

APPENDIX

Annex on Higher Education Area

The appendix, entitled *Annex on Higher Education Area*, assembles the first reports of a PRIN (Research Project of National Interest) currently in progress, overseen by the University of Roma 3. The focus of the survey are the policies for the recognition of “non formal” and “informal” learning that have been carried out, over the last decade, in the public universities of four European national contexts (France, Ireland, United Kingdom, Spain)¹. It is a typical “adults education” theme, where *lifelong learning requests*, innovations in *higher education* and crisis of the traditional forms of university teaching are closely related.

¹ The outcomes of the first surveys carried out within this PRIN, added to this issue as “Annex on Higher Education Area”, have been recently published in Italian (P. Di Rienzo, 2010). I wish to thank prof.ssa Aureliana Alberici, central coordinator of the Project, and the authors of the reports on the four national contexts, for having kindly authorized a free translation and adaptation of their essays. For a more detailed analysis of the plan and the results of this inquiry, I refer to above quoted Di Rienzo (2010). Here, quickly I point out only two relevance aspects of the national cases focused:

- a) institutional language (“anglo-” versus “neo-latin” area);
- b) evaluation and validation tradition (“APL” [Assessment of Prior Learning] *versus* VA [Validation des Acquis] prototype)

Measures of citizenship

Carlo Catarisi²

1. EHEA³: a “referential threshold”⁴ macro-level

“Measure” is a word widely used in the lexicon of the European Union to indicate, in the policies pertaining work and training, *the operational device whereby, within specific Community objectives, a priority axis is carried out on a multiannual time span, being connected to a financing plan for planned operations*⁵.

At first glance, it can perhaps seem restrictive to include in the meaning of this word the national initiatives constituting the field for the research conducted up to now. However, the definition that in my title follows the word in question (“of citizenship”) associates the pragmatic sense evoked by the word with a meaning of wider political scope, compared to a pure “labour market” application of the word. It is well known that the association of the sphere of social citizenship rights with the sphere of production and commercial outcomes is a “continuous low” of the prose of the European Union. However, this association often remains rather vague,

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³ In full, “European Higher Education Area”: acronym that is recurrent from the “Sorbonne Declaration” (1998) onwards. Its meaning is explained in footnote n. 5 and in point 3 of this essay.

⁴ “Le Boterf stresses the difference between *competence referentials* and *real competencies*. The competence referentials are objectives according to which people and their environment organize learning processes: the competence required, hence, refer to the prescribed task in terms of goals, professional needs and implementation conditions. The task constitutes an objective to be reached under given conditions; hence, it appears in the guise of a prescription to be carried out in a particular professional situation, which calls upon a set of resources deemed as necessary for the implementation and for reaching the objective set” (Zaggia, 2008, p. 63).

⁵ For a first example on the use of the term, see EC Regulations No 363/2004 and 800/2008, which tie in with the EC Treaty on aids to companies destined to training.

pointing to underlying uncertainties in the political standpoint taken. In my opinion, however, the outline provided by the documentation featured in the first part of this PRIN allows a precise interpretation, in a procedural sense, of the registered processes, connecting the market sphere with that of citizenship rights. As far as the market aspects are concerned, my interpretative reading is based on a perspective which can be described with the following clarification.

1. Along with the diversified and informal development of lifelong learning practices, promoted by a “free market” oriented towards the production of “intangible assets” and an “economy of knowledge”, civil society is characterized by the request that the practice of professional competencies be publicly regulated, so as to safeguard “inexpert” users/clients (that hence find themselves in a position of asymmetry of competence, with regard to the producers, a scenario emerging in conditions of urgent resort to certain goods and services) from inconsistent or deceiving offers. Via such route, the formal entitlement to practice a specific activity balances the seductive effect of the advertising-oriented communication and the levels of publicly-certified education maintain and re-activate their “classic” function of precondition of public practice of professional activities.

The argument previously expressed in point 1, centred on the theme of assessment and control of learning rather than its promotion, has perhaps a contrastive impact on the optimistic emphasis with which it is at times possible to speak of current trends as indicators of a progressively open and inclusive “society of knowledge”. However, the research accounts featured in this PRIN have in common a glaringly obvious fact: from the United Kingdom to the Canary Islands, with a *détour* on the fervent French Republic, it is possible to witness the recurrence of observative and operative categories that, in their overall Italian enumeration, are denominated “certification”, “validation”, “accreditation” and the like. *These are devices of control*, and not of unreserved promotion or recognition. Moreover, the recent fortunes of the “competence” category, to be found in the scientific literature pertaining *lifelong learning* and continuous training, have never conceptually entailed an abrogation of the

control exerted over the learning processes classified and described (Ropé, Tanguy, 2000)⁶.

