D5.3- Recommendations for the recognition of short learning programmes within EQF (EFQ) and guidelines for incorporation of non-accredited learning

Work package:	WP5 - Recognition issues with regard to SLPs
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1. About E-SLP Project

This report is published as part of the E-SLP project: European Short Learning Programmes. The E-SLP project is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and from 1 January 2018 until 31 December 2020.

Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) are a group of courses (units, modules or other learning building blocks) with a common subject focusing on specific needs in society which can be used as stackable elements of larger formal degrees targeting non-traditional and adult learners. The E-SLP project focusses on online, flexible and scalable SLPs in the European context.

This report forms part of work package 5 and was coordinated by The Open University UK.

1.1. Partners

P1   European Association of Distance Teaching Universities

P2   Fernuniversität in Hagen

P3   The Open University

P4   Open Universiteit Nederland

P5   Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia

P6   Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

P7   Hellenic Open University

P8   Universita Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO

P9   Anadolu University

P10   Universidade Aberta

P11   Open University of Cyprus

P12   Open University of the University of Jyväskylä

P13   Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

P14   National Association of Distance Education

P15   Akademia Gorniczo Hutnicza Im. Stanislawa Staszica W Krakowie

1.2.   Content

The following report provides an overview of the approaches to the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIFL) within and between the partner countries and institutions of the E-SLP project, in order to identify similarities and differences and make recommendations for the recognition and incorporation of non-formal and informal learning in SLPs. The country and institution specific information in this report has been reviewed for accuracy by representatives of the partner institutions.

2. Introduction

Throughout the completion of desktop research exploring approaches to recognition within partner countries, a significant theme that emerged is the concept of validation (as opposed to recognition) of non-formal and informal prior learning (VNIFL) and the approaches used within the context of each country. Although VNIFL is commonly used within European Countries, the terminology across the world varies quite considerably. In Australia for example, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is used. In the United Kingdom, the term RPL is also used but used interchangeably with the term Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). The United States of America (USA) uses Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) and Canada often uses Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).

According to Laudenbach and Lis (2019) validation of Prior Learning (VPL) is fundamental to the EUs approach to LLL and is used by some universities in response to 'economic and labour market needs' and for others as a way of widening access and participation within HE (Duvecot et al, 2014). Validation is therefore mostly used for gaining exemptions, accessing educational programmes or awarding parts of a qualification or credits (Calleja & Eckert, 2016). According to the European Commission (2011) cited by Sava, Borca and Danciu (2013) VPL takes place for one of two purposes in HE; to allow admission into a programme or to allow learners to validate that they have met (either partially or completely) the learning outcomes of a HE programme. HEIs should therefore be proactive in developing policies for the VNIFL and should be able to award credit for learning that has been acquired outside formal education (EU Commission, 2015).

In 2012, the European Commission (EU) passed a recommendation that required all European member states to implement procedures for the VNIFL in line with their national education systems by 2018 (Laudenbach and Lis, 2019). Despite this however Haasler et al (2018) cited by Laudenbach and Lis (2019) rightly acknowledge that some countries have still not achieved this making it clear that Europe presents a very disjointed picture of VPL.

To empower VPL further, the 3rd VPL Biennale that took place in May 2019 resulted in the development of the Berlin declaration which is not only intended to drive policy makers and stakeholders to make validation policies more inclusive but also seeks to be an international benchmark for validation systems establishing a common language amongst stakeholders, practitioners and policy makers (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019).

This report documents the approaches to the VNIFL across the partner countries and where applicable their associated institutions. The report then presents recommendations for the recognition and incorporation of non-formal and informal learning within SLPs.

A summary of validation practices can be found in Annex 1.

