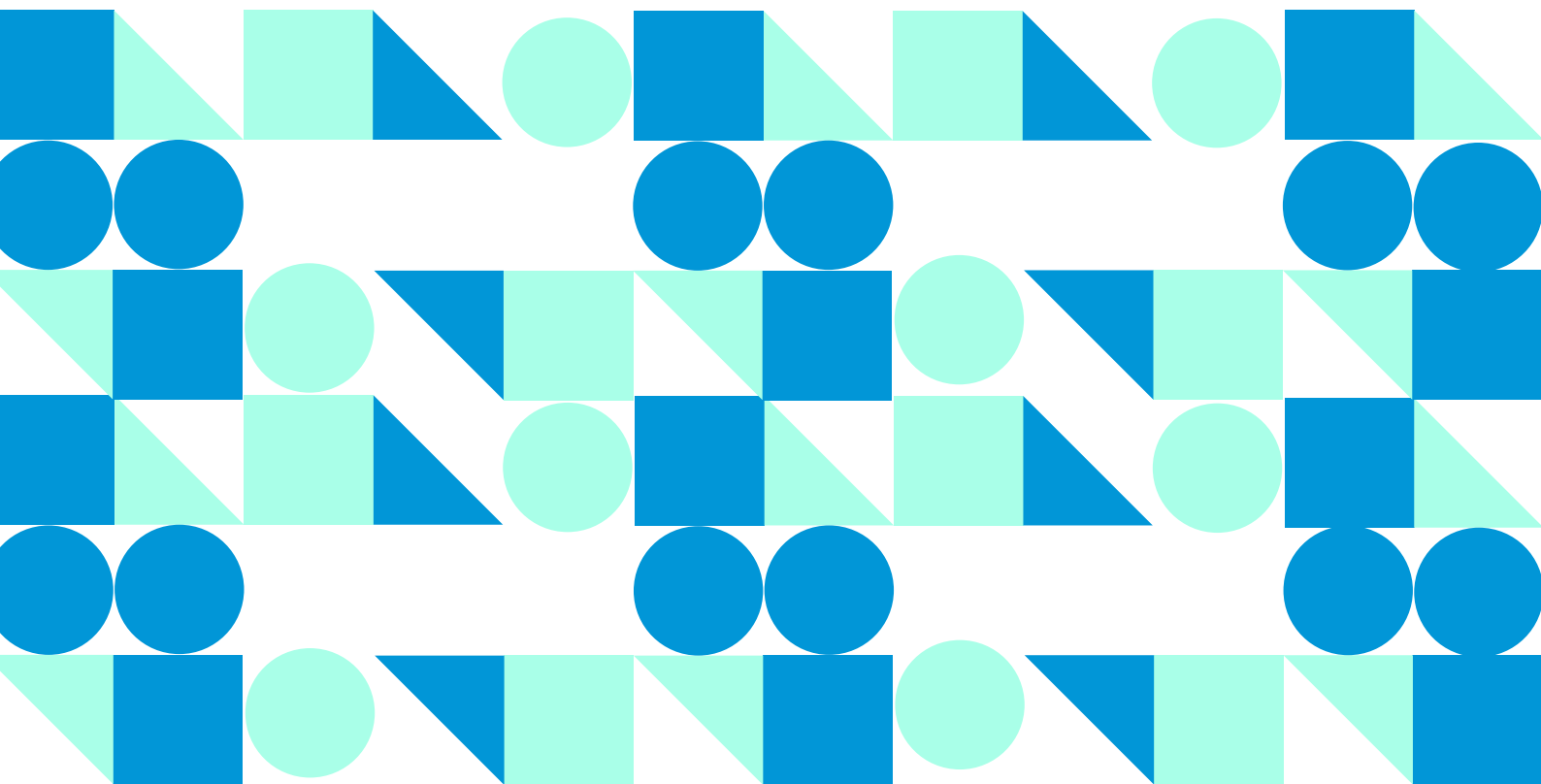




Research paper

# Coordinating guidance and validation







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# Foreword

In a society in which individuals change jobs more and more often, and the pace of innovation and new technologies keeps increasing, individuals need to be prepared for repeated transitions and adaptation to change. Flexible, continuous and more adaptive learning is needed to ensure skills remain relevant to today's labour market. In addition, all learning might become relevant at some stage in one's life, with non-formal and informal learning becoming as important as formal education in maintaining an adequate level of skills. Lifelong learning is truly a necessity.

In this context, validation and guidance are two important tools to assist individuals, organisations and Member States in adapting to the new reality and creating real lifelong learning systems. Career guidance and counselling play a major role in managing people's transitions, while validation can assist in fulfilling people's full potentials by making visible and providing value to all learning an individual has acquired. Both concepts are increasingly important in European policies and strategies and are usually connected in policy documents. The Council resolution on lifelong guidance encourages Member States to consider ways of 'enabling people to benefit from support in obtaining validation and recognition on the labour market of their formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in order to safeguard their employment and maintain their employability, in particular during the second part of their careers' (Council, 2008, p. 6). The 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning identifies information, guidance and counselling as a cornerstone of validation; this is also reflected in the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2015).

However, we know very little of practical means of interlinking them and how this might be made more efficient. Building on Cedefop's expertise in the two areas, this study aims at exploring in what way career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning can better be linked, examining specific selected practices. The purpose is to understand the necessary conditions, synergies and benefits of linking validation of non-formal and informal learning with career guidance and counselling services. The study contributes to increasing our understanding of these two important policy areas and moving towards a more holistic and coherent approach to the development of truly lifelong learning systems.

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# Executive summary

How can career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning be better coordinated, so ensuring the most appropriate support to individuals' career decisions and personal development? What conditions will support successful coordination between validation and guidance? How can output coherence between these two services be developed? What are the benefits and the challenges of increased coordination between validation and guidance?

These questions guided the 2017 Cedefop study aiming to explore how to connect validation of non-formal and informal learning and career guidance.

## Scope and methodology

The study featured 13 practices (case studies) of how validation and career guidance are linked in various contexts and institutional settings across Europe. The practices, selected from 12 countries <sup>(1)</sup>, aimed to capture different approaches and the extent of coordination between the two services.

A research framework addressed the main research questions and considered macro, meso and micro factors that may shape the relationship between validation and guidance. There were three main components: background/context (for each of the practices selected); practical operation (how things happen on the ground); and overall assessment (organisational and individual benefits, as well as challenges and successes in different forms of relationship between validation and guidance). The research framework was updated during the study to reflect inputs from the successive research phases:

- (a) desk research (literature review): gathering information on guidance and validation practices across the selected countries. Theoretical literature (academic and commissioned research, government and technical reports) was also considered;
- (b) field research (site visits): elaboration of 13 case studies through individual interviews, focus group discussions and, where possible, observations. The case studies also included beneficiary and practitioner stories, brief testimonials illustrating different aspects of how practices were carried out. They did not aim to describe national approaches to guidance or validation, but to focus on how validation and guidance are connected within a practice.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Austria, Czechia, Finland (two practices), France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and UK-Scotland.

## Forms of relationship between validation and guidance

The main analytical concepts used in the study were 'coordination' and 'coherence'. 'Coordination' relates to governance mechanisms determined by the institution(s) shaping the relationship between validation and guidance, including:

- (a) types of actor involved (public employment services (PES), chambers, trade unions, employers, education institutions, municipalities, NGOs) and division of tasks and responsibilities among them;
- (b) degree of centralisation: either centralised (initiated, managed, monitored and mainly financed by the State) or driven by regional/local/sectoral partnerships (and part funded by the State, EU, the respective region or sector). Centralised practices may enshrine the connection between validation and guidance in national legislation, policy or strategy;
- (c) degree of formalisation of the validation and guidance relationship. Coordination can be achieved in at least three ways:
  - (i) formal cooperation between independent services, usually via a shared framework and/or systematic referrals (signposting between services) including standardised procedures;
  - (ii) informal cooperation between independent services; without frameworks to ensure institutional cooperation, personal cooperation between guidance practitioners and validation provider staff plays an important role;
  - (iii) integration of services; a single organisation usually provides validation and guidance, offering guidance at each stage of the practice.

Such mechanisms determine how and to what extent coherence is achieved. In this study, coherence reflects how well guidance and validation services exchange information with one another (degree of harmonisation of procedures), and how well the two services mutually enable support to individuals. As an example, guidance outputs, such as skills identification, can support certification if they share competence standards and if relevant information is properly documented and transmitted, so that it can be used and further developed.

## Factors for successful services coordination

The case study analysis found several factors for consideration in assessing coordination between validation and guidance:

- (a) a framework improving coordination between the two. This is defined or driven by national/regional legislation, a strategy, or a network of regional/sectoral partnerships between different stakeholders (including employers and

- employee organisations). It sets up clear principles, rules or procedures and systematically helps transitions and feedback between guidance and validation. Cooperation between independent services would not be based on goodwill, and/or the contacts/networks of a few practitioners, but institutionalised, with fixed principles common to all parties/stakeholders. However, the existence of a framework does not necessarily guarantee that practitioners will use it;
- (b) flexible and free-of-charge guidance provided through all stages of a practice; individualised support when the client needs it, through a combination of delivery forms. This guidance ensures that needs can be updated or readjusted through the stages of the practice. Practitioners must share a common understanding of the aims of the practice, their related roles and responsibilities. Particularly during formal/informal cooperation between independent services, practitioner roles and responsibilities must be clearly assigned: this supports smoother and quicker referrals between the services. Fragmented guidance, with unclear roles and responsibilities, may have a negative effect, with clients feeling they have insufficient support;
  - (c) coherence of outputs at different stages: using outputs from the early stages of a practice as inputs for subsequent stages ensures consistent application of standards, brings continuity in the delivery of services, and saves practitioner time and effort. More coherent outputs can simplify operation of a shared system, ensure structured interaction among practitioners and deliver more effective information exchange. This is typically the case with individual portfolios: built from early screening stages, updated and aligned, with shared standards and clearly targeted at supporting referrals, further training or certification leading to qualification;
  - (d) practitioner competences: skilled practitioners are essential to successful coordination, which must accommodate both the specific technical requirements of each activity and the existence of overlaps between them. The roles and competences of practitioners working in guidance and validation may overlap to different degrees, especially in what concerns provision of information screening/profiling of clients and skills assessments. These overlaps create an opportunity for more efficient organisation of activities, which should nevertheless not be made at the expense of service quality. All practitioners need to be adequately trained in their specific relevant roles, while having an understanding of the overall process and practice. In addition to specialised technical competences, all practitioners should have equally important soft skills: empathy for clients, ability to motivate them, communication skills, ability to work in teams, and commitment;

- (e) monitoring and evaluation arrangements: collecting data on participant transitions into employment or further education (after validation) can provide evidence of the need for follow-up guidance as well as indicating the quality of the services provided.

## Policy recommendations

- (a) The recommendations are based on the main factors ensuring coordination between guidance and validation: comprehensiveness: provide adequate information and guidance before the decision to undergo validation, through the entire validation process and also after it;
- (b) coherence: use common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks through all the stages of the practice to identify, document and assess skills;
- (c) ensure quality of staff resources and competences, as well as tools used.

Achieving comprehensiveness requires mechanisms for coordinating and setting up clear links between validation and guidance. This requires political will, agreement between political partners and broad societal support; the latter may come from involving practitioners in developing an appropriate overarching policy or a single legal framework, which clearly defines objectives, roles and responsibilities. The allocation of necessary human and financial resources (including joint funding through the ESF) should also be considered.

Adequate financial and human resources can help develop comprehensive, systematised and coordinated processes, from outreach to potential candidates and identifying their skills to validating/certifying their competences. Services coordinating career guidance and validation also add to active labour market policies, including measures for upskilling of low-qualified/skilled adults.

Coherence means developing a common policy strategy or a single legal framework linking guidance and validation across all occupation and education sectors. It requires extensive dialogue and cooperation between a wide range of stakeholders, from policy-makers to teachers/trainers and business associations. Consensus is required on what is to be achieved and how services, roles and functions of practitioners should be defined. Without this, stakeholders will apply different interpretations to guidance and validation and what they are meant to achieve.

A common reference framework for qualifications or competence standards is also needed. Adherence to such a framework ensures that the different tools used to identify, document and assess skills are 'coherent', with continuity between the

outputs produced as each builds on the previous one. It guarantees information traceability and prevents the duplication of work, as well as ensuring systematic coordination between different services supplied by separate entities.

Any common qualifications or competence standards framework should be relatable to individuals' non-formal and informal learning experiences to ensure coherence between outputs and continuity in the interpretation of career development needs and goals.

Uniform common standards help in delivering consistent quality guidance and validation services. The quality of services can be improved by focusing on individuals, by responding flexibly to needs, and by considering the readiness of individuals to get engaged in validation and guidance.

The specific roles/functions of guidance and validation practitioners, both in respect of technical and soft skills, should be subject to specialised training throughout all stages. Common training can generate shared understanding of the process and its outputs, and improve the coherence and overall quality of services; it can create balanced teams that cooperate and exchange information well. Elaboration of common guidelines and quality criteria for services develops healthy communication within the team and with clients.

While these recommendations should help improve how validation and guidance services work together, it will be necessary to check that the desired effects are being achieved. Data collection and monitoring will help demonstrate the quality and performance of guidance and validation services and show the effects of any steps taken in support. In turn, coherence between outputs can enable systematic monitoring throughout all stages of guidance and validation, providing feedback to suggest further means of improving the services and their coordinated actions.



# CHAPTER 1.

## Introduction

### 1.1. Project background

In the transition to the learning society, flexible, continuous and more adaptive learning is needed to ensure skills remain relevant to today's labour market. At the same time, the EU currently faces important economic and social challenges which greatly affect low-qualified people who often have limited career prospects. Early disengagement from education and training is an acute issue in many Member States, leading frequently to unemployment and inactivity among young people. The rate of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) is particularly high among the low-qualified. The financial crisis, coupled with economic and structural changes, have left many adults with low qualifications (and obsolete skills) unemployed. Close to 70 million Europeans struggle with basic reading and writing, calculation and use of digital tools in everyday life, as shown by the OECD's survey on adult skills (PIAAC). People lacking these basic skills are at higher risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. These issues explain why schools, universities, trade unions, employers and legislative bodies all need to work closely together to ensure a skilled workforce for the future.

Guidance and counselling can play a major role in getting low-qualified individuals to upskill and gain new qualifications to improve their career prospects, according to their personal ambitions and interests. The same is true of other groups looking to advance their career prospects. Therefore, guidance and counselling give purpose to the validation procedure. The Council resolution on lifelong guidance requests Member States to consider ways of 'enabling people to benefit from support in obtaining validation and recognition on the labour market of their formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in order to safeguard their employment and maintain their employability, in particular during the second part of their careers' (Council, 2008, p. 6). In addition, the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) guidelines highlight as good practice the use of policies and systems that promote and support 'lifelong guidance in helping citizens to identify and have validated their competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning' (ELGPN, 2015, p. 35).

The 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning identifies information, guidance and counselling as a cornerstone of validation. The European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning stress that this requires functional validation arrangements, including

‘impartial and comprehensive information, guidance and counselling throughout the process’ (Cedefop, 2015, p. 3).

In the Council recommendation on upskilling pathways (Council, 2016), the three-step process (skills assessment, a tailored learning offer and the validation and recognition of the learning acquired) requires guidance and outreach services to support learners’ progression through every step of the upskilling pathway.

## 1.2. Aims and objectives

The main objective of this study is to improve the understanding of how career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning can be better coordinated to ensure the most appropriate support to career decisions and personal development. More precisely, this refers to the following key research questions:

- (a) what are the necessary conditions to ensure successful coordination between validation and guidance activities in practice?
- (b) how can the coherence of the outputs of validation and guidance be assured?
- (c) what are the benefits (individual, organisational) of increased coordination between the two services and what are the challenges?

## 1.3. Structure of the report

The report is structured into four main chapters: following clarifications about the background and specific aims and objectives of the study in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 provides insights into the main reference concepts such as career/lifelong guidance, and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The chapter includes a theoretical discussion about the relationship between validation and guidance and introduces the methodology used.

Chapter 3 focuses on a comparative analysis based on 13 specific practices explored within this study. The chapter outlines forms of coordination between validation and career guidance. It also discusses different dimensions of coordination such as context, conditions, institutional setting of the practices, coherence of outputs and, finally, benefits and challenges to organisation and individuals. Findings from the comparative analysis are then summarised into conclusions.

Chapter 4 translates the findings into policy recommendations to improve the synergies between validation and career guidance.

## CHAPTER 2.

# Concepts and methodology

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the key concepts which defined the scope of this study and shaped its methodology (including a research and theoretical framework and data collection methods).

### 2.1. The concepts of career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning

Both career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning are linked to the broader concept of 'lifelong learning'. While validation aims to assure that all learning, irrespective of how and where it has been acquired, is valued and considered, lifelong/career guidance <sup>(2)</sup> focuses more on personal development. Guidance is defined as a 'continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used' (Council, 2008, p.2). In this study, guidance is used as an overarching concept: it may be directly connected to validation (for instance, guidance provided within/during a validation procedure) or it may refer to different career guidance activities (such as counselling, advising, assessing) which take place either prior to undertaking the validation procedure or after completing validation (Section 2.1.1 and Section 3.3.2.1).

Although validation and career guidance broadly share a similar aim (both support an individual's pursuit of career development and education), validation has a more pronounced formal component (related to assessment standards and certification) and is defined as 'a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard' <sup>(3)</sup> (Council, 2012, p .5).

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<sup>(2)</sup> The study regards 'career guidance', 'lifelong guidance' and 'guidance' as synonyms.

<sup>(3)</sup> In our understanding, 'relevant standard' includes occupational as well as qualification standard.

### **2.1.1. Relationship between validation and career guidance activities**

Findings from the literature review, carried out as part of the study, reveal that theoretical literature, including available academic and commissioned research, government and technical reports, does not systematically explore the link between validation and guidance. This is not surprising given the lack of clear-cut distinction between the concepts of validation and career guidance (and their activities). Although the thematic report on guidance and counselling of the 2014 update of the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning identifies a wide diversity of approaches to guidance supporting validation, this report did not have enough evidence for more specific conclusions (EC, Cedefop and ICF, 2014, p. 12).

To understand the relationship between validation and lifelong guidance, it is necessary to compare their distinct activities, bearing in mind that neither service has a single standardised method.

Table 1 compares validation and guidance activities and identifies their similarities and differences. It shows that career guidance services are more diversified and have a larger scope than validation. Career guidance includes four main types of activity: informative; developing career management skills (CMS) and autonomy; direct support and capacity building; and managing critical information and assuring quality. These consist of many sub-activities <sup>(4)</sup>. In comparison, validation includes four consecutive phases/activities: identification, documentation, assessment and certification (Council, 2012), although not all of these must be included in all cases.

While fragmentation of services is characteristic of both validation and guidance, the trend is more pronounced for lifelong guidance. This can be explained by the fact that guidance is offered by many different organisations such as schools, training providers, PES or private employment services, hiring agencies, local administrations, human resources departments in enterprises, and NGOs. In comparison, validation is most commonly found within education and training contexts but is now increasingly carried out by labour market authorities, economic sectors, enterprises and voluntary organisations. Also, validation processes differ depending on the subsector of education in which they occur. The European inventory found that validation practices are much less common in general education than in vocational training. It also found that, in many countries,

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<sup>(4)</sup> In the study we use Ford's adapted classification (Ford, 2007) which covers the definition provided in the EU Council resolution on lifelong guidance (2008) but is more structured and detailed. In the resolution definition, guidance covers 'a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills' (Council, 2008, p. 2).

higher and adult education have validation differently organised from that in vocational training (see e.g. EC, Cedefop and ICF, 2017, p. 34).

One important component of the relationship between validation and career guidance is the institutional setting in which they are embedded (Section 3.3.1). For instance, if these services are provided independently (by different organisations/institutions), career guidance may signpost individuals towards taking up validation or flexible training offers. In this way, guidance can act as a referral to validation, making people aware of the opportunities and benefits of validation and offering them adjusted learning solutions. In addition to providing a referral to validation, guidance practitioners can help individuals to use relevant labour market information and effectively choose occupational pathways in line with their preferences and potential.

Evidence from the literature review and the case studies shows high similarity (or even overlap) between the 'identification' and 'documentation' phases/activities of validation and the counselling and assessing career guidance activities. For instance, any lifelong guidance process will start by identifying a person's strengths and interests. This may involve identifying prior learning (including learning that took place in non-formal and informal settings) and documenting the learning needed before and during the validation procedure. In a similar way, documentation collected during the guidance process can be used as an input for validation. Results from assessment developed in career guidance (particularly identifying skills, attitudes and preferences) may support certification to a higher or lower degree depending on how they are set (Section 3.3.3).

