

COUNTRY REPORT GERMANY

ANNEX TO WP 1.2

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A) DEFINITION OF VALIDATION

Germany supported the development of the recommendation of the council for the validation of non-formal and informal learning of December 20, 2012 published by the European Commission (European Council 2012). With all the existing validation approaches and definitions of the term, this can be seen as the lowest common denominator of the understanding of validation and its implementation.

The recommendations allow for the implementation of national regulations for validation until 2018. The recognition of informally and non-formally acquired knowledge is supposed to be facilitated by a relevant authority. By request from single persons and with the involvement of chambers, social partners, unions and education providers, any skills or competences that were not acquired through formal education or qualification will be validated in a certain period of time. At least for now, this does not include recognition and accreditation for study programmes/degree courses, professions and certificates.

In accordance with the council's recommendations, the European guidelines for the validation of informal and formal learning are relevant for the basic structure of validation (CEDEFOP 2009). These guidelines stipulate an equal right for access to validation for everyone. In addition, it is important to always keep in mind that in the course of a validation procedure the privacy and the rights of the individual must be respected and any information collected for a validation procedure cannot be used for other purposes without the individual's consent. According to the guidelines, the institutions and procedures must be clear and individual tasks must be assigned for a successful implementation of validation procedures.

According to the council's recommendations for validation, the guidelines of CEDEFOP and appropriate practical implementation, five steps of the procedure can be established that will lead to the identification and evaluation of informally and non-formally acquired competences (CEDEFOP 2009, BBT 2010 and European Council 2012). More and more, these steps are being used in Germany and they can be regarded as the currently prevalent validation model.

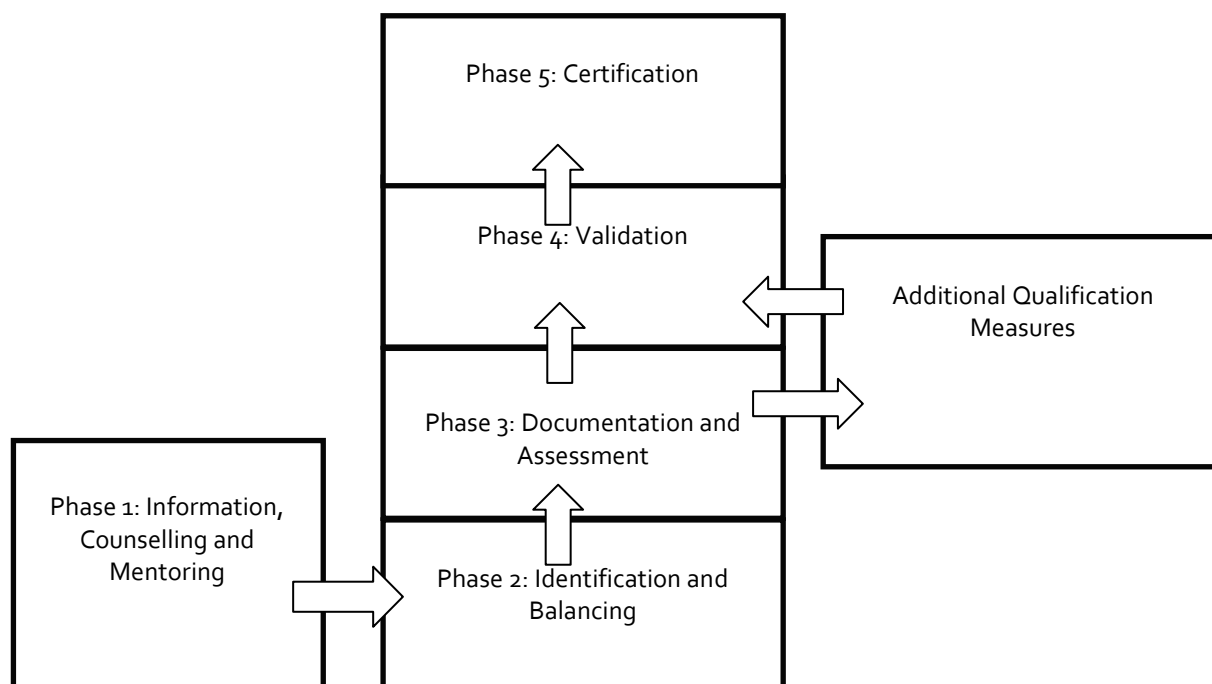


Figure 1: Five steps of validation

The individual phases of the validation procedure can be described as follows:

Phase 1: Information, Counselling and Mentoring

The goal of this phase is to enable interested individuals to get information about the possibilities to have their professional competences certified and receive a professional degree equivalent to that of secondary schools. Furthermore, they receive the necessary information for the course of the procedure and they can profit from counselling for the whole process.

