



European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014

Country report Finland

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1 Introduction

Higher Education

In Finland the most extensive developments in validation over the past few years have taken place in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Prior to 2010, first steps towards establishing validation procedures and raising awareness were taken in HEIs. After 2010, however, the development seemed to gain more momentum through realisation of concrete, more systematic approaches to validation in HEIs¹. New guidelines² to validation in Higher Education (HE) have been developed. Those include prior learning from formal, non-formal and informal contexts.

The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture set up a working group to prepare common goals for post experience academic education in 2012. The working group proposes the creation of new professional post-experience specialisation education in higher education³. This would replace existing professional specialisation training in polytechnics, and specialisation studies and specialisation programmes in universities. The new specialisation education would be governed by clear legislative parameters, creating a new type of education alongside degree studies and continuing education. It is proposed that the reform enter into force on 1 January 2015. Recognition of prior learning is an essential element of the new educational model⁴.

Liberal Adult Education (non-formal)

Another new development on a sectoral level is the adaptation of validation by non-formal education. OK Study Centre is a nationwide adult education institution. It is maintained by an educational NGO called the Association for Educational Activity (Opintotoiminnan Keskusliitto ry), which acts as an umbrella for its 67 member organisations. OK Study Centre focusses on training associations and NGOs. The Centre has developed an e-learning environment⁵ that guides the trainers of the organisation to construct their training programmes in terms of learning outcomes and makes validation feasible. The Centre has also introduced the Open Badge –system⁶, the aim of which is to recognize and certify learning through the courses provided by the OK Study Centre and in the near future Open Badges will also be developed for learning gained in the informal sector, e.g. in voluntary work.

Initial Vocational Education and Training

The students have the right to get their prior studies or other acquired competence corresponding to the key objectives of the national qualification requirements assessed and recognised. The National Qualification Requirements have a legal status. They have been based on a learning outcome approach from the early 1990s. Revisions of the qualifications are done on a regular basis to better meet with the changing requirements of working life.

The students may include prior competence in the qualification and use it to replace compulsory, elective or free-choice studies. If necessary, the equivalence of the competence must be demonstrated by a vocational skills demonstration, for example.

¹ <http://www.uef.fi/en/studies/rpl-decisions-and-guidelines>

² <http://www.tunnistaosaaminen.fi/node/27>

³ Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland (2013) *Vanguard expertise. New professional specialisation studies in tertiary education (Asiantuntijuus edellä. Korkeakoulujen uusi erikoistumiskoulutus)*. Available from: <http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2013/liitteet/tr07.pdf?lang=en> [Accessed on 01/11/2013].

⁴ For more information see the Report in Finnish and abstract in Swedish and English:

<http://www.tunnistaosaaminen.fi/node/27> Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland (2013) *Vanguard expertise. New professional specialisation studies in tertiary education (Asiantuntijuus edellä. Korkeakoulujen uusi erikoistumiskoulutus)*. Available from: <http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2013/liitteet/tr07.pdf?lang=en> [Accessed on 01/11/2013].

⁵ <http://ostu.ok-opintokeskus.fi/>

⁶ <http://ok-opintokeskus.fi/osaamismerkeill%C3%A4-osaaminen-n%C3%A4ky%C3%A4ksi>

During the recent years, validation procedures have been systematically developed in IVET. Many vocational education providers see validation as a possibility to motivate young people with existing competences by recognising them. This development varies between vocational colleges and even within colleges⁷. However, there is a growing consensus among training providers that the role of validation should be strengthened in IVET, since young people increasingly gain competences through their hobbies, summer jobs, on-the-job-training, voluntary work etc.

Competence Based Qualifications (initial, further and specialist vocational qualifications)

The Competence Based Qualifications (CBQs) in Finland embed validation of non-formal and informal learning as an integral part of the entire qualifications system. The system has been in place since 1994 and was further strengthened in 2007 by the Decree on Individualisation (see 2.1. for further details). There have not been any major changes with regards to CBQs in Finland in recent years. The CBQ system is very popular among the adult population in Finland and there are ca. 100 000 people involved in the CBQ system yearly. The Qualification Requirements have a legal status and the revisions of the qualifications are done on a regular basis to better meet the changing requirements of working life.

2 National perspective on validation

2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has relatively long and established roots in Finland and the legislation and policies are well developed and detailed. However, there is no one single law regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning, but laws and regulations for each field of education define validation separately. These fields include general upper secondary education, vocational education and training (including adult VET), and higher education. The core message of the legislation is that validation of non-formal and informal learning is a subjective right of the individual and the competences of an individual should be validated regardless of when and where they have been acquired.

There have been no changes in legislation since 2010 regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning. The first Government Proposal to the Parliament for an Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning was prepared in 2010 based on a Committee Report National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning (2009)⁸. In May 2012, the Government submitted to the Parliament the second proposal for an Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning. The proposals are yet to be enforced. The proposed law on National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning (2012)⁹ is yet to be enforced. However, the proposal is relatively well known and used by practitioners in Finland despite the delay in the enforcement. The NQF "has led to new and intensified discussions about validation of prior learning in the country" and "it has meant that learning outcomes (in terms of knowledge, skills and competences) have been defined for all levels"¹⁰.

A new draft proposal¹¹ (FI) for a change in legislation regarding VET qualifications and ECVET will be proposed by the Government. It has been on public consultation and is planned to be passed to the Parliament in March 2014. This would bring relatively extensive changes in legislation as the proposal suggests changes to both Vocational Education Act and Vocational Adult Education Act. The objective of the proposal is to clarify the vocational

⁷ Interview

⁸ http://www.oph.fi/download/121526_NQF-muistio_EN_02_10.pdf

⁹ <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/esitykset/he/2012/20120038.pdf>

¹⁰ Nevala, A-M, 2011. *European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010. Country Report: Finland.*

¹¹ http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Koulutus/artikkelit/tutke/liitteet/TUTKE_HEluonnos_27_8_2013.pdf

qualifications system, the terminology and validation of prior learning and the use of ECVET. The aim is to have the law enforced on the 1.8.2015. The draft proposal stresses and strengthens the learning outcomes based approach and better matching of qualification requirements and the needs of working life, and flexibility/ individual pathways. The draft proposal suggests a shift from time based credit or points (opintoviikko) to learning outcomes based competence points (osaamispiste, ECVET-points).

As stated earlier, each field of education has separate laws and regulations regarding validation.

In the General upper secondary education Act (629/1998 §23)¹² (FI) (Lukiolaki) it is stated that the student has a right to have the competences that are relevant in the general upper secondary curriculum of the general upper secondary school assessed and recognised. The education provider is responsible for planning and organising the assessment procedures needed to verify the competences. This option is not widely used.

The Vocational Education Act (630/1998)¹³(FI) (Laki ammatillisesta koulutuksesta)¹³ is similar to the General upper secondary education Act with regards to validation, but in addition there is a reference to skills demonstration in case there is no documented evidence to support the possession of the required competences. In IVET, validation of non-formal and informal learning has increased substantially recently. There are no national statistics about it, but there have been several projects enhancing the validation in the IVET and many systematic developments.

Vocational Adult Education Act (631/1998)¹⁴ (FI) (Laki ammatillisesta aikuiskoulutuksesta) has the most detailed descriptions and Decrees regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning. This law refers to the Competence Based Qualifications (CBQs). The law describes the CBQs as “qualifications independent of the acquisition method of vocational skills or competences”. The Act was strengthened by the Personalisation Regulation in 2007¹⁵ (FI). It defines the validation process in three stages that will be described later in this chapter.

