA must honour diverse forms of learning. The authentic assessment approach was developed some 20 years ago by De Paul University School for New Learning (SNL) in Illinois, USA (School for New Learning (SLN) 1994). SNL constructed four qualities that embrace the diversity embedded in students' experiential learning and self-directed inquiry. These qualities are: clarity, flexibility, empathy and integrity. The SNL approach integrates these qualities at the formative, summative as well as programme levels.

In formative assessment, clarity means providing clear and accessible feedback that is descriptive and helpful in defining students' accomplishments and communicating expectations. Flexibility encourages juxtaposition of multiple points of view, while empathy entails honouring adults' perspectives within a trusting relationship. Integrity in formative assessment is when feedback presents subsequent learning activities to guide learners in an honest, accurate and constructive manner to demonstrate the necessary criteria.

In summative assessment, clarity is about articulating criteria for the demonstration of competence and how learning will be evaluated. Flexibility entails honouring diverse interpretation of content, critical analysis, and reflection. Empathy is when assessment validates the authentic voices in the context of their learning. Integrity means that qualified assessors must directly assess the learning evidence as defined in the criteria. At the programme level, clarity in accountability benchmarks enables shared analysis of on-going improvement efforts; flexibility engages those closest to the targeted assessment to define and reframe multiple paths of inquiry. For programme assessment, multiple perspectives are integrated, in collecting information and interpreting meaning. Integrating the expectations and standards of the college and the university must be completed and assessment processes and results monitored accordingly.

Using the above qualities developed by SLN, Wilbur et al. (2012) have argued with regard to competence-based assessments that in order to honour diverse learning processes, the criteria for PLA must be flexible for learners to engage in authentic learning rather than following prescribed pathways. The researchers formulated five standards:

- Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for *learning*, and not for *experience*.
- Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.

- Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not apart from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.
- The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
- Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.

With respect to programme evaluation, Hoffman et al. (2009) have drawn on CAEL's Ten Standards to identify five critical factors: (1) Institutional mission and commitment; (2) Institutional support (financial, administrative, and faculty); (3) PLA programme parameters, (4) PLA evaluator development; and (5) PLA programme feedback and evaluation, Travers and Evans 2011; Travers and Evans (2011) propose a ten-by-five matrix that provides a structure from which a PLA programme can be evaluated.

These efforts to drive the transition from course-based to competence-based programmes highlight the priority afforded to the subject of quality assurance and the objective of honouring diverse learning experiences.

6.1.6 Canada

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), as it is called in Canada, is a tool that assists several target groups, including:

- older workers – with or without formal credentials – wishing to identify their prior learning and have it assessed for employability or certification reasons;
- immigrants who require recognition of competences acquired outside Canada;
- members of marginalised groups who have not had their learning valued for a number of reasons;
- human resource managers and counselling practitioners tasked with supporting adults who have work and life experience but little confidence in their skills and abilities (Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO 2008, p. 50).

PLAR is used by the different sub-sectors of education and training to varying extents. Most public colleges recognise prior learning in at least some of their programmes. Some universities also recognise it – often in programmes offered through continuing education. British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario offer PLAR to adults at the secondary level, with a particular focus on individuals who have not completed secondary education. For example, in Ontario, the Ministry of Education provides funding to school boards to offer PLAR to adult learners who are working towards a secondary school certificate or diploma (CMEC and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO 2008, p. 50).

PLAR is present in most of Canada's public colleges. A distinction is made between assessment for academic credit (located primarily at college level) and

assessment of knowledge, skills and competences for personal development, training needs assessment and employment. In both cases, it involves comparing the adult's learning achievements to standards or requirements set by credentialing bodies (CMEC and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO 2008).

While progression through access to academic qualifications still remains the key aspect of PLAR (Van Kleef 2011), opening up access and progress in skilled and professional occupations in the labour market is now reported as the key employment issue in Canada (CMEC 2007; OECD 2008, p. 14). An example is the Foreign Credential Recognition of adult learners, which is a process of verifying the equivalency of educational and professional experience obtained in another country. The Canadian government, through the Department of Human Resources and Social Development, plays a facilitative and funding role. But the recognition of credentials for regulated occupations (i.e. with respect to the fulfilment of licensing requirements) is mainly a provincial and territorial responsibility that has been legislatively delegated to regulatory bodies (CMEC 2007; OECD 2008, p. 14).

Standards and Methods of Assessment

Canada's first efforts to establish national RPL standards occurred when the Government of Canada funded projects lead to the development of 14 PLAR Standards through the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (1990–1999). The Canadian Association of for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) expanded on this work in 1999 with the development of practitioner benchmarks and later, on assessor, advice and facilitator competencies. Currently CAPLA has begun work in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders to develop quality assurance guidelines for the field of practice. A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications was developed in 2009 by Canada's forum of Labour Market Ministers and the Foreign Qualifications Recognition Working Group continues to guide and support the implementation of the Framework (Kennedy 2014).

The country note for Canada on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (RNFIL) activity (OECD 2008) lists the three key PLAR mechanisms:

- The *challenge mechanism* is one in which the student may be permitted to challenge the school, college or university concerning the requirement to achieve specific units of credit through a taught course and examination.
- *Equivalence* enables students to demonstrate that previously acquired qualifications should count for exemption from parts of a qualification. This mechanism relates to arrangements for the transfer of credit from one situation to another. Agreements allowing credit transfer between colleges within a province are normal across Canada, and occasionally between colleges and universities. This practice is widespread between provinces/territories. Credit transfer arrangements almost never exempt the candidate from the final examination. Thus, for example, a midwife or mechanic may be able to demonstrate that they have all

the knowledge, skills and attitudes for qualified entry, but they still have to take a written exam for entry. Indeed, much PLAR activity is in preparation for a final examination (OECD 2008, p. 11).

- *The portfolio* is a commonly accepted tool for PLAR. One noteworthy instance of the use of the portfolio is at the Prior Learning Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for personal development and career planning. The centre supports the applicant, who submits evidence to assemble the portfolio. The Centre also advises on opportunities to fill gaps through further training. This can help learners come to grips with written examinations for professional entry. The portfolio process has been a valuable support for those facing barriers of poverty, low formal schooling, social isolation, and lack of workplace experience (CMEC and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO 2008; see also Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Centre 2008). Workers in community-based organisations have a history of experimentation with the use of portfolio-based assessment.

Delivery of PLAR

Use of PLAR in university-based Adult Education programmes. In Canada, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition is considered a central element of an “adult-focused post-secondary institutions” (Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) 2000). “Adult Education” refers to formal programmes of study to prepare individuals to become educators of adults, and is distinguished from “adult education” (lower case), the broad activity of providing education for adults (c.f. Spencer 2008). According to a survey of PLAR, Wihak and Wong (2011) report, 8 of the 11 responding universities reported making use of PLAR in their Adult Education programmes for admissions or for advanced standing (i.e. acknowledging learning from experience in the form of academic credits). The survey considered the following aspects:

- *Information.* All eight universities using PLAR indicated that they make considerable effort to inform students about its availability.
- *Support provided to applicants in having their learning assessed.* There is considerable variability in the amount and nature of support offered in terms of portfolio development courses, individual guidance, written information versus personal guidance.
- *Methods used to assess learning.* The predominant method used to assess learning is the paper-based portfolio, supplemented by interviews and/or demonstrations. The e-portfolio, Wihak argues, creates potential barriers for those adult learners who are not computer literate or do not have convenient access to computers (Wong 2004). In addition, there are issues relating to privacy, the time required to master software, and the compatibility of computer hardware and software.
- *Course-based or programme based PLAR.* In some cases, PLAR processes require that applicants have taken specific non-credit programme(s). In other

institutions, applicants holding a trade, business, or journey person certificate are granted a certain number of credits.

- *Faculty compensation.* While at some universities, assessment of PLAR is considered part of academic duties with no additional compensation, in others a fee is paid for the time involved in the assessment, or an honorarium based on the number of course credits the applicant is petitioning. These are part of the institution's collective agreement with the faculty members.

The Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) a non-credit programme, uses a DACUM-like self-assessment instrument reflecting thirteen competences with 229 associated performance elements. Wihak and Wong (2011) call for different theoretical lenses that focus both on the prior learning of adults who apply to Adult Education programmes, as well as the learning required in Adult Education programmes.

Research perspectives on PLAR in university-based Adult Education programmes depend to a large extent on the theoretical position adopted with respect to prior learning. Sullivan and Thompson (2005) argue that adults' knowledge and skills can be identified and stated in terms of behavioural outcomes. Fenwick (2006), describing a much less formal process used in PLAR at the University of Alberta, argues that knowledge in Adult Education should not be codified in the reform of desired competences, as this reinforces the mainstream voice. Instead, Fenwick advocates a stance derived from complexity theory, according to which PLAR should focus on the processes of knowledge creation, rather than on knowledge as a product. Such an approach would shift the emphasis to portfolios, interviews and extended conversations. Joining Fenwick (2006) and Harris (2006), Wihak and Wong (2011) recommend that research must regard both the content and the processes of learning within and outside the higher education context. They argue that Adult Education scholars must have a theoretically articulated stance with regard to PLAR within their own discipline. Only then can university-based Adult Education programmes play a greater leadership role in encouraging increased use and acceptance of PLAR within the broader academic community.

Quality Assurance

The criteria for PLAR in academic and workplace settings were developed by the Canadian Institute for Recognising Learning in 2006. The Institute works with educators, workplaces, governments and occupational groups to develop standards and processes for quality assurance, and facilitates the integration of immigrants. The quality principles it advocates are accessibility, accountability, criterion-referencing, efficiency, equity, fairness, legality, equality, the right of appeal, transparency, validity and reliability (Morrissey et al. 2008).

As in the USA, attempts are being made to implement quality criteria which support the use of competences as units of measurement for assessment in PLAR. This development reflects pressure to implement and improve current assessment measures following the adoption of legislation to ensure that immigrant professionals are treated equitably in licensing processes (Van Kleef 2012). Van Kleef explores

Baartman et al.'s (2007) criteria for quality in assessing competences as a framework for quality. According to Baartman et al. (2007, p. 261), competency-based assessment programmes should display the following characteristics: Acceptability of all stakeholders of the assessment criteria, including benchmarks for relevant and sufficient evidence, and meaningful post-assessment feedback; Authenticity with regard to the degree of resemblance to a competency-based assessment for the future workplace; Cognitive Complexity, i.e. the extent to which thinking skills are integrated into competency standards; Comparability, i.e. assessment should be conducted in a consistent and responsible way; Cost Efficiency, i.e. the time and resources needed to develop and carry out competency-based assessments must be comparable to the benefits; Educational Consequences, determining whether the assessment program yields positive effects on learning and instruction; Fairness, i.e. the fair chance that candidates can demonstrate their competences; Candidates and staff should have insights into the benefits of multiple methods of assessment and tools; Fitness for purpose means selecting tools that can best demonstrate the relevant learning; Fitness for Self-Assessment means competency-based assessment programmes should simulate self-regulated learning; Meaningfulness is the value for stakeholders involved; Reproducibility of decisions refers to the need for assessment decisions to be accurate over situations and assessors; Transparency ensures that the assessment programme should be understandable to all stakeholders (p. 261).