Table 1. **Relationship between validation phases/activities and types of career guidance activity**

Types of career/lifelong guidance activities	Validation phases/activities
<p>Informative activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advising – helping individuals and groups to interpret information and choose the most appropriate options</li> <li>• Signposting/referral – ensuring that people have accurate information about all the relevant agencies and the guidance services they provide and, therefore, can select the most appropriate resources for their needs</li> </ul>	<p>No equivalent activity</p>
<p>Developing (CMS) and autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling – helping individuals to discover, clarify, assess and understand their own experience and explore available alternatives and strategies for achievement</li> <li>• Assessing – helping individuals to obtain an organised and structured understanding of their personal, educational and vocational development to allow for informed judgments on the relevance of opportunities presented (in work, training, etc.)</li> <li>• Teaching – promoting the acquisition of career managing skills, relating to methodologies such as CV and presentation letter creation, job search methods, time management techniques, interpersonal communication techniques.</li> <li>• Mentoring – offering individuals and groups support to help them overcome personal barriers and realise their potential</li> </ul>	<p>Identification – increasing an individual's awareness of prior learning achievements</p> <p>Documentation – providing evidence of the learning outcomes acquired</p>
<p>No full equivalent as assessment in career guidance tends to be less formalised; it does not have to be carried out by a certified assessor</p>	<p>Assessment – comparing an individual's learning outcomes against specific reference points and/or standards</p>
<p>No equivalent activity. Career guidance may support certification, but it is not included as a component in guidance provision</p>	<p>Certification – confirming officially the achievement of learning outcomes against a specified standard</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct support and capacity building</li> <li>Advocating – negotiating directly with organisations on behalf of individuals or groups for whom there may be additional barriers to access</li> </ul>	<p>No equivalent activity</p>
<p>Managing critical information and assuring quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following up – keeping in touch with individuals after guidance interventions, to assess if further guidance is needed and of what type, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>Informing people of future opportunities after completing a validation process</p>

NB: Overlapping activities are written in blue.

Source: Adapted from Cedefop (2015, 2016a, 2016b), ELGPN (2015) and Ford (2007).

Assessment and certification within validation share fewer similarities with career guidance activities compared to identification and documentation. This may be related to the formal component included in validation (for instance, requirements for assessment to be carried out by accredited assessors who are typically, specialists in a given professional field, requirements for certification to be managed by a credible authority/organisation). Many validation processes will not immediately lead to certification, because individuals may lack the needed knowledge or competences. Career guidance will play an important role in redirecting individuals to tailored learning experiences so that the validation can be completed.

Although follow-up is not covered in the four validation phases/activities, individuals may be informed of future opportunities or supported in developing ideas for a further career pathway upon completing a validation process (see Section 3.3.2). This may include a referral to guidance services which are provided independently from the validation process.

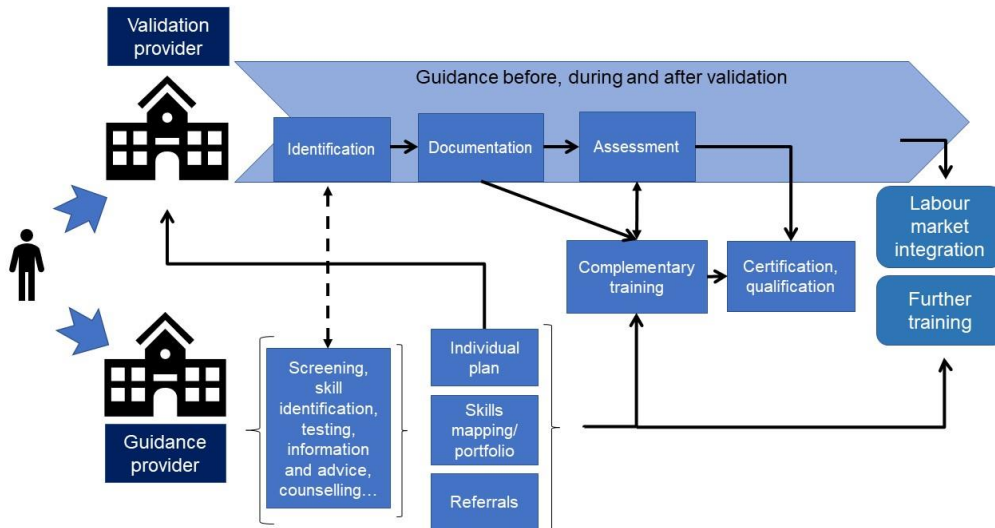
Validation procedures leading to certification will normally include the four stages in one way or another but the emphasis on certain stages will vary depending on the objectives of each process. For instance, validation that takes place in an education institution (to obtain a formal qualification) will tend to emphasise assessment and certification. A validation process carried out by voluntary organisations is likely to emphasise identification and documentation. This means that the form of relationship between guidance and validation services is also determined by the type of organisation involved in their delivery and purpose of the activity (Section 3.3.1).

Figure 1 presents a general model for connecting validation and guidance based on the practices explored <sup>(5)</sup>.

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<sup>(5)</sup> In the model, validation is understood as leading to certification.

Figure 1. **General model of linkage between validation and guidance based on the practices explored**



Source: Cedefop.

One important component of the relationship between validation and guidance refers to the starting point of a practice:

- (a) is the person directly contacting a validation provider with the clear aim to undergo a validation procedure?
- (b) does the person first contact other services to clarify the possibilities and, based on that, make further career or personal development decisions which may include undergoing validation?

In the first case, guidance activities will directly connect to validation (usually referred to as 'guidance within/during validation'); in the second case, guidance will precede the decision for validation ('guidance before validation'). In the first case, people usually go directly to a validation provider and may proceed straight away to an assessment or examination of their competences to obtain a certification or qualification, provided they already possess the required competences. If they do not readily possess the required competences to obtain a certification/qualification, the validation provider directs people to complementary training before they can undergo an assessment or examination.

In the second case, people may not be aware of the possibility of undergoing validation until they receive career guidance (from PES, chambers of commerce or other relevant career counselling services). Depending on the practitioners (and services) in charge of providing guidance, the activities to clarify a person's options for learning and career development may involve (varying intensity of) screening and profiling and/or a skills audit. The person may then be referred to a validation



provider; the referral may be formal or informal depending on the form of cooperation between services (Chapter 3).

Upon completing validation, people improve their chances of (re)integrating into the labour market thanks to the qualifications or certifications obtained. A person receiving only a partial qualification may decide on further training and may need follow-up guidance.

## 2.2. Methodology

This report is based on the findings from 13 practices from 12 countries: Austria, Czechia, Finland (two practices), France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and UK-Scotland. Table 2 outlines the practices and includes a brief description of each. Country selection aimed to capture the different characteristics in validation and career guidance, the extent of coordination between the two services and broad socioeconomic models/indicators (such as production, welfare and employment regimes as well as collective bargaining models). The country selection also aimed to achieve a geographic balance (North, South, East and West) across Europe.

The practices were explored by national experts with substantial expertise in validation and/or research related to career guidance (see Annex 1). The case studies exemplified different forms of coordination between validation of non-formal and informal learning and career guidance services; they were selected in accordance with a theoretical and research framework, developed in advance (before the start of the field work).

### 2.2.1. Theoretical and research framework

The theoretical and research framework was developed based on the three main research questions (Section 1.2). Also, it considered elements of both the European guidelines for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2015) and the European guidelines for policies and systems development in lifelong guidance (ELGPN, 2015).

The framework consisted of three main components and took account of macro, meso and micro factors that may shape the relationship between validation and guidance. While the paragraphs below briefly review the framework's structure, Annex 2 has detailed information.

- (a) Background/context: this focused on the contextual factors that underpin each of the practices selected. The factors referred to year and rationale for introducing the practice (which may relate to laws and regulations, policies, strategies, national frameworks on validation and/or career guidance),

- purpose, institutional setting (including division of roles and responsibilities between major stakeholders), target group, focus and activities.
- (b) Practical implementation: this part described how things happen on the ground and captured all important aspects of the relationship between validation and career guidance, including consecutive steps (entry-exit level) of the practice, methods and tools used, outputs, type of support provided and quality assurance (covering also practitioner competences).
  - (c) Overall assessment: this focused on the organisational and individual benefits resulting from the different forms of relationship between validation and guidance; it covered challenges and successes, as well as suggestions for improvement that might be transferable to other contexts.

The theoretical and research framework was updated during the study and provided the basis for the comparative analysis carried out in Chapter 3.

### **2.2.2. Data gathering**

Information to support the research was obtained in two successive phases:

- (a) desk research (literature review), carried out from February to June 2018; this gathered information from existing literature on guidance and validation practices across the 12 different countries selected for case studies. In total, 26 relevant practices were identified (two per country) from which 13 were shortlisted for a case study. Identifying at least two practices per country allowed the study to analyse guidance and validation services that had varied scopes and organisational setups, diverse aims and differing focuses on specific target groups, specific economic contexts or occupational sectors. In addition to the literature referring to concrete practices, theoretical literature (such as academic research and commissioned research, government and technical reports) was also considered;
- (b) field research took place from August to November 2018 and produced 13 practice-focused case studies. Table 2 shows the practices selected. The case studies did not aim to describe national approaches to guidance or validation, but to focus on how validation and guidance are connected within a specific practice. Data was collected during site visits through individual interviews, focus group discussions and observations (of processes, of interactions between guidance/validation practitioners and beneficiaries) where possible. More than 70 people were interviewed, including guidance practitioners, validation experts, project managers and coordinators, methodologists, national executives and beneficiaries. Field research included beneficiaries' and practitioners' stories. These brief testimonials illustrate different aspects of practice on the ground. The stories give

additional depth to the data collected and make them more realistic and understandable for the reader, so excerpts from some stories were included in the form of boxes in Chapter 3.

Table 2. **Overview of selected practices**

Name of the practice	Brief description	Country
<i>Du kannst was! (DKW)/You have skills/ You can do it</i>	Regional initiative (in Upper Austria) enabling low-qualified adults with substantial work experience to acquire an apprenticeship qualification in occupations in high demand on the regional labour market.	Austria
<i>Centrum vzdělávání všem (CVV)/ Education for Everybody Centre</i>	Regional initiative (in South Moravia) funded by the regional government which provides free-of-charge career guidance to people aged 14 and above.	Czechia
<i>Maahanmuuttajien ohjauspalvelut ja osaamisen tunnistaminen (SIMHE Metropolia)/ Supporting immigrants at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences</i>	National initiative of the Ministry of Education and Culture aimed at improving and promoting work-related migration, tackling labour market skills mismatch and lack of skilled workers. <i>SIMHE</i> Metropolia, is just one of several practices under the initiative.	Finland 1
<i>Tampereen ammatillisen koulutuskeskuksen toimintamalli opiskelijoiden ohjauksessa ja aiemmin opitun tunnistamisessa ja tunnustamisessa ammattitutkintojärjestelmän viitekehyksessä (TAKK)/ Guidance and validation within the competence-based qualification (CBQ) system at TAKK</i>	National initiative to provide purposeful educational opportunities for adults who want to acquire a formal vocational qualification, the competence-based qualification (CBQ).	Finland 2

Name of the practice	Brief description	Country
<i>Bilan de compétences/</i> Competences assessment	National initiative enabling a <i>Bilan</i> as a universal right for all citizens. It was created to achieve a better balance between labour supply and demand by supporting individuals in identifying their competences and then in developing a professional plan that includes their individual aspirations and fits with current labour market needs.	France
<i>Writeon.ie</i>	National tool supporting adult learning services, aiming to improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes of adult learners. For this purpose, NALA, a voluntary sector organisation promoting adult literacy, has developed a distance learning tool ( <i>Writeon.ie</i> ) based on RPL.	Ireland
<i>IDAN/</i> An integrated provision of career guidance and validation services with follow-up services at IDAN education centre	National initiative addressing the need for upskilling of employees (in certified trades) without a completed upper secondary school level.	Iceland
Upskilling through PES	Regional initiative (in Emilia-Romagna) targeted towards upskilling of unemployed people registered at PES who have a low employability profile.	Italy
<i>LeerWerkLoketten/</i> Learning and Working Desks	Regional initiative aiming to strengthen people's skills and competences to match regional labour market needs through the brokering function of the Desks that foster cooperation between education providers, local authorities, social organisations and the business community.	Netherlands

Name of the practice	Brief description	Country
<i>Linking powiat labour offices (local PES offices) with the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning organised within formal VET</i>	National initiative focusing on the cooperation between PES services and examination boards responsible for assessment and certification in the VET sector. The background of the initiative relates to growing interest in VNIL of adults' competences (because of skills gap) and reform in the VET system (providing more flexible access to examinations).	Poland
<i>Programa Qualifica/Qualifica Programme</i>	National initiative aiming to raise adult participation in LLL and train for an upskilled workforce.	Portugal
<i>Branschvalideringen/Sectoral validations</i>	Sectoral initiative initiated by labour market stakeholders to address skills shortcomings and bottlenecks in some sectors and trades experiencing difficulties in this respect.	Sweden
<i>My World of Work (MyWoW)</i>	Web-based career information and advice resource used in schools and careers centres across the country and complementing the career management skills (CMS) framework for Scotland; allows users (pupils, young people and adults) to profile their interests, skills and strengths using a range of digital tools and activities.	UK-Scotland

Source: Based on the case studies.

## CHAPTER 3.

# Comparative analysis

This chapter will analyse the 13 practices covered by the study, along several dimensions that characterise the relationship between career guidance and validating non-formal and informal learning. The dimensions have been selected in accordance with the main research questions (Section 1.2), the theoretical and research framework (Annex 2) and the underlying data. Each of the dimensions is further explored in a dedicated section.

### 3.1. Introduction

‘Coordination’ is a key reference concept for the comparative analysis in this study; the practices reviewed show different forms of coordination between validation and guidance. Coordination relates to the governance mechanisms determined by the institution shaping the relationship between validation and guidance. Characteristics of these governance mechanisms include:

- (a) types of actors involved (including public employment services (PES), chambers, trade unions, employers, education institutions, municipalities, NGOs) and division of tasks and responsibilities among them;
- (b) degree of centralisation: a practice may be centralised (initiated, managed, monitored and mainly financed by the State) or driven by regional/local/sectoral partnerships (and part funded by the EU, State, region or sector). This aspect affects the framework for coordination between validation and guidance (Section 3.3.1.2). In the centralised practices, national legislation, policy or strategy may enshrine the connection between validation and guidance. In comparison, the practices driven by regional/local/sectoral partnerships often have higher involvement of employers and employee organisations because they usually aim to address skills mismatches or deal with the demand for upskilling in a given region/sector;
- (c) degree of formalisation of the relationship between validation and guidance (Section 3.2).

The mechanisms that shape the coordination between validation and guidance determine how and to what extent coherence is achieved. Coherence, as used by this study, reflects how well guidance and validation services exchange information with one another (degree of harmonisation of processes), and how well they mutually enable the intended support to individuals. For example, outputs

from guidance processes, such as skills identification, can support certification if they are based on common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks and if information at a previous stage of the practice is properly documented and transmitted to the next stage, so that it can be used and further developed. Coherent outcomes are usually well documented through standardised/harmonised forms used by practitioners. Also, a digital system may support information transfer among services.

The question about how coherence of outcomes can be ensured in different contexts relates to the benefits (individual, organisational) and challenges of linking validation and guidance services. Benefits and challenges may differ depending on the way activities are coordinated. Figure 2 summarises the dimensions used for comparative analysis in the following subsections.

Figure 2. **Dimensions of comparative analysis**

Research questions	Dimensions
1. What are the necessary conditions to ensure successful coordination between validation and guidance in practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisations implementing the practice</li> <li>• Existence of a framework enabling coordination</li> <li>• Rationale and target group</li> </ul>
2. What are the characteristics of guidance provision?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities</li> <li>• Comprehensiveness</li> <li>• Prescribed/harmonised procedure</li> <li>• Flexibility of access and form of delivery</li> </ul>
3. How can the coherence of the outputs of guidance and validation be assured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of common standards and reference frameworks</li> <li>• Use of standardised/ harmonised forms</li> <li>• Digital systems</li> <li>• Staff competences</li> </ul>
4. What are the benefits and challenges of increased coordination between the two services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual benefits</li> <li>• Organisational benefits</li> <li>• Challenges</li> </ul>

### 3.2. Forms of relationship between validation and guidance

Depending on how the coordination between validation and guidance takes place, three general forms of relationship can be distinguished: formal cooperation between independent agencies, informal cooperation between distinct organisations, and integration of services, typically within one organisation <sup>(6)</sup>.

<sup>(6)</sup> The theoretical possibility for absence of cooperation was not observed in any of the practices explored.

Formal cooperation <sup>(7)</sup> between independent services may result from a framework setting up clear principles, rules and procedures on connecting validation and guidance. A framework can be defined or driven by national/regional legislation or a strategy from a network of regional/sectoral partnerships between different stakeholders (including employers and employee organisations). The Austrian practice is characterised by a regional network including business and labour chambers, regional adult learning providers, regional government and an umbrella organisation coordinating cooperation between the partners. In this form of cooperation, partners may sign an agreement or create an action plan for regional development. In the Dutch practice, the activities of the Learning and working desks are based on a biannual regional business plan agreed by regional partners. For this form of cooperation, career guidance is usually provided before and during validation <sup>(8)</sup>; some cases may have follow-up guidance. Depending on the activity (initial screening of competences, client profiling, creation of a portfolio), different stakeholders may provide guidance; some services have more or less formalised referrals (signposting). The formal component has a systematic process, a harmonised procedure which may include standard forms and common tools used by practitioners. Outputs created at the different steps of the practice may or may not be based on common standards.

Informal cooperation between independent services can be identified in the absence of an operational or legislative framework (to support the formal link between validation and career guidance) and is based on personal contacts and relationships among practitioners. This form of cooperation is not institutionalised, but depends on the practitioners engaging in endeavours without prescribed or harmonised procedures or internal guidelines to follow. Guidance is typically provided before validation: there is no follow-up of clients/beneficiaries and, usually, outputs created at the different stages of the practice are not based on common standards. In some contexts, informal cooperation relates to recent reforms in the education system; for instance, VET reforms in Poland have enabled validation of non-formal and informal learning. A PES counsellor may now recommend that a client undergoes a validation procedure (based on results of a skills audit), although these results cannot be used further in the validation procedure. The summary report created at the end of the *Bilan de compétences* in

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<sup>(7)</sup> 'Formal'/'formalised', 'informal' and 'integrated' are value-free categories without a rating. One form of coordination might fit better in one specific context than in another, therefore it is important to understand the context of the practice.

<sup>(8)</sup> Although validation procedures do not always include all four stages (identification, documentation, assessment and certification), for the purpose of comparative analysis, we refer here to validation that leads to certification.



France may also include a referral to *Validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE) (leading to a formal certification). For instance, in the Czech practice, guidance provided under this form of cooperation may equip beneficiaries with career management skills that support their further decisions on work and learning;

Integration of services is observed when the same organisation provides validation and career guidance. The integration of both services can be enshrined in legislation and/or follow a long tradition creating a 'national approach' in which guidance is an essential part of validation. For example, in the Icelandic practice, lifelong guidance is an integral part of the national model of validation. In accordance with legislation, validation has to include all four stages: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. Validation should also provide preparation, information and follow-up (which are career guidance components). Another example is the Finnish *SIMHE Metropolia* that has interwoven the elements of career guidance and validation. Finland has a long tradition in validating non-formal and informal learning, which can explain why guidance provision today forms an integral part of any of its validation arrangements (in VET, adult education, higher education). In integrated services, career guidance usually takes place before and during validation; in some cases, guidance also occurs after validation. Guidance practitioners have an important role because they are involved at each step of the practice and sometimes serve as mentors for the client. Outputs created within integrated services may be coherent (based on common standards, such as in the Icelandic *IDAN* and the Finnish *TAKK*) or not (as in the Finnish *SIMHE Metropolia*).

Because the study only covers 13 practices, additional forms of coordination between validation and guidance are likely to exist. Also, the forms of coordination described above should not be understood as 'pure' forms. A practice is usually characterised by a mix of features, whereby some are more pronounced than others. For instance, the Austrian practice *Du kannst was!* has elements of formal cooperation (such as a shared operational framework and systematic referrals between services) as well as elements of informal cooperation, which is expressed in the project partners' commitment and will to cooperate. Also, a practice may be currently characterised by informal cooperation while some evidence (such as organisational reforms) suggests potential for more formalised cooperation (as in the Italian and the Swedish practices described in Section 3.3.2). Table 3 summarises the different forms of coordination.

Table 3. **Forms of coordinating validation and guidance services**

Forms	Characteristic features
Formal cooperation	<p>Takes place between independent services; cooperation is supported through a shared project/operational framework and/or a network of regional/sectoral stakeholders. Guidance is typically provided before and during validation; some cases may have a follow-up. Referrals between services are systematic or formalised (following standardised procedure). Both services may use common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks. This increases the coherence between their outputs and enables information sharing/transfer. The latter can be supported through a digital system.</p> <p>Examples: <i>Du kannst was!</i>, <i>LeerWerkLoketten</i></p>
Informal cooperation	<p>No formal link or institutional cooperation exists between services. However, individual practitioners may cooperate on an informal basis; for instance, guidance practitioners may recommend clients to undergo a validation procedure. Guidance is usually provided before validation and does not include a follow-up of clients. Sometimes guidance is fragmented (delivered by practitioners from different organisations). Although outputs produced within guidance do not have a formal value for the validation process, they can develop the client's CMS and support further choices related to learning and work.</p> <p>Examples: <i>Bilan</i>, <i>CVV</i>, <i>Writeon.ie</i>.</p>
Integration	<p>Services are typically provided by a single organisation and integration can be enshrined in legislation or be based on lengthy experience in carrying out VNIL. Processes, procedures and methods are clearly defined and harmonised and referrals between services are not relevant as guidance and validation are integrated. Guidance is provided before and during, sometimes also after validation. Outputs can have varying coherence: in some cases, they are based on common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks; in others, they are used to inform the next stage. Guidance practitioners have an important role because they are involved at each step of the practice and may sometimes act as mentors for the beneficiaries.</p> <p>Examples: <i>IDAN</i>, <i>Qualifica</i>, <i>SIMHE</i> Metropolia, <i>TAKK</i>.</p>

Source: Based on the case studies.

