

European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network

Work Package 2: Widening Access

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BRIEFING NOTE

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1. Context:

1.1. This briefing note is based on the brief data collection on the provision of guidance and support on the validation process in education and working life organisations prepared by the members of the WP2. Members were asked to respond to the following questions:

- Please describe the process of guidance in the validation process in your country.
- Please specify the services provided (face-to face, ICT tools, etc...).
- Please describe the practitioners who provide the service and briefly mention their qualifications and training.
- 1-2 interesting practices in your country

1.2. Eight members sent their responses: Cyprus, France, Iceland, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and Turkey.

1.3. This brief analysis stimulated the national teams to develop a good framework for reviewing the present situation in relation to the process of guidance in the validation process, contributing to the development of a common understanding. Furthermore, promoted the review of the national contexts and infrastructures in relation to the legislation and implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning thus specifically the provision of guidance within the process of validation.

1.4. Placed at the heart of the notion of the lifelong learning, validation of non-formal and informal learning has been found to be an increasingly important area of activity for policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders. This process helps to improve access and mobility of the individuals both into education and employment. In the group work with the WP 2 countries in the Lisbon Plenary, this area of work was prioritised by many countries. This would also closely link to the adult education, employment and VET areas and support social cohesion. As WP 2, Widening Access, it is our specific focus to explore the guidance support in the validation process since validation should be supported by information, guidance and counselling services. Counselling individuals and providing information, advice and guidance is crucial to validation success. Starting with the process of reaching out to engage potential candidates for validation, then preparing the candidate for assessment, the role continues by guiding the candidate after the assessment decision.

1.5 All national experience reflected in national projects, the work of the peer learning cluster for the recognition of learning outcomes and the 2007 European inventory indicate that potential candidates and those in the process of receiving validation should have access to impartial and informed advice. It is not possible to establish a single process for validation that will accommodate the needs of all candidates. It is widely accepted that the system needs careful tailoring to the needs of the individual and this is, at least partially, achieved by providing information, advice and guidance at the right times.¹

1.6 Brief country-specific summaries of some members on the validation of non-formal and informal learning as an overview are provided as Annex 1. The guidance provision within the validation process of the member states are summarised in Section 2.

1.7 Other resources relevant to the discussions in Utrecht meeting could be:

- European Inventory on Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning, EC and CEDEFOP([http://ec.europa.eu/education/more- information/moreinformation139_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm)),
- European Guidelines for Validating non-formal and informal learning (<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/4041.aspx> (2009))
- Common European principles on the validation of non-formal and informal learning European Council Conclusions (2004)
- www.observal.org

1.8 As background, we also need to clarify terms in relation to the validation process.

- Non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) concerns the knowledge, skills and competences that individuals acquire and develop through work and life experience that is not provided by formal education and training institutions. The learning does not take place in a formal setting such as a school or university but rather in an informal setting such as at work – both paid and voluntary - in the home/community and during leisure activities.
- Although it is not provided by a formal education or training institution and does not usually lead to certification, non-formal learning generally consists of a structured programme of learning with clear objectives, times and support and an explicit intention to learn from the participant. For example, an in-company course to train staff on financial management procedures or an adult literacy course.
- Informal learning differs in that it is not generally structured and, in most cases, the learning is not directly intentional on the part of the learner, it is implicit and results from daily activities related to work, family life or leisure. For example, the acquisition of budget management skills through voluntary work as a treasurer, or of presentational skills through amateur theatre.
- Validation needs to be understood as a broad process encompassing three main steps:
 - *Identification* of the knowledge, skills and competences gained through non-formal and informal learning → learning outcomes become explicit for the individual which provides a better informed basis for future learning and career decisions.
 - *Documentation* of the knowledge, skills and competences gained through NFIL → makes learning outcomes visible beyond the individual and provides a form of 'social' recognition that can be used with employers to show evidence of suitability for jobs and/or with education and training institutions to gain access to formal

¹2009 European Guidelines for Validation, <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/4041.aspx>

education/training opportunities and, possibly, exemption from part of the course.