2. *The quality control on learning – divided in the previously mentioned phases (certification, validation, accreditation) and with all the nuances of meaning that said phases acquire depending on the national context observed – can be schematically traced back to two areas of application, different in level: the area of those competencies connected to professional services for the exercise of which a secondary school education level educational credential is a prerequisite and the area of the professions requiring instead a title at university, or post-university level (higher education level). This distinction, traditionally typical of our nation, is modulated everywhere (I refer to the countries observed in this study, but the phenomenon has correlations on the wider European and worldwide scale) by the widespread reproduction of an “ordinistic” corporative filter line which, regulating access to professions consolidated historically as “civically basic” (e.g., medicine, architecture, engineering, and law, professions that are all specialized in the safeguard of goods essential to people) influences institutionally, according to paradigmatic threshold perspectives applied in an up – bottom sense, the public control of the learning processes at every level⁷.*

⁶ “The EC Commission Communication entitled “Adult education: it is never too late to learn” (Brussels, November 23rd, 2006) states that ‘a lifelong learning paradigm values all kinds of learning: formal, non formal and informal. *Recognition and validation* of non-formal and informal learning form a cornerstone in the lifelong learning strategy. The learning outcomes *should be recognised and valued*, regardless of where and how they are achieved’ ” (Daniele, *The European framework for the recognition and the validation of informal and non-formal learning*, Enclosed Text). The saliency of the instance of *formal recognition* is hence evident.

⁷ In this sense, also the progressive definition of the EQF (*European Qualification Framework*) system for Lifelong Learning – intentionally aimed at re-evaluating every type of ability and of competencies, howsoever acquired – ends up producing a vertical configuration of learning levels, connected to outcomes qualitatively rising in the direction of the scientifically-founded and professionally-qualifying competence (Daniele, cit., Enclosed Text). But the scientifically-founded and professionally-qualifying competence is in fact, in all Europe, a traditional and fundamental assessment criterion of the academic-university context; institutional context that, from the Sorbonne Declaration (1998) onwards is re-proposed – with an unprecedented pluralistic outlook vis-à-vis possible extra-mural cooperation, but without substantial variations as to the traditional epistemic-disciplinary

The objection that, in the Anglophone and North European area, the intellectual professions defined above as “civically basic” are organized according to “associations” and not “orders”, little affects their substantial institutional polarity, centred on – the different national and regional laws on the matter notwithstanding – two universally acknowledged aspects:

a) a basic power of “expert opinion” in the context of criminal and civil law;

b) an exclusive relationship with public institutions of *higher education* for the initial training (and, not exclusively, for continuous training) of those aspiring to a specific professional title (Freidson, 2002)⁸.

3. *The exclusive attribution of this recruiting function to consolidated organisations of intellectual professions – albeit modulated, in the various national contexts, with reference to different higher education structures – tends to project a secular specialization of the academic world in the “European Space for Higher Education” to be constituted.*

axes – with the denomination of “European Higher Education Area” (Zaggia, 2008, pp. 11-15). And, as is easily deducible from the regulations of the single nations and of the EU, a significant element confirming the tradition is the persistent requirement of a single-cycle degree to access the professions of medicine, architecture and law (in the main branches of Law and Magistracy). The single-cycle degree is frequently required also to access the profession of teacher in state schools. There has been an opening towards undergraduate degrees also in Italy (in the last decade, following Law 509/99), for the engineering profession; however the innovative significance of the measure has been greatly reduced, in Italy, by the policies of the Order of Engineers, which has established a differentiation between “junior” and “senior” members depending on degree levels. Said differentiation has had discriminating repercussions on the planning competencies legally allowed in this field and, with regard to this latter aspect, the move of our Order of Engineers corresponds, on the EU territory, with the tradition of analogous professional organizations.

⁸ On the persistent dominance of the ordinarist model in the texts drawn by the last Italian parliament concerning the regulation for the practice of intellectual professions, see Catarsi, 2009, p. 244 and subs. Said model maintains an administratively privileged and culturally paradigmatic position also in the bill “Act issued by the Government on intellectual professions”, introduced in the current 16th Parliament by senator Fioroni, the majority party sponsor of the bill, at the Permanent Commission “Industry, Commerce and Tourism” (25th June 2000 session); see, in particular, articles 3 and 6). On the subject, it would be narrow to attribute this position to a parochial spirit of caste. It is instead more interesting to open an international comparison, with the aim of gathering elsewhere precise “functional equivalents” of the neo-corporative trend so familiar to us (Butera, Donati, Cesaria, 1997, part II, chap. 5 and part III; Freidson, cit.; Malatesta, 2006; Sassen, 2008).