The University of Applied Sciences Decree (352/2003 §14)¹⁶ (Valtioneuvoston asetus ammattikorkeakouluista) states that a student may - according to the decision of the University of Applied Sciences - accredit or substitute studies linked to the degree in question, also through competences gained in non-formal or informal contexts.

The Universities Act (558/2009 §44)¹⁷(EN) (Yliopistolaki) states that:

“The student may, as determined by the university, have knowledge and skills attested in some other manner counted towards the degree or substitute studies in the degree syllabus with knowledge and skills attested in some other manner.”

However, many universities in Finland still opt for recognition of prior formal learning, if any.

Legislation grants a subjective right for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the different fields of formal education. In general, in upper secondary education, in higher education and in initial vocational education; validation procedures are constantly being developed and they are becoming more widespread and popular. However, the only systematic approach that is nationally used by all education providers is the CBQs system.

The validation procedure (referred to as personalisation¹⁸ in the CBQ system) consists of three stages:

Application phase (cf. identification phase)

¹² <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1998/19980629>

¹³ <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1998/19980630>

¹⁴ <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1998/19980631>

¹⁵ http://www.oph.fi/download/47354_Henkilokohtaistaminen.pdf

¹⁶ <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/smur/2003/20030352>

¹⁷ <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2009/en20090558.pdf>

¹⁸ http://www.oph.fi/download/47354_Henkilokohtaistaminen.pdf

The personalisation in the application phase begins from information and initial guidance. It has to be ensured by the (training) organisation that each candidate receives adequate information on possible options of training programmes, validation procedures and options for learning methods. The candidate has a wide variety of options and together with the organisation's advisors and counsellors the ideal "learning path" or "career path" is canvassed. The candidate's skills and prior learning (regardless of the method or place of acquiring them) are canvassed and identified, possible needs for additional training and learning are identified along with possible needs for guidance and support during the entire process.

Competence test phase (cf. assessment phase)

The planning of competence tests is dependent on the results of the application phase and the requirements of the CBQ in question. If the applicant provides enough evidence of his/her skills in the canvassing process, some or all CBQ modules may be accredited without testing. If, however, the applicant provides no or insufficient evidence, competence tests are planned to take place in a suitable working environment. The testing situations are planned in co-operation with work place representatives and carried out to meet with the CBQ requirements. Also, the candidate's cultural and language background is taken into consideration when planning the tests.

At this phase an individual competence-based test plan is drafted, in which the candidate, along with the advisor and/or trainer compile a plan according to which the candidate will carry out the required competence tests. The plan states the method, place and time of carrying out the tests. Competence tests are carried out accordingly.

Applicants are entitled to receive support and advisory counselling throughout the entire process.

Completing the vocational skills phase

In case the candidate requires preparatory training in order to carry out the CBQs, the (training) organisation is responsible for canvassing and identifying the learning needs of the applicant. The organisation has to be able to provide flexibility in learning options and various study methods and learning environments for the candidate. The organisation has to take into account the candidate's life and work situation, learning needs including on-the-job-learning and prior learning, cultural and linguistic background.

Advisors and/or trainers provide counselling and support throughout the planning of training and the training itself. The counselling includes support in different kinds of learning methods, candidate's rights and obligations, introduction to the studies and learning environments and compilation of individual learning plans.

Documentation (cf. documentation phase)

Each phase is recorded into a single document that can be used for follow up purposes and to maintain quality. The documentation in individualisation is rarely used for making a person's competences visible, but rather for QA and follow-up purposes. The documentation is rarely used by the individual as independent documentation for proof of competences. If necessary, the candidate may, however, receive a certificate for each passed unit/module.

Certification

In the CBQ system, certificates are awarded by Qualification Committees (Näyttötutkintotoimikunta). The Committees are sector specific tripartite bodies, whose responsibility is to oversee the quality of the provision of CBQs. The Committees evaluate the documentation provided by the candidate regarding prior learning and monitor that the competence tests are carried out according to the qualification requirements. In the CBQ system the candidate can also receive a certificate of a qualification unit at request.

In some higher education institutions (e.g. University of Eastern Finland) in which validation procedures are provided, the process consists of application, identification (evidence),

assessment and accreditation. In case there is no documented evidence, competence tests are used too. In HE it is not possible to carry out the entire qualification through validation.¹⁹

In Finland the validation procedures are embedded into formal education, in which the objective is to achieve a qualification or a qualification unit or units. Therefore it is not common that the individuals take advantage of the different stages of validation separately, i.e. for identification purposes. However, there is evidence from the non-formal sector, third sector as well as from working life that identification and documentation are used to make an individual's competences visible.

2.2 Skills audits

The Finnish employment services have a national website that provides services in three languages: Finnish, Swedish and English. The employment services provide individual support and counselling for job seekers. The objective of vocational guidance and career planning²⁰ services of the employment offices is to assess the capacities, objectives and alternatives related to education, training and employment and help jobseekers to make a career plan that best matches one's situation. One's own targets are specified and a psychologist will assist job seekers in finding the right solutions. At a job search interview the job seeker, together with the employment counsellor, assess the competences and need for training of the client. A job search plan is carried out as a result of the interview.

Various online services have also been developed to support career planning. They provide access to information about training and employment opportunities and ways of assessing your own interests and objectives.

Job search training and *job clubs*²¹ are also provided free of charge for the job seekers. The purpose of job search training is to recognise one's own strengths, prepare for job interviews and make job applications.

The employment services also procure training services from various training providers. The majority of the procured formal training consist of CBQs, in which all candidates will have their competences validated. In practice all labour training includes skills audits as the core of the training. The main target groups for these services are the unemployed, people at risk of unemployment and immigrants.

2.3 Relationship with qualifications framework and credit systems, and information on standards used for validation

Qualifications and qualifications frameworks

*"Transparency and comparability of qualifications, at national and European level, are core objectives of the NQF. This is to be achieved by describing all existing qualifications in a coherent way and by using a consistent conceptual approach. This will illustrate the relationship between different qualifications and clarify how individuals can make progress within the system and how they can build pathways based on experience and/or on formal learning. Recognition of prior learning is emphasised as an important feature of the NQF and as a necessary element in a strategy for lifelong learning"*²².

The Finnish NQF, Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning, has been inspired by the EQF so that it introduces eight levels. The level descriptors are Knowledge, Work method and application (skills), Responsibility, management and entrepreneurship, Evaluation and Key skills for lifelong learning.

¹⁹More detailed description in English on the University of Eastern Finland website:
http://www.uef.fi/documents/16531/153445/RPL_PROCESS_UEF.pdf/82c9ae64-f8df-476b-a366-b51f0888b482

²⁰http://www.mol.fi/mol/en/02_working/01_services/03_vocationalguidance/index.jsp

²¹http://www.mol.fi/mol/en/02_working/01_services/01_jobseeking/01_support_jobsearch/index.jsp

²² Cedefop. 2013. Analysis and overview of NQF developments in European countries. Annual report 2012.
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/21311.aspx>

Credit systems

ECTS have been in use in all HE institutions since 1.8.2005. The corresponding laws and regulations relating to recognition of prior learning (including formal learning) support the use of ECTS points especially in mobility. Many HEIs have developed or are in the process of developing learning outcomes based curricula, which will further enhance linking validation and the ECTS points. In HE it is not possible to obtain a full degree²³ via validation, but the number of credits obtained through validation is not limited. In Finland validation is not commonly used for access purposes, but the validation procedure begins after enrolment.