### 3.3. Coordinating validation and guidance: dimensions

This section analyses how practices shape coordination between career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The analysis includes elements such as institutional setting and context, characteristics of guidance provision, coherence between outcomes, and benefits and challenges of the respective approach (Figure 2).

#### 3.3.1. Institutional setting and context

Evidence from the 13 case studies shows that validation and career guidance may connect in considerably different ways depending on their institutional setting and context: types of social actors (governing as well as implementing organisations), their historical relationship to prerequisites for formal or informal cooperation,

existing framework for coordination and the rationale for their target groups. Table 4 outlines each of the following aspects:

- (a) types of institution involved and their responsibilities: Is the practice managed and carried out by one or several institution(s)? What is their type: labour market stakeholders, PES, education institutions, NGOs? Who is responsible for what? In the cases of several implementing institutions, are there prerequisites for formal/informal cooperation between them, such as creating new institutions or modernising institutions that predate the practice (including setting up new partnerships)?
- (b) existence of a framework to coordinate guidance and validation: whether institutions follow a framework for managing and delivering a practice. A framework may be defined or driven by national/regional legislation or a strategy developed by a network of regional/sectoral partnerships between different stakeholders (including employers and employee organisations);
- (c) rationale and groups targeted: does a practice emanate from the organisations' original rationale and the groups they target or does it introduce a novel rationale and new target groups? Are the target groups broad or specific?

#### 3.3.1.1. *Types of institution involved and their responsibilities*

This section focuses on the governance and arrangements to carry out the different practices reviewed. It highlights: the types of institution involved in the different practices and their respective responsibilities; the extent to which links between guidance and validation are derived from cooperation among multiple institutions; and the extent to which links between guidance and validation may shape new forms of institutional arrangements, either through the creation of new structures or new forms of interinstitutional cooperation.

All the reviewed practices show some form of coordination between validation and guidance services. In a few cases, coordinating validation and guidance services led to new structures or networks, such as the Czech CVV, the Dutch *LeerWerkLoketten*, the Finnish *SIMHE Metropolia*, the Portuguese *Qualifica* and – to a lesser extent – the Italian Upskilling through PES. The remaining practices relate to new initiatives emerging from either existing coordination arrangements or new forms of coordination between existing institutions. A few cases had centralised coordination of validation and guidance, as with the Portuguese *Qualifica* and the two Finnish practices, *SIMHE-Metropolia* and *TAKK*.

Table 4. Overview: aspects of institutional settings

Practice/ year of launch	Institutions involved	New structures*	Framework	Rationale	Target group
<i>Du kannst was!</i> 2007	Regional economic chambers, social partners and companies, education/training providers	No	Regional partnership-based	Upskilling mainly, but not only	Specific: low-qualified adults with substantial work experience in a given occupational field
<i>CVV</i> 2013	Education for Everybody Centre (CVV), public institution financed by the South Moravian government	CVV	No framework	Making career guidance affordable and accessible to all	Broad: aged 14+ (mainly students, mothers, people wishing to change their career)
<i>SIMHE Metropolia</i> 2016	Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (UAS)	<i>SIMHE</i> service	Initiative of the Ministry of Education and Culture based on a recommendation	Improving and promoting work-related migration, tackling lack of skilled workers	Specific: immigrants with higher education background and/or with eligibility for higher education studies
<i>TAKK</i> 1994	Tampere Adult Education Centre ( <i>TAKK</i> )	No	Legal	Ensuring skilled workforce through providing purposeful educational opportunities	Broad: adults in general wishing to obtain a formal vocational qualification (CBQ)
<i>Bilan</i> 1991	Centres of the network of the interinstitutional centres; centres of the adult continuing training association, private training and career guidance centres	No	No framework	Enabling individuals to identify their skills and to define a career plan	Broad: all working age citizens (employed and unemployed)

Practice/ year of launch	Institutions involved	New structures*	Framework	Rationale	Target group
<i>Writeon.ie</i> 2008	National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) launched <i>Writeon.ie</i> . ETB adult literacy services in Ireland frequently make use of <i>Writeon</i> . Coordination with adult education guidance services varies according to local arrangements. A local provider called Word Aid is a centre under the Adult Learning Service of Kilkenny and Carlow ETB	No	No framework	Enabling acquisition of a Level 2 or 3 accreditation on the NQF through RPL	Broad: adults in general including low-skilled/qualified, unemployed, disadvantaged groups
<i>IDAN</i> 2006	<i>IDAN</i> – private, non-profit education and training provider supported by the federation of employees and unions represented by the industries	No	Legal	Upskilling of employees in certified trades without a completed upper secondary school	Specific: low-qualified adults aged 23/older
<i>Upskilling through PES</i> 2016	Regional authority under the national Ministry of Labour, regional PES, private employment services, accredited training providers	Active Network for Employment	Regional partnership-based	Modernising labour market activation policies and PES, focusing on upskilling	Specific: unemployed low-skilled adults registered with the PES
<i>LeerWerk-Loketten</i> 2009	Education providers, local authorities, social organisations and the business community	Learning and working desks	Regional partnership-based	Fostering cooperation to strengthen people's competences to match regional labour market needs	Broad: employees, pupils/students, jobseekers, employers
<i>Linking powiat labour offices with VNIL in VET</i> 2012	Regional/local PES, and regional (VET) examination boards	No	No framework	Reintegration into the labour market	Specific: unemployed people registered with the PES

Practice/ year of launch	Institutions involved	New structures*	Framework	Rationale	Target group
<i>Qualifica</i> 2017	Network of <i>Qualifica</i> centres managed by National Agency for Qualification and Professional Education	<i>Qualifica</i> centres	Legal	Raising adult participation in lifelong learning and training for an upskilled workforce	Specific: less qualified adults, unemployed people and NEET
<i>Bransch-valideringen</i> 2009	Sectoral trade committees, employers, PES, vocational schools, training centres or private enterprises	No.	No framework	Addressing skills shortages and bottlenecks in sectors	Broad: unemployed people registered with the PES, migrants, adults, looking to obtain a sectoral certification
<i>MyWoW</i> 2011	Skills Development Scotland manages MyWoW, carried out in schools and career centres across the country	No	Shared CMS framework links all relevant services along a lifelong perspective	More and better use of new technologies, including online tools and resources	Broad: pupils, adults transitioning from the army to civil life, newly arrived migrants and refugees, etc.

(\*) 'New institutions' refers to those created after the practice had been introduced.

Source: Case studies.

In Czechia, an ESF project created, in 2013, the *Education for Everybody Centre* (CVV) to promote adult education and increase participation in adult learning in the South Moravian Region. The project's success (expressed in high-quality and free career guidance and a comprehensive online database of adult learning courses) led the regional government to provide open-ended support to the CVV. The CVV is now funded and governed by the South Moravian regional government's Department of Education which coordinates with the South Moravian Department for Regional Development for the planning and supervision of CVV endeavours.

The *LeerWerkLoketten* practice in the Netherlands set up Learning and working desks in nearly all Dutch regions. These desks create regional alliances between education institutions, regional business networks, municipalities, social partners, third sector organisations, validation providers <sup>(9)</sup> and regional PES offices. The alliances actively improve the connection between their region's education and the labour market. The institutional makeup of these alliances may have regional differences. The social and economic features of its region shape each desk; it may then act accordingly by involving specific partners. While the desks have local or regional practices, each regional desk has a national partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment that has governing and funding responsibilities for the practice.

In the case of the Finnish practice, the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (UAS) existed before the introduction of the SIMHE service. However, the service is a new structure within Metropolia UAS and also in the field of education and employment services in Finland.

In Italy, the focus of the Emilia-Romagna regional government on upskilling the unemployed workforce via PES services came about following a series of labour market reforms, starting in 2014-15 with the Jobs Act. The reform aimed to improve and expand on the PES active labour market policy in job matching, vocational guidance, support in job search, and search for training. In the case of Emilia-Romagna, this has resulted in an informal link between PES activation services and validation processes (see Section 3.3.2.2). The practice is provided and delivered primarily by the PES (mainly involved in client profiling and career guidance) and by all those bodies accredited by the Regional Government for training and validation services. The institutional governance model is complex, with both national and regional authorities responsible for the legislation governing

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<sup>(9)</sup> Validation providers can be independent or part of a VET school or a university. Independent providers are accredited and serve mainly in the labour market while 'embedded' providers work within schools/universities and integrate validation into the learning processes.

the practice. The government of Emilia-Romagna is responsible for planning all regional policies relating to training and employment. It is supported in the management and delivery of services by the Regional Agency for Employment (network of regional PES), which carries out the policy guidelines defined by the Emilia-Romagna Region. The Upskilling through PES practice is supported by the Rete Attiva per il Lavoro (Active Network for Employment) created in 2017 by the Emilia-Romagna Region and coordinated by the Regional Agency for Employment. The Active Network for Employment gathers both public and private bodies accredited to offer career guidance, validation and job search services supporting unemployed citizens.

Some of the reviewed practices relate to new initiatives emerging from previous interinstitutional cooperation. These include the Austrian *Du kannst was!* and the Irish *Writeon.ie*.

In Austria, while the *Du kannst was!* initiative was a novelty, developed from an existing association of social partners in the Upper Austria region. This regional partnership served as a legal vehicle for setting up the initiative (through applying for financing from the region). *Du kannst was!* strengthens the social dialogue between State institutions, regional providers of continuing vocational education and training (CVET) and a range of regulatory partners within the national vocational education system. The regulatory partners include Regional Chambers of Labour, Regional Economic Chambers, regional branches of the public employment service, the regional branches of the Austrian Trade Union Federation, the Federation of Austrian Industry and Provincial Boards of Education. The Apprenticeship Offices of the Economic Chamber (the awarding body for apprenticeship certificates in Austria) are responsible for organising and providing the validation examinations and the certification.

In Ireland, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is called the recognition of prior learning (RPL). The initiative selected for this case study is *Writeon.ie*, which falls within the scope of RPL. This is a national initiative developed by the independent charity NALA in September 2008. It is regularly used by the staff of over 180 adult learning centres that fall under the remit of the 16 education and training boards (ETBs) across Ireland. A learner can register directly on *Writeon.ie*, visit a local adult learning centre or be referred from a local adult education guidance service (AEGS) under the local ETB. Guidance is provided at different points of the learning process; for example, local AEGS guidance counsellors offer guidance sessions in local adult learning centres

Some practices reviewed have led to setting up new cooperation arrangements among existing bodies, notably those PES with responsibility for career guidance. This is the case in Poland and Sweden. In Poland, extramural



vocational examinations were introduced in 2012. While these are conducted within the formal VET system by eight regional examination boards (REB), supervised by a Central Examination Board (CEB), the novelty is that the practice has initiated informal cooperation between the CEB and the PES (Section 3.3.2.2). In Sweden, the *Branschvalideringen* (sectoral validation) practice was developed organically by national-level sectoral committees (of social partners) by setting the sectoral standards and accrediting the training and validation providers (vocational schools, training centres or private enterprises). The novelty is that *Branschvalideringen* also involves the PES, with responsibilities for providing career guidance, for validation referrals and for covering the costs of branch validation.

The *Bilan de compétences* in France was introduced by law in 1991 well before the emergence of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL) as a priority in EU policy. While the *Bilan de compétences* is centrally governed by the State, its legal framework allows considerable flexibility for both the State and the social partners to negotiate and regulate the practice. *Bilan* is delivered by various types of organisation (public, private and independent); the practitioners employed at these organisations are accredited by joint collective bodies for individual training leave (OPACIF). Each economic sector has a different OPACIF and practices vary greatly among the accredited organisations.

Only a few of the practices reviewed have integrated or centralised forms of governance. These include the Portuguese *Qualifica* and the UK-Scotland My World of Work (*MyWoW*) resources. The *Qualifica* programme is carried out by a nationwide network of centres (*Qualifica* centres) created in 2017 under the governance of the National Agency for Qualifications and Professional Education (ANQEP). Similar structures existed previously under initiatives first introduced in 2000 with the creation of centres for recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC). In the case of *MyWoW*, it is entirely managed, promoted and developed by Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Scotland's national careers service. The *MyWoW* resource is mainly used in education (specifically in primary and secondary education) and by careers guidance professionals and practitioners within the national careers service.

Some case studies focused on one organisation (among others of the same type) carrying out a given practice: *TAKK* and *SIMHE Metropolia* in Finland and *IDAN* in Iceland. Two of the practices reviewed are in adult learning centres: *TAKK* and *IDAN*. The Tampere Adult Education Centre (*TAKK*) is a leading provider of VET for adults in Finland. It is accredited for carrying out activities governed by the competence-based qualification (CBQ) framework for validating vocational skills acquired in non-formal, informal or formal contexts. *TAKK* predates the introduction

of the CBQ framework used by the formal VET system in Finland. In providing CBQs, TAKK closely cooperates with companies and PES offices. TAKK also outsources on-the-job learning to companies and may direct users to the PES for labour market training: this is made possible through the use by all stakeholders of the common national CBQ framework.

IDAN is a non-profit education and training provider (LLL centre) owned by the federation of employees and unions; it has played an important role in developing validation in Iceland. This provider serves as a delegated body of the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. IDAN not only organises validation nationally, but also provides career guidance as an integrated service to validation, along with continuing vocational education and training (CVET) services, working together with companies to offer company-based training. As with other LLL centres, IDAN cooperates with the ETSC (the national coordinating body for validation).

SIMHE is an initiative launched by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and currently involves six higher education institutions, each of which has its own SIMHE service. While all SIMHE services integrate career guidance and validation in some form or another, providers (in this case, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences) are solely and independently responsible for the design, planning, operating and further developing their own SIMHE service. Providers are also accountable to the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture from which they receive funding for SIMHE <sup>(10)</sup>.

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<sup>(10)</sup> The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture has a dedicated steering group tasked with monitoring the higher education institutions responsible for recognising the skills of immigrants in higher education.

### **Conclusions on institutional setting and context**

- (a) Coordination between validation and guidance exists generally but in diverse forms, which has mostly to do with country-specific administrative arrangements and traditions.
- (b) There is high path dependency in the sense that existing institutions shape the way coordination between validation and guidance takes place.
- (c) Centralised coordination of validation and guidance is relatively rare; this can be explained by the prevalence of coordination between existing institutions with separate remits.
- (d) Practices involving centralised forms of management and implementation of validation and guidance are more likely to have integrated services.

#### 3.3.1.2. *Frameworks for coordinating guidance and validation activities*

A framework is defined or driven by national/regional legislation or a strategy developed by a network of regional/sectoral partnerships between different stakeholders (including employers and employee organisations). It fixes clear principles, rules or procedures about connecting validation and guidance. Frameworks are an important aspect of the institutional setting because they may determine the extent of centralisation or formalisation of institutional cooperation (Section 3.3.2.2).

Frameworks set up rules and processes to coordinate validation and guidance; they exist in diverse structures, varying between legal (legislatively defined) and non-legal forms (policy strategies, formal interinstitutional cooperation agreements, business plans). Legal frameworks govern the coordination of validation and guidance in a few of the practices reviewed (the Icelandic, the Finnish *TAKK* and the Portuguese). For most other practices, coordination between validation and guidance is based on a diversity of non-legal frameworks. Some practices have no framework for coordination between validation and guidance, implying that coordination is informal.

Legal frameworks to coordinate career guidance and validation services are in place in Portugal, Finland and Iceland. In Portugal, the *Qualifica* programme, launched in 2017, is enshrined in national regulations introduced in 2016 covering the national system for recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC). The regulations provide for a clear mandate for the ANQEP (National agency for qualification and professional education) to manage the *Qualifica* programme and the network of *Qualifica* centres. ANQEP's *Methodological guide for lifelong guidance* dedicates a chapter to explaining the connection between validation (RVCC) and guidance (ANQEP 2017, p. 49). In Finland, *TAKK* offers competence-based qualifications (CBQ) to adults; its CBQ system is based on a legal framework defining guidance as essential to providing the CBQ qualifications

while also recognising prior learning (validation). In Iceland, *IDAN* provides both career guidance and validation services: the link between them is defined in the Adult Education Act (2010) and the Regulation for Adult Education, No 1163 (2011); these legal regulations state that guidance should be provided when validating prior learning. There is also a quality standard related to guidance in the accreditation system for education providers (such as *IDAN*) working with the target group of the national coordinating body for validation (ETSC). The target group includes low-qualified adults aged 23 or older.

Some practices have been developed around shared frameworks that are non-legal in nature but aim to ensure consistent cooperation between different services or stakeholders. This is the case for Upskilling through PES in Italy, Learning and working desks in the Netherlands, *Du kannst was!* in Austria, *SIMHE Metropolia* in Finland and *MyWoW* in UK-Scotland.

Upskilling through PES in Emilia-Romagna is based on the regional system of qualifications that offers to validate and certify competences acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. In this regional framework, PES plays the central role in planning the upskilling pathways for clients. The Active Network for Employment (*Rete Attiva per il Lavoro*) acts as an 'umbrella organisation' within the framework and ensures coordination between PES and accredited private employment services. The relationships between the PES and the accredited providers of the network are yet to be fully formalised; for example, procedures must be created to exchange data on beneficiaries (Section 3.3.2.2).

In the Netherlands, each learning and working desk bases its actions on a biannual regional business plan, signed by the regional core partners at administrative level. Each regional business plan describes the regional training provision and maps the available validation and guidance services for the various target groups. The cooperating partners contribute and are committed to each plan.

The *Du kannst was!* initiative in Upper Austria is based on a formal agreement for cooperation between social partners in the region and their respective CVET providers, as well as CVET providers who participate in the Upper Austria adult learning platform.

The *SIMHE Metropolia* practice in Finland was developed using recommendations of the working group on immigration issues at the Ministry of Education and Culture. The working group was set up to improve integration of asylum seekers, including people with higher education background and/or eligibility for higher education studies. One recommendation resulted in a pilot project by *Metropolia UAS* and the University of Jyväskylä; this aimed to identify and recognise highly educated immigrants' education achievements in their

country of origin so they could swiftly enter further education or training. This integration of guidance and validation services in the higher education sector may be seen as transferring successful experience from other education sectors (such as the CBQ system in VET).

The *MyWoW* practice in UK-Scotland is based on a shared CMS framework which uses a lifelong perspective to link all relevant services. It defines targets, priorities and strategies for career education and guidance in all levels of education and training. The framework was developed by SDS, the national skills body for Scotland that provides help to individuals of all ages to build their career-management, work-based and employability skills throughout their lifetime. Schools and career centres carry out the *MyWoW* practice while the development and improvement of content has employer input relating to career opportunities in specific industries.

Some practices reviewed have no frameworks for coordination between validation and guidance services, so cooperation is informal (Section 3.3.2.2). This is the case for the Czech CVV, the French *Bilan de compétences*, the Irish *Writeon.ie*, the Polish and the Swedish practices.

Czechia does not have laws, regulations, policies, strategies, guidelines or funding to underpin the link between career guidance and validation. They are offered as separate services without formal coordination, cooperation or systematic referrals. However, CVV branches in the South Moravian region can be found in upper secondary vocational schools, which are accredited for awarding vocational qualifications in areas of their specialisations. Therefore, CVV personnel and education providers/awarding bodies closely cooperate on a practical level. The CVV can refer its clients to these institutions, although referrals are not binding.

The review of the *Bilan de compétences* reveals that career guidance and validation services do not have legal, formal or systemic institutional cooperation because a separate regulation covers validation (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience*). Cooperation depends on the accredited practitioners involved in providing the *Bilan*. Similarly, in Ireland, *Writeon.ie* has no official legal or formal institutional cooperation between bodies responsible for career guidance and those delivering RPL through *Writeon.ie*. However, cooperation takes place on an informal or unofficial level. For instance, the AEGS provides guidance support to adult learners using *Writeon.ie*, although the way in which it coordinates with validation is entirely a local business.

Poland does not have a framework to coordinate between guidance and validation services; however, the 2012 VET reform introduced the possibility for PES counsellors to refer clients for validation to the VET system. In Sweden, the

*Branschvalideringen* practice has, so far, been based on informal cooperation between independent services: PES, companies, validation providers and training centres. Guidance, either formal or informal, is provided by all these stakeholders, but without a framework with clear guidelines and definition of responsibilities. The PES is aware of this problem and is currently trying to improve services in this respect.