The research reports featured in this PRIN highlight many signs of similar tendencies, making it possible to interpret the construction of the EHEA as an emerging process of institutional integration between “universities” in the classical sense (which constitute to date the majority everywhere), polytechnic structures (present mainly in the UK) and post-graduate specialization structures⁹, occurring in the name of a “modernized” function of scientific-competential accreditation at an “advanced level”. Elsewhere I have used a typical Anglo Saxon expression, “dentist’s threshold”¹⁰, to define the threshold denoting in a distinctive way the level of advancement in question: it is, in essence, the threshold distinguishing a public accreditation title in the context of professional activities specifically inherent the safeguard of personal integrity (in a physical, patrimonial, moral and existential sense) of a potential citizen-user¹¹.

What previously illustrated from points 1 to 3 highlights, in the EHEA to be constituted, the persistence of traditional functions of higher education institutions. However, in addition to the conservative traits persisting in said modernization process, the following innovative emergence can be identified:

4. *The function of “certifying accreditation” awarded to higher education structures is applied today, to an unprecedented extent*

⁹ Launched in France almost three decades ago and, albeit to a lesser degree and more recently, also common in Spain.

¹⁰ The expression “dentist’s threshold” finds its dignified origin in the closing sentences of a famous conference by Keynes: “If economists could manage to get themselves thought of as humble, competent people on a level with dentists, that would be splendid” (Keynes, 1931).

¹¹ “The threshold, distinguishing the practice of some professions from others, has this simple and unavoidable basis: the guarantee of professional competence, in anticipation of interventions that are highly threatening for the personal integrity of the users/clients, and such as to engender – owing to the urgency of the event and the complexity of the knowledge applied – a constitutive asymmetry of ‘intellectual power’ between the professional and the recipient of the service, must be publicly regulated via the awarding of titles obtained at the end of basic formative cycles, culminating in ‘final tests’ (the so – called *capolavori* of the ancient corporations, which to date, in the faithful English transposition are called, in the extensive sense of the word, ‘masterpieces’) carried out by experts and defined – and in this sense publicly codified – as being of (at least) satisfactory level. This, in essence, is the ‘logic of professionalism’, which hinders any form of ‘anarchy of competence’” (Catarsi, 2010, to be published shortly).

compared to the past, to prior learning¹² in every moment of a citizen's individual existence. Lifelong training is a socio-cultural perspective that, against the background of learning modalities in continuous technological transformation, laps against the century-old "ivory towers"¹³ erected on the site of the (re)modernized EHEA .

Joining point (4) with the previous three, the scheme of measures of citizenship provided by the construction of HEES appears doubly defined: it is a renewed offer of certified professional guarantees, to favour both the role of potential "user" (or client) inherent in the citizen, and the co-existing role of potential "producer" (or professional).

2. Perspectives of local transition to EHEA: protocols and persons

With relation to the processes of institutional configuration described in the previous paragraph, I will endeavour to highlight extremely concisely (the limits of space for the present essay being restrictive), two aspects emerging from the research reports on the national contexts analyzed:

- the adaptation, as to the general strategies of self-promotion and image, of the traditional institutions and academic "bodies" to the functions of certificating accreditation assigned to them by the EHEA to be constituted;
- the need to review assessment and accreditation methods.

As far as point (a) is concerned, a polarity punctuated by an *inertial resistance* and, to the opposite extreme, an *active resilience* emerges on the whole. Said polarization is appropriately summed up by the following extract from the report dedicated to the English-speaking area, where the situation prevailing in the United Kingdom exemplifies a general tendency

¹² The adjective "prior" can be used to overcome, in the operativeness, the customary *gnoseologic* differentiation between "formal", "non-formal" and "informal", to be traced back – via the selective filter of public accreditation – to the *pragmatic-institutional* distinction between "certifying" and "non certifying" (Catarsi, 2010, point 2, footnote n. 9).

¹³ The metaphorical expression is the title of a recent study on the relationship between European university systems and economy: Moscati, Regini, Rostan, 2010.

to “inertial resistance”, as opposed to the typical “active resilience” of other European countries.

“In the United Kingdom, vocational training and university training have for a long time followed parallel paths: whilst the now almost obsolete *National Vocational Qualification Framework* is also a system for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning, the two discourses do not intersect. In other European countries, instead, the debate on the recognition of vocational and experiential competencies in the field of vocational and academic training occurs in a more coordinated way, as a contribution to solving common problems: the reduction of the time and cost of studying, the promotion of greater competencies and new qualifications, extension to higher education for greater social inclusion, flexibility in the labour market, mobility of workers within the European borders” (Stringher, *The recognition and validation of vocational and experiential competencies in the English-speaking area*, Enclosed Text).

On the whole, it is possible to witness an emergence, in the processes identifiable within the different national contexts, of the tendency to reconfirm the traditional autonomy of university-type institutions, which, in adapting to innovation, state their socio-cultural relegitimization. The trend is especially noticeable in France.

