

Desk Research Methodology

In the early stages of the project, each partner country completed a mapping document to provide:

- a contextual status report for each national prison system, including trends¹
- information regarding existing arrangements for education delivery including opportunities in informal learning
- examples of good practice in the provision of non-formal and informal learning
- a national and international picture of the state of the art in validation methodologies

The prompts were designed to illicit qualitative desk-research driven responses. The template and guidelines were created by the coordinating partner and distributed to other partners in November, 2015. These were returned in February, 2016. The report reflects a snapshot of the national prison and justice status and initiatives. The statistics are true of 17th May, 2016.²

Existing reports and studies of informal and non-formal learning are consulted and documented. Interviews and conversations took place with Ministries and National Prison services as well as professionals working within relevant fields.

The data provided relating to non-formal and informal learning does not and cannot claim to be complete or empirically-grounded research but instead represents and reflects the research and estimations of experts working within prison and offender learning contexts.

Information is collectively analysed and compared, where possible and constitutes a 'state of the art', although differences in policy priority necessarily leads to some variation within the national reporting.

The summary outcomes of this national research will be presented as part of the EPEA conference in Romania in 2017. It will also inform the other intellectual outputs of the project:

- The development of the LEVEL 5 Competence Framework
- The Train the Trainer Programme
- Practice Guidebook

¹ Note: only five of the partner countries work within prison contexts

² www.prisonstudies.org [date accessed: 17.05/16]

Austria

The validation of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning is a relatively new concept in Austria.

A recent OECD review of vocational education and training explicitly recommended a joint advisory body in Austria to improve the recognition of prior formal and informal learning (cf. Musset et al., 2013, p. 36). In addition to this, the Austrian federal ministry of Education and Women's Affairs has recently launched a public consultation on the issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

However, there is little national / legal activity concerning validation of learning outcomes from informal or non-formal learning, apart from a mention in the Austrian Strategy for lifelong learning (which has officially been published in 2011), the establishment of a coordination point for the NQF and several pilot projects for validation.

At present, there is no provision or comprehensive and coordinated system for the formative validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences (cf. BMBF, 2015, p. 9). Furthermore, the validation of competences and learning outcomes is of limited relevance in education and employment.

Although several formats for formative competence assessment exist and are being used by various institutions in the spheres of adult learning, lifelong guidance and vocational orientation, there is currently no formal process or system in place for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning experiences (particularly not in higher education).

Over the last couple of years, several approaches for the validation of non-formally/informally acquired skills and competences have been developed with the aim of facilitating vocational re-orientation (c.f. paragraph 1.3). However, these instruments are standalone solutions and not embedded into an integrated political strategy. Overall, there is little systematic coordination in regards to validation of non-formal or informal learning in Austria (cf. BMUKK, 2011, p.46)

“Assessment” tools that are currently being used include the following (with very varying dissemination):

Kompetenz+ Beratung (supported by the Ministry of Education): This approach has been offered since 2012 and provides a standardised format which has so far been used by approximately 2000 persons. It combines workshops with a final individual coaching which leads to a competence protocol and an action plan. In contrast to other formats, the focus is on some distinct activities which have led to relevant competences instead of a whole-life competence assessment. The focus of this approach is furthermore on acknowledging competences (i.e. help clients to become aware of them) rather than validating them.

Kompetenzbilanz (developed by Zukunftszentrum Tirol): actually a coaching process including an introductory workshop, two individual coaching sessions to make participants aware of important experiences and skills and a final coaching session to develop next steps and goals for the future. The Kompetenzbilanz approach has been copied and adapted by several institutions in Austria.

Kompetenzprofil (www.kompetenzprofil.at): This approach consists of 4 group workshops and 20 hours of individual work, provided by the Volkshochschule Linz.

Competence portfolio for teens WIK:I (supported by the Ministry of Family and Youth): The main outcome of the WIK:I workshops is an evidence of competences that can be added to job applications.

Other tools have been developed particularly for the competences of volunteers, such as the “testimony of volunteering activities” promoted by the Ministry of Social Affairs, the competence portfolio for volunteers, and the SLIC competence workshop for senior volunteers. And of course, the Youthpass is a tool that is in use in Austria, too.

