



European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014

Thematic report: guidance and
counselling

by Jane Sanderson

Cite this report as:

European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014).
*European inventory on validation of non-formal and
informal learning 2014. Thematic report: guidance and
counselling.*
<http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/87237.pdf>.

In partnership with



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

A project carried out by

ICF
INTERNATIONAL

A report submitted by [ICF Consulting Services](#)

[ICF Consulting Services Limited](#)

Watling House
33 Cannon Street
London
EC4M 5SB

T +44 (0)20 3096 4800

F +44 (0)20 3368 6960

www.icfi.com

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Availability of customised guidance to different target groups.....	1
1.2	The role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions	4
1.3	Methods used to deliver guidance	8
1.4	Skills and qualifications of guidance counsellors.....	11
1.5	Summary and conclusions	14
2	Bibliography	15

1 Introduction

This thematic report forms part of the 2014 update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (the European Inventory). The updated European Inventory is made up of the following outputs, which together form a 'snapshot' of the state of play in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning (validation) in Europe:

- Country updates covering 33 European countries¹;
- 2 case studies providing examples of validation 'in practice';
- Eight thematic reports (of which this report is one); and
- A final synthesis report identifying overall findings from the project.

The thematic reports are intended to provide more detail in relation to a number of subjects of central interest to policy makers and practitioners. Using the 2014 country updates and case studies, as well as the results of an online survey carried out between 3 October 2013 - 11 November 2013 and other literature relating to the topic of validation of non-formal and informal learning, these reports aim to identify and analyse key issues and trends, as well as examples of good practice and lessons learned in relation to a specific aspect of validation. They are intended for use by stakeholders in the field of validation.

The effective provision of high quality guidance and counselling plays a central role in supporting the success of validation processes. This is especially true in the case of initial guidance within the validation process², with evidence highlighting that delivery mechanisms, as well as content, both play a key role in shaping the effectiveness of information and guidance provision through each stage of validation.

This thematic report provides an analysis of evidence in relation to arrangements in Member States around the provision of guidance and counselling to support validation of informal and non-formal learning. Specifically, the report considers the availability of tailored information and support, designed and delivered in order to facilitate the validation process for a defined target group. It also examines the role of existing information, advice and guidance networks and/or institutions in relation to delivery or support, and explores the methods used to deliver this guidance and support. Finally, it provides an overview of the evidence gathered in relation to the skills and qualifications of guidance counsellors.

1.1 Availability of customised guidance to different target groups

The extent to which Member States are offering tailored or customised information and guidance for specific target groups in relation to the validation of learning is, according to the available evidence, extremely variable. The importance of ensuring that the provision of support and counselling is designed to meet the specific needs of different groups is significant, particularly in terms of devising a process of validation that is equal, and inclusive in its approach to supporting all groups to progress towards employment and/or learning.

1.1.1 Delivering guidance targeting specific groups or audiences

The provision of customised guidance and information to meet the particular needs of identified groups is generally acknowledged to be one of the most effective ways to organise support for those wanting to find out more about validation. A review of the country reports and other relevant material such as academic papers (*Ibid*, Whittaker, R. et al; NIACE *Using the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) within the Qualifications and Credit Framework*) shows that in some cases, well developed structures are in place to provide dedicated guidance and information resources to individuals who have been identified as a priority. Such is the case in Finland where guidance and counselling service centres for adults form a national network and provide information for all adult education, Competence-Based Qualifications and validation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Underpinning this is

¹ There are 36 country updates in total, as two reports have been prepared for Belgium and three for the UK, in order to take account of the devolved responsibility for education and training policy in these countries.

² Whittaker, R. Et al *Streamlining RPL Processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning*, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University, 2011. The report can be found [here](#).

Opin ovi³ - The National Programme of Guidance and Counselling Services for Adults, and part of the operational programme includes projects targeting specific groups of individuals and providing them with tailored information about validation, such as the ALPO support program of the Ministry of the Interior in the field of guidance for immigrants, as described below.

Case Study example: ALPO – Initial guidance and counselling services for immigrants in Finland

Aiming towards work, education and active citizenship

Administered by the Ministry of Employment and Economy and the Ministry of Education and Culture, the ALPO programme comprises a range of co-ordination and development projects related to initial phase guidance and orientation services for immigrants.

Regional projects providing a wide range of guidance and information services, and systems for testing and competence mapping have been developed as key instruments to support people to move towards employment, or to steer them towards suitable education choices.

Testing language skills and mapping candidates' existing competencies support the identification of suitable placements within employment and/or education. Language learning materials also promote the acquisition of the level of proficiency necessary within Finnish society and working life.

Online language learning materials are also available through the project, enabling independent study. The delivery of project services by a multi-channel approach (guidance is available in written form, face to face, over the phone or electronically) helps to increase equality and reduce discrimination related to education, working life and placement in the labour market.

More information can be found on the project website:

http://www.rakennerahastot.fi/vanhat_sivut/rakennerahastot/tiedostot/ESR_keh_ohj_A4_esittelyt_englanniksi/Participation/development_programme_for_the_initial_guidance_and_counselling_service_for_immigrants.pdf

The 2014 Inventory country updates provide some interesting examples of design and delivery of counselling and advice for target groups, such as in Austria, where websites providing information about different aspects of validation have been developed by stakeholder organisations such as the Public Employment Service, with the intention of targeting specific groups, for example:

- The website of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture provides information about second-chance education (such as acquisition of Hauptschule qualifications by adults, ExternistInnenreifeprüfung, Studienberechtigungsprüfung and Berufsmaturaprüfung);
- The website, www.erwachsenenbildung.at, provided by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, presents comprehensive information on Austrian adult learning and second-chance education offers, including opportunities for the validation and recognition of informally developed competences;
- The website of the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education provides information about accreditation of programmes and courses provided within this framework;
- The website of the initiative for professional recognition (Berufsanerkennung) targeted at migrants provides information about the acceptance and recognition of vocational qualifications or professional experience acquired in other countries as well as about counselling available.