**Conclusions: frameworks to coordinate guidance and validation**

- (a) Different types of framework shape the form of coordination between validation and guidance services.
- (b) Legal frameworks covering validation and guidance tend to lead towards an integrated offer of the validation and guidance services.
- (c) Non-legal frameworks tend to be used in practices involving multiple (existing) institutions to guarantee consistent forms of cooperation between guidance and validation services.
- (d) In the absence of a framework, links between validation and career guidance occur through informal cooperation between independent services.
- (e) The existence (or lack) of a framework often indicates the level of political commitment to create links between validation and guidance.

3.3.1.3. *Rationale and groups targeted*

Exploring the rationale of the practices – reasons for targeting particular groups – helps explain the scope of institutional responsibility or cooperation and to elicit the reasons behind the coordination between career guidance and validation. In most of the practices reviewed, existing institutions set the target groups. Regardless of whether the practice originates from such institutions, the coordinated guidance and validation services predominantly target low-qualified/skilled adults. Few practices target very specific groups, such as newly arrived migrants in the case of SIMHE *Metropolia*, or have a broader target group, as for all citizens in the case of the *Bilan*.

The Italian and Polish practices help unemployed people (including the low-skilled) enter the labour market by offering career guidance and the possibility to validate prior non-formal/informal learning. Both practices involve existing institutions – the PES – that focus on career counselling and client profiling and/or screening (see Table 1).

Adult learners (including low-qualified adults) are a key target group for the Finnish *TAKK* and the Icelandic *ÍÐAN*. The *TAKK* clearly integrates career guidance with CBQ provision. The *ÍÐAN* is unique in that its pilot project contributed to developing the policy framework for integrating career guidance and validation services. *Du kannst was!* in Austria and *Branschvalideringen* in Sweden have a

similar rationale. To meet regional labour demand across various sectors, the Austrian practice targets low-qualified adults with substantial work experience in a given occupational field. *Branschvalideringen* responds to labour demand in sectors across the nation, but does not have specific target groups (as long as profiles are suited to the validation process). In practice, however, most beneficiaries are refugees or immigrants, who are registered at the job centre as unemployed and whose profiles are often ill-suited for validation. Both these practices involve sectoral employer organisations and social partners cooperating with PES and accredited training and validation providers.

Two of the reviewed practices are targeted at very specific groups. For instance, the Finnish SIMHE *Metropolia* targets all migrants with a higher education background and/or eligibility for higher education studies. This practice confers a set of new responsibilities on Metropolia University of Applied Sciences while expanding its service offer. In Scotland, MyWoW is mainly targeted at primary and secondary school pupils; its next-steps provision targets young people aged 15-18 transitioning from secondary education without a confirmed career pathway. However, *MyWow* is also available to other groups via the national careers service centres: adult provision is targeted at those transitioning from the armed services to civil life, those facing redundancy and newly arrived migrants and refugees.

Of the four practices that led to the creation of a new structure (the Czech, the Dutch, the Finnish SIMHE *Metropolia* and the Portuguese), two are targeted at specific groups: SIMHE *Metropolia* (see above) and the *Qualifica* programme are aimed at less qualified adults, unemployed people and NEET. However, the CVV in Czechia and the Learning and working desks in the Netherlands target broader groups. While PES are involved as partners in both practices, their services are open to all individuals and not limited to unemployed people; this suggests that new structures linking validation and guidance can broaden the scope of intervention of certain existing institutions.

The French *Bilan de compétences* is another practice with a broad target group, covering the working age population. According to its governing legislation, all citizens have a right to the *Bilan*. Evidence shows that the low-qualified rarely undergo the procedures foreseen under this practice; this may be related to lack of information or because the *Bilan* is not directly linked to further training, upskilling or acquisition of a qualification.

**Conclusions: rationale and groups targeted**

- (a) Most of the practices reviewed emanate from the rationale of existing organisations (PES, social partners) originally set up to address specific target groups, typically the low-qualified and/or unemployed.
- (b) Coordination between existing institutions with pre-selected target groups might constrain a practice's scope of intervention because including other target groups would mean considerable institutional adaptation.
- (c) Practices resulting in new structures coordinating validation and guidance can expand the scope of targeting among existing institutions, such as the Dutch practice.

**3.3.2. Guidance provision**

The study uses a broad definition of guidance based on the 2008 Council resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies. In the resolution, guidance is defined as a 'continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used' (Council, 2008, p. 2). This broad definition includes guidance before, during and after validation (Section 3.3.2.1) and it may not necessarily comply with national definitions of guidance. However, using such a European definition provides a common basis to compare practices with various national definitions.

Table 5 outlines different components of guidance provision across the 13 practices which may influence its link to validation:

- (a) comprehensiveness: is guidance provided through all stages of a practice, before, during and after validation?
- (b) cooperation: is there a prescribed/harmonised procedure that connects guidance and validation? Do services cooperate formally or informally?
- (c) flexible access: is guidance characterised by flexible access or is it offered at fixed moments (one or two interventions/actions) within a practice?
- (d) forms of delivery: how is guidance provided: face to face, by phone, online, through a combination of various forms? Are forms of delivery adapted to individual needs?



Table 5. Components of guidance provision

Practice	Comprehensiveness	Cooperation		Flexible access and forms of delivery		
	Before (B)/ During (D)/ After (A) validation	Prescribed and/or harmonised procedure	Formal/ informal cooperation	Readiness of target group (+)	Flexible access	Forms of delivery
<i>Du kannst was!</i>	B, D	Harmonised	Formal	Low	Yes	Combined
<i>CVV</i>	B	No procedure	Informal	Mixed	Yes	Combined
<i>SIMHE Metropolia</i>	B, D, A	Harmonised	Integrated***	High	Yes	Combined
<i>TAKK</i>	B, D, A	Both*	Integrated	Mixed	Yes	Combined
<i>Bilan</i>	B	No procedure	Informal	Mixed	Not specified	Face-to-face
<i>Writeon.ie</i>	B, A	No procedure	Informal	Low	Yes	Combined
<i>IDAN</i>	B, D, A	Both	Integrated	Low	Yes	Combined
<i>Upskilling through PES</i>	B, D, A	No procedure	Informal****	Low	Not specified	Combined
<i>LeerWerkLoketten</i>	B, D	Harmonised	Formal	Mixed	Yes	Combined
<i>Linking poviats labour offices with VNIL in VET</i>	B	No procedure	Informal	Mixed	Not specified	Combined
<i>Qualifica</i>	B, D, A	Both	Integrated	Low	Yes	Face-to-face
<i>Branschvalideringen</i>	B, D	Harmonised**	Informal****	Low	Not specified	Face-to-face
<i>MyWoW</i>	B	No procedure	N.a. *****	Mixed	Yes	Combined

(\*) Both = prescribed and harmonised procedure.

(\*\*) (SE): Harmonised procedure if guidance is organised by the employer, but if it is organised by the PES, the procedure is either prescribed or harmonised.

(\*\*\*) In the case of integrated services, the cooperation is between practitioners from the same service which could be both formal and informal. This is noted in the text

(\*\*\*\*) (IT, SE): Informal cooperation between validation and guidance with potential of becoming formal.

(\*\*\*\*\*) (UK-Scotland): A recently launched practice; therefore, currently no cooperation between the two services, but there is a potential for such.

(+) Low level of readiness is typically (but not only) associated with low-skilled/qualified adults needing more comprehensive guidance in contrast to people with high level of readiness who are referred to self-help guidance services. 'Mixed' means that the practice targets people with different backgrounds in, for example, education and skills levels.

Source: Based on the case studies.

### 3.3.2.1. *Comprehensiveness of guidance provision*

The whole process before, during and after validation is challenging to describe because the distinction between validation and career guidance is not entirely clear-cut. Often it is not possible to state exactly where guidance starts and ends and where validation begins (Chapter 2.1). In addition, some practices use their own definition for validation, such as the Italian initiative Upskilling through PES, the Portuguese *Qualifica* and the Swedish *Branschvalideringen*. These definitions are explained later in the relevant sections. Because it is important to have a common reference point for all practices, 'comprehensive guidance provision' in this study is understood as guidance provided through all the stages of validation leading to certification (before, during and after validation). 'Guidance before validation' refers to guidance activities such as signposting, advising and counselling (Table 1) that precede the individual decision for engagement in a validation procedure. 'Guidance during validation' includes counselling and assessing and relates to support offered within the validation procedure: examples are portfolio work and mapping of competences against assessment standards. 'Guidance after validation' is about informing people of future opportunities for learning and/or career pathways after assessment and certification processes have taken place. In the study, it is called also 'follow-up guidance' as it corresponds to following up in terms of guidance activities.

Six out of the 13 practices explored, offer guidance before, during and after validation: the two Finnish practices, the Icelandic *IDAN*, the Italian Upskilling through PES in Emilia-Romagna, the Portuguese *Qualifica* and the Swedish *Branschvalideringen*. While all these practices have follow-up guidance, it is most pronounced in the case of Iceland; this may be because Iceland's legislation on validating prior learning enshrines guidance <sup>(11)</sup>. Without considering legislative requirements, *IDAN* guidance practitioners are especially committed to providing follow-up guidance given the characteristics of the main group targeted by the practice: employees in certified trades without having completed upper secondary education. The aim of validation in this context is to certify the competences already held by these employees (via journeyman exams). Employees who partially possess the needed competences may, through further education and training, still acquire the competences missing after the validation process. At this time, follow-up guidance from *IDAN* takes place: guidance practitioners will contact those employees to assess whether they are undertaking further training to

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(<sup>11</sup>) Validation of prior learning must include all four stages: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. Additional tasks include preparation, information and follow-up.

complete the journeyman's exam. Also, they motivate them and refer them to a guidance practitioner or a teacher in a school.

In the Finnish practice *TAKK*, legislation also defines the guidance after validation. The practice's main output for a client, the 'personal competence development plan' <sup>(12)</sup> includes a plan for focusing on a learner's transition to working life and/or further studies after completing the competence-based qualification (CBQ). However, there is no monitoring and follow-up of clients' progress with their plans (after obtaining the CBQ).

In practices that include follow-up guidance, validation does not necessarily lead to acquiring a 'full qualification'; additional training might be needed. For example, in the case of the Finnish *SIMHE* Metropolia, a feedback session follows the 'validation discussion' at the end of the practice <sup>(13)</sup>; participants give and receive feedback on recognising prior learning and are informed about job-search practices and working life in Finland. The *SIMHE* recognition of prior learning usually does not include a certification phase <sup>(14)</sup>. Beneficiaries can attend a personal guidance discussion at any time during the process and after the 'validation discussion'. In the case of the latter, the personal guidance discussion will focus on a client's plans and how to achieve them. Although components of follow-up guidance exist, some practitioners acknowledge that more can be done, for example, through developing special pathways to higher education studies and/or the organisation of internships in companies <sup>(15)</sup>.

In Portugal, if an adult learner acquires a partial qualification after completing a RVCC process (recognition, validation and certification of competences), the *Qualifica* centre in charge has to develop a personal qualification plan and inform the client about the remaining training necessary to achieve a full qualification. RVCC includes:

- (a) recognition – adult learners identify competences acquired throughout their life via portfolio work;
- (b) validation – competences are compared with existing standards and assessed by practitioners at a *Qualifica* centre;
- (c) and certification – adult learners are evaluated through an exam by a certification jury appointed by the respective *Qualifica* centre.

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<sup>(12)</sup> This term describes the personalisation of the studies.

<sup>(13)</sup> During the 'validation discussion', field-specific experts engage in a dialogue with candidates to identify their previous skills and competences.

<sup>(14)</sup> The document produced during the 'validation discussion' can be used as part of the RPL process and thus lead to formal recognition and certification.

<sup>(15)</sup> Based on the Finnish (*Metropolia*) case study.

The referral towards further education and training (in this case, understood as follow-up guidance) is usually done at the certification stage.

In the Italian practice, the regional PES (in Emilia-Romagna) plans the entire upskilling pathway of a client. This follows the recent labour market reforms in Italy (the Jobs Act) which give PES responsibilities for carrying out active labour market policies. Upskilling in the practice includes validation and certification, which are seen as two distinct steps of the same action; further, validation does not always lead to certification. The upskilling process consists of consecutive steps.

Step 1 (verification/validation through evidence) takes place through developing a 'portfolio' (*scheda capacità e competenze*). During this step, a validation practitioner may support a candidate in reconstructing their previous work or learning experience.

Steps 2 and 3 lead respectively to partial (*certificato di competenze*) and full certification (*certificato di qualifica professionale*) relating to a specific professional area. After validation and/or certification, beneficiaries return to the PES, where their employability profile is revised and usually included in the PES job matching database. Additional actions such as career counselling and/or further training can then be undertaken to improve the employability of beneficiaries.

In the Swedish practice, validation is defined as 'a structured assessment, documentation, and recognition of a person's knowledge, skills, and competences with reference to established standards, irrespective of where and how these are acquired' <sup>(16)</sup>. The sectors develop the fixed standards without reference to IVET qualification standards. Guidance in this practice is more fragmented. For example, although PES provides guidance, it is not responsible for planning the entire upskilling pathway of a client (as in the Italian practice). More specifically, the PES is responsible for initial screening, for referring unemployed beneficiaries to validation, and for covering the costs of the validation procedure. Skills mapping (which follows the initial screening) typically includes guidance because it identifies a client's levels of knowledge, skills and competence compared to a relevant sectoral standard. Skills mapping is carried out by validation providers (mostly VET schools, but also private enterprises) appointed by sectoral trade committees <sup>(17)</sup>. After completing the validation procedure, beneficiaries acquire a certificate of employability based on sectoral standards <sup>(18)</sup> and return to the job centre (local PES), where they receive information, advice and practical assistance to find

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<sup>(16)</sup> Based on a practitioner's story from the case study.

<sup>(17)</sup> Based on the Swedish case study.

<sup>(18)</sup> Many sectoral organisations believe that curricula in formal VET programmes do not sufficiently consider labour market requirements. Therefore, they prefer to develop their own standards for employability (based on the Swedish case study).

employment or continue towards a full (formal IVET) qualification, usually through an apprenticeship. The fragmented guidance may have a negative impact on the ability of case workers to ensure that clients are progressing in their career plans.

Practices characterised by informal cooperation between validation and guidance services (such as the Czech, the French and the Polish practices), usually offer guidance before a client decides to engage in a validation procedure. Irish adult learners in adult learning centres using *Writeon.ie* have access to qualified guidance professionals before and after validation through the AEGS (Adult Education Guidance Service) (Section 3.3.2.2). Upon completing *Writeon.ie*, a learner may be directed to the AEGS for guidance to further education and training opportunities on an informal basis by the adult learning centres. During validation, one-to-one tutor support for learners (if requested) helps compile evidence for accreditation such as portfolio work. The one-to-one support takes place at the adult learning centre carrying out *Writeon.ie*; the tutors are usually not professional career counsellors.

The Austrian and the Dutch practices provide guidance before and during validation. In the case of the Austrian *Du kannst was!*, the initiative enables beneficiaries to acquire an apprenticeship certificate in occupations in high demand on the regional labour market <sup>(19)</sup>. Once clients acquire the certificate, they have a relatively small possibility of not finding appropriate employment. However, no data are collected on the participant transition into employment or further education (after validation). In general, such data could be extremely useful because it may provide evidence of the need for follow-up guidance which relates also to quality assurance/development of a practice; collecting data would help assess the effectiveness of the practice. The learning and working desks in the Netherlands collect some relevant data; for instance, each desk quantifies the kind of service provided to individuals (the number of learning and working arrangements acquired per individual). However, these data are not used for follow-up guidance because it probably needs to be further specified.

The *MyWoW* (UK-Scotland) resource focuses mainly on guidance before validation (related to identification and early-stage documentation), offered by schools and career centres; it includes the skills profiling of pupils and adults based on a digital CMS framework. The conceptualisation of *MyWoW* entails a strong lifelong learning component, which makes it different from the rest of the practices explored. *MyWoW* 'provides individuals with the required skills set to enable subject and career decisions to be taken both in the classroom and beyond, helping

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<sup>(19)</sup> The initiative targeted occupations according to the regional economy and regional demand for upskilling. They were chosen by a project consortium in cooperation with the regional PES.

them to identify and document new and existing skills and confirming the importance of continuing to do so throughout their working life, with a view to aiding employability and providing opportunities for progression' <sup>(20)</sup>.

**Conclusions: comprehensiveness of guidance provision**

- (a) Guidance can be provided before, during and after validation (leading to certification). Guidance offered before validation refers to signposting, advising and counselling. Guidance provided during validation includes counselling and assessing. Guidance provided after validation refers to follow-up.
- (b) From the practices reviewed, an existing or developing framework for coordinating validation and guidance resulted in more comprehensive guidance (before, during and after validation or before and during validation). In comparison, when no coordination framework exists, guidance is usually offered only before validation.
- (c) There may not be a framework for coordination, but practitioners may still be highly committed to connecting validation and guidance even though the connection (cooperation between services) is informal.
- (d) In cases with fragmented guidance (for instance, no legal framework for coordination and unclear division of tasks and responsibilities), the service has less capacity to help clients progress towards their career goals.

3.3.2.2. *Cooperation between services*

Cooperation between validation and guidance varies depending on its degree of formalisation; cooperation may be formal or informal or a combination of both. Formal cooperation includes a harmonised procedure for cross-referrals between services, clear distribution of roles among practitioners and guidelines for service provision that may or not be based on a specific regulation.

In the Austrian *Du kannst was!* procedures are harmonised in the sense that practitioners involved at the different stages follow similar procedures when communicating with one another and there are systematic referrals between them. Usually, practitioners at the guidance and counselling services of the economic chambers/chambers of labour provide 'general' guidance that refers suitable candidates to a more specific guidance, directly connected to *Du kannst was!*, which carries out screening. A practitioner highlighted the importance of providing 'general guidance' by a separate organisation (Box 1).

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<sup>(20)</sup> Quotation from the executive summary of the UK-Scottish case study.

Box 1. ***Du kannst was!, Austria***

Practitioner's story: 'It was important for all project partners to have an independent organisation offering the general guidance and counselling. We also saw that we get more interest after organising general career fairs where we present *Du kannst was!*, than if we organise specialised events. Many clients do not want others to know about their "lack of qualifications" or their will to do further training, so we can reach the target group better by offering general 'career/further training events.'

Source: Austrian case study.

After screening, candidates are referred to guided workshops where, supported by adult educators, they develop a skills portfolio. As a next step, candidates take an exam (a 'first competence check', which is the first part of the final apprenticeship examination) at the apprenticeship offices at the economic chambers <sup>(21)</sup>. In addition to the exam, staff at the apprenticeship offices also assess the portfolio of candidates. If some competences are missing, the person is referred to further training. After completing the training, a 'second competence check' takes place; it focuses mainly on competences lacking during the first 'check' and possibly leads to certification. A harmonised procedure (expressed in the clear division of roles and responsibilities between guidance practitioners, adult educators and validation/field experts) may improve the coherence of stages and outputs created in the different steps of the practice (see Section 3.3.3). Some informal aspects of cooperation between guidance and validation services results from highly committed partners, regular and frequent communication between different practitioners and when guidance practitioners acknowledge the value of validation procedures <sup>(22)</sup>.

The Austrian and the Dutch practices show similarities: both are characterised by formal cooperation between services and follow a harmonised procedure. However, there are subtle differences between these two practices. The procedure followed by the Dutch Learning and working desks has a clear operational logic; it is standardised. For instance, when a client first contacts the desk, the individual's question/need is categorised, according to a formal matrix. Based on that categorisation, a staff member sets a date for a one-to-one consultation with a guidance practitioner to analyse further the question/need. After the consultation, the client can be referred to a validation procedure or to other solutions such as further education. Given that the desks have a broad target group, which may encompass many different individual needs (*Du kannst was!* has a narrow target group), the standardised procedures for every kind of referral saves time in service

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<sup>(21)</sup> They are the awarding body for apprenticeship certificates in Austria.

<sup>(22)</sup> Based on the Austrian case study.

provision. Learning and working desks also have a 'brokering' function in their region because they can quickly match individuals with employer needs, given that employers are also clients of the desks (Box 2).

**Box 2. *LeerWerkLoketten, the Netherlands***

Beneficiary's story: Mr. D. sent an e-mail to the *Leerwerkloket Twente*, along the lines of: 'I have worked in the healthcare sector for more than 20 years as a manager and advisor and I have experience. I see many jobs in IT and many vacancies for programmers. Are there training opportunities for people with my background (medical and business administration) and my age (60+)?' To his surprise, Mr. D was called quickly with the invitation for a conversation with a consultant from the *Leerwerkloket*. There would soon be an information meeting at the *Leerwerkloket* of a company that wanted to (re)train people as programmers.

Source: Dutch case study.