Phase 2: Identification and Balancing

Identification and balancing form the basis of the process of validating education measures. Candidates identify and analyze their individual and professional competences and their educational background. These are being documented in a portfolio that includes data, facts and proof pertaining to a certain professional qualification profile. Included here are formal education and non-formal education as well as informal learning.

Phase 3: Documentation and Assessment

Experts appraise the portfolio, interview the candidate and provide an assessment at the end. On the one hand, they check if the submitted proofs are relevant, reliable and significant and on the other hand, they determine if and how the scope and the level of the professional competence and the educational background fulfil the requirements for the profession or degree programme. The assessment is being made from a holistic point of view and is suitable for adults.

Phase 4: Validation

The institution responsible for validation decides, based on the assessment of the experts, which professional competences exist and which requirements are fulfilled and then issues a certificate of learning achievement. Furthermore, the institution decides which additional performances in the area of education must be delivered in order for the candidate to obtain the desired degree or certificate.

Phase: Certification

The certification is being issued pertaining to the requirements and standards of the profession or degree programme. The chambers or other certifying institutions issue a report or certify the requirements for the profession or degree programme.

In accordance with this course of the process of validation but without explanation of the first phase of the information, the council's definition of the term validation in the recommendations of December 2012 is as follows:

"Validation means a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:

- 1. IDENTIFICATION through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;*
- 2. DOCUMENTATION to make visible the individual's experiences;*
- 3. a formal ASSESSMENT of these experiences; and*
- 4. CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification".*

The following terminology serves as a basis for the definition of formal, non-formal and informal learning in Germany:

Formal learning:

- ▶ Takes place under organized, institutionally secure conditions;
- ▶ Is based on didactic-methodological criteria;
- ▶ Learning outcomes and learning contents are being defined and the learning outcomes are verifiable;
- ▶ The learning is generally being supervised by professionally educated persons and there is an educational interaction with the learning individuals.

Nonformal learning:

- ▶ Is organized and planned learning, similar to formal learning;
- ▶ Is not part of the public educational system and is not being recognized or accredited by it;
- ▶ Mostly takes place outside of institutions of the public educational system in companies or other educational institutions.

Informal learning is defined as learning through experience. It:

- ▶ Results from job- or activity-related demands and is not institutionalized;
- ▶ Produces a learning outcome that results from problem-solving on the job.
- ▶ Is generally not supervised by education professionals.

The „Deutsche Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen (DQR)“ (German Qualifications Framework) (AK DQR 2011), which is being implemented since early 2013, is in accordance with the above mentioned positions and definitions even if they are not explicitly defined in the glossary.

B) FRAME CONDITIONS AND REGULATIONS

In higher education, the relevant framework conditions and regulations for validation in Germany are set by several bodies concerning both higher education and vocational education and training. As Germany is a federal republic, legislation works as a general frame for all Länder (federal lands). For concrete configuration the Länder have developed their own regulations. Hence the *Framework Act for Higher Education* (BMBF 1999/2005) set the general frame for admission to higher education – all specified regulations on admission are subject to the provision of Land legislation (BMBF 1999/2005, p. 10–11).

As a mediating body between Federation and Länder the *Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (Standing Conference)* is relevant. This body unites the ministers and senators of the Länder responsible for education, higher education and research, as well as cultural affairs. It works via self-coordination of the Länder and ensures common ground in the relevant fields of education to allow mobility of students and staff within Germany. The required coordination takes place via resolutions, recommendations or state agreements. (KMK 2014)

Relevant for validation of non-formal and informal learning are three resolutions of the Standing Conference from 2002, 2008 and 2009.

In 2002 the Standing Conference decided that recognition of competences of up to 50% of a degree course is possible, presumed that content and level is equivalent. (KMK 2002, p. 2).

