

Assessment of Prior Learning

Case studies report



**TOWARDS A QUALIFIED CONSTRUCTION
WORKFORCE FOR POLAND**

ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING

Case studies report

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CASE STUDIES REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

In the majority of the surveyed countries, the ultimate regulatory bodies in matters of Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) are a number of government departments or ministries: education (Belgium, the Czech Republic), labour (Italy, France, Belgium), economics (Germany) and/or culture (Belgium). Note that in Belgium more than one ministry is involved in this process and in the Czech Republic each ministry regulates its respective sectors. In the UK it is the autonomous agencies responsible for regulating qualifications (in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) which are also responsible for promoting APL as an alternative assessment route.

However, in Italy, Germany and Belgium, the APL process is more decentralised, as regional governments and agencies, or education organizations (for example the chambers of industry and commerce and the ministries of education of the Länder in Germany, or the universities in Belgium), have the power to recognise prior learning.

Romania, Italy and France have specialised agencies that deal with adult education and training and which also oversee the APL process. While the Romanian agency is autonomous (acting as the ultimate regulatory body in the matter), its Italian and French counterparts are subordinate to the ministries of labour.

France and the Czech Republic formally acknowledge the concept of APL, through the “Validation des Acquis de l’Expérience,” (validation of receipt of experience) introduced in 2002, and the Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results, passed in 2006. In the other countries, it is also possible to have one’s prior learning assessed and recognized, but the process is no different from the standard validation of formal education and training.

At the moment, recognition of prior learning that leads towards a University degree is only possible in France and Belgium. In all other countries, only vocational learning can be assessed and recognized.

The **assessment process** is carried out by a variety of organisations depending on the country: the vocational training providers (Italy, France), public or private organisations accredited by regulating bodies (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Romania, the UK), the local chambers of artisans and the regional chambers of industry and commerce (Germany) and/or the Universities (France and Belgium).

While the total **duration** of the final examination (or tests) varies from 4 to 20 hours (depending both on the country and on the complexity of the competencies that are assessed), the application procedure may be far more lengthy. For instance, in France, applicants must go through an average of 3 interviews with the assessing organisation

before they reach the actual assessment stage. During these interviews, they receive assistance in building up their application files, in preparing for their tests, etc. This process may take as much as 6 to 8 months. In Romania, however, this process cannot legally surpass 30 days. The time is calculated from the moment applicants submit their files until the final day of the assessments, when the decision is made. In the UK, if the standard assessment process is used (for example, an NVQ as part of an apprenticeship), then the Awarding Body insists that the assessment period must be longer than 10 weeks. However, a special accelerated APL process has been established, requiring only a preparatory interview and a day or two of testing.

The **assessment methods** are usually a combination of written, theoretical, oral (interviews) and practical tests (where applicants are observed while they perform their tasks either in the real work place or simulated environment). Romanian legislation also requires applicants to produce a portfolio containing third party evaluations, examples or proof of previous work, etc. This is also a prerequisite in France, where in order to get to the examination stage, applicants must submit documentation that prove their prior learning.

The certifications issued within each country usually have **national recognition**. In Belgium and the Czech Republic though, a number of competences are only recognized at a sectoral level. In Romania, when an applicant fails to complete at least one of the several units required to receive a nationally recognized certificate of professional competences, he or she may still get credit for the units completed, but is denied the full certificate.

QA arrangements

Apart from the general condition that Assessing Organizations in every country must be accredited by their respective regulatory bodies, some countries also require these organisations to display **specific quality labels** (Italy – ISO, France – OPQF, Belgium – the test centres subsidised by the European Social Fund must display an ESF quality logo). In Romania, assessment providers also have to undergo both internal and external audits.

Responsibilities

In Italy, Germany, Romania and the UK, the **tools used in the APL process** are designed by the assessment providers, and need to be validated by the regulating bodies. In France, it is the agency specialised in adult education and training (AFPA) that designs these tools. In Belgium, there is a third party organisation, SERV (the consultative body of the Flemish employers’ and workers’ organisations), that designs these tools. Finally, in the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Education is responsible for this area, with the support of a project financed by the European Social Fund known as the National Qualification Framework 2.

In order to be certified as an RPL assessor, one has to be an experienced professional in the sector in which the person to be assessed is seeking recognition. The exception is Germany, where only certified trainers can act as assessors.

In the Czech Republic, only the highest-ranking professional in a certain field can become an assessor, while in the other countries the standards are more permissive. In addition, as well as being a proven professional, an assessor needs to be a certified trainer (in Italy or UK) or must prove that he or she has a strong knowledge of the assessment process.

Sectoral partners are usually involved in the APL process on an individual level, given the fact that assessors are also professionals in their respective sectors. On an organizational level, involvement is lower. In the UK, sectoral partners are involved in setting up the qualifications.

Guidance and counselling

Usually the first step in guidance and counselling is taken by the labour offices. They direct the candidates to the assessment providers who carry on from there.

In France and Romania, guidance and counselling procedures are more elaborate than in the other countries, as they are designed to cover all the stages of the RPL process from the moment applicants decide to enroll until after they have been granted their certification. Guidance and counselling includes: interviews with psychologists and evaluators, assistance in gathering the required documentation, debriefings about the evaluation methodology, and post-evaluation feedback.

Motivation

The main **benefit** for the applicants is access to an employment requiring a higher level of qualification, which is usually accompanied by a better salary. Additionally, RPL is usually less time-consuming and less expensive than going through formal training channels.

The main **difficulties** identified by the respondents are:

- the fact that the possibility of having one's prior learning recognised is little known amongst the general public (Belgium, Romania, UK);
- the cost of the process (France, the Czech Republic, Romania); in the UK, the funding comes to the employer, who perceives little benefit from qualifying staff who are already competent
- the tediousness of the paperwork (France, Belgium);
- the insufficient degree of training of the assessors (Italy);
- the fact that it is virtually impossible to succeed in the theoretical examination without previous formal training (Germany).
- the huge variety of systems, availability and costs across the UK, with funding schemes constantly changing at a local level. A migrant worker is almost certainly unable to negotiate a successful path through this complicated system without support.
- In the UK, the language of assessment can be difficult even for native speakers - for migrants it can be near impossible.

Sustainability

Respondents from Belgium and Romania were unable to provide official figures as to the number of people who achieve RPL in their countries every year.

The Italian respondent was only able to provide a limited figure representing the total number of RPL certificates granted within the constructions sector annually: 140.

The Czech respondent stated that in 2009 there were approximately 520 people who acquired a certificate through this system.

The German respondent stated that there are about 25,000 to 30,000 “Externenprüfungen” in his country every year, across all sectors. (This is a surprisingly high figure, considering that the same respondent explained that it is almost impossible to have one’s prior learning recognised without formal training. However, it is not clear whether this figure represents the total number of APL applications or the actual number of APL certificates granted.)

APL is not free of charge for the applicants, although there may be cases where they receive support from the government or even from their employer.

In Germany, the cost of an examination is around €120. In France the overall cost of RPL certification in order to obtain, for example, a certification in bricklaying is estimated at €1,400-1,500. However, applicants receive State grants and never pay the full amount.

In Belgium, applicants receive full payment from their employer during their absence for the examination, and the cost of transportation to and from the test center is refunded. Additionally, the test centres are subsidised by the European Social Fund and the Flemish Government. This allows many people to be entitled to a reduced rate and some may even be exempt from the fee altogether. Examples include:

- unemployed people and people in part-time compulsory education: free of charge;
- self-employed people belonging to a disadvantaged group: €25;
- employees belonging to a disadvantaged group and the self-employed: €50;
- employees not belonging to a disadvantaged group: €100.

The Flemish respondent also provided a detailed picture of the APL costs for applicants in higher education. Universities require proficiency tests whose costs range from €55 (for the partial elements of a competence) to €770 (for a master’s degree if the applicant doesn’t already hold a bachelor’s degree).

In Romania, the current cost of a qualification with 8 units of competence is €300. Assessment centers must periodically undergo a reauthorisation procedure. The regulatory body (CNFPA – The National Board for Adult Vocational Training) charges them:

- 1 gross minimum wage (€150) for the first level of authorisation (valid for 1 year);
- 2 gross minimum wages for the second level of authorisation (valid for 2 years);

- 3 gross minimum wages for the third level of authorisation (valid for 3 years).

In the UK, costs are usually paid from some official grant, but the opportunities and systems vary enormously from place to place and time to time. Assessment Centres are usually run as commercial undertakings.