The Italian initiative Upskilling through PES in Emilia Romagna presents an interesting case of services cooperating informally with the potential of becoming more formal. The cooperation is characterised as informal because it currently lacks harmonised/prescribed procedures for connecting validation and guidance<sup>(23)</sup>. For example, PES is responsible for general guidance which includes quantitative and qualitative profiling of participants<sup>(24)</sup> and a three-hour 'laboratory of active job search techniques'<sup>(25)</sup>. During the 'laboratory', guidance practitioners explore their clients' competences and attitudes and decide whether participants need additional group or individual guidance sessions. Thus, participants with a high employability profile (those deemed ready to integrate into the labour market) can be immediately included in the PES job matching database. Participants with a low employability profile are referred either to a training course from an accredited VET provider of formal qualifications or an internship/on-the-job training with accredited private employment services or enterprises<sup>(26)</sup>. In both

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<sup>(23)</sup> Based on the Italian case study.

<sup>(24)</sup> Quantitative profiling refers to basic profiling based on data provided by the participant (gender, age, education, etc.). After the quantitative profiling, a qualitative proceeding based on a 30-minute interview with a PES operator helps identify a participant's competences and needs.

<sup>(25)</sup> The laboratory (organised for groups of participants) offers tips on how to behave during a job interview, and information on how to undertake an active job search, along with immediate feedback on participants' personal attitudes observed by the guidance practitioners.

<sup>(26)</sup> PES and the accredited private employment services form part of the *Rete Attiva per il Lavoro* (active network for employment) which serves as an 'umbrella organisation'



cases (training or internship), clients will have their competences validated (and certified) through the regional system for validation and certification of competences. PES mainly delivers general guidance; however, the validation and certification is provided by accredited private employment services (for internships) or VET accredited providers (for training). The informal component of cooperation relates to practitioners from the different services communicating with one another. If these practitioners were to design a formal, procedural link between guidance and skills validation, then this cooperation would be formalised (Box 3). Since PES has the responsibility to plan the entire upskilling pathway of a client, this 'centralisation'/coordination of the practice may help formal cooperation.

**Box 3. Upskilling through PES, Italy**

Practitioner's story: 'We are still in the initial phase of the active network for employment (formally set up in 2017). Some rules exist but we still lack formalised procedures to effectively link the two services. We have not clearly identified subsequent steps, so we need to design a formalised and procedural link. When serving clients, however, validation and guidance practitioners informally talk to one another and have created a link. Further work on these connections could identify some improved procedures. These, for sure, could simplify the work of practitioners and make the entire procedure more straightforward/linear.'

*Source:* Italian case study.

In the case of Swedish sectoral validations, two different settings are observed. There is a harmonised procedure to connect guidance and validation and, despite the lack of a prescribed or harmonised procedure, actions are taken (such as developing national strategies, guidelines) to improve (and, in a way, formalise) the link between services. In the first setting, enterprises use the practice for their employees and generally consider it successful. For guidance and counselling, this is hardly surprising, given that employers refer to and closely follow participants throughout the process, despite the involvement of other bodies (validation providers and training centres). In the second setting, the practice targets unemployed persons registered at PES, with different actors offering guidance in the different steps of the practice. In principle, a case worker of the job centre (local PES) should follow a client throughout the process, but this does not always happen. For example, job centre case workers screen and make referrals (to a validation provider) in a career guidance setting, but often do not follow through after the beneficiaries move on to the next steps (skills mapping and

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ensuring the coordination between the different services provided to the client and supervised by the Regional Agency for Employment.

validation). Also, individual job centres have relative autonomy in referring clients for validation; regional/local priorities and resources result in inconsistent service among job centres (Box 4).

Box 4. ***Branschvalideringen, Sweden***

Practitioner's story: 'Individual job centres have significant differences in addressing the issue [referring clients for validation], which results in an uneven service level.'

Practitioner's story: 'I do not have a vocational qualification or experience from the building and construction sector, so I can't make a qualified decision about a person's vocational competence. I have, however, over the years developed a knowledge base and a feeling for the subject which enables me to get a reasonable impression of whether the beneficiary is a possible candidate for validation or not. If I'm in doubt, I always send him or her for a skills mapping [which is carried out by the validation provider] ... Also, if a candidate whom I consider not suited for validation insists, I will always refer him or her for a skills mapping process. This procedure is one that I have developed myself out of my personal experience, however, I am not aware of how other job centres actually go about it.'

Source: Swedish case study.

PES in Sweden is currently revising practices for career-guidance services and has elaborated a national strategy paper (2018). The strategy foresees coordinating PES services with other actors and stakeholders who also offer guidance <sup>(27)</sup>.

Practices characterised by integrated services (those in Finland, Iceland, and Portugal) are likely to have harmonised and/or prescribed procedures connecting validation and guidance. Given that services are integrated (interwoven guidance and validation), the issue of cooperation relates to interactions among staff of the same service. This cooperation can be both formal (following certain internal guidelines and/or legal requirements) and informal. The Finnish *SIMHE Metropolia* has harmonised procedures through the staff, clearly communicating and interacting to distribute roles and develop understanding of aims and contents for procedures and what is to be done, how, by whom and when.

In the second Finnish practice (TAKK), legislation defines the CBQ process and different phases that must each include guidance. Legislation does not define the exact procedures or methods to be used at each stage. Providers (such as TAKK) decide independently on their involvement in processes to provide CBQs in order to fulfil the legislative requirements. This individual-centred and flexible

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<sup>(27)</sup> Based on the Swedish case study.

approach (in CBQ provision) means that agreed decisions, solutions or suggestions are all based on the individual's specific needs and own choices.

The Icelandic practice is very similar to the Finnish one (TAKK) because integration of services is based on legislation which defines the national validation model sequence of activities: preparation, information, screening (identification), documentation, assessment, certification and follow-up. A handbook offers guidelines to clarify the roles of stakeholders and each staff member (project manager, guidance practitioner and assessor). Although the standardised procedure is organised in steps, it is still flexible enough to adapt to individual needs through the guidance component. If needed, more tailored guidance can be provided; in some cases, guidance practitioners contact participants regularly to keep them motivated during the validation procedure. Informal aspects of the interaction are expressed in the fact that assessors consult guidance practitioners. For example, if there are doubts about the assessment interview <sup>(28)</sup>, the assessor reviews it with the guidance practitioner who was also present at the interview.

Both *SIMHE Metropolia* and *TAKK* share similarities with the *Qualifica* practice in Portugal, whereby the guidance and validation stages are developed using formal steps and procedures based on a specific regulation. The flexible approach seems, however, to be less pronounced in Portugal because *Qualifica* centres have less autonomy (compared to *TAKK*) to decide on the steps to follow when considering adult learners' interests, motivation and expectations. Another insight into cooperation is revealed by the *Qualifica* centres; depending on institutional ties <sup>(29)</sup>, the centres can cooperate 'directly' with PES or employers. For example, *Qualifica* centres located within vocational training centres connected to the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP/PES) can easily set up links with PES. Those located within companies or sectoral organisations may directly contact employers (usually via the human resources department) to improve the training courses for adult learners wanting to accelerate their (re)insertion into the labour market after completing a RVCC procedure.

Practices characterised by informal cooperation between services, such as the Czech, the Irish, the French and the Polish <sup>(30)</sup>, do not have prescribed or

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<sup>(28)</sup> At the assessment interview (leading to certification), assessors review the beneficiaries' portfolio and self-assessment lists. They then ask questions related to the curricula standards and seek to confirm competences based on learning outcomes.

<sup>(29)</sup> *Qualifica* centres are mostly located in public and private schools, but also in vocational training centres connected to IEFP/PES, sectoral associations, non-governmental organisations and companies.

<sup>(30)</sup> These practices do not show strong indications for future formalisation of cooperation between guidance and validation. Therefore, they are described separately from the

harmonised procedures to link validation and guidance. The informal cooperation is determined by a practice's institutional setting (Section 3.3.1) and their practitioners' knowledge, skills and competences (Section 3.3.4). In the Czech context, validation relates to taking an exam on a vocational qualification included in the national register of qualifications; it does not require guidance or identifying and documenting evidence. CVV guidance practitioners consider clients' competences and the vocational qualification and assessment standards accessible from the Register; they can simply refer suitable candidates to the appropriate validation exam. Only clients whose competences fully match those set in qualification and assessment standards are referred to the appropriate organisation offering examinations for vocational qualifications. Clients registered as unemployed, whose competences only partially match those in the standards, may be referred to PES, which funds retraining courses. Czechia's current public opinion, that formal education has much greater value than validation of non-formal and informal learning, may be a reason that validation and guidance services only cooperate on an informal level. Although the practice only has informal cooperation between services, it is distinguished by highly committed practitioners (Section 3.3.4).

The Polish practice has similarities to and differences from the Czech one. The institutional similarities include that Poland's formal VET system validates non-formal and informal learning through regional examination boards organising VET exams leading to a certification. Also, guidance is not considered as part of validation provision and is delivered separately. Cooperation between validation and guidance remains informal because of its novelty: no such cooperation existed until VET examination reforms enabled the link between validation and guidance and the promotion of validation within career guidance and counselling <sup>(31)</sup>. In contrast to the Czech practice, where regional government funds a career guidance service that signposts clients to a validation procedure, Poland has mostly the local (*powiat*) PES offices that refer potential candidates to validation. Cooperation between the services relies more on individual practitioners and less on institutional cooperation between local PES offices and the regional examination boards. Informal cooperation emerges if a PES counsellor identifies (through screening and skills audit) a client who would benefit from taking a VNIL procedure. The PES counsellor then informs the client about the possibility and refers that person to the closest regional examination board (Box 5). Clients not qualifying for validation might be directed to further training. The Czech CVV did

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Italian and Swedish practices, where measures have already been taken to make the relationship more formal.

<sup>(31)</sup> Based on the Polish case study.

not mention the issue of guidance practitioners not knowing about validation procedures; however, the Polish practice recognised that the limited synergies between validation and guidance resulted partly from inadequate communication with PES staff and client about VNIL solutions. Publicly available information about VNIL on the local PES websites is not enough. Also, skills audits are rarely focused on validation <sup>(32)</sup>.

**Box 5. Linking poviát labour offices with VNIL in VET, Poland**

Beneficiary's story: 'I graduated from a secondary school and did not think of gaining professional qualifications. However, because of my personal circumstances I had to start work after completing secondary school and found employment at the coal mine. After working there for three years, I was released because of the company's difficult financial conditions. I approached the PES office where I learned that my competences might be recognised by taking an exam conducted by a regional examination board and this might help me to find employment in another coal mine company. As a result, I received a VET qualification without attending formal training.'

Source: Polish case study.

The French *Bilan de compétences* does not have a prescribed/harmonised procedure connecting validation <sup>(33)</sup> and guidance because its main aim is supporting an individual's capacity and confidence to move forward with professional development. The *Bilan* does not entail further training or education and validation or evaluation of skills is not related to any specific qualification or standard of competence (see Box 6). While individuals may be referred to a *Bilan de compétences* provider by a range of actors (PES operators such as *Pôle emploi*, *Missions locales*, *Cap emploi*, non-profit organisations, educational services or a private company's human resource services), practitioners carrying out the *Bilan* rarely propose validation leading to a certification (VAE) <sup>(34)</sup>. The case study reveals an apparent need to improve information dissemination on VAE possibilities among *Bilan* practitioners through events such as organised discussions or regular workshops. The *Bilan* is delivered by a complex network of

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<sup>(32)</sup> Based on the Polish case study.

<sup>(33)</sup> This refers to *Validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE). Qualifications which can be obtained via the VAE procedure are registered in the national qualification directory (RNCP) which covers all vocationally or professionally oriented qualifications, including all higher education qualifications with a vocational and professional orientation and purpose. In addition to vocational qualifications awarded by Ministries, sectoral vocational qualifications can also be awarded through VAE and are included in the RNCP.

<sup>(34)</sup> Based on the French case study.

accredited organisations <sup>(35)</sup>; some may have a double accreditation for delivering *Bilan* as well as for providing VAE. The double accreditation can be a prerequisite for organisations to allow participants from one service (*Bilan*) to transition quickly to the other (VAE).

Box 6. ***Bilan de compétences, France***

Practitioner's story: 'In some cases, when people wish to enter a validation process, I suggest beginning with a competence assessment through the *Bilan de compétences*. Not systematically, however. The point is that the *Bilan de compétences* can bring up some interesting results that can be further explored.'

Source: French case study.

In comparison to the *Bilan*, which focuses more on identifying competences and does not include training and certification, the Irish *Writeon.ie* practice has developed a distance learning tool in literacy which allows adult learners to obtain qualifications based on the recognition of their prior learning. Informal cooperation takes place at various points. The AEGS (Adult Education Guidance Service) and the local PES can inform suitable clients about several tools, including *Writeon.ie*. In practice, the AEGS provides individuals with an opportunity to identify and explore available education and career options, enabling them to decide about their future learning and/or career progression. During their meetings, a staff member profiles the individual to determine their existing skills, experience and education level <sup>(36)</sup>. NALA staff, who are directly responsible for *Writeon.ie*, can offer information and support to clients to help them understand their own experiences and explore available learning opportunities (typically by directing them to the local ETB and the AEGS). Staff organise sessions with representatives of the AEGS to visit the centre and inform clients about available guidance services. In this practice, a clear distinction of roles is observed: staff at AEGS are professional guidance counsellors; staff at local adult learning centres are qualified educators; and *Writeon.ie* providers are qualified and experienced in a number of education related fields (Box 7).

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<sup>(35)</sup> It is carried out by public organisations, the centres of the network of the interinstitutional centres (*Centres interinstitutionnels de bilan de compétences*, CIBC, 250 centres) and the centres of the Adult Continuing Training Association (*Association pour la formation professionnelle des adultes*, AFPA, 274 training centres), as well as by private training centres and private career guidance centres.

<sup>(36)</sup> Based on the Irish case study.

Box 7. **Writeon.ie, Ireland**

Practitioner's story: 'If the staff in the Word Aid centre, [a *Writeon.ie* provider], are to offer more formalised guidance, are we not stepping on the toes of the AEGS? They are professional guidance counsellors. We're not. For some of our learners progression into employment may never be an option for various reasons. For them, information about what guidance services exist and where they need to go to find them is what they need.'

Source: Irish case study.

The UK-Scotland *MyWoW* resource has potential for signposting to third-party institutions able to undertake assessment and certification, most often with a view to securing partial exemption from an existing programme or award. However, this is a part of the *MyWoW* resource.

**Conclusions: cooperation between services**

- (a) Cooperation between validation and guidance varies depending on its degree of formalisation: cooperation may be formal or informal or a combination of both. Elements of formal cooperation include a harmonised procedure for cross-referrals between services, clear distribution of roles among practitioners involved, guidelines for service provision that may or not be based on a specific regulation. The clearer the distribution of roles, the smoother and quicker the cross-referrals.
- (b) Practices with integration enshrined in legislation will more likely have harmonised and/or prescribed procedures for connecting validation and guidance. In these cases, the flexibility of guidance provision varies depending on the extent to which institutions involved can design their own procedures.
- (c) Services characterised by informal cooperation do not follow a prescribed/harmonised procedure in linking validation and guidance. Their cooperation relies on practitioner (individual) cooperation rather than on institutional cooperation. The informal cooperation is determined by factors such as the institutional setting of the practice (type of actors involved) and knowledge of practitioners about validation procedures.
- (d) The existence of a harmonised procedure (expressed in the clear division of roles and responsibilities among guidance and validation practitioners) may improve the coherence of stages and outputs created at the different steps of the practice.
- (e) Commitment of practitioners is an important factor that ensures successful coordination between validation and guidance. More formal cooperation or integration of services does not necessarily mean more highly committed practitioners. Practices characterised by informal cooperation may also be distinguished by highly committed practitioners.

3.3.2.3. *Flexible access and forms of delivery*

'Flexible access' in this study is understood as personal/individualised support at any point when the client needs it through a combination of delivery forms such as

face-to-face guidance, digital tools and phone contact. Flexible access and forms of delivery depend on several interrelated factors, including:

- (a) the clients' level of readiness for decision-making. A low level of readiness is typically (but not only) associated with low-skilled/qualified adults needing more comprehensive guidance, in contrast to people with a high level of readiness who are usually referred to self-help guidance services (adapted from Sampson et al., 1999);
- (b) the degree of formalisation of procedures and the degree of control of guidance practitioners over individual cases;
- (c) the resources of guidance provision measured by time dedicated by practitioners, staff competences and applicability of tools used (Section 3.3.4);
- (d) forms of delivery, for instance use of one or several delivery channels (multi-channelling).

Table 5 shows a relationship between comprehensiveness of guidance provision (guidance provided before, during and after validation) and level of readiness of beneficiaries. Usually, clients with a low level of readiness need more comprehensive guidance compared to clients with a medium or high level of readiness. For example, the Icelandic *IDAN* case study revealed that some participants may need more encouragement than others (especially those with lower readiness which may be due to lack of self-esteem, learning difficulties of some kind or because of insufficient belief in one's own capability to learn) <sup>(37)</sup>. In this context, *IDAN* guidance practitioners serve as a 'support net' for beneficiaries, encouraging them during and after validation (see Section 3.3.2.1). Practitioners at *Qualifica* have to be 'sensitive' when working with adult learners, to give them the motivation and confidence they need to validate their skills <sup>(38)</sup>. Hence an important component of flexible guidance provision, particularly in relation to low skilled/qualified adults, is practitioner attitude: to show empathy (for an individual's story) and an ability to motivate the person to seek further personal and professional development.

Flexible access to guidance may relate not only to the readiness of the target group, but also to its age. For instance, the UK-Scotland *MyWoW* resource shows that, with the ageing of the target group, a more individual-centred approach is often needed.

Box 8 illustrates different examples of flexible guidance delivery.

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<sup>(37)</sup> Based on the Icelandic case study.

<sup>(38)</sup> Based on the Portuguese case study.



Box 8. **Flexible guidance delivery, selected practices**

*IDAN*: 'The process is very focused on the individual and the guidance practitioners encourage clients to take part and complete it' [...]. 'The guidance is kind of the glue in the process; we [the guidance practitioners] are there for the individual, we organise the process and contact the assessors. We are the glue from the beginning to the end. Always there to answer questions, people call and ask for advice and guidance during and after the procedures. And we connect them to other service providers after the process.'

*Qualifica*: 'The adult learner is, most of the time, with the same practitioners who set and monitor his/her path during all the stages of the procedure [guidance and recognition, validation, and certification]. This ensures, in a certain way, a more tailored and flexible intervention and gives adult learners more confidence and motivation. The fact that practitioners share the same workplace is a strong advantage... When adult learners are sent to education/training providers, guidance practitioners have to follow-up on their progress at least for the first four months after the referral.'

*MyWoW*: 'The use of the source [*MyWoW*] is initiated by teachers or career advisors. As pupils progress through primary and secondary education, making subject and career choices, the nature and frequency of CIAG provision [career information, advice and guidance] also adapts, becoming more individual-centred.'

Source: Practitioners' stories from the Icelandic, Portuguese and UK-Scotland case studies.

The excerpts from the Icelandic and the Portuguese case studies in Box 8 highlight the central role of guidance in practices leading to certification, given that the process may be longer than expected and beneficiaries may become discouraged (especially if they are low-qualified/skilled). In both practices, guidance practitioners are likely to have a coordination role and act as mentors for the beneficiaries. This is observed also in the Finnish *TAKK* and *SIMHE Metropolia*. The coordination and mentoring role of guidance practitioners may be associated with the need for more comprehensive guidance provision; however, it may also be related to the fact that all four practices (*IDAN*, *Qualifica*, *SIMHE Metropolia* and *TAKK*) are examples of integrated services.

While most practices offer different forms of guidance, in the cases of Portugal and Sweden, face-to-face guidance has a higher priority over other delivery forms, possibly because of the clients' low level of readiness. This form of guidance also has a higher priority in the case of the French *Bilan*, given the personalised nature of the service; for example, developing an individual professional project (the main output) needs many one-to-one interactions between a client and practitioner.

People need different guidance support and the multi-channelling (combination of face-to-face guidance, digital tools, phone) allows for a flexible support service. For example, multi-channelling might be adequate for a broad

target group (such as the Dutch *LeerWerkLoketten*) as well as the needs of a specific target group, which is nevertheless heterogeneous, such as immigrants with higher education in *SIMHE Metropolia* (Box 9).

**Box 9. Multi-channelling, selected practices**

*LeerWerkLoketten*: 'Desks do not always deem digital services as the fastest or best solution. For certain parts of the service and for certain target groups, face-to-face guidance should be used. Face-to-face guidance can be provided for individuals or groups, in one session or as a series of sessions, with or without using specific (standardised) tools and instruments. It can be combined with digital/web-based guidance offering information about validation and possibly including tools for self-assessment to help individuals identify their acquired knowledge, skills and competences.'

*SIMHE Metropolia*: 'Various means to provide information, guidance and counselling are offered based on the individual's own needs and preferences. The client can receive guidance by email (first contact, information provision, screening), by personal guidance discussions and/or by participating in Guidance Generalia lectures that are a form of group guidance.'

*Source*: Practitioners' stories from the Dutch and the Finnish (*SIMHE Metropolia*) case studies.