Although various institutions offer formative formats for competence assessment, we could only identify one profession that fully embraces the concept of validation of non-formal and informal learning and that is the

profession of adult educators (including managerial positions, teaching, counselling and librarianship). There is a well-elaborated validation system for the qualification and recognition of adult educators (wba-Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich/Austrian Academy of Continuing Education).

Nevertheless, Austria has a longstanding tradition of formal education with a strong emphasis on its widespread dual vocational training system which still has a very good reputation (similar to Germany). Vocational education remains an important pillar of the Austrian education system: In 2012, 76% of students who were enrolled in upper secondary education participated in pre-vocational or vocational programmes, the second highest percentage in the OECD (cf. OECD, 2014).

France

In France, there has been limited progress towards the validation of competences gained through non-formal and informal learning.

A French policy recommendation, dated 3 May 2012, further promotes the implementation of cultural projects to benefit those monitored or held within the justice system. However, there did not prove to be a real political will from decision-makers and this has had limited success.

The protocol notes that access to culture is a fundamental right, as well as education and health. This is particularly necessary for prisoners who are among the most deprived of access to such opportunities. The policy advises the Ministry of Justice that cultural opportunities contribute to integration, openness and the prevention of delinquency and recidivism. Culture has an educational and civic virtue that contributes to: the enhancement of self-esteem, the mastery of fundamentals, a deepening of the knowledge base and the acquisition of professional skills.

Within the French prison system, non-formal and informal activities are implemented by the prison administration through various agreements with institutional and associative partners. Research suggests that there is no obligation for professional stakeholders to deliver transversal competences when teaching prisoners.

However, with the support of the decentralised services of the Ministry of Culture and Communication, the Prison Service of Integration and Probation (SPIP) in each prison is piloting a programme of culturally diverse activities for those in detention, including: visual arts, music, workshop writing, theatre and sport. This approach is designed to allow detainees to appreciate cultural and social difference and to collaborate within a demanding project. There is also an option for detainees to engage in personal learning contexts (as opposed to collective work) where they can re-examine their memory, explore their imagination, discover their sensitivity and their capacity for emancipation. Access to these non-formal or informal activities also supports the process of (re)integration of persons under a measure of justice by instilling a sense of achievement and underpinning the impact of the actions, training and artistic creations of detainees who enroll.

There has been a small amount of progress in terms of the validation of competences acquired in training. Work has been undertaken towards the development of a management tool for monitoring these acquired skills based on the Canadian tool GILC, known in France as the "personal skills portfolio" <http://gilc.psko.fr/>. Academic skills are validated following summative assessments.

We are able to observe some recognition of competences within local initiatives, one or a group of linked teaching units, but this is primarily an informal practice. Finally, we have assessment tools to identify the academic skills of prisoners, but not to seize their transferable skills as well as informal abilities.

Germany

In Germany there is no national strategy for the validation of informal and non-formal learning (VINFL). In fact, a legal framework or standardised system does not exist at national level. Also, the regulatory provisions dealing with the recognition of cross-cutting or specialised competences are extremely rare. VINFL is not usually part of training for teachers. However, there is a general agreement on the growing importance of recognising learning outcomes of informal learning.

However, in general, it is possible to state that the issue is considered less important than the recognition of formal learning and that the two kinds of validation are legally not on an equal footing. Similarly, also at the policy and practice level, the issue is perceived as less important than the validation of formal learning. Looking at admission

procedures, training and study programmes, as well as certification in formal education (at upper secondary level and in higher education), there is a very limited focus on the competences acquired in informal and non-formal education settings.

In recent years, a number of key publications have been highlighting the importance of lifelong learning, particularly connected to VINFL: the 2004 'Strategy for lifelong learning in the Federal Republic of Germany', the 2007 Recommendations for Further Education, and the 2008 Recommendations for Vocational Education and Training. Other European projects, such as the Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliance Programme, PROMOTE³, have been focusing on VINFL and have analysed the situation of different European countries, comparing strategies and approaches in relation to different sectors (e.g. traineeships, senior volunteering, etc.).

One tool that it is worth mentioning for assessing informal and non-formal learning outcomes is the admission to final examinations under Section 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (BbIG), better known as the 'Externen-Prüfung' (examination for candidates not involved in a formal vocational training programme).

