

COOPERATE TO VALIDATE

OBSERVAL-Net Manifesto on wider access and cooperation for strengthening validation practices in Europe

Europe needs competent people

Enhancing competences, developing better skills and knowledge for more people are at the centre of policy aims across all European countries. Europe strives by 2020 to reduce the rates of early school leaving below 10% and to achieve rates of at least 40% of 30-34 year-olds completing third level education. The aim is that more adults can and will participate in lifelong learning and more children go to pre-school. The OECD Skills Strategy (2012) stresses the importance of skills-

development for economic growth and labour productivity: a shortage of skills can increase the hiring cost of skilled people and become an obstacle for innovation, competitiveness and adoption of new technologies. But beside the labour market, better educated and more competent people are also an investment in building a more cohesive society - higher civic and social engagement and more trust between people.

Skills surplus and lack of skills

However, when surveyed it appears that there are more people who report having a surplus of skills than those who lack skills. Skills mismatch (both lack and surplus) is the key focus of the EU 2020 flagship initiative “*New skills for new jobs*” promoting better anticipation of future skills needs; development of better matching between skills and labour market needs, and bridging the gap between the worlds of education and work. Finding the right balance between **skills demand in the changing labour market, skills development in educational institutions** and existing and constantly changing **skills supply by people**, is a big

challenge for all parties. Regarding the demand side, CEDEFOP foresees in its recent Skills Forecast for 2020 that there is a risk of skills polarisation: most new jobs will be at the higher and lower end of the job spectrum. They also predict a continuation of the trend towards more skill-intensive jobs at all levels and the decline of many traditional manual or routine jobs. But despite these trends there will also be over-qualification in the short term: the supply of people with high-level qualifications will exceed the numbers of jobs requiring that level of qualification.



Validation as a tool for better match of skills and qualifications

Skill mismatch is not just about the discrepancy between demand and supply as measured by the level of qualifications, it may be equally about the lack of the 'right' skills in the relevant field compared to the required competences, or not being aware of the skills demand and/or supply. Putting existing skills to effective use is one of the three major strategic action lines in OECD skills strategy.

CEDEFOP recognises that macro level skill forecasts have limits and more detailed sector, national or regional skill analyses are essential to improve the match between demand and supply. Partnerships of various stakeholders, including education and training providers, social partners and employment services are necessary to improve labour market intelligence and coordination.

VNIL (Validation of non-formal and informal learning) is one of the key tools

The position of validation at policy level

The importance of VNIL has been underlined consistently by European policy processes starting with initiatives such as the Bologna Process for higher education and the Copenhagen Process for vocational education and training, and has been developed since. There are Common European Principles (2004) for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning; European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP 2009/ 2011); and a European Inventory for the

for solving the puzzles related to skills mismatch. Validation makes competences visible and helps adults to progress their training while also improving labour market information about the existing skills supply. Current VNIL practices have been more driven by skills supply than demand. Educational institutions and people having different competences but no qualification have been more active in VNIL than the bodies which actually require the skills. Demand driven VNIL and stronger cooperation between individuals, employers and educational institutions is one of the future challenges. Methods and tools for validating skills that are explicitly needed on the labour market, with employers as the key drivers of this process, should get more attention. It is very important that in this process people are recognised and rewarded stressing that the glass of their competences is half full, not half empty.

validation of non-formal and informal learning (data from 2004, 2005, 2007, 2010). Several policy documents (European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and related national frameworks) and tools (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System -ECTS-; European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training -ECVET- Europass, Youthpass) support VNIL. On a global level, both OECD and UNESCO have addressed the relevance of recognition and validation.



But VNIL practices are still lagging behind in most European countries. According to the European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2010, only four EU Member States have a highly developed validation system and progress is said to be uneven and slow across countries. In order to change the situation the European Council adopted recommendations on the validation of non-formal and informal learning on 20 December 2012. According to the recommendations, member states should, by no later than 2018, have in place arrangements for the VNIL which enable

individuals to validate their skills and knowledge for obtaining a partial or full qualification. Among other things, the recommendations stress the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process across all relevant sectors, and the inclusion and involvement of all stakeholders such as employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognition of professional qualifications, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers, and civil society organisations.

OBSERVAL-Net promotes validation practices

Over the past decades the European Commission policy has promoted (and continues to promote) the development and implementation of VNIL practices at different levels, providing opportunities for networking and peer learning, sharing best practices, testing tools, and elaborating training materials, guidelines etc. OBSERVAL-Net partners have extensive experience in realising validation policies in different educational sectors and institutions, together with employers and other stakeholders (including trade unions, NGOs) at local, regional, national and European levels. OBSERVAL-Net project has facilitated the creation of a

transversal network capable of developing national and trans-national evidence-based models of best practices in VNIL. The project also analysed examples of best VNIL practices across European countries and mainstreams these practices through strategic development and policy making at national-regional level. *The European Observatory of VNIL* developed within the OBSERVAL project and elaborated within the OBSERVAL-Net project is an example of an open-source platform for sharing VNIL practices across Europe between the many stakeholders, practitioners and professionals.

Invitation to take the next steps

Taking into account the vast experience and extensive cooperation among different stakeholders, and in line with the European Council recommendations for facilitating effective peer learning and exchanges of experience and good practice, the OBSERVAL-NET partners invite:

- **authorities at all levels to take responsibility for supporting and motivating** educational institutions to take initiatives in providing wider and better VNIL practices and **informing them about VNIL needs;**
- **all stakeholders** active in VNIL to **share resources about best VNIL practices.** The Observatory is an

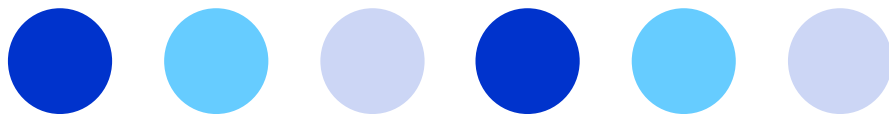


important source that can operate both as a home for different case studies but also as a source alongside other similar initiatives;

- **educational institutions** to make active use of the **competence-profile for VNIL practitioners** in developing training for people providing guidance, counselling or providing VNIL assessment. If necessary, the competence-profile can be developed further and adapted to the national and local needs;
- **employers, trade unions and 3rd sector organisations** to take an active part in thinking and designing **demand-based approaches, methods and tools for VNIL**. Every

learning outcome is valuable but adults are more motivated to validate their skills and competences -and if necessary obtain new skills and competences- if it is driven by clear prospects on the labour market and other forms of social participation in society;

- **all professionals working in the domain of lifelong learning to create a learning community on VNIL-methodology and practices;**
- **people themselves to be active in demanding more and better VNIL practices from all institutions and share experiences (via the Observatory or other tools) of the grass-root initiatives in VNIL.**



OBSERVAL-Net consortium:

EUCEN (BE) - *Coordinators*
Inholland University (NL)
Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CH)
National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning (DK)
3s Research Laboratory (AT)
CPZ International Centre for Knowledge Promotion (SI)
Navreme Boheme (CZ)
Lille 1 University (FR)

Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle (LX)
Regionaal Platform Arbeidsmarktbeleid Noord (NL)
Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CH)
Central Denmark Region (DK)
Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (AT)
Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (SI)
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (CZ)
Centre Régional de Ressources Pédagogiques et de développement de la qualité et de la formation (FR)

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