In the year 2008 the Standing Conference specified the possibilities of recognition: it could be 1) an individual case-to-case review of a higher education institution (HEI) examining the qualifications of an applicant on equivalence of content and level to a degree course – individual recognition; 2) with homogeneous groups of candidates, e.g. with cooperation agreements between HEI and institutions of vocational education and training (VET) – blanket recognition; 3) recognition through an admission test, based on recognition regulation or recognition principles, implementation with guidelines for filling out forms, information material – combined recognition. Important for the Standing Conference is the differentiation between the recognition as higher education entrance qualification (e.g., a precondition for studying) and the credit transfer of prior learning (acquired in vocational education and training) for studies. Nevertheless, it is possible to combine admission examination and placement test. (KMK 2008, p. 1–2).

Apart from the federal legislation and the resolutions of the Standing Conference, as stated above, is the legislation of the Länder. This is most relevant for the issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education within the given frame.

In 2009, the Standing Conference opened up access to higher education for professionally qualified persons in a twofold way: Persons with advanced vocational qualifications may receive a *generally higher education entrance qualification*. To this group belong "Meister", graduates from trade and technical schools and master's schools (Fachschulen), graduates from further vocational training following the Vocational Education and Training Act (BBiG), graduates from special occupations like sailors and candidates with diplomas for professions in the health sector as well as for nursing and socio-pedagogical occupations. Persons who do not belong to this group but who have completed a dual vocational education and training and have three years of professional experience as well as persons who successfully pass an aptitude assessment procedure based on exam regulations at a HEI may receive a *specified higher education entrance qualification* (for a specific study programme). Additional regulations can be applied by the Länder themselves. (KMK 2009, S. 1–2)

Following these three framing resolutions, the Länder developed different approaches for the validation of non-formal and informal learning – and hence for opening up HEIs for new target groups. This means that depending on *where* people study in Germany they have different regulations concerning the validation of their non-formal and informal learning. Hence, the entry regulations for persons with vocational education but without higher education entrance qualification *or* a first academic degree vary (see for synopsis KMK 2011). The most open Länder in Germany concerning legislation at the moment (May 2014) are Berlin, Baden-Württemberg and Lower Saxony.

The *Berlin Higher Education Act* from July 2011 lays down the possibility that professionals with longstanding high-quality professional experience but without a first academic degree can be accepted for continuing education master's programmes with an admission test. The HEI needs to formulate a *statute of admission* that defines additional aptitudes and qualifications for master's programmes and how they need to be proven. Additionally, this statute of admission stipulates the requirements for vocationally qualified persons without first academic degree who apply for enrollment in appropriate continuing education master's programmes or in artistic master's programmes and lays down the examination procedure (Berliner Hochschulgesetz 2011, §10, (5), (6)).

Lower Saxony is very innovative in opening up HEIs for vocationally qualified persons. In the *Lower Saxony Higher Education Act* (Niedersächsisches Hochschulgesetz 2007) the following aspects for admission and recognition are regulated: Graduates from the most familiar federally regulated continuing education receive a generally higher education entrance qualification. Candidates who completed a dual vocational education and training and have three years of professional experience are allowed to enroll in a specialized study programme. Candidates who received a Meister in their vocational education and training can enroll in any study programme. Competencies acquired in the professional life can be accredited for a study programme. (Niedersächsisches Hochschulgesetz 2007, §18)

Baden-Württemberg provides broad possibilities for the access of vocational qualified persons (beruflich Qualifizierte) to a regular study programme or a continuing education programme (Landeshochschulgesetz 2014, §58) on the one hand – since 2014 the possibility of studying a Bachelor program extra-occupationally exists in Baden-Württemberg (ibid., §31 (2)). On the other hand, it has standardized procedures for aptitude assessment procedures for the different groups of vocationally qualified persons (ibid., §58, exemplarily see DHWB, N.d.).

In the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) different possibilities for recognition and accreditation in vocational education and training (VET) below HE are stipulated. Corresponding possibilities are also defined in the trade and are laid down in the Trade and Crafts Code (HwO). Recognition exists in the following cases:

- ▶ Admission to final examination in the training (Ausbildung) in specific cases (BBiG § 45): Apprentices whose achievements justify an admission can be admitted to a premature final examination (paragraph 1). Persons can be admitted to a final examination for a recognised occupation requiring formal training (training occupation) if they show evidence that they have been employed in this occupation for a period at least one and a half times as long as is prescribed for the period of initial training (paragraph 2). In this way of recognition about of 7 percent of the skilled employees get their final examination from the chamber.
- ▶ By equalization (Gleichstellung) of final examination certificates in the training (BBiG § 50) a recognition of certificates, that are acquired outside the scope (Geltungsbereich) of the BBiG or abroad, can take place. In addition, occupational qualifications from abroad can be recognized as equivalent.
- ▶ In the context of further training pre-qualifications from abroad (BBiG § 55) can be recognized, in addition an equalization (Gleichstellung) of final examination certificates that are acquired outside the scope (Geltungsbereich) of the BBiG or abroad can take place.
- ▶ In the context of occupational retraining pre-qualifications from abroad and equalization (Gleichstellung) of examination certificates that are acquired abroad can take place. (BBiG § 61, § 63)