If candidates are able to furnish evidence that they have been employed in the occupation for which they wish to take the examination for a period at least one and a half times as long as is prescribed for the period of initial training, they can be admitted to a final examination for a recognised occupation requiring formal training without having attended such training. Credit can also be obtained for a higher level of general educational attainment, such as the Fachoberschulreife (entrance qualification for specialised upper secondary school), which shortens the period of employment for which evidence must be produced. Finally, a previous relevant programme of initial vocational education and training (IVET) in a different training sector can also be credited towards the required periods of employment.⁴

The recognition of professional qualifications is, instead, more advanced, especially since the 'Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Feststellung und Anerkennung im Ausland erworbener Berufsqualifikationen' (German Act Improving the Identification and Recognition of Professional Qualifications Acquired Abroad) (Recognition Act) came into force on 1 April 2012. The Act increased the possibility of recognising vocational qualifications acquired abroad for professions within the jurisdiction of the federal government.

By the end of 2013, 11 States had approved a corresponding state recognition law for the professions, which are based on state regulations. A very high number of people (10,989) applied for the recognition of a professional qualification acquired abroad in the reporting period. 20% of those applications referred to a non-regulated profession. In general, there is a very high demand for the recognition of professions related to the healthcare sector; in fact over half of all applications requested the granting of a medical licence.

The interest for professional recognition is high in Germany and keeps growing as it is shown by the great number of visitors of the web portal 'Recognition in Germany', opened in April 2012, that gives information on the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications.⁵

Most of the approaches to validate informal and non-formal learning are adopted below the political (regulative) level and generally aim to represent a precondition for a "further" recognition connected to entitlements. In recent years, with the support of public funds, there have been several approaches, both at national and regional level for several different target groups. A selection of relevant examples includes:

- Career choice pass (Berufswahlpass) – an instrument for career orientation used in schools.
- Thematic study group competence diagnosis (Facharbeitskreis Kompetenzfeststellung) – approaches to improve the integration of migrants in the labour market.
- Competence certificate for voluntary work (Kompetenznachweis Ehrenamt) – a certificate to document knowledge, skills and competences acquired in voluntary settings.
- Competence balance for vocational returnees (Kompetenzbilanz für BerufsrückkehrerInnen) – a tool to document knowledge, skills and competences developed during parental leave.
- Competence certificate culture (Kompetenznachweis Kultur) – a certificate to document knowledge, skills and competences acquired while participating in cultural events guided by skilled personnel.
- Competence panorama for migrants (Kompetenzenpanorama für Migrantinnen & Mi-granten) – a portfolio of competences with the aim to improve the process of integration.

³ Promoting and Validating Key Competences in Mobility and Traineeships in Europe (www.promote-eu.org)

⁴ Source: Germany Country Report, CEDEFOP: https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2012/2012_CR_DE.pdf, 2012

⁵ Source: Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung – Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training: VET data report Germany 2014 VET - Facts and analyses accompanying the Federal report on vocational education and training – selected findings.

- Qualipass (Qualipass in Baden-Württemberg) – a tool for assessing certain activities of students outside school supported by coaches.

Latvia

According to the European Inventory on Validation (CEDEFOP, 2007), Latvia fell into a group of countries with a low level of activity in this area, where there was “little in terms of policy or practice to facilitate validation”.

The introduction of the revised national Lifelong Learning Strategy, Guidelines for Lifelong Learning 2007-2013, adopted on 23 February 2007 (revised version adopted on 9 December 2009) states that: "non-formal education and informal learning, including adult learning, regardless of the learner's age and whether they have already completed compulsory education, have begun to achieve more autonomy and weight next to formal learning". However, the vast majority of the activities has to be “completed in terms of the existing funding”, meaning that no additional funds are allocated to the new activities.

Nevertheless, there has been substantial progress at policy level in the following areas related to validation of non-formal and informal learning:

- Compatibility has been achieved between the European Qualification Framework and the National Qualification Framework (NQF) in response to a Cabinet Ministers' Decree of October 2010 and qualification requirements are now defined in terms of learning outcomes (competences);
- Amendments to the Law on Vocational Education (June 2010) proposed Article 6 providing that professional qualifications can be awarded to persons who have acquired their skills outside formal education system;
- Following this amendment, Cabinet Regulations 'On Recognition/Assessment of Professional Competences Acquired Outside Formal Education System' were adopted in February 2011.
- The validation of prior learning and experience is based on learning outcomes/level descriptors that form the NQF levels.
- The respective regulations of Cabinet ministers stipulate the procedure of validation in general education and vocational and higher education.