CASE STUDY CANADA



A. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR RPL

1. What are the main regulatory bodies; what role for each, what hierarchy?

The Industry Training Authority (ITA) is a crown agency operating at a provincial level. It was established in 2004 and is responsible for managing British Columbia’s (BC’s – a province in Canada) industry training system to develop the skilled workforce needed to ensure competitiveness and the economic prosperity of businesses and the province. The ITA has legislative authority to set occupational standards for the trades, manage training and assessment programmes, and issue certification.

They work collaboratively with industry, training providers, labour unions, government and other stakeholders to meet the industry’s training needs, while at the same time providing career development opportunities for individual British Columbians.

The ITA system was developed over a period of nine months, commencing September 2008 and culminating in a pilot assessment program conducted in May/June 2009 for cooks without formal credentials.

2. Who can provide the service of RPL?

The RPL service is provided by the ITA in collaboration with industry, which is represented by the Industry Training Organization (ITO). The service is a series of assessments that are conducted by a qualified assessor experienced in the trade they are assessing.

3. How much time does the RPL process (ordinarily) take?

The RPL process for the culinary trade consisted of a 2 hour competency conversation and written assessment as well as a 6 – 8 hour practical assessment. The process of gathering evidence of prior learning and experience took place before the actual assessment, on average takes 4 – 6 weeks prior to the assessment, in order to assemble a portfolio of evidence and prepare for the assessments.

The process varies depending on the trade that is being assessed; the ITA’s experience is with the culinary trade; more trades are being piloted.

4. What methods are regularly used to gather evidences?

- A. Portfolio of evidence – An analysis of the evidence provided by challengers of their employment/work experience, previous training, and other relevant evidence
- B. Written Assessment – A written assessment comprising short answer and multiple-choice questions conducted before the competency conversation to test the basic knowledge of a challenger
- C. Competency Conversation – A conversation (interview) between the challenger and the assessor provides an opportunity for further evidence to be collected
- D. Practical Assessment – A demonstration of practical skills by the challenger to meet the Occupational Performance Standards, where oral questions are used by the assessor to draw out further evidence from the challenger

Currently, all forms of assessment are used to gather evidence. In a mature MAP system the tools to gather evidence can be configured specifically for the challenge candidate, although there is a requirement that in all cases multiple forms should be used to paint an accurate picture of competency.

5. What type of recognition (=certification) is provided (National / sectoral / private)?

Successful challengers in the pilot received a BC credential (Certificate of Qualification) in the culinary trade at either level 1, 2, or 3, and those deemed competent at Professional Cook 3 level received the Red Seal endorsement. The Red Seal endorsement recognises that the individual has met the national standard for the culinary trade. Challengers who did not demonstrate competency at the level being challenged were entitled to receive the lower level credential if all the criteria were met. Those who did not achieve a credential did get credit for those areas in which they were able to demonstrate competency, and will not need to be re-assessed in these areas. Advice on how to address gaps in their skills and knowledge identified during the assessment process was also provided.

B. QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) ARRANGEMENTS

1. What are QA arrangements for RPL in the organisations in your group?

There are a number of elements included in the MAP system where quality assurance is required. The table below details these activities and the resources required for the assessment.

Quality assurance strategy	Description of activities	Timing	Responsibility	Resources required
1. MAP System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ management model ▪ infrastructure and resources ▪ service agreements ▪ fees 	Agreements established between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ITA and ITOs for the delivery of any aspect of the MAP System - ITA and assessment venues - ITA and assessors 	Contractual agreements with periodic review	ITA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal advice - Financial modelling based on costs and funding arrangements
2. Policy and procedures	Provincial level policy, including consultation and liaison with enterprise partners (ITOs, training providers, regulatory bodies, unions, etc)	Review cycle To be announced	ITA	ITA policy development
	Procedures for ensuring the assessment process operates effectively and efficiently	Annual review cycle	ITA	ITA procedure development
3. Occupational performance standards	Policy, approach, and format (template)	Reviewed annually	ITA	ITA policy development
	Environmental scan and standards development	6–12mths – industry consultation	ITOs develop according to ITA guidelines	ITA funding
	Industry validation and endorsement process	When finalised	ITOs validate ITA – Standards Review Committee	Committee/panel established to ensure guidelines and requirements are met
	Review and maintenance	3–5 year cycle	ITOs manage	ITA funding
4. Assessors	Selection criteria	Periodic Review	ITA	ITA policy development in consultation with ITOs
	Register of assessors established and maintained	Initial and ongoing		ITOs provide recommendations
	ITA training programme established and credential issued	Regularly scheduled programmes offered	Designated providers deliver ITA approved training programme ITA issues credential	Funding for delivery of and resources for ITA training programme

Quality assurance strategy	Description of activities	Timing	Responsibility	Resources required
	Ongoing professional development to enhance competence	Annually and on a risk management basis	ITO – industry focus ITA – cross-industry focus	Determined as required, depending on specific requirements
5. Assessment materials	Develop guidelines and maintain currency of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assessment tools - Challenger Information Kit - Assessor Guide 	Annually or on a risk management basis	ITA	ITA project/ contractor funding
	Validation and ongoing review of assessment tools	3-5 year cycle	ITOs	
6. Moderation activities	Options include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - team assessment - peer review - assessment tool validation - sampling/review of outcomes - outcome/result validation 	Once or Twice per year depending on assessment volume and frequency	Facilitation of moderation sessions to be contracted ITA undertakes sampling and statistical analyses as part of quality assurance	ITA contractor funding
7. Record keeping arrangements	ITA to determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - system level requirements, e.g. database - assessment record keeping requirements - assessor record keeping requirements 	Review cycle annually or on a risk management basis	ITA	Database/record management established
8. Monitoring activities and reports	Regular reports on MAP system activity	Monthly and annual cycles	ITA	Database/reporting system established
9. Continuous improvement and compliance	Internal audits / self-assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - check of policies, procedures and materials against established guidelines 	Annually	ITA	
	External audit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - check of policies, procedures and materials against established guidelines 	2–3 years / strategic industry audit and risk management	ITA to arrange external audit	Contractor funding

C. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Who designs the specific tools used in the RPL process?

Assessment tools are developed with input from trade Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). Assessment methodology (i.e. credentialing rules, relevant assessment tools) is also identified by SMEs and written by technical writers.

2. Who can be a RPL assessor in your country? What are the main conditions? What profile is required?

Assessors were selected using criteria determined by the ITA in consultation with industry. These included:

- Certificate of Qualification with an interprovincial Red Seal endorsement – Professional Cook
- a minimum of 5 years of relevant industry experience (including training time), three years of which must be in a supervisory capacity
- current knowledge of industry practices
- strong interpersonal skills
- knowledge of language, literacy, and numeracy issues in the context of workplace assessment

3. How are sectoral partners involved in RPL?

Industry partners are actively involved in all stages of the standards, assessment tool, assessment methodology, and assessment process. The standards are developed and recommended to the ITA by industry along with the assessment tools and methodology. The ITA approves these documents. Industry is involved with assessor recruitment and plays an important role in challenger recruitment and marketing.

D. GUIDANCE & COUNSELLING

1. Who provides guidance & counselling?

Throughout the entire process, the assessors and industry provide the majority of the guidance to the challenge candidate.

The industry (namely ITOs) helps candidates put their portfolio of evidence together and apply to challenge the assessment. Most of this guidance is done immediately prior to assessment taking place.



Once the candidate is approved to take part in the assessment, an assessor takes over the role of “counsellor”. The assessor helps the candidate make appropriate decisions on elective units to challenge etc.

E. MOTIVATION

1. What are the main motivators? What benefits? What incentives?

The main motivator is to ensure that all individuals have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their skills against industry standards, so that only those who are truly competent may become certified. The existing form of assessment (written multiple-choice examination) is not an ideal assessment instrument for many candidates, and furthermore does not collect sufficient evidence to determine practical competency in a trade occupation.

2. What are the main difficulties you experience with the RPL system?

- Ensuring consistency across all assessments (building confidence within the trade)
- Obtaining widespread industry support for change across a range of trade areas for enhanced forms of assessment
- Streamlining the administrative processes and paperwork for assessors and challengers
- Ensuring the process is cost effective
- Ensuring a manageable workload for assessors
- Ensuring standards remain current and relevant
- Providing clear and user friendly information for challengers

F. SUSTAINABILITY

1. How many have achieved APL, what was the most recent number/year?

A total of 52 people applied to challenge the Professional Cook 3 credential, with 24 successfully achieving the qualification and the Red Seal endorsement.

There were 11 people who applied to challenge the Professional Cook 2 credential, with four successfully achieving the credential.

