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Country report

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2016 update to the European inventory
on validation of non-formal and informal learning

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1 Introduction and Evaluation

1.1 Abstract

Validation practices in Estonia are well developed in the formal education sector. Higher education (HE) has been leading developments in relation to validation, though other sectors - such as the vocational education and training (VET) sector - have been following these developments. Thus the challenge in Estonia is for other sectors to follow suit in terms of their developments in validation and to create a unified system. The current model is fragmented and for potential applicants it could be difficult to find his/her way around the various systems that are sector specific.

1.2 Main changes since the 2014 update

In Estonia validation is defined as follows: Validation is a process that helps a recognized institution assess the competence of an applicant based on specific criteria. The key criteria are designed to assess how the applicant's knowledge, skills and aptitudes match the entry requirements of the educational institution, the learning outcomes of the programme or sections of it or the competency requirements of occupational standards¹.

Validation practices are well developed in higher education and vocational education due to extensive ESF programme funding. Therefore, a unified system of validation has been formed in higher education and the VET sector has followed the lead. The funding period came to an end in 2013 and since then very little change has taken place in validation practices. Validation in HE and VET is seen as a regular part of study process and each institution is responsible for implementing validation including providing information and guidance, assessing and certifying. Due to the end of funding, a well-functioning network of validation practitioners from HE institutions is no longer active and thus there are no new common initiatives on validation in the HE sector. The VET sector is sharing best practices on validation through the Estonian ECVET expert network, as the validation of prior experience and recognition of skills and competences is a tool for ECVET. Validation has not gained much attention nationally and the initiatives have been down to each individual institution.

During the programme periods (LÜKKA 2005-2008; Primus 2008-2013) many materials were produced e.g. manuals for applicants and institutions, information materials etc., and these are still in use today even though the materials have not been updated. Validation practitioners had many training opportunities during the programme periods which unfortunately is no longer the case. Again it is the responsibility of the institutions to train their staff. How well the institutions are implementing validation is difficult to analyse as there is no overall data on validation processes and beneficiaries. Validation practices especially in the HE sector were unified and highly developed but due to the end of funding there has been no further overall developments on validation.

New goals have been set by the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy which is a document that guides the most important developments in the area of education. It is the basis on which the government will make its decisions for educational funding for the years 2014-2020 and for the development of programmes that support the achievement of necessary changes.

¹ Both terms occupational and professional standard are used. In the current document we stick to 'occupational standard'. RPL – A guide for applicants (2010) - http://primus.archimedes.ee/sites/default/files/vota/vota_taotleja_eng.pdf

The general goal of drafting the Lifelong Learning Strategy is to provide all people in Estonia with learning opportunities that are tailored to their needs and capabilities throughout their whole lifespan, in order for them to maximize opportunities for dignified self-actualization within society, in their work as well as in their family life.

The Adult Education Programme aims to implement validation in general adult education. The focus has been put on adult gymnasiums and development of validation practices for the needs of adult learners. Higher Education and VET sector programmes state the need to improve the quality of validation practices and develop further validation in the education area. These programme documents are setting the goals for the next five years.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

In Estonia, validation is understood as a process that helps a competent authority assess the competence of an applicant based on specific criteria. This includes the extent to which an applicant's knowledge, skills and attitudes conform to the enrolment criteria of an educational institution, the learning outcomes of the curriculum, or its part(s), or the competency requirements of an occupational standard. If the applicant's competences meet the requirements, they will be taken into account with respect to the enrolment criteria, completion of the curriculum, or in terms of awarding an occupational qualification².

The purpose of validation is:

- to value the competence of a person and provide equal opportunities for assessing and acknowledging it, regardless of the time, place and the way in which the knowledge and skills were acquired;
- to support lifelong learning and mobility between the education system and the labour market and within each of these; and,
- to improve access to education for people, including people who are socially disadvantaged: to broaden opportunities to acquire an education and compete in the labour market and therefore support a more efficient use of the resources of both the individual and society.

In Estonia, principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (also known as Recognition of Prior Learning, RPL) have been developed and are now regulated by higher education and vocational education legislation. The validation principles are generally also used in the system for awarding occupational qualifications. In the field of general education validation is allowed by law but validation process and practice has not been clearly defined. Validation processes are being developed for adult gymnasiums. Institutions providing non-formal education have been partially involved in the implementation of validation principles.

As indicated above, validation has an important role to play in enhancing the links between different levels of education and the labour market. The concept of assessment of prior experiential learning encompasses the idea of lifelong learning and the notion that learning is valuable no matter where or when it has been acquired.