- *Recognition* of the knowledge, skills and competences gained through NFIL. This step involves assessment of the levels of knowledge, skills and competence the individual possesses against an agreed standard, and, if successful, the issuing of a formal recognized certificate/qualification.

The term 'validation' therefore covers related concepts such as the accreditation or recognition of prior experience and learning.²

2. The present state

In all countries, it seems that there is now recognition of the role validation has to play and a commitment to introducing, implementing, or consolidating systems of validation thus the actual scale of implementation varies. Although the need for the guidance services are well understood, the guidance support within the validation process seems to be in progress, not well-developed.

2.1 Brief description of the **process of guidance in the validation process**

- In France, from the time children enter secondary school until they reach the baccalaureate level (first higher education degree) they are accompanied by their teachers in building a portfolio. This is a personal document in which they register all that can help them to construct their orientation. They are helped in doing so by their teachers (specific time in the curricula) but also by counsellors that are at their disposal inside schools and that they can also consult on a personal basis outside schools in centres for information and guidance. This portfolio as a new tool is experimented as an “online” tool that can include informal and non formal skills. Those skills can be assessed by institutions (graduation in sports, music, licences...) or just attested (mother tongue...). They can later be validated through the validation system. To be recognised as a certification, the person has to undertake a formal validation. Portfolios also exist in adult education; they are constituted with the help of counsellors working for the employment administration.
- In Iceland, guidance has a key role in the APEL process, and the role of guidance is supported by recent legislature on adult education. In March 2010 The Adult Education Act (nr. 27) was passed in Iceland. The act covers the “organisation of adult education by education and training providers that receive accreditation based on the Act, and public allocation for its implementation”. The law also states that individuals who intend to have their individual non-formal and informal learning evaluated and fulfil the requirements of the Act are offered individual guidance and counselling. The counselor takes part in the information process in the beginning and assists in documentation of competences. The counselor should be present and available to the individual through the whole process. Also he/she looks after the interest of the participant and follows Common European principles for the validation process.
- In Spain, counsellors are not in the validation procedure, advisors and assessors legally participate during the open call for the validation of a certain competence thus counsellors are always in attendance to help citizens. Guidance within the validation process is conceived as a non-compulsory accompanying procedure. Citizens can apply for information, guidance or counselling throughout the validation process whenever they fill the need to do so: before, during and after the validation process. The guidance approach is either as the information on the validation procedure itself or as the information, guidance and counselling on how the citizen can best obtain their personal and working goals, that is, help them to better design

² Background Note to Accompany Public Consultation on the Promotion and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, EAC-VALIDATION-CONSULTATION@ec.europa.eu

their learning and training pathway to obtain a degree or a certificate of occupational standards or any other approach that may help them to better organize and structure their lives.

2.2 The services provided (face-to face, ICT tools, etc...)

- The French government is now developing a Unique Public Service (SPO) that will help all information seekers by providing a common service joining together all kind of services: youth information, centres of information and guidance, employment services, aiming at giving a better access and better answer according to the needs.
- The service in Iceland is mostly provided face to face.
- In Poland, An instrument called “vocational preparation of adults” was introduced in 2009 to improve the employability of registered unemployed and some categories of job-seekers who are out of employment and formally confirm their skills and qualifications.
- In Spain, guidance can be provided individually or in groups; face-to-face or by means of telephone and on-line (TIC). Citizens approach the central/national administration by means of TIC. The Ministry of Education offers information and guidance via websites offering the possibility of asking for information by telephone or email. Most citizens approach their regional or local administrations, if jobless most probably their Employment office.
- In Turkey, the national web-based career information system with self-assessment tools, help individuals aged 13 and over to explore their abilities, interests and occupational values and thus make realistic choices. Databases in relation to education and training and the labour market are dimensions of the system. On the web page of the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), the occupational standards, qualifications and the documents on the authorised organisations are placed. Moreover, a new portal is under development and it will provide more information on the validation process for both the individuals and organisations. VQA will run this portal and it will provide information on the validation process and on the services available both to individuals and organisations.