“Obviously, for the French universities, what is at stake are the legitimacy and the social credibility of the titles issued; allowing adults to access flexible and streamlined formative university paths starting with the recognition and validation of prior learning, is tantamount to acknowledging that the learning acquired in informal and non-formal contexts has the same value as the disciplinary knowledge developed in the academic context” (Daniele, *The recognition and validation of vocational and experiential competencies in France*, Enclosed Text).

The Spanish legislation on the accreditation of professional competencies, which has recently produced (2006) on the subject a curricularly verticalized structure similar to that of the *European Qualification Framework*, confirms at every level, from central government level to peripheral regions level, the certifying presence of university teachers.

“The protagonists of the planning round-table for recognition, assessment and validation are ICCP [Canarian Institute of Professional Qualifications] professors, government members of the Council of Education and university lecturers” (Colapietro, *The recognition and*

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validation of vocational and experiential competencies in Spain, Enclosed Text).

The English-speaking area is characterized by a marked plurality of styles and of local models. All the cases analyzed through specific projects of central supervision (e.g., “Transfine”) reveal that the single EHEA institutions have paid special attention to the definition of objective parameters for the recognition and validation of prior learning. In this respect, qualities such as “application and action”, together with a display of “autonomy and accountability” in carrying out specific tests, are generally acknowledged success indicators, whose exact empirical and assessment determination is influenced, alas, by the formative policies adopted and practiced in the single issuing institutions.

After having pointed out the general tendency to functional re-legitimization on behalf of traditional university-type institutions as a whole, it is necessary to acknowledge the processes of local differentiation, which can generate assessment and certificative disparities. With this in mind, the observation must focus further especially on situations of greater effort for the recognition of prior learning in the extra-academic context, like the ones that have been carried out in many French universities based on a decades-long organic legislation inherent to the “*validation des acquis*”. It is a well known fact that, where a greater “laboratory atmosphere” is created, interesting unintentional effects and *progresses* to reflect upon emerge: Labuyère, Quintero, 2009. Thus, via common aspects in the reports examined up to now, a *vexata quaestio* of validation theory regains topicality. An issue that to date has been evoked in the perspective of a customary dichotomy, which can be summed up with the *contra* “person” “protocol”¹⁴ alternative. The report on the English-speaking area introduces the issue as follows:

¹⁴“In the 19th and 20th centuries we made stuff: corn and steel and trucks. Now, we make protocols: sets of instructions. A software program is a protocol for organizing information. A new drug is a protocol for organizing chemicals. Wal-Mart produces protocols for moving and marketing consumer goods. Even when you are buying a car, you are mostly paying for the knowledge embedded in its design, not the metal and glass” (Brooks, 2009). If we associate the previous technological definition of the term “protocol” with its legal-administrative one, defining it as an instrument constituted by the totality of the procedures and elements via which the documents are treated with legal-probatory and managerial purposes, the result is an operative definition capturing the essential traits of the expression “certificate of recognition of prior learning”.

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“In the QCA [Qualification and Curriculum Authority] guidelines the individual is the central element and the driving force behind the whole process: the choice of pursuing a whole course of studies, or to opt for requesting recognition, is devolved upon the single learner. The very idea of using an explicit language in that sense, preferring expressions such as “claiming credit” (recognition request) to the more technical expression implied by the acronym RPL (recognition of prior learning), highlights this position on behalf of the British system. This choice could harm procedures, in that the less autonomous individuals are the very ones who could benefit more from the accreditation paths, provided that clear and detailed communications and procedures of *counselling* and support to candidates are established, both before and during experiential recognition” (Stringher, cit., Enclosed Text).

But it is in the following extract from the Spanish report that the personological aspects of the issue are stated almost with a tone of caesura.

“The Spanish model places itself critically compared to the French and English models, despite agreeing on the basic principle of accrediting all that has been learnt in informal and non-formal contexts. A model is always born of a principle, from theoretical premises which tend to put what has been postulated into practice. Therefore the question is: what are knowledge and competence? And how and with what instruments is it possible to assess them? For France, in contrast with what happens in England, it is not sufficient to quantitatively “add” the different types of knowledge acquired; additional quantification is replaced by the subject and his/her capacity to learn and construct competencies. Other variables to consider are hence the different preconditions according to which the “formative worlds involved” are articulated: academia and the labour market, without omitting the subject in the valorisation of his latent potential.

In our opinion, what is important is to consider the starting point, which constitutes the support during the whole path, up to the completion of the implied epistemology. In other words, what is the academic model of science and experience in Spain?” (Colapietro, cit., Enclosed Text).