As reported in the 2014 update, RPL can be used for:

- Admission to higher education and VET institutions with respect to fulfilling entrance requirements. In HE this is only valid if the applicant has a certain previous level of

² Both terms occupational and professional qualification are used. In the current document we stick to 'occupational qualification'.

education (e.g. High school diploma, bachelor or master's degree, depending on the level of study applied for);

- Continuing studies in higher education and vocational education;
- Changing curriculum of study in higher education and vocational education; and,
- Achieving an occupational qualification.

The legal framework for validation is specific to the education level and more advanced in HE and VET. There is no overall policy to cover validation at all education levels and each is responsible for its own development and implementation.

The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf) is providing a focus on adult education and validation. One of the objectives is to create equal opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone including using prior learning experiences at secondary education level. Adult Education Programme 2016-2019 states that validation principles for general education will be developed and training is provided for validation counsellors and assessors. Also, overall validation data collection is one of the targeted activities.

Adult Education Programme 2016-2019 (Täiskasvanuhariduse programm 2016-2019) focuses on early school leavers, people who have dropped-out from learning and low qualified adults. Validation is seen as a tool to provide equal opportunities for learners. The Higher Education Programme 2016-2019 (Kõrgharidusprogramm 2016-2019) document features validation as a means for a flexible form of study by supporting access to higher education for various groups of learners. Vocational Education Programme 2016-2019 (Kutseharidusprogramm 2016-2019) states that an increase in the number of validation applications is expected and assessment quality has improved. Therefore validation practitioners (assessors and counsellors) will be supported by training and development. The main focus in validation practices in VET is given to learners who are early school leavers or people who have dropped-out who would like to return to studies.

2.2 Validation in education and training

Implementing validation in higher education

General legislation supporting HE in Estonia is laid down in the following legal acts: Universities Act, Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, Private Schools Act, and Standard of Higher Education.

The framework document, the Standard of Higher Education (2008), specifies the requirements for HE programmes and quality assurance. It is a fundamental legal act concerning licensing and accreditation of study programmes or higher education institutions (HEI).

The Standard of Higher Education stipulates the aims and general principles for validation in very broad terms. According to Subsection 12 (3) of the Standard of Higher Education, validation can be implemented:

- for complying with the conditions for admission established by the educational institution;
- for the transfer of previously acquired credit points upon completion of a curriculum; and,
- for accrediting prior studies and professional experience as credit points.

An exception is the final thesis of the first and second level of HE, in which case validation is not allowed.

The Government regulation "Statutes and forms of diploma and diploma supplement" (<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/13169943?leiaKehtiv>) stipulates that validation shall be reflected in the Diploma Supplement. The subjects and modules that have been completed using validation shall be indicated and marked in line with how the prior learning (formal, non-formal or informal) has taken place. The indication "recognised on the basis of prior learning" shall be added to the subject/module in the diploma supplement.

There has been a programme for validation development since 2003 (under the LÜKKA project (http://www.ut.ee/lykka/set_lang_id=2) framework) and 2008 (as part of the Primus programme, <http://primus.archimedes.ee/>), both supported by European Social Fund (ESF). As a result, a network of validation professionals of various specialisms has been created, gathering statistics on validation and developing the guideline materials for applicants, assessors and consultants.

In terms of the legislative framework in HE, as reported in the 2010 and 2014 update, the 2003 *University Act* allowed up to 50 % of HE programmes to be obtained through RPL. From September 2007 there has been no limitation but it is stated that HEIs cannot award whole diplomas or certificates on the basis of prior and experiential learning. In practice, this means that the whole of the curriculum may be recognised on the basis of prior learning, except for the thesis or final examination (which have to be defended and taken, respectively, at the corresponding university).

As also reported in the 2010 and 2014 update, validation can also be used to access HE - replacing the necessary entrance qualifications, except for first degree level entry. The entrance requirements for postgraduate qualifications could state for example that the candidate should have a previous degree in the same area of study or work experience in the field of study. If the applicant has studied in a different field but has relevant work experience or has completed additional training courses, these could fulfil the requirements. Nevertheless, an application for validation is valid only if the applicant has a certain level of completed previous education. If the student has not completed undergraduate studies he/she is not eligible to apply for master level studies – so validation refers mainly to the subject area, rather than level of education.

The University Act requires that universities accredit prior and experiential learning and obliges them to develop their own rules and procedures for RPL. Since 2008, the rules and purposes of RPL have been set out in major principles by the Standard of Higher Education.

The Standard of Higher Education also includes a broad framework of common validation implementation regulations and states that all HEIs need to have validation regulations within the institution. Validation regulations were the first step towards formalising the process of validation within universities, as validation might have been used beforehand without formal requirements. The process therefore varied greatly in different universities as well as within one institution.