Accreditation exists in the Vocational Training Act in the following cases:

- ▶ In the training prior vocational training can be recognized (BBiG § 7) and the training period can be shortened (BBiG § 8)
- ▶ In the further training particular parts of the examination can be remitted (BBiG § 56)

Another way of recognitions and accreditation opens the Federal Recognition Act. It regulates the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications or parts of vocational qualifications. The law entered into force in 2012 and the exact designation is „Law to improve the assessment and recognition of vocational education and training qualifications acquired abroad“ (BQFG). It regulates the procedures and criteria for the assessment of the equivalence of foreign vocational qualifications vis-à-vis the respective German reference occupation. It is the first law to give all persons in training occupations in the dual system a legal entitlement to individual assessment of the equivalence of their vocational qualifications, regardless of nationality (Federal Recognition Act). The Federal Recognition act only covers federal law regulated professions. Therefore it applies to around 600 professions: This includes around 330 dual training occupations (Ausbildungsberufe) and 180 further education degrees that are regulated by the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) and by the Trade and Crafts Code (HwO).

The criteria and procedures for the assessment of equivalency are regulated by law. The main question is if there are substantial differences between the foreign professional qualifications and the domestic reference profession and if these can be compensated by professional experience or other qualifications if applicable. The allowance of professional experience is one of the central unique selling points (USPs) of the German BQFG in international comparison.

In a first report of the BMBF is stated that in 2012 alone almost 11,000 applications were processed (BMBF 2014). The statistics show that 82 percent of the 2012 completed recognition procedure has led to a full recognition of professional qualifications acquired abroad. There was great interest especially in the medical health professions, particularly doctors and nurses, precisely in those areas where there is already a strong shortage of skilled workers.

C) EXISTING PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

For almost ten years several projects and initiatives in the higher education sector have been trying to open up the sector by working on framework conditions in HEI and by developing procedures and methods for crediting vocational competencies for higher education.

The initiative that set the tone for crediting vocational competencies is "ANKOM – *Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulstudiengänge*" (*Validation of vocational competencies on degree courses/study programmes*), an initiative funded by the federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF). From 2005 till 2008 eleven development projects were funded – they developed and tested recognition procedures. ANKOM extracted three procedures of validation:

- ▶ **Blanket recognition:** Set for homogenous groups of candidates, for certain professions and certain vocational trainings. Blanket recognition could be based on a cooperation between university and institution of vocational education. The procedure is based on the decision of the examination board, exam regulations and recognition regulations.
- ▶ **Individual recognition:** Set for heterogeneous candidates or persons with an individual education profile. The procedure is based on individual procedures.
- ▶ **Combined recognition:** A combination of individual procedures and blanket procedures. The procedure is based on recognition regulations or recognition principles, implementation with guidelines for filling out forms, information material, advise offers.

Furthermore, during the test of methods and procedures a *recognition guideline* (Anrechnungsleitlinie) has been developed to ensure transparency between all actors, to advance the building of trust between all parties involved and to enhance the traceability of the equivalence statement (Äquivalenzfeststellung) of competences acquired in vocational education and training and competences acquired in higher education. (Wissenschaftliche Begleitung der BMBF-Initiative „ANKOM“ 2010, p. 5–6) The quality standards as minimal standards focus on five subject areas:

- ▶ Description of learning outcomes
- ▶ Equivalence check
- ▶ Formal establishment of the recognition regulation
- ▶ Information and guidance
- ▶ Evaluation (Wissenschaftliche Begleitung der BMBF-Initiative „ANKOM“ 2010, p. 6–9)

A second initiative concerned with the recognition of prior learning was the initiative "OHN – *Offene Hochschule Niedersachsen*" (*Open Higher Education Institution Lower Saxony*), a model project in Lower Saxony from 2008–2012 on four higher education locations, including 5 HEIs. The three main goals of the model project were: 1) opening up of HEIs for new target groups by special course offers for professionals; 2) facilitation of transitions between VET and HE through recognition of competences; 3) Integration of adult education offers in higher education (Servicestelle Offene Hochschule Niedersachsen gGmbH, o.J.).