3. Country specific approaches to validation

3.1.   Belgium

In French-speaking Belgium a regulatory framework on the VNIFL has been in place since 2014 in the Decree on the organisation of Higher Education (HE) (Mathou, 2016). VNIFL is now a fundamental component of employment and education policies and two types of VNIFL currently exist (Mathou, 2016). According to Mathou (2016) the different types of VNIFL include valorisation of prior experience (VAE) which leads to potential exemptions from parts of a study programme in either adult or HE and the validation of competence (VDC) which leads to the award of a recognised certificate within continuous vocational education and training. In response to the regulatory framework identified above, VAE in HE is now more officially recognised. Despite being deemed as effective, work is still needed to improve the value that VDC has in the labour market as well as raising awareness of VAE to adult and HE users (Mathou, 2016).

The validation system in French-speaking Belgium is somewhat fragmented. As a result of there being four systems for VNFIL relevant to the different sectors of education, there has not been a consistent development of VNFIL in Belgium with each system having its own governance and steering arrangements (Mathou, 2016). At that time, Mathou anticipated that Belgium was unlikely to move towards an integrated framework for the different stages of validation, however it is important to acknowledge that VAE is now regulated by a single regulatory framework in HE (Decree of 7 November 2013). It is also important to acknowledged that in Belgium, one of the key objectives of the National Qualifications Framework is to support the recognition and VNIFL (Mathou, 2016).

As well as the recognition of formal certificated learning, one university, KU Leuven gives students the opportunity to seek exemption based on learning that took place outside of formal education e.g. within the workplace, otherwise known as previous acquired competence (PAC). On successful completion of an appropriate assessment and receipt of an aptitude certificate, students can request exemption towards course units where the certificated competences are taught.

3.2.   Finland

According to Karttunen (2016) VNIFL is well established in Finland and embedded in the formal training and education systems. Despite this however, no single law exists regarding the VNIFL, rather it is defined within the laws and regulations for each field of education. Within all fields, a fundamental message within the legislation is that the VNIFL is a right of the individual and practices should be in place to validate competences irrespective of where they have been acquired (Karttunen, 2016). A clear strength of the Finnish validation system is cooperation between all stakeholders and inclusion of key social partners in the design of qualification content and validation procedures which helps to ensure the opportunities for validation are well articulated within society.

3.3.   Germany

According to Ball (2016), a national validation system has not yet been established in Germany. However, in HE, the federal state and Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) laws provide the legal basis and coordination of various validation processes. Initiatives within this context are then the responsibility of the autonomous universities and implemented primarily by individual HEIs and partnerships (Ball, 2016). Both national and individual procedures can be employed in Germany or in some cases a combination of the two. According to Ball (2016), individual procedures require applicants to provide proof of their prior learning that is then compared to the curriculum of a degree programme. According to Stamm-Riemer, Loroff and Hartmann (2011) global procedures involve a comparison of HE and vocational curricula to identify equivalent global qualifications that can be recognised. It is however apparent that all education sectors have different approaches to validation, but all support the transition from one educational sector to another (Ball, 2016). Despite using a learning outcomes approach, placing emphasis on the knowledge and comprehension of the learner as opposed to the length and place of learning, the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) has not yet referenced learning achieved through non-formal and informal means.

3.4. Greece

In contrast to practices that exist in other countries, Manoudi (2016) makes it clear that VNIFL is not yet developed in Greece. The fundamental reason for this is that such learning is not adequately recognised and valued in society despite representing the majority of pathways in Greece (Manoudi, 2016). In addition to planned legislative changes, it is important that a cultural move in favour of learning outcomes is required to support steps towards the validation and recognition of non-traditional learning (Manoudi, 2016). It is important to note however that non-formal learning does not have the same definition in Greece as that provided by the Council Recommendation for the VNIFL (2012).

A comprehensive national framework for the certification of non-formal education and informal learning is therefore not present in Greece (European Commission, 2018). Despite this, law 4115/2013 along with the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance is the key administration body of the network for LLL with the purpose of developing and implementing a comprehensive system to certificate non-formal education (European Commission, 2018). Although HE in Greece has academic freedom, Law 4009/2011 specifies the primary requirement of HEIs beyond their educational focus is to contribute to LLL with VNIFL being fundamental to this. The referencing of the Hellenic Qualifications Framework (HGF) to the EQF in 2015 was an important first step towards the creation of a framework for the VNIFL. The LLL law (Law 3879/2010) recognised non-formal and informal learning as part of the National Framework for LLL.