ECVET system is relatively well developed in Finland. The National Board of Education started a FINECVET –project²⁴ already in 2004, the purpose of which was to enhance and test the implementation of the ECVET system. The project had three phases and the last phase ended in 2012. Several case studies²⁵ were reported and analysed during the project both from initial vocational education and CBQs (adult VET). At the end of the FINECVET –project a handbook²⁶ was published. The FINECVET publication provides information on the process of recognition and validation of learning that has taken place abroad, including models for Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreements, process descriptions and an ECVET vocabulary.

The Finnish VET qualification system is described in learning outcomes since the early 1990s and it is modular, thus ECVET is relatively unproblematic to implement. Finland foresees to implement ECVET points (a shift from time based study points to competence points) in IVET qualifications in 2015 (alterations in the Vocational Education Act on ECVET).

Practically all vocational qualifications can be obtained partially and/or fully through validation. Validation as a procedure is not as such used for access purposes, but the general prerequisite to enter further or specialised qualifications is experience of the field in question. There are no specific statistics on the number of credits or passed modules via validation in vocational education and training. There are rough estimates that ca. 5-10% of the candidates taking CBQs enter the assessment phase directly without any further learning. This figure is relatively low considering that most of the candidates that take CBQs have extensive work experience. The reasons for this appear to be the following: firstly, there is no earmarked financing for validation process and the VET providers gain public financing for arranging training, which is their basic task. Secondly, the Finnish education system for the most part is free of charge and even if validation is offered as an option, many people decline it as they find education beneficial²⁷.

The Finnish NQF consists of eight levels and thus corresponds with the EQF levels. All upper secondary qualifications (general and vocational) and further vocational qualifications are placed on level 4 (all these qualifications grant access to HE irrespective of whether qualifications are gained through validation or education). Specialist vocational qualifications are placed on level 5 (also access to HE). The HE qualifications are placed on levels 6-8 respectively according to the three cycle HE qualification framework.

Standards

In the Finnish VET system (both IVET and CBQs) there are national qualification requirements that are described in learning outcomes and include assessment targets, criteria and methods. The qualification requirements are developed in close co-operation with working life and educational authorities. The standards and the certification are the

²³http://www.uef.fi/documents/16531/153445/Instructions+on+the+practices+and+procedures+for+recognising+prior+learning+_eng.pdf/d9ada0f4-a078-4b53-b8b9-c955a4fe523d

²⁴ http://www.finecvet.fi/pages/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=6

²⁵ http://www.finecvet.fi/pages/images/stories/tiedostot/2011/Individual_learning_paths_Lapland_Tourism_College.pdf

²⁶ Finnish National Board of Education. 2012. Finecvet as Pioneer. From Piloting to Implementation! http://www.finecvet.fi/pages/images/stories/tiedostot/2012/987849_FINECVET-ENG.pdf

²⁷ Interview

same for formal education and validation procedures. The market value of the Finnish VET qualifications is high, because working life is closely integrated in the qualification development process as well as in the assessment procedures and providing candidates with further learning possibilities.

As the qualification requirements are the same for both formal education and validation purposes, the assessment stresses learning outcomes and not the learning process in both cases. In CBQs this has been the practice since 1995 and today skills demonstrations²⁸ are carried out also in school based IVET system. The learning outcomes based qualification criteria are the corner stone of the quality assurance in the Finnish VET system.

In Higher Education there are no national standards, but the institutions are responsible for the curriculum development. Some HEIs, who have adopted validation procedures, have started developing learning outcomes based curricula, which makes validation procedures easier and more transparent.

2.4 National institutional framework

In Finland there is no central institution responsible for validation as a whole, although “the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education are the two authorities leading work in this field”²⁹. In Finland validation procedures are embedded in formal qualification structures in VET and in HE. The VET system is governed by the National Board of Education and the HEIs decide on their procedures and organisation independently.

2.5 Governance and allocation of responsibilities

2.5.1 Allocation of responsibilities

In Finland the Ministry of Culture and Education is responsible for the qualifications structure, i.e. which qualifications are included in the structure and which are for instance obsolete or too marginal and need to be removed. The Ministry is responsible for strategic planning and guidelines in Education and Research 2011-2016, A Development Plan³⁰ (EN), which outlines national priorities in education, including validation, and is carried out every four years. The Ministry is in charge of development of legislation regarding validation.

The National Board of Education³¹ has a more executive role. The NBE decides the national qualifications requirements of VET qualifications in co-operation with working life and training providers. The NBE provides the validation practitioners with guidelines and has a strong role in the quality assurance with regards to validation. The NBE is also allocating finances to the development of validation in many respects, e.g. development projects for improving validation practices and competence development of the validation professionals.

The National Education and Training Committees are tripartite advisory bodies appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture to ensure effective contacts between the VET sector and the world of work at a national level. Committees participate in development and anticipation of vocational education and training as advisory bodies.

Qualification Committees³² have the responsibility of supervising and monitoring the quality of competence tests and are responsible for organizing CBQs. The Committees also decide on rectifying an assessment. The Committees receive the proposals for recognition of prior learning from the tri-partite group of assessors. The Committee members are experts of the given field and they are appointed by the NBE. The members represent employer organisations, employee organisations, training organisations and unions. The Qualification

²⁸ <http://www.ammattiosaaja.fi/en/at-the-vocational-school/vocational-skills-demonstrations>

²⁹ Nevala, A-M, 2011. European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010. Country Report: Finland. P. 3.

³⁰ Ministry of Education and Culture. 2012. Education and Research. A Development Plan. <http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2012/liitteet/okm03.pdf?lang=fi>

³¹ http://www.oph.fi/english/education/adult_education/vocational_adult_education

³² http://www.oph.fi/english/mobility/europass/finnish_education_system/vocational_education_and_training

Committees award the qualification certificates based on the documentation and recommendation provided by the qualification organisers.

2.5.2 Explain more specifically the role of different stakeholders

Education and training providers

Vocational adult education and training (CBQs)

The bodies organising CBQs are working side by side with working life. The assessment of the competence tests is carried out in a tripartite manner, i.e. employer and employee representatives as well as education representatives are mandatory in the assessment process of CBQs. The competence tests normally take place in an authentic work environment (e.g. the candidate's job or on-the-job-training location), which requires close cooperation with working life.

The bodies organising CBQs often arrange preparatory training and guidance. In some cases, the CBQ organisers may procure the guidance and preparatory training services from a different organisation.

It is the responsibility of the CBQ providers to train the working life assessors and tutors. The training usually consists of the qualification requirements, guidance and assessment and assessment criteria.

Guidance in CBQs is an integral part of the process. It is the right of the individual to receive guidance at all stages of the process. Guidance is provided by the CBQ provider.

IVET (School based)

In initial vocational education and training cooperation with working life is important, but it is not in such a dominant role as in CBQs. Validation provision between IVET providers vary; some IVET organisations have developed systematic validation procedures and assessment of informal and non-formal learning are carried out throughout the education process and in co-operation with working life. In some IVET organisations only prior formal learning is recognised³³. The students' knowledge and skills are assessed and the students are given feedback on their progress at sufficiently regular intervals both during and after the studies. The students' acceptable performances are graded on the following scale: excellent (3), good (2) and satisfactory (1). The national qualification requirements contain criteria for student assessment.