The model project has led to the development of recognition procedures with some weight on blanket recognition (at the University Oldenburg). To promote further institutionalization of the opening of HEIs after the end of the model project, a service center has been established that 1) coordinates the opening of HEIs for vocational qualified persons in Lower Saxony; 2) works on the networking between all actors who are busy for the opening of HEIs; 3) gives advice to prospective students and other actors; 4) coordinates the setting up and development of structured public relations activities. (Servicestelle Offene Hochschule Niedersachsen gGmbH, o.J.)

A third initiative that also has a focus on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning at HEI started in 2012 – again funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF): "*Aufstieg durch Bildung: offene Hochschulen*" (*Advancement through Education: Open Universities*). This is a German-wide program funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research for opening higher education institutions to new target groups and hence to lifelong learning. The programme runs in two phases – the first phase with 26 projects started in 2011 and ends in 2015. The second phase will start in October 2014 and end in 2018. The current 26 projects concentrate on developing new strategies and programs for lifelong learning. This includes testing and implementing practices and procedures of recognition of informal and non-formal learning. Furthermore, the projects try to link theory and practice in new ways, develop new modes of delivery of programmes, new forms of assessment and adequate modes of quality assurance. DUW provides academic supervision and accompanying research for the projects jointly with Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Universität Oldenburg. (Wissenschaftliche Begleitung o.J.)

In the context of vocational education and training (VET) exist several initiatives for the validation of non-formal and informal learning – two of them will be outlined here: the project "*Anerkennung informell erworbener Kompetenzen – AiKo*" (*Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills*) in Baden-Württemberg and the project series to "*European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training*" (ECVET).

The project AiKo is conducted in Baden-Württemberg with partners of HEIs in cooperation with companies from of the metal and electrical industry from 2013 to 2014 (AiKo 2012). The following aims should be achieved:

- ▶ Analysis of the need for the recognition of informal acquired skills in the field of metal and electrical industry and drawing conclusions for the demand for skilled personnel and the system of vocational education and training.
- ▶ Development of a tool for the recognition of informal acquired skills and testing in different companies.
- ▶ Development of a procedure for recognition of informal acquired skills and transfer in the VET-system.

In the focus of the project are unskilled and semi-skilled workers on the one side and the group of skilled workers on the other side from typical fields of the metal and electrical industry as production and fabrication, maintenance and quality control, construction and preparation of work. For both target groups it is empirically analysed which informally acquired skills influence their professional development in the best way and how these skills can be identified, assessed and recognized. On the basis of potential tasks in the fields of activity an evaluation sheet is developed and used that contains the different perspectives of self and external assessment for the informally acquired skills in the fields of activity.

The ECVET-project series – funded by the European commission – focuses on "accreditation, recognition and transfer of learning outcomes between European objective and national framework conditions" (Eberhardt 2013, translation E.C.). The project series aim to identify informal acquired skills and to cluster them in learning units. These units need to be specified as part of a qualification in knowledge, skills and competences and be recognized and accumulated for the individual person. Independently of the learning path designated number of credits shall be allocated to these learning units. Normative standards are focused on the learning outcome and not on the input or the learning process. The outcome orientation means, that the learner is responsible for the learning success. The system of ECVET focuses on individuals who shall be enabled to document their individual learning path and to transfer their learning outcomes form one to another learning context. An ambitious aim is to make ECVET and ECTS compatible and mutually recognisable.

D) ENGAGED UNIVERSITIES

Oldenburg University

Study Format: undergraduate and postgraduate

Dimension of recognition: shortening of programme

Kind of learning: formal *and* informal

Kind of recognition: blanket *and* individual

Presented Example: blanket recognition of formally acquired vocational competencies

At Oldenburg University two kinds of recognition of vocational competencies exist.

The **blanket recognition** is based on a method called "Equivalence Check" that helps to decide which module(s) of a certain vocational qualification correspond(s) to a certain part of the respective programme. "(...) the equivalence check is carried out by independent experts or evaluators who comparatively assess the vocational qualification and the degree programme in terms of content and level." (Tutschner et al. 2009, p.14). For this assessment two specific tools have been developed: (1) The Learning Outcome Matrix (LOM) is being used for comparing learning outcomes. "The LOM calculates the degree of correspondence between the study module and the vocational subjects as well as the overall level of correspondence resulting from these details (...)." (ibidem). (2) The Module Level Indicator (MLI) is used to assess the level of learning outcomes in correspondence to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

On the basis of this "Equivalence Check", Oldenburg University has assessed several vocational qualifications. Graduates of those qualifications are granted the accreditation of the specific modules without any other exam or the like. The blanket recognition has been implemented for the Bachelor of Business Administration and the Master in Education and Research Management.