3.5. Italy

In 2013, the national legislative decree on the certification of competence and VNIFL was affirmed in Italy. This led to the development of a national legal framework on the VNIFL (Perulli, 2016). This framework established a mechanism for mutual recognition amongst regional qualifications along with procedures for the VNIFL and certification of competences (Perulli, 2016). The institution holding authority for the implementation of this system in Italy is the National Technical Committee. The national policy on the VNIFL, linked to law 92/2012 establishes a clear "systematic top-down approach" (Perulli, 2016, p. 5) to this subject by defining a national system for the certification of such learning. However, this is mainly applied in the national Vocational Training framework and consequently, despite national movements towards more defined validation procedures, there remains a lack of regulatory tools for validation in HE. In HE, post-secondary, non-academic education activities, professional experience, professional certificates (such as language certification, or ECDL) can be recognised for exemption by a University (within the process of recognition/admission of a student to

a Bachelor or Master's Degree programme) with the strict limitation of a maximum of 12 CFU (ECTS credits), as per Law no 240 of 30th December 2010[1].

Although Italy's national qualifications framework was only adopted in January 2018 ("Quadro nazionale delle qualificazioni" established with the Decree of Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and Ministry of Education, University and Research[2]), clear links have been identified between validation processes and qualification systems. However, decree 13/2013 states that only competences that belong to qualifications within the National Repertory of Qualifications can be certified and/or validated, by the authorised body for its respective territory (Perulli, 2016). It is clear however that every qualification can be formally certified after education, training or validation from a minimum of one competence up to a whole qualification (Perulli, 2016). Furthermore, decree 13/2013 requires each institution which is entitled to provide study titles and qualifications in the national framework, to provide information about competences and professional profiles, in order to link educational programmes to the "National directory of education and training titles and professional qualifications" established by Law no 9, 28th June 2012. While this means that Bachelor and Masters degree programmes must "declare" in their specification which professions their students will be able to enter once achieved, it does not provide a specific framework for recognition of professional activities or prior learning within a formal University study programme[3].

3.6.   Lithuania

According to Beleckiene (2016), there are multiple legal frameworks covering validation in Lithuania with it forming part of broader education and employment policies and supporting the development of LLL. Regulations for validation arrangements differ across the different educational sectors and therefore it is clear that a national policy for the VNIFL does not exist in Lithuania. Results of validation

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[1] http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/10240l.htm "Rules regarding the organization of universities, academic staff and recruitment, as well as the Government's delegation to promote the quality and efficiency of the university system" Accessed 3rd June 2019 (English translation required).

[2] https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2018/01/25/18A00411/sg Establishment of the national framework of qualifications issued in the framework of the national system for the certification of skills pursuant to legislative decree 16 January 2013, n. 13. (18A00411) (Official Gazette No. 20 of 25-01-2018) Accessed 3rd June 2019 (English translation required).

[3] https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/02/15/13G00043/sg Definition of the general rules and essential levels of the services for the identification and validation of the non-formal and informal learning in accordance with article 4, paragraphs 58 and 68, of the law 28 June 2012, n. 92. (13G00043) (Official Gazette n.39 dated 02-15-2013) Accessed 3rd June 2019 (English translation required).

are however recognised within the education system and do lead to formal qualifications (Beleckiene, 2016).

Despite the absence of a national strategy for the VNIFL, it is possible for qualifications at all levels of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework to be obtained through both formal education and professional experience or independent study (Beleckiene, 2016). 75% of the total study volume in Lithuania can therefore be obtained through validation (Ministry of Education and Science, 2010 cited by Beleckiene, 2016). Despite this generous allowance and clear recognition of the importance of validation, Lithuania lacks a national system for the harmonisation of validation across the different sectors requiring greater inter-institutional collaboration to facilitate further validation development (Becleckiene, 2016).