The question is open, but we must also highlight, in the operative sense, the limits of this openness, which has the risk of recreating ancient and sterile divisions between “engineers” and “cultural anthropologists”, possibly in a desperate effort on behalf of the arts faculties to regain academic spaces conquered by the “technical-scientific” ones. The

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relevance of the reflective and metacognitive inclinations of the subject engaged in learning and under assessment is in fact undeniable, vis-à-vis a purely techno-cybernetical assessment (*effective evidence indicially based*) of the learning acquired. However, said relevance must be correlated, during formative assessment, to precise socio-technical learning contexts, in order to develop a personalized diagnosis and prognosis based on recurrent *performance* “glitches”. With reference to this latter aspect, I would like to call to mind, for a respectful and appropriate composition of “sociographies of situated learning”, the theoretical and methodological guidelines that I have expressed elsewhere (Catarsi, 2007; chapters 5, 6, 7 in particular). The French context, with procedures centred upon *livrets* and *épreuves* submitted to *jurys de VAE* features, in a greater number and in a stricter sense compared to the others analyzed, synthonic examples containing auspicious guidelines. It is perhaps the case of experimentally promoting their transferability on the HEES scenario, without ignoring cautionary measures such as the ones suggested in the previously mentioned Labuyère, Quintero, 2009.

The European framework for the recognition and the validation of informal and non-formal learning

Luisa Daniele¹⁵

1. The paradigm of permanent learning

On the European and international level, the reflection on permanent education and training, or *Lifelong Learning*, started to receive a strong impulse in the 1970s, through the efforts of the most representative supranational organizations such as the Council of Europe, the UNESCO and the OCSE. During the 1990s in particular, the OCSE and the European Union reintroduced the concept of *Lifelong Learning* in order to develop an active citizenship, promote the individual, and create greater employability. On the European level, the consultations about adult learning between the member States led to the definition, during the Council of Lisbon (March 2000)¹⁶, of a communitarian strategy to turn Europe into the most competitive and dynamic economy of the world, with permanent learning as the key element to knowledge. Said strategy has subsequently been organized into shared objectives in the “Memorandum on lifelong learning”¹⁷ (October 2000), and then restated in the policy document

¹⁵ Member of the PRIN 2007 working group established by the chair of Adult Education, Professor Alberici, Roma Tre University, institution in charge of the project *The validation of professional and experiential competencies in adults willing to be (re)integrated in university, in a lifelong learning perspective*.

¹⁶ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm

¹⁷ The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning sets six key messages:

- New basic competencies for everyone
- More investments in human resources
- Innovation in teaching and learning methods
- Assessing learning outcomes
- Rethinking orientation

“Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality” (European Commission, 2001).

The consultations between the social partners that followed the Memorandum in each Member State led to consolidate the European vision of permanent education and training.

The definition of *Lifelong learning* adopted includes all the formal, informal and non-formal learning activities, i.e., *Lifelong learning* is: “any learning activity undertaken at any moment in life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence within a personal, civic, social and/or occupational perspective”. The Memorandum defines the principles governing permanent learning, which are: the centrality of the learner; the importance of equal opportunities; the quality and relevance of learning opportunities.

After the 1990s, both on the international and European level, important changes in the context of adult training and education have taken place. First, there has been a shift of emphasis from the system of education to the individual learner and hence from a pyramidal system of disciplinary knowledge to a net-like map of competencies and skills acquired in situ and hence liable to be read also in relation with non-formal learning sites. Therefore, said shift in the horizon of sense of adult education brings two concepts to the fore: that of the adult’s competence and that of integration both on the institutional and pedagogical level. The adult’s competence is no longer seen as the result of an activity of knowledge acquisition carried out in youth allowing, in maturity, to apply the knowledge acquired to the chosen profession, but as the ability to mobilize, at any given moment, specific resources (knowledge, skills, qualities) depending on the performance expected (Le Boterf, 1994).

The realisation of policies for Lifelong Learning is hence a long term objective, to be fulfilled following two guiding principles: increasing both the basic competencies and the motivation to learn autonomously, even after the school experience is over, of the new generations on one hand, and giving adults the opportunity to access learning on the other. Therefore, there is a shift in the paradigm of permanent learning: from the focus on regular and continuous training for adults, to the attention paid to strengthening the basic competencies of young learners. Said changes in the final objectives of the system entail a change in the context of the agents

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- Learning closer to home.

responsible of it: the field of permanent learning does not only extend to the subject's lifespan (*lifelong*), but also to all the fields of interest of his/her personal and professional life (*lifewide*).

2. The policies for the certification of non-formal and informal competencies within the framework of the Bologna Process

The 1990s also saw the rise of a movement of higher education reform starting from the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, signed by the Council of Europe and by the UNESCO in Lisbon on April 11th, 1997.

The Lisbon Convention defined some fundamental principles and general and specific objectives, subsequently restated in the Declaration of Sorbonne (May 25th, 1998).

The Bologna Declaration of June 19th, 1999, fits into this normative international framework, and it features various objectives to put into practice the principles previously expressed in May 1998 at the Sorbonne (table 2.1).