PLAR nurses and staff of the School of Nursing at York University in Toronto support the use of holistic statements of competences as units of measurement for assessment, and also support the use of multiple assessment tools that combine both traditional, standardised testing and competency-based assessment methods which meet the principle of “fitness for purpose”. However, Van Kleef argues that questions remain concerning the applicability of quality measures in educational assessment to quality measures in the assessment of prior learning for professional registration, given their very different conditions, purposes and participants (Van Kleef 2012).

There are no immediate plans to systematise PLAR in Canada, although RVA practice will be formed and enriched by the quality assurance project “Ensuring Quality Assessment through Training and Collaboration” currently underway through CAPLA and its partners (Kennedy 2014)

6.1.7 South Africa

RPL has existed in South Africa for over 15 years now. Technical arrangements for the recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are highlighted in the OECD (2007) country report. In South Africa, the term RPL is used for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. It is defined as a comparison of prior learning and experience (howsoever obtained) against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification. Learning is measured in terms of learning outcomes for a specific qualification, and may lead to achievement of credits towards the intended qualification.

RPL can be either for *credit*, usually associated with general and further education and training; for *access*, usually associated with higher education (Samuels 2013); and for *advancement* of current requiring new certification.

RPL is implemented in a variety of contexts, ranging from Further Education and Training (FET), General Education and Training (GET) and higher education, to Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and workplace-based training. There are three main target groups for RPL:

- the access group, including under-qualified adult learners wishing to up-skill and improve their qualifications, and candidates lacking minimum requirements for entry into a formal learning programme;
- the redress group, including workers who may be semi-skilled and even unemployed, who may have worked for many years, but were prevented from gaining qualifications due to restrictive policies in the past;
- and candidates who left formal education prematurely and who have, over a number of years, built up learning through short programmes.

Different approaches to RPL have also emerged since Harris (1999) highlighted these through her research in South Africa. The range of approaches includes: credit-exchange (the ability of the individual to perform certain job tasks to a predetermined standard), developmental (the emphasis is on what the learner has learnt – rather than matching competences to pre-agreed standards, the curriculum and institutional prescriptions are used to determine ‘acceptable’ prior learning), radical (the focus is on the collective rather than the individual – only the experience of the emancipated group counts as knowledge), and the Trojan horse (an enquiry into the social construction of knowledge and curricula through which both experiential knowledge and discipline-based knowledge approach (and complement) each other). Therefore, while RPL in South Africa on the one hand is highly standardised and centralised through close association with the NQF and the SAQA, on the other hand it recognises the different strategies in implementing RVA for different target groups – “access”, “redress” and “credit/qualification attainers”.

The current revised policy seeks to position RPL in relation to the following key priority areas: (1) access to quality learning pathways for all South Africans, including unemployed persons; (2) redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; (3) fair recognition of workforce knowledge and skills in South Africa.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

The South African Qualifications (SAQA) Act was passed in 1995, and provides the context for South African education and training, including RPL, in the post-Apartheid era. The new NQF Act was passed in 2008 and came into effect on 1 June 2009. The new South African NQF comprises three sub-frameworks and ten levels. Three types of qualifications are recognised: certificates, diplomas and degrees. The key issue is that qualifications and standards must be registered in the

national qualifications framework, which, with the latest reforms, also includes units and modules. If the outcomes of informal and non-formal learning are registered in this way, they are recognised.

The process of RVA is described as identifying what the candidate knows and can do, matching the candidate's skills and knowledge to specific standards, assessing the candidate against those standards, and crediting the candidate.

The overall approach outlined by the SAQA in its Guidelines is not only for industry-based models, as it is considered to be a generic process for both workplace and institutionally-based accreditation of prior learning (APL) (Samuels 2013).

The form, quality and sources of evidence leading to the attainment of credits depend on the particular qualification; care should be taken neither to require too much evidence nor to expect the candidate to cover the syllabus in its entirety. In implementing RVA, candidate support should not be underestimated, and should as far as possible include the possibility for candidates to choose the assessment methodologies with which they are most comfortable. The "nested" approach towards standards generation and qualifications specification is a useful way to understand what should be assessed in an RPL process.

There are relatively common stages for RVA. The inclusion of preparation, assessment and, when applicable, an appeals process is indicated in the SAQA Guidelines. The recognition practices are largely summative, linked to the NQF-registered qualifications and standards. They also allow for access to institutions (incl. bridging, undergraduate and graduate programmes) as well as upgrading workplace performance; for example in the real estate, construction and insurance industries. The role of social partners (employers and trade unions) in the learning process and in the process of RVA is emphasised.

Delivery of RPL

Criteria for implementation of RPL have been developed for SAQA, the Quality Councils, for providers, for recognised professional bodies and for RPL practitioners (SAQA 2012a). Practitioners should be registered as an assessor, workplace assessor and/or moderator with the relevant body; should undertake specific RPL-related continuing professional development activities; and adhere to a code of conduct (SAQA 2012a). Assessors are required to identify equivalencies. Prior learning is often unstructured, tacit and intuitive, requiring the assessor to identify equivalencies to the required evidence in order to prove applied competence through an integrated assessment of the learning field.

Quality Assurance

The SAQA (2012b) has issued guidelines for the implementation of RPL, which highlight RPL as a holistic approach to the process and execution of assessment that is both incremental and developmental. The quality of assessment within the NQF relates to reliability, validity, authenticity, sufficiency and currency. There is

no fundamental difference between the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge, and the assessment of those acquired through a current learning programme; the only difference lies in the route to the assessment.

Quality assurance of RPL was further reflected upon in the Resolution and Working Document on RPL (SAQA 2012a) that resulted from the National RPL Conference: *Bridging and expanding existing islands of excellent practice*, hosted by SAQA in February 2011. The document notes that:

- RPL needs to take into account an improved understanding of RPL practices across education, training, development and work; assessments and moderation need application against agreed standards, qualifications, part-qualifications outcome statements and other descriptions of learning;
- an effort should be made to allow standard practice to grow within sub-sectors, rather than imposing top-down standardisation;
- the concept of RPL needs to be taken beyond traditional reliability and validity, to include quality indicators such as acceptability to stakeholders, fitness for purpose, transparency, and fair consequences. Moreover, several other potential indicators require exploration in judging the quality of RPL assessments;
- The measurement of equivalence is very complicated. Qualifications at the identical NQF level have similar cognitive demand, but are not necessarily equivalent. At the same time, curriculum comparisons are a robust means to establish comparability of cognitive demand.
- Modules on RPL advising, administering, pedagogy (mediation), assessment and moderation, for example, need to be developed for the development and professionalisation of these specialised services.
- Finally, mutual understandings of quality assurance need to be developed.

A revised policy on RPL (SAQA 2012b) highlights the following principles of quality assurance: (1) The focus is on what has been learnt and not on the status of the learning site; (2) Credit is awarded for knowledge and skills through experience and not for experience alone; (3) Learning is made explicit through assessment and/or other methods that engage the intrinsic development of knowledge, skills and competences acquired; (4) Candidate guidance and support, the preparation of evidence and the development of an appropriate combination of teaching-learning, mentoring and assessment approaches are core to RPL practice. Notwithstanding all the features listed here, “RPL is generally considered to be a developmental process, and not an end in itself.” (SAQA 2012b, p. 10)

6.1.8 Austria

In Austria, two types of RVA mechanisms currently exist in the educational sector (Austria. Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture 2011):

1. those that focus on access to external examinations and are set in the formal system, and/or aim at formal education and training qualifications; and

2. those that are mostly set in the further education and training sector, and take the form of competence audits, portfolios and similar tools, which have personal use for individuals.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

In the first case, examples include:

1. the acquisition of the lower secondary school leaving certificate by adults;
2. the awarding of the professional title of *Ingenieur* (engineer) as a result of exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination;
3. providing access to university entrance qualification examinations for skilled workers, and graduates of 3- to 4-year full-time courses at VET schools (*berufsbildende Schulen*);
4. providing access to an upper secondary school leaving examination, which is externally organised, and provides direct access to higher education;
5. providing access to continuing VET courses at universities as well as courses at universities of applied sciences for persons who have not completed the upper secondary examination;
6. providing access to evening schools (VET colleges and secondary academic schools) for adults by allowing participants to provide evidence of acquired knowledge in a context of a modular examination.

In the case of RVA mechanisms set in the formal system and/or aiming at formal education and training qualifications (external examinations), the assessment methods for recognition correspond to those used in the formal system. Written tests and oral exams are the most commonly used methods for external examinations, and competences are usually assessed according to standards set in the formal system. In the case of the apprenticeship leaving exam – as well as in the case of exceptional admissions – both theory (usually written) and practice are emphasised, and candidates are expected to furnish evidence of their practical know-how and job-related skills.

In the second case, Austria has developed methods of assessment that are supplementary to traditional assessment. There are, for example, no mandated approaches to the implementation of RVA in the further education sector or the non-formal education sector. A variety of portfolio approaches is applied in the initiatives developed at adult learning institutions. In some cases, the portfolio is combined with an assessment centre. Examples of this practice include the competence portfolio for volunteers used by all Austrian adult education associations, the competence profile “KOMPAZ” designed by the Adult Education Centre Linz, the Competence Balance used by the Tyrol Centre of the Future, or the family competences portfolio (Brandstetter and Luomi-Messerer 2010; Prokopp 2011). The Academy of Continuing Education (Wba) uses a combination of portfolio approach and 3-day assessment, the so-called “certification workshop”, where candidates demonstrate

their professional, personal and social skills and competences (Brandstetter and Luomi-Messerer 2010; Prokopp and Luomi-Messerer 2010).

While RVA mechanisms are set in the formal system, some preparation courses take place in the non-formal system and are statistically recorded for the further education and training sector (Markowitsch et al. 2008). Many of the recognition mechanisms set in the formal system or aimed at the formal education and training sector are linked to preparation courses to support candidates, but these courses are generally not compulsory. The availability of support measures, such as information and awareness-raising, guidance, counselling and financial support varies depending on the recognition mechanism or initiative.

Thus, while RVA assessment is not separated from traditional assessment, mechanisms have been put in place in Austria that are supplementary to traditional assessment, such as guidance and counselling and financial support. Austria has also explored opportunities for RVA in adult learning institutions that are outside the regulatory function of the education system and labour market.

Quality Assurance

Despite the differences in the nature of RVA in the two sectors and the likely tension between the regulatory aspect of quality assurance measures on the one hand and the broadening of access to adults in adult learning institutions on the other, Austria (Austria. Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture 2011; see also, Republik Österreich 2011) has recommended that RVA processes be supported by the widespread implementation of the following principles and practices:

- the provision of guidance and counselling;
- financial support for institutions and/or individuals;
- regional and temporal accessibility of mechanisms;
- the adoption of a modular approach;
- the recognition of partial certifications.

The quality principles set out in the European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning are considered by the Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture to be suitable for planning and implementing RVA processes in the country.