3.7.   Netherlands

Based on a vision of LLL, VPL became a fundamental part of the cultural and historical context of the Netherlands and is now deemed as necessary to take account of the Dutch LLL setting (Duvecot, 2016). With this is mind, a National system for VNIFL exists in the Netherlands and was established in 1998 making it possible that non-formal learning can lead to partial exemption from a HE programme based on assessment by specialised committees (Duvecot, 2016). There is normally however, no recognition for informal learning. Non-formal learning offered by Dutch HEIs is predominantly classified according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) however because informal learning is not normally recognised, a link has not been made within this type of learning and the qualifications framework.

Despite being relatively organised in the Netherlands questions about the accessibility of VPL to users led to the development of a new policy on the VNIFL in 2014 with the aim of broadening validation opportunities to Dutch citizens (Duvecot, 2016). This policy also enabled a national and sectoral approach to validation with the national approach using the formal pathway to VPL and sectoral approach using the more informal pathway (Duvecot, 2016).

3.8.   Poland

In Poland, there are no central regulations addressing validation (Duda and Gruza, 2016). Despite this however, the need for such regulations relating to all contexts of education at all levels is stated in government policy documents (Duda and Gruza, 2016). However, the development of a uniform validation system in Poland has not been completed. It is evident that the culture for learning in Poland is dominated by education that takes place in a formal environment and as a direct consequence

participation by adults in LLL remains low stimulating the importance of VNIFL gaining greater recognition in Poland (Duda and Gruza, 2016).

3.9.   Portugal

According to Guimaraes (2016), the VNIFL is available through two mechanisms in Portugal. These mechanisms include the accreditation of learning in HEIs and the national system for the recognition, validation and certification of competence (RVCC). Details about the accreditation of non-formal and informal learning in HE is however limited with very little sector change since the 2014 country update on the VNIFL (Guimaraes, 2016). Despite this however, HEIs have consolidated validation processes that take place to ensure some level of consistency in line with legislation published in 2013.

In Portugal, validation within HE was therefore the result of legislation changes in 2013 namely Decree law 115/2013 section 07/08 (Guimarares, 2016). Each institution is responsible for setting their specific validation procedures, but they require approval by the Scientific Board of Universities and Polytechnics. Formal rules must therefore be published by each institution within the government's official journal. A limit of up to one-third of the total number of ECTs relating to a degree can be claimed through validation.

Since 2009, VNIFL has been part of the National Qualifications Framework in Portugal with the aim to increase the number of working age Portuguese people who are certificated (Guimaraes, 2016).

3.10.   Spain

In Spain rules for validating learning are well established and responsibilities for such processes are set within Royal Decree 1224/2009 on the recognition of professional competences acquired through work/professional experience (Carro, 2016). The procedures are then established by each regional authority, however only 9 out of 17 regions have developed their own regulations/legislation (Carro, 2016). This is interesting because the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Spain, provides an alternative route for individuals to gain the qualifications of the ministries of Education and Labour (Carro, 2016). Although well established, a unique system for validating prior learning does not exist in Spain and instead different processes exist with varying objectives and target audiences (Carro, 2016). These have been present in Spain since 2012 and have allowed large volumes of people to achieve a qualification without completing an educational programme from scratch (Carro, 2016). It is important to note however that Decree 1224/2009 does not cover validation of skills and professional/work experience developed through LLL but since the establishment of procedures for the validation of learning acquired through non-formal and informal contexts, LLL has become more accepted within Spanish society. The Spanish National Qualifications Framework for LLL also integrates

VNIFL with qualifications acquired through formal education as a mechanism to further support LLL. Specific to HE, the Royal Decree 861/2010 developed the concept of the recognition of work experience in Spain as a mechanism to achieve academic credit towards a degree. This however cannot exceed 15% of the total number of credits that make up the qualification.