In principle, a national system for validating non-formal and informal learning in general education and vocational and higher education has been set up. This system aims to provide diplomas certifying acquired knowledge and skills through non-formal and informal learning. The State Service of Education Quality coordinates this process. 350 delegation agreements have been signed with 32 vocational institutions regarding the validation of professional competences obtained from the non-formal education system in 100 professional qualifications. (Quality Evaluation Department).

On 10 June 2010, the Parliament approved amendments in the Vocational Education Law with Section (29.1) declaring the following: “(1) The assessment of vocational competence shall take into account the requirements of the respective Occupational Standard; (2) The accredited educational institutions and accredited examination centres can be delegated to perform the validation process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning; (3) The regulation on the validation process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning is defined by the Cabinet of 'Ministers'.

EU LLL program's project “Towards an Integrated System for Validation of non-formal and informal Learning: Initiating a national network of Cooperation and Information Exchange” (Val-Net) began in 2012. Project partners are: Latvian National Library, National Centre of Education, Latvian Adult Education Association, Training and Consultancy Centre “Baltic Bright” and Gulbene Library.

Furthermore, adult education is a key area where projects are attempting to foreground evaluation and validation. The EduEval project 'Evaluation for the Professional Development of Adult Education Staff (Project Number: 538743-LLP-1-2013-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP) aims to increase understanding of the adult education system by embedding evaluation at the heart of the system. It also seeks to improve adult education at a European level through the sharing of good practice.

Key research has also been carried out into the field of adult education. Trends and Issues in Adult Education Evaluation: The Latvia Case⁶ presents the results of an investigation conducted in Latvia within the scope of the

⁶ Gilberto Marzano, Velta Lubkina, Svetlana Usca, Rezekne University of Applied Sciences, Rezekne, Latvia; Tamara Pigozne, University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia.

European Union's (EU) Evaluation for the Professional Development of Adult Education Staff (EduEval) project concerning the evaluation of adult education. The investigation started in 2014, with a methodology based on the review of current literature, analysis of statistic data and official documents, web analysis, and a sampling based on semi-structured interviews. The results of this research show that in Latvia, adult education is generally connected to the business sector, and is considered a means by which to acquire useful skills for career progression or for retaining employment.

As such, the majority of adult educators acting within non-formal learning environments are self-taught professionals, and there are no officially consolidated policies for the evaluation of adult education. However, Latvian educators and researchers largely agree about the necessity of introducing quality control in the adult education process, and in recent years, much progress has been made to develop a framework for the evaluation of adult educators.

VINFL is not usually part of training for teachers. However, there is a general agreement on the growing importance of recognising learning outcomes of informal learning.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning has now begun. The validation system can be divided into the following levels:

1. assessment with the aim to award an elementary or general secondary education attesting document;
2. assessment with the aim to award a vocational qualification that is identical to the qualification that can be obtained by studying at any of the vocational education programmes;
3. assessment within higher education with the aim to make the education process more flexible and accessible.

Netherlands

In the Netherlands the system for validating non-formal and informal learning is well-developed.

There is a wealth of research promoting the value of non-formal and informal learning, which stresses the positive effects of the arts on non-formal learning. These include:

- Unlocking Value
- talent4_evaluation_report
- sport science and art in the prevention of criminal behaviour
- Rose, Melissa – A New Leaf – The Benefits of Arts Education in Prisons – Faculty Michael Rushton
- McNeill-et-al.-2011-Inspiring-Desistance
- Lloyds value for money report
- GHillman Trend Paper eval-effectiveness-employability-arts
- Doing the Arts Justice_0
- ArtinPrisons_Djurichkovic
- ArtinPrisons_Australia
- Art Programs in Prison Final Version
- 4-research a. brewster
- Arts-At-Risk-Youth
- The-Arts-of-Desistance-2014-11-03
- ENTRADO_Natalia_Azevedo_Alterado
- Cultural Activities 2015-v2
- Apresentação Holanda

In terms of validation, two government-commissioned institutions – The Dutch Qualifications Framework (NLQF) and the National Expertise Centre (EVC) – publish guidelines, monitor and control the quality of learning programmes and administer certificates. They work in close dialogue with the different employment sectors, such as the metalwork, cleansing and healthcare. These are the sectors where former prisoners most often find work.