Implementing validation in vocational education

Validation in vocational education is legally governed by the VET Institutions Act (2013) and Vocational Education Standard (2013). Validation terms and procedures are set out in each school's rules for the organisation of studies. Prior learning may be taken into account:

1. in fulfilling the school's terms of admission;
2. in completing the curriculum except the final examination by considering prior learning as a final grade of a subject, topic or module; or,
3. in recognising a previously passed vocational examination as passing a final examination.

A VET institution is obligated to inform its students of the validation terms, conditions and procedures. This includes providing information in relation to deadlines and costs that are related to assessment, as well as validation of the possibilities of contesting the results. VET institutions are also obliged to ensure that all applicants have access to the necessary information and access to counselling if required.

Validation is certified by a graduation certificate, diploma or an equivalent document. Experiential learning, hobby activities or any other everyday activity shall be certified by reference to the work accomplished and its presentation, an occupational qualification

certificate, contract of employment, copy of an assignment or any other documental proof. A description of the vocational experience and self-analysis is added to the application.

If necessary, a school has the right to give an applicant some practical tasks, to interview the individual or evaluate his or her skills in whatever way it chooses in order to evaluate prior learning.

Vocational Education Standard (2013) is a framework document for vocational education that sets out general principles for validation. The document states the aim of the validation process, common principles that all vocational education institutions need to follow and general rules for the assessment and recognition of validation in vocational education. In accordance with the set procedures, validation can be used for admission to fulfil entrance requirements and continuing studies in vocational education. According to the document, vocational education institutions have to assure the quality of validation process by providing information for the applicant and quality assuring the assessment.

Validation in general education

Validation in general education is in its early stages of development. The Adult Education Programme 2016-2019 will focus on developing validation practices in adult gymnasiums. Most of the adult gymnasiums include validation regulations but have very little practical experience in the implementation of validation. Validation has been practiced on a case by case basis and it has mostly recognised prior formal learning.

2.3 Validation and the labour market

The implementation of validation in awarding occupational qualifications is not fully regulated by legislation in Estonia. Institutions awarding occupational qualifications can specify operations related to validation in procedures for awarding occupational qualifications.

In the process of awarding an occupational qualification, the assessment committee (established by an occupational qualification committee) assesses the competence of an applicant with respect to the requirements of occupational qualification standards, based on the criteria set out in the rules and procedures for awarding the qualification. The occupational competence of a person is assessed and recognised based on learning obtained from formal, non-formal or informal learning. Validation provides the applicant with an opportunity to apply for the occupational qualification, using appropriate methods and evidence in order to avoid assessment and validation of the competences that have been assessed and validated earlier.

The Professions Act

An eight-level qualification framework was established in 2008 called the Professions Act. As reported in the 2010 and 2014 update, the Professions Act, which serves as the basis for significant changes in the Estonian system of occupational qualifications, took effect on 1 September 2008. Estonia has a comprehensive qualifications framework, which consists of four sub-frameworks: for general education, for vocational education and training (VET), for HE and for occupational qualifications with sub-framework specific level descriptors. Referencing of the Estonian qualification framework to the EQF took place from 2008 to 2011. The creation and implementation of the NQF is based on the principles for accountability and quality assurance of qualifications laid down by the European Parliament and Council recommendation on the establishment of the EQF.

In the context of validation, the act clarifies the process of acquiring occupational standards and states the responsibility of the professional body (e.g. procedures for assessing and validating competences).

2.3.1 Skills audits

Skills audits, as described in the European Recommendation on Validation, are not available in Estonia.

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund organises the provision of labour market services that help unemployed people find new employment. This provision includes career counselling services and labour market training. The provision of career counselling also entails advice and guidance in relation to further education opportunities; career choices; training or work corresponding to the user's personal characteristics; as well as, education and skills for people who are unemployed or who have received notice of termination of their employment or service relationship. The aim of career counselling is to advise individuals on matters relating to choice of employment or profession and access to employment and career formation. The aim of labour market training is to help unemployed people find work through learning or developing the required skills and knowledge.

To support individuals in their effort to secure employment, Individual Action Plans are drawn up by the Unemployment Fund. Individuals are assessed and a job mediation consultant compiles the action plan for the person. The objective of the Individual Action Plan is to enable the individual to consider and plan the activities required to find and secure employment. The plan also includes a description of the professional and working skills of the unemployed person and of their broader skills which could facilitate employment.

Career information and counselling are also provided by career centres in higher education institutions. Higher education institutions are focused on current students, employers and alumni.

Career counselling services have no clear links to validation practices.