3.11. Turkey

According to Akkok (2016) the 2014-2018 LLL Strategy document of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), promotes widespread use of validation in Turkey. The VNIFL within HE was legally introduced into the Turkish HE system in 2011 by an amendment in Law No 2547 (article 44/b) which delegates responsibility to senates of HEIs to specify their own regulations (Akkok, 2016). Despite this however, it is still in its infancy and it is important to note that article 44/b in Law Number 2547 only allows this recognition for registered HE students (Akkok, 2016).

Validation in Turkey has been defined in the legislation for the Turkish Qualifications Framework and as previously stated is prioritised within the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) LLL Strategy Paper (Akkok, 2016). Despite this however there is room for more developments in HE so that the validation process can become more visible. The Vocational and Qualifications Authority (VQA) and the LLL department of the Ministry of National Education are actively working to widen the VNIFL in Turkey. Turkey has implemented a system to assess, evaluate and certify skills of adults against national vocational qualifications. The validation processes in the scope of LLL aim for the definition and the recognition of all knowledge, skills and competences achieved in informal and non-formal learning contexts in all TQF levels. The Turkish Qualifications Framework is fundamental to the creation of the validation system (Akkok, 2016). Thus, the TQF was designed to allow for certifying the qualifications achieved as a result of the learning in a non-formal and informal learning environment[4].

3.12. United Kingdom

VNIFL is commonly known as recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL) in the UK and is used for access, exemption and award in HE (Hawley, 2016). As there is no specific strategy devoted to RPEL, the offer will depend on the provider themselves, the disadvantage of this however is that without a stronger drive at national level, the number of individuals who benefit from RPEL opportunities will remain relatively low (Hawley, 2016). Qualifications awarded through RPL both certificated and experiential, are trusted by stakeholders as they are deemed the same as those awarded through formal learning opportunities but without the same graded outcomes (Hawley, 2016).

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[4] https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/tk-cr2016.pdf Accessed at 24 July 2019

According to Duvecot, Kang and Murray (2014), VPL provides a method for identifying how one's prior learning reflects the learning expected through National Qualifications Frameworks. The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) are based on the premise that qualifications are awarded for the achievement of learning outcomes as opposed to years of study. Qualification descriptors describe the expected outcomes for the award of individual qualifications and are used in the development of courses at a specific level. In 2008 a credit framework for HE was developed and used by all degree-awarding institutions who award academic credit within their programmes of study. The use of RPL for the award of academic credit is recognised by the QAA[5] with the FHEQ guidance on academic credit arrangements acknowledging that HEIs must reference the credit volume and level when determining the level and quality of what they might formally recognise as prior learning as part of a particular programme (QAA, 2008). The Quality Code for HE does not stipulate a limit to the amount of credit that can be awarded for RPL, either certificated or experiential, in the same way as Italy and Portugal, but it does stipulate that such limits must be clearly articulated within the regulations for each individual HEI.

A summary of country and institution approaches to VNIFL can be found in table 1 in Annex 1.

4. Conclusions

4.1. Key observations

One of the core themes that has emerged from this report is that within all countries the responsibility for recognising non-formal and informal learning is delegated to HEIs. Each institution is therefore autonomous in deciding what prior learning can be recognised.

With regards to less formal education, most countries understand the value of non-formal and informal learning to the labour market and as a means of developing a culture of LLL. However, despite this, and irrespective of the presence of European Guidelines on the VNIFL, not all countries have developed a system to implement it. This raises issues if prior learning is to be considered as a means of exemption against components of an SLP. It would seem unjust to only consider formal certificated learning here given the role SLPs have in developing LLL opportunities and particularly if a learner has completed part of an SLP through this mode of learning. Its use, however, would be dependent on the institutions ability to recognise this learning within individual learning building blocks (LBBs). The

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[5] The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK. The independent body appointed to check the standards and quality of Higher Education in the UK.

decision regarding this and the nature of non-formal and informal learning that will be accepted will have to be delegated to the institution that owns the SLP and their underpinning policy on RPL or VNIFL.