Oldenburg University even went one step further. Within a validation project they published General Recommendations for the Accreditation of Certain Advanced Training Programs alongside a step-by-step manual for other universities offering bachelor and master's programmes. Based on this other universities can implement blanket recognition for those programmes holding a general accreditation recommendation. (cf. Oldenburg University 2014)

Berlin University for Professional Studies

Study Format: postgraduate

Dimension of recognition: admission and shortening of programme

Kind of learning: formal and informal

Kind of recognition: individual

Presented Example: recognition process regarding formal and informal competencies

At the Berlin University for Professional Studies (DUW) recognition is possible for achievements and competences as follows:

- ▶ **Course work and examinations from within higher education and outside higher education** – if they are equal regarding the duration of studies and examinations are substantially equal in content, scope and requirements to the programme at DUW)
- ▶ **Competences acquired in professional practice or outstanding practical qualifications** – if said competences are found to be equivalent to the competences of the corresponding course or module.

Equivalence shall be determined by overall consideration and evaluation not by a schematic comparison.

The recognition process occurs in two different scenarios at Berlin University for Professional Studies.

(1) Shortening of programme: This does not happen very often as of the – only postgraduate – students' specific interests: They usually want to ground their competences in science and further develop them in dialogue with their fellow students. Furthermore, they pay for their studies and want to benefit from them as much as possible.

(2) Admission: this is the case more and more often due to the Bologna structure (bachelor with 180 CP), the workload structure of the master's programmes at DUW (90 CP) and the guideline that a master's degree is obtained with 300 CP in total as a general rule. Thus, students often apply for validation regarding the "missing" 30 CP.

The basis for this recognition process is a so-called "Competence Portfolio" that has to be filled in and submitted by the prospective students.

Students fill out a form that is structured along the formal and informal competences. Within those categories they are asked to describe their achievements: In case of formal competences they can refer to attached programme descriptions or study regulations, in case of informal competences acquired within the professional context they must describe their competences in two dimensions:

- ▶ **Assumed responsibilities** (e.g., management responsibilities, budgets, resources, process design, project management)
- ▶ **Further managerial tasks** (e.g., development of target-oriented solution approaches, implementation of processes)

As of the underlying portfolio concept they also have to prove the competences by attaching artefacts: i.e., certificates, employer's references.

Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences

Study Format: undergraduate and postgraduate

Dimension of recognition: Shortening of programme

Kind of learning: formal *and* informal

Kind of recognition: individual

Presented Example: institutionalization: recognition regulations for bachelor and master's programmes

The Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences focused on permeability within a state-founded Germany-wide project. As one basis they developed a concept for the recognition of vocational achievements and subsequently implemented recognition regulations for their bachelor and master's programmes that will be outlined in the following paragraphs.

Within validation they differentiate between three **kinds of achievements**:

1. Study work from the same programme at a different university
2. Study work from a different programme at a university or university of cooperative education
3. Achievements from outside a university especially from the job or from vocational training

Achievements from the job or vocational training can be validated on request if they are equivalent.

The **equivalence check** is conducted on a certain module of the programme. Equivalence is given if there are no major differences regarding the acquisition of competences. Based on the German Higher Education Qualification Framework, competencies are understood as a construct consisting of professional knowledge and understanding, the application and the transfer of the corresponding knowledge as well as communicative and social aspects.

There are two guiding principles for the equivalence check: learning outcome and level.

a) learning outcomes, content: basis for examining a major difference are the learning outcome oriented competences; whereby the learning outcomes shall be compared with regard to the requirements of the study programme, and not on a micro level. If no learning outcomes are given, the comparison should be based on the given content.

b) level: Examination if the competencies acquired and to be acquired are on the same level using the usual steps of taxonomy. The workload of a module, the quality of an educational institution and the profile of a study programme shall be considered as accompanying criteria only:

Workload: A minor difference in quantity is not a valid reason for not approving.

Quality of educational institution: It is to be examined if the competences meet the quality standards of the programme. The accreditation can serve as an indicator.

