



## **PILOTING NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN GUIDELINES DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE THE TAKE UP OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING OUTCOMES**

### **Summary**

European and National Lifelong Learning Policy has emphasised the importance of the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, since Member States agreed the Common European Principles in 2004.

The Recognition of Prior Learning Outcomes is a common issue in the national systems of the UK as well as the partner countries with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA] Accreditation of Prior Learning [APL] Guidance for the Qualifications and Curriculum Framework [QCF].<sup>1</sup>

The Project will pilot these Guidelines in the VET Teacher and Trainer Sector using the Lifelong Learning UK Standards through the development of user-friendly tools, methods and support materials.

The partners in the other EU Member States will collaborate in this process, ensuring that common Standards are applied to the Recognition of Prior Learning Outcomes [RPLO] in this Sector using the European Guidelines (2008) within the context of the European Qualification Framework [EQF] Decision (2007) and the developing European Credit System for VET [ECVET].

The project will improve the attractiveness and effectiveness of the VET Teachers and Trainers profession in the UK and the partner countries.

The project will demonstrate how Credit-based qualifications will make the transition from being RPLO-neutral to being RPLO-friendly, using best practice from UK and EU projects and research, including the Cedefop study on the Recognition and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning for VET Teachers and Trainers.

The outcomes in England and Wales, and across the partner countries will be:

- A validated methodology of RPLO;
- Comprehensive assessment guidance, including reference to rules of combination;
- Relevant requirements for assessment and verification;
- Demonstration of the ways in which quality assurance can ensure the reliability and validity of RPLO; new tools and methods for RPLO;
- Units of assessment, which relate to National Standards; and
- Support material for relevant professional development.

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<sup>1</sup> For the context of this Innovation, see Guidance and Support Materials for the Qualification and Curriculum Framework (Version 3) at [http://www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_19657.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_19657.aspx)

The impact of the Project will be to demonstrate the ways in which RPLO enhances the attractiveness and rigour of VET within Lifelong Learning by ensuring that vocational and professional specialists are given access to full professional status as VET Teachers and Trainers based on their existing knowledge, skills and competencies.

This will improve National policy and practice and inform the development of RPLO at European level through support for credit-based qualification frameworks across the EU and dissemination to other sectors.

### **The Consortium**

The Proposal is based on a Consortium of 8 funded Partners (plus 1 Silent Partner) from 5 countries.

The Partners are:

1. Cambridge Assessment [UK] (Contractor)
2. Konrad Associates International [UK] (Coordinator)
3. Lifelong Learning UK [UK]
4. Foundation Degree Forward [UK]
5. Newcastle upon Tyne College [UK]
6. INHOLLAND University of Applied Science [NL]
7. Municipality of Södertälje [SE]
8. Balear Development and Training Co. Ltd [ES]
9. ECAP Foundation – Switzerland [CH]

### **Direct Relation to Operational Objectives**

**Priority 3:** Transparency and recognition of competencies and qualifications

Selected Objectives

- To facilitate the development of innovative practices in the field of vocational education and training other than at tertiary level, and their transfer, including from one participating country to others.
- To improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and competencies, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

### **Contribution to European Priorities**

The development of user-friendly Recognition of Prior Learning Outcomes [RPLO] for VET teachers and trainers will raise the profile of the Validation of Non-formal learning in an EQF/ECVET-compatible Qualification and Credit Framework. This will be achieved by enabling VET teachers and trainers to become role models for individual-centred RPLO within a Lifelong Learning philosophy.

The development of common approaches to quality assured RPLO will promote greater mutual trust between national VET systems.

The transparency and recognition of qualifications and competencies, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning will be enhanced through the development of sector-specific implementation of European and national guidelines based on the outcomes of recent European projects and national practice.

## **Contribution to National Priorities**

**Priority 1:** Applications that promote the transfer and recognition of qualifications and competencies in the UK and across Europe.

**Priority 4:** Applications, which demonstrate close links and relevance to national VET systems.

The promotion of the transfer and recognition of qualifications and competencies in the UK and across Europe over the next two years will depend on the progress made to implement the 2008 Decision to implement EQF in the Member States by 2010 / 2012; and the extent that the development of ECVET is fully integrated into national and sectoral qualifications and units of learning and assessment based on Learning Outcomes.

The Project will make a specific contribution to this process in the UK directly through the identified target groups, supported by the National APEL Working Group established under the European Observatory on the Validation of Non-formal Learning [OBSERVAL] and, through national stakeholders, contribute to the National Occupational Standards activity across the four UK national systems.