Although different processes exist for VNIFL, an appreciation of the value of informal and non-formal learning is evident and could help the European Commission meet the target of having 25% of the population engaging in learning throughout their lives by 2025. This is supported by the growing prevalence of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) with a more recent emphasis on the development of Micro-credentials as a means of upskilling the current work force, facilitating personal growth without the need to commit to a formal full cycle qualification. To ensure Microcredential courses are developed to a high standard, the European MOOC Consortium (EMC) launched a Common Microcredential Framework (CMF) in April 2019 to facilitate the 'creation of portable credentials for lifelong learners' (O'Grady, 2019). Fundamental to this framework is the requirement that Microcredential courses are developed within the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to support the recognition of these credentials across different countries. The release of this framework was timely for this project but what it does raise is the need for consistency with the size of SLPs. Although SLPs in the ESLP project do not fit the size description of microcredentials within the CMF of 100-150 hours, a suggestion is that the individual programmes that create an SLP could.

4.2   Problems and solutions

One of the fundamental issues with validation is that there is no single European level framework for the process of VNIFL. The presence of learning outcomes within the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (see Annex 2) and cycle descriptors of the Framework for Qualifications in the European Area (see Annex 3) should however provide a reference point to facilitate the recognition of less formal learning within SLPs. This is important to ensure that SLPs are open to the concept that higher-level learning does take place outside formal educational settings (Marr and Bravenboer, 2017).

5. Recommendations

In response to the points raised within this report the following recommendations have been made.

5.1   Recognition of prior formal, non-formal or informal learning

To widen access to higher level study and value the range of learning opportunities that are available within society, it is recommended that all SLPs provide opportunities for the recognition of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning that:

- Is at or above the level of the SLP.

- Has been completed at a recognised HEI (formal learning only).

- Is assessed for relevance against the learning outcomes of the SLP or LBB.

Recognition of prior learning should be considered at curriculum design stage and the following principles approved within the SLP regulations:

- The maximum amount of prior learning that will be recognised within an SLP.

- The maximum age of prior learning that will be considered for recognition.

- The inclusion of an assessment only option as a mechanism to recognise prior non-formal or informal learning against a LBB within an SLP.

To support the mutual recognition of SLPs a memorandum of understanding should be developed and signed by the European Open and Distance Teaching Universities contributing to the E-SLP project.

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Annex

1. Summary table on validation practices

Country	Validation of non-formal and informal learning – National perspective	Validation of non-formal and informal learning – Links to National Qualifications Framework
Belgium: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven	For the Flemish region, the Decree on the flexibilisation defines PAC as a previously acquired competence being the whole of knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes acquired through learning processes that are not ratified by study certificates. The following definitions are used: APL: A previously acquired competence, being the set of knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes acquired through learning processes that were not validated with proof of study. EVK: A previously acquired qualification being any domestic or foreign study certificate that indicates that a formal learning trajectory, whether or not within education, has been successfully completed, insofar as it is not a credit certificate that was obtained within the institution and study program within which the qualification is to be applied. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14650	Unified accreditation organisations with the Netherlands: https://www.nvao.net/en
Finland: Open University of the University of Jyväskylä	National validation system has not been established.	No links to National Qualifications Framework. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is possible; usually at department level.
Germany: Fernuniversität in Hagen	National validation system has not been established in Germany but in HE, the federal state and KMK laws provided the legal basis and coordination of such processes.	Learning achieved through non-formal and informal learning has not been referenced to the DQR.