Profile of programme: comparison of competencies, i.e., regarding thematic priorities, qualification and competence aims, research or application orientation

In case of doubt regarding equivalence, the examination board decides on consultation of one or two examiners of the module. Regarding the proof of informally acquired competences, Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences asks to see documents that prove the competencies and the learning outcomes such as résumés, learning or working diaries, work samples, job descriptions or employment reference letters. These documents should be supplemented with a portfolio. Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences (2014b)

Fachhochschule der Diakonie (Diaconal University of Applied Sciences)

Study Format: undergraduate and graduate

Dimension of recognition: shortening of programme

Kind of learning: formal *and* informal

Kind of recognition: blanket *and* individual

Presented Example: e-portfolio integrated into the curriculum

The Fachhochschule der Diakonie offers a variety of recognition possibilities (cf. Fachhochschule der Diakonie, 2014a):

- ▶ **Blanket recognition of specific vocational qualifications** with a defined grade point average or alternatively a grading assessment
- ▶ **Blanket recognition of specific trainings and qualifications** on the basis of cooperative agreements
- ▶ **Individual recognition of vocational advanced trainings** based on equivalent competences, similar workload, academic level of teachers, course assessment
- ▶ **Individual recognition of informally acquired competencies** on the basis of a portfolio

As the possibility of individual recognition of informally acquired competences has not been used a lot due to the complexity and high workload for students, the Fachhochschule der Diakonie developed a model of integrating the portfolio into the curriculum (cf. Fachhochschule der Diakonie, 2014a). Students should work on their portfolio within a module that is part of the curriculum and rated with 3 to 5 CP. It is assumed that this would function as a motivator as motivation is crucial in establishing portfolios in an educational context.

In this module students would learn to reflect on their competences, to describe and prove them within contact seminars. In work groups students can mutually identify competences by describing situations from the work context to each other. Within the module students are guided and advised by instructors, who can also explain the expectations on and the assessments criteria of the portfolio. As soon as the portfolios are finished, they are matched with learning outcomes within the syllabus. This step makes students reflect on their expectations of the study program and on individual learning targets.

If matches are found, students can apply for accreditation after completing the portfolio with further artefacts. Being guided through this process shall become part of the accreditation process in order to minimize the conclusive exam to one oral or written exam.

Finally, the examination committee decides in consultation with the instructor in charge for the respective module.

In respect to the general competence and portfolio idea, the portfolio could prospectively be used within further studies as a tool for documenting competences. To accomplish this goal, the portfolio must be sensibly integrated into the curriculum in each module.

E) ASSESSMENT

Germany does not have a very long history (10 to 12 years) for an explicit dealing with the validation of non-formal and informal learning at HEIs. Until now no legal framework and overall system of validation of non-formal and informal learning exists; this also has to do with the state of a Federal Republic. Quite some progress has been made since the mid-2000 years particularly with the ANKOM initiative that – as stated above – set the tone for a more systematic dealing with this topic and helped to develop different approaches for the validation of non-formal and informal learning at HEIs. There are some HEIs that developed quite some expertise in validation (e.g., University of Oldenburg). In a classification¹ with four categories (high, medium-high, medium-low, low) of CEDEFOP in the *European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning* (2010), Germany is ranked as “medium-high” together with Denmark, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the UK². (Jo/Souto/Dechemin 2010, p. 6–9) Hence it could be stated that the engagement with validation in HE had become some dynamic, still it is concentrated on publicly funded initiatives. The discussion on the DQR in the last years has also fueled the discussion of permeability between HE and VET and – last but not least – the DQR provides a framework that could act as a “mediator” between the different forms of learning when it comes to validation. When assessing the framing of the German context some general requirements and hence also challenges can be extracted:

1. Necessity of national regulations

The German case shows the necessity of national regulations as a general frame for the validation of non-formal and informal learning at HEIs. These also show the political will to implement strategies of lifelong learning and provide the institutions with guidelines for how to deal with the validation of non-formal and informal learning in general. Nevertheless, the German case has shown that the circumstances in a Federal Republic – such as Germany – require a good coordination between the different bodies: the Federal Ministry, the Länder and the HEIs themselves. However, in a quite autonomously acting sector such as HE these regulations are only one necessary requirement.

2. Speaking a common language and having a common procedure

Speaking a common language is central when talking about permeability between different sectors and the validation of different forms of learning.