Eight people applied to challenge the Professional Cook 1 with 3 successfully achieving



2. What does it cost, who pays?

As the programme is in the pilot phases, the assessment process is free for challengers who qualify.

3. How is sustainability of the RPL process assured?

The cost to be covered by the ITA as compared to the challenge candidate has yet to be determined and will be determined as more pilots are completed.

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CASE STUDY ITALY



A. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR RPL

1. What are the main regulatory bodies; what role for each, what hierarchy?

The main regulatory bodies are the Regions, under the coordination of the Ministry of Labour through a technical agency called ISFOL. The recognition of the certification is also the Regions' responsibility, and they also decide how to structure the assessments/evaluations.

2. Who can provide the service of RPL?

Bilateral bodies approved (accredited) from the Regions. For example in the building sector, the building schools are a bilateral network of schools spread all over the national territory, and they are permitted to assess the prior learning.

3. How much time does the RPL process (ordinarily) take?

Timing depends on the profile involved, but an average duration for the assessment phase alone might be no more than 1.5 days (10-12 hours).

4. What methods are regularly used to gather evidences?

Self assessment, practical tests, and evaluation from the trainer.

5. What type of recognition (=certification) is provided (National / sectoral / private)?

Sectoral and regional certification, but recognised and valid throughout the national territory.

B. QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) ARRANGEMENTS

1. What are QA arrangements for RPL in the organisations in your group?

The quality assurance is provided in two ways: first of all, each training organization must be accredited from the Region. Secondly, the commission has an external evaluation also inserted in a framework of organisational ISO quality dimension.

2. What are the most important points of the QA system?

Many parameters and indicators of quality of the training and evaluation process: satisfaction with the targets, sharing of aims of evaluation, coherence of the evaluation process, independence and objectivity of the assessment /evaluation etc.

C. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Who designs the specific tools used in the RPL process?

At bilateral level and approved by the Regions.

2. Who can be a RPL assessor in your country? What are the main conditions? What profile is required?

Currently there is an ongoing process in different Regions (e.g. in Lombardia) to construct the ideal profile of an assessor. The pre-requisites are to be a trainer, to be familiar with pedagogical and didactical methodologies, and to be an expert in the specific sector of assessment.

3. How are sectoral partners involved in RPL?

In Italy, the bilateral aspect is present in all the VET processes in the building sector, so the bilateral approach is also practiced in RPL at a sectoral level.

D. GUIDANCE & COUNSELLING

1. Who provides guidance & counselling?

VET sectoral institutions and public employment services.



2. How is guidance/counselling provided before validation?

On an individual basis with the purpose of filling in training gaps.

3. How is guidance/counselling provided during validation

On an individual basis with the purpose of filling in training gaps.

4. How is guidance/counselling provided after validation

On an individual basis with the purpose of filling in training gaps.

E. MOTIVATION

1. What are the main motivators? What benefits? What incentives?

The main motivation is the benefit for all the target groups, following the principles indicated below.

2. What are the main difficulties you experience with the RPL system?

The main difficulties are related with the training of assessors. It has to be a person who can accurately assess abilities of the candidate and help in preparation to the assessment, he has to help with the motivation of the individuals to be assessed, linked with their real professional progression and benefit in the labour market.

F. SUSTAINABILITY

1. How many have achieved APL, what are the most recent number/year?

A precise answer is difficult. There is only data available on the Trasfobuilding experiments, where the assessed people numbered around 140.

2. What does it cost, who pays?

Bilateral funds and/or public employment services

G. ANY OTHER COMMENTS

The formulation of “the fundamental principles underpinning validation” represents the crucial step that APL as a guiding principle for lifelong learning strategies has to take. These principles address both the top-down approach - the policy-level (EU-mobility and learning space) - as well as the bottom-up approach - the implementation of validation on ‘the working floors’ of the labour market and in the learning system. Focusing on implementation, a few options and suggestions for activating these principles arise. It is important to start a debate on the way to use these principles or guidelines. The best option is to stimulate and speed up the effective implementation both top-down as well as bottom-up uses of APL in as many contexts as possible; the worst the system could do is create barriers or bureaucracy to hinder this implementation.

One important good practice in the building sector is the project Trasfobuilding (see www.trasfobuilding.org/en)

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CASE STUDY GERMANY



PRELIMINARY NOTE

Recognition of the results of learning in Germany is dependent on certification, therefore more or less dependent on formal learning. If – e.g. in enterprises – results of non-formal or informal learning are factually recognised by promotion into higher positions or higher payment, this is restricted to the particular firm and in most cases will be lost when and if the person changes firm; it certainly will in case of unemployment. If prior learning is understood as learning which has taken place outside formal learning contexts, in Germany a definite procedure of recognition of prior learning does not exist nor does a respective regulation. However, in the VET-system it is possible to achieve recognition of prior learning by passing the same exam as persons who have completed a defined three year apprenticeship training course (so-called Externenprüfung – examinations for applicants from outside the apprenticeship training system). (This is not possible in Higher Education.)

All answers refer to that precondition.

A. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR RPL

1. What are the main regulatory bodies; what role for each, what hierarchy?

Chambers of artisans responsible chambers of industry and commerce (at local resp. regional level) are responsible for the execution of the exams. The overall regulation is with the Federal Ministry of Economy as well as the Ministries of Education of the Länder (shared responsibility for the legal aspect and the training regulation).

2. Who can provide the service of RPL?

Every chamber.

3. How much time does the RPL process (ordinarily) take?

Between four and eight hours for the practical exam; about four hours for the theoretical exam.

4. What methods are regularly used to gather evidences?

Practical exam: to execute a practical task.

Theoretical exam: to complete exercises in mathematics, technical competence and economic and social competence at a minimum (training regulations differ according to occupation).

5. What type of recognition (=certification) is provided (National / sectoral / private)?

Certificate as a professional, qualified worker in a defined occupation (Facharbeiter, Fachange-stellter), which is valid at a national level.

B. QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) ARRANGEMENTS

1. What are QA arrangements for RPL in the organisations in your group?

Quality is safeguarded by procedures of the exams and the competence of examiners.

2. What are the most important points of the QA system?

See above.

C. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Who designs the specific tools used in the RPL process?

The examination board of the respective chamber, or their umbrella organisation. In last few years, more and more centralised exams have been used.

2. Who can be a RPL assessor in your country? What are the main conditions? What profile is required?

Everybody who has a qualification equivalent or higher to that of a certified trainer in the named occupation can act as examiner.



3. How are sectoral partners involved in RPL?

As organisations, they are not. However, representatives of social partners often as persons act as examiners.

D. GUIDANCE & COUNSELLING

1. Who provides guidance & counselling?

To my knowledge, there is no systematic guidance or counselling.

E. MOTIVATION

1. What are the main motivators? What benefits? What incentives?

The exam is equivalent to the qualification to that of someone who has participated in the respective regular apprenticeship training course. Thus, in case of employment and unemployment, it provides the same rights, claims and entitlements.

2. What are the main difficulties you experience with the RPL system?

It is extremely difficult to pass the exam without prior formal education and training; in particular, passing the theoretical examine is nearly impossible without former experience.

F. SUSTAINABILITY

1. How many have achieved APL, what was the most recent number/year?

About 25,000 to 30,000 Externenprüfungen per year are registered in Germany. This is nearly five percent of all examinations in occupational areas for which an apprenticeship exists. Figures by sector or by occupation are not available.

2. What does it cost, who pays?

The fee for the exam is around €120. In addition, material costs must be taken into consideration (however, during the exam, the final product of practical test belongs to the candidate). Costs vary depending on the occupation. The fee is paid by the applicant. Occasionally when the firm is sending him/her to pass the exam the firm will cover the costs.

3. How is sustainability of the RPL process assured?

The certificate is valid for the lifetime resp. the professional career of the owner.

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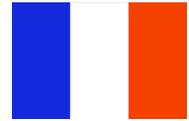
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CASE STUDY FRANCE



A. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR RPL

1. What are the main regulatory bodies; what role for each, what hierarchy?

Ministry for Employment - Departmental Directorate of Labour, Employment and Vocational Training (DDTEFP)

Association for Adult Vocational Training, AFPA: www.afpa.fr

2. Who can provide the service of RPL?

As a general rule, the vocational training providers specific for each occupation or occupational area that they are in charge of.

A jury of professionals issues the certificate (certificates) that is (are) then signed by the DDTEFP.

For each occupation there is a corresponding code (ROME) and a Title registered in a National Register of Qualifications which gathers information about the description of learning outcomes.