6.1.9 Germany

In Germany, as in Austria, non-formal and informal learning are an integral and institutionalised part of the education and training system. In addition to procedures aimed at formal recognition and the labour market, steps are also being undertaken to promote lifelong learning, with the long-term aim of providing more effective ways of achieving recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal routes in different educational domains.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

RVA for facilitated admission to courses or examinations. Germany has a variety of procedures to recognise non-formal and informal learning in different learning environments:

In the Vocational Education and Training sector clear conditions are provided to candidates seeking admission to examinations as external students (*Externenprüfung*) upon completion of a dual system of vocational apprenticeship. Candidates with previous employment experience may take the examination (without having attended formal classes). The following conditions apply:

- Admission must be preceded by a period of employment at least one and a half times the length of the prescribed training period for that particular occupation. This minimum period may be waived if the candidate can demonstrate that they have acquired the vocational expertise that justifies admission to the examination;
- Periods of employment also include training periods in other relevant apprenticeship trades;
- Foreign qualifications and periods of employment abroad are taken into account;
- Qualification in a recognised apprenticeship trade can also be obtained by persons who have not gone through dual training (usually a requirement), but can instead provide evidence of relevant employment or training;
- Admission to the external student examination is granted by competent bodies solely on the basis of documentary evidence.

In the higher education sector, RVA is facilitated by developing equivalences and credit point systems. Usually recognition mechanisms in higher education recognise the competences and study programmes that people have acquired in vocational training, continuing vocational education and training and in the workplace (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008, p. 48).

Although traditional assessment methods such as tests and examinations are used to assess outcomes from non-formal and informal learning against standards in vocational education and training, examinations are designed in such a way as to take into account active learning processes (Frank 2011), so that competences from non-formal and informal learning can be assessed in an authentic and holistic manner. In fact, the concerned parties regularly undertake structural and content-related changes with regard to training regulations with the aim of making assessments more authentic particularly at the level of initial and continuing education and training.

Like Austria, Germany has developed methods of assessment that are supplementary to traditional assessment methods. Instruments such as the ProfilPASS (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008) have been developed to record the training, learning and work biographies of individuals. The central task for users is to complete their own biography, and it is recommended that they receive qualified guidance for this. The ProfilPASS system comprises the ProfilPASS tool and a guidance concept.

Advisors are trained at so-called “dialogue-centres” in the methodology of documenting competences in a 2-day preparatory seminar. The training of advisors is coordinated at the national level by the ProfilPASS Service Centre of the German Institute of Adult Education and the Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning (DIE) (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008, p. 44).

The ProfilPASS places emphasis on self-exploration and self-reflection. It is to a lesser extent an instrument providing an exact measurement of competences. The notion “competences” comprises both cognitive and motivational dimensions. A basic requirement of motivation is empowering individuals by helping them to improve their self-esteem and self-confidence, rather than undertaking an exact measurement of abilities (Preißer 2005). The various steps in the ProfilPASS are:

1. Biographical interviews to stimulate users to narrate activities and episodes of successful performance.
2. Small group discussions to highlight personal competences.
3. Self-assessment through performance of their identified competences.
4. Developing a vision for the future by combining users’ own preferences and choices with the competences they themselves identify.

Expanding the Use and Availability of RVA

Many researchers (Münchhausen 2011) have pointed out the huge potential as well as the challenges in validating competences of low-skilled employees (part-time or casual workers), whose number in the German labour market is increasing. Many authors also note that unlike in other European countries, RVA in Germany does not cover the needs of low-skilled workers (Beinke and Splittstöber 2011). There are barriers to the formal recognition of competences acquired by part-time and casual workers in Germany. Low-skilled workers are frequently unable to participate in external examinations, which focus on theory, and where assessment standards and methods are still highly structured (*ibid.*).

These authors argue that RVA mechanisms are more effective after enrolment in retraining or rehabilitation programmes rather than prior to training, which is often the case in the traditional methodology for RVA. Many researchers also note the importance of taking into account the subjective and contextual nature of the competences of low-skilled workers (Koch and Strasser 2008, p. 45f.), and argue that validation processes should be individualised and flexible.

In light of this, research studies are being undertaken (Münchhausen 2011) that highlight the huge potential of developing diagnostic instruments to strengthen the informal learning of low-skilled employees in the context of organisational learning. These diagnostic instruments could measure progress and “competence gain” by comparing the competence profiles of atypical employees at the beginning and conclusion of their work on the basis of a range of competence dimensions.

Münchhausen's study has shown that non-traditional diagnostic instruments give a better picture of competence gain among part-time and casual workers than traditional assessment instruments such as external examinations and tests; the latter still tend to predominate the German initial and continuing vocational education and training system. By using diagnostic instruments, it was found that low-skilled employees do not necessarily perceive their work negatively, but that they do so only in relation to the end of contract, age, duration and social status. In fact, contrary to common perceptions, low-skilled workers learn new tasks, and try to overcome challenges; they have the same access to information and further learning opportunities as the others in the organisation; they are cognisant of criteria, such as complexity, decision-making, and holism; they view age as a critical employment factor, resulting in a loss of personal confidence and an increasingly defensive attitude over time, and feel pressured to seek other employment as their contract reaches its conclusion; they are more likely to be influenced by their personal, social and methodological competences, than by their professional competences. An important conclusion that emerges from the study on competence validation of atypical workers is that casual and part-time workers frequently possess "hidden" stores of knowledge. In the process of informal organisational learning they develop new knowledge which contributes to increased self-confidence. An important goal of RVA should be to strengthen informal learning through the recognition of competences in the workplace.

In view of the ever-increasing number of persons in low-skilled jobs, contractual and part-time work, various measures have already been taken in Germany to validate informally acquired competences. It is felt, however, that further discussions are needed in relation to the development and implementation of: recognition infrastructure; guidance and counselling; assessment procedures; assessment standards; transparent and quality assured systems that support and complement the existing education system (Seidel 2011).

Quality Assurance

Germany (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008) highlights a series of legal, social and individual conditions that must be met to realise the vision of an open learning system.

- A social as well as a legal foundation for RVA must exist.
- Existing recognition procedures must be improved and new procedures with facilitated admission to courses or examinations developed.
- The system of documentation, recording and recognition with different, inter-meshing procedures must be transparent.
- A culture of trust in respect of self-evaluation procedures must be maintained.
- The motivation and the ability to both reflect and perform self-evaluation and, most of all, a willingness and ability to continue learning must be a precondition for recognising all forms of learning.

6.1.10 Denmark

Standards and Methods of Assessment

While summative recognition links validation of non-formal and informal learning to standards in the education system, formative recognition links validation to human resource management through mapping, notional levelling, personal or career development planning.

Approaches to validation differ depending upon whether it is conducted to facilitate further learning, for career advancement purposes or to document voluntary and leisure activities.

In the *educational sector*, the recognition of informal and non-formal learning is conducted in relation to the standards utilised in the formal education and training system. Competence assessment in Denmark is always tied to educational objectives and the admission requirements of specific education programmes. Validation is located exclusively within the education system in Denmark.

In the area of *voluntary and leisure activities*, *My Competence Folder* was developed in co-operation with social partners, stakeholders from voluntary organisations and various agencies of civil society. Compiled on a voluntary basis, the folder gathers together information/documentary evidence on completed formal education, uncompleted education or training programmes, as well as competences acquired in working life, through voluntary activities, or through non-formal and informal learning. The folder consists of a CV-style framework or portfolio. There are other frameworks and methods for documenting “real competences”, as they are called in Denmark.

In the work domain, the systematic identification, documentation and assessment of employees’ competences already figures in enterprise-level competence development systems. Enterprises may choose their own points of reference for the RVA of employees; alternatively, state-approved education or training programme standards can serve as reference points (Denmark. Ministry of Education (UVM) 2008).

In spring 2011, a committee was established in order to develop an action plan and a model of RVA. The model describes a process of VPL divided into four stages. (1) The educational institution identifies one or more study objectives or admission requirements against which a candidate is to be evaluated; (2) the educational institution is responsible for the specific counselling and guidance relating to the process of prior learning assessment; (3) the educational institution conducts the assessment process; and (4) the educational institution carries out guidance and counselling to determine how the individual candidate can use his or her prior learning assessment, including a plan for a subsequent educational programme.

The model illustrates how the education pathway of the candidate can be combined with a job and employment pathway. In addition, the model clarifies different roles and responsibilities of stakeholders through the stages of the overall process. In order to ensure transparency in the overall process, all stages must include clear guidelines and assessment criteria.

It is the educational institution, which is responsible for conducting prior learning assessment on the basis of educational standards, admission requirements and competence objectives against which the candidate wishes to be evaluated. In the processes of documentation and assessment in educational institutions, the documentation work is referenced against the specific educational objectives and requirements. Both the applicant and the educational institution contribute to the documentation process.

According to Danish law, assessment must be conducted solely by the educational institution offering the study programmes to which a specific assessment is related. Other stakeholders can be in charge of information, identification, guidance and counselling, in a broader perspective, in the phase leading up to the assessment process (“the pre-phase”). These stakeholders include i.a. trade unions, employers’ associations, job centres, unemployment insurance funds, civic education institutions, study committees and “eVejledning” (online guidance service), who can all take care of this part of the process and often in collaboration with the educational institution.. In “pre-phase” companies can, among other things, define new tasks and future business plans through the matching of competence profiles. For individuals, both employees and jobseekers, this part of the process may include documentation of what they have previously learnt. For companies and individuals, the pre-phase helps to clarify and identify objectives and the direction for career development, and it helps create a potential plan for the types of formal education which would be relevant in future.

Delivery of RVA

RVA practitioners are key to the RVA process in Denmark. Practitioners include individuals delivering information, advice and guidance; those who carry out assessments; the managers of educational institutions, and a range of other stakeholders with important but less direct roles in the validation process.

The largest group of practitioners are counsellors/guiders and assessors. According to Danish legislation, the qualification requirements for assessors are the same as for those, who teach in the formal educational system. Educational institutions are responsible for ensuring that assessors are appropriately qualified and must ensure that assessors are able to attend necessary courses and training to conduct VPL assessments.

A number of different initiatives have been undertaken to drive the professionalisation of practitioners in the field of RVA. In the vocational education and training sector, the Ministry of Education has implemented competence development initiatives for practitioners. In the voluntary sector, the Danish Adult Education Association (DAEA) the umbrella organisation for non-formal adult learning offers a training programme for teachers and guidance counsellors, who are being trained as “prior learning guides”. The learning outcomes of the DAEA course are formulated as enabling participants:

- To relate guidance and counselling to the process of identification and documentation of prior learning based on the latest research;
- To use tools for identification and documentation of prior learning including the tools developed by the Ministry of Education especially for non-formal adult education, voluntary associations and voluntary work;
- To teach and support others to work as a ‘prior learning guide’ (*sparringspartner*).