In vocational qualification units, competence is assessed by means of vocational skills demonstrations, which entail performing work assignments relevant to the vocational skills requirements in the most authentic settings possible. Where necessary, other assessment methods are used to supplement vocational skills demonstrations. Skills demonstrations are designed, implemented and assessed in co-operation with representatives of the world of work within the framework of the national qualification requirements. As far as possible, skills demonstrations are arranged as part of on-the-job learning periods, either in workplaces or at vocational institutions. Students are awarded a separate certificate for completion of skills demonstrations, which forms part of the qualification certificate.

Assessment in IVET is carried out in co-operation with teachers, on-the-job instructors or workplace instructors. Workplace instructors are appointed by the employer. The purpose of the assessment is to guide, motivate the students, and develop their abilities in self-assessment.³⁴

VET providers maintain one or more bodies for vocational skills demonstrations and some also have field-specific local advisory councils, which include representatives of the world of

³³ Interview

³⁴ http://www.oph.fi/english/education/vocational_upper_secondary_education_and_training/curriculum

work. Close contacts with the local world of work constitute the cornerstone for high-quality instruction.

Higher Education

HEIs are autonomous and may independently decide on the validation procedures. As stated earlier on, some HEIs have opted out of validation, but the HEIs that have embraced validation appear to have organised it along similar lines as in IVET. There is relatively little cooperation on validation procedures with working life or any other stakeholders (mostly intra disciplinary cooperation)³⁵.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

Private sector actors, including social partners, have an important role in collaboration and development activities in the CBQs system and in IVET. In comparison to many other European countries, the involvement of the private sector in the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland is very practical and strong. For example, their engagement in the competence-based qualification system stretches from national to local level and from strategic work to being involved in assessments.³⁶ To be more specific, they are involved in:

- Assessing competence tests: Employee and employer representatives, together with a qualified assessor (usually a vocational teacher), make up the tripartite assessment team. Additionally, self-assessment by the candidate is carried out. Assessing skills demonstrations: In addition to the teacher, a working life representative and the student himself or herself participate in the assessment of the demonstrations.
- Quality assurance and supervision of competence-based tests: Social partners take part in Qualification Committees (*tutkintotoimikunta*) that are tripartite committees set up by the Finnish National Board of Education to oversee the organisation and supervision of competence-based tests.
- Quality assurance of skills demonstrations: Each education provider appoints a tri-partite body for the purposes of implementing and monitoring skills demonstrations. Vocational skills demonstrations aim to ensure the quality of education and training in co-operation with working life and feedback received from skills demonstrations is used as a basis for developing instruction. National learning outcomes are also evaluated on the basis of skills demonstrations.
- Planning and development of VET: Social partners take part in the National Education and Training Committees that operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture for the planning and development of vocational education (including curricula development).
- Provision of workplace learning opportunities for VET students (IVET, CBQs and polytechnics).

A growing number of companies are also making use of the opportunities provided by the competence-based education system by encouraging their employees to have the learning they have acquired at work and in other parts of life (in formal, informal or non-formal settings) validated. The CBQ system is particularly appealing for them as it is based on the needs of working life. Furthermore, the basic idea behind the system is that adults with previous work (paid or unpaid) and/or study experience should only study those areas of study programmes that provide them with skills that they do not as yet command. It therefore enables employees to shorten their study time by having their prior experience validated. This reduces costs (time and training costs) for the company and its employees³⁷.

Third sector organisations

³⁵ Interview

³⁶ Nevala, A-M, 2011. European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010. Country Report: Finland.

³⁷ Nevala, A-M, 2011. European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010. Country Report: Finland.

Third sector actors inform their target groups about the CBQs and the possibility for validation (e.g. third sector associations for immigrants). Their employee and employer members can also act as co-assessors in the validation process and provide guidance services for their customers.

Some third sector organisations provide validation services and have developed tools for validation. OK Study Centre³⁸, as explained in the introduction, is a nationwide adult education institution. It is maintained by an educational NGO called the Association for Educational Activity (Opintotoiminnan Keskusliitto ry), which acts as an umbrella for its 67 member organisations.

OK Study Centre has developed an e-learning platform³⁹ for the members, which promotes and instructs how to validate the competences of their customers. They have developed methodology and learning outcome based certification. The outcomes of the validation can be taken advantage of in formal training as the learning outcomes are made visible.

2.5.3 Coordination between stakeholders

As validation procedures are mainly embedded in the formal education systems, there is wide national coordination between different stakeholders as earlier described. The legislation and policies are detailed and determine the roles and involvement of different stakeholders. National coordination is very effective and brings transparency to the validation procedures. All stakeholders know their role and responsibilities, thus increasing the quality of the validation procedures in general.

2.6 Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives

TYÖELÄMÄSSÄ HANKITUN OSAAMISEN TUNNUSTAMINEN KORKEAKOULUISSA – ESF project The University of Eastern Finland coordinated an ESF -project “**Recognition of working life competences in higher education**”. The project started in 2010 and ended in 2012.

The outcomes of the project:

- Regional validation network
- Validation process implemented in the HEIs of the region: University of Eastern Finland, Universities of Applied Sciences of Savonia, Mikkeli and North-Karelia
- HEIs have tested and evaluated validation practices⁴⁰ (EN)
- Publication: Osaaminen näkyväksi. 2012. Eds. Airola, A. & Hirvonen, H. (Making Learning Visible)⁴¹
- The practitioners are able to develop learning outcome based curricula, apply competence assessment procedures and develop PSP-guidance to better comply with validation procedures

QUALITY IN VALIDATION IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES – Nordplus project

Denmark (coordinator), Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland carried out a two-phase Nordplus project. In the first phase 2011-12 the countries carried out a mapping and completed reports⁴² (Nordic) about the quality assurance factors in their respective countries. All of the reports were carried out according to a pre-planned questionnaire grid.

³⁸ <http://ok-opintokeskus.fi/en/node/255>

³⁹ <http://ostu.ok-opintokeskus.fi/etusivu>

⁴⁰ <http://www.uef.fi/en/studies/rpl-decisions-and-guidelines>

⁴¹ Osaaminen näkyväksi. 2012. Eds. Airola, A. & Hirvonen, H. http://epublications.uef.fi/pub/urn_isbn_978-952-61-0696-0/urn_isbn_978-952-61-0696-0.pdf

⁴² <http://www.viauc.dk/projekter/NVR/aktiviteter/Sider/Nordplusprojekt-landerapporter.aspx>

In the second phase 2012-13 a Nordic QA tool for validation⁴³ (EN) was developed and tested. An article⁴⁴ was also written regarding QA in validation.

The target groups of the project are validation stakeholders in the Nordic Countries. This tool has been widely promoted by the Nordic Network of Adult Learning (NVL) and each Nordic country has promoted the tool in different ways in their respective countries in seminars and training of stakeholders.

Programme for Early school leavers

LÄPÄISYN TEHOSTAMISOHJELMA 2011-2014

The Ministry of Education and Culture launched a national programme to prevent dropping out and enhance passing IVET. The overall budget for 2011-2014 is 16 million EUR.

The main activities supported by the programme are:

- Improving guidance services to prevent dropping out
- Improving validation of non-formal and informal learning in order to shorten study times
- Developing innovative pedagogical approaches
- Developing housing services and extra-curricular activities for the young people.

The IVET providers are able to apply for project based funding to develop their activities. Several national IVET provider networks have carried out projects funded by the programme and they have, among other things, developed more systematic approaches to the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A research report of the implementation of the programme was published in 2013⁴⁵.