The NLQF, developed and implemented by The National Coordination Point (NCP), systematically organises all existing qualification levels in The Netherlands, from Level 1 basic education to a Doctorate's degree at level 8. However, an NLQF level indicator does not give an entitlement to a title or a degree. Rather, the framework aims to

provide an insight into the levels of qualifications and map these nationally and internationally, thus enhancing labour market mobility.

The NLQF also offers training providers which are not Government-regulated the potential to classify their training programmes and qualifications at an appropriate level of the NLQF.

The EVC or Erkennen Verworven Competencies (Certifying Acquired Competences) validates “hands on” experience or vocational competences (www.kenniscentrumevc.nl).

The purpose of the EVC is to validate and certify the qualities and competences gained by employees (prior to, within and outwith the workplace) and to guarantee the quality of their certification procedures. Through a procedure for the certification of your Acquired Competences (EVC) your specific skills and knowledge are mapped out according to a certified standard. The organisation administers the Experience Certificate which is valued within the labour market and, as such, it enhances employability and improves recruitment strategies.

Whilst VINFL is not yet part of the formal training for teachers, in recent years some schools for Vocational Training have begun to adopt VINFL training, for example Edexcel and Pearson, in order to ensure that teachers have a more complete overview of all of their pupils’ skills and knowledge.

A number of European projects have also set out to explore the potential benefits of VINFL. In the EQUAL project (ESF-Equal ‘Art Work(s) in the Tertiary sector’ 2004 – 2008’) artistic workshops (theatre, music, dance, musical theatre) were delivered in prisons and other disadvantaged groups in the UK, Italy, Hungary and the Netherlands. The workshops stretched over 10 weeks and worked towards a final presentation. The participants were beforehand told that they were also learning employability skills. They were observed by researchers from a research institute and universities, they filled out questionnaires and had group talks about their progress.

The vast majority of the results were very positive and the bulk of participants were stimulated by knowing they were learning useful skills while having fun doing artistic work. They reported increased self-esteem, motivation, communication skills, collaboration skills, self-direction, critical thinking and a broader horizon. The final report of the research, formulated by the University of Exeter is available⁷.

The European (Grundtvig) project PEETA (Personal Effectiveness and Employability Through the Arts) 2010-2012, worked along the same lines as the EQUAL project. In this case the partners were in the UK, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Turkey. Led by the University of Exeter, the project researched the potential of developing certification for the learned employability skills during the artistic workshops and spent considerable time in each country observing and talking with the participating prisoners, giving feedback on their progress and assembling portfolios of evidence.

Based on the EQUAL experience, Exeter had selected the following competences to be measured during group projects:

- GOOD COMMUNICATION: listening to others, appropriate communication with others
- POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION: contributing ideas and suggestions, being reliable, collaborative team working skills
- DELIVERING SET TASKS: demonstrating task management skills, flexibility, problem solving skills, time management
- REFLECTIVE LEARNING: describing one’s own personal effectiveness in group, identifying personal effectiveness skills and qualities to be developed for employability, planning ways to develop personal effectiveness skills and qualities for employability

These pilots in the 6 countries showed again how motivating it was for the prisoners to know that they would be learning skills while doing creative work. Most had not been very successful in a formal learning setting before.

Out of these research results, and together with Edexcel/Pearson, the University of Exeter developed a BTEC (level 1 and 2) unit and SEPE award (Supporting Employability and Personal Effectiveness).

Romania

In Romania, there is a significant amount of information regarding the validation process and the importance of this process. In this respect many resource are underlining the necessity of the validation of the informal learning.⁸

The Romanian Education Law 1/2011 underlines that those students who have graduated the formal/informal/non-formal courses can be evaluated and a certificate with will be issued.⁹

A great deal of research has been developed within the prison sector regarding staff and inmates' developmental needs. The EU project – European Partnership for an Inclusive Society (ESF, 2010-2012) – is a study of best practices in Europe for assisting young offenders. A key aspect of this study was the development and pilot of a validation system for informal learning, employed within Spain. The Romanian Prison System adapted this “validation” tool for Romanian prisons.