Subsequently, the so-called Bologna process has been implemented following various stages consisting of meetings of the signatory EU education ministers: Prague, May 19th, 2001, Berlin, September 18-19th, 2003, Bergen, May 19-20th, 2005, London, May 17-18th, 2007, Leuven, April 28-29th, 2009.

The 2001 Prague communiqué placed further emphasis on Lifelong learning: "*Lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area. In the future Europe, built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life*" (European University Association, 2001, p. 2).

The communiqué of the following Berlin meeting (2003) reinforces the principle of *Lifelong learning* in order to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA): "*Ministers underline the important contribution of higher education in making lifelong learning a reality. They are taking steps to align their national policies to realise this goal and urge Higher Education Institutions and all concerned to enhance the possibilities for lifelong learning at higher education level including the recognition of*

prior learning.” (Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education, 2003, p. 6).

Table 1 – The objectives stated in the Bologna Declaration

<p>Said objectives are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “The adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the <i>Diploma Supplement</i>, in order to promote European citizens’ employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system. 2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries. 3. Establishment of a system of credits – such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by the receiving universities concerned. 4. Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to: for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services; for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights; 5. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies; 6. Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research”.
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In the Bergen communiqué (2005) the Ministers highlighted clearly the close relationship between permanent learning and the European Framework for Qualifications (which was being drafted in 2005). In addition, they declare to consider the realisation of European and National Frameworks for Qualifications by the Bologna Process as an opportunity to develop lifelong training: “*We see the development of national and European frameworks for qualifications as an opportunity to further embed lifelong learning in higher education*” (Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education, 2005, p. 3). They also aim to create opportunities to improve recognition of prior learning by: “*creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning*” (Ibidem, p. 5).

In London (2007) no reflections on lifelong training and university were developed, and the issue was postponed to the subsequent meeting of Leuven in 2009.

In fact, the Leuven communiqué states that: “*Widening participation shall also be achieved through lifelong learning as an integral part of our education systems. Lifelong learning is subject to the principle of public responsibility. The accessibility, quality of provision and transparency of information shall be assured. Lifelong learning involves obtaining qualifications, extending knowledge and understanding, gaining new skills and competencies, or enriching personal growth. Lifelong learning implies that qualifications may be obtained through flexible learning paths, including part-time studies, as well as work-based routes.*”¹⁸

Furthermore, the Charter on Lifelong Learning developed by the European University Association is referred to in order to define the partnerships necessary for the implementation of lifelong learning policies between public authorities, higher education institutions, students, employers and employees.

These communiqués use the same definitory framework of *Lifelong learning* used within the framework of the community documents: the definition given, in fact, is extensive and includes all the learning activities, and, as such, also higher education.

2.1. The European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning

The need to establish common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe is stated in the Copenhagen Declaration of November 2002 on European co-operation in vocational education and training. In it, 31 European Ministers, the social partners and the Commission stated the need to develop a set of common principles regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between approaches in different countries and at different levels.

The “Education and Training 2010” report states that “the common European principles should be developed as matter of priority and

¹⁸ The Leuven communiqué can be consulted on the website:
http://www.bolognaprocess.it/content/index.php?action=read_cnt&id_cnt=6635

implemented at national level, respecting Member States competencies”¹⁹ furthermore, the development of common criteria can support and spread the credit transferability system developed within the context of the formal systems of education and training (the ECTS system in particular).

The principles defined in the document are intended as a stimulus for the validation of non-formal and informal learning at national level and as support to a process, autonomously conducted by the Member States, which may lead to coherent and compatible validation practices in Europe.

The main focus is on the following areas of validation:

- validation of learning taking place in formal education and training settings;
- validation of learning taking place in relation to the labour market (enterprises, public organisations and economic sectors);
- validation of learning taking place in relation to voluntary and civil society activities, as well as in community learning.

The final document of the working Group stresses that in the policies of the European countries particular attention should be given to validation approaches aiming at the (re)integration of individuals into education and training (for example targeting the needs of school drop-outs, unemployed and immigrants).

This policy objective, common to all the three areas mentioned above, confirms the crucial role played by the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning, especially in promoting social integration, employability and lifelong learning of the least qualified individuals, be these youths or adults, employed or unemployed, nationals or immigrants.

The common European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning are a guide for the development of non-formal and informal methods and systems for validation; they do not prescribe any particular methodological or institutional solutions and represent a set of basic requirements.