In the formal education and training sector, the National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning (NVR) has organised several seminars, courses and conferences in the past 5 years. In 2011, the Knowledge Centre was asked to develop a module for the formal diploma programme, which is now offered at university colleges. The module, entitled “Realkompetence” (RVA), is positioned at level 6 within the Danish NQF and corresponds to ten credit points within the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The module targets employees in educational institutions who work with VPL (e.g., counsellors, teachers, coordinators and managers); counsellors at job centres; youth counsellors; counsellors in trade unions; and counsellors in non-formal adult education. Admission requirements include a short-cycle higher or medium-cycle higher education and a minimum of 2 years of relevant vocational experience. Applicants with other and equivalent background may gain admittance through VPL.

Integrating experience from practice and theoretical knowledge, the course enables students to gain the competences to undertake and develop relevant tasks for all phases of the VPL process, including tasks across educations and sectors.

Although many of the practitioners in the field of RVA also fulfil other tasks, it is obvious that the performance of RVA practitioners is essential to ensuring quality and building trust in the outcomes of the validation process. At the same time, there is a growing demand for training by counsellors/guiders and assessors in Denmark.

Quality Assurance

Danish VPL legislation grants individuals (from 18 or 25 years depending on the educational field) the right to have prior learning experiences validated in relation to specific goals in adult education and continuing training. The legislation focuses on the needs of the individual and aims to make the process as accessible and flexible as possible. A key aim is to motivate those with little or no education to participate in lifelong learning by facilitating the recognition of prior learning. Principles for assessments and quality assurance in the VPL legislation are:

- VPL is an individual right.
- The responsibility to contribute to the documentation of prior learning rests with the individual.
- While a user fee may be charged, low-skilled workers enjoy free access to this service.

- Competence assessment should relate to the objectives and admission requirements of the education programme.
- Competences should be recognised no matter where and how they are acquired, but without compromising the quality or standard of the education.
- The methods used must ensure that assessments are reliable.
- Assessment results are to be documented by the issuing of certificates.
- Individuals are able to appeal prior learning decisions to an appeal board, the Qualifications Board.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Science, Innovation and Higher Education both provide funding to VPL measures. The range of measures conducted at no cost to participants includes: the assessment of reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic and mathematics skills in Preparatory Adult Education or in courses staged within the vocational training system; competence assessments within adult vocational training (GVU and AMU); competence assessments for entry to general adult education programmes; and general adult education competence assessments in connection with competence certificates. Within higher education, institutions are able to levy fees for VPL and these vary from one institution to the next.

The implementation of quality VPL is a major concern for all stakeholders. In autumn 2010, the National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning (NVR), in association with the Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality Management (SCKK), conducted a project on the professionalisation of staff working in VPL, especially in educational institutions. This project was one of the most important initiatives to improve quality in Danish VPL to date (Denmark. SCKK 2010).

The handbook on RPL (Denmark. Ministry of Education (UVM)) stresses the need to apply valid and reliable methods in the assessment and validation of prior learning in order to safeguard legitimacy. Institutions must develop transparent guidelines for practitioners. A recent study (Andersen and Laugesen 2012) highlighted the findings of a web-based survey on quality assurance in education institutions. The survey addressed the following dimensions of quality: (1) The availability online of information on an institutions procedures and standards for VPL; (2) The availability of documentation to ensure accountability; (3) The criteria/standards used for assessment; (4) The role of participants in evaluating the VPL process. The evaluation showed that there is still considerable potential for improvement in the area of quality assurance.

Drawing on the findings of an evaluation study on the status of validation of prior learning in adult education carried out in 2010–2011 the Danish Ministry of Education has identified four areas for improvement:

- Mapping guidance and counselling activities prior to VPL
- Broadening the scope of VPL to include business and employment
- Developing a quality code for VPL
- Increasing public access to information on VPL.

6.1.11 Norway

In Norway validation of prior learning is in most cases linked to the formal education system. It is accordingly geared to the requirements of the national curriculum, and aimed at granting access or shortening the duration of existing education programmes/courses.

The two major environments for non-formal education and training in Norway are working life and adult education (delivered through NGOs). There is a comprehensive provision of learning activities, targeted at attaining qualifications and career enhancement as well as personal development. Surveys have shown that employment is the most important arena for learning, but that a systematic approach is often lacking, especially in small enterprises.

Norway is in the process of developing a national qualifications framework for the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning. At present industries set their own standards in cooperation with the relevant ministries, working in close cooperation with the VET education system.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

While Norway is still in the process of developing a national qualifications framework, validation processes in the formal education and training system are facilitated by the outcome-based design of national curricula. Thinking in terms of learning outcomes (Christensen 2013).

During the development of its national validation system, Norway laid the foundation for a varied set of methods and tools for the documentation and validation of competence and skills, and these methods and tools were piloted widely.

Upper secondary school level is the area where validation of prior learning is most often put to use, with good results. Assessment at this level is tied to the requirements of the national curricula, both in theoretical and vocational subjects, and the results are documented in a so-called “Individual Competence Proof”. The following methods are widely used:

- *Dialogue-based methods* include discussions between assessors and learners (one-to-one), often supported by computerised or manual tools and combined with portfolio assessment, self-assessment and testing.
- *Portfolio assessments* are based on written documentation, photographs etc., and are often used to support post-admission communication and to tailor courses to individuals’ knowledge and skills.
- *Vocational testing* is carried out in vocational subjects. It combines interviews and practice, both to chart the learner’s background, training, work experience, language skills and objectives, and to observe his/her skills in practice. This form of assessment addresses both the theoretical and practical aspects of a trade. Vocational testing provides adults with an opportunity to show what they can actually do in their own fields.

In the voluntary sector, the Personal Competence Document (PCD) is a tool for mapping and documenting competences based on self-evaluation. The development of this tool was the result of the national validation project. The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (NAAL) – a national umbrella organisation for 19 study associations with around 600,000 participants per year – has the overall responsibility for maintaining the PCD, which is accessible on the NAAL website. NAAL offers presentations, information and guidance regarding the PCD to organisations and institutions.

In the employment sector, a system for documentation was agreed between social partners in the context of the Basic Agreement for 2006–2009 which states that “The enterprise is requested to have a system for documentation of the individual employees’ experience, courses and practice related to the conditions of work.” The new basic agreement for 2010–2013 continues this focus, stating that “It is important that the enterprise has a system for documenting the individual’s experience, courses and practice related to the employment relationship.” While documenting competences is considered useful, small companies, in particular, struggle to implement competence development. In Norway, 83 % of enterprises have fewer than 20 employees, and allocating time and resources for competence development as part of their human resource management system or for helping employees to acquire a qualification, is a financial and organisational challenge. One solution which seems to work well is for small enterprises to form learning clusters or networks.

Delivery and Quality Assurance

Assessors are expected to possess expertise relevant to the conduct of assessments. Validation results must be consistent irrespective of the location at which RVA is undertaken. RVA processes must be clearly described and the necessary competences defined. County authorities are responsible for ensuring the quality and training of staff, which is carried out in regional assessment centres. Annual courses and seminars are held for assessors, and mentoring services are available to inexperienced assessors. Normally, assessors have a professional background in the trade or area of education in question (for VET), or both. Trained assessors are registered on regional lists maintained by assessment centres.

Organisational and coordination mechanisms constitute an important component of the Norwegian national system for the validation of prior learning. Service centres, where adults can have their experience and prior learning validated, exist in all counties. Funding is delegated to the 19 counties, and regional centres provide information and guidance. They are also responsible for the quality of the validation process and for training assessors. Often, upper secondary schools also function as assessment centres. In order to offer the same opportunities to job-seekers who wish to have their competence validated, projects have been initiated to improve cooperation between the education system and the Labour and Welfare Administration. Employers’ bodies and trade unions are important stakeholders at

the national and regional level, and drivers in the realisation of policy goals and practice (e.g., by offering apprenticeships and other training schemes in enterprises locally, thus supporting adults in VET schemes).

6.1.12 Finland

Scope of RVA

Unlike the RVA systems in Denmark and Norway, which link RVA to the formal education system and curricula, in Finland, RVA is oriented to competence-based vocational qualifications, offering the adult population a flexible method of renewing and maintaining its skills with a particular focus on vocational competences.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

The idea behind competence-based vocational qualifications is that candidates must meet certain requirements, which are described in terms of learning outcomes and competences (acquired formally, non-formally or informally e.g., in the workplace), and which can be acquired by combining different learning methods to fit a candidate's needs.

Competence-based qualifications are defined in terms of three levels: (1) Upper secondary vocational qualifications are entry level qualifications indicating that individuals have the competences for entry to an employment in the field; (2) Further vocational qualifications indicate the vocational skills required by skilled workers in the field; (3) Specialist vocational qualifications indicate that individuals are in command of the most demanding tasks in the field. Moreover, through the acquisition of competence-based qualifications adults are eligible to apply for admission to study programmes at polytechnics or universities.

The Finnish RVA system is characterized by an elaborate support system of individualised preparatory training for those seeking to attain a qualification. More specifically, support for candidates consists of the preparation of "individual plans". These include details of the competence test that candidates are required to take as part of a qualification or its modules; where and how the test will be taken; whether the candidate's vocational skills need to be supplemented before the qualification can be obtained; and the means of supplementing existing skills (on-the-job training or participation in a programme of preparatory training).

Individualised learning has not only resulted in a steady increase in the numbers of adults seeking recognition, it has promoted greater cooperation among employers, workers and the education sector. The tests are open to everyone, regardless of age, work experience or educational background. Although preparatory training may not always be necessary particularly for those who already have broad and all-round professional competences, practice has shown that competence tests are in most cases completed in connection with the support of preparatory training.

Delivery of RVA

Assessment of the competence-based tests is carried out by experts in the field of training as well as representatives from the work domain. The learning outcomes are recognised and validated in the context of competence-based tests, in which candidates must demonstrate the expected learning outcomes and competences by participating in authentic work assignments. In addition, candidates are expected to take part in a process of self-assessment.

In the Finnish system, the awarding body is separate from the training and test provider. The qualification certificates are awarded when all the required modules of a qualification have been completed. The Qualifications Committee is the awarding body, and certificates are official documents. In addition, the Finnish National Board of Education has recommended that an international supplement be issued to the candidates together with their competence certification.

An important feature of the Finnish RVA system, particularly in the adult VET system, is the introduction of training towards specialist qualifications for adult educators. The aim is to strengthen the ability of vocational teachers' to operate within the competence-based qualifications system for adults. The training is organised by the Finnish National Board of Education and is funded by the government. However, a recent study (Jokinen 2010) has revealed a growing trend towards enrolment in "fast learning" that is programmes driven by market-needs. This trend will come at the cost of valuing expertise obtained through learning and experience prior to the training programme.

Overall, however, there is a high level of satisfaction with the Finnish system of competence-based qualifications and in particular with the flexibility that it renders in promoting a more fluid, interpersonal and semi-bureaucratic "agent identity", one which is different from the "subject-specific" nature of traditional teacher training (ibid.).