Together, the websites highlighted above combine to provide comprehensive information and support service for a range of groups.

³ For more information please refer to the website:

http://www.opinovi.fi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=453%3Awhat-is-national-esf-operational-programme-and-the-opin-ovi-projects&catid=1%3Aaikuisohjauksen-koordinointiprojekti-ajankohtaista&Itemid=403&lang=fi

One of the key challenges for those designing and delivering guidance and counselling provision is how to identify and categorise the target groups. For instance in the UK, “*The goal is to design [information and guidance] services that reach ever-increasing numbers of people in a cost-effective and efficient way*”⁴. To address this challenge, careers services in England and Scotland have adopted an approach of “*differentiated service delivery systematic approaches to customer segmentation, and proactive marketing of services*”⁵. The country reports highlight that these groups are commonly defined in different ways, such as in relation to the key characteristics of the individual, or their specific situation such as:

- **Employment status:** especially within the context of supporting those who are unemployed. For example, In Poland, support for validation of learning (outside the provision delivered within the schools system) is targeted towards supporting unemployed people and jobseekers registered at employment offices or in non-public employment agencies. Information is also available on the Internet portal of the Central Examination Board, Polish Craft Association and Voluntary Labour Corps.

In Greece also, a focus of activity for the period 2014-2020, will be promoting the links between guidance and certification and, most importantly to facilitate the re-entry of unemployed people into the labour market.

However, in some cases support is also targeted to those already in employment, such as the provision of guidance and information for employees, which in Bulgaria is considered to be the joint responsibility of employers, the Public Employment Agency, social partners, and information centres.

- **Age:** some Members States have identified groups requiring tailored support, as defined by their age or stage of life. In Poland, the project Business Academy 50+ offers guidance and counselling for a defined model of validation and to update professional competences for individuals over the age of 50, based on the occupations of salespeople and sales representatives. There are examples in other countries, as shown in the example below, this can relate to young people as well as adult learners.

Case Study example: Nefiks, Slovenia

This project has been promoting the importance and value of acquiring and documenting skills and competencies gained through volunteering and non-formal education for over 10 years. It aims to encourage young people to participate in educational activities in different fields, and engages with employers to encourage them to consider non-formal education as a reference through the employment and recruitment process.

In terms of its target group, the project works with young people, with a particular focus on those who are harder to help, or are at the risk of exclusion. Key activities which are designed to engage with target groups include workshops, stakeholder meetings, peer advisory system and public promotional activities.

The project comprises a record book and an on-line portfolio, through which the young person can record their knowledge, experience and skills acquired in 6 different fields:

- active citizenship and responsible work on projects
- work (summer work, student employment, other types of short term employment)
- organised forms of education
- camps and voluntary work
- exchanges/visits of foreign countries
- other ways of acquiring knowledge, skills and experiences

More information on the project can be found on the website: <http://talentiran.si/en-nefiks>

- **Geographical location:** Finally, guidance and counselling can also be organised according to physical or geographical boundaries, in this way provision is often targeted to the local labour market situation or employment context.

⁴ DMH Associates, CfBT Education Trust, *Evidence and Impact: Careers and guidance-related interventions*, 2009 the report can be found [here](#)

⁵ Watts, A.G. *Careers Wales: A Review in an International Perspective* Welsh Government, 2009 the report can be found [here](#)

For example in France, where every individual has the right to access guidance on the validation process, in relation to the initial stages of guidance this tends to be delivered by the regional information points (PIC). On progressing through the constituent stages of the validation process, other stakeholders play a role in delivering guidance and support, most commonly by the network or awarding body responsible for the organisation of the process; this tends to be either at the provider level (e.g. universities) or at the regional level.

In Italy, validation approaches are often organised according to regional boundaries. Regional validation systems are in place to deliver information and advice, however these systems are not always co-ordinated across regional jurisdictions. The role of a regional network is predominantly the provision of information about the territory and employment opportunities; however every regional system is obliged to include initial information and guidance for individuals prior to commencing the validation process.

1.2 The role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

The 2014 Inventory country updates explore the role of existing information, advice and guidance networks or institutions, and the extent to which guidance and counselling on validation of learning forms an integrated part of a wider support provision landscape.

The evidence presented in the country reports shows that situations vary significantly. In some cases, provision of advice and support for validation is embedded within the existing infrastructure. This can be as part of an embedded network e.g. In Norway where a network of career guidance centres has been introduced at a national level, or it can be the responsibility of an identified organisation or institution, as is the case in Turkey where the VQA is the central body delivering information, guidance and advice at all stages of validation.

In Liechtenstein, information is provided through a single point of contact: the Gateway Portal, which was established in 2009. The Portal is a single point of access through which, due to the number of people using this offer being quite small, the counsellors provide personal guidance and support for each individual.

At the other end of the spectrum, and a situation that is described in a significant number of country reports, the provision of information and counselling for validation is the responsibility of the training provider or institution offering the validation process. These varying approaches are presented below.

1.2.1 Some countries have developed a co-ordinated network of provision

In Finland, in 2011 the Ministry of Education and Culture published a national strategy for lifelong guidance which incorporated discussions on improving the validation of non-formal and informal learning through improved guidance procedures. A national network of guidance and counselling service centres for adults provide information and guidance regarding all adult education. Whilst the validation providers are at the core of guidance and counselling, this takes place within a defined strategic and operational framework.