2.3 Description of the practitioners who provide the service and their qualifications and training

- In Cyprus, the counselors in the formal education system has a first degree in Psychology and a Master Degree in Counseling Psychology.
- In Iceland, the counsellors who provide the service should be educational and vocational counsellors, or someone that has been trained in the methodology of validation. It is feasible that the counsellor is educated as a career counsellor. The Education and Training Service Centre develops methodologies to validate non-formal and informal learning in Iceland. They train the counsellors in their specified roles in the process and keep them informed of the development of means and methods for validation of competences in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. The practitioners are licensed guidance counsellors (holding a MA degree or a diploma in Educational and vocational guidance). The Education and Training Service Centre coordinates four development meetings per year with the counsellors where the framework, methods tools regarding counselling for the target group, including counselling in the validation process, are further developed.
- In Poland, in labour offices, vocational development specialists at different categories with Bachelor’s or Master of Arts Degrees plan the human resources development and organisation of trainings and vocational preparation of adults.
- In Slovak Republic, in counselling centres organised by the social affairs and family section (counselling and psychological services offices established at labour offices) supervision is an

obligatory part of training, i.e. during the first two years of employment in the network of counselling centres. There is a two-year education programme organised for new specialists. Guidance in schools is carried out by pedagogical staff (teachers in the role of educational counsellors), as well as specialists (mainly psychologists). Education counsellors complete specialised training and further education in the field.

- In Spain, the professionals who want to be involved in the validation procedure have an intensive on-line training course. It is non-compulsory for counsellors. Guidance counsellors working at Secondary Schools or Schools for Adult Education has an initial compulsory training as psychologists, pedagogues. In the labour sector, employment counsellors have no specific initial training.
- In Turkey, since the validation process is in a low degree of development³, the qualifications of the counsellors as validation practitioners are not defined yet. However, the guidance practitioners in the formal education sector has undergraduate degree in guidance and counseling or psychology.

2.4 Interesting practices on **guidance provision with the validation process**

- The Icelandic validation model emphasizes the role of guidance in the process. The guidance services are financed through the Education and Training Service Centre, free of charge and available according to the needs of the target group at lifelong learning centres distributed around the country. During the beginning phase, the counsellor participates in a working group in cooperation with the project manager and assessors. The working group prepares the projects methods and tools and timeline. After having advertised that validation is being offered for a specific group, an information meeting is held where the counsellors introduces his role in the process. Those who register into the project go to a screening interview with the counsellor(s) in order to see whether they fulfil the criteria set. If they do not, they receive guidance towards appropriate competence development offers. When a group of around 15-20 participants has been formed a portfolio session takes place where the counsellor guides the group through defining their competences (2x2 hour sessions) with a focus on divergent assessment. A convergent assessment against specific standards is then executed with guidance from the assessors involved in the project in addition to the counsellor(s) (2x2 hour sessions). During the assessment phase, counsellors can participate in interviews with the assessor in order to provide support to the participant as needed. Following the assessment phase, each participant meets the counsellor to review the process and explore further options for competence development. In many cases participants go into the formal school system to complete their studies in a specific area (e.g. carpentry) after having received recognition towards a shortening of the study path through the validation process. The counsellors also provide follow-up after the process for the participants as needed.
- In Slovak Republic, in terms of transferring the innovative approaches in the field, the career counsellors are trained through CH-Q training (with Dutch support) which has the goal of further individual development of youth and adults in education and career development to stimulate professional flexibility and mobility“. Focus is on exploring, assessing and validating competences, gained in both education and profession, as well as a broader life context. Moreover, there is new program called “Navigation in the Profession”. The purpose of it is to provide career guidance to different groups by searching for a new profession, either immediately after graduation, or helping in a situation of changing a new professional orientation. It helps to find a “tailor – made” profession.

³ European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning, 2010, http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm),

- In Spain in the Education sector, the Ministry of Education, mainly the Guidance Department, has developed two new platforms:
 - *TodoFP* (*FP = Formación Profesional = VET*): <http://todofp.es> , a new website for information and guidance: mainly information on VET and Guidance (including self-guidance tools), targeted for both citizens, students, parents as well as teachers and guidance professionals. (Questions and messages in the *Suggestions Box* are normally answered within 48 hours).
 - *Acredita*: <http://todofp.es/todofp/formacion/acreditacion-de-competencias.html> Web site with specific information on the Validation procedure, targeted for both the general citizenship and for guidance professionals. The website has different interactive guidance tools that help both young and adult people find their pathways and support their transitions in life .It has self-evaluation questionnaires for the validation procedure and a tool that allows citizens the online management of their own validation procedure.