The set of common European principles for validation is organised according to six areas (tab. 2):

¹⁹ The “Education and Training 2010” report can be consulted on the website: http://www.indire.it/socrates/content/index.php?action=read_rivista&id=5908

Table 2 – Common European principles in six areas

<p>1. The purpose of validation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– The validation of the learning outcomes, irrespective of where these have been acquired:• aims at making visible the full range of knowledge and competencies held by an individual• supports lifelong learning, employability and active citizenship• can result in formal and personal recognition of learning acquired <p>2. Individual Entitlements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– an individual accesses the validation process voluntarily– in cases where validation is part of a compulsory system arrangements should be put in place to ensure transparency, fairness and privacy– in organisations where validation is implemented this should be based on social dialogue– the individuals must have the right to use the results of the validation– special provisions should be designed for individuals with special needs– the results of the validation must be the property of the individual who requested it– In cases where validation is part of human resource management in enterprises the privacy of the individual must be ensured <p>3. Responsibilities of institutions and stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– results of validation must be presented in such a way that they can be understood at European and international level– the privacy of the individual must be respected– validation should be supported by information, guidance and counselling services– education and training systems, enterprises, public organisations and economic sectors, non-formal learning organisations, including NGOs, should provide a legal and practical basis enabling individuals to have their learning validated– validation should be an integral part of human resource development in enterprises and public organisations and should be based on social dialogue <p>4. Confidence and trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Transparency of procedures:• to guarantee confidentiality to all• the methodologies for validation should be stated clearly• clear information on time and cost should be presented– transparency of criteria– availability of, and access to, information <p>5. Impartiality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– assessors should operate according to a code of conduct– assessors must be professionally competent and take part systematically in initial and continuing training actions <p>6 Credibility and legitimacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– the development, implementation and financing of a mechanism for validation must involve all relevant stakeholders– validation bodies need to be impartial and shall involve all stakeholders significantly concerned

- purpose of validation
- individual entitlements
- responsibilities of institutions and stakeholders

APPENDIX

- confidence and trust
- impartiality
- credibility.

The basic logic of the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning implies the passage from a diagnostic approach to an evolutionary one and from a fragmented approach to a global one: the different competencies acquired through the workplace, through personal experiences or voluntary work are not considered in isolation but in interaction with each other, taking into account the experiential dimension of an individual.

3. The latest developments

As of 2005 a new phase in the European works on the theme of the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning has begun: in fact said theme takes on a central position in the debate on lifelong education and training at EC level.

Firstly it is important to recall the process of construction of a system of Credit Transfer for vocational Education and Training: *ECVET- European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training*, inspired by the *ECTS (European credit transfer system)*²⁰ system, already used in the higher education sector. The ECVET should enable the transfer and capitalisation of learning outcomes from a learning context to another or in the case of individuals who pass from an education and training system to another. The construction process of the ECVET system, is established with the start of a consultation process between Countries (Commission staff working document, 2006), which ended only in 2008.

The European integrated credit transfer system (ECVET) is part of the set of instruments included in the European Qualification Framework strategy, - EQF, which will be discussed at a later stage. ECVET is constructed as a system of credit awarding (*credit points*) to qualifications and/or their components (*units*).

²⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48en.htm> ;
http://www.crui.it/crui/ECTS/cosa_e.htm

The second relevant area of discussion, with reference to the objective of establishing a common reference system for the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning, is the one represented by the definition of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) for the education and training system, which enables to put in relation and position, in a structure consisting of levels, the different titles (qualifications, diplomas, certificates etc.) obtained in the Member States. The meeting of EU Heads of Government held in Brussels in March 2005, consisted of a consultation between the member States in order to evaluate the different positions with regard to the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework. On the basis of the conclusions of the consultation process, on September 5th, 2006, the Commission issued a Recommendation Proposal on the establishment of the *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* (EQF) (Commission of the European Communities, 2006), which led to the definitive Recommendation of January 2008 (European Union, 2008). The EQF is a translation device – a converter or reading grid – enabling to position and compare, within an eight-level structure, the different titles (qualifications, diplomas, certificates etc.) obtained in the member States: the comparison is based on the learning outcomes. With said grid, the member States, on a voluntary basis, are encouraged to review their own education and training systems, so as to establish comparability between the single national reference systems. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) has been hence thought and established as a proper common reference code, so as to enable the different European countries to position and thus make transparent their national systems. Additionally, a further explicit objective of the EQF is supporting the processes of validation of non-formal and informal learning, enabling the definition of knowledge and competencies acquired in the study and training paths.

Among the key elements defining the EQF are the common reference levels, connected to the learning outcomes and placed in an eight-level structure. The structure of levels enables to organize in increasing order – from minimum to maximum complexity – the learning outcomes that can be acquired in an individual's lifespan, not only through formal paths, but also non-formal and informal paths.

The learning outcomes express what a person is expected to know, understand and/or is able to do on completion of a learning process; using the “learning outcome” as a comparative indicator means overcoming a

comparison logic based on learning methods and paths of acquisition. In the EQF the learning outcomes are represented through knowledge, skills and competencies descriptors, which are also coherent with a new formulation of the *key competencies* (Commission of the European Communities, 2005)²¹. On the basis of this structure it is possible – on the national, regional and sectoral level – to classify academic and vocational titles (diplomas, qualifications, certificates etc.), recognizing the learning outcomes achieved by the individuals, referring them to the appropriate level of the EQF.