2.4 Validation and the third sector

The third sector has not played an active role in validation initiatives. The youth and volunteering sector has shown little or no interest in validation in order to gain recognition for non-formal or informal learning. Even though a Youth Worker (vocational) title can be obtained largely through work experience (paid or unpaid).

The third sector is involved mostly in awarding occupational qualification certificates as awarding bodies. For those active in the third sector who wish to have their skills validated, this is possible through the methods outlined previously in this report (validation and labour market).

The Estonian RPL Association (ERPLA) was established (2013) as an NGO by a group of higher education validation practitioners. The aims of the association are: to support the professionalisation of RPL practitioners; to support the implementation and quality assurance of RPL principles; to support cooperation in RPL in all sectors; and, to create a unified RPL system. ERPLA has not been an active contributor due to lack of funding and initiative by the members.

3 Links to national qualification systems

An eight-level qualification framework was established in 2008 (the Professions Act, <http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutsesysteem/oigusaktidkutseseadus>). Estonia has a comprehensive qualifications framework, which consists of four sub-frameworks: for general education; for vocational education and training; for HE; and, for occupational qualifications with sub-framework specific level descriptors.

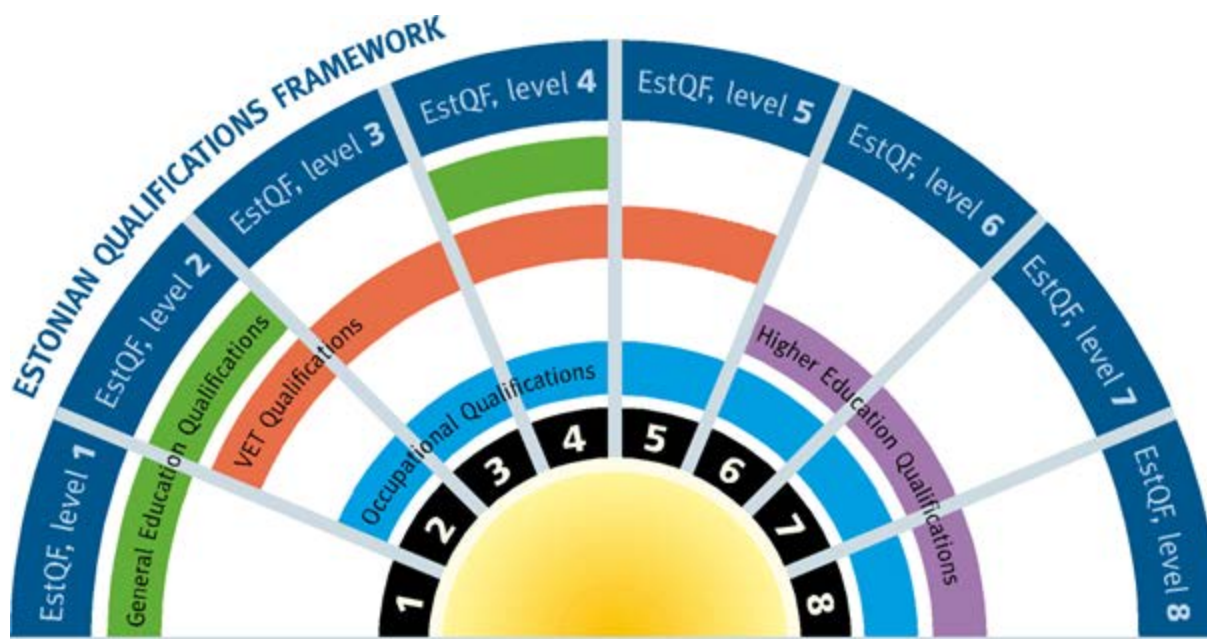
The learning outcomes of each of these have been described in terms of levels:

- the learning outcomes of general education qualifications are described in national curricula for basic schools and upper secondary schools;
- the learning outcomes of vocational education are described in the vocational education standard;
- the learning outcomes of levels of higher education (professional higher education, Bachelor's study, Master's study and Doctoral study) are described in the higher education standard;
- competence requirements for occupational qualifications, i.e. professions, are described in occupational standards.

The descriptions of levels (<http://www.kutsekoda.ee/fw/contenthelper/10216434/10444993>) of the Qualifications Framework determine general requirements for learning outcomes of the education system and for levels of the occupational qualifications system.

As referred above, referencing of the Estonian qualification framework to the EQF took place from December 2008 to August 2011. The creation and implementation of the Estonian qualification framework is based on the principles for accountability and quality assurance of qualifications laid down by the European Parliament and Council recommendation on the establishment of the EQF. Occupational qualifications can be gained through formal education as well as through non-formal and informal learning.

Estonian Qualifications Framework



4 Standards

Both occupational standards and educational standards are used in validation.