For example a brick-layer qualification has the following identification ROME: F1701, NSF : 232 S, Title : TP-01259

3. How much time does the RPL process (ordinarily) take?

The maximum duration may be as much as 5 years.

For the accompaniment, on average, we include three appointments with the candidate, for a period ranging from a half an hour to two hours.

So, it is a duration of 10 hours (especially for the constitution of the file) up to 24 hours (depending on demand, the requirement of the applicant to seek help in building his file, the test preparation skills, etc...).

Depending on the date of the validation review, the procedure may take up to 6 or 8 months.

Appointments are held in the offices of the provider, but the support can also be provided remotely through email or telephone for persons who live further away.

Each evaluation lasts from 2 to 4 hours

4. What methods are regularly used to gather evidences?

The AFPA is responsible for analysing the admissibility of the application. The technical department for validation will determine the Title which can be obtained through the APL procedure. (For each Title there is a sum of certificates of competences which requires individual validation.)

Applicants are informed and will be required to fill in a file.

The DDTEFT service will notify the candidate on the admissibility of his application.

The eligible applicants will be placed in a situation similar to the evaluation with a jury. This is the stage of preparation for the final assessment, called the second phase of coaching.

For more information on this, please see: <http://www.afpa.fr/particulier/demandeur-d-emploi/vae-valider-vos-competences/deroulement-dune-vae.html>

5. What type of recognition (=certification) is provided (National / sectoral / private)?

The Title has nationwide recognition.

B. QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) ARRANGEMENTS

1. What are QA arrangements for RPL in the organisations in your group?

There is a specific quality label, called OPQF from the name of the institution which delivers the certificate (in French: Office Professionnel de Qualification des Organismes de Formation). This certification is available for all the bodies which provide intellectual and professional services. The AFPA has the OPQF quality label.

2. What are the most important points of the QA system?

There are several standards and quality labels related to specific qualifications. For the building trades, the FFB (Federation of the Building) and AFPA are members of the committee for education **Qualit'Er** (national label for renewable energy). The FFB and the

AFPA have ongoing relation concerning the evolution of Titles and certifications integrating sustainable development.

C. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Who designs the specific tools used in the RPL process?

Validation procedures and how to present the experience gained are set by the training organisation in charge of validation. In our case this is the AFPA.

2. Who can be a RPL assessor in your country? What are the main conditions? What profile is required?

These are usually professionals from the sector and trainers in training centres for apprentices, like the AFPA.

Eg. An entrepreneur who worked at least 5 years in the field, having developed listening skills and other soft skills can apply to serve on a jury with the VAE DDTEFP. Once having made the request, it will either be authorized or rejected by the DDTEFP.

3. How are sectoral partners involved in RPL?

The jury is composed of at least two industry professionals from the respective industry. They are appointed by the departmental director of employment and vocational training on the basis of proposals from professional organisations and unions.

The assessment of skills is done in real or simulated conditions by a jury formed of one trainer-assessor and one professional-assessor.

D. GUIDANCE & COUNSELLING

1. Who provides guidance & counselling?

Any structure within the scope of the guidance and employability: ANPE (Association for Employment, now a job centre), local missions, assessment centres, training organisations. Usually the first step is an interview with a psychologist or counsellor working with a set of tools that directs candidate to the appropriate training structure (in our case to the AFPA). The candidate is then informed, and is asked to fill a folder and attach evidence of their experience (must have at least 3 years professional experience or other experience used to acquire certain skills in the field in question. In this case, the building sector, for example, a



job applicant may have completed some construction on a voluntary basis for an association). After the admissibility of his application, the coaching process begins.

2. How is guidance/counselling provided before validation?

At AFPA this is done with trainers and with counsellors or psychologists.

Completing an online application form: applicants may submit their applications online using a contact form. It follows briefings (individual or group) organised by the AFPA. Once the file is completed and after the stage of admission, the support stage begins.

The support consists of two phases: collection of records (evidence of previous experience, work, products) and the setting of status.

3. How is guidance/counselling provided during validation

With trainers who accompany the technical validation committee that prepare candidates for situations that are encountered during the evaluation in front of the jury.

4. How is guidance/counselling provided after validation

Dependent on whether it is a validation of partial or full Title. Obtained certificates are stored and of course the candidates may be redirected to another approach, a recovery process, or a new balance of skills, so that the gains are preserved and valued.

The certificates are valid for 5 years.

E. MOTIVATION

1. What are the main motivators? What benefits? What incentives?

The APL (VAE) was introduced by the law of social modernization on January 17th, 2002.

The APL is open to anyone involved in working life (any type of public employee, applicant for employment, volunteer, etc...). The VAE is a open and widely available, it is the right of an individual not just a privilege to some.

2. What are the main difficulties you experience with the RPL system ?

First, it's a fairly demanding for the person being engaged in formal education to obtain a diploma/certificate for up to 5 years. The APL system allows to simplify the process but certificates have limited life as well. Then there is the motivation of creating this record and

the collection of evidence (certificates of skills, certificates, etc..). Finally there are also problems which the employees have to face themselves, such as the funding issue and the problem of undertaking training while still in work. This may mean that the small demand for qualified individuals may eventually end. There is also a large amount energy and perseverance necessary. For many candidates this means re-entering a training circuit with its constraints, deadlines, and test evaluations.

F. SUSTAINABILITY

1. How many have achieved APL, what were the most recent number/year?

For example, out of the total number of applications for APL at the national level, those applying to masonry represent 3.9% in 2005.

Less than one third (1 / 3) of candidates obtain title by APL following two years of support at the AFPA.

2. What does it cost, who pays?

Usually job seekers benefit from financial support (state grants). For employees there is a support level of DIF (individual training) or training plan (a portion of the budget for each company in France is required to be used for training its employees). It may be that their financial contribution is requested. The overall cost of VAE certification in order to obtain a title like that of masonry is estimated at €1400-1500.

3. How is sustainability of the RPL process assured?

For people in difficult situations, there is a legal system of aid already mentioned, and the others support the cost of the process themselves.

G. ANY OTHER COMMENTS

This form was filled in by Claudia Sapta (UPIV Amiens) following the investigation conducted with professionals from the AFPA (e.g. those responsible for career guidance and training). People questioned preferred an open discussion, hence the need for me to summarise the information, and to structure and format it. I also relied on comprehensive studies about the procedure of VAE in France (mainly published by the Ministry of Labour), and on my own work as expert at the University Paul Sabatier Toulouse, where I'm involved in a similar investigation into the system of VAE at the University level.

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CASE STUDY BELGIUM



A. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR RPL

1. What are the main regulatory bodies; what role for each, what hierarchy?

A. Ministry of labour, ministry of education and training, ministry for Culture.

Certification of competences can take place in various ways, and while it is usually a matter of education, where the certification of competences is awarded after successful completion of an educational programme, it could also be awarded through certain dispensations which may be granted within an education or vocational training programme. With regards to higher education, the Flemish Government has transferred powers to the Associations for Higher Education. Students may obtain a certificate of proficiency for competences acquired outside the formal education system.

Certificates are also issued and certified by the Flemish Government in Culture, Youth and Sports.

- B. Associations of universities
- C. Assessment centres for certificate of experience

2. Who can provide the service of RPL?

The most important initiative for matching the supply of and demand for competence is the development of the ‘Title of professional competence’ or the ‘certificate of experience.’

The certificate of experience is an official, generally recognised document issued by the Flemish Government. The certificate of experience provides certainty that well-defined, professional competences (mainly for bottleneck occupations) have been acquired.

For an assessment of competences in order to obtain an experience certificate, the individual must visit a test centre. Depending on the occupation and skill area, the applicant must go to an accredited test centre for experience certification.

In education, the Associations are responsible for assessment of higher education.

3. How much time does the RPL process (ordinarily) take?

It depends on the experience or education of the individual and the competence to be evaluated.

4. What methods are regularly used to gather evidences?

A large variety of tests, either practical, theoretical, or a mixture of both.

5. What type of recognition (=certification) is provided (National / sectoral / private)?

The certificate of experience is national (Flemish); education is national, but vocational training organized by sector is sectoral and qualifications are not recognized nationally.

B. QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) ARRANGEMENTS

1. What are QA arrangements for RPL in the organisations in your group?

In Flanders the test centres with subsidies from ESF have to have an ESF quality logo of a higher level like EQF for instance.

2. What are the most important points of the QA system?

Organisational and personal development based on 6 items cfr. ESF quality-label.

C. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Who designs the specific tools used in the RPL process?

Supporting organizations of the government (SERV) representing social partners and labour market organizations.

2. Who can be a RPL assessor in your country? What are the main conditions? What profile is required?

Any experienced person who is able to reliably perform the assessments.