ERKO –project 2012-2013 (Ministry of Education and Culture, Universities of Turku and Tampere)

The Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland set up several projects to enhance the preparation of the specialisation studies (see further information on the new initiative in chapter 2). One of them was called 'Implementation of specialisation studies in universities' (ERKO). The project was a joint venture of the universities of Turku and Tampere. The idea of the ERKO project was to design implementation plans for six pilot programmes and to capitalise on the results so as to build capacity for the new system. Pilots (line of trade) were: food industry, municipal sector, effective communication, inter-culturalism, and teaching. The thread was to collect the practical experience of implementation in the university context. For each pilot, scientific and professional experts were recruited to produce a plan for a specific expert programme. Separate work packages were organised for RPL, finances, and quality. The project made several recommendations for the development of post-experience academic education. One of the key developments listed for the future is the "recognition of expertise", a special form of recognition of prior learning, making it possible for individuals in working life to get their expertise recognised by a professional body. A consortium of higher education institutions and working life organisations is seen as a governing body for the new specialisation studies in a certain field of work or professional area.

⁴³ <http://www.viauc.dk/projekter/NVR/aktiviteter/Documents/QAmodel%20UK%20June13.pdf>

⁴⁴ Karttunen, A. 2013. Quality in Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. Prerequisites for High Market Value Validation Process.
<http://www.viauc.dk/projekter/NVR/aktiviteter/Documents/Quality%20in%20VNIL%20Sofia%20sept13.pdf>

⁴⁵ Vehviläinen, J. & Koramo, M. 2013. Ammatillisen koulutuksen läpäisyn tehostamisohjelma vuosina 2011-2012. Opetushallitus. Raportit ja selvitykset 2013:5.
http://www.oph.fi/download/149332_Ammatillisen_koulutuksen_lapaisyn_tehostamisohjelma_vuosina_2011-2012.PDF

The project started in 2012 and finalised its report in 2013. The report in Finnish and abstract in Swedish and English is available through the website <http://erko.utu.fi>

FUTUREX - Future Experts 2010-2013 (ESF)

The Futurex project analyses the functionality of post-experience education models and their critical success factors, and looks for best practices for their implementation. The project has been working in close cooperation with the two other projects focusing on specialisation studies development in Finland, namely the working group under the Ministry of Education and Culture and the ERKO-project, coordinated by University of Turku and University of Tampere. Based on research on expertise formation, the project proposes a *pedagogical model for the recognition of expertise in the new specialisation studies model*. Recognition of expertise is a special form of recognition of prior learning, focusing on *the recognition of prior learning within a specialized body of knowledge or area of expertise, defined by consortia of higher education institutions and work life organisations*.

Futurex project's aims are 1. to find essential areas of competence in the near future and recognise lines of businesses where higher education level competence is needed, 2. to find the most applicable alternative models of development to suit post-experience education (education, networks, workplace learning, etc.), 3. to study how field specific competence areas can be defined within the innovation networks of working life and higher education institutions, 4. to study how organisations can benefit from the collectively defined knowledge (digital knowledge database) in their knowledge management and how experts can make visible their know-how, gathered along their career paths (digital skills passport), and 5. to develop the educational quality system.

The report in Finnish and abstract in English will be available through website <http://futurex.utu.fi>

The National Board Education maintains the Finnish Europass website (www.europass.fi), where all documentation is available. According to the interviewees, Europass is well liked and widely used by students and also employed in teaching activities by teachers. Also the Certificate and Diploma Supplements are widely used⁴⁶.

Finland is one of the top 20 countries in number of visits to the Europass portal during 2013, occupying the 16th position with 68 631 visits. By September 2013, a total of 17,255 Europass CV documents had been downloaded in Finnish: 6,166 CV examples, 3,614 CV instructions and 7 475 CV templates⁴⁷.

In 2012, 70 organisations issued Youthpass certificates in Finland. This was an increase from 57 in 2010 and 2011. Youthpass was issued for a total of 97 projects in 2012, again an increase on previous years (84 in 2011, 83 in 2010). Over 1,000 Youthpass certificates were issued in 2010 (compared to 705 in 2011 and 920 in 2010). Awareness and usage therefore seems to be on the increase.

2.7 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

2.7.1 Funding

In Finland validation procedures are practically free (see section 2.7.2 for more details) for the individual and the validation providers get funding in most cases from the state and municipalities. Validation procedures are embedded as an integral part of formal training systems, and therefore there is no earmarked funding for validation.

There are various ways of gaining funding for validation depending on the life situation of the individual.

⁴⁶ Interview

⁴⁷ Cedefop, (2013) *Visits for the Europass portal during 2013*. Available from: http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/Statistics/3_Annual_activity/2013/Europass_Statistic_Reports_Year_Visits_Downloads_2013.PDF [1 November 2013].

The Education Fund is a fund administered by the social partners of the Finnish labour market. Its purpose is to support employees' vocational studies by granting them financial assistance (**Adult Education Allowance**) and to support the development of the vocational qualification system by granting scholarships for competence-based qualifications (Scholarship for Qualified Employee). The Fund also provides information and advice on benefits and makes proposals for the development of legislation within its field. The maximum allowance period is 19 months if the applicant has a working history of at least eight years⁴⁸.

The **scholarship for qualified employee** is available for those who have passed the tests of CBQs. The scholarship is granted on condition that the person has at least five years of working history in Finland before he/she has passed the tests. It doesn't matter whether the applicant is unemployed, employed or on study leave.

In 2012 the scholarship costs totalled EUR 8.5 million and the scholarship was granted to 23179 persons. The scholarship is financed from the unemployment insurance contributions paid by employers (2/3) and employees (1/3)⁴⁹.

In case of unemployment an individual can study during the unemployment period (according to an individual agreement with the local employment centre). The unemployed person may use the **unemployment allowances** solely for studying purposes. The maximum allowance period is 24 months.

In **apprenticeship training** the students are in paid employment. The employers get a grant for each student. The apprentices in Finland are mainly adults, unlike in other countries. The qualifications carried out via apprenticeship training are mainly CBQs and individualised⁵⁰.

The funding system for validation purposes is sustainable as it is linked with formal education and traditionally in Finland education is free.

2.7.2 Distribution of costs

As validation procedures are embedded in the formal training system, there are no calculations as to what the costs are which are borne by organisations. The funding to organise training is provided mostly by either the state, municipalities or employers, and more rarely by the students themselves. The funding includes validation procedures. There is no earmarked money for validation, but it is an integral part of the entire education system, especially in CBQs. Validation is not charged in HEIs either, but it is an integral part of the guidance and counselling right after enrolment⁵¹.

Validation does not cost anything to individuals in Finland; validation is carried out free of charge. This applies to students at all levels of education from general to vocational and higher education. However, all participants in the QBC system are eligible paying a fee of EUR 58 per qualification whether they study all courses or only take part in competence tests and thereby have their prior learning validated. The EUR 58 fee includes competence tests for *all* parts of the qualification. The fee is seen as a low one as all other costs are paid by the public authorities and this is the only fee for students. Therefore it is not seen as a barrier to learning or validation in Finland⁵².