The Occupational Qualification Standard (OQS) describes occupational activities and provides the competency requirements for occupational qualifications and their levels.

OQS consists of three parts. Part A of the standard (description of the occupation) provides an overview of the nature of work, major parts of work and tasks, necessary tools, work environment, including the specificities of work and describes the personal characteristics and skills enhancing occupational activities. This information is useful for people who are

choosing an occupation or career. This source also helps career advisers, labour market consultants, human resources managers and trainers.

The competence requirements presented in part B of the standard serve as a basis for the assessment of the applicant for the occupational qualification. These requirements are presented as descriptions of mandatory and optional competences. Competence is an ability to perform a specific part of work or a task on the basis of having the knowledge, skills and attitudes required.

Part C of the standard contains general information and references to annexes.

Occupational standards are accompanied by assessment standards which specify assessment methods, procedures and assessment criteria. For example, applying for an adult educator's qualification standard is voluntary and depends on the applicant's wish to formalise his/her professional skills. The application process includes portfolio compilation and examination. Portfolios can contain applicants' self-analysis and assessment of competencies and relevant evidence material to support his/her claim. The examination is carried out as an interview where the applicant is asked to give proof of his/her competencies.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

Validation as a process is governed by the Ministry of Education and Research, which has the responsibility to set overall policy aims and benchmarks. There is no single institution responsible for validation implementation in all sectors thus the development of validation practices is scattered between government agencies.

Developments in HE were led by the Archimedes Foundation, which is an independent body established by the Estonian government with the objective to coordinate and implement different international and national programmes and projects in the field of training, education and research. Archimedes was responsible for implementing the ESF-funded project 'Primus' and its office was the main coordinating body in the development of RPL. As the 'Primus' funding ended also the responsibilities of Archimedes Foundation came to an end and there has been no clear institution leading validation developments in HE.

Validation for obtaining occupational qualification is coordinated by the Estonian Qualifications Authority and, in vocational education, the developments are led by Foundation INNOVE. The main objective of the Foundation INNOVE is to coordinate lifelong learning development activities and to implement relevant programmes and projects and the EU structural aid in a targeted and efficient manner.

Validation has been led by the HE sector due to extensive funding schemes. As a result, the validation procedures and arrangements for a quality code (the 'principles of RPL', which also constitute the quality criteria for RPL) that have been developed for HE is being adopted by other sectors as well.

In line with legislative requirements (VET Institutions Act 2013; Vocational education standard 2013; University Act 2008, Standard of Higher Education 2008), all higher education, and vocational education institutions have put in place a set of regulations for the recognition of prior learning. Institutions must have validation processes in place, provide guidance for learners, undertake assessments, assure the quality of the process and provide information.

Most of adult gymnasiums have put in place a set of regulations for validation and currently a working group has been initiated by the Ministry of Education and Research to support adult gymnasiums in updating their validation regulations and practices.

The private sector does not have a major role to play in validation practices. Employers are included in assessment of validation in various cases in HE, VET and occupational

standards. Employers are part of assessment processes in more technical areas and also in the ICT area. The assessment of occupational standards is carried out by an awarding body which usually consists of employers' representatives.

As noted in the previous European Inventory reports for Estonia, employers have always appreciated prior formal, non-formal and informal learning when hiring people, and have valued work experience, personal characteristics and abilities. The main tool used for the first evaluation of an individual is the review of the candidate's CV, followed by an interview. Most companies have worked out a personnel policy and internal rules for measuring the potential of the applicant, although these are not available publicly.

In the labour market two main trends are evident: on the one hand, attention is paid to official qualifications in some cases; on the other hand, work experience is valued more than a university degree.

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

In the past two years, awareness-raising for validation has not been systematic in any of the sectors (HE, VET, general education). In the education sector, each institution is responsible for informing current students about validation options. For example, Tallinn University has a website for information: <http://www.tlu.ee/vota>. The website covers information on the validation process, provides information on how to apply and also has information for supporting reflection as an applicant. Various videos and guidance materials have been provided for the applicant.

Awareness of validation practices in the HE sector has been increasing in recent years and potential applicants, as well as academics, are well aware of validation opportunities. The Primus ESF programme had a great impact on raising awareness as many information materials were created and distributed. A website for validation was created and is referred to today even though the website has not seen major updates (<http://vota.archimedes.ee>).

Vocational education has developed information materials that are sector-specific.

Qualification awarding bodies share information with potential applicants. The term validation is often not used. Although the work that is being done is a validation process, it is not named that way.

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

As reported in the 2010 and 2014 update, educational providers are responsible for providing information on their own validation regulations and procedures. As noted above, a website dedicated to validation that gathers, hosts and links all validation-related information was run by the Primus programme (see <http://vota.archimedes.ee/>).