3. How are sectoral partners involved in RPL?

Through the government and represented in such organisations as SERV. But there is not enough engagement of the sectors in the process.

D. GUIDANCE & COUNSELLING

1. Who provides guidance & counselling?

Career coaching providers. VDAB for non-employed people. It would be useful if the Trade Unions could do this too.

2. How is guidance/counselling provided before validation?

Same organisations

3. How is guidance/counselling provided during validation

Same organisations

4. How is guidance/counselling provided after validation

Same organisations

E. MOTIVATION

1. What are the main motivators? What benefits? What incentives?

To gain recognition in general, have more social benefits, more salary, improved employability.

2. What are the main difficulties you experience with the RPL system ?

The process of recognition is not known amongst general public, procedures to organise the assessment takes a long time.

F. SUSTAINABILITY

1. How many have achieved APL, what was the most recent number/year?

No data found

2. What does it cost, who pays?

The procedure for recognition of acquired competences or qualifications in higher education does not involve any costs unless it relates to certificates for which the institution does not know the 'value' and therefore considers it necessary to order an additional proficiency test.

This is not the case for competences acquired outside formal education, that is, through non-formal or informal learning. In these cases, the associations (a cooperative link between one University and/or one or more University colleges) are responsible for recognition and assessment as well as for the cost of the proficiency test.

The maximum cost for the assessment varies:

- **€590** for a proficiency assessment at academic or professional bachelor level
- **€770** for a proficiency assessment at master's level if the individual has no bachelor's degree
- **€230** for a proficiency assessment at master's level if the individual has a bachelor's degree
- **€55** administrative cost for a proficiency assessment for partial elements of a study.
The cost depends on the number of competence assessments to be undertaken

The procedure for the recognition of acquired competences or qualifications in adult education does not involve any costs. There are two exceptions to that rule:

1. **€15** for students who have enrolled in a long-distance course and want their competences assessed.
2. **€15** for students who take up the procedure of assessment through the decentralised examination boards in order to obtain a secondary education diploma.

The cost of non-formal and informal learning on the labour market include the payment of the employee's wages during his or her absence in addition to the costs of the procedure itself.

Naturally there are, in theory, 3 actors who might be approached for funding, namely the government, the employee or the employer.

Sectoral vocational training funds may also be engaged or paid educational leave.

However, sectoral vocational training funds are managed by the social partners within the federal structure of the social dialogue.

For the recognition of competences according to a certificate of experience, the European Social Funding, together with Flanders, makes the necessary financial resources available to the test centres.

The individual is only required to pay for the practical test plus a small fee. Many people are also entitled to a reduced rate or even an exemption from payment. The cost of transport to and from the test centre is also completely refunded. A declaration on ‘word-of-honour’ or a driving licence will suffice for this. The exploratory interview is free of charge for every applicant. The contribution to the practical test is adjusted according to the situation of the applicant:

- Unemployed people registered at the VDAB and people in part-time compulsory education: **free of charge**
- Self-employed people belonging to a disadvantaged group: **€25**
- Employees belonging to a disadvantaged group and the self-employed not belonging to a disadvantaged group: **€50**
- Employees not belonging to a disadvantaged group: **€100**

“Training vouchers” may also be required for the test. In practice, all test centres are currently providing the service free of charge.

3.How is sustainability of the RPL process assured?

Not currently, and changes in the government in Flanders is a very negative factor that is impacting on the RPL implementation in Belgium!

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CASE STUDY CZECH REPUBLIC



A. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR RPL

1. What are the main regulatory bodies; what role for each, what hierarchy?

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (the author of the Act) plays the central coordinating role in the process of recognition of education results.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport:

- a) coordinates the activities of the central administration bodies (ministries) performed following the Act on Recognition of Further Education Results
- b) approves, modifies, cancels, and issues a list of partial qualifications (i.e. approves the content and form of the National Qualification Framework) including the content of qualification and assessment standards.

Other ministries – authorising bodies (including the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport):

- a) participate in the preparation of qualification and assessment standards,
- b) decide on appointments, extensions and withdrawals of authorization,
- c) conduct a register of persons granted authorization,
- d) provide the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport with data of persons provided with authorisation to the list of authorised persons included in the National Qualification Framework,
- e) monitor the activities of persons provided with authorisation,
- f) conduct registration of examinations by authorised persons they provided with authorisation, including registration of issued certificates.

2. Who can provide the service of RPL?

Recognition of further education results is performed by authorised persons. These may be any individuals or legal entities meeting the requirements stipulated by the law (except for



other qualification requirements). Authorisation is granted to these entities by the individual ministries according to their competencies (e.g. the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs authorises the occupations in the labour law relations, safety at work, employment, old age pension schemes, social care etc.; the Ministry of Industry and Trade authorise the occupations in the fields of energy, heating industry, gas industry, metallurgy, machinery, electrical engineering etc.). These ministries are called authorising bodies.

3. How much time does the RPL process (ordinarily) take?

The duration of the process depends on which qualification is being assessed. It ranges from 4 up to 20 hours.

4. What methods are regularly used to gather evidences?

Recognition is strictly based on assessment and this assessment is conducted through practical or oral tests, and sometimes in forms of written tests.

5. What type of recognition (=certification) is provided (National / sectoral / private)?

There is only one wide national recognition system (by Act No. 179/2006), but there are some sectoral systems in place. These systems are mainly based on education and accreditation of education (accreditation systems such as for social services, health care, pedagogic staff, welders, etc.).

B. QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) ARRANGEMENTS

1. What are QA arrangements for RPL in the organisations in your group?

Each ministry that gives authorisation is responsible for both assessment and assessors (authorised personnel). When assessment is provided at the end of professional retraining, labour offices are responsible for supervising quality.

2. What are the most important points of the QA system?

Assessment takes place on a specific day, which is reported to the ministry. Assessment is public so ministry experts may attend. Evidence such protocol on result and progress of assessment is kept and available for future record.

C. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Who designs the specific tools used in the RPL process?

Tools for recognition procedures are designed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports through Act No. 179/2006 and through projects (financed by ESF).

2. Who can be a RPL assessor in your country? What are the main conditions? What profile is required?

Requirements for authorised persons differ from qualification to qualification. Assessment standards for qualification provide the minimum requirements for an assessor. In general, only the highest professional from a certain area can be an assessor.

Everybody who fulfils the minimum requirements can be the authorised person (assessor).

3. How are sectoral partners involved in RPL?

Sectoral partners are involved when minimum requirements are stated as standard.

D. GUIDANCE & COUNSELLING

1. Who provides guidance & counselling?

Guidance and counselling is provided on a project-by-project basis and has not as of yet been implemented. The project UNIV System is preparing for this (the shortcut comes from the recognition of non-formal and informal learning). In projects in cooperation with vocational schools (mainly upper secondary) there is network of services available to citizens who want to enter into the system of recognition.

Certain guidance & counselling services are provided by labour offices. These guidance systems are often aimed at increasing and then recognising learning to increase employability of labour office clients.

Guidance provided is also usually provided for commercial bases, especially connected with further (non-formal) education supply.

2. How is guidance/counselling provided before validation?

Systems are under development.

3. How is guidance/counselling provided during validation

Systems are under development.

4. How is guidance/counselling provided after validation

Systems are under development.

E. MOTIVATION

1. What are the main motivators? What benefits? What incentives?

There are two types of motivation. Some laws are interconnected with a system of RPL (admission to work in certain areas; ability to gain approval for working in some regulated professions) or that with a certificate of qualification you can gain a formal qualification diploma (on EQF levels 3,4).

2. What are the main difficulties you experience with the RPL system?

One of several difficulties is identifying the price of the recognition procedure outside of projects financed by ESF and which is charged to citizens who seek recognition.

F. SUSTAINABILITY

1. How many have achieved APL, what was the most recent number/year?

In 2009 there were approximately 520 individuals who acquired certificate through this system (Act No. 179/2006).

2. What does it cost, who pays?

In general the individuals pays for their recognition.

3. How is sustainability of the RPL process assured?

Assurance of sustainability is guaranteed by law (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports ought to sustain this system in the future; there is Department for Adult Education at the ministry which is in charge of this system).

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CASE STUDY ROMANIA



A. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR RPL.

1. What are the main regulatory bodies; what role for each, what hierarchy?

- ▶ The National Adult Training Board is the National Authority for Qualifications in Romania
- ▶ Tripartite body - Government, Employer's Associations and Trade Unions – advisory role in setting up adult vocational training policies and strategies
- ▶ Since 2003, NATB also has a decision-making role in ensuring the quality of the vocational training and professional competences assessment system

2. Who can provide the service of RPL?

The RPL service is provided mostly by private organisations, they must to be authorised as assessment providers by the NATB.