Similarly, in Norway, information and guidance is embedded within the existing information provision infrastructure, and this begins with initial guidance. For instance, the guidelines on validation relating to upper secondary education state that: the guidance stage starts when the applicant contacts the county administration. Through guidance, it becomes clear whether the purpose of the validation is to be enrolled in upper secondary education, or undergo validation in order to prove competence (knowledge and skills) in individual subjects at upper secondary level.

Iceland also has an established network of provision which forms an integral part of the validation landscape. Guidance and counselling around validation is supported by a formal network of career counsellors located at the Lifelong Learning Centres, focussed on sharing experience and good practice to support the development of guidance services in cooperation with the Education and Training Service Centre.

The model of local and national co-ordination of guidance and counselling networks is also evident in Spain, which has an integrated network of provision. The regions ('Comunidades Autonomas') are responsible for the provision of information and guidance. However, support is also provided at national level in the websites of the Ministry of Education (TodoFP portal) and the national public employment service (SEPE, Ministry of Employment). The national level resources also act as a signposting service; information on validation and who to contact for advice in each of the Communities is available there. Information and guidance can also be obtained through a range of points including: Centres for Adult Education, Guidance Departments in Secondary and VET Schools, Integrated Vocational Training Centres, Centres of the public employment service (national and regional), Municipalities, Chambers of Commerce, Trade unions and business organisations.

In Denmark, the country report shows that the main channels of provision are twofold. There is a network in place for the provision of guidance and counselling, where stakeholders including study committees, job centres, and trade unions, provide information and support concerning the validation process. Alongside this, tailored guidance such as one-to-one support and group support, in regards to the specific RPL-programmes, is provided by educational institutions and the Adult and Continuing Training Centres (VEU-centres). Whilst this provides a comprehensive service in terms of coverage, it is highlighted that guidance is not currently coordinated between these different bodies.

Case study example: a co-ordinated network of guidance and counselling support in the Netherlands

The situation in the Netherlands highlights a combined, multi-level approach, whereby information and guidance concerning validation is made available at a number of different levels. Aside from training providers being obliged to offer information and advice on why, how and when to embark on the validation process other channels of support are present at a:

- Macro-level: through the Ministry of Education and the social partners;
- Meso-level: by the sector partners (employers and trade unions);
- Micro level: within organisations by HR departments and internal 'ambassadors', also with any registered provider.

As noted above, training providers offer guidance and counselling, and providers are the main source of information for people interested in validation of prior learning. Private training providers form a key part of the information and guidance sector, and include former Government-funded advisory training centres or AOBs, many of which were privatised after 2000, as well as independent organisations and larger consultancies⁶.

In addition, a regional structure has been set up with 35 Leer Werk Loketten (*Counter for services around the issue of 'working and learning'*) across the country. The centres are open to everyone and offer free advice on learning and working opportunities. These centres form a link between training providers and the labour market. They (amongst others) facilitate the cooperation between training providers and employees and/or employers, in order to use validation of learning as a career-guidance tool.

1.2.2 Some Member States have a named organisation with central responsibility for provision of advice and guidance

Alongside the model of an established network for provision of guidance and information, country reports also highlight examples of a different approach, one where a central institution or organisation has responsibility.

For example, in Turkey the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) is the central body delivering information, guidance and advice at all stages of validation. The main source is the VQA's website⁷.

In the UK, in Scotland, it is the role of Skills Development Scotland to provide information to individuals about employment and learning opportunities. The SDS 'My World of Work'

⁶ Source: <http://euroguidance.eu/guidance-systems/guidance-system-in-the-netherlands-overview/>

⁷ Please see www.myk.gov.tr

website⁸ signposts individuals to the SCQF website to find out more information about validation of learning. At a 'grass roots' level, individual guidance providers would refer individuals to a learning provider, if they identified a need for information and validation was seen as an appropriate pathway for the individual. Within learning providers, counselling may be provided by guidance or teaching staff.

Similarly, In Germany, there is no overall network of counselling and guidance services, but the National Guidance Forum in Education, Career and Employment serves as an independent network for those wishing to find out about validation of learning.

In Sweden, there are two main organisations that are responsible for providing guidance and information about validation - the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and the Swedish National Agency for Education. Alongside these, other relevant stakeholders take part in activities aimed at raising awareness about validation within their areas of responsibilities (e.g. Public Employment Service, the Swedish Council for Higher Education and the National Council of Adult Liberal Education).

1.2.3 Some Member States organise provision in relation to sector (both occupational and education sector)

Sector-specific provision (occupation sector): The provision of information and support around the validation process can be shaped according to occupational sector of the skills and competencies acquired by the individual. For instance in France, where in the field of health and social care qualifications, guidance on VAE (or Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience) and related services are provided by a structure called ASP (Agence de Services et Paiement) on behalf of different Ministries.

In Malta, the developing Sector Skills Units will be responsible for providing guidance and counselling services to individuals submitting their documentation for validation, within the relevant occupational area under the remit of the Sector Skills Unit. Whilst the national system of validation is being developed, the childcare sector already has an established system of validation for which the Employment Training Centre (ETC) has main responsibility for providing information and guidance to candidates.

In Croatia, provision of validation information and guidance is also organised according to sectoral boundaries. For example, the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts provides support to its members and other interested individuals prior to and following on from the validation process. Support can take several forms, such as the provision of literature relating to relevant exams; descriptions of occupations and qualifications; raising awareness of employment opportunities; professional further education and training; or re-training opportunities. Other sectoral associations in Croatia also provide support to individuals embarking on the validation process, often in the form of professional literature and guidance.

Sector-specific provision (education sector): educational sector can also be a factor in shaping the provision of advice and guidance on entering and completing the validation process.

For example, in Luxembourg, it is the responsibility of training providers in each sector to provide information and guidance. For instance in the *lycée technique*, individualised guidance and support is available via counsellors working in each school. At the secondary level, the Ministry of National Education (cellule VAE) manages the provision of information, advice and guidance, which can take the form of direct support provided by staff from guidance services, and websites can be used to help identify which qualifications correspond to the experience of the candidate (e.g. website of the Chambre des Métiers, and the mySchool! portal).