¹ Understood as an overall assessment and judgement by the authors – not as an exact science. (Jo/Souto/Dechemin 2010, p. 6)

² Ranked as “high” are Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, as “medium-low” Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia and as “low” Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Turkey. (Jo/Souto/Dechemin 2010, p. 6)

As the European debate already shows, the issue of the currency – be it ECTS for HE and ECVET for the VET-sector – is crucial. Moreover, the European developments concerning frameworks (e.g., EQR) also demonstrate that there needs to be a common language when comparing the outcomes of learning. On a European level the concept of learning outcomes is the common language – not only when comparing learning in different sectors but also when comparing learning in different European countries. For Germany learning outcomes are one part of the common language – central still is the term “competency” (as outlined in the DQR) as counterpart for the concept of learning outcomes. With focusing on competencies, also input and learning process are included.

3. Filling formal frameworks with „validation life“

A lot has been done in Germany to formalize validation processes – especially with the setting up of blanket recognition processes. The risk of high formalization entails the risk that the concepts and processes become too complex and sophisticated so that the different actors involved – persons who want to have their non-formal and informal learning validated, actors in the HEIs who manage the validation processes, companies and organisations that want to cooperate for validation – are put off.

4. The more individual and informal the more difficult!

The outcomes of the different initiatives in Germany show one central challenge for opening up HE for non-formal and informal learning that the more individual and more informal it gets the more reserved both candidates for recognition as well as HEIs in providing procedures become. Individual here means individual procedures, individual learning to be validated. Informal learning as learning that takes place in an everyday context and that is not structured by learning goals (European Council 2012, p. 5) is the second perceived hurdle. In both cases a structured guidance is needed; it needs time and guidance for accompanying candidates to bring to light their learning outcomes for recognition. On the side of the institution the reluctance has to do with additional time and resources provided for these processes that are outside of the regular student counselling and of regular teaching and learning processes. On the side of the individuals it has to do with too little information on possibilities and on individual hurdles to enter a HEI, as evaluations and surveys show. (e.g., Cendon 2012)

5. Equivalent instead of similar

The issue of equivalence and similarity already has some tradition when talking about permeability between HE and the VET-sector or more specifically of the validation of non-formal and informal learning in HE. This is partly discussed when talking about the depth of a learning outcome or the extend of a competency and is dealt with in the description for the different cycles via Dublin descriptors in the Framework European Higher Education Area (EHEA Framework). Moreover, this issue is closely linked to the so-called “Bildungs-Schisma” (education schism) (Baethge 2006) in Germany, the historically grown segregation between the VET system and the HE-sector.

6. Bringing the procedures to the heart of the organisation (no parallel structures)

The initiatives and projects in Germany show that many procedures are still organized in project structures or in decentralized units, in short: in parallel structures. Hence after the end of projects and public funding, sustainability is questionable if no posts and processes are implemented in the HEIs. This is a big topic in Germany as in some universities highly valuable and specific expertise is available but not at the core and therefore in the central structure of the university as in the administration, the student counselling, the examination office. Hence, to get sustainability with regard to the built-up expertise of the people involved and the processes developed, integration in the existing structures at HEIs is necessary: by bringing the procedures to the heart of the organization.

7. Campaigning for recognition (cultural change)

Recognition and accreditation is no fast-selling item. On the contrary, it needs much informing and awareness raising of the relevant actors. As especially in Germany thinking about the learning process from its end – the outcomes of learning and not the process per se – is more alien, it is necessary to bring the idea of getting already learnt recognised and/or accredited and to have a more individualized approach to a HEI. All of the existing initiatives in Germany have this part – the campaigning – in mind; the initiative in Lower Saxony, for example, has established as one relevant outcome of the model project an institution whose main goal is among other things the campaigning for validation and accreditation (Servicestelle Offene Hochschule Niedersachsen gGmbH N.d.)

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ACRONYMS

AiKo	Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills
ANKOM	Validation of vocational competences on study programmes
BBiG	Vocational Training Act
BBT	The Federal Office of Vocational Training and Technology
BMBF	Federal Ministry of education and research
BQFG	Federal Recognition Act
DUW	Berlin University for Professional Studies
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
DQR	German Qualifications Framework
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
HwO	Trade and Crafts Code
KMK	Standing Conference of Education Ministers
LOM	Learning Outcome Matrix
MLI	Module Level Indicator
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
OHN	Open Higher Education Institution Lower Saxony
VET	Vocational education and training