The validation of informal learning in prison within Romania adopts the following approach:

- a credit system is used for each activity, such as: educational programmes, leisure programmes etc. (e.g. specific programmes, such as psychological intervention will receive 30 credits, general programmes, such as health education will receive 25 credits)
- standards regarding accreditation were developed by National Administration of Penitentiary
- criteria for skills evaluation were established

This credit system is used at national level in Romanian Prison System, however the system has been adopted more as a motivational tool and less as a validation or certification tool.

Furthermore, Romania has adopted the resolution 2006/C168/01¹⁰, regarding the recognition of informal and non-formal learning value for the youth, which emphasises the absolute importance of non-formal and informal learning and calls for clearer definitions of the concepts. In addition, the white paper highlights the importance of demonstrating and valuing the skills and competences acquired as a result of engagement in these activities and seeks greater parity between these activities and formal learning/training.

Much of the EU project-based research that has been conducted regarding informal learning specifically promotes the use of CV Europass and Youth pass.

Theoretical studies regarding informal learning were developed:

- http://www.tinact.ro/files_docs/educatia-nonformala-si-informala.pdf
- <http://iec.psih.uaic.ro/ciea/file/2010/31%20Jurcan%20Georgeta.pdf>

and theoretical approaches in order to raise the awareness regarding the importance of the informal learning:

- <http://trainermarianaicob.weebly.com/blog/educatia-formala-nonformala-si-informala>
- <http://www.asociatia-profesorilor.ro/educatia-informala.html>

In the same time, a blog for teachers has been developed:

- <http://iteach.ro/pg/blog/mariana.patrichi/read/32476/educatia-formala-nonformala-si-informala>

Scotland

⁸ <http://www.nonformalii.ro/stiri-articole-testimoniale/articole/europa-fata-in-fata-cu-validarea-invatarii-nonformale-si-informale>
<https://ec.europa.eu/epale/ro/tags/validarea-invatarii-nonformale-si-informale>

⁹ <http://www.tinapse.ro/home/pentru-cei-care-cred-in-voluntariat-educatie-nonformala-si-tineret/documente-de-suport/legea-educatiei-nationale-articole-si-metodologii-regulamente-care-sustin-initiativa>

¹⁰ [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:42006X0720\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:42006X0720(01)&from=EN)

<http://www.gnac.ro/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/04/Rezolutia-Consiliului-si-reprezentantilor-guvernului-privind-recunoasterea-valorii-educatiei-non-formale-si-informale-in-randurile-tineretului-european-2006.pdf>

Scotland recognises the value of access to quality, lifelong educational opportunity and has made progress towards the validation of competences gained from non-formal and informal learning.

On a UK-wide level, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) has undertaken significant research into the benefits of lifelong learning consisting of a combination of formal, non-formal and informal learning.¹¹

The value of lifelong learning and educational opportunities is well documented. The Open Book project at Goldsmiths University is run by former prisoners and provides intensive support to other ex-offenders to engage in informal learning as a pathway into more formal learning. An IFL paper outlines that lifelong learning “reduces damaging populism, and pushes up standard debate and decision-making.”¹²

Nina Champion of the Prisoners’ Education Trust cites informal learning opportunities for adults as one of the key rehabilitative outcomes for its ability to enable personal and social development¹³. Hughes develops this statement further, explaining that opportunities for informal self-directed learning, as part of a blended learning model, also promotes personal autonomy, agency and empowerment.¹⁴

Government policy also foregrounds the role the arts sector can play in providing opportunities for informal learning and all its associated social and communicative benefits. The Arts is also an area which policy-makers believe can inspire further motivation to engage in a wider range of educational opportunities. Approximately 12% of offender learning funding is retained for Personal and Social development, a key element of which is informal learning. Prisoner Learning Alliance Research into Justice Policy in England and Wales posits that, “[g]iven the small proportion of Skills Funding Agency money for Personal Social Development, non-accredited learning, as well as the push for accreditations, this can lead to the perverse result that engagement and motivational activities can be side-lined”¹⁵

Qualitative research further demonstrates the potential for informal learning to motivate engagement in future learning:

It opens doors for you as well because a lot of people in here didn’t like school, or they didn’t go, or they didn’t feel any good...because they had dyslexia and it wasn’t recognised. They come in here, they’re thinking about education but they don’t want to do it, because they feel daft, they feel like people will take the mick because they canny get it right or something. They come down and do a bit of the arts, and it seems to open doors for them; it gives them a chance to look at things and watch what’s happening in other classes...and they start to get more curious. Before they know it they’ve went from the window to the door, and then they’re in a class. Without that process in the arts, they wouldn’t have done that in the first place. They wouldn’t have had the opportunity to push themselves in.¹⁶