6.1.13 France

Standards and Methods of Assessment

In France, assessment puts the individual at the centre of the RVA process, and assessment plays an essential role in the processes of recognition. As Feutrie (2008) points out, VAE legislation passed in 2002 introduced a shift from a learning approach to an approach based on evaluation, and in this sense, he argues that "assessment procedures have to help candidates become conscious of unplanned learning that is hidden in activities, and understand that it has a value. The procedures also need to make learning outcomes visible, help the candidates organise learning outcomes in a way that suits the standards of the relevant qualification, and prepare the candidates to meet the jury under the best conditions" (Feutrie 2008, p. 168).

The validation of prior learning spans the entire a learning process, from the acquisition of competences to their refinement, demonstrating an increasing capacity to solve problems. The objective of this process is not to identify knowledge or skills, but to verify whether candidates can demonstrate that their schemes of thinking, the models they use, their methodologies, are relevant. The objective is not only to award qualifications, but to steer candidates' personal and professional progress, and to provide them with the tools to do so (Feutrie 2008).

Alongside the VAE system, France has a system of recognition with a substantial focus on formative assessment. This system was established under the *Bilan de Compétences* Law of 1991 and is a formative procedure that takes stock of occupational and personal experience. The *Bilan de Compétences* has the following objectives:

- to take stock of occupational and personal experience;
- to identify acquired knowledge, competences, attitudes related to work, training and social life;
- to make explicit the potential of the individual, to collect and arrange elements to define a personal or occupational “project”;
- to help manage personal resources, in order to organise occupational priorities;
- to assist in career choices and career changes.

There are two stages to the *Bilan de Compétences*: The first is that of self-assessment (*auto-évaluation*), which is assisted by regional service centres. These assessments are used to build up an occupational or training plan. The candidate is requested to map their needs and expectations; and information, methods and techniques are then provided to the candidate. In the second stage, assistance is provided to candidates to analyse their motivations and occupational interests, to identify competences and occupational aptitudes and, eventually, to assess their general knowledge. This information enables candidates to define their opportunities for mobility. Candidates then receive advice from a reviewer on the steps necessary to reach their objectives.

Methods of assessment are declarative as well as simulated. The main method is the declarative one, usually in a written application describing the activities that candidates have undertaken related to the desired diploma or degree. A clear analysis and description of the acquired experience that these activities have enabled them to build up is required. Candidates attach all the documents that can demonstrate and prove this acquired experience: work certificates, examples of professional achievements, assorted attestations, and so on. A less common method is to present a real or simulated situation in which candidates demonstrate their acquired experience by performing profession cases, candidates appear before a board of examiners for an interview.

Validation of acquired experience is broken down into five phases. The first comprises consultation, information, and guidance. An applicant enters the second phase if their application conforms to the legal and administrative rules. Thirdly, the application is prepared, usually with the assistance of an advisor. In the fourth phase the VAE board evaluates the application. Finally, there is monitoring following

the board's evaluation, particularly if the board instructed the candidate to further develop his or her project and to complete the certification process. Benchmarks for assessment are criteria based on the guidelines of the profession and the required qualifications (Paulet 2013).

Holistic assessments are used, requiring candidates to describe their prior work experience and to present an analysis explaining how they acquired the skills and knowledge, what they did to do so, where, in what context, by solving what problems, and what results they obtained. By asking candidates to adopt a more objective view, the board can better understand whether the acquired experience is closely dependent on the context in which it was obtained or whether it is transferable to other situations.

Post-assessment is an important feature of VAE in France. Following the board's decision to award a qualification, reject an application, or grant it only partially, candidates are given instructions indicating how to build on their experience to attain full certification: additional training modules to be successfully completed; further professional experience to be acquired; a report or dissertation to be written, and so on. The formulae vary and must be applied on a case-by-case basis.

Delivery of RVA

Professionals are identified to help candidates. Most universities have established validation centres that call on professionals to help candidates analyse their experience, present them in a legible manner and link the outcomes of their experiential learning with the requirements of the qualifications. This is a further example of how the French system successfully promotes guidance for individuals throughout their educational pathway.

Members of the board are trained to maintain rigour when assessing the acquired experience in terms of the skills, know-how and knowledge which candidates have obtained through non-formal learning and wish to demonstrate other than by academic examination.

Validation is not simply about reporting on the results of an assessment in the summative sense. The updated system obliges boards of examiners to adopt new attitudes. Two main approaches are pursued. One is for the board of examiners to weigh an individual's experience against the standards and references of the qualification; whereas the other is based on a developmental principle, which takes into account the individual's experience as a whole.

6.1.14 Portugal

The New Opportunities Initiative (NOI) for recognising the non-formal and informal learning of adults with low qualifications, together with a set of measures for implementing the National Qualifications System, was placed at the highest

governmental level, and institutionalised within the mainstream of the education and training system. The recognition of prior learning was a major factor in this process of institutionalization (Gomes 2013).

Standards and Methods of Assessment

The experience of Adult Education and Training Courses (AET Courses) in Portugal had long shown that some trainees, while lacking proper certification, possessed the competences necessary to validate all of the Competence Units within a specific Key Competences Reference Framework. In other words, these trainees did not in fact need to attend or complete a course within the traditional curricular structure of the AET programme. This opened the way to the creation, in 2000, of the National System of Competences Recognition, Validation and Certification (RVCC System) for the recognition of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The first six RVCC centres were organised by various different kinds of institutional bodies: a business association, a vocational training centre directly managed by the public employment services (Institute of Employment and Vocational Training), a state school, a vocational education school, a local development association and a protocol-based management vocational training centre. These were the first specialised units in the implementation of RVCC processes, enabling academic equivalence to be granted for Year 4, 6 or 9 of schooling.

As with the AET courses, the institutional existence of the National Agency for Adult Education and Training (a public organisation reporting to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and to the Ministry of Education¹) was decisive for the launch of the two modalities (the RVCC System and the AET courses) that played a core role in shaping the current adult education and training system in Portugal.

In the period between 2006 and 2011, a national network of RVCC centres emerged, incorporating over 450 New Opportunities Centres, while maintaining the institutional variety of organisational bodies with a nuclear structure that trains their technical teams in the implementation of RVCC processes.

The national network of New Opportunities Centres comprises various stages of intervention, including initial diagnosis and forwarding (Almeida et al. 2008),

¹ANEFA ceased to exist in 2003, giving rise to a division of responsibilities between the then Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Ministry of Education, wherein the management attributions of these modalities were divided, respectively between the Institute of Employment and Professional Training (IEFP) and the Directorate General for Vocational Training (DGFV). This situation remained in force until 2007, when the current National Agency for Qualification, I.P., was set up, once again a public institute reporting to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Ministry of Education, which were attributed with the responsibility for implementing the New Opportunities Initiative and management and coordination of the National Qualifications System. Today, the current institutional body in charge of managing the education and training policies is the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education, I.P. and significant changes have occurred in the RVCC system and in the national network of centres dedicated to this kind of processes.

guidance and orientation. New technical elements were incorporated within the teams, in particular for the candidates' guidance and counselling stages. New concepts and procedures such as partial certification, vocational certification or dual certification were also developed.

Adult education and training courses opened the path towards dual certification for adults. Together with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, adults were guided through training pathways and education pathways. In the latter case adults could have their uncompleted secondary school education validated (Year 12 of schooling). Several pedagogical principles were applied in the context of the dual certification system, including:

- Application of a reference framework for key competences
- Modular organisation of adult education and training curricula
- Local construction of curricula
- Procedural, qualitative and guiding assessment
- Personal and social mediation

The curricular organisation and pedagogical strategies used were particularly well adapted to people with low school qualifications, who faced the challenge of acquiring competences for a specific professional area (or key competences for study) while also gaining a higher secondary school certificate.

The key innovation introduced in these adult education and training courses was the introduction of customised training pathways comprising only those modules where learners displayed deficits (Gomes and Rodrigues 2007; Rodrigues 2009). Today modular training units are used by adult working populations to overcome specific competence deficits. Modular training enables certification and is a significant qualifications pathway within the framework of the National Qualifications System, together with the recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

The New Opportunities Initiative was the most ambitious public intervention in adult education and training in Portugal's recent history (Guimarães 2009; see also Guimarães 2012).

Quality Assurance

The Quality Charter of the New Opportunities Centres (Gomes and Simões 2007) and the self-evaluation model based on the common assessment framework (CAF) made up the instruments of quality assurance. New financing models were established and new technical and methodological guidelines were developed and disseminated. Finally, an administrative management and information system for adult qualification procedures was designed and developed. This is now used by all RVCC Centres and training bodies, thus making it possible to obtain rigorous statistical information (SIGO), and enabling detailed monitoring of the New Opportunities Initiative and the respective issue of course certificates and diplomas for academic pathways.

More than 1.5 million adults have enrolled at a New Opportunities Centre and more than half a million people have been certified in this period.

6.1.15 Scotland

In the late 1980s, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), in collaboration with numerous higher-education institutions, developed the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) mechanism. Based on the portfolio approach, APEL has remained a marginal institutional activity within further and higher education of some newer or “post-1992” universities and a few professional areas such as nursing, health and social care (Whittaker 2011). One of the main reasons for this marginalisation is the demanding nature of compiling portfolios, especially for adult returners who have been out of the educational system for some time (Whittaker 2011). As a result of this, the application of APEL has largely been limited to an “assessment on demand” tool for dispensing credit.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

In a project dealing with RPL in career guidance in formal schools undertaken by Skills Development Scotland, the following features were highlighted:

- Learning and skills gained through informal learning are mapped against the appropriate level of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).
- Careers advisors are identified to select pupils in formal schools and undertake RVA profiling against the SCQF.
- RPL profiling was undertaken as an individual or group process to ascertain whether the peer-support dimension of a group model enhanced the experience for the participants. Evaluation aimed to investigate the applicability of the model to other contexts and a wide range of client groups, including the long-term unemployed and individuals facing redundancy.

In the context of a project dealing with RPL for workers in the health and care sectors it was found that

SCQF RPL resource pack and profiling tools supported both the formative and summative processes of recognition. The formative process involved learners building their confidence, developing their capacity to think and write reflectively. The summative process of recognition involved a staged approach to evidence-gathering enabled assessment towards and SVQ in health and social care.

- Three types of organisational learning culture were identified: expansive, restrictive and passive-restrictive. These were found to be linked to the sector. The care sector, for example, is more likely to hold an expansive attitude to learning and training than production sectors. The generic aspects of the model and material have broad applicability within the social services sectors for workers at all levels.

- There was a strong emphasis on carrying forward the pedagogical approach developed in the context of the community setting to the workplace.
- Demystifying SVQ assessment systems and language were important to help learners progress more quickly through the qualification.
- Mentors held focus group discussions with learners. The self-confidence generated through the identification of strengths and skills, and understanding their relevance to current work roles, led to greater confidence within the workplace itself.
- Mentors play an important role in the quality of the learner experience. Mentors need to be given sufficient time, training and continuing support to carry out this role effectively (Whittaker 2008). Mentors need to be given opportunities to use their role as a means of achieving their own professional development goals.