This Project will pilot a sector-specific implementation of European and national guidelines in a way that will contribute to the post-Leitch Reform of Vocational Qualifications and specifically to the process of Accreditation of the Reformed Vocational Qualifications to the Qualification and Curriculum Framework [QCF] for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (due in 2009) that will be informed by the first year of the Project (2008-09).

LLUK will lead on the communication of findings to other Sector Skills Councils and the final Project outcomes will support the full functioning of the QCF (by September 2010).

The operation of the Pilot during the second year of the Project will involve the full range of stakeholders and users across the partnership, led by the Success North Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Training [CETT].

This Project will strengthen the QCA Guidance designed to make the QCF RPL-friendly.

## **Project Description**

### **Rationale and Background:**

All the countries involved are at different stages in the implementation of the EQF Decision and developing their VET Qualification towards compatibility with ECVET. "Most countries have made progress with the validation of non-formal and informal learning. ... The challenge is now to move from experiment to full application in national qualifications systems, including improving access to higher education and access to education and training qualifications for low-skilled and older or unemployed workers." *Draft 2008 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education & Training 2010' work programme*, pages 3-4

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport_en.html)

"Indications from research literature, Leonardo da Vinci projects and the second international review (2007) commissioned by CEDEFOP suggest that the validation of informal and non-formal learning is of increasing importance in Member States. Furthermore the commitment of large numbers of countries to the OECD activity in this field and the European Commission's peer learning cluster indicate that validation is seen as an important element of policy. ... It is possible to see the formal validation process as an example of summative assessment and the validation forces for non-formal and informal learning as formative assessment. Understanding summative approaches is not only a question of understanding the quality (reliability and validity) of the methods for assessment, it is just as much about how integrated these approaches are with qualifications

systems and how they reference to established performance standards and norms.”  
*European Guidelines on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning*, First Draft  
November 2007, Pages 4 and 7.

“Recognition and Validation of non-formal and informal learning can provide a valid, reliable and alternative route towards professional recognition and certification of VET teachers and trainers; ... provide an important incentive to VET teachers and trainers to engage in professional development. By acknowledging what they already know, understand and can do, it is also possible to reduce the time taken to achieve recognized certification. ... promotes the model of the professional reflective practitioner through a different paradigm of learning which encourages the VET teacher or trainer to set a personal programme of individual professional development.” *Recognition and Validation of non-formal and informal learning for VET teachers and trainers in the EU Member States*, Cedefop Panorama series 147, 2007.

“Within the English context, APEL is best described as a bottom-up model driven largely by providers. While the government takes a directive role in the national skills strategy, they have yet to take the lead in developing a national system for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning, of which APEL is an important part.” *Leney T (2007), OECD Activity on the Recognition of non-formal and informal learning, Country Background Report for the UK*, page 49.

Following the Credit Works Study for the Learning and Skills Council (May 2007), “There is no doubt that for most stakeholders interviewed, historical and many current approaches to APL and Exemption were considered ineffective, difficult, dull and bureaucratic. However as this project progressed clear evidence of demand for APL and Exemption emerged, providing the current weaknesses and failures were addressed and workable solutions were put in place within the QCF.” *Examining the implications of APL and Exemption within the QCF in the context of supporting and measuring learner progression*, page 7.

These conclusions led to a joint plan of action on APL and Exemption on the QCF prepared in March 2008 by QCA and its counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland. This involves active participation of stakeholders in the development of a set of Guidelines on APL in the QCF, with particular involvement of the Sector Skills Councils [SSCs]. This work will draw on a Review of practice in terms of APL linked to National Qualifications Frameworks [NQFs] based on the European Inventory (2007) and OECD activity within the context of the above European Guidelines. It is expected that the final draft of the Guidelines on APL in the QCF will be published in June 2008. One of the aspects of the Review will be the ways in which the Rules of Combination provide exemption for individuals. A number of the UK partners have been involved in this process of development. The final draft of the Guidelines and the Final Report on Tests and Trials in June 2008 will provide the starting point for the project.

#### **Aims and Objectives of the Project:**

1. Develop an effective, efficient and quality assured methodology that implements the QCA and other national guidelines on RPL/O for VET Teachers and Trainers that will make the QCF and other EQF/ECVET compatible qualification frameworks individual-friendly using the same standards of validity and reliability as in formal qualifications.
2. Identify, justify and specify tools and methods that will implement this methodology covering the use of the Europass CV, Europass Mobility and Language Passport; paper and electronic portfolios; guidance for assessor and internal and external verifiers (including those from different national systems and sectors); information packs for individuals, voluntary organisations and community groups, trades unions and employers.