Different forms of guidance may be suitable for each step of a given practice. For example, the practices in this study usually have the initial contact online or over the phone; a guidance practitioner then screens/profiles a client through a face-to-face consultation, possibly supported by digital tools, and portfolio work is typically done in a group session(s). Evidence from the Austrian, the Icelandic, the Irish, the Italian and the Portuguese case studies shows that beneficiaries need guidance that is as flexible as possible when building their portfolio (see Box 10). This may be related to the fact that portfolio building (if it leads to certification) needs the appropriate identification and description of individual competences against competence standards. Flexible guidance at this stage is particularly important for low skilled/qualified beneficiaries as well as for those not familiar with the assessment standards/references. For example, trainers/teachers at *Qualifica* assist beneficiaries in developing a portfolio through decoding/simplifying the complex competence standards; these are sometimes 'vague' for beneficiaries. More specifically, teachers and trainers support adult learners in better describing their learning outcomes by giving examples of regular opportunities to develop specific competences <sup>(39)</sup>.

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<sup>(39)</sup> Based on the Portuguese case study.

Box 10. ***IDAN*, Iceland**

Practitioner's story: 'When developing the portfolio, some candidates join the group session, others fill in the document at home with or without the assistance of assessors and guidance practitioners. That is variable and based on the readiness and circumstances of individuals. Access to guidance practitioners during this phase is not limited and can also be through emails and telephone conversations.'

Source: Icelandic case study.

Digital platforms are important in the Irish *Writeon.ie* and the UK-Scotland *MyWoW* resources. In Ireland, this relates to the nature of the practice (it uses ICT to develop adult learners' literacy and numeracy skills and record their progress) and to the need for adult learners to overcome different learning barriers such as fears attached to the early stages of literacy learning, access to *Writeon.ie* in remote parts of the region, and family commitments. In comparison, *MyWoW* is a web-based career information and advice platform which does not include training and does not lead to specific certifications. The *MyWoW* platform supports developing career management skills (CMS) and the delivery of career information and advice to young people and adults in Scotland (see Box 11).

Box 11. **Use of digital platforms, selected practices**

*Writeon.ie*: '*Writeon.ie* is flexible. Depending on the needs of the learner, they can undertake *Writeon.ie* through independent learning online, with telephone tutor support (distance learning service), or in face-to-face, blended learning with a tutor and a peer group in an adult learning centre. They can work in the privacy of their own home and be supported through online tutors or tutors in a centre.'

*MyWoW*: 'Users first need to set-up their individual account on *MyWoW*. They are then encouraged to profile their interests, skills and strengths using a range of different activities with certain data sets retained by *MyWoW*. As the data set is completed, user profiles are mapped against different career profiles with the option to review career or subject choices, either independently or as part of a guided process involving a career adviser.'

Source: Practitioners' stories from the Irish and UK-Scotland case studies.

### **Conclusions on flexible access and forms of guidance delivery**

- (a) People need different levels of guidance; flexibility implies adaptation to the needs of beneficiaries. For instance, the lower the level of readiness of clients, the more comprehensive and individualised guidance they will need.
- (b) Multi-channelling allows for a flexible support service in accordance with the needs of the target group.
- (c) Beneficiaries need guidance that is as flexible as possible when building their portfolio. Flexible guidance at this step is particularly important for low skilled/qualified adults as well as for beneficiaries not familiar with the assessment standards/references used.
- (d) Important components of flexible guidance provision, particularly in relation to low skilled/qualified adults, are the attitude and soft skills of the practitioners, for instance, to show empathy (for an individual's story) and to motivate the person for further personal and professional development.

### **3.3.3. Coherence of outputs**

'Coherence', in this study, is understood as whether outputs produced at a certain stage of the practice can be used as inputs for the next stage. The existence of coherence between outputs ensures effective information exchange and the seamless transfer of clients between services or from one stage of the practice to another (with integrated guidance and validation services).

Coherence can be supported through different tools that collect and document information about beneficiaries. Initial screening can use digital profiling tools as well as web-based self-assessment tools that are complemented by a face-to-face interview with a guidance practitioner. Profiling tools (from the practices reviewed) usually focus on beneficiaries' personal characteristics (such as age, education, employment status) while the self-assessment tools may go a step further and link individual educational and work experience with a certain occupational profile or qualification standard. The identification and documentation phase (counselling and assessing) typically uses a skills portfolio or a similar tool that is based on common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks. If the skills portfolio and the self-assessment tool from the initial screening refer to the same competence standards, they are 'coherent'. This means the information from both steps (initial screening and identification and documentation) can be transferred to, and further developed at, the next stage of the practice. This process would be simplified by using a shared digital system to store the results from the consecutive steps of the practice: initial screening, identification and documentation, assessment and certification. Such a system would also improve information exchange and cross-referrals between services as well as follow-up guidance.

Table 6 provides details of several factors that may influence the extent of coherence of outputs in the practices explored. These are:

- (a) use of common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks through all the stages of the practice to identify, document and assess skills;
- (b) use of standardised tools/forms/records/templates to document the outputs at the different steps of the practice;
- (c) use of a shared digital system to exchange information between services/stages of the practice.

Table 6. **Overview: coherence of outputs**

Practice	Formal/informal cooperation	Prescribed and/or harmonised procedure	Use of common standards through all the stages	Use of standardised / harmonised forms/tools/ records	Use of digital systems to share information
<i>Du kannst was!</i>	Formal	Harmonised	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>CVV</i>	Informal	No procedure	No	No	No
<i>SIMHE Metropolia</i>	Integrated	Harmonised	No	Yes	No
<i>TAKK</i>	Integrated	Both	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Bilan</i>	Informal	No procedure	No	No	No
<i>Writeon.ie</i>	Informal	No procedure	N.a.	Yes	No
<i>İDAN</i>	Integrated	Both	Yes	Yes	No
<i>Upskilling through PES</i>	Informal	No procedure	No	Yes	No
<i>LeerWerkLoketten</i>	Formal	Harmonised	Yes	Yes	No
<i>Linking poviát labour offices with VNIL in VET</i>	Informal	No procedure	No	Yes	No
<i>Qualifica</i>	Integrated	Both	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Branschvalideringen</i>	Informal	Harmonised	Yes	Yes	No
<i>MyWoW</i>	N.a.	No procedure	No	Yes	No

Source: Case studies.

Practices characterised by informal cooperation between validation and guidance do not typically use a common standard or a common reference framework for producing their outputs: examples include practices in Czechia, France, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Sweden and UK-Scotland. They also do not have a digital system to share information. The organisations have varied use of

standardised forms/tools/records to identify and document competences. For instance, when PES is involved with practices, standardised forms tend to be used, as in the Italian, the Irish, the Polish and the Swedish cases. Where practitioners have relative freedom to decide what forms and methods they can use, no standardised forms are applied (the Czech *CVV* and the French *Bilan de compétences*).

Because the Czech practice does not formally connect guidance and validation, it is not surprising that there is no coherence of outputs. Nevertheless, this could soon change: *CVV* practitioners now compare clients' competences against those listed in the vocational qualification and assessment standards from the national register of qualifications. The comparison does not directly support certification, but it may support a referral to an accredited validation body (that performs assessment and certification) or a referral to further training. While they always carry out some form of identifying competences (by interviewing a client), a portfolio is created only when it is considered useful. Czech employers usually do not consider portfolios when recruiting and portfolios are not used for certification.

The Polish practice has similar coherence to *CVV*. Standardised questionnaires (developed at the central level) are used by PES staff for profiling clients as well as for conducting skills audits to explore their professional preferences and interests. None of these outputs are based on vocational standards that support certification. The absence of coherence between outputs may be related to the broader national context. For instance, the career guidance and counselling system in Poland does not envisage validation and certification procedures (including a connection between outputs), while the VET examination system does not provide any guidance and counselling service to adult learners, at least not explicitly. Stakeholders and decision-makers consider an examination as the only reliable way of assessing skills; therefore, using other methods (such as skills portfolio) is not feasible in the near future <sup>(40)</sup>.

The main output of the French *Bilan de compétences* is the synthesis report drawn up by a professional guidance practitioner who summarises the competences and aptitudes identified by the participants and how these relate to their career objectives. The report also includes up to three proposals for career development, as well as an action plan. However, it does not refer to occupational standards or to formal or sectoral qualifications used in *VAE*. The synthesis report has no standard structure and is personalised (equivalent to an agreement between a guidance practitioner and a client). The only requirement is that the

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<sup>(40)</sup> Based on the Polish case study.

report should include a professional plan. The professional plan may or may not support referral to VAE.

In the Italian practice, the PES uses client profiling tools not based on the professional validation and certification standards defined in the regional system for validation and the certification of competences. Information gathered during client profiling (general guidance stage) is uploaded to the service's ICT-based system and remains available to PES guidance experts when dealing with the clients. Their profiling uses a digital tool (*dichiarazione immediata disponibilità*) developed by the National Agency for Active Labour Policies, ANPAL) that indicates the clients' probability of remaining unemployed and their overall level of disadvantage on the local labour market (the digital tool connects a client's personal data with current features of the labour market). The profile is then complemented by a face-to-face interview between the PES guidance expert and the client, to understand and identify better the actions needed to help the client (re-)integrate into the labour market. The self-evaluation form (*scheda capacità e competenze*), which the client fills in after completing a training course or an internship, resembles a portfolio and relates to at least one competence unit of a professional qualification included in the regional system for validation and certification of competences. Box 12 notes the benefits of coherence between outputs from the general guidance (profiling) stage and those from the validation and certification stage. Also, improving information sharing between services currently using two different information systems <sup>(41)</sup> could lead to improved coordination between them. Using a shared digital information system would enable structured interaction among practitioners across guidance and validation services and would also improve the sharing of information among them <sup>(42)</sup>. With this aim, an agreement concerning the use of the two information systems has already been concluded, with implementation now pending.

**Box 12. Upskilling through PES, Italy**

Practitioner's story: 'If a thorough analysis of individual competences is already done by PES when providing general guidance, the guidance phase during certification [self-evaluation step including a reconstruction of previous professional experience] can be quicker and simpler, because the individual already has a clear picture of personal accomplishments and relevant competences to be validated and possibly certified.'

Source: Italian case study.

<sup>(41)</sup> SILER (Labour information system Emilia-Romagna) and SIFER (Vocational training information system Emilia-Romagna).

<sup>(42)</sup> Based on the Italian case study.

The Swedish practice is the only one (among those characterised by informal cooperation) with outputs based on common sectoral standards defined by sectoral committees. For the initial screening, the PES staff uses a self-assessment tool designed to cover several job profiles defined by the sectoral standards. The tool was introduced several years ago and led to significant positive changes because referral decisions now have a more informed basis (some candidates had been wrongly referred for validation without the necessary qualifications and/or work experience). The tool uses the same standards as the next step: skills mapping. A relevant sectoral standard is used in skills mapping to identify participants' knowledge, skills and competence; it is then decided whether they need complementary training or can directly proceed to validation. Although the Swedes have no digital system to share information between services, the self-assessment forms are web-based and standardised; some PES case workers send them as supplementary information to practitioners involved in skills mapping (for example, when there is a doubt whether a client is suitable for validation). These cases have some informal transfer of information between services.

The UK-Scotland *MyWoW* resource includes early-stage, career-matching tools which rely mainly on participants' values and preferences being matched against job types. The tools are not based on qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks. However, within the *MyWoW* resource, some elements of user data can be repurposed (for example, using skills statements within the CV builder) or exported (exporting a CV or strengths report). These elements can potentially form the basis of a portfolio which might then support subsequent assessment and certification steps.

Practices that integrate validation and guidance (the Finnish *SIMHE Metropolia* and *TAKK*, the Icelandic *IDAN* and the Portuguese *Qualifica*) usually use a common standard for their outputs. Typically, practitioners use standardised forms for some or all stages of a practice. The *TAKK* and *Qualifica* cases have digital systems to share information. Given that the same institution usually hosts integrated services, digital systems would be easier to develop and maintain as compared to independent, but connected, services.

In the Finnish *SIMHE Metropolia*, the results from the personal guidance discussion' (which is part of the guidance and counselling provision) serve as a basis for guidance practitioners to decide whether to refer a client to validation. These results are documented in a summary which does not follow a standardised structure because guidance practitioners write it as a free text. The summary does not refer to qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks. In this sense, the summary has no coherence with the subsequent output of the practice, which is 'mapping of competences'. This



output is based on a field-specific expert's 'validation discussion' with the participants to identify their skills and competences. The skills and competences previously acquired by immigrants (the target group of the practice) in their country of origin are identified by comparing them against an equivalent study programme/qualification delivered at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and against requirements from working life in the profession. Mapping of competences is a standardised document which can be beneficial and useful to clients, such as in applying for a job, because the employer receives an external and documented assessment provided by a recognised education institute and a field expert.

The Finnish *TAKK* uses the national vocational qualification requirements (NVQRs) as a reference point for all outputs produced during the CBQ process. Formal adult vocational education in Finland is mainly based on the CBQ system that has candidates prove their vocational skills in competence tests arranged according to their personal competence development plan <sup>(43)</sup> for acquiring their desired qualification. A personal competence development plan is prepared for each candidate seeking a competence-based qualification. The plan sets out the necessary competence tests for candidates and whether their vocational skills need to be supplemented (for example, through on-the-job learning or preparatory training) to complete the competence-based qualification. The practice's main output is the personal competence development plan; it integrates all intermediate outputs, such as examination of client's previously acquired competences, selection of a most suitable qualification, preparatory training if needed, competence tests and certification. *TAKK* practitioners use standardised documents and store all relevant information in an electronic student administration system (a shared digital system), which enables accurate and effective information and documentation transfer. The system is helpful because all matters regarding students' studies are documented in one place and all parties involved have access to it. At any time, adult learners can check the status of their personal competence development plan, to see what has been completed and the next steps.

Outputs created during the different steps at *IDAN* are coherent in the sense that all are based on the curricula standards/subjects related to a specific trade. During the screening phase, a candidate (supported by a guidance practitioner) fills in a self-assessment checklist for a specific trade (vocational qualification). At the beginning of the self-assessment, the candidate is asked about prior learning in general, courses taken, jobs and leisure time interests. Then, the assessment

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<sup>(43)</sup> This is the term used in the respective documents.

focuses on subjects included in the curricula of the specific trade. As the next step, a portfolio is elaborated (within a group session) that builds on the same curricula standards used for the self-assessment list. In the final stage (the assessment interview), assessors review a candidate's portfolio and self-assessment list and ask questions related to the subjects included in the curricula to confirm competences declared by candidates. This results in a certificate with an outline of subjects validated by assessors. Since not all subjects included in the curricula have been validated, an informal personal plan outlines steps towards further studies. The portfolio and the self-assessment lists are both standardised documents. Certification results (manifested in subjects validated) are registered into a database for upper secondary schools. The database enables transfer of information from certification to transition to further studies; to some extent it can be seen as a shared digital system.

In the Portuguese *Qualifica* programme, the portfolio developed during the competence recognition step (the step following the comprehensive screening/diagnosis) is based on the criteria set out in the national qualifications catalogue. These criteria are also considered in validation and certification, subsequent to competence recognition. Learners who undergo RVCC can obtain a school certification of general education or a professional certification within VET<sup>(44)</sup>. When *Qualifica* candidates seek professional certification, a vocational development portfolio (*Portefólio de Desenvolvimento Vocacional*) is created during the screening/diagnosis, providing relevant information to be integrated in the portfolio needed for the RVCC procedure (ANQEP 2017, p. 49). The vocational development portfolio includes information about candidates' educational and professional backgrounds, their skills acquired throughout life (in formal, non-formal and informal contexts), their motivations and expectations. Although the portfolio may not be directly based on the professional standards referred to in the portfolio developed at the competence recognition step, both outputs build on each other and are therefore coherent. Their coherence is also supported by the fact that the same *Qualifica* practitioners will often screen participants and subsequently assist them in developing their portfolio during the competence recognition step. The standardised assessment and monitoring tools applied during RVCC have been developed by ANQEP (the National Agency for

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<sup>(44)</sup> The result of the certification of competences enables the candidate to obtain a full certification (when the candidate certifies all the competence units of the standard) or a partial certification. In the school RVCC, full certification enables the candidate to obtain a certificate of basic education (four, six or nine years of schooling) or upper secondary education (12 years of schooling). In the professional RVCC, full certification testifies that the candidate holds the competences of the professional RVCC standard in question

Qualification and Vocational Education). An electronic platform – information and management system of the educational and training offer (SIGO) – gathers information about each candidate in the *Qualifica* centres; it records their progress in compliance with data confidentiality requirements. In addition, an online tool – *Passaporte Qualifica* – has been developed to match users' profiles with possible upskilling pathways that consider their qualifications and skills they have already acquired as well as their career goals and expectations. The passport can be updated and printed at any time, serving as a tool to record adult learners' progress throughout the *Qualifica* procedure. Both *SIGO* and the *Passaporte Qualifica* can be seen as elements of a shared digital information system.

Practices characterised by formal cooperation between services and a harmonised procedure connecting validation and guidance use a common standard to create outputs through the different stages; they also use standardised forms and may use a shared digital system to exchange information. For example, the outputs of the Austrian *Du kannst was!* are based on common occupational profiles laid out in the training and examination regulations of the respective apprenticeship occupation. The outputs include:

- (a) a checklist used by guidance practitioners to evaluate whether a potential beneficiary matches the occupational profile;
- (b) a skills portfolio, also serving as a self-assessment (created within guided workshops with the support of adult educators);
- (c) competence checks carried out by the apprenticeship office of the economic chamber;
- (d) an apprenticeship certificate.

Standardised forms are used for all outputs of *Du kannst was!* and a shared digital database in the form of an online 'cloud' serves as an information pool for the practitioners. For example, the checklists filled in during the individual guidance counselling sessions are transferred to cloud storage. The representative of the adult training provider (VHS) coordinates the database available to all practitioners. The database allows them to refer the clients to suitable institutions for the consecutive steps of the validation process.

The Dutch learning and working desks do not use common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks for outputs created during the different stages of the practice because these outputs vary greatly depending on the clients' needs. For example, the initial screening of clients is not based on any standard because it aims to clarify whether a client should be referred to validation leading to certification or to formative career advice

(<sup>45</sup>). From the moment it becomes clear that a client will be referred for validation, the outputs produced at each consecutive step are coherent. If clients want to validate their prior learning in relation to a formal qualification, they are referred to a partner of the desks (typically an accredited validation provider). There, the clients must build a portfolio (a 'showcase') showing how their learning experiences match with the competences of the qualification chosen. The clients are then assessed (informally) by the respective partner of the desks and a report summarises all the learning outcomes of the person that match with those defined for the qualification chosen. The client can present the report to an awarding body (an exam committee of a VET-school or university). The awarding body can then decide whether to grant exemption from a learning programme; the decision is based on the report (the informal assessment of the portfolio) produced by the partner. There is no common digital system to transfer information between services.

#### **Conclusions: coherence of outputs**

- (a) To identify, document and assess skills, the practices reviewed use tools such as digital profiling, web-based self-assessment and skills portfolios. These tools are 'coherent' when all or most of them are based on common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks.
- (b) The form of cooperation between validation and guidance is likely to influence the degree of coherence of outputs. For instance, tools used at the different stages of a practice are more 'coherent' (based on common standard/reference framework) in practices characterised by formal cooperation or integration of validation and guidance compared to practices characterised by informal cooperation between services.
- (c) Increased coherence of outputs can simplify a shared digital system which would enable structured interaction among practitioners across services and effective information exchange in cross-referrals between validation and guidance.

#### **3.3.4. Practitioner competences**

The practitioners involved in guidance and validation have varied roles and functions: some may be more involved in (basic, brief or comprehensive) screening/profiling of clients, identification and documentation, while others undertake assessment and certification. While an appropriate level of specialised technical competence is necessary to develop these roles, several activities significantly overlap between validation and guidance.

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(<sup>45</sup>) Formative career advice consists of supporting clients in documenting their learning achievements, strengths and weaknesses and deciding on what/where/how to learn further.

Information functions under validation are frequently provided within guidance processes. Practitioners who conduct basic screening/profiling of clients frequently provide general information on validation. Client advisors at the local PES offices in Poland oversee basic profiling including individual information on age, disabilities, competences, work experiences, place of residence, reasons for being unemployed and for inability to find employment, and motivation to find employment. Based on the results from the basic profiling, the advisers can then refer clients to PES counsellors who carry out skills audits and advise them on engaging in validation arrangements.

Appropriately trained practitioners for brief screening are able to interview their clients better and understand their requests from a perspective of long-term career issues. This is the case with services provided under the Italian practice Upskilling through PES.

Practitioners undertaking comprehensive screening/profiling of clients <sup>(46)</sup>, can also identify and document the readiness of individuals for validation: identify the need for guidance provision, clarify career options, advise clients about suitable learning and working pathways. In such cases, as in the Czech practice, specialised training is needed in psychology or career guidance that uses psychometric and other tools.

Practitioners more strongly involved in assessment and certification must be familiar with the validation process and different assessment methodologies, to have experience in the specific field of work, to be trained in assessment and validation processes and to know about quality assurance mechanisms (Cedefop 2015, p. 34). Examples of this would include the Austrian, Dutch, Finnish (SIMHE *Metropolia*), Icelandic and Italian practices.

The following subsections provide more details about practitioner competences, roles and functions in relation to both brief and comprehensive screening, identification, documentation, assessment and certification. The cases with overlapping competences, for instance in the two Finnish practices, present hybrid types of individualised guidance services.