Creative Scotland argue that embedding the arts as a core educational provision in this way creates an “active learning environment in which practical exploration, experimentation and collaborative working is encouraged. For participants in a prison context this can often be a radical shift in their relationship to ‘learning’ as negative past experiences of formal education have left them with a feeling of ‘failure’, with no belief in their wider ability”).¹⁷

However, the Arts Alliance believes that “[t]here is a fundamental disconnect between the work being done by arts organisations and measures of success within the criminal justice system. While government targets are built around an end – offending – arts organisations tend to focus on means – personal, social and emotional skills. What is often lacking is a clear theory of change and evidence that links one to the other”.¹⁸

Furthermore, within the Scottish context, growing research¹⁹ and policy work has focused on the retrospective validation of learning in an attempt to “make learning visible”. The national approach to the validation of formal and

¹¹ Niace (2009) Lifelong Learning and Crime: An analysis of the cost-effectiveness of in-prison educational and vocational interventions. IFFL public value paper 2. Leicester: Niace. <http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/Public-valuepaper-2.pdf>; Niace (2009) Learning Through Life. Leicester: Niace.; Niace (2012) The Work Programme. What is the role of skills? Leicester: Niace. <http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/w/o/workprogrammeweb.pdf>

¹² Schuller, T. Crime and Lifelong Learning

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¹⁵ (Prisoner Learning Alliance – Smart Rehabilitation Report).

¹⁶ Prisoner, HMP Perth

¹⁷ Creative Scotland (2015): Guide for Artists Working in Prisons,” p.4

¹⁸ (Arts Alliance (2012): Re-imagining Futures: Exploring Arts Interventions and the Process of Desistance. p. 51).

¹⁹

experiential learning within Scotland is referred to as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), administered by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

RPL is defined as: “the process for recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts”²⁰. Through the process of RPL, “Learners reflect on their experience in order to discover and then express what these experiences have taught them. RPL is a process through which learning gained from experience can be recognised and used. It also includes learning gained through non-formal learning and training programmes in the workplace, in the community and in the voluntary sector.”²¹

The validation process consists of four stages: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. However, it is not an automatic process. There are a number of reasons one might wish to engage in the process of RPL: to enter an advanced level of study, to build confidence or to work towards career planning. However, RPL is not automatically offered by educational providers, affiliates or employers and may not always be accessible to individuals. Furthermore, through analysis of entry requirements there appears to be some reticence on the part of Further and Higher education establishments to consider RPL on the same basis as formally achieved qualifications.

The national curriculum in Scotland is known as the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). It delivers a range of formally assessed qualifications from SCQF levels 1-9. CfE aims to help learners develop the attributes, knowledge and skills required for life, learning and work. Education Scotland has outlined four key capacities: to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

CfE now measures and validates learning until the age of 15 based on ‘experiences and outcomes’. This term is designed to foreground “the importance of the quality and nature of the learning experience in developing attributes and capabilities and in achieving active engagement, motivation and depth of learning. An outcome represents what is to be achieved”. However, as yet, the validation of non-formal and informal learning does not play any formal part in teacher training. Furthermore, there has been limited research into the role and benefits of validation within informal learning.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) also works alongside government bodies including the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and SCQF to offer skills diagnostic tools targeted at wide-ranging individuals, such as ‘My World of Work’. These tools are designed to support individuals to identify the transferable skills and competences gained from experiences outwith formal education and qualifications which can be benchmarked formatively against the SCQF framework. The agency also helps learners to target interests and motivations to support their career development and provides competency-based statements which can be used in the pursuit of further and higher education as well as employment.

There are also training providers in the UK which offer formal and non-formal curricula “that explicitly grow skills for learning, skills for employment and skills for life” (ASDAN website). The focus with ASDAN qualifications is very much on the development of personal and social attributes which will improve life chances. ASDAN affiliated practitioners deliver curricula, resources and qualifications within thousands of registered centres.