The following recommendations were made (Whittaker 2011) in the context of a higher education project to integrate quality assurance and flexible entry (Whittaker et al. 2006) at all Scottish higher education institutions:

- Recognition of informal and non-formal learning should be integrated within mainstream curriculum design and delivery. Learning outcomes need to be defined in a way that supports a variety of means of achieving them and flexibility in mode of assessment, without detracting from the quality of the provision (Whittaker et al. 2006).
- Parity of esteem between different modes of learning should be undertaken already at the curriculum design stage of programmes. It would help individuals to translate their knowledge into forms that are deemed appropriate for assessment and credit rating which requires them to move away from informal learning to something that is more easily understood by the “academy” (Whittaker 2011, p. 189).
- Learners seeking credit within programmes through informal learning should not be subjected to more demanding levels of assessment than those seeking credit through the formal route. Alternative assessment frameworks need to be considered (Whittaker 2012).

Quality Principles

Developing the SCQF RPL Guidelines (SCQF 2005) with nationally agreed principles for the recognition and credit-rating of non-formal and informal learning has been an important stimulus for RPL in Scotland. Earlier RPL took place within the context of institutional projects.

As part of the development of the national SCQF RPL Guidelines, a review (commissioned by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Universities of Scotland and the Scottish Executive) (Whittaker 2005) revealed that:

1. Linking RPL to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) could facilitate the identification of further learning pathways as part of an educational and career guidance process;
2. Awarding of specific credit within the context of formal programmes is an important function of RPL, equally important, however, is the formative role of RVA in terms of personal growth and development;
3. Making explicit key outcomes of formative recognition was important;
4. The need to change from the term “accreditation” to “recognition” of prior informal learning, would enable a broader conceptualisation of the use and outcomes of the process;
5. Formative recognition can be undertaken in the community or workplace (Whittaker 2011, p. 179);
6. There was also a need to move to more streamlined methods embedded within curriculum design and delivery;
7. The process of evidence-gathering should be appropriate to the type of recognition undertaken and to its purpose.
8. Since the launch of the guidelines in 2005, RPL activity in Scotland has focused on research and development at sector level (Whittaker 2011).

6.1.16 England

Across the whole of the UK, the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) has distinct characteristics. Although it was established in the early 1990s, it was not then connected to any government policy. In this sense it was a “bottom-up” approach. The system for recognising APL tends to have a higher education focus and is established as a method of recognising non-formal learning for people who have relevant knowledge and experience but have no qualification through the formal education system.

Pokorny (2011) highlights the changes in APEL priorities and practices from a broader access agenda to one that is suited to a global economic agenda focused predominantly on the accreditation of learning for work-based contexts (UK. QAA 2004, p. 1). She points out that prior to 1992 APEL was located in the polytechnic sector under the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), which was responsible for awarding over half of undergraduate degrees in the UK, and was used for admission purposes. However, this form of learning was considered to pose a threat to academic standards and knowledge development by and through the academy.

Currently, institutions of higher and further education in England are encouraged to demonstrate a greater willingness to engage with and respond to the specific skill demands and needs of employers – this means providing more flexible, accessible and tailored courses designed with employers to equip students for the workplace. This is reflected in the launch of the foundation degree qualification in 2000, one of the government’s responses to this agenda within which, Pokorny laments, RVA is

treated as mere “alternative entry” to the start of a course, which is a rather restricted definition of APEL’s focus on the foundation degree benchmark status (Pokorny 2011).

Standards and Methods of Assessment

Awarding credits to employment-based training programmes rather than individual assessments is becoming the common practice. These degree programmes usually have more generic learning outcomes than traditional degrees, plus a high level of negotiation around the practice-based content of the programme, which can make them more amenable to APEL (cf. Pokorny 2011).

APEL is thus becoming subsumed under work-based learning (WBL) or the accreditation of employment-based learning and training. Haldane and Wallace (2009) describe how technology can assist with APEL guidance in quality WBL programmes (which successfully recruit around 1,000 students per year). APEL is also financially more attractive because guidance and assessment can be delivered within the curriculum. This is because the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) does not fund pre-enrolment APEL processes (Gallacher and Feutrie 2003).

WBL has certain features that can support APEL, but a WBL degree does not of itself resolve “concerns about what and how high level knowledge gained outside of universities is recognised and legitimised” (Pokorny 2011).

The National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) framework was informed by employers and embraced APEL as a means by which experienced workers could demonstrate their competence against established standards of performance, reducing or obviating the need for training. Despite criticisms levelled at this approach due to its labour market orientation, the NVQ framework, says Pokorny, did much to promote APEL at pre-degree level in vocational education. It also opened up potential APEL-based pathways to higher education through higher level NVQs.

Quality Assurance

The guidelines for quality assurance, issued by the oversight body of the APL system, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education, state a range of important principles that pertain to APL (United Kingdom of Great Britain. QAA 2004). Among their stipulations, they insist that “decisions regarding the accreditation of prior learning are a matter of academic judgement . . . [and that] the decision-making process and outcomes should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair” (CEDEFOP 2007, p. 7). Furthermore, “where limits exist on the proportion of learning that can be recognised through the accreditation process, these limits should be explicit” (CEDEFOP 2007, p. 7). In this way, the UK system for APL seeks to ensure high standards while still reaching all those who are in need of recognition for their non-formally attained skills and knowledge.

6.2 Developing Countries

6.2.1 *Philippines*

Non-formal and informal learning is an important means of acquiring skills for many adults in the Philippines. The Philippines has developed the alternative learning system, which awards the same qualifications as in the formal system. Alternative learning programmes exist within all subsectors of the education and training system, spanning basic education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

At the basic level, RVA is typically offered within the community-based Alternative Learning System (ALS). The ALS exists parallel to the formal school system and addresses the learning needs of those who wish to acquire basic literacy skills as well as functional literacy skills recognised as equivalent to both primary and secondary levels. It is important to note that RVA at the basic level is usually undertaken after enrolment in a non-formal or informal programme rather than prior to enrolment in a programme.

The ALS consists of two components: the non-formal Accreditation and Equivalency Programme and the Informal Education Programme (InfEd)

The Accreditation and Equivalency Programme is implemented through different modalities such as radio broadcasts, digitalised learning, TV episodes, face-to-face learning using print modules, and self-directed learning. Those who pass the Philippine Education Placement Test for Basic Education Level are recognised as primary or high school graduates. The results of the test are also accepted by technical/vocational and higher education institutions as well as for employment purposes, particularly in jobs that require an elementary or high school diploma.

The Informal Education Programme recognises competences gained by individuals following completion of short-term, interest-based courses in community learning centres. The competences promoted within community learning centres include social, economic, cultural, aesthetic, physical, spiritual, political literacies, which are considered necessary for the well-being of the community. The competences acquired through InfEd are evaluated by resource persons in community learning centres. The competences attained through all forms of learning are then documented in a passport. These passports can be used for equivalency purposes in obtaining employment, for further learning in the context of basic education, or for purposes of social recognition in the community.

At the level of TVET, workplace competences are assessed, validated and certified against competence standards developed by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). The National Certification (NC) or the Certificate of Competency (CoC) are issued to those who meet the competency standards and pass the Competency Assessment and Certification for Technical

and Vocational Education (TVET). This recognition of workplace competences against TVET standards and levels is considered by the government to promote the productivity, global competitiveness and quality of Filipino middle-level workers.

In higher education, the accreditation of prior learning toward a college diploma (undergraduate level) takes place in the context of the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Programme for Baccalaureate and Master Levels (ETEEAP). This programme falls under the jurisdiction of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). Individuals who have acquired work experience and expertise through non-formal and informal training are awarded appropriate academic degrees by CHED-accredited higher education institutions.

There are also schools and open learning systems which recognise the non-formal and informal learning and experience of learners for admission to non-accredited courses. The non-traditional open distance learning system of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines' (PUP), for example, assesses 72 units of college education, together with RVA of non-formal and informal learning, in relation to college courses at the PUP and the Far Eastern University.

Delivery of RVA

To promote non-formal and informal education programmes in communities, ALS implementers in co-ordination with local government officials draw up a profile of the community and its programme objectives. This information is disseminated through town meetings. On the basis of these overall programme objectives, community learning centres and non-formal educational programmes are able to develop specific learning objectives.

The non-formal education and InfEd Programme clients are mostly early school leavers from elementary and secondary schools. They come from depressed and marginalised communities in rural and urban or remote hard-to-reach geographical areas. Some represent groups who have served in penal and rehabilitation institutions. Many also belong to indigenous communities. This population represents about 45 % or 40 million of the total Philippines population. Whilst some ALS clients are of school going age (6–15 years old), the majority are beyond the school going age (over 15 years old). Despite the socio-cultural and economic circumstances of these groups, there is a strong motivation to participate in these programmes and they view ALS as “second chance” education.

Support to learners in the ALS programmes is provided through the use of CD-ROM modules, workbooks, livelihood projects and microfinance, leadership training; and a referral system for graduates/completers. NGOs and community-based organisations play a significant part in implementing community education programmes and in developing assessment tools for non-accredited programmes round topics such as leadership, community organisation, environmental competences and enterprise development. NGOs use an array of assessment methods such as small group discussions, peer assessment, life-story workshops and narratives, and assessment around entrepreneurship knowledge and skills.

In the TVET sector, TESDA has developed a dual system of training (at school and in the workplace) for the continuing education and training teachers of TVET. It is based on curriculum developed from competency standards and is modular in structure Quality assurance

For the TVET sector, the quality assurance of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is based on Training Regulations promulgated by TESDA. These regulations lay down the minimum training requirements to be complied with by all TVET providers (schools, training centres, enterprises). Programme delivery is competence-based, allowing learners free entry and exit. For each Training Regulation there is a corresponding assessment tool that is used for national assessment, which also covers RVA. These assessment tools consist of varied methods of assessment such as demonstrations, oral questioning, portfolio assessments, third party reports, interviews, and written tests. In this way, TESDA opens assessment, validation and certification to all interested applicants regardless of their educational background.

In the case of its Alternative Learning Programme, the government plans to promote quality assurance by incorporating the ALS program into the Philippines Qualifications Framework (PQF). In preparation for this, the government envisions the establishment of a national test covering both formal and non-formal basic education within the Alternative Learning System (ALS), which will be administered for both school students and community-based learners. Additionally, formal basic education has already introduced functional literacy as its goal, which is also the goal of non-formal basic education within the ALS. By creating such synergies between formal and non-formal learning the Department of Education hopes to accommodate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in its PQF.

6.2.2 Thailand

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning at the basic level falls within the remit of the Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE), a service of the Ministry of Education. This office is responsible for setting the criteria for RVA (Thailand. Ministry of Education, Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE) 2008).

Standards and Methods of Assessment

The reference points for RVA of non-formal and informal learning are the national curricula at the primary and secondary levels. In order to promote comparability between non-formal and informal learning, the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education (ONIE) has developed the Non-Formal Education (NFE) Equivalency Programme. The Ministry of Education has developed and issued a national

curriculum, which has been adjusted to serve as a guideline for the development of curricula based on local needs and contexts for use in non-formal education programmes.