The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) in Malta plays a central role in providing support and advice for people wishing to validate their informal or non-formal learning. Support covers a number of areas, including how to organise and

⁸ Please see <http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/>

document evidence of learning; how to prepare for assessment; what to do following the assessment decision; and familiarisation with the validation and assessment procedures.

Support specifically tailored to the Higher Education sector is also present in France, where guidance and counselling is provided by a specific service responsible for VAE (or *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*) and lifelong learning. Within Universities, counselling is generally provided by a team of two professionals, including a general guidance practitioner and a professor responsible for the type of qualification targeted.

In recognition that there are certain groups which are under-represented in the HE sector, the example below highlights how activity can be targeted not only to a specific sector, but also a target group *within* the sector.

Case study example: ALLinHE

This project, which operated across the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, UK, Slovenia, Romania, France, Switzerland, South Korea, had the overarching aim through validation, of attracting under-represented groups to higher education.

The project included a comparative analysis of the guidance and counselling provided for the different validation methods and approaches to under-represented (target) groups in HE across partner countries, and supported analysis of new strategies and methods resulting in a handbook to highlight best practices in validation methods and approaches for HE professionals.

More information can be found on the website: <http://allinhe.eu>

In Finland, in IVET it is a legal obligation of the provider to include guidance counselling in VET programmes. In programmes leading to upper secondary vocational qualifications, the VET provider works with each student to draw up an individual study plan, which covers also identification and recognition of prior learning. In HEIs, validation is commonly incorporated into the Personal Study Planning Guidance process, since it is acknowledged that guidance is an integral part of validation and is one of the quality assurance factors in the provision of validation.

In countries where information and guidance provision does not specifically cover validation at a general level, there is nonetheless recognition of the importance of aligning provision to meet the different information needs of specific sectors. For example, in Poland, the developing system of providing guidance for validation is to be interlinked with existing structures, for instance within the school system where each student is able to access additional support from professionals such as a teacher, adviser, or a professional counsellor.

1.2.4 For others, there is no overarching, co-ordinated approach to providing guidance

For a significant number of Member States, there is very little or no dedicated, nationally-organised structure for provision of information and guidance concerning the validation of non-formal or informal learning. More often than not, where dedicated structures are not in place for the provision of information and guidance on validation, the relevant counselling and guidance is provided by other sources such as the educational institutions, those institutions who offer the validation or portfolio processes, or at a project level.

This is the case in Austria, where in the absence of a national, co-ordinated network of agencies or organisations, information and guidance on validation is provided to individual candidates only in certain cases, most commonly by the institution offering the validation organisation measure. Similarly, in Poland information about the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning is currently limited and discussions around developing a validation system indicate that it will be explicitly related to vocational guidance and information structures.

In Malta, where there is no integrated national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning, validation arrangements tend to be implemented as part of activity related to specific projects. This is also the situation in Bulgaria, as described in the case study example below:

Case study example: project-based approaches to providing guidance and counselling for validation in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, there is no uniform legal framework, national system, policy or strategy on validation of non-formal and informal learning in place. Nor is there a defined national institutional framework on validation, which clearly allocates the responsibilities of different stakeholders.

However, there are examples of validation approaches, and within this, the provision of guidance and counselling for validation, being developed at a project level. For instance, through the project 'System for validation of non-formal acquired knowledge, skills and competences', the role of VET schools has become more prominent – to illustrate, there are consultants (typically teachers working at the VET school) who support candidates during identification of competences for validation, evidence collection and development of a portfolio. At a next stage, assessors (different to the consultants, also teachers) advise candidates how to prepare for the examination / assessment.

Another example of project-based activity, and one which has an occupational sector focus, is the EU project 'Validation of self-acquired learning and cREdits trAnsfer in web design and compuTEr animation' (CREATE), a Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation project.

The project addressed skills shortages and unemployment in the ICT/multimedia sector, where learning is often informal and self-acquired. Beneficiaries were young people (aged 16-25) including early school leavers⁹ (ESLs) as well as the long-term unemployed who have informally acquired knowledge, skills and competences in computer animation and web design and wish to have these skills validated.

The project is especially innovative because it developed methods including an online toolkit for the assessment of the outcomes of informal learning in computer animation and web design. The assessment toolkit was tested and piloted in several Centres for Vocational Training (CVTs). Successful participants were provided with a certificate describing their competences in computer animation and web design, based on units of learning outcomes and allocated ECVET points.

A further example from Bulgaria is the project "Development of Workforce Competence Assessment System by Sectors and Regions" or "C.A.S.S.Y.". The project partners, Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) and Confederation of Labour „Podkrepa" implemented the project between 2009 and 2013, the overall project objective was to enhance labour market adaptability and effectiveness, as well as to strike a greater balance of labour market demand and supply by developing a system for workforce competence assessment by sectors and regions¹⁰.

1.3 Methods used to deliver guidance

Given the different arrangements that have been identified for the delivery of information and guidance, it is unsurprising that the evidence gathered demonstrates that there is a wide range of methods which are used to deliver support to individuals to help them to enter and successfully navigate the validation process.

The research conducted by Whittaker et al¹¹ established there are a range of delivery approaches available, such as E-learning resources, virtual learning environments, written materials e.g. guides and handbooks, and one-to-one contact with individuals such as face to face meetings and/or group meetings with staff/mentors/advisors.