Greece: Hellenic Open University	There is no national validation system and no comprehensive national framework for the certification of non-formal education and informal learning.	The National Qualifications Framework established in 2015 does not include any validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning. The Lifelong learning law (Law 3879/2010) recognised non-formal and informal learning as part of the National Framework for Lifelong Learning.
Italy: Universita Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO	National legal framework on the validation of non-formal and informal learning was developed in 2018.	Clear links have been identified between validation processes and qualification systems.
Lithuania: National Association of Distance Education	National validation system has not been established. It is embedded within the legislation of the individual education sectors. Procedures and principles for validating learning are organised according to the decree law no. V-289	Validation of person's competences acquired through formal, non-formal, vocational or informal learning is executed by low no. V-15 of Minister of Education and Science.
Netherlands: Open Universiteit Nederland	Non-formal learning can lead to partial exemption for programmes of HEI based on assessment by specialised committees of the HEIs. There is normally no recognition of informal learning.	Non formal learning offered by Dutch HEIs is almost always classified according to EQF. There is normally no recognition of informal learning and hence no link to the EQF.
Poland: Akademia Gorniczo Hutnicza Im. Stanislawa Staszica W Krakowie	Procedures on validation of non-formal and informal learning is a part of an integrated Qualification system developed in 2016. The current, new Law on Higher Education (2018) established a procedure on recognising learning outcomes achieved outside the formal education system.	Clear links between integrated Qualification System and validation procedures has been established and clearly described at Integrated Qualification System webpage. The current educational system based on qualification framework makes SLP (and micro-programmes) possible and HE as the integrators for Lifelong Learning.
Portugal: Universidade Aberta	Validation within HE, was the result of legislation changes in 2013 namely Decree law 115/2013 section 07/08.	Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been part of the National Qualifications Framework in Portugal since 2009.

	Each institution is responsible for setting their specific validation procedures but they require approval by the Scientific Board of Universities and Polytechnics.	
Spain: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia and Universitat Oberta de Catalunya	Procedures and responsibilities for validating learning are organised according to the Royal Decree 1224/2009.	The Spanish National Qualifications Framework for LLL integrates validation of non-formal and informal learning with qualifications acquired through formal education.
Turkey: Anadolu University	The TQF Regulation describes the duties and responsibilities of HEIs regarding validation, learner mobility and the validation of informal and non-formal learning.	The TQF is central to the establishment of the validation system. The alignment of VET with national occupational standards and work to support the link between education and employment are goals of the TQF.
UK: The Open University UK	RPEL aopportunities in the UK – No national strategy.	The use of RPL/RPEL for the award of academic credit is recognised by the QAA. The FHEQ guidance on academic credit acknowlededes that HEIs must reference credit volume and level when determining what they might formally reconise as prior learning within a specific programme.

The table provides an overview of the practices that exist across the partner countries in relation to the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIF).

2. Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

	Skills	Knowledge	Responsibility and autonomy
Level 4 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are:	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study.	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study.	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities.
Level 5 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are: FQHEA Short cycle	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge.	A comprehensive range of cognitive skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems.	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others.
Level 6 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are: FQHEA First cycle	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles.	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study.	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups.
Level 7 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are: FQHEA Second cycle	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research. Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields.	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams.

| Level 8

The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are:

FQHEA

Third cycle | Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields. | The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice | Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research. |

https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page Accessed 3rd February 2020

3. Level descriptors of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

	Credit value	Level descriptors
First Cycle Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle (e.g. Bachelor's degrees) are awarded to students who: EQF Level 6	This cycle typically include 180-240 ECTS credits.	• Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study. • Can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study. • Have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues. • Can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences. • Have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.
Second Cycle Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle (e.g. Master's degrees) are awarded to students who: EQF Level 7	This cycle typically include 90-120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the 2nd cycle.	• Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context. • Can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study. • Have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements. • Can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously. • Have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.
Third cycle Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle	A typical amount of credits is not prescribed for this cycle.	• Have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field. • Have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity. • Have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication.

are awarded to students who: EQF Level 8		• Are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas. • Can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise. • Can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.

http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Framework_for_Qualifications_of_the_European_Higher_Education_Area Accessed 3rd February 2020

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