In Romania, this service is also provided by public institutions like the Regional Centres for Adult Training which are subordinate to the National Employment Authority.

3. How much time does the RPL process (ordinarily) take?

The length of the process depends on the personal situation of the assessed person, their program, and their ability to provide valid evidence in a short time, but it also depends on the complexity of the competences to be assessed in all the contexts.

However, there is a legal constraint which stipulates that the whole process cannot take more than 30 days. This time is calculated from the initial point of registration by the person to be assessed until the final day of assessments when the decision is made.

4. What methods are regularly used to gather evidences?

The following list provides an overview of evaluation methods regularly deployed to gather evidences:

- ▶ **written test:** (mandatory)
 - multiple choice test;
 - true/false statements;
 - fill in – short answer test;
 - long answer test;
 - a combination of the above test types
- ▶ **Oral tests:** (ordinarily associated with the practical test)
 - structured interview;
- ▶ **Practical test:** (mandatory)
 - Direct observation in real/simulated conditions of work;
 - Project (developing a product, a training course, etc.);
 - Portfolio - integrated competence test (third party evaluations, previous work, proof of previous work etc.)

5. What type of recognition (=certification) is provided (National / sectoral / private)?

Nationally recognised **certificates of professional competences** can be issued by providers of assessment services. Certificates are issued by the providers of assessment services - on behalf of the awarding authorities - to candidates who have met the requirements for these standards. On the back side of the certificate, a list of the assessed and validated competences is provided.

In Romania, the **certificate of professional competences** has the same value and recognition as a **graduation certificate** only when all the units of competences for the entire qualification standard are validated.

When only part of these units are acquired, the assessment centre can still provide a certificate describing the units of competences validated during the assessment process.

B. QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) ARRANGEMENTS

1. What are QA arrangements for RPL in the organisations in your group?

The National Awarding Authorities are committed to ensuring that the National Qualifications retain value and credibility and to promote valid and reliable assessment.

Quality assurance of the assessment process has internal and external elements:

Internal verification is carried out by employees of the provider of assessment services. Failure to comply with internal verification by a provider of assessment services can lead to withdrawal of the authorisation to provide such services.

The internal elements are:

- ▶ Assessment of competence is carried out according to the procedures in place;
- ▶ Internal verification of the assessment process and the assessment instruments;
- ▶ Evaluation of the quality of assessment instruments;
- ▶ Regular self evaluation and reporting to external monitoring bodies.

External verification is carried out by external monitoring bodies that ensure providers of assessment services are actually assessing their candidates according to the requirements of the National Awarding Authorities.

The external verification is focussed on:

- ▶ Compliance with the authorisation requirements for providers of assessment services;
- ▶ Determining consistency of the assessment system;
- ▶ Determining compliance with the procedures in place;
- ▶ Ensuring the appropriateness of the evaluation tools used by the provider (validity and completeness);
- ▶ Reliability of assessment decisions;
- ▶ Ensuring the credibility of certification and award registration;
- ▶ Checking the reliability of the assessment process data.

2. What are the most important points of the QA system?

Effective internal and external verifications are key quality management processes which support the objective that assessment consistently meets national standards.

The **internal verification** procedure should at least cover the following items:

- ▶ manner in which verification and compliance to procedures is monitored;
- ▶ manner (frequency and sample quantity) of internal verification activities related to checking the quality of evaluation tools;
- ▶ manner of internal verification of certification and registration process;
- ▶ manner of monitoring the quality of assessors;
- ▶ manner of monitoring of the accuracy of recording activities;
- ▶ manner in which the implementation of recommendations for improvement takes place

The **external verification** procedure should at least cover the following items:

- ▶ external verification desk research (analyse self assessment reports; analyse assessment process data; prepare external verification visits)

- ▶ external verification visits
- ▶ sample based verification of evaluation tools

C. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Who designs the specific tools used in the RPL process?

Each private assessment centre must design the appropriate tools for the qualifications that they request authorization to be used in the RPL process. This is a mandatory point which is analysed during the process of authorisation of each centre. Tools are checked in order to confirm that they respect the core assessment principles: validity, reliability, and fairness.

2. Who can be a RPL assessor in your country? What are the main conditions? What profile is required?

Assessors should be acknowledged as professionals in their sector with recent and relevant work, or coordination experience (within last 3 years).

The main points of the ideal assessor’s profile are presented below:

- ▶ be familiar with the validation process;
- ▶ have no personal interest in the validation outcome (to guarantee impartiality & avoid conflicts of interest);
- ▶ be familiar with different assessment methodologies;
- ▶ able to inspire trust and to create a proper psychological setting for the candidates;
- ▶ committed to providing feedback on the match between learning outcomes and validation standards/references (via support systems);
- ▶ be trained in assessment and validation processes and be knowledgeable about quality assurance mechanisms.

In order to fulfill these responsibilities they should prove that they *know how to* and *can*:

- ▶ analyse the content of the standard in order to determine the critical aspects, choose the most suitable assessment methods, and elaborate assessment instruments;
- ▶ explain and detail the content of the standard and means of self-assessment to persons who request assessment, provide details on the assessment process and means to submit competence evidence by the candidate;
- ▶ combine appropriate assessment methods to enable valid, credible, impartial, transparent, cost-efficient assessment processes. In other words, plan and organise assessments;

- ▶ analyse direct and indirect competence evidence in order to decide whether it is valid, authentic, qualitative, current and sufficient, and determine whether additional evidence is required to eventually decide if all critical aspects related to each competence unit are covered;
- ▶ record the assessment results throughout the assessment process, draft assessment individual files, provide proactive feedback to candidates, and report to the centre management the assessment results according to the procedures.

3.How are sectoral partners involved in RPL?

Sectoral Committees are nationwide coverage institutions with an advisory and approval role in the process of verification and validation of the Occupational Standards.

D. GUIDANCE & COUNSELLING

1. Who provides guidance & counselling?

The assessor and the front office of the assessment centres are in charge of this part of the process.

2. How is guidance/counselling provided before validation?

An interview is set up with the candidate before the beginning of the validation procedure so that the evaluator can ensure that the person to be assessed is completely ready for assessment and has understood the process.

3. How is guidance/counselling provided during validation

The assessor is constrained to provide information and feedback concerning each step of the evaluation process.

Candidates must be informed prior to the assessment session about the required performance criteria and assessment norms.

The evaluator provides the candidate with a series of partial results and the possibility of further clarifications.

4. How is guidance/counselling provided after validation

The evaluator provides feedback in connection with the assessment results and the necessary future theoretical and practical training.

E. MOTIVATION

1. What are the main motivators? What benefits? What incentives?

Principally, the applicants are motivated to follow this procedure because:

- ▶ they can receive a certification of skills obtained through work experience (it is not mandatory to follow a training course);
- ▶ the certificate provided is recognised nationwide;
- ▶ there is no age limit to access the evaluation process;
- ▶ it costs less than a training course;
- ▶ it takes less time to complete.

2. What are the main difficulties you experience with the RPL system?

The procedure and its advantages are not yet well known by the target groups.

The procedure is not (yet) free of charge for the unemployed, even if training courses are free for this category. (There is a project to fix this legal problem.)

F. SUSTAINABILITY

1. How many have achieved APL, what was the most recent number/year?

Unfortunately, for the moment, there is no centralised authority available to be consulted for these figures.

In Romania there are 51 authorized assessment centres.

2. What does it cost, who pays?

Assessment providers charge the applicant for the assessment process. The price is influenced by the market as well as by the complexity of the qualification for which an assessment process is organised. For example, for a qualification with 8 units of competences, the cost is €300 (Medium salary in Romania is about €300 per month).

3. How is sustainability of the RPL process assured?

For the moment, the applicant provides the cost for the evaluation process.

Internal verification costs are covered by the assessment centre.

Activities of the external monitoring bodies are financed by the National Awarding Authorities (NATB in Romania) based on activities described in the approved annual external verification plan.