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<sup>(46)</sup> Comprehensive screening uses diagnostic interviews to assess internal and external factors affecting career decision-making, including self-awareness, motivation, awareness of career-related information and influence of context. In general, it follows preliminary brief screening and should be developed by trained practitioners. Source: CareersNet.

3.3.4.1. *Practitioner involved in screening/profiling of clients, identification and documentation*

An important distinction in relation to practitioner competences is their ability to perform brief or comprehensive screening/profiling of clients <sup>(47)</sup>. While both activities involve identifying skills, the procedures differ in relation to the depth of skills identification. For brief screening, skills identification can be based on limited enquiry into clients' qualifications and their previous work experience ('What have you done before?'). Comprehensive screening frequently includes psychological testing and counselling to identify skills, attitudes and to clarify career targets. Comprehensive screening allows for a better understanding of the needs of clients and enables more individualised and dynamic support, aligned with clients' needs. In a careers services' organisation this tends to lead to a tiered service, according to client readiness to make career choices. Sampson et al. (2003, adapted) distinguish three general levels:

- (a) self-help provision. The client has the main responsibility for collecting career information, decision-making and career management. This requires clients to have good knowledge and command of ICT skills and practitioners to prepare the activities and other materials;
- (b) brief, staff assisted services. In this case, clients need moderate assistance from practitioners such as enabling the client's self-directed decision-making, providing guidance on search for career information, proposing participation in workshops or short-term group counselling. This type of individualised guidance requires enough training of practitioners to enable them to carry out brief screening and career assessment;
- (c) individual case-managed services. These services are relevant for clients with low level of readiness (typically low-qualified/skilled adults, but not only) and who usually have an undefined request for personal and occupational development. The client may face extra difficulties around work and social integration. As these cases need more comprehensive guidance, the practitioners need advanced training.

In the practices analysed there is a predominance of brief, staff-assisted services and some notable cases of individual case management. The latter tends to act as an enabling factor for flexible guidance and counselling support at all stages.

The Finnish practice *TAKK* can be seen as including both briefly assisted services and individual case-managed ones. 'Individualisation' in Finland is an

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<sup>(47)</sup> Basic screening/profiling of clients is not discussed here because practitioners do not need any specific competences.

official concept defined in guidance-related legislation. The individual-centred approach is associated with the elaboration of a 'personal competence development plan' of CBQ (competence-based qualification) candidates and the key role of adult trainers. The plan defines how existing vocational skills need to be supplemented to complete a CBQ. Trainers should coordinate, prepare and supervise the achievement of the candidates' 'personal competence development plan' towards acquiring a CBQ. They are involved in examining the applicant's previously acquired skills and competences, defining the most suitable qualification for the applicant, and assessing the need for guidance and support measures (if they are seen as necessary). Elements of the individual case-managed services relate to the depth of skills identification carried out in the practice. For example, the candidates' previous competences are assessed by trainers conducting personal interviews which cover the following aspects: which of the already documented competences can be proposed for recognition; whether, on the basis of skills already achieved, the individual can be guided towards directly completing a suitable qualification or modules of such a qualification; is preparatory learning needed and, if so, how will it be organised? Depending on clients' needs, several personal interviews may be necessary. Elements of the briefly assisted services relate to adult trainers not necessarily having training in career guidance, counselling or testing methods frequently associated with comprehensive screening. They usually have a higher education degree in the relevant vocational field and at least three years of work experience or another relevant qualification and pedagogical studies (vocational teacher qualification). The generic function/role of adult trainers ensures continuity between the different steps of the practice. This generic function/role (guidance practitioners coordinate the whole process) may be related to *TAKK* providing validation and guidance as integrated services.

Individualised guidance provided in the other Finnish practice (*SIMHE Metropolia*) has proven to be the most suitable way of conducting guidance and counselling for *SIMHE Metropolia* clients (immigrants with higher education background) because of their heterogenic background and individual needs in planning their future in Finland. Briefly assisted service is available alongside individual case-managed service. The individual-centred approach considers an individual's needs and choices and uses that as a base for all decisions, information, solutions or suggestions <sup>(48)</sup>. Typically, guidance practitioners at *SIMHE Metropolia* have a higher education degree and most are formally qualified to work as student guidance counsellors. They are responsible for conducting the

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<sup>(48)</sup> Based on the Finnish *SIMHE Metropolia* case study.

personal guidance discussion with clients, for checking their suitability for proceeding to validation and for organising the RPL process. Practitioners promote individualised interviews and discussions of the clients' previous studies, as well as their hopes and ideas for future education and career. The discussion can include different lifelong guidance activities (such as advising, counselling); the content and the nature of the discussion depends greatly on client needs. At *SIMHE Metropolia*, guidance practitioners also have a generic function as mentors for the clients and as coordinators of the whole process. Their role requires management skills for coordinating communications with clients and between clients and field-specific experts (arranging the 'validation discussion' or in providing client information to the experts and briefing clients in advance of the discussion). Soft skills include commitment to work, having empathy for clients and experience in working with multicultural communities and people with immigration background <sup>(49)</sup>.

The Czech CVV and the Irish *Writeon.ie* practices are examples of individual case-managed services. The Czech practice carries out comprehensive screening to understand clients' needs better; this includes a diagnostic interview conducted by trained practitioners to assess client self-awareness, motivation and external issues affecting career decision-making. Staff in CVV have a degree in psychology or related fields and use different psycho-diagnostic methods to understand clients' concerns, interests and desires <sup>(50)</sup>. From this they can advise clients in their career paths and recommend specific courses that would match their wishes and skills. Some staff members are trained in the Swiss CH-Q method, a comprehensive tool for self-management of competences and personal development and for working with clients to help them grow and identify their strengths, talents and passions. The method focuses on identifying clients' competences and on supporting them in their career decision-making; it is often used in portfolio building (as in the Austrian practice *Du kannst was!*). With soft skills, the case study highlighted that CVV practitioners embrace new approaches, learn together, cooperate closely in teams and devote their attention and expertise to individual clients <sup>(51)</sup>. For further training, CVV staff participate in workshops and meet with guidance practitioners from other organisations to share and exchange new and trending methods in career guidance.

In Ireland, staff available to provide support at the Adult Education Guidance Service (AEGS) for adult learners using *Writeon.ie*, who engage with the AEGS

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<sup>(49)</sup> Idem.

<sup>(50)</sup> Based on the Czech case study.

<sup>(51)</sup> Idem.



(engagement strategy changes locally) are qualified to screen clients comprehensively. Staff at AEGS must have at least one of the following qualifications: a postgraduate diploma in careers guidance or careers guidance and counselling; a masters of education (guidance), a master of science in counselling or an equivalent postgraduate qualification recognised by the Irish Association of Counsellors and Therapists or the Institute of Guidance Counsellors<sup>(52)</sup>. These requirements ensure that practitioners are experienced in skills assessment and can appropriately refer a client to educational or career pathways.

The Italian practice Upskilling through PES presents an interesting example of briefly assisted services with continuing efforts to increase the range of competences of guidance practitioners. PES guidance practitioners have been typically responsible for the delivery of all guidance and counselling services; they must have competences acquired through long professional experience in the field. The continuing reforms of Italy's labour market aim to change the role of PES; staff should move away from administrative tasks and carry out active labour market policies (including upskilling and, therefore, also validation). PES guidance practitioners in Emilia Romagna are currently being trained to become labour market activation experts in order to offer client measures suiting their personal profile and get them swiftly back to work. The training focuses on familiarising guidance practitioners with all available resources to help clients (re)integrate into the labour market, on their ability to identify clients' skills and competences, and on networking with colleagues in other related services. The national and regional accredited bodies performing validation and guidance have already developed strong competences in this field; many PES guidance practitioners still need to be trained to perform certain activities. For instance, in the region of Emilia Romagna, all accredited bodies have some personnel accredited as experts of evaluation processes (who support clients during portfolio building). However, not all PES have this kind of accredited personnel yet and continual training for PES guidance practitioners should address the issue.

#### 3.3.4.2. *Competences of practitioners involved in assessment and certification*

Practitioners involved in assessment and certification are typically field-specific experts who must meet certain formal requirements. In the Austrian initiative *Du*

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<sup>(52)</sup> The qualification requirements to be eligible for employment as an adult education guidance counsellor or an adult education guidance coordinator are outlined in Circular letter 70/04: Department of Education and Skills (2004). *Circular 70/04 - Pay and conditions for adult education guidance counsellors and adult education guidance coordinators*.

[https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Archived-Circulars/fe70\\_04.doc](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Archived-Circulars/fe70_04.doc)  
[accessed 20.9.2019].

*kannst was!*, examiners carrying out the performance checks must be experts in their occupational field, nominated by the apprenticeship offices of the economic chambers and must fulfil all the criteria specified by the Vocational Training Act. In the Netherlands, prior learning outcomes can be validated against formal qualifications ('education route') as well as against sector/industry standards ('labour market route'). In the education route, the institute (validation provider) has responsibility for qualifications requirements. The institute's exam committees that award qualifications will check whether validation has been done with trained and certified staff in accordance with the internal quality requirements for validation. In the labour market route, according to the quality code for validation, only certified professionals with documented competences can be validation assessors.

Experts involved in assessment and certification may also be involved in identifying and documenting skills and competences. An expert in evaluation methods (*Esperto dei Processi Valutativi*) in the Italian practice Upskilling through PES helps the client develop a portfolio while also participating in the examination commission responsible for certification.

Practitioners involved in assessment and certification usually have training on assessment methodologies or approaches. Field-specific experts, members of the teaching staff at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (UAS), are trained to use the 'validation discussion'. This is a method developed by the *SIMHE Metropolia* services for identifying the migrants' skills and competences acquired in previous studies, through study-related work experience or in any other way (formal, non-formal, informal learning) in their country of origin. The field experts usually have an advanced degree in their field of study, formal pedagogical competences (teacher training) and long experience in using the RPL-procedure designed for the higher education sector in Finland.

Apart from knowledge about assessment methodologies and approaches, soft skills are also important. For example, in the Icelandic practice, the soft skills of assessors (usually experienced teachers, professionals or senior trainers in a specific field) include good communication skills and a positive attitude towards helping clients validate competences <sup>(53)</sup>.

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<sup>(53)</sup> Based on the Icelandic case study.

### **Conclusions: competences of practitioners**

- (a) Roles and functions of practitioners involved in guidance and validation vary depending on the activities they perform. Specialised competences and technical training are necessary to perform activities in both guidance and validation, particularly at higher levels of complexity. Some practitioners may be more involved in screening/profiling of clients, identification and documentation, while others may be more involved in assessment and certification. Roles can nevertheless overlap. The same practitioners may carry out several activities, indicating a significant overlap between validation and guidance.
- (b) Practitioners who conduct basic screening/profiling of clients' competences frequently provide general information on validation, without any specific training for screening. Practitioners undertaking brief screening who are appropriately trained, generally have a better understanding of the clients' needs from a long-term career perspective. Practitioners who conduct comprehensive screening of clients and identification and documentation need to be able to understand the readiness of individuals for validation, helping plan guidance provision, clarifying career options and advising clients about suitable learning and working pathways. In these cases, specialised training in guidance or psychology is generally required. Practitioners more involved in assessment and certification must be familiar with the validation procedure and different assessment methodologies, to have experience in the specific field of work, to be trained in assessment and validation processes and to know about quality assurance mechanisms.
- (c) The different roles and competences of validation and guidance practitioners overlap to different degrees. For example, individualised guidance (such as brief assistance or individual case-managed services) will normally include the capacity to carry out screening/profiling, while a basic understanding of assessment might be important for a guidance practitioner to prepare the individual for assessment. Because of this overlap of roles and competences, practitioner training should be both specific and general. Specific training for a particular role/function is important to assure specialisation and adequate competences. Common training for all those involved in a practice is also important for creating coherence of activities and outputs.
- (d) In addition to technical competences, all practitioners should have the equally important soft skills such as empathy for clients, ability to motivate, communication skills, ability to work in teams, and commitment. Strengthening of soft skills may have a positive impact on flexible guidance provision.

### **3.3.5. Greater coordination between validation and guidance**

This section focuses on the benefits and challenges resulting from the various processes, approaches and arrangements that link validation and guidance, as described in the practices reviewed for this study.

#### **3.3.5.1. *Benefits***

Greater coordination between validation and guidance services potentially generates benefits both for the organisations involved and for individual

beneficiaries. The review of the practices has made it possible to identify common organisational and individual benefits that result:

- (a) different approaches to coordination all generate benefits:
  - (i) developing interinstitutional frameworks for coordination between validation and guidance activities (often based on regional/local partnerships) allows for efficient allocation of responsibilities, greater clarity in the information produced and disseminated and smoother transitions between validation and guidance. This is the case in the Austrian initiative *Du kannst was!*: the regional network of educational and labour market stakeholders can offer an apprenticeship certificate and/or efficient transfers to further education while matching learners' expectations and employers' skills needs. Regional and local stakeholders involved in the Dutch Learning and working desks work closely together to provide VNIL or further education solutions. This gives them greater visibility, a better understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities, and in turn generates more clarity on the services they offer. Also, services provided by the desks can be tailored according to individual (and even local) needs, strengthening educational and labour market outcomes for individuals. In the Italian Emilia Romagna region, the Active Network for Employment was recently launched to enable PES to exchange information on the profile of its clients with training providers and regional employers. This exchange makes validation procedures more efficient as well as improving the matching of labour demand and supply in the region;
  - (ii) integrated provision of validation and guidance governed by legal frameworks can be potentially efficient and practical to organise: in the Portuguese *Qualifica*, integrating validation and guidance leads to efficiencies in costs and human resources. The fact that the *Qualifica* centres are embedded in different types of local entity (schools, PES) allows them to understand the particularities of their local environment in relation to the needs of adult learners and the demands of the local labour market. This organisational setup not only improves communication between different local entities but also generates savings on staff and infrastructure costs;
  - (iii) informal cooperation – not governed by any frameworks – has its benefits, particularly with highly committed organisations, as is the case with the CVV in Czechia;
- (b) by developing VNIL policy and current practice, the PES has an increased role in providing informed referrals between guidance and validation. The latter

- has led to improvement of screening and job matching procedures and has had a positive effect on shifting from more administration/bureaucratic-type services to more client-centred career guidance services. The Italian practice has developed and now uses profiling tools and procedures to guide clients towards VNIL. Training ensures that PES guidance practitioners can competently use these tools and procedures. In the Swedish *Branschvalideringen*, the PES has introduced self-assessment tools to ensure the correct candidates are referred for validation;
- (c) the linking of guidance and validation services can also bring about innovative approaches which benefit organisations by enhancing their specialisation and their policy influence. In the *SIMHE* Metropolia in Finland, the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences has introduced new ways of providing guidance and counselling during RPL processes. The *MyWoW* resource shows that the Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is fully instrumental in developing career management skills (CMS) within and beyond schools, and delivering careers information advice and guidance to young people and adults in Scotland. When promoting *MyWoW* to those developing CMS in schools, SDS highlights how this resource complements delivery of Scotland's national curriculum (Curriculum for excellence). A single CMS framework helps individual beneficiaries understand where they stand, what they are worth and what training and validation supports their professional ambitions;
- (d) developing links between career guidance and validation also improves information and raises awareness, enabling individuals to make more informed career decisions. By using the guidance counselling services of regional institutions, individuals taking part in the Austrian initiative *Du kannst was!* benefit from information on career and further education offers as well as from efficient placement in the most suited offer. The Czech CVV not only helps participants to identify their skills, but also recommends courses and other opportunities to acquire the skills needed for their career ambitions; this puts them in a better position to obtain the jobs they want and to keep them. Career guidance experts in the Finnish *SIMHE* Metropolia offer immigrant beneficiaries an indication of the suitability of their skills and competences for the Finnish labour market and detail options available (further training, RPL) to find an occupation suited to their education background and interests. Since the reform of VET policies in 2012 in Poland, PES have been providing clients with information on validation opportunities within the VET system as part of career guidance which improves their ability to make better informed decisions about career development.

### 3.3.5.2. Challenges

Most of the practices reviewed show that linking career guidance and validation is a relatively new focus in public policies. This brings several challenges which mostly relate to an organisation's capacity for adapting to this policy trend and also to an individual's readiness for, and attitudes towards, validation. More precisely:

- (a) the absence of systematic or formal cooperation between guidance and validation services can create fragmentation or asymmetries in the provision of both services. In France, the background and connections of individual guidance practitioners shape referrals to validation in the *Bilan de compétences*. As a result, beneficiaries may miss opportunities to undertake a helpful validation procedure (VAE). In Ireland, the current review of career guidance is also expected to initiate further discussions about strengthening cooperation across the nation between RPL and career guidance services. The absence of a common definition or understanding of RPL continues to be challenging;
- (b) some practices reviewed have identified resourcing and staffing issues which can affect the quality of services provided. In Poland, PES counsellors have less time for career guidance provision compared to the time they dedicate to administrative tasks. In Portugal, obstacles to team cohesion have been reported by *Qualifica* centres in certain contexts. For those *Qualifica* centres located in schools, the high turnover of teachers and trainers each year makes it difficult to maintain a well-trained team of practitioners;
- (c) the lack of monitoring and follow up on beneficiaries also creates difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of some practices reviewed. France does not collect data on the *Bilan de compétences*, though such monitoring would be very useful in assessing the effects of its instruments and outputs on individual career development and providing insights into the relevance of linking the *Bilan* to validation services (VAE). While satisfaction surveys might help with monitoring (done by most of the practices reviewed), these usually do not provide information on clients' progress towards their career goals. Therefore, satisfaction surveys do not accurately measure the effectiveness and relevance of linking validation and guidance;
- (d) the general lack of relevance of adult learning in policy for obtaining qualifications constrains developing services towards validating non-formal and informal learning. In Poland, acquiring competences takes place in the formal system; central and regional examination boards focus primarily on IVET learners and less so on adults seeking to validate their non-formal or informal skills. However, the 2012 reform of the Polish VET system resulted

- in progress towards facilitating jobseekers' access to the formal examination system;
- (e) some practices reviewed are struggling with a lack of readiness for validation among target participants. This is the case of the Finnish *SIMHE Metropolia*. Beneficiaries from various cultural backgrounds have diverse expectations and understanding of how the Finnish education system and labour market function; this has caused unnecessary setbacks for some clients with *SIMHE Metropolia*. Such challenges are also related to the lack of appropriate and thorough screening as was noted with *Branschvalideringen* in Sweden. More recently, the Swedish PES has new screening tools and other corrective actions to address the issue;
  - (f) the limited relevance of tools and methods to identify and validate the skills of individual participants can also prevent beneficiaries from undergoing effective validation. In Portugal, *Qualifica* practitioners have commented on the highly complex RVCC procedures and the fact that its competence standards have little relevance to real-life work experiences. In Poland, the skills audits conducted by PES counsellors rarely focus on recognising skills within the formal VET system; validation can only take place through formal examinations, which can discourage adults with a negative experience of formal education from having their non-formal and informal skills validated. Unlike some other European countries, Polish validation procedures do not include portfolio building, practical tests or interviews;
  - (g) some practices reviewed are characterised by long waiting times which can discourage beneficiaries from completing a validation process. This is the case with the Austrian initiative *Du kannst was!* where a minimum number of participants (deemed suitable for validation in a given occupation) is needed for the practice to begin. These delays mean potential candidates may not follow through to validation, which can make delays even longer. The Icelandic practice also needs a minimum number of participants before initiating a validation process. Waiting times may be as long as 9 to 12 months.

### 3.4. Conclusions

This section presents conclusions in relation to the core research questions from Chapter 1.2., based on forms of coordinating guidance and validation been encountered in the practices reviewed. Additional forms are possible but further research is needed to explore them.