The accreditation of educational achievements in the Thai basic education context has concentrated on four significant components. The first is basic knowledge, which is understood as the Thai language, mathematics, English and science. The second is vocational development, which consists of knowledge and abilities in the area of vocational and occupational skills. These abilities include problem solving, occupational administration, computer competences, working attitudes and professional ethics. The third component is quality of life improvement, which is an evaluation of an individual's perception of the value of family life and the skills that contribute to a happy life. It also focuses on the promotion of healthy living, both physically and mentally, and attitudes to religious principles and ethics in everyday life. The final component is social and community development, which concerns an individual's ability to apply their own potential for leading a good life in a community. This involves a strong family focus, but also participating in and supporting the activities that benefit the community and society as a whole.

In accordance with the NFE Basic Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) standards, the Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission has developed a range of non-formal and informal education programmes, including:

- Basic education equivalency programme
- Education for occupational development
- Education for life skills development
- Education for community and social development

Credits accumulated by learners are transferable within the same type or between different types of education, regardless of whether the credits are acquired through formal, non-formal or informal education, vocational training or work experience.

Support provided to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds through the development of active learning methodologies, such as dual education and/or training, cooperative learning, constructivist learning, project-based learning in various settings, be they on-the-job settings training programmes, internships or placement programmes in collaboration with industry, employers, trade unions, civil society agencies and community-based organisations.

Quality Assurance

Accredited non-formal educational establishments are expected to formulate regulations and guidelines to be followed by all personnel concerning the criteria of assessment. Some of the quality criteria are: (1) Learning assessment must include knowledge, skills and broader competences such as moral, civic, values, and personal attributes of honesty and integrity. (2) Assessment must take into account competences related to quality of life activities contributing to personal, career and social development in the context of family, the community and society.

In addition, quality assurance alludes to the quality of non-formal education provision, and the arrangements that non-formal educational establishments make in regard to the National NFE Quality Assessment Test at the end of each semester.

Credit transfers of educational results, knowledge and experiences are undertaken by non-formal education establishments, based on the guidelines and criteria formulated by ONIE. ONIE is currently trying to develop techniques to recognise informal learning through workplace learning.

One of the aims of the Thai National Qualifications Framework is to serve as a reference to the learner/worker in the workplace or other learning settings. Given that pathways for further learning are defined in an NQF, this should provide learning opportunities to those who would like to update and upgrade their competences in the workplace and gain qualifications through the of validation of experiences or recognition of prior learning. In this way, the NQF would provide the enabling environment and tool for valuing the competences an individual possesses. At the same time, individuals obtaining certificates through this programme will have the same rights and qualification as those who obtain certificates in the formal schooling system. Establishing the standard for these methods and NFE learners is therefore still a work in progress and a challenge for ONIE.

6.2.3 Bangladesh

Recognition of Prior Learning in Bangladesh is a sub-component of a larger project aimed at increasing the access of underprivileged groups to TVET, which was initiated in the context of Bangladesh's National Skills Development Policy in collaboration with the Dhaka office of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Arthur 2009). The project's aim is to develop RPL for Bangladesh that would cater for skills gained both formally and informally.

Given the fact that Bangladesh has a large informal sector, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Overseas Workers in coordination with the ILO's office in Dhaka is conducting a project to develop and implement the recognition of prior learning for this sector. It is hoped that RPL will result in the recognition of competences gained but not previously recognised in the informal sector of the Bangladesh economy. RPL is expected to provide some informal sector workers with opportunities to move to employment in the formal sector. This particularly important benefit of RPL will affect some 80 % of the working population of Bangladesh (Arthur 2009).

The Government considers RPL also advantageous as a means to address the challenge of early school leavers. Many citizens leave school before completing the eighth grade of the general education system and, because of this, are unable to enrol in formal skills training programmes. However, the government has removed this requirement, so that early school leavers are now able to access formal skills courses programmes with the aid of RPL. Access through RPL enables individuals to gain entry or admission to a particular course or qualification without necessarily

meeting some of the standard prerequisites such as completion of Year 8. RPL would enable early school leavers and workers in the informal economy to demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to undertake a training course or meet the prerequisites at a specific level of the NTVEQF.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

In Bangladesh, RVA is linked to the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF). The NTVQF provides a uniform framework for establishing course assessment requirements and course entry points. It is expected to provide the basis for an effective RVA process. However, the overall success of linking RPL to NTVQF will hinge on the incorporation of industry advisory groups alongside government agencies and NGOs in the development of RPL infrastructure and assessor training etc.

It has been proposed that RVA methodology and tools not be based exclusively on centrally set examinations. However, centrally set challenge tests will be used for moderation purposes. This will, the project implementers believe, maintain the integrity of the system in its infancy.

The introduction of a portfolio system (Competency Log Book) to document evidence of competences gained within the informal economy has also been proposed (Arthur 2009).

Delivery of RVA

Like Burkina Faso and Benin, Bangladesh has a well-developed traditional apprenticeship system. This invites the involvement of master craftspersons and resource persons from NGOs as RPL assessors in technical training centres and technical skills centres. Assessors will be trained to use reasonable adjustment processes for informal sector workers during the assessment process.

At present training institutions (both public and private) have few incentives to respond to market needs, especially in the informal economy. One of the critical issues in the development of an RVA system in Bangladesh will therefore be to allow public and publicly financed institutions greater autonomy in selecting training and assessment programmes, hiring assessors, and generating revenues by selling these services. The potential advantages of allowing the private sector a key role in the management of TVET institutions will be the greater market responsiveness to the needs of the informal sector (Arthur 2009). However, the government will need to provide incentives to NGOs to provide RPL services to the informal sector initially (ibid.).

Several levels of training for assessors have been proposed, targeting NGOs, technical and training centres, technical skills centres and master craftspersons (in both rural and urban settings). These training opportunities will be oriented towards individuals already qualified in workplace assessment as well as those requiring foundational training in this area.

Assessors will be trained to collect evidence, design assessment instruments, plan and organise assessment, assess competences, carry out reasonable adjustments, validate assessment instruments, and carry out appeal processes. It is hoped that the latter training interventions will promote transparency and enhance the integrity of the RPL system by laying the basis for a culture in which assessment decisions can be questioned and appealed.

Social inclusiveness is an important consideration in the RPL system. Since 80 % of employment is generated in the informal economy, support mechanisms need to be put in place that will enable the disadvantaged to access RPL. It is foreseen that NGOs and other public/private partnerships will expand the provision of RVA to socially marginalised groups in the informal sector. Costs, location and literacy issues will also need to be addressed and an acceptance of reasonable adjustment criteria will be required (Arthur 2009).

RPL is expected to be piloted as an integral component of the new NTVQF. The initial target of RPL will be the National Pre-Vocational Certificate 1 and Certificate 2 (NPVC 1 and NPVC 2). It will include training for assessors/trainers and be limited to four industry groups already identified. RPL could also target an industry group suggested by industry skills committees (Arthur 2009).

Quality Assurance

In Bangladesh, RPL will build on already existing models of collaboration between public and private institutions. It is envisaged that collaboration will produce a series of checks and balances, ensuring that quality assurance is built into the RPL system. There is expected to be a single TVET body, which will be responsible for co-ordinating the overall training system, providing oversight, financing of training, curriculum development, supervising skills tests, RPL, certification and accreditation (Arthur 2009).

6.2.4 Mexico

Like the Philippines, Mexico displays a sub-sectoral approach to RVA, with different approaches in primary and secondary education, higher education and the employment sector.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

In *primary and secondary education*, successful assessment can result in the award of credits or certification through the recognition of skills relevant to the Educational Model for Life and Work (Modelo Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo, MEVyT). Within this programme modules are organised around everyday life skills and oriented towards the development of competences.

The assessment processes facilitate learning and accreditation for people from diverse geographical and socio-cultural environments. The assessment of learning outcomes is viewed as a formative and ongoing process, allowing young people and adults to identify the progress and limitations of their learning.

Rigour and fairness are maintained through the use of assessors who are neither involved in the educational process or learning facilitators. Instead the final assessment, accreditation and certification are undertaken by a third party assessor authorised by the Secretariat of Public Education.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in basic education begins with a series of diagnostic tests. A diagnostic test allows individuals to discover how their knowledge, skills and wider competences align to basic education and schooling certification. These tests result either in the issuing of a primary or secondary certificate, or the applicant's referral to the appropriate level of participation in basic education.

Mexico also uses traditional examinations for assessment in the basic education sector, as certification at these levels is a requirement for admission to programmes leading to baccalaureate and higher education qualifications. While this may appear to create inflexibilities, the broader standards described in the MEVyT programme help to ameliorate this by enabling broader learning to be directly assessed.

At the baccalaureate and higher education levels, assessment is organised around a set of national criteria and standards, and is directed at citizens aged 25 years and older who have acquired knowledge corresponding to this level through self-guided learning and work experience.

Competences are assessed through a process divided into three parts. First, knowledge of Spanish, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences and the contemporary world, as well as reasoning and verbal skills, are assessed through a general knowledge examination. Following this, candidates complete a written examination covering the subjects of science, technology and the arts, including themes related to social, historical, and current affairs. Finally, students are required to take an oral examination chaired by two examiners. Candidates are evaluated against a baccalaureate graduate standard on verbal expression and their cultural and educational background.

In the case of citizens aged 30 years and older wishing to pursue a bachelor degree, assessments are held at the Centre for the Assessment of Higher Education. Both standardised tests and practical assessments are used. General examinations, interviews, presentation of a thesis and a final oral exam are used to determine candidates' performance against the criteria. An additional practical assessment is required in some areas such as health and engineering. Bachelor degrees in early childhood education follow a slightly different process. Students in this area take a general exam and those who do not pass must complete a second practical assessment, which includes the presentation of a lesson plan and a video of the candidate teaching a sequence of activities related to their lesson plan.

The awarding body is the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for issuing bachelor degrees and professional licences. Professional bodies are involved in the whole accreditation process from examination design through to the actual oral examination of candidates.

RVA for workforce development and employability is closely associated with the National System of Competency Standards (NSCS), which has been developed by the National Council for Standardisation and Certification of Labour Competences (CONOCER) and under which RVA is organised, regulated and implemented (García-Bullé 2013).

The Mexican Qualifications Framework has been established by the General Directorate of Accreditation, Incorporation and Revalidation, within the Ministry for Public Education. CONOCER is participating in linking the NSCS and the Mexican Qualifications Framework. These linkages are expected to contribute to labour mobility within the country or a region. CONOCER promotes development of certifiable standards for the use of RVA of competences by employers and workers, accredits the assessment and certifications unit standards, and issues the official “labour competence certificates”.

Although assessments are oriented to the competitiveness of a particular economic sector and relevance in the labour market, they are nevertheless oriented to a holistic notion of competences. The various types of competences include, functional and labour competences (e.g. knowledge and abilities required to execute a particular function in any service or manufacturing activity); social competences, meaning the capability to build relationships of trust with others through productive collaboration both in work teams and social networks; attitudes, referring to entrepreneurship, such as the capability to achieve goals, self-esteem, resilience, personal will and strength to fight for one’s beliefs; intellectual competences, meaning the capabilities to generate new ideas and innovation; and ethical competences, namely the core values that help to identify what is right and what is wrong, what is good or bad for the social group to which people belong.