2.7.3 Data on flows of beneficiaries⁵³

Numbers of student in the Competence Based Qualifications (including apprenticeships)

New students (full	2010	2011	2012
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⁴⁸ <http://www.koulutusrahasto.fi/en/theeducationfund/>

⁴⁹ <http://www.koulutusrahasto.fi/en/scholarshipforqualifiedemployee/>

⁵⁰ <http://www.euroapprenticeship.eu/en/finland.html>

⁵¹ Interview

⁵² Nevala, A-M (2011). European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. Country Report. Finland.

⁵³ <http://vipunen.csc.fi> (The National Board of Education statistics tool. Available in Finnish)

Numbers of student in the Competence Based Qualifications (including apprenticeships)			
Qualification)⁵⁴			
Basic Vocational Qualification	16 424	18621	N/A
Further VQ	19338	18362	
Specialist VQ	9406	9002	
TOTAL:	45 168	45985	
New students (part Qualification)⁵⁵			
Basic VQ	920	1164	
Further VQ	3619	4042	
Specialist VQ	271	395	
TOTAL:	4810	5601	
CBQs (all students)⁵⁶			
Basic VQ	47547	50073	
Further VQ	46709	45312	
Specialist VQ	23347	23234	
TOTAL:	117603	118619	

Vocational adult education and CBQs

In 2011 there were 88 600 adult students participating in the preparatory training for CBQs (this figure does not include apprenticeship training). There was a 3% increase from 2010. 49% of the students were studying for basic vocational qualifications, 43% for further vocational qualifications and 8% for specialist vocational qualifications. 54% of the students were women.

43 400 were new students. 22 000 students gained the full qualification in 2011⁵⁷.

Apprenticeship training (CBQs)

According to Statistics Finland, in 2011 there were 56 900 students taking part in apprenticeship training. This is 5% less than in 2010. 41% of the students were studying for basic vocational qualifications, 30% for further vocational qualifications and 29% for specialist vocational qualifications. 52% of the students were women. 22 000 were new students and 13 300 gained a full qualification in 2011.

Both groups are involved with validation (the individualisation process). There is no available data on the extent of validation among adult students, but the whole CBQ system is based on validation of competences. There are estimates that between 5-10% of all the candidates do not receive any preparatory training, but take the competence tests directly.⁵⁸

Data for 2012 will be available on the 6.11.2013 on Statistics Finland.

⁵⁴ New students, who started that particular year and are aiming at full qualification (including apprenticeships)

⁵⁵ New students, who started that particular year and are aiming at part qualification (including apprenticeships)

⁵⁶ All students taking CBQs that are registered in the system that particular year (including apprenticeships)

⁵⁷ http://www.stat.fi/til/aop/2011/03/aop_2011_03_2012-11-06_tie_003_fi.html

⁵⁸ http://www.stat.fi/til/aop/2011/04/aop_2011_04_2012-11-06_tie_004_fi.html

There are no available statistics on validation in IVET or HEIs. University of Eastern Finland reported that in 2011 they had validated credits worth 250 Bachelor Degrees (including formal, non-formal and informal learning)⁵⁹.

2.7.4 Evidence of benefits to individuals

In Koulutuksen Tilastollinen Vuosikirja 2011⁶⁰, which is a statistical yearbook about education in Finland the benefits of CBQs are discussed in the light of statistics. The publication states that

“While three quarters of those who had completed a qualification on curricular programmes in 2008 were included in the labour force in 2009, the proportion for those who had completed an upper secondary vocational qualification as a competence-based qualification was nine out of ten, with 71% employed and 19% unemployed.

Among those who had completed an upper secondary vocational qualification as a competence-based qualification, the employment rate was also highest in relative terms among those with a qualification in Social Services, Health and Sports, standing at 89%. Likewise, the employment rate was lowest among those with a qualification in Technology, Communications and Transport, where about a third of those who had completed a qualification in 2008 were not unemployed at the end of 2009. Several industrial plants discontinued their operations in 2009 and the employment situation was generally poor in the technological sector in particular.

Among holders of further and specialist qualifications, 83% were employed and 11% were unemployed, which means that almost everyone was included in the labour force. Only about 6% were full-time students or involved in other activities, i.e. in military or non-military service, doing domestic work at home, retired or on unemployment pension.”

The statistical yearbook provides clear indication of the high market value of validation in Finland and it shows that even in times of high unemployment, people with qualifications gained in a CBQs system are at better odds of gaining employment than the ones who have completed a qualification on school based curricular programmes.

“Ensuring access to systems that allow validation of informal and non-formal learning is important to making lifelong learning reality for all individuals. Therefore, the main rationale for the development of validation in Finland lies in the fact that validation can make it easier for all individuals (especially those who have no or few formal qualifications) to access formal learning opportunities. Validation can also shorten study times, which can reduce costs for individuals and society. Validation can also motivate more people to take up learning as they can have learning they have gained through work, hobbies or other non-formal means recognised”⁶¹.

“However, no studies have been carried out to measure the benefits of validation to individuals as such. The clearest evidence of the impact of validation of informal and non-formal learning on individuals can be seen from the learner numbers on the QBC system”⁶²:

- The number of adults involved in the CBQ system has grown every year since it was first introduced in 1994.
- The number of individuals obtaining full CBQs without undertaking *any* formal learning has increased; they make up 5-10% of beneficiaries today.
- Today, all participants in the QBC are exposed to validation as all providers are obliged to consider the prior learning (learning acquired in formal, non-formal and informal

⁵⁹ Interview

⁶⁰ Kumpulainen, T. 2012. Koulutuksen tilastollinen vuosikirja 2011. Koulutuksen seurantaraportit 2012:5. Opetushallitus. http://www.oph.fi/download/141011_Koulutuksen_tilastollinen_vuosikirja_2011.pdf (Preface and summary are available also in English)

⁶¹ Nevala, A-M, 2011. European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010. Country Report: Finland.

⁶² Ibid. P. 9

environments) of all candidates and design an individual plan that takes such learning into consideration.

3 Information, advice and guidance

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

“The validation of informal and non-formal is not advertised in Finland as such. Instead, the public authorities and the social partners are actively involved in raising awareness about the competence-based qualification system in which validation is embedded as a central feature. For example, a dedicated website <http://www.nayttotutkinnot.fi> provides information from the qualification system itself, to good practice examples and assessment methods and offers information on the benefits of acquiring such qualifications”⁶³.

“So far the validation of informal and non-formal learning in the field of higher education has focussed more on current students and therefore it has not been actively advertised to prospective students”⁶⁴. HEIs have improved guidance and increased staff competences in the methods related to the validation of formal, informal and non-formal learning. Student guidebooks of most HE institutions refer to validation opportunities.

Interestingly enough, in Finland the Trade unions and Federations of trade unions are very active in promoting the CBQs. Many of the unions have information about the qualifications on their websites and links to suitable qualifications in the field.

There are also several websites (some of them are interactive) promoting the CBQs system or providing information about how to finance studies or other practicalities.

The regional employment agencies provide information on CBQs and they also partially finance taking CBQs in the case of unemployment. The employment agencies collect information on all training opportunities in the region and provide information for their customers.

Educational institutions that are CBQ providers carry out direct marketing to their customers.

3.2 Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions

In 2011 the Ministry of Education and Culture published a national strategy for Life Long Guidance⁶⁵. The strategy discusses improving validation of non-formal and informal learning through improved guidance procedures throughout the field of stakeholders. The strategy gave a task of coordinating regional guidance networks and regional strategies to the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. In 2013 there are several regional LLG strategies and guidelines being developed. Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been discussed in some of the regional LLG development plans and strategies. The regional LLG networks are not organised similarly in each region, but generally the networks include members from all levels of education, trade unions as well as educational and employment authorities.