3 Themes for the study visit

The general theme of the visit is to examine the provision of guidance and support, role of existing information, advice and guidance networks/institutions for the validation of non-formal informal learning policies and practices in countries of WP2 (brief presentations of Iceland, France and Spain) and review the case study of Netherlands. Specifically,

- Providing access to the adequate services of guidance and counselling in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning process
- Qualifications and competences of practitioners: What specific competences and training are needed for the practitioners supporting individuals in the process of validation of informal/non formal learning?
- Transitions : Access to adults and role of Public Employment services in helping adults to source and interpret information about themselves and about learning and work.

Moreover, another task during the field visit will be to review and discuss the existing common reference tools, reference points for lifelong guidance policy and systems development (the proposed new tool), discuss the possible content of the chapter on WP2 of the manual and list the terms proposed to be included in the Glossary. It is proposed that each member state have a preparation on this task beforehand to have a focused discussion and review within the visit.

4. Key Messages

- 4.1 Within the validation process, potential candidates and those in the process of receiving validation should have access to impartial and informed advice. It is not possible to establish a single process for validation that will accommodate the needs of all candidates. It is widely accepted that the system needs careful tailoring to the needs of the individual and this is, at least partially, achieved by providing information, advice and guidance at the right times. Counselling individuals and providing information, advice and guidance is crucial to validation success. Starting with the process of reaching out to engage potential candidates for validation, then preparing the candidate for assessment, the role continues by guiding the candidate after the assessment decision.

4.2 Before a decision is made to seek validation, candidates need to know what the added value is, what to expect, what standards have to be met and what form the evidence of learning outcomes needs to take. Similarly, at the end of validation, or of certification, evidence suggests a candidate will want to know of potential routes to further qualifications that are available. Guidance offered at appropriate points can make this process efficient and effective for all partners.

4.3 Timely access to information, advice and guidance is essential: ICT-based systems offer many advantages to users as well as providing -effective tools for information exchange between candidates and counsellors. The trend to developing ICT solutions for guidance within validation systems continues. Many initiatives are on a national scale and it seems clear that ICT systems are the key to further expansion of validation processes, especially in the assessment phase.

4.4 The distinctive part of the counsellors' role within the validation process is their independence from the actual assessment process for an individual and their ability to offer impartial but useful advice. To The distinctive part of the counsellors' role is their independence from the actual assessment process for an individual and their ability to offer impartial but useful advice.

To fulfill this role counsellors should have:

- a thorough knowledge of the education system (orientation);
- a thorough knowledge of the validation process (information);
- an understanding of the labour market (expected standards and post assessment advice);
- a list of contacts (experts) to answer specific technical questions (social partners and other sector experts).

Annex 1

THE BRIEF SUMMARIES of the validation of non-formal and informal learning in some of the WP 2 member states

Cyprus

There is no legislation or guidelines for validation in place at national level, there are some initiatives emerging in the private sector, implemented both by social partners and individual companies, mainly in the areas of IT, banking and accounting/auditing. The public and private sector provision has been encouraged and strengthened primarily through the approval and subsequent subsidization of training activities provided by the Human Resource Development Authority. The Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and other ministries also play a role in the provision of non-formal learning. The future development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that will incorporate the System of Vocational Qualifications is expected to contribute to the further improvement of knowledge, skills and competences through lifelong learning. The transparency of Vocational Qualifications, that is an important part of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), is expected to improve the vocational education and training systems. As a result, the persons involved will acquire the knowledge, skills and competences that are needed in the labour market both at National and European level.