Different methods and instruments are combined. The mechanism for the evaluation and certification of competences is based on portfolio evidence, observations of real life performances, interviews, or proof of knowledge. When required, an evaluation of attitudes, behaviour and personal values is carried out through “360° evaluations” including workshops, case resolution and presentations, as well as simulated scenarios and assessment centre models.

Assessment is accessible to all. CONOCER does not deny access to any candidate, firm, trade union or institution that approaches an evaluation centre to go through the assessment and further certification processes; all candidates who decide to participate in the process are accepted for the evaluation and certification process.

Information to key players is an important element of the RVA system. Following initial contact, candidates, firms, trade unions and institutions wishing to engage with the RVA system receive a statement detailing their rights and obligations and the cost of the process.

RVA is voluntary. Applicants undertake a voluntary diagnostic test in order to receive a preliminary assessment of their level of competences. Various options for addressing skills gaps are available. Based on the preliminary assessment of their level of competences, applicants decide whether they want to go directly to the evaluation process, or improve their competence through a particular training programme or additional work experience.

6.2.5 *Mauritius*

The RVA system in Mauritius has a clear rationale and is designed to bring people back into education and training. *Employers* recognise and use RVA because it provides them with qualified and motivated personnel. Pathways for further learning have been clearly defined within the Mauritian Qualifications Framework (MQF), attracting significant interest from *trade unions*. The success of the recognition system in Mauritius would not have been possible without the vital role played by the *government* in supporting the initiative (Allgoo 2013).

Standards and Methods of Assessment

Mauritius has deployed a learning outcomes-based qualification framework for the establishment of RVA. In the process of recognition, care is taken that a candidate's claim to validation is made against the MQF and that the qualification issued is the same as would be obtained through the formal system (Allgoo 2013). In addition, in line with its objectives, the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) has developed more than 110 outcome-based qualifications within the MQF. These comprise a number of unit standards that enable RVA, clearly defining pathways on the MQF and encouraging lifelong learning.

A candidate who acquires a certificate through RVA has the possibility to progress further on the NQF. In so doing, they not only re-enter the education and training system but also climb the social ladder.

The RPL model as set up by the MQA comprises three phases: Pre-screening; Facilitation; and Assessment. Once a candidate makes an application for RPL to the MQA, the application is pre-screened. Following a successful outcome in the pre-screening exercise, an RPL facilitator, registered with the MQA, is assigned to the RPL candidate. The facilitator guides the RPL candidate through the process of building a portfolio over a period of 3 months. The portfolio is a collection of evidence, comprising personal details, employment history, evidence of skills and knowledge, non-formal courses, life-experience learning, community and voluntary activities, and relevant experience in the selected trade.

The evidence to be submitted may comprise any or all of the following: statements of results of formal education; sample of work produced; performance appraisal reports; references from current or previous employers; job descriptions; details of formal training, seminars, conferences and workshops attended which are relevant to the RPL application; certificates of participation/achievements/awards; letters of recommendation; video tapes, tape recordings and/or photographs of work activities; specific details of work and/or participation in projects; and written testimonials from managers or colleagues.

Once the portfolio has been completed, the RPL candidate then submits it to the MQA, and it is forwarded to the awarding body for assessment. The assessment is carried out through an interview and at the end of the process, the RPL candidate either obtains a full qualification, no qualification or a partial qualification, known as a "Record of Learning".

Delivery of RVA

With regard to process development and implementation: (1) the roles of facilitators, advisors and assessors are clearly defined and contextualised. (2) *Facilitators* are registered and appointed by the MQA to communicate to the learner the different options that can be offered after conducting a pre-assessment. (3) Rigour is maintained through the use of trained *RVA assessors* who review the portfolio of the applicant; compare the evidence provided with the performance criteria; and make judgements as to whether the applicant wholly or partially meets the requirements. (4) Assessors check whether the evidence submitted conforms to the following recognition principles: validity (is the evidence relevant?); sufficiency (is there enough evidence?); authenticity (is the evidence a true reflection of the candidate?); currency (is the evidence provided reliable within the context?). (5) A clear and easy-to-follow, process of assessment is developed and used: identifying what the learner knows and can do; matching the skills, knowledge and experience of the learner against standards; assessing the learner; acknowledging the competences of the learner; crediting the learner for skills, knowledge and experience already acquired; and issuing a record of learning/qualification.

Quality Assurance

Under the Mauritian Qualifications Authority (MQA) Act 2001, training providers have to seek accreditation for their programmes prior to delivery. Accreditation of programmes enables the MQA to set benchmarks for quality management arrangements in education and training for the TVET sector. MQA envisions the creation of so-called Learners' Accounts within a National Qualifications Framework Information System (NQFIS) – a data base comprising records of achievement for each Mauritian learner from the primary to tertiary level, as well as the technical and vocational sectors. Additionally, the NQFIS will provide useful and relevant information on the labour force. As such, this information system will provide employers and educational providers the possibility to match the skills available on the labour market with those placed on the MQF. The MQF will also act as a reference for the individual once his/her achieved learning has been recorded in the database.

6.2.6 Namibia

In 2009, the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) and the National Training Agency (NTA) were assigned the responsibility of overseeing the development of a national policy on the recognition of prior learning. An RPL steering committee with representatives from the different sectors was constituted to work on the draft policy. Following a consultative process, principled approval was granted by the Minister of Education. Full implementation will commence once the policy has been ratified.

The policy enables candidates to earn credit for unit standards or full qualifications which are in line with the NQF. Within this context RPL refers to a broad spectrum of processes all aimed at achieving a particular outcome, including the recognition of prior certification, recognition of non-certificated formal learning, recognition of non-certified non-formal learning, articulation, credit transfer and mutual recognition (Namibia. Ministry of Education 2009).

Standards and Methods of Assessment

At the secondary school level, Namibia has successfully developed equivalency systems. This allows learners to flexibly transfer between conventional schools and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) providers.

According to legislation enacted in 1997, the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) is required to provide study opportunities to adults and out-of-school youth to upgrade their professional and vocational skills and their level of general education (Namibia. Government of the Republic of Namibia 1996). Similarly, institutions of higher learning are required to facilitate access for some students through open and distance learning programmes. The Centre for External Studies at the University of Namibia and the Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning at the Polytechnic of Namibia also offer tertiary education programmes through the distance-learning mode of study.

Applicants for RPL enter into an assessment agreement with the college before undergoing a series of assessments to demonstrate their competence. The assessment process involves pre- and post-interviews, portfolio development and proficiency tests. Following the assessment process, candidates are given written feedback on the outcome of the assessment.

Quality Assurance

The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) has developed an institutional policy on RPL to broaden access to its post-secondary programme. The policy defines RPL as “the process of identifying, matching, assessing and crediting the knowledge, skills and experience that candidates have gained through formal, informal or non-formal learning” (NAMCOL 2008). At present, the policy is being applied to enable candidates to gain access into the college’s post-secondary programmes at certificate and diploma levels.

The National RPL policy places emphasis on the following elements to ensure the quality of the RPL process: (1) Parity of esteem; (2) Awards obtained through RPL will not indicate whether or not they were obtained via the RPL route and will be treated as any other qualification award; (3) Articulation between sectors and pathways is ensured in terms of the NQF; (4) Quality is not to be compromised. The policy guidelines explicitly speak of high quality of the occupational and unit standards as well as that of assessment. The intention of these guidelines is

to ensure that RPL candidates enjoy equal opportunities for social and economic advancement. (5) A system of RPL that is planned, structured and well-resourced will have clear procedures, competence standards and related assessment tools, qualified assessors and portfolios; it will ensure sustainable funding and buy-in by all stakeholders; and will possess a simple, easily understood system.

The RPL policy is currently at the initial implementation stage. The stakeholders involved are employers, training providers, and government and different quality assurance bodies. The NQA provides technical support through capacity building.

6.2.7 Benin

Benin does not have an established system of recognition and validation of learning outcomes and competences. Instead, recognition of non-formal and informal learning takes place on a case-by-case and ad hoc basis, and there are no official recognition procedures or frameworks. Nevertheless, Benin has been able to develop criteria and standards of recognition in those areas where an informal system of recognition has begun to operate.

Standards and Methods of Assessment

In Benin, the focus of recognition is on the assessment of competences towards a vocational qualification in the context of the country's technical and vocational education and training certification system. The two certificates that are being promoted in close connection with recognition processes are the Vocational Skill Certificates (*Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle*, CQP) and the Occupational Skills Certificate (*Certificat de Qualification de Métier*, CQM).

Delivery of RVA

While Benin does not have a national qualifications framework, various government ministries and professional organisations are working in close partnership to transform traditional apprenticeships into a regulated dual training system. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning needs to be seen in the context of the reforms in the Beninese traditional apprenticeship system and its evolution into a dual system of training (workplace-based and school-based) (Walther and Filipiak 2007).

The dual system of training is designed to help young, uneducated individuals to acquire vocational qualifications, which are registered in the *Directory of Training and Professional Qualifications*. Central to the running of a dual training system is the employment of traditional master craftsmen, who train their apprentices to the CQP level. These master craftsmen-trainers are invited to update their skills beforehand by attaining an advanced vocational qualification, building on the

competences they already possess. This in turn is improving the quality of training imparted to apprentices. The extent to which RVA is being used before and after acquiring the CQP and CQM qualifications could provide an interesting area of future research.

Quality Assurance

The dual system of training which has been developed in Benin in close relationship with the traditional apprenticeship system includes the acquisition of literacy and cognitive skills of craftspeople, employees and micro-entrepreneurs as well as young people (Walther and Filipiak 2007).

6.2.8 Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso the informal economy accounts for up to 90 % of total employment. Only about 5 % of the workforce receives formal initial training and the rate of formal continuing training is very low. Formal Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays only a minor role (Savadogo and Walther 2013). The majority of workers acquire skills through informal or non-formal training that includes on-the-job training, self-training and traditional apprenticeships.

Given the high importance of the informal sector in the economy and its relevance for productivity, donor agencies such as the French Development Agency (ADF) in collaboration with local professional associations and national authorities are exploring new opportunities to recognise and certify competences acquired through traditional apprenticeships.

RVA in Burkina Faso needs to be placed in the context of the country's skills development policy agenda, which foresees a shift from a diploma-oriented system of education and training to a skills development system targeting early school leavers and workers in the informal economy. The shift is to be seen in relation to the move away from a formal school-based TVET system to one which integrates the diversity of the formal, non-formal and informal pathways. Finally, and most importantly, the skills development framework signals a shift away from a knowledge-based national certification framework to a framework recognising and validating all types of skills and work experiences (Savadogo and Walther 2013).

The new paradigm of skills development will include the establishment of an outcomes-based National Qualifications Framework (NQF) with several pathways, including school-based training, apprenticeship training, workplace training, and one of the pathways will be the recognition of formal and non-formal learning and skills.

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