1.3.1 Exploring different delivery approaches

How far these different approaches can be effective depends very much on the delivery arrangements, the nature of the validation process, and the individual concerned. Provision must recognise that each individual will have their own requirements, as noted in one report

⁹ Early school leavers (ESLs) are defined at EU level as 18-24 year-olds with at most lower secondary level education who have not progressed to any further education or training

¹⁰ For more information about the project, and to access project documents please refer to the following link: <http://www.competencemap.bg/about+the+project/1/YdK3clajYNevitKTcRaDg9ejjINKzYdaHMFODchOfIZK3cderYBaXINaviRKnIR>

¹¹ <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/publications/streamlining-rpl-processes-facilitating-the-award-of-credit-for-prior-informal-learning.pdf?sfvrsn=4>.

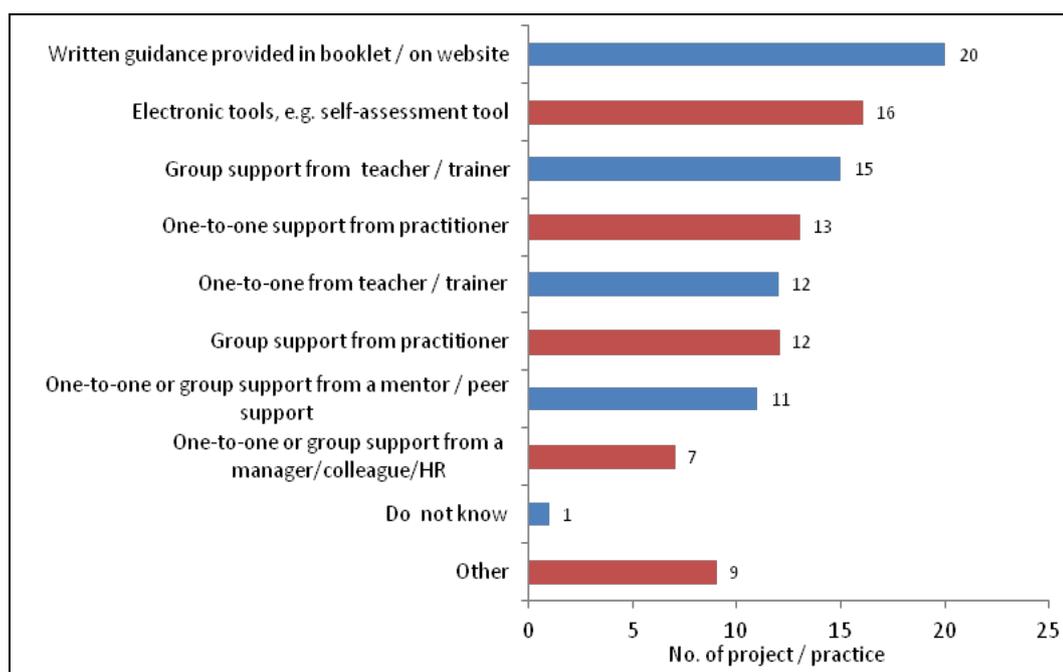
'VLE [Virtual Learning Environments] and other forms of technology enhanced learning resources are beneficial but the learners have to be able to have the skills to engage with these for them to be effective'¹².

One means of addressing this issue is to recognise the value of a blended learning approach, having multiple, clearly defined points of contact, and providing relevant information, advice and guidance in a range of different modes.

In the UK, for example, the approaches to provision of support and guidance vary according to the sector, institution, and the recipient group. There is no specific information provider for the various types of validation in place, and the relevant individual learning providers offer information and support to individuals accessing the validation processes on offer. Research has been undertaken to explore existing delivery approaches¹³ and found that within individual organisations there tended to be more than one guidance activity in place for learners entering and undergoing a validation process. These activities included both non-accredited guidance (e.g. on-line, workshop, tutorial, detailed guidance booklet) and accredited modules (e.g. on-line, face-to-face, blended delivery).

The findings of the on-line survey¹⁴ reinforced this, with 64 per cent of respondents having used more than one method of guidance (with an average of 2.8 methods per respondent). Figure 1.1 below illustrates the methods of guidance that projects and/or practices employ. With just under half of respondents (48 per cent), written information is the most commonly used method to guide validation participants. The next most cited guidance method was electronic tools (36 per cent), closely followed by group support from a trainer / teacher (34 per cent).

Figure 1.1 Type of guidance provided by survey respondents



Source: 2014 Inventory Update: Online Survey of Projects and Practices, number of respondents, 42

1.3.2 Web-based delivery of guidance and counselling

As highlighted in the survey responses, the internet is a key means of providing information about validation of learning. Information portals which can be accessed by the general public are commonplace, providing information on the different types of validation procedures and

¹² Whittaker, R. Et al *Streamlining RPL Processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning*, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University, 2011.

¹³ Research undertaken by the SEEC AP(E)L network group, please see the website for more information : <http://www.seec.org.uk/apl-recognition-and-accreditation-prior-or-previous-learning/>

¹⁴ 2014 Inventory Update: Online Survey of Projects and Practices

the requirements - for example in Luxembourg www.guichet.public.lu and www.lifelong-learning.lu. In Portugal, updated information on education and training offers and the validation process at national level is provided by a national database: SIGO — Integrated System of Information and Management of Education and Training Offer (Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Formativa)¹⁵. In Denmark, a counselling web portal provides general information about prior learning (www.ug.dk).

In Turkey there are three main sources of support on-line. The Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) website is the main source of information and advice for all stages of the validation process. The Lifelong Learning DG of the Ministry of National Education provides information via its project website on lifelong learning and the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning. Individuals can also receive e-guidance from the National Careers Information System.

There are also specific situations where technology can be especially relevant to the delivery of guidance. In Bulgaria for example, E-guidance is particularly relevant for validation related to ICT professions. For example, the CREATE project ('Validation of self-acquired learning and credits transfer in web design and computer animation') has developed E-based tools for validation (Please see Case Study example in section 1.2 for more details). In Spain the web platform TodoFP portal was designed to provide information and advice to individuals. Information is also provided in the website of the National Public Employment Service (SEPE, Ministry of Employment). In Germany, the ProfilPASS tool used to self-assess competencies and abilities was developed into the eProfilPASS in 2012 as presented below.