Assessment centres must follow a re-authorisation procedure when the previous authorisations expire (after 1, 2 or 3 years). The National Awarding Body (NATB) charges this to the applicant with an amount based on the authorization level:

- ▶ first level of authorisation (for 1 year) – 1 gross minimum wage (approx. 150 euros in Ro)
- ▶ second level of authorisation (for 2 years) - 2 gross minimum wages
- ▶ third level of authorisation (for 3 years) - 3 gross minimum wages

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CASE STUDY UNITED KINGDOM



EWPA (Experienced Worker Practical Assessment)

A. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR RPL

1. What are the main regulatory bodies; what role for each, what hierarchy?

ConstructionSkills (www.cskills.org) is the Government-licensed Sector Skills Council for construction and has created EWPA as an additional route for RPL assessment of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) for construction craft skills. There is a variety of commercial Awarding Bodies who offer construction NVQs (for example: City & Guilds, Edexcel, Construction Awards Alliance, and Cskills Awards) and who are responsible for keeping the qualifications up-to-date, assuring quality (through external verification) and marketing. *OfQual* (Office of Qualifications & Examinations Regulation, www.ofqual.gov.uk) is responsible for licensing Awarding Bodies. Assessment Centres are responsible for assessors, internal verification and local marketing. Assessment Centres are often either Further Education Colleges or large employers, and they act as subcontractors to Awarding Bodies.

2. Who can provide the service of RPL?

The NVQ system permits assessment irrespective of the means by which competence has been gained. It is therefore very suitable for RPL. Only assessment centres with their own building facilities can offer EWPA.

3. How much time does the RPL process (ordinarily) take?

The EWPA process typically takes 1½ days over the course of 2-3 weeks, and consists of an initial interview and a one day practical test at an Assessment Centre.

4. What methods are regularly used to gather evidences?

The candidate is required to carry out some construction work in the Assessment Centre (for example a bricklayer would be asked to build a small section of wall incorporating a variety of elements such as windows and corners, as well as preparing the site, estimating requirements, working from drawings, etc.) under observation from the assessor. The

assessor will also interview the candidate in order to ensure that the underpinning theory and facts are known.

5. What type of recognition (=certification) is provided (National / sectoral / private)?

The NVQ is a national qualification. The appropriate NVQ is a requirement for successful completion of an apprenticeship. Under the new national Qualifications & Credit Framework (QCF), the qualification is registered in an on-line database.

B. QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) ARRANGEMENTS

1. What are QA arrangements for RPL in the organisations in your group?

Assessors and Internal Verifiers must be vocationally competent in the NVQ, and also hold an Assessor or Verifier qualification. Internal Verifiers review (or observe) a sample of the assessments. External Verifiers periodically (typically every 6 months) review a random sample of each Assessment Centre’s assessments.

2. What are the most important points of the QA system?

Internal verification is conducted by people who are competent technically and competent as assessors/verifiers. External verification is conducted by people who are experts in assessment and verification.

C. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Who designs the specific tools used in the RPL process?

The Awarding Body can provide Assessment Centres with tools (for example: knowledge tests, training and guidance for assessors, recording proformas). Assessment Centres develop their own assessment procedures and tools.

2. Who can be a RPL assessor in your country? What are the main conditions? What profile is required?

All Assessors and Internal verifiers must be vocationally competent in the NVQ and also hold the appropriate national Assessor / Verifier qualification. There is currently no specific qualification for RPL Assessors, although one is being developed under the RPLO project for VET teachers in Further Education Colleges.

3. How are sectoral partners involved in RPL?

ConstructionSkills is an employers' body, and has input to its policy making from trades union representatives, further and higher education, professional institutions.

D. GUIDANCE & COUNSELLING

1. Who provides guidance & counselling?

This is not generally well developed. It depends on the Assessment Centre, which may have a tutor or mentor assigned to the candidate. FE Colleges all have Advice & Guidance departments. In some cases the assessor provides guidance and counselling (in the absence of anyone else) but this does create potential conflicts of interest. EWPA is often provided as part of a project which will also provide guidance and counselling.

2. How is guidance/counselling provided before validation?

The assessor has an initial meeting with the candidate to identify the appropriate NVQ, identify any areas that require additional learning, brief the candidate on the assessment process, and ensure that the candidate will arrive at the Assessment Centre with all required documentation.

3. How is guidance/counselling provided during validation

No guidance/counselling is available during the assessment.

4. How is guidance/counselling provided after validation

The assessor will provide formative feedback after assessment, especially where the candidate's performance is not yet adequate. In some cases an employer, college, trades union, project or other person will provide guidance and counselling after validation.

E. MOTIVATION

1. What are the main motivators? What benefits? What incentives?

For the worker, the NVQ is required in order to obtain a CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) card for that occupation. A CSCS card is required to work on any major construction site. Qualifications are valued at a time of recession/unemployment, giving a competitive advantage for staying employed at a time of redundancies, or while job seeking.



EWPA does not require any involvement by an employer; it is therefore available to the unemployed or those with an unsympathetic employer.

2. What are the main difficulties you experience with the RPL system?

Awareness of the system and opportunities is very limited, especially amongst migrant workers who are unlikely to have encountered a competence-based system before.

Language is usually an obstacle for migrant workers, making it difficult for the assessor to brief them (the vocabulary of assessment and qualifications is vastly different from the words used in everyday life or work, and even the concepts of competence-based assessment are likely to be unknown) and question them.

The cost can also be a significant obstacle. EWPA assessment typically costs €1,500 per person because of the costs of the building materials and test rigs as well as assessor costs. Individuals are not eligible for grants from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB, one of the bodies which formed *ConstructionSkills*). There are sometimes short-term and local subsidies available from projects, for example using European Social Funds.

The small number of Assessment Centres accredited for EWPA means that it may be difficult to find a centre at the time and place that the candidate is available.

Construction workers are usually subcontractors, moving from employer to employer and site to site, making it difficult to inform them of opportunities. The construction sector as a whole is suspicious of external inspection and authority, and migrant workers are often even more so (perhaps because of doubts over the legality of their residence, employment and tax status, perhaps because of a historical and cultural expectation of governments as oppressors).

F. SUSTAINABILITY

1. How many have achieved APL, what was the most recent number/year?

Eight thousand candidates achieved NVQ through OSAT or EWPA in 2008, a four-fold increase since 2003, with the majority of these being OSAT. The cumulative total for OSAT is 180,000. The number of EWPA candidates is small.

2. What does it cost, who pays?

The Assessment Centre's cost depends on the assessor's time and expenses (including test rigs and building materials which cannot be re-used). In addition, there is an Awarding Body

fee for the certification. The assessor’s time varies according to the number of candidates who can be assessed at the same time.

EWPA is usually paid for by the candidate. In some cases the employer pays and is able to recover some or all the cost from CITB. In some cases the cost is paid by a project.

3. How is sustainability of the RPL process assured?

The small number of EWPA assessments makes it uneconomic for most Assessment Centres to offer EWPA, and even the Assessment Centres already offering EWPA are only able to offer it for a very small number of NVQs. Assessment is a commercial activity by the Assessment Centre, and so requires a continuing demand at an economical cost for the Assessment Centre to continue to offer it. The Assessment Centre will sometimes gain government funding for RPL by taking part in (or setting up) a particular project. Project funding is very specific (special rules, particular target groups, limited time).

G. ANY OTHER COMMENTS

Because EWPA is most commonly offered when funded by a project, it is very difficult to generalise since each situation tends to be unique. As a result, EWPA is little known, especially by migrant workers. It is not simple to set it up, even when project funding is available.

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CASE STUDY UNITED KINGDOM



OSAT (On-Site Assessment & Training)

A. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR RPL

1. What are the main regulatory bodies; what role for each, what hierarchy?

ConstructionSkills (www.cskills.org) is the Government-licensed Sector Skills Council for construction and has created OSAT as the main route of assessment for National Vocational Qualifications for construction craft skills. There is a variety of commercial Awarding Bodies who offer construction NVQs (for example: City & Guilds, Edexcel, Construction Awards Alliance, Cskills Awards) and who are responsible for keeping the qualifications up-to-date, assuring quality (through external verification) and marketing. *OfQual* (Office of Qualifications & Examinations Regulation, www.ofqual.gov.uk) is responsible for licensing Awarding Bodies. Assessment Centres are responsible for assessors, internal verification and local marketing. Assessment Centres are often Further Education Colleges or large employers, and they act as subcontractors to Awarding Bodies.

2. Who can provide the service of RPL?

The NVQ system permits assessment irrespective of the means by which competence has been gained. It is therefore very suitable for RPL. Assessment Centres licensed by an Awarding Body to offer construction NVQs will usually offer OSAT.

3. How much time does the RPL process (ordinarily) take?

The OSAT process typically takes between 6 weeks and 18 months to assemble a portfolio of evidence against all the performance requirements of the NVQ. The process starts with a diagnostic assessment to ensure that competence covers all aspects of the NVQ and to plan the collection of evidence. The assessment itself is usually spread over 3 to 4 days, and it takes place at the candidate's workplace.