3. Prepare, validate and accredit with the QCF appropriate Units of learning and assessment for RPL professionals at EQF Levels 4 and 5 incorporated in the Rules of Combination for the Standards; support partner countries in incorporating these approaches into their National Qualification Framework.
4. Carry out a pilot implementation at EQF Level 4 and 5 of a credit-based approach to RPLO for VET Teachers and Trainers in the partner countries aimed at VET Teachers and Trainers and other professionals with RPL related roles and responsibilities.
5. Evaluate the process of developing the methodology, the resulting tools and methods and the extent to which these were fit for purpose, and the provision for the RPLO proposed for RPL professionals.
6. Carry out formative dissemination and preparation for exploitation at national and European levels using the Cedefop Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning and TNet Virtual Communities.
7. Disseminate the final results and products within the UK, the partner countries and, through the Leonardo da Vinci European Observatory Network [OBSERVAL], in all eligible countries.

#### **Links to Call Priorities**

1. Leonardo Priority 3 and UK Priority 1: Applications that promote the transfer and recognition of qualifications and competencies in the UK and across Europe. The Project supports the testing and use of EQF and ECVET compatible qualification frameworks in the UK national systems and those of the partner countries in the VET Teacher and Trainer Sector through the use of learning outcomes with allocation of credit points; mapping qualifications and competencies onto the eight EQF reference levels; use and refinement of flexible approaches for validation, transfer and recognition of learning outcomes achieved in formal, informal and non formal contexts; and will use the Europass Transparency Tools to provide a common approach to the documentation of individuals' knowledge skills and competencies .
2. UK Priority 4: Applications that demonstrate close links and relevance to national VET systems. The Project is linked to the UK priorities in the development of skills as identified in the Leitch Report. It specifically supports the development of the QCF by piloting the APL in the QCF Guidelines and aligning these to best practice across the EU; enhances the operation of the national standards for VET Teachers and Trainers the personal and professional development of VET Teachers and Trainers based upon RPLO. This will enhance the lifelong learning of these professionals and also provide experiential learning that will ensure that they provide sound role models for learners.

#### **Creation and adaptation of pedagogical materials**

Since 2000, National and European projects have created a wide range of material to support the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Project will review, classify and update this material to meet the requirements of changing policy and practice, based on mutual learning between the partners and the wider VET community of practice.

For example, the Common European Standards for APEL Professionals developed in the Leonardo da Vinci Thematic Action Project EuroguideVAL (2005-2007)<sup>2</sup> has identified that an appreciation of the models of RPL and an ability to apply them in national and sectoral contexts is an essential part of the professional competence of VET Teachers and Trainers.

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.euroguideval.org/>

The implementation of common standards through the use of appropriate pedagogical material will be carried out in the Pilot phase of the Project and will be based on situated learning linked to the need of the VET Teachers and Trainers Community of Practice.

### **Target Groups and anticipated impact**

The target groups are National regulators of the VET curriculum, Sector curriculum authorities, employers of VET teachers and trainers and trade unions; qualification awarding bodies; providers of work based learning; individual VET teachers and trainers and employment based training advisors.

Anticipated impact will be improvement of national guidelines to meet the needs of the QCF and other EQF/ECVET compatible qualification frameworks; use of RPL-friendly procedures by training institutions and employers; a significant increase in the take-up of RPL by VET teachers and trainers who lack recognised certification; use of learning portfolios by VET teachers and trainers as part of their continuing professional development; greater use by VET providers of the Europass tools with their learners; take up of the developed methodology by other sectors and in other Member States as part of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme.

### **Progress indicators of the delivery of expected outcomes**

The quantitative outcomes of the project will be evident in 2010/11 and therefore the project management will mainly rely on such qualitative indicators as: Internal provider quality assurance reports to the funding bodies; Inspection reports; Centre reports and external verifier reports to awarding bodies.

These indicators will be kept under review during the first year of the Project to take account of policy changes and will be incorporated into the Pilot phase in the second year.

### **Type of Transfer**

#### **Sectoral Transfer**

The innovative outcomes are the RPLO methodology, tools and methods and an EQF Level 4 and 5 Credit-based approach to RPLO for VET Teachers and Trainers in the partner countries with a range of user groups within national VET systems. These outcomes will be disseminated and exploited by other sectors using national and European networks.