France

France is one of the countries with a high level of development in validation of non-formal and informal learning. Validation of prior learning (VAE) has been established as a right for every citizen in France in 2002 and used to deliver whole or partial qualifications. Bodies awarding qualifications has developed their own rules for the context –specific implementation of the principles outlined in the legislation. The most recent change in 2009 aimed to increase the number of individuals accessing the validation process, in particular private sector workers and to develop guidance for the validation process. In the educational field, competences are part of the validation of the national common base. It is built from primary schooling until the age of 16 (end of compulsory education). The competences are validated within the disciplinary teaching by the teachers; some competences are “key-competences” in guidance: autonomy and initiative, civic and social skills. Since 2002, a significant investment has been made in the higher education sector in particular to produce standards described in terms of learning outcomes in order to facilitate the system. In addition, in higher education, recognition of professional experience has also been used for a long time to allow access to individuals who do not meet formal requirement criteria and, in some cases, acquisition of diploma. The number of VAE candidates per year is high in comparison to most other European countries.⁴

Iceland

The Education and Training Service Centre is contracted by the Ministry of Education to develop methodologies to validate non-formal and informal learning in Iceland. The main target group is people with little formal education but later the service will be made available to qualified staff on

⁴ 2009 European Guidelines for Validation, <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/4041.aspx>

the labour market. Since the project started in 2004 various pilot projects have been carried out and information on methods and policy has been collected from neighbouring countries.

In Iceland the validation process can be described in five steps.

1. Information and feedback. Before the validation process is done it is important to inform about the goal of the validation, role of assessors, possible outcome and the rights of the individual in the process.
2. Documentation. In this step the individual looks back on his life and documents competences he/she has acquired through work, education and spare time (this may include recommendations from employers, diplomas, certificates etc.). In this step the role of the counselor is highlighted – *and access should always be to a counselor who can guide and support through the whole process.*
3. Analysis. An interview takes place after the documentation where the individual and assessor decide how the competence measures up to certain qualification requirements. *The counselor can take part in the interview as well as he/she has important insight in the individuals' strengths and competences.*
4. Confirmation. When it has been decided which competences are eligible for validation a confirmation process is needed. *This is done according to a confirmation plan accepted by the assessor and counselor.* Special needs of each person should be taken in account – need for more time, usage of visual example, technical confirmation and so on. It is important to look for other means than conventional tests to confirm validation.
5. Validation and acceptance of competence. A module is considered validated when it has been documented officially in the name of the individual as finished or passed. It is important that stakeholders accept the validation and are informed about the validation procedure.

Latvia

There does not exist legally regulated process of the provision of guidance services for the validation process and the resources for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Latvia. The Ministry of Education and Science has started the development of the range of necessary legal regulation documents and negotiation process for determining institutional responsibility (which institutions take care of what issues).

Poland

There is no general system for validation of non-formal and informal learning in Poland. Numerous actions are taken to create such a system. The Interministerial Team for Life-Long Learning, including Polish Qualifications Framework was established in February 2010. This team is a platform for the cooperation between different Ministries and stakeholders. On 14th February 2011 the team adopted the strategic document entitled “Lifelong learning perspectives” and this document sets all objectives and directions of activity concerning lifelong learning until 2020. The contents of the document takes account of the obligations following from the establishment of the European lifelong learning area, including the European Qualifications Framework and Poland-specific conditions enlisted in the diagnosis. Activities aimed at developing the lifelong learning and main effects thereof, i.e. competences and qualifications of persons will be taken into account in all prepared development strategies and documents containing detailed description of actions necessary for the development of competences and qualifications of persons in all sectors will be prepared.

This document points out that in adult life, having entered the labour market, people need to constantly develop and improve their key competences and professional competence in such a way so as to ensure that those persons are ready for vocational re-orientation, even towards the end of their

activity on the labour market. Education and training systems should re-orientate towards closer cooperation with the work environment and toward incorporating to a greater extent the role of learning in other systems than formal environment. This requires the acceptance of non-formal and informal learning as equivalent forms of learning and gaining qualifications, including the development of a system of identification, evaluation and acceptance of the effects of learning in other systems than formal environment. In Poland, as in most EU Member States, a decision was made to elaborate and implement a system of Polish Qualifications Framework as a tool for comparing qualifications which is consistent in its assumptions with the arrangements at the European level. This tool should contribute to the implementation of changes aiming at creating a transparent and efficient national qualifications system, taking account of the equivalent strength of gaining qualifications through different paths – formal, non-formal and informal.