4. What methods are regularly used to gather evidences?

The candidate will assemble a portfolio of evidence made up of:



- Items produced by the candidate (including photos and videos) in the workplace.
- Witness testimony by employers, supervisors, colleagues, customers etc.
- Evidence of assessment (for example: qualifications already achieved, results of tests).

In addition the assessor will observe the candidate at work, inspect past work created by the candidate, interview the candidate and their colleagues, etc. The process therefore needs the active cooperation of the site operator.

5. What type of recognition (=certification) is provided (National / sectoral / private)?

The NVQ is a national qualification. The appropriate NVQ is a requirement for successful completion of an apprenticeship. Under the new national Qualifications & Credit Framework (QCF) the qualification is registered in an on-line database.

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3. How are sectoral partners involved in RPL?

ConstructionSkills is an employers' body, and has input to its policy making from trades union representatives, further and higher education, and professional institutions.

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1. Who provides guidance & counselling?

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2. How is guidance/counselling provided before validation?

The assessor has an initial meeting with the candidate to identify the appropriate NVQ, identify any areas that require additional learning, brief the candidate on the assessment process, and help the candidate to plan how and when to assemble the portfolio of evidence.

3. How is guidance/counselling provided during validation?

The assessor will provide formative feedback during assessment, especially where the candidate's evidence is not yet adequate.

4. How is guidance/counselling provided after validation?

The assessor will provide formative feedback after assessment, especially where the candidate's evidence is not yet adequate. In some cases an employer, college, trades union, project, or other person will provide guidance and counselling after validation.

E. MOTIVATION

1. What are the main motivators? What benefits? What incentives?

For the worker, the NVQ is required in order to obtain a CSCS card (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) for that occupation. A CSCS card is required to work on any major construction site. Qualifications are valued at a time of recession/unemployment, giving a competitive advantage for staying employed at a time of redundancies, or when job seeking.

Some enlightened employers can see benefits from a qualified workforce such as improved competitiveness, greater loyalty, improved image, and as a key differentiator in bidding for public sector contracts. It is not clear that RPL will actually improve performance, although there is some evidence that it encourages continuing development, which leads to greater flexibility and safety (with cost reductions), improved adaptability (to new technologies and other change), continuing improvement/efficiency, and less waste/re-work.

2. What are the main difficulties you experience with the RPL system?

Awareness of the system and opportunities is very limited, especially amongst migrant workers who are unlikely to have encountered a competence-based system before.

OSAT requires a supportive employer who is willing to allow the assessor on site and take the candidate's time. Most employers are concerned that they will have to pay a qualified worker more and that qualified workers may choose to leave and work elsewhere.

The cost can be a significant obstacle. Fortunately, assessment, as well as training, is eligible for grants from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB, one of the bodies which formed *ConstructionSkills*, and to which all contractors pay a levy reflecting the number of employees). In addition, there are sometimes short-term and local subsidies available from projects, for example using European Social Funds.

Construction workers are usually subcontractors moving from employer to employer and site to site, which makes continuity of assessment difficult. The construction sector as a whole is suspicious of external inspection and authority and migrant workers are often even more so (perhaps because of doubts over legality of their residence, employment and tax status, or perhaps because of a historical and cultural expectation of governments as oppressors).

Language is another major issue. OSAT is conducted only in English or Welsh. Translation or interpretation is not allowed.

F. SUSTAINABILITY

1. How many have achieved APL, what was the most recent number/year?

Eight thousand candidates achieved NVQ through OSAT or EWPA in 2008, a four-fold increase since 2003, with the majority of successful candidates going through the OSAT. The cumulative total for OSAT is 180,000. The number of candidates who are assessed without being part of a training programme is extremely small.

2. What does it cost, who pays?

The Assessment Centre’s cost depends on the assessor’s time and expenses (such as travel and even accommodation when visiting remote sites). In addition there is an Awarding Body fee for the certification. The assessor’s time varies according to the number of candidates who are on the same site and the number of visits that are needed before assessment is completed.

OSAT is usually paid for by the employer. In many cases the employer is able to recover some or all the cost from CITB. In some cases the cost is paid by a project. OSAT is usually less expensive than off-site assessment at an Assessment Centre (EWPA – see previous case study).

3. How is sustainability of the RPL process assured?

Assessment is a commercial activity by the Assessment Centre so, provided there is continuing demand at an economic price, the Assessment Centre will continue to offer it. The Assessment Centre will sometimes gain government funding for RPL by taking part in (or setting up) a particular project. Project funding is very specific (with special rules, particular target groups, and limited time).

G. ANY OTHER COMMENTS

OSAT is most commonly used as part of initial professional development (for example as part of an apprenticeship) in association with off-site training, rather than for RPL.

CONTACT DETAILS

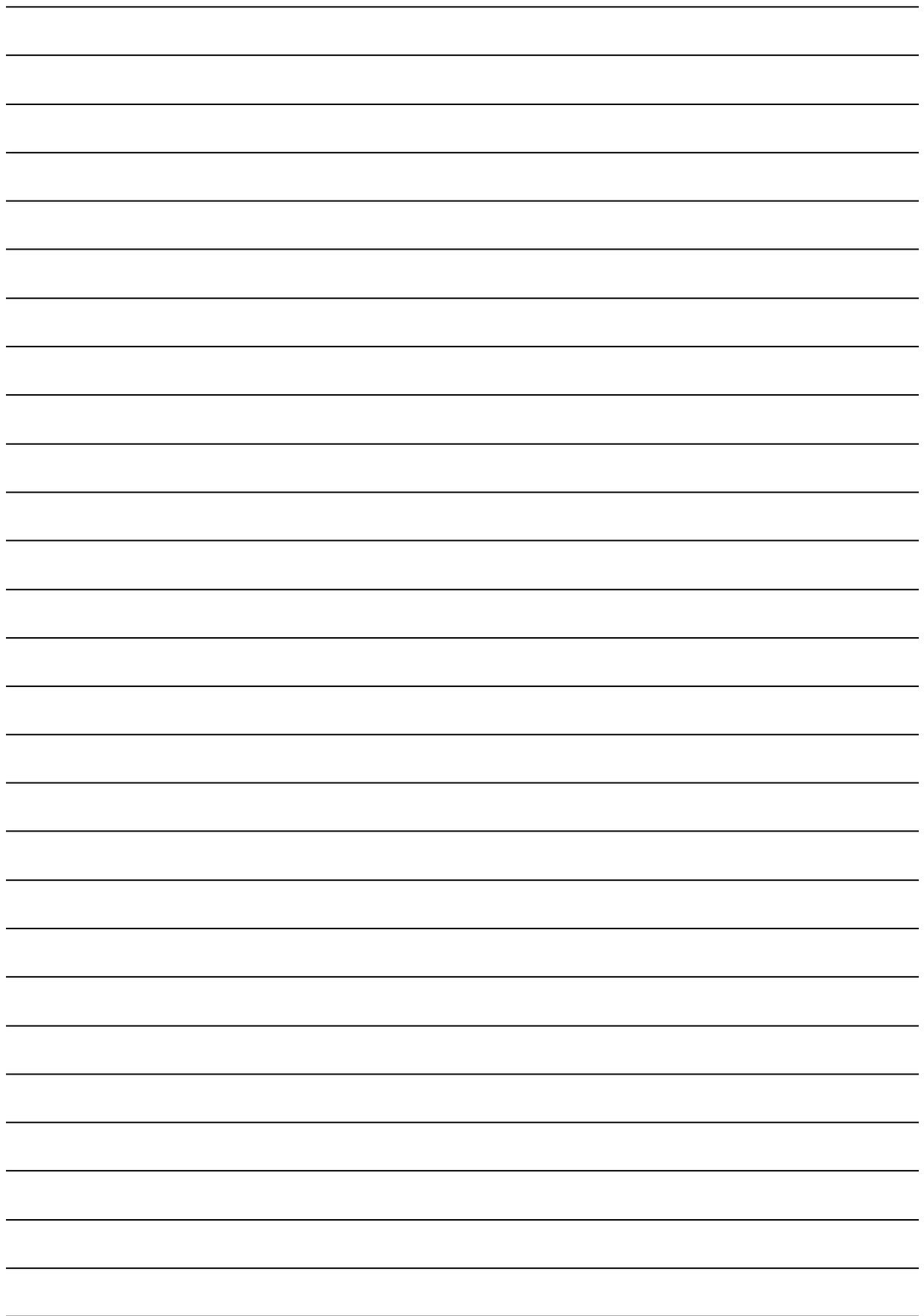
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Case studies report

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