Case study example - ProfilPASS

ProfilPASS aims to review, document and assess informally acquired competences, regardless of where they were acquired or their field of learning. It is based on user self-assessment and supported by professional guidance. The ProfilPASS validation procedure is built up by 'multipliers' (Multiplikatoren) who qualify counsellors to use the ProfilPASS-system in practice. Apart from the ProfilPASS-counsellors, there are 55 ProfilPASS-dialogue-centres which promote the ProfilPASS-system in their region.

The dialogue centres employ field workers which cooperate in networks with the counsellors. At the start of the ProfilPASS-process, the users receive information about informal learning, recognition and the ProfilPASS-approach. During the approach, the identification of competences takes place before the personal and individual educational planning is carried out. The provider is responsible for the counselling; that is why the range of counselling is tailored to the target group of the providers. An electronic version of the ProfilPASS, the eProfilPASS, was introduced in 2012.

More information can be found on the website: <http://www.profilpass-online.de/>

1.3.3 Individual, face-to-face provision of support

The importance of providing guidance and counselling through individual, face to face interaction cannot be overstated, in order to identify and meet the specific needs of each person. In Austria, individual interaction forms a central part of the support delivered by the Adult Education Centre in Linz, as described below.

Case study example – the competence portfolio of the Adult Education Centre Linz, Austria

The competence portfolio contains information about an individual's core competencies.

¹⁵ The SIGO website is divided into two areas: Adults and Youth. Both sites are intended for the use of professionals involved in training and certification. More information can be found on the following Government website: <http://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/sigo>

Throughout the competence portfolio process, individual or group-based interaction and support is built into each stage.

The portfolio is developed through three defined stages of activity: a series of three workshops guided by two trained coaches, an individual's work at home in between these workshops and a concluding discussion to address any unresolved issues or questions.

On completion of these three steps, a portfolio is created that contains information on:

- Career progression - this shows all of the steps taken in the formal education and training system as well as the steps that have led to the acquisition of skills and competencies through non-formal and informal learning.
- Analysis of potential - this is an analysis of individual tasks and activities that an individual has carried out in different roles and stages of their life in view of the skills and competencies used, or gained, to complete them. Individuals also carry out a self-assessment of their competencies.
- Personal profile - the abilities highlighted in the stages above are reduced to core competencies. The individual has the choice of which competencies to select.

Once the portfolio is complete, the coaches are responsible for identifying the individual's core competencies and for assessing the extent to which the competencies reflect the defined indicators.

The portfolio method is complemented with an assessment centre where people who have completed their competence portfolio undergo a number of tests, including psychometric tests, mock job interviews, group discussions, role-plays, case studies, and other tasks. Several observers assess the behaviour of the participants in view of six dimensions of social competence, which are ability to work with others, teamwork, ability to reflect, ability to resolve conflicts, self-awareness, and communication skills.

For initial guidance in validation in particular, many Member States have developed systems to provide individualised guidance based on face to face discussion, these often focus on supporting the first stages of the validation process. In Cyprus, where guidance on validation is provided through the current system of Vocational Qualifications of the HRDA, during the diagnosis stage (identification), candidates discuss with the internal examiner their goals and knowledge-skills-competence (as identified in their self-assessment). However, it should be noted that this guidance process is not structured or standardised, and this was highlighted by HRDA as a concern, resulting in a proposed new route of validation of non-formal and informal learning for vocational qualification which includes structured provision of guidance.

Similarly, in Switzerland, the guidance in the identification and self-evaluation phase can differ in duration from service to service, and is based on the needs of the public. Generally, this phase is offered on an individual basis although sometimes it is delivered in small groups. The guidance in this phase gives the candidate advice on how to prepare their validation dossier.

1.4 Skills and qualifications of guidance counsellors

The amount of information available in relation to the skills and qualifications of guidance counsellors in the country updates is somewhat limited. However, there is some interesting evidence which, coupled with existing research, provides an indication of the requirements, approaches and associated issues for practitioners charged with supporting individuals through the validation process.

Whilst the evidence from the country updates shows that not all countries covered by the Inventory have yet developed comprehensive provisions to support the development of staff involved in validation, it is the case that the more than half of the countries have done so. The extent to which guidance staff have the autonomy over their participation varies: only in a few cases is participation mandatory for staff, for example in Luxembourg, training is systematically provided to the guidance practitioners that support candidates and members of validation committees. A more common approach by far is to support participation through

the production of resources, for example guidelines concerning provisions. For instance in the Netherlands, the Quality Code for validation of prior learning (EVC) describes the role of practitioners and a common set of competences for EVC-processes has been defined.

1.4.1 Issues affecting the guidance practitioner workforce

The role of guidance counsellors forms a cornerstone of an effectively functioning validation process, from initial guidance and information provision, supporting the steps through validation, assessment and beyond. Research¹⁶ has identified that at each stage of validation, there must be adequate provision in terms of capacity, as well as capability and skills of guidance counsellors. This relates not only to resourcing and available capacity of guidance counsellors to meet demand, but also ensuring practitioners have the skills and qualifications needed, and have access to initial and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities. Therein lies a challenge, as identified by research in the UK¹⁷ where the importance of ensuring a standardised approach to delivering validation support was emphasised.

This was identified as a problem also in Romania, where there are relatively limited initiatives to support validation practices amongst guidance practitioners. The Euroguidance network in Romania supports the role of validation in the formal educational system amongst the school counsellors network, with a special focus on the lifelong learning portfolio of students in pre-university education. However, despite the fact that the school counsellors are keen to support the validation process of students, the lack of a legal framework and absence of common methodologies to support the validation process in formal education has thus far prevented the development of specific practices among practitioners.