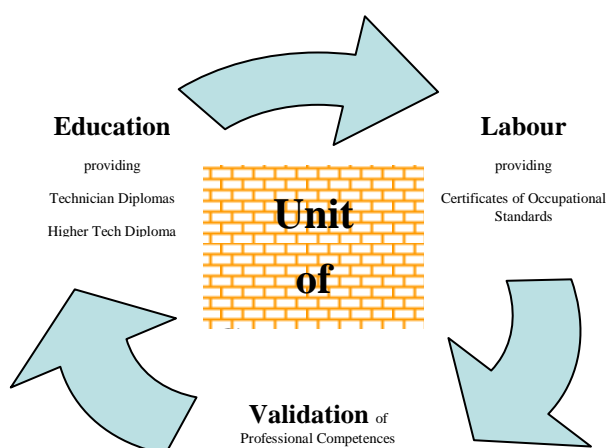
Slovak Republic

Slovak Republic is considered to have a medium-low degree of development⁵ in the validation of non-formal and informal learning and has established validation systems in one or more sectors, but not amounting to an overall framework for all types of learning. Validation systems are utilized, but take-up remains more limited.

Spain

The issue of validation of prior experience in an official national basis has been on the agenda for the first time in Spain very recently. Nowadays, the validation process is based on a very new legislative procedure; a national law passed in July 2009 “Validation of Professional Competences acquired by working experience” which includes the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

In order to understand the new Spanish Lifelong Learning LLL system, the concept of “*Unit of Competence*” needs to be understood. A “Unit of Competence” is the “*Minimum knowledge/Skill Unit*” acknowledged and accepted by both sectors, Education and Labour and likewise, Units of Competence are central/pivotal to the validation process as indicated in the Figure below. With the units of competence, citizens can move and progress from education sector to labour sector or vice versa and validate their professional competences acquired in other ways (by working experience,



informal or non-formal learning). This LLL comprehensive, all-inclusive system will support citizens to make their transitions in life and to manage and develop the nowadays non-linear career pathways.

The validation process can be described as divided in 3 compulsory phases (guidance is not included in the validation process since it is absolutely voluntary):

1. Advise:

Compulsory phase provided individually or in groups, face-to-face or by means of TIC, by an Advisor (who is an expert in the field

⁵ European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning, 2010, http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm

to be validated) that will familiarize the citizen with the access requirements (age/working experience); will help to self-evaluate his/her competences, and will finally help to provide the relevant evidence. This advisor will draft a non-binding report for the evaluator. The advisor can profit from a specifically designed Advisor's handbook and a Handbook of evidences (national common reference for assessing each competence), among other tools.

2. Assessment/Evaluation:

The "Commission of Assessors", consisting of 5 assessors, all experts in the field to be validated, will evaluate the professional competence of the candidate. Assessors will also benefit from an Assessor's Handbook and the Guides of Evidence (national common reference for assessing each competence), among other tools. The result of his/her assessment must be "a proved / non-proved professional competence".

3. Accreditation & Registration:

Professional competence will be accredited by means of "Units of Competence". These "Units of Competence" will be compiled in a Register. According to citizens' needs and to better comply with his/her career pathways, these Units of Competence may be accumulated in order to obtain a Certificate of Occupational Standards (minimum accreditation for working) awarded by the Ministry of Labour or a Technician or Higher Technician Diploma (VET Diplomas) awarded by the Ministry of Education.

Turkey

Turkey has shown progress in the development of national policies in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning. It is well recognised by both public and private actors that there is a need to make use of the full range of learning outcomes, irrespective of their origin, and to successfully link those experiences to formal standards or a qualifications framework.

A significant development in this respect is Law No.5544, adopted in 2006. As noted in the previous European Inventory report for Turkey this Law on the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) indicated the start of a new period regarding the recognition and certification of professional competences. A national qualifications framework has been in the process of development under the coordination of VQA and the stakeholders and is expected to be completed by the end of 2010. Once the national qualifications framework is established it will be used to support the provision of validation opportunities. This framework has been in the process of development with the communication, co-ordination and collaboration of the public and private sector, labour unions and professional organisations, with new policies and strategies being defined.