In practice, advice and guidance is based on the sector and provided by individual institutions. In the absence of a single institution for guidance, generally speaking, information and guidance is fragmented and only covers the institution to which the applicant is applying. The same applies for qualification standards where each awarding body offers information and guidance usually through their website and direct email or phone communication. Some awarding bodies offer seminars and workshops for potential applicants.

6.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund has a number of guidance practitioners but their work is primarily focussed on unemployed people where validation practices are not

seen as part of their competence. Thus, it is left to individuals to identify validation options suitable for their own needs.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

In HE, clear profiles of practitioners exist. The VET sector has been following the practice currently implemented in the HE sector.

The Estonian Qualification Authority (QA) has developed a competency standard for assessors of competencies. It is targeted at occupational certificates' awarding bodies who carry out assessments. The standard helps awarding bodies to select assessors and helps assessors to self-analyse their competencies as assessors. Advisors/counsellors are not clearly defined in the process of awarding occupational certificates. Counselling is regulated by each awarding body and there are no set requirements.

In the context of higher education, **the validation adviser**, above all, acts as a support person in the validation process. Advisers are traditionally employees of the (educational) institution (e.g. an Academic Affairs Specialist, the Director for Academic Affairs) whose main duties are:

- to explain the rules established by the (educational) institution to applicants, including the requirements set for application and evidence, and to instruct them during the whole RPL process;
- to explain the learning outcomes of the study programme/the competency requirements of the occupational standard to applicants and to guide them in the process of describing their knowledge and skills and assessing their compliance; and,
- to advise on how to prepare the application and collect evidence and to check the compliance of the material with the requirements before submission for assessment.

Depending on the specific character of the (educational) institution, the adviser can also be responsible for monitoring the progress of the process, for exchanging information on organisational issues between the applicant and the assessor and, if necessary and possible, for supporting the applicant's self-esteem and continued motivation to learn.

A validation assessor is usually the person who is also the assessor in non-specialist studies or in the process of awarding occupational qualifications. This is likely to be a lecturer, a teacher, the manager of the study programme, a specialist in the field, or a member of the occupational qualifications committee.

The main tasks of the assessor are:

- to assess the adequacy and relevance of evidence and to provide relevant feedback to the applicant; and,
- to assess whether the applicant's competences comply with the specific learning outcomes/competency requirements and to provide feedback to the applicant.

7.2 Qualification requirements

In HE validation practitioners' competencies have been described. There are no official requirements but these competencies are expected.

Table 7.1 Advisor

Understands the principles and process of RPL and is familiar with the relevant regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can name the main principles of RPL. ■ Can explain the importance of those principles. ■ Can describe the main components of the process. ■ Can describe the process of RPL in his/her organisation. ■ Can name regulations affecting RPL. ■ Can explain which regulation(s) have most impact on the adviser role.
Is familiar with the main components of an outcome-based curriculum and/or occupational standard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can describe the structural logic of a curriculum and an occupational standard. ■ Can name components of the study programme at the educational level assessed or of the relevant occupational standard.
Is familiar with the principles of assessing experience-based learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can name the principles of assessing experience-based learning. ■ Can name and explain the main methods of assessing experience-based learning. ■ Can relate learning outcomes or competencies with evidence.
Knows and respects the limits of his/her role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can explain the nature of the role of an adviser in the context of RPL. ■ Can distinguish the roles of an adviser and an assessor. ■ Stays within the limits of the adviser's role.
Can advise the applicant in respect of carrying out a self-analysis, selecting evidence and preparing an analysis of what has been learned from experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Asks the applicant questions that facilitate self-analysis. ■ Uses active listening techniques. ■ Helps find relevant evidence. ■ Gives feedback to the applicant that supports development. ■ Gives advice to the applicant on finding and filling in the right application form.
Co-operates with different parties involved with the RPL process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communicates with the applicant, the assessor and the supporting personnel involved with the process
Expresses points clearly and specifically, and produces accurate documentation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Presents information in a way that is comprehensible to all parties. ■ Fills in documentation related to consultation according to the regulations of the competent authority.