1.4.2 The importance of a consistent approach to training for guidance staff

The importance of effective quality processes are clear, these should be monitored to ensure the right information and guidance is provided. In order for guidance counselling to be delivered to a consistent level of quality and in a standardised way, at the heart of the approach must be a common understanding amongst staff of the way validation is carried out, as is being addressed through activity described in the case study example below.

Case study example: IMPROVE - Improving Validation of Non-Formal learning in European career guidance practitioners

This project, co-financed by the European Commission within the Lifelong Learning Programme, Grundtvig, aims to develop and pilot a guide to the validation of non-formal learning in career guidance practitioners, coherent with the CEDEFOP guidelines and to support better understanding of the existing frameworks for validating the competence of career guidance practitioners and the effectiveness of non-formal learning assessment.

The project is operating across a number of countries: Italy, Czech Republic, Spain, Greece, Romania, and Germany. The guide will be focused on how to perform effective validation procedures with career guidance practitioners, in order to foster effective validation practice.

More information can be found on the website: <http://www.improveguidance.eu/what-improve>

1.4.3 The importance and prevalence of qualifications for guidance practitioners

The importance of standardised qualifications supporting guidance which includes information about validation is underlined by the 2014 online survey of projects and practices, where 24 per cent of respondents identified that part of their quality assurance procedures for validation of learning included 'prerequisite qualifications for Counsellors'.

¹⁶ Whittaker, R. Et al *Streamlining RPL Processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning*, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University, 2011.

¹⁷ NIACE (The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, England and Wales). *Using the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)* April 2013. The report is available [here](#)

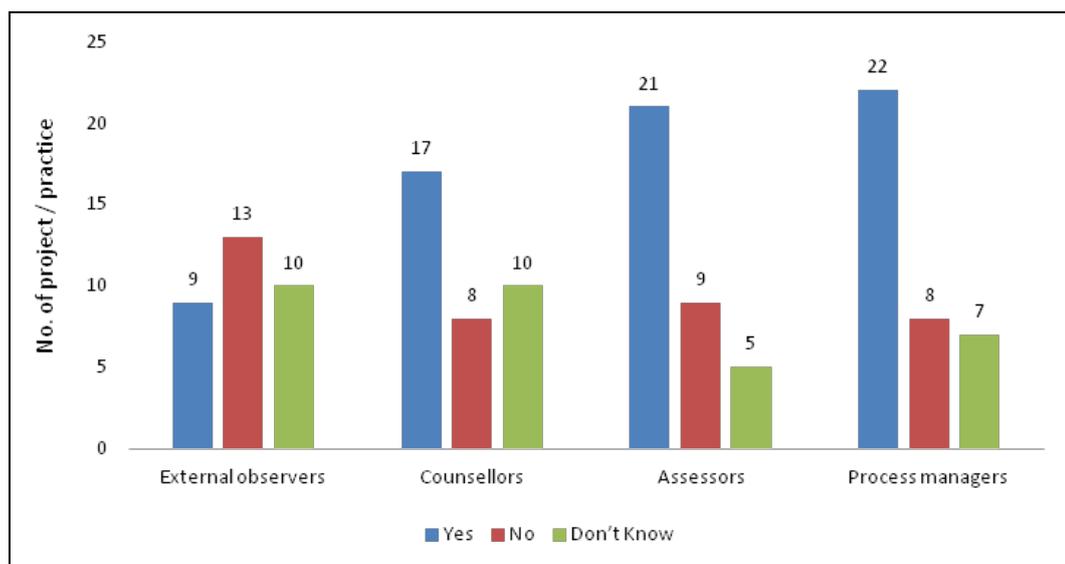
Where respondents described the qualifications required, these included: *Professional experience for guidance as well as Knowledge about European and National Qualifications Frameworks; At least 4 years of working / teaching experience in the sector and to pass a course and exam on the assessment system; and Counsellors having a degree in psychology and experience in the processes of orientation, skills assessment and job search support.*

It is interesting to note that a 2009 Cedefop publication¹⁸ which focusses on practitioner competences and qualification routes, talks about the importance of accreditation of prior experience and learning (APEL) for career guidance specialist staff themselves. The report states that “*Wherever training is offered, whether accredited or not, it should recognise prior learning and experience*”. There is also recognition that often “*those whose non-formal delivery experiences can lead to an interest in progressing to a more formal professional role in career guidance. Their prior experience and learning should be recognised in their route to further qualification*”.

More generally, information from Member States is limited. In relation to describing specific qualifications for guidance counsellors it is possible to identify general approaches overall at country level, for instance in Iceland where it is stated the majority of counsellors have a Diploma or a Master’s degree in Educational and Vocational Counselling.

The online survey respondents were also asked whether training was provided for the different staff members involved in the validation process. As can be seen from Figure 1.2, the staff most commonly receiving training were process managers (53 per cent), followed by assessors (51 per cent), counsellors (41 per cent) and external observers (22 per cent).

Figure 1.2 Training of staff



Source: 2014 Inventory Update: Online Survey of Projects and Practices; number of respondents: 41

1.4.4 In some cases guidance counsellors are not required to have qualifications

Whilst most of the examples gathered highlight that, in order to deliver effective guidance counselling, dedicated individuals are required who have acquired specialist competencies and qualifications, this is not always the case. In Hungary for instance, institution level pilots in higher education provide preliminary information and guidance services during the validation process. In these cases, the guidance is delivered through voluntary activity of teachers and/or some administrative staff, rather than through specialist guidance counsellors. In Poland also, where information on the process of validation is a fairly new element in the education system, each student can draw on support and guidance from a

¹⁸ Cedefop, (2009) *Professionalising Career Guidance: Practitioner Competences and Qualification Routes in Europe*

range of people including teachers, advisors, or a psychologist, as well as a qualified professional guidance counsellor.