The regional employment centres provide advice and guidance on education and validation possibilities. They work in close co-operation with the CBQ providers of the region.

In Finland there are several guidance and counselling service centres for adults, which form a national network and provide information and guidance regarding all adult education, the CBQs and validation in HEIs.

Opin ovi - The National Programme of Guidance and Counselling Services for Adults

⁶³ Ibid. P. 12

⁶⁴ Ibid. P. 12

⁶⁵ Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö. 2011. Elinikäisen ohjauksen kehittämisen strategiset tavoitteet. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2011:15.

30 regional projects
10 national projects
3 composite programmes
1 National Coordination Project

Information, guidance and counselling services are offered to those who:

- are looking for information on study options and jobs
- wish to improve their professional knowledge
- wish to change professions or move to a new job
- wish to improve the professional skills of their workplace or community.

These services are developed by the *Opin ovi* (Door to Learning) projects across Finland.

The goal is to develop educational counselling and professional guidance services so that they meet the needs of all working-age adults and improve the availability of skilled workforces in the different regions of Finland. The programme is working to accomplish this by e.g. building new kinds of service models, enabling cooperation in the guidance services sector and improving the skills of guidance personnel.

The *Opin ovi* programme is coordinated by the National Coordination Project. Its job is to gather information about the results and good practices created by the regional *Opin ovi* projects, and distribute this information at national level. The National Coordination Project (1.8.2008-31.12.2013) is managed by the Teacher Education College of the JAMK University of Applied Sciences and funded by the European Social Fund and the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for Southeast Finland.

www.opinovi.fi

The validation providers are at the core of guidance and counselling. In CBQs it is the legal obligation of the provider to arrange adequate guidance and counselling services to the candidates in each stage of the individualisation process. In IVET it is a legal obligation of the provider to include guidance counselling in VET programmes. In programmes leading to upper secondary vocational qualifications, the VET provider co-operates with each student to draw up the student's individual study plan, which covers also identification and recognition of prior learning. In HEIs validation is commonly initiated during the Personal Study Planning Guidance process, since it is acknowledged that guidance is an integral part of validation and is one of the quality assurance factors in the provision of validation.

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

There are extensive measures in Higher Education in Finland to enhance the awareness of validation amongst guidance practitioners.

RPL in Higher Education (ESF)

The project has focused on developing recognition of prior learning in Finnish higher education through *training, seminars and dissemination* activities. Project has also offered *consultation and audit for universities and universities of applied sciences to develop their RPL policies and practices*. All higher education institutions in Finland have participated in the development and build their recognition systems under the general principles of transparency and equal treatment of students enrolled in the institution. Recognition of prior learning in Finnish higher education is closely linked to the process of personal study planning, where all students are supervised by senior members of the academia to create a personal study plan, taking also into account the learning acquired outside formal education, whether it has taken place prior or during the studies at hand.

The project started in 2009 and will end in 2014. An international publication in English will be available through Springer in the Spring 2014 under the title "Promoting, assessing and recognising and certifying Lifelong Learning: International perspectives and practices", edited by Timo Halttunen, Stephen Billett and Mari Koivisto. More information on the book www.springer.com

Project website: www.tunnistaosaaminen.fi

CBQs in adult VET have relatively established practices as the system has been operational since mid-90s. There is extensive legislation, guidelines and a quality assurance system in place, which ensure that the validation practices are transparent and carried out in similar ways by all validation practitioners around the country.

4 Quality assurance and evaluation

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

In Finland there is no specific quality assurance framework concerning validation procedures. As validation is embedded in the formal qualification system, the quality assurance mechanisms that apply to education and training with special emphasis on assessment are also applied to validation procedures.

4.2 Quality assurance systems/procedures

As higher education and non-formal education providers in Finland have less established and systematic validation systems, there are no established quality assurance systems in place either.

On the other hand, the quality assurance mechanisms⁶⁶ regarding CBQs are well developed and relatively extensive. The corner stone of the quality assurance in CBQs are the national **qualification requirements** that are developed in cooperation with experts from working life and education. The qualification requirements determine the learning outcomes along with assessment criteria.

*The Qualification Committees*⁶⁷ have an important role in QA. They monitor and supervise the validation procedures and also support CBQ organisers in their work. The Qualification Committees perform **external audits** to CBQ organisers with the aim of improving and supporting validation procedures and co-operation with working life.

The CBQ providers are obliged to have a **contract for arranging competence tests**. The providers are also required to compile a detailed **plan to arrange competence tests**. The contract and the plan must be approved by the Qualification Committee in charge of the qualification in question. Each qualification requires a separate plan and contract.

In the CBQ system at least one of the assessors needs to be a **certified CBQ assessor**. The assessors undergo a training programme "Specialist in CBQs", which is 25 ECTS points. The working life assessors are trained. Training of the work life assessors is the responsibility of the CBQ provider.

Legislation, national policies and guidelines regarding validation are extensive and detailed. They provide a solid ground for QA.

4.3 Evaluation framework

VET (including QBC)⁶⁸

The Educational Evaluation Council⁶⁹ is a leading independent specialist organisation for educational evaluation and development. The Council's task is to evaluate education and learning, to contribute to the development of external evaluation, and to co-operate with

⁶⁶ Karttunen, A. 2012. Quality in Validation in the Nordic Countries. Finnish Report. <http://www.viauc.dk/projekter/NVR/internationalt/Documents/Materialer%20Nordplus/Quality%20report%20Finland.pdf>

⁶⁷ Opetushallitus. 2012. Näyttötutkinto-opas. Näyttötutkinnon järjestäjien ja tutkintotoimikuntien käyttöön. Oppaat ja Käsikirjat 2012:11. http://www.oph.fi/download/143969_Nayttotutkinto-opas_2012.pdf

⁶⁸ Nevala, A-M, 2011. European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010. Country Report: Finland.

⁶⁹ For further information, see: www.edev.fi

international stakeholders. Evaluation serves the needs of the Ministry of Education and Culture, education providers, and schools. The Council works as an expert network.

However, in Finland there is no national quality assurance body for validation of informal and non-formal learning as such. For the validation of non-formal and informal learning the decentralisation of education means that individual providers are given a great deal of freedom to apply the legislative framework.

In order to ensure the quality of the assessment system and an appropriate match with the demands of the labour market, co-operation with key labour market players is essential and has been at the heart of all activities since the development of the system. In fact, tripartite bodies are involved in quality assurance in VET (initial VET and the competence-based qualification system). Quality assurance has been devolved:

- To local level in the case of upper secondary VET qualifications (QA led by providers and multi-stakeholder steering committees attached to VET providers). VET providers also nominate local boards (representatives of employers, employees, VET providers, teachers and students in the field concerned) to ensure the quality of vocational skills demonstrations. The board decides on the arrangement and assessment of skills demonstrations and awards appropriate certificates.).
- To tripartite qualification committees in the case of competence-based qualifications.

Developments, like the creation of a national system of evaluating learning outcomes of skills demonstrations (IVET) bring some synergy into assessment of quality of VET provisions (also in relation to validation).

Higher education

As stated above, each HEI has the freedom to implement their own system for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. The 2009 recommendations of the Finnish Council of University Rectors and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences state that 'the validation practices should be tied into the quality assurance system of the HE institutions'.