Table 7.2 Assessor

Understands the principles and process of RPL and is familiar with relevant regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can name the main principles of RPL. Can explain the importance of those principles. Can describe the main components of the process. Can describe the process of RPL in their organisation. Can name regulations concerning RPL. Can explain which regulation(s) are critical to their work.
Is familiar with the main components of an outcome-based curriculum or occupational standard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can describe the structural logic of a curriculum or an occupational standard. Can name components of the study programme at the educational level assessed or of the relevant occupational standard.
Knows and follows the principles of RPL assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is independent and impartial in assessment. Applies comprehensive assessment, which includes considering general (transferable) competences. Uses relevant methods of assessment. Compiles assessment criteria that are consistent with learning outcomes or competency requirements. In assessment, relies on suitable evidence and asks for additional evidence, if necessary. Uses threshold criteria in assessment. Gives feedback to the applicant that will support further studies.
Knows the field assessed at least at the level of the compliance to which it is being assessed in the RPL application.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complies with the qualification requirements of the competent authority where he/she acts as an assessor.
Co-operates with different parties of the RPL process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates with applicants, advisers and, if necessary, with external parties. Co-operates with other assessors in order to reach a joint assessment decision.
Expresses him/herself clearly, produces accurate documentation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents information in a way that is comprehensible to all parties. Fills in documentation related to assessment according to the regulations of the competent authority.
Can identify and mitigate risks that might affect the quality of assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can specify the risks to the quality of assessment. Can identify those risks in the assessment process. Can mitigate the risks whenever feasible.

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

There were many training opportunities in the HE sector due to extensive funding (ESF programme). Training courses were offered to assessors, advisers and applicants. Courses for assessors and counsellors were recommended in order to serve as validation practitioners. Courses for applicants were voluntary and in place to help applicants in the process of validation and to support their self-analysis. As the programme period has ended, it has been up to the institutions to carry out training for validation practitioners. Thus training is now less consistent. For example, Tallinn University is offering workshops for potential validation applicants at the beginning of each semester. A general e-learning module for applicants is also available (<http://tartu.archimedes.ee/primus/VOTA/>). Training for assessors or advisors has been triggered by the need when new people have started to work at the university and one of their tasks is validation related. Tallinn University (<http://tartu.archimedes.ee/primus/VOTA/>) has also created an online manual for validation advisors.

During the period of 2008-2012, 973 people participated in RPL assessor trainings, 242 in RPL counsellor trainings, 4 438 people participated in various seminars on issues of RPL,

1 109 applicants participated in self-analysis training courses and 4 843 people participated in various information seminars, open-day courses, one-time events, etc.

8 Quality assurance

As reported in the 2010 and 2014 update, common validation principles have been agreed by HEIs. The VET sector has also been using these principles. In addition, a manual for validation was published in 2011³.

The quality of validation is not an isolated phenomenon, but is an integral part of the framework of quality regulations and management of an (educational) institution. The validation principles are also used as the validation quality criteria. Relying on these principles, each (educational) institution assures the quality of validation depending on its specific character, traditions, quality management system, etc.

The principles of RPL (validation) were defined, which also constitute the quality criteria for RPL:

- RPL is goal-oriented.
- RPL is based on the needs of the applicant and is voluntary for the applicant.
- The organisation and methods of RPL are reliable and based on the standards of education, occupational standards and good practices. Trust plays a central role and results from social recognition, precisely defined standards and clear information on the process and criteria of assessment.
- The assessors and advisers are competent, independent and impartial. Independence and impartiality are key factors in the assessment process and are based on the responsibility of assessors. The roles of assessors and advisers are clear and separate.
- RPL assessment follows precise and unambiguous assessment principles.
- The quality assurance process of RPL is systematic and based on the principle of continuous improvement.

Responsibility for the quality of validation rests with the (educational) institution. As a rule, there are a number of different people involved in validation in any one (educational) institution. This typically includes people who are responsible for the content of validation (advisers, assessors) and people who are responsible for organisational matters (usually members of the support staff).

In terms of the transparency and reliability of validation, entering information about validation in official graduation certificates is of central importance but it is often overlooked. The latter can result in misleading aggregation.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

Validation costs have been mostly covered by the applicant and development costs have been ESF programme-based in HE and VET sectors. As the ESF programme periods have ended it has left a funding void for validation developments. For example, the ESF programme Primus had a budget for validation activities (2008-2013) of EUR 1.46 million. The funding covered training courses for assessors, counsellors, applicants, assessment and counselling costs, information campaigns and other related activities, such as the development of specific portfolios and study visits.

³ The manual can be found at the following link:
http://primus.archimedes.ee/sites/default/files/vota/Manual%20for%20RPL_eng.pdf

The Adult Education programme 2016-2019 document states that there is funding for validation developments in general adult education (adult education gymnasiums). Funding is meant for the training of assessors and advisors, generating information materials and developing the validation system. For future years (2016-2019) the budget is roughly EUR 65 000. Higher education and vocational education programmes also state validation as one of their activities, although in the budget it is not so clearly stated which funds are earmarked for the development of validation.