1.5 Summary and conclusions

The 2014 Inventory country updates provide a range of evidence in relation to the key points of this report i.e. to what extent guidance and counselling is being targeted to meet the identified needs of specific groups, the role of existing information networks and institutions, the different methods used to deliver guidance, and the skills and qualifications of guidance counsellors.

It is problematic to draw overarching conclusions in relation to these areas, mainly due to the variation in approaches that are adopted by different member states across the different aspects examined, for instance in terms of the infrastructure for delivery i.e. co-ordinated network of provision, single organisation or institution-led support. This is also true within the different methods employed to provide guidance and counselling, and the extent to which guidance counsellors work according to a standardised system of delivery and their own professional qualifications and development.

That said, it is possible to draw out some examples of commonality of approach, for instance in relation to the provision of customised, tailored guidance on validation (and in relation to providing information and guidance more generally). The reports identified examples where support is targeted to defined groups, such as the Finnish ALPO project supporting migrants to achieve accreditation of their prior learning. In Greece and Poland, support is available for those people who are unemployed, whilst in Bulgaria, provision is available to help those who are already in work, to utilise the validation process and enhance their career prospects.

Age and stage of life is also evident as a means of categorising support, and the country reports identify provision for young people (Slovenia) as well as older people (Poland). As well as the characteristics of an individual information and guidance provision can be targeted according to the geographical location of those seeking validation support, for instance organised on a regional basis as is the case in France and Italy.

The way in which delivery of guidance is organised is crucial to its success. For instance in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Spain, a co-ordinated network of provision exists. In Germany, Scotland and Turkey there is one named organisation with responsibility for providing guidance on validation (in Sweden this is shared between two organisations). Some countries (Croatia, France Malta) have examples of support and guidance being organised according to the requirements of occupational sectors, whilst others (Finland, France, Luxembourg, Malta) are aligned to educational sectors.

In relation to the delivery mechanisms for guidance and support, the country reports highlight a range of approaches. In many cases, a combined approach is employed (virtual provision via on-line resources, telephone face-to-face) but with some interventions focussing on a specific channel such as the provision of on-line support in Bulgaria and Turkey, or face-to-face support delivered in Austria, Cyprus and Switzerland.

The report considered the extent to which guidance counsellors and professionals were required to have formal certification or training and qualifications, to provide the necessary guidance to individuals. Again, the country reports showed significant variation, with some countries such as Iceland, reporting that the majority of counsellors have a Diploma or a Master's degree in Educational and Vocational Counselling, or Luxembourg where training is systematically delivered to counsellors. Conversely, in Romania, initiatives for the training and qualification of practitioners are limited. Alongside the issue of qualifications of practitioners, there are also examples where elements of the support role can be undertaken on a voluntary basis e.g. by a teacher or administrative staff member, such as Hungary and Poland.

On a final note, further research is required on a number of fronts, for instance to explore the range of guidance activities (such as assessments) and the extent to which they are linked to the individual stages of validation. Further research is also needed to understand guidance as an integrated process that can make use of diverse methodologies in order to further understand the type of support that is provided.

2 Bibliography

- Cedefop (2009). *Professionalising Career Guidance: Practitioner Competences and Qualification Routes in Europe*
- DMH Associates; CfBT Education Trust (2009). *Evidence and Impact: Careers and guidance-related interventions*.
<http://cdn.cfbt.com/~media/cfbtcorporate/files/research/2009/r-evidence-and-impact-careers-and-guidance-related-interventions-report-2009.pdf>
- Research undertaken by the SEEC AP(E)L network group. <http://www.seec.org.uk/apl-recognition-and-accreditation-prior-or-previous-learning/>
- NIACE-The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, England and Wales (2013). *Using the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)*. http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/niace_rpl_report_v0_2_formatted.pdf
- Watts, A.G. (2009). *Careers Wales: A Review in an International Perspective* Welsh Government. <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/090806-careers-wales-review-international-perspective-en.pdf>
- Whittaker, R. Et al (2011). *Streamlining RPL Processes: facilitating the award of credit for prior informal learning*. Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University.
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/RPL-Processes-Report-11.pdf>

On line resources referenced in the report

- Bulgaria – Development of Workforce Competence Assessment System by Sectors and Regions (project description and documents):
<http://www.competencemap.bg/about+the+project/1/YdK3clajYNevltKTcRaDg9ejlNKzYdaHMFODchOfIZK3cderYBaXINavIRKnIR>
- Finland, Opin ovi - The National Programme of Guidance and Counselling Services for Adults For more information please refer to the website:
http://www.opinovi.fi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=453%3Awhat-is-national-esf-operational-programme-and-the-opin-ovi-projects&catid=1%3Aaikuisohjauksen-koordinaatioprojekti-ajankohtaista&Itemid=403&lang=fi
- Finland, ALPO – Initial guidance and counselling services for immigrants. More information can be found on the project website: www.intermin.fi/alpo
- Netherlands – Guidance system in the Netherlands: <http://euroguidance.eu/guidance-systems/guidance-system-in-the-netherlands-overview/>
- Portugal – SIGO website: <http://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/sigo>
- Slovenia, Nefiks project. More information can be found on the website: <http://talentiran.si/en-nefiks>
- Turkey, the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) website. Please see www.myk.gov.tr.
- Multi-country project: ALLinHE. More information can be found on the website: <http://allinhe.eu>
- Multi-country project: IMPROVE - Improving Validation of Non-Formal learning in European career guidance practitioners. More information can be found on the website: <http://www.improveguidance.eu/what-improve>