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is an independent expert body assisting higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Culture in matters relating to evaluation⁷⁰. The Council members represent universities, universities of applied sciences, students and working life. FINHEEC audits the quality assurance systems of all Finnish Higher Education Institutions. Among audit criteria in samples of degree education are for instance learning outcomes and their definition as well as lifelong learning.

5 Validation methods

5.1 Methods used and the validation process

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate			
Declarative methods	x		x
Interview	x		
Observation	x		x
Portfolio method	x	x	
Presentation			x
Simulation and evidence extracted	x	x	x

⁷⁰ For further information, see: www.kka.fi

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
from work			
Tests and examinations	x	x	x
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify	xSelf-assessment tools	x Self-assessment e-tools that produce documentation	x Self-assessment tools

Competence Based Qualifications

In the application phase (identification) the applicant is *interviewed* and the qualification options or possibly qualification requirements are discussed depending on the needs of the candidate. *Self-assessments* are commonly used⁷¹. In Finland there is an e-tool (www.osaan.fi) (FI), which comprises of all CBQs and the assessment criteria. The candidate may make a self-assessment to verify if s/he has the required competences to take the competence tests. The candidate is also asked to provide any *evidence* of his/her competences related to the learning outcomes of the qualification in question.

In cases where the candidate has reliable documented evidence of competences (e.g. from non-formal settings) the documentation is delivered to the Qualification Committee for assessment. The Committee may recognize a qualification unit or units of the entire qualification on the basis of the evidence. In cases where there is no documented evidence or one cannot verify competences on the basis of the documentation, *competence tests* will take place⁷².

The competence tests are in most cases carried out in an *authentic work environment*. The candidate has drafted an *individual plan* on how to make his/her competence test and how it complies with the qualification criteria. The test situation is *monitored and assessed* by an employer representative, an employee representative and a representative from education (*tripartite assessment*). The assessors record the results on an assessment sheet, in which the learning outcomes and assessment criteria are described. After the competence test the assessors and the candidate review the test situation and give feedback to the candidate. All assessors must reach a consensus of the assessment results. The documented assessment results are delivered to the Qualification Committee, which will award the qualification and the certificate⁷³.

OSAMA -project

Two VET providers (Omnia and Axxell) developed a **picture based e-tool for identification of competences of immigrants**. Often immigrants do not have any certification of their prior learning and even with certification it is hard to verify their competence level. The OSAMA –tool provides an opportunity to quick-scan the vocational competence of an individual.

The project was funded by the National Board of Education and it started in 2009 and ended in 2012.

The e-tool covers **six different professions** and it provides validation practitioners and recruiters information as to the level of the vocational competences of an individual. The test is available at <http://prometheus.axxell.fi/videos/osama/>.

Competence tests are also arranged in HEIs⁷⁴, but they are usually carried out as simulations. E.g. in IT studies it is a relatively common practice to arrange IT workshops, where the candidates must perform assigned tasks. In IVET skills demonstrations are used.

⁷¹ Interview

⁷² Opetushallitus. 2012. Näyttötutkinto-opas. Näyttötutkinnon järjestäjien ja tutkintotoimikuntien käyttöön. Oppaat ja käsikirjat 2012:11. http://www.oph.fi/download/143969_Nayttotutkinto-opas_2012.pdf

⁷³ Opetushallitus. 2012. Arvioinnin Opas. Ammatillinen Peruskoulutus. Näyttötutkinnot. Oppaat ja käsikirjat 2012:9. http://www.oph.fi/download/142318_Arviinnin_opas.pdf

⁷⁴ Interview

Skills demonstrations are carried out either in authentic working situations (e.g. on-the-job-training) or in simulated situations.

6 Validation practitioners

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

In the Finnish CBQs system the validation practitioners are Specialists in CBQs, teachers, guidance staff, employee and employer representatives as well as private practitioners.

All the practitioners should be experienced in their own specific professional field and have a good understanding of the validation process. The *certified assessors* undergo an extensive 25 ECTS “Specialist in CBQs” training programme. The training is based on a *national curriculum* and is described in *learning outcomes and assessment criteria* is provided. The training is *compulsory* for CBQ assessors. The curriculum was renewed in 2012⁷⁵.

6.2 Provision of training and support networks of validation practitioners

Universities of Applied Sciences provide the training. Receiving the qualification is also possible through validation. Specialists have been trained since 1995 and there are over 12 000 trained specialists in Finland. Approximately 800 specialists are trained yearly. As the CBQ system has evolved over the years, further training has also been provided for Specialists, who need to have their competences updated.

The main focus of the specialist training is 1) planning of CBQs, 2) organizing CBQs according to an individualized process and 3) quality assurance in CBQs.

The CBQ providers are responsible for training of the work life assessors. They are required to understand the CBQ system, the qualification requirements and the assessment criteria.

The Qualification Committees play an important role as a *support network* for practitioners. They provide a forum for discussion and development of validation procedures and assessment.

For practitioners in IVET (school based) assessment training is provided regularly especially recently as the assessment has shifted from assessment of learning to assessment of competences. Seminars are also arranged for practitioners and providers arrange internal training and workshops. There is a nationwide training programme for work place instructors based on national guidelines. The training includes planning and implementing on-the-job learning and assessing learning and competence during on-the-job learning periods. The curriculum was renewed in 2012. IVET providers are responsible for training the work place instructors and assessors. Further training has also been provided for work place instructors, who need to have their competences updated.

In HE, there has been an extensive nationwide training programme for validation practitioners, which was coordinated by the University of Turku and University of Eastern Finland. Hundreds of counsellors and teachers were trained to promote validation practices in HE.

AOTT-mestari koulutus 2010-2012 (Validation and Valuation of Learning –Expert Training)

Validation Expert training is a further training programme for stakeholders involved in validation process. The target group of the training is wide; VET staff, HE and liberal adult education and it is targeted for professionals working at different stages and in different roles of the validation process.

Several teacher training colleges in Finland have provided a mandatory training (Specialist in Competence Based Qualifications) for Finnish VET professionals since 1995, but this programme only focuses on the Finnish adult VET system providing a relatively narrow view on validation of non-

⁷⁵ Opetushallitus. 2012. Näyttötutkintomestari, koulutusohjelma. Määräykset ja ohjeet 2012:43.
http://oph.fi/download/144552_Nayttotutkintomestari_koulutusohjelma_25_op_.pdf

formal and informal learning.

It was considered of utmost importance that a training programme is developed, which sheds light on the European aspects and policy outlines on VNIL due to the future changes in the Finnish legislation (NQF and ECVET). Secondly the purpose is to enable the Finnish VNIL providers to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of the depth and width of VNIL.

The training programme consists of five modules (Orientation to VNIL, European Frame of Reference (EQF, NQF, ECVET and other tools), Quality in VNIL, Competences of an assessor in VNIL process and Competences of an advisor in VNIL process). The training programme is described in terms of *learning outcomes*.

The training programme was initially developed as an ESF –project ISOK, but later on national training activities were financed by the National Board of Education. Over 1000 validation practitioners have studied one or more modules of the training programme in Finland and abroad.

In 2013 the training programme received a European **Validation Prize 2013** in the category “New VNIL Profession”.

See: www.aottmestari.fi

6.3 Qualification requirements

In the Finnish CBQ system at least one of the assessors in the assessment process must be a **Specialist in Competence Based Qualifications**. It is a 25 credit compulsory training programme arranged by several Universities of Applied Science in Finland. The work life assessors must be trained by the CBQ provider organisation. For further information, see previous chapter 6.1.

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