**3.4.1. What are the necessary conditions to ensure successful coordination between validation and guidance activities?**

This study understands ‘successful’ as coordination between validation and guidance activities that benefits the individual as well as the organisation. That means ensuring appropriate support to an individual’s career decision-making and personal development through effective cooperation among independent services or integration of guidance and validation activities in one service. Several factors determine whether cooperation/integration works well:

- (a) existence of a framework that improves coordination between validation and guidance. A framework is defined or driven by national/regional legislation, a strategy or a network of regional/sectoral partnerships between different stakeholders (including employers and employee organisations). It sets up clear principles, rules or procedures about connecting validation and guidance. A framework helps connect services and systematically make transitions between guidance and validation. With independent services, such a framework means that cooperation would not be fortuitous (based on the goodwill and/or the contacts/networks of a few practitioners), but institutionalised and with fixed principles, common to all parties/stakeholders. From the practices reviewed, a framework embedded in legislation, national policy or strategies/frameworks, is usually observed in integrated services operating nationally. Regional cooperation between independent services typically relies on an agreement between relevant partners in a given region (chambers of commerce, education institutions, employees) while State agencies may be involved in shared financing and decision-making. Frameworks may also be set at sectoral level (as in Sweden) where employers and PES play an important role in practice. The framework setting generally tends to determine or influence how or whether coordination between services will work. The existence of a framework does not necessarily guarantee practitioner commitment (see below);
- (b) flexible and free-of-charge guidance provided through all the stages of a practice (before, during and after validation) and also connected to other individual support services that may reach potential beneficiaries. Flexible guidance is understood as individualised support at any point when the client needs it, through a combination of delivery forms such as face-to-face guidance, digital tools, and phone contact. Some countries grant an individual right to this access to guidance, the most outstanding example being the French *Bilan de compétences*, through which all working age citizens (employed and unemployed) have the right to identify their skills and to define a career plan. Flexible guidance ensures that the needs or ambitions of



individuals can be updated or readjusted as they progress through the stages. The lower the level of readiness of clients (as with low- skilled/qualified adults), the higher the need for comprehensive and individualised guidance. Practitioners must have a shared understanding of the aims of the practice, their related roles and responsibilities. During formal/informal cooperation between independent services, roles and responsibilities must be clearly assigned to support smoother and quicker referrals between them. Fragmented guidance, combined with unclear distribution of roles and responsibilities, may have a negative effect on flexible access; clients may feel they have insufficient guidance;

- (c) coherence of outputs created at the different stages of a practice. If outputs produced at previous stages of a practice can be used as inputs for subsequent stages, this will ensure consistent application of standards, continuity in the delivery of services and will save practitioner time and effort. More coherent outputs can simplify operation of a shared digital system to enable structured interaction among practitioners across services and, therefore, more effectively exchange information;
- (d) practitioner competences. Successful coordination between validation and guidance requires skilled practitioners. Roles and functions of practitioners involved in guidance and validation vary depending on the activities they perform: some may be more involved in screening/profiling of clients, identifying and documenting skills, others in assessing and certifying competences. The same practitioners may carry out several tasks that significantly overlap between validation and guidance. Practitioners who conduct basic screening/profiling of clients should also be able to provide general information on validation of competences. This may be done by administrative staff without any specific training for screening. Practitioners who carry out brief screenings should be appropriately trained to 'briefly interview clients to understand the level of concreteness of their request and gauge the complexity of the career related issues they face'. Practitioners who conduct comprehensive screening of clients, identification and documentation must gauge the readiness of individuals for validation: identify the need to provide guidance, clarify career options and advise clients about suitable learning and working pathways. In these cases, specialised training is needed, for instance, in psychology or career guidance that uses psychometric or other tools. Practitioners more strongly involved in assessment and certification must be familiar with the validation process and different assessment methodologies, to have experience in the specific field of work, to be trained in assessment and validation processes, and to know about quality assurance

mechanisms. The different roles and competences of practitioners overlap to different degrees. Because of this overlap, practitioner training should be both specific and general. Specific training for a particular role/function is important to assure specialisation and adequate competences. Some common training for all those involved in a practice is also important to create coherence of activities and outputs. In addition to technical competences, all practitioners should have equally important soft skills such as empathy for clients, ability to motivate, communication skills, ability to work in teams, and commitment. Strengthening of soft skills may have a positive impact on flexible guidance provision;

- (e) monitoring and evaluation arrangements. Collecting data on participants' transition into employment or further education (after validation) can be extremely useful as it may provide evidence of the need for follow-up guidance, which also relates to sustainable practices. This indicates the quality of the guidance and validation services: the higher the success rate in transitioning into employment or further education, the greater the quality (and effectiveness) of guidance and validation services.

#### **3.4.2. How can the coherence of the outcomes of guidance and validation be assured?**

Higher coherence between outputs of guidance and validation activities results from using common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks. To identify, document and assess clients' skills, the practices reviewed use different tools such as digital profiling, web-based self-assessment and, skills portfolios. These tools are 'coherent' when all or most are based on common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks. The form of coordination between validation and guidance is likely to influence the degree of coherence of outputs. Tools used at the different stages of a practice are more 'coherent' (based on common standard/reference framework) in practices characterised by formal cooperation or integration of validation and guidance, compared to practices characterised by informal cooperation between services.

#### **3.4.3. What are the benefits of increased coordination between the two services and what are the challenges?**

Based on findings presented, the summary table below provides an outline of common benefits and challenges (in relation to the practices explored) at systemic, organisational and individual level.

Table 7. **Benefits and challenges of increased coordination between validation and guidance**

Level	Benefits	Challenges
<b>Systemic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better policy design (improved targeting of the service, distribution of budget across services, selection of staff), that allows increase in efficiency;</li> <li>• Increased regional and local service coverage improves the relevance of guidance and validation services;</li> <li>• Innovative processes (such as extending services to cover a new target group) can inspire new policies linking guidance and validation;</li> <li>• Higher involvement of stakeholders at all levels (local, regional, national).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validation of non-formal and informal learning not being a policy priority;</li> <li>• Setting up links between guidance and validation is not a policy priority in certain countries;</li> <li>• Competence acquisition among the low-skilled and the unemployed outside formal education is not a policy priority in some countries.</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficiencies in service provision resulting from frameworks for interinstitutional cooperation or for integrated service provision, as well as from cooperation among committed stakeholders in the absence of a framework;</li> <li>• Validation is contributing to changing the role of PES, moving away from administrative services to more personalised guidance services;</li> <li>• Gains in quality assurance;</li> <li>• Increase in efficacy – services better address the needs of people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of common understanding (among practitioners involved) about the goals of services;</li> <li>• Lack of appreciation of one another's activities;</li> <li>• Guidance and validation treated as separate services in the organisational or institutional setup, leading to asymmetries of information and fragmentation of services;</li> <li>• Resourcing issues due to organisational changes linked to the practice;</li> <li>• Lack of monitoring and follow up to assess the impacts of the practices.</li> </ul>
<b>Individual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framework-based practices linking guidance and validation give (potential) participants clear information on the service while enabling them to make better informed career decisions;</li> <li>• Coordinated validation and guidance services better suit the needs of individuals;</li> <li>• Increased relevance of such coordinated services for training and labour market integration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of readiness or suitability for validation among individual participants, which may be due to the nature of the groups targeted by the practice or insufficient targeting and lack of screening.</li> </ul>

Source: Case studies.

## CHAPTER 4.

# Recommendations

The recommendations are derived from the analytical conclusions presented in the previous chapter. The findings are determined by the explorative nature of the study; they refer to 13 practices selected from 12 countries: Austria, Czechia, Finland (two practices), France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and UK-Scotland. Despite the limited number of practices (compared to an extensive quantitative study), they still capture the diversity in scope and organisational structures of the guidance and validation services offered across Europe. They have diverse aims and are tailored to specific target groups, specific economic contexts or occupational sectors. National policy strategies (related to a national validation model) shape some practices, while other practices may be more strongly affected by a network of regional partners or sectoral committees. Some practices target low-qualified/skilled adults (including NEET, refugees), others aim at adults in general or at migrants with higher education background.

The recommendations reflect the most important factors ensuring successful coordination between guidance and validation services including:

- (a) comprehensiveness (provision of adequate information and guidance before the decision to undergo validation is taken, through the entire validation process and also after it);
- (b) coherence (use of common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks through all the stages of the practice to identify, document and assess skills);
- (c) quality of staff resources and competences as well as tools used.

The following recommendations relate to important factors ensuring successful coordination between guidance and validation services.

### 4.1. **Comprehensiveness**

Coordinating validation and guidance would benefit from setting up clear links between the two services. This requires political will, agreement between political partners and broad societal support. The last can be achieved by involving practitioners in developing, for instance, an overarching policy strategy (that includes a lifelong learning strategy, strategy for adult learning, skills strategy or specific strategy for guidance or validation) or a single legal framework. Whichever form they take, strategies or frameworks should clearly define the tasks and

responsibilities of all the stakeholders involved at the national, regional and/or local (municipality) level through the development and dissemination of guidelines. The allocation of necessary financial resources (including shared funding through the ESF) as well as human resources (enough qualified staff) should also be considered.

Adequate allocation of financial and human resources would help develop comprehensive, systematised and coordinated processes, from outreach to potential candidates and identifying their skills to validating/certifying their competences. Services coordinating career guidance and skills validation also add to the offer of active labour market policies, including measures for upskilling of low-qualified/skilled adults.

As part of this approach:

- (a) guidance should always provide information on the benefits of and opportunities for validation, as well as on the relevant procedures available to people, as per the 2012 recommendation (Council, 2012);
- (b) guidance should involve screening and profiling, not only as a way of identifying an individual's skills, but also to assess their readiness (suitability) for validation;
- (c) guidance should be continuously available to people undertaking validation (throughout the identification, documentation, assessment and validation/certification stages) and continue after completing validation, because an individual's professional development goals or expectations may evolve or even change significantly over time.

Comprehensiveness also implies that creating clear links between (or coordinating) guidance and validation services should take place for all occupations across all sectors at all levels of education.

## 4.2. Coherence

Developing a common policy strategy or a single legal framework linking guidance and validation across all occupational and educational sectors requires extensive dialogue and cooperation between a wide range of stakeholders (from policy-makers to teachers/trainers, to business associations) to reach a clear consensus on issues such as unemployment reduction, job creation, growth and competitiveness, and social inclusion. This common understanding should cover what is to be achieved and how services, roles and functions of practitioners should be defined. Without such a consensus, different stakeholders will 'pull in different directions' and apply different interpretations to guidance and validation and what

they are meant to achieve. Coordinating guidance and validation requires (alignment with) a common reference framework for qualifications or competence standards. To identify, document, and assess skills, the practices use different tools at different stages of the process: these include digital profiling, web-based self-assessment, and skills portfolios. These tools are 'coherent' when all or most of them are based on common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks. This ensures continuity between the outputs produced, with each new output building on the previous one, so the output from one activity (or stage) can be used as an input for the following activity (or stage). This guarantees information traceability and prevents duplication of work. For example, individualised career development plans feed into individualised skills portfolios, which are used to tailor training programmes or competence assessment examinations. A common reference framework also ensures systematised coordination between different services, especially when separate entities provide the services.

Any common qualifications or competence standards framework should be relatable to non-formal and informal learning experiences. This also ensures coherence between outputs (especially those produced at the skills identification stage) and continuity in the interpretation of career development needs and goals.

### 4.3. Quality

Uniform common standards are essential for assuring consistent quality when delivering guidance and validation services.

Quality of services can be improved by focusing on individuals, by flexibly responding to needs (available everywhere and at any time) and by considering the readiness of individuals to get engaged in validation and guidance.

Because coordinating guidance and validation remains a relatively new practice (at least in some contexts and countries), it is recommended to provide adequate training for specific practitioner roles/functions (including technical, but also soft skills) throughout all the stages of guidance and validation. Training is particularly relevant for entities moving away from administrative services towards individual-centred or personalised services (for instance, PES). Common training for all those involved in a practice can also improve the coherence of services and intended outputs; it can create balanced teams that cooperate and exchange information well. Elaboration of common guidelines and quality criteria for services develops healthy communication within the team and with clients.

The commitment of practitioners (time dedicated to clients, motivational work with specific target groups) should also be considered: exchange of experience

among practitioners may be beneficial in this respect. Specific incentives (such as through training) may be created to increase practitioner commitment.

Data collection and monitoring (on the outcomes and impacts of validation) is important to gauge the quality and performance of guidance and validation services. Coherence between outputs to guarantee the traceability of information throughout all stages of guidance and validation will improve the development of monitoring mechanisms.

## Abbreviations

AEGS	Adult Education Guidance Service
ANQEP	National Agency for Qualification and Professional Education
CBQ	competence-based qualifications
CEB	Central Examination Board
CMS	career management skills
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
ETBs	education and training boards
ETSC	Education and Training Service Centre
ESF	European Social Fund
IEFP	Institute for Employment and Vocational Training
IVET	initial vocational education and training
LMI	labour market intelligence
LLL	lifelong learning
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NEET	young people not in employment, education or training
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NVQRs	national vocational qualification requirements
OPACIF	<i>Organisme Paritaire Agréé au titre du Congé Individuel de Formation</i> (joint collective bodies for individual training leaves)
PES	public employment service
PIAAC	Programme for the international assessment of adult competences
QOI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
REB	regional examination board
RPL	recognition of prior learning
RVCC	recognition, validation and certification of competences
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
VAE	<i>validation des acquis de l'expérience</i>
VET	vocational education and training
VNIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning
VPL	validation of prior learning
UAS	University of applied sciences



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## Website and projects

- Berlin declaration on validation of prior learning*, formulated by the VPL community at the 3rd VPL Biennale, Berlin, 7 and 8 May 2019:  
<https://vplbiennale.org/berlin-declaration-on-validation-of-prior-learning/>
- BRIDGE (Building up regional initiatives to develop guidance for low-skilled adults – Volkshochschulverband Baden-Württemberg e.V.). The outputs of the project recommend widening access to guidance (tools, time, languages); promoting access of specific target groups (profile the services and develop evidence-based policies to target specific groups); include guidance in the validation process. <https://bridgeguidanceproject.wordpress.com/>
- CareersNet, Cedefop's network for lifelong guidance and career development:  
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/networks/careersnet>
- Competence cards for professional and immigration counselling*; a Bertelsmann Stiftung project in cooperation with organisations responsible for providing immigration counselling to adult immigrants: <https://www.bertelsmannstiftung.de/en/our-projects/careers-via-competences/project-news/immigration-counseling-for-adult-immigrants/>
- Policy learning forum on upskilling pathways, Brussels, 7 and 8 February 2018; organised by Cedefop together with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and in cooperation with the European Commission:  
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/events/policy-learning-forum-upskilling-pathways-vision-future-0>
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) – Global observatory of recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning.  
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## Annex 1.

### Core research team and country experts

Core research team	
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Country experts	
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## Annex 2.

# Theoretical and research framework

Background/context		What was the original NEED of the practice? Why is it believed that it is an adequate ('good') response? What is the geographic scope (national, regional, local)? Who carries out the practice?
	2	<p><b>LAWS, FRAMEWORKS and FINANCING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there laws and regulations/policies or strategies or other national frameworks ('guidelines', 'principles') in place underpinning career guidance and validation? Do they refer (and if yes how) to the linkage between services?</li> <li>• Is there (dedicated) funding to support the integration or coordination of career guidance and validation services?</li> <li>• How is the practice financed? By the EU; by the State/regions/municipalities (including also subcontracting of services to private, non-profit and voluntary organisations); by employers and trade unions contributions; co-funding (please explain the sources); other.</li> <li>• Are individuals required to pay fees?</li> </ul>
	3	<p>What is the FOCUS of the practice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career-guidance-oriented (possibly with elements of validation)</li> <li>• Validation-oriented (possibly with elements of career guidance)</li> <li>• The practice has both focuses (validation may constitute a potential provision in comprehensive career support)</li> </ul>
	4	<p>What ACTIVITIES are carried out?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screening (yes/no, if yes: self-assessment, basic profiling, brief screening, comprehensive screening)</li> <li>• Which validation stages are included in the activities?</li> <li>• Which career guidance activities are carried out?</li> <li>• Other activities (training, support activities)</li> </ul>
	5	<p>What is the PURPOSE/RATIONALE of the practice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention and re-engagement (youth employability, early school leavers)</li> <li>• Upskilling</li> <li>• Obtaining a qualification</li> <li>• Enterprise-based programmes (skills/age management)</li> <li>• Integration (migrants, refugees, minorities, people with special needs)</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>
	6	<p>For WHOM is the practice meant (universal, specific target groups)?</p> <p>low skilled/qualified (adults or young people)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adults in general (may include highly educated/skilled and qualified inactive)</li> <li>• Unemployed</li> <li>• Disadvantaged groups (immigrants/refugees, children of immigrant/refugees, people with special needs/disabilities)</li> <li>• Other-please explain</li> <li>• No specific target group</li> </ul>
	7	<p>SECTOR: where does it take place: PES, schools, validation centres, etc.)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primarily/ also carried out by educational providers</li> <li>• Primarily/ also by carried out PES and the national careers service</li> <li>• Primarily/also carried out within enterprises</li> <li>• Primarily/also carried out by third sector (volunteering and/or youth organisations)</li> </ul>

	8	<b>INSTITUTIONAL SETTING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of stakeholder are involved and what is their role?</li> <li>• Which are the major external stakeholders (NGO's)?</li> </ul>
Practical implementation	9	The Practice STEP-BY-STEP (overall duration vs duration of each step)
	10	What are the METHODS and TOOLS used? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is identification of prior learning carried out?</li> <li>• What reference point (standard) is being used if any?</li> <li>• Is the process of identification of skills linked to other skills assessment practices and if 'yes' how/ to what practices?</li> <li>• What formats are used for documenting outcomes?</li> </ul>
	11	<b>WHAT</b> are the final and intermediate OUTPUTS of the practice (portfolio, (part of) qualification/certification, referral to a specific training (or other learning processes), licence allowing the individual to carry out specific tasks, career plan, referral to a validation/career guidance service, other)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent do documentation formats support the transfer and portability of outcomes from one service to the other?</li> <li>• Are there any data protection issues (restriction related to information transfer from one service to the other) and how were/could they be overcome?</li> </ul>
	12	<b>QUALITY ASSURANCE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What quality assurance arrangements/frameworks are in place?</li> <li>• What are the measures implemented to maintain standards?</li> <li>• What kind of measures are in place to quality assure the outputs?</li> <li>• Do validation practitioners have sufficient information related to career guidance and vice versa to ensure coordination, cooperation?</li> <li>• Do practitioners have expertise in the possible linkages between education and training, the labour market and society that the learner can reach out to?</li> <li>• Is support to the development of career management skills provided to the individual along the whole process?</li> <li>• What is the profile of the practitioners involved in the practice (in the case of integrated and also coordinated services)?</li> <li>• Are there specific requirements for practitioners/staff members to provide the services (specific qualifications, skills)?</li> <li>• Do practitioners receive sufficient training on how to carry out their role (specific training: career counselling and assessment, careers education/pedagogy; more generic training: recording statistics of career service usage)?</li> <li>• Are practitioners familiar with different assessment methodologies; are they knowledgeable about quality assurance mechanisms?</li> <li>• Do they have a capacity to rephrase learning experience into learning outcomes that can be matched with existing standards?</li> <li>• Is there guidance provided to individuals all along the process?</li> </ul>

	<p>13 What is the MODEL OF LINKAGE between validation and guidance in the practice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Integrated model:</i> validation and career guidance form part of the same procedure and are delivered by the same organisation/validation and career guidance form part of the same procedure; however, they are offered by different organisations;</li> <li>• <i>Coordinated model:</i> validation and career guidance are offered as separate services (either by the same or different organisations) but they are connected by more or less systematic referrals to each other (completion of a set of career guidance activities (by PES) may entail a quasi-systematic referral to a specific validation process; completion of certain stages of the validation process may entail referral to specific career 57guidance services). This connection or cooperation may be more or less formalised;</li> <li>• <i>Non-integrated and not coordinated:</i> validation and career guidance are offered as separate services and there is no coordination, no formal cooperation and no systematic referrals;</li> <li>• <i>Other.</i></li> </ul>
Overall assessment	<p>14 What are the ACTUAL organisational and the individual GAINS/BENEFITS of the integration/coordination of validation and guidance?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Organisational gains:</i> cost saving, smoother and quicker transfer to further education/labour market, other;</li> <li>• <i>Individual gains:</i> clarification of choices, experiences, strengths, weaknesses and identification of opportunities; increased likelihood of appropriate career choice and associated learning processes (when applicable); increased likelihood of successful job (re)integration; the practice helps individuals define a professional project and develop stable careers; gets people to progress in their careers with motivational gains translating into productivity gains; other.</li> </ul>
	<p>15 What are the CHALLENGES to integration and cooperation between career guidance and validation services? Challenges may be lack of information, insufficient funding, different working methods, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where evidence is available (evaluation reports), what does this tell us about which practices/methods in terms of integration/coordination of guidance and validation are working well/not so well?</li> <li>• What are the costs and problems of integration/stronger cooperation between guidance and validation?</li> </ul>
	<p>16 What are the SUCCESS FACTORS and lessons learned? How is 'successful' integration/coordination between services achieved? Is this documented?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the necessary conditions ensuring successful integration and/or coordination of services?</li> <li>• How is the coherence of the outcomes of guidance and validation assured?</li> <li>• Is there research available (evaluation reports) in relation to success factors and what are the main findings?</li> <li>• What are the lessons learned?</li> <li>• How could the integration/coordination of the services be improved?</li> </ul>
	<p>17 Which aspects of the described practice are TRANSFERABLE?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would this form of integration/cooperation of services work in different sectors of learning/with different target groups/in different countries?</li> </ul>



# Coordinating guidance and validation

Validation and guidance help individuals, organisations and Member States adapt to career challenges and create successful lifelong learning systems. However, little is known about how they are linked in practice and how this connection can be made more efficient. Building on Cedefop's expertise in the two areas, this study – based on analysis of 13 practices from 12 countries – explores how coordination between career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning can be improved. Results point to three factors:

- (a) comprehensiveness: provision of adequate information and guidance before a decision to undergo validation is taken, throughout the entire validation process, as well as after it;
- (b) coherence: use of common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks in all the stages of the practice to identify, document and assess skills;
- (c) quality of staff, resources, competences, and tools used.

The study concludes with policy recommendations on how to improve the link between guidance and validation.



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