Applicants in some higher education institutions have to pay a fee which varies by institution. Certain institutions charge a fee based on the amount of credit points for which they are applying, while for others there is a simple application fee with no additional credit point charge. There is no overall system.

As of 2013, HE is free for students. Some universities charge a fee for validation applications and some offer validation for free to their students. Universities are autonomous in this decision.

Funding for validation in vocational education is similar to higher education, where it is also funded by the ESF programme. Funding is primarily for training validation practitioners and for the promotion of validation.

9.2 Distribution of costs

HEI cover the cost of validation in many cases as validation is seen as a regular part of the study system. HE is free for students since autumn 2013 thus universities usually do not charge validation applicants extra (as mentioned above, universities are autonomous in deciding whether to charge a fee).

The cost of validation counselling and assessment is seen as part of the everyday work and duties of staff and therefore these costs are typically covered by the university. As indicated above, some universities apply a fee for validation application however, to date, there has not been any analysis on the distribution of cost for validation in HE.

A similar situation can be observed in the VET sector whereby individuals cover most of the cost for applying for a qualification standard. The fees are different depending on the field and level of the standard. A qualifying body determines the fee.

There are no tax incentives for companies to become involved in validation.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

There is no up to date data on the benefits of validation.

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

There is no up to date detailed information on the number of applications in various sectors. Validation data collection is one of the planned activities for the future in HE and VET. In higher education there is data on the number of ECTS credit points acquired through validation. In the 2014-2015 academic year, in total 71 505 ECTS credits were gained by validation out of which 62 068 ECTS credits were prior formal education and 9 436 credits prior non-formal learning.

9.4.2 Validation users

No available data.

9.4.3 Validation and migrants / refugees and other disadvantaged groups

No available data on migrants. There are no specific validation initiatives targeting migrants.

10 Validation methods

Methods used in the validation process mainly relate to assessment, as illustrated in the table below.

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate			
Declarative methods	✓	✓	
Interview	✓		✓
Observation			
Portfolio method		✓	✓
Presentation			
Simulation and evidence extracted from work			
Tests and examinations			✓
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify			

Assessment follows precise and unambiguous assessment principles:

1. It is not the existence of experience, but what has been learned from it that is being assessed.
2. What is most important in the assessment of prior learning is its compliance with the learning outcomes of the study programme or the competency requirements of the occupational standard.
3. The assessment of prior learning is based on the principle of comprehensive assessment.
4. The applicant is not assessed more strictly in RPL than full-time students.
5. Assessment of prior learning mainly uses pass or fail assessment. An exception is the recognition of prior formal education that ended with a grading if a comparable assessment system is used as a basis.

Assessment methods are divided into 'verification'- and 'portfolio'-type methods. The first type is more assessor-centred, often including prepared questions, exercises, and being especially suitable for assessing specific skills and a specific knowledge on a subject. Examples of 'verification'-type assessment methods are demonstration (including, a written quiz with open-ended questions, a multiple-choice test, exercises), simulation (including, solution of a problem, a practical task) and observation (including, conducting a class). In certain cases, the latter may exceed its common limits and become assessment of the applicable competencies as a whole (including, transferable competencies and attitudes). 'Portfolio'-type assessment methods (e.g. a study portfolio and a practical-training log) are more applicant-centred and include the evidence of applicants' achievements, their analysis of their learning from experience, and other material the applicant links to the competencies acquired.

The most common 'portfolio'-type assessment method used in validation is a study portfolio containing various types of evidence compiled by the applicant. This method is well-suited

for assessing more complex and interrelated knowledge and skills, which is characteristic of validation.

Irrespective of the fact whether the portfolio is a sample one or expressing the development of an applicant, from the structural and readability aspects, it is recommended that the applicant should use the method STARR (a competence interview method: *Situation, Task, Action, Result, Reflection*) for compiling the study portfolio and analysing learning from experience.

From the point of view of authenticity and validity, the second more common method applied in validation is an interview. This is a method that cannot be easily classified as assessor-centred or applicant-centred methods of assessment.

In summary, a portfolio and interviews are the most commonly used methods in all sectors. In more practical areas, observation and demonstration is used. Case studies are also used as reflective assignments.

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<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/505022014002/consolide/current>

11.2 Sources

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- Ministry of Education and Research
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Country report Estonia

2016 update to the European inventory on
validation of non-formal and informal learning

The 2012 Council recommendation on validation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

This country report is one of 36 that, together with a synthesis report and thematic reports, constitute the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory is a regularly updated overview of validation practices and arrangements in all Member States, EFTA countries and Turkey. It is a reference point for information on validation in Europe. It is organised around the principles defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation that were further elaborated in the European guidelines for validation. This is its sixth update (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016).



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