#### **Geographical Transfer**

The countries in the partnership are at different stages of implementing National Qualification Frameworks and RPLO systems. The Pilot phase will develop transnational approaches to assessment and verification that will facilitate future mobility of VET Teachers and Trainers.

#### **Policy Transfer**

The outcomes will be useful to the development of specific policies and especially the refinement of national and European guidelines in RPLO for EQF/ECVET compatible qualifications in other sectors.

### **Innovative results or content on which the project is based**

The innovative content and results are derived from the experience since 2004 in the projects listed in 8.3 above. The recruitment of VET teachers, tutors and trainers in the UK has traditionally relied on those choosing a second career having practised, or continuing to

practise in their occupational area. *Pass on Your Skills* is a recruitment initiative that LLUK is running in both England (Catalyst Programme) and Scotland (Experience Counts) that gives technical and vocational specialists the opportunity to teach in the FE sector in order to fill key vacancies and prepare the next generation of specialists. This is one illustration of the importance of recognising existing knowledge, skills and experience in determining the appropriate pathway to professional status as a teacher, but also that this should be seen as equitable between candidates. Similarly where new Regulations and professional standards have been put in place, as in England in terms of Licensed Teacher status, equitable access for the existing workforce to gaining value from their prior learning and experience is an important component of the professionalisation agenda, especially where it draws in those from parts of the VET system not previously covered by formal requirements.

Describe the rationale behind choosing the above project or product as basis for this proposal

The rationale for the choice of these projects and products are that they are all concerned with the development and implementation of the Common European Principles on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (2004), and the development of the EQF/ECVET. The feasibility of this rationale has been established by the LLUK Level 3 Option Unit "Assessment and Support for the Recognition of Prior Learning through the Accreditation of Learning Outcomes" accredited by LLUK in December 2007 and produced as the pilot UK implementation of the EuroguideVAL Common European Standards.

How does your proposal use the results?

Apart from the Cedefop Panorama (2007), there has not been any investigation of the potential impact of developments in this Sector. The proposal builds on the *general* findings of the above projects using the experience of partners to create accessible, effective and attractive methodologies, tools, methods and support materials for RPLO in this Sector. The specific experiences of validation in Canada, France, Ireland, Scotland, Sweden and Switzerland will be applied to the needs of EQF/ECVET compatible curricula.

What is the added value of your proposal compared to the previous project(s) (listed under 8.3)?

Building the necessary methodology, tools and methods required by RPLO in line with the recent European and National Guidelines cited above. The specific added value is that the proposal will support the work of QCA and other stakeholders in enabling the QCF to make the transition from APL-neutral to APL-friendly as part of the reform of VET in the UK.

**European added value**

The European added value is the support provided to the implementation of Common European tools and methods as part of the Copenhagen process within the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme and especially the Common European Principles for the validation of Non-formal and Informal learning.

As identified in the Helsinki Communiqué (2006) validation is an important part of the support provided by Member States and Social Partners to the three major goals agreed by Ministers of Education:

- Improving the quality and effectiveness of EU education and training systems through ensuring that VET teachers and trainers can demonstrate the benefits of Validation in their personal and professional development through the process of RPLO and providing an attractive and attainable role model to learners.
- Improving accessibility to all through focusing on what learners can do rather than simply on traditional formal teaching opening up greater empowerment of individuals and ensuring that they and their employers can benefit from individual

projects and pathways. This emphasis will be particularly important for those who are not fully included in Lifelong Learning and those with learning disabilities.

- Opening up education and training to the wider world by offering attractive opportunities to recognise non-formal and informal learning.

## **Results**

### **Project Book** - Methodological Report covering

- The nature of appropriate methodology for the development of RPLO-friendly provision.
- A comprehensive specification of appropriate tools, methods and support materials.
- Units of learning and assessment for RPL professionals.
- Analysis of QA approaches used in the partner countries with the implications for the development of RPLO-friendly processes within national qualifications for VET Teachers and Trainers.
- Analysis of the results of the pilot implementation.
- Recommendations for adaptation of national and European Guidelines.

**Target Groups:** National / regional regulators of the VET curriculum; Sector curriculum authorities; employers of VET teachers and trainers and trade unions; qualification awarding bodies; providers of work based learning; individual VET teachers and trainers and employment based training advisors; National OBSERVAL working groups.

**Language:** English with abstracts in Dutch, Spanish and Swedish

**National RPLO procedures** - Specification of recognition procedure with timescale for implementation (Dutch, English, Spanish and Swedish)

**Theoretical Analysis** aimed at VET Researchers and Educational Scientists