²⁰ Cedefop

²¹ (SCQF: Cameron & Kavanagh)

CONCLUSION

There appears, on the whole, to be robust and affirmative research across Europe which calls for improvement in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In Austria, the OECD²² have recommended the creation of a joint advisory body for that purpose. Similarly, the 2004 'Strategy for lifelong learning in the Federal Republic of Germany' underpins this finding.

In fact, most countries report that the importance of non-formal and informal learning is being recognised at policy level. Most of the countries report having national qualification frameworks which are mapped across European and international frameworks. The Netherlands, Latvia and Scotland have frameworks that are equipped to recognise and validate skills and competences gained outwith formal spheres of learning. Indeed, Scotland's system of 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) is well established and the Latvian 'Revised Guidelines for Lifelong Learning 2007-2013' claims that "non-formal education and informal learning...have begun to achieve more autonomy and weight next to formal learning". Indeed, the European Union underpins the central importance of non-formal and informal learning activities and their just recognition in resolution 2006/C168/01 'on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field'. This is upheld in law in Romania through the Romanian Education Law 1/2011.

VALMOPRIS opportunity

All countries report a degree of political will in seeking to develop, harness and recognise the competences that engagement with non-formal and informal learning can bring. In Scotland the national curriculum, CfE demonstrates a recognition and value of transferable skills and competences in its focus on experience and outcomes. In Germany, the 'Externen Prufung' allows individuals to validate learning that has come from previous learning for employment purposes. Similarly, there are many documented local and specialised tools for the validation of competences from previous, informal and non-formal learning. Germany, for example, has a great deal of provision in this area, whilst France reports a more informal or ad hoc approach to competence validation.

Furthermore, many of the countries report a robust approach to vocational education, particularly the Austrian dual vocational training system. A number of countries reported validation strategies that worked in conjunction with vocational education and employability strategies, such as: France's 'Personal Skills Portfolio'; Scotland's 'My World of Work'; Germany's Berufswahlpass. Youthpass was also a commonly cited tool.

Latvia also has a clear methodology for acknowledging and validating vocational skills gained from employment but not necessarily from formalised vocational training. The Netherlands reports on a particularly well-embedded national system of vocational competence validation in the Erkennen Verworven Competencies, which is designed to support the labour market by improving both an individual's employability and the employment process itself. Latvia instead adopts a validation approach in which examination centres assess vocational competences. Both countries map these skills against the national qualifications frameworks.

The research suggests that non-formal and informal learning and the benefits it can bring in terms of competence development and motivation is increasingly well-recognised and valued. However, most research also bears out the fact that any clear and consistent strategy for the validation and, moreover acceptance, of that learning on a national level is in a stage of relative infancy. Romania appear to have the most developed validation system in place within prisons with an accreditation system in place for programme work. However, this system of validation is aimed at inspiring motivation rather than being a tool for certification which is widely recognised by employers of training providers.

Despite positive research, three countries – France, Austria and Germany – report no formalised provision or system for VINFL. French research demonstrates that neither the obligation nor the tools exist to design, deliver, measure or validate competences. In fact, whilst a growing body of European research would appear to demonstrate the absolute importance of validation strategies, no kind of Europe-wide approach exists. Furthermore, no country reports formalised provision or system for validation of competences gained from non-formal and informal learning that carries as much respect or recognition as formal qualifications and certification.

²² Musset et al, 2013, p.36

In fact, some research concedes that the value of experiences and outcomes gained from non-formal and informal is limited. Austria, Scotland and Germany all refer to the difficulties faced when trying to gain recognition of unaccredited prior learning of any sort within the further and higher education sectors.

Research and policy in France, Scotland and the Netherlands outlines the centrality of the Arts within informal and non-formal education provision, particularly within the prison sector. All research and practice demonstrates the positive effects of the arts on non-formal learning.

A number of projects attest to a positive impact from engagement within creative and participatory projects. The work of the European projects EQUAL²³, PEETA and the French SPIP pilot have sought to embed creative learning opportunities within prison settings. All three approaches also aim to recognise, if not validate, the skills and competences gained as a result of these activities.

This approach is also very present in the Romanian approach to working with young offenders and the strategy within the Scottish Prison Service and associated educational partners. Policy and research on this matter bears out the fact that not only do these activities help to develop the participants' skills and competences but also increases their motivation to engage in further learning.

²³ ESF-Equal 'Art Work(s) in the Tertiary sector' 2004 – 2008'