The second key element of the EQF consists of the common principles agreed on the European level on the ‘Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training’ (Council of the European Union, 2004). In said document the Council of the European Union emphasises as a priority the definition of a common framework of quality assurance. Said framework includes the following elements:

- an appropriate model, to facilitate planning, evaluation and review of systems at the appropriate levels in Member States;
- monitoring as appropriate at national or regional level, possibly combined with voluntary peer review;
- measuring tools developed at national or regional level to facilitate Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems.

More recent documents also make an explicit reference to the principle of recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning. In fact, the Commission communication *Adult learning: It is never too late to learn*. (Brussels, October 23rd, 2006) states that: “A lifelong learning paradigm values all kinds of learning – formal, non-formal and informal. Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning form a cornerstone in the lifelong learning strategy. The learning outcomes should

²¹ It should be noted that the key competencies for lifelong learning include that of learning to learn: “Learning to learn skills require firstly the acquisition of the fundamental basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and ICT that are necessary for further learning. Building on this, an individual should be able to access, gain, process and assimilate new knowledge and skills. This requires effective management of one’s learning, career and work patterns, and in particular the ability to persevere with learning, to concentrate on extended periods and to reflect critically on the purposes and aims of learning.” (Commission of the European Communities, 2005, p. 18).

be recognised and valued, regardless of where and how they are achieved” (Commissione delle Comunità Europee, 2006, p. 8).

The following Commission Communication: *Action Plan on Adult learning: It is always a good time to learn*, (Brussels, September 27th, 2007) includes among the operational objectives to be achieved by 2010 “speed[ing] up the process of assessing and recognizing non-formal and informal learning for the disadvantaged groups. [...] Assessment and recognition of skills and social competencies, regardless of where and how they are achieved, are especially important for those who do not have basic qualifications, in order to facilitate their integration in society” (Commissione delle Comunità Europee, 2007, p. 10).

Said themes are developed and systematized in the *European Guidelines for the Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning* of 2009, by a working Group of the Direzione Generale Educazione e Cultura and of the Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training).

The ten commitments²² featured in the European Universities Charter on Lifelong Learning confirm a vision of lifelong learning in higher education as a path that does not just contemplate initial training, but integrates all the ages of a citizen’s and worker’s life, regardless of the site of learning.

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- ²² “1. Embedding concepts of widening access and lifelong learning in the institutional strategies of universities
2. Providing positive educational responses to a diversified student population. Said diversity, with a view to developing a culture of success and innovation, is a unique opportunity for universities
3. Putting in place high quality flexible and transparent learning paths for all learners
4. Providing appropriate guidance and counselling services and recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning
5. Integrating lifelong learning with the quality procedures implemented by the universities
6. Introducing in the universities, a specific contribution to lifelong learning underpinned by research
7. Promoting a flexible and creative learning environment for all students
8. Developing partnerships at local, regional, national and international level to provide attractive and relevant programmes
9. Offering lifelong learning opportunities for university employees – whether academic, administrative or technical and auxiliary staff
10. Acting as role models of lifelong learning institutions and authorities”

Conclusions

A general reading of the documents cited makes it possible to identify some elements that constitute necessary preconditions for the application of the principle of recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning at community level and in the single countries. Said elements are:

- the notion of a pathway: the fragmented nature of the vocational paths imposes the need to retrace the learning pathways achieved in the different vocational contexts, through various devices: the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning but also the European CV and the other components of Europass.
- The search for links between the different learning contexts, through the definition of connecting instruments, or “bridges”, between a system and another. Said principle is acknowledged by the emergence, at least at European level, of the need to establish a common reference system for certifications, regardless of how they have been acquired, and not different systems of certification according to the different learning modalities (formal, informal or non-formal).
- The notion of *learning outcomes* as central in the definition of the training curricula, as precondition for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in formal contexts, e.g. academic.
- The assurance of quality, tied to the principle of defending an individual’s rights and the principles of transparency and reliability of the titles, even of those acquired through the process of recognition and validation (Feutrie, 2008, pp. 207-208).

The recognition and validation of vocational and experiential competencies in the English-speaking area

Cristina Stringher²³

Introduction

This chapter offers an overview on the validation of vocational and experiential competencies in the English-speaking area, with particular reference to the United Kingdom. In this context, there is a proliferation of different terminologies to refer to the concept investigated: “recognition”, “valuation”, “accreditation” and the neologism “validation” are often used in the official and research documents in an interchangeable way, although semantically they refer to concepts that are not perfectly synonymous. Furthermore, in various parts of the English-speaking world, the different terminology adopted implies a difficulty in the very search for information: the acronyms PLA (*Prior learning assessment*), PLAR (*Prior learning assessment & recognition*), typical of the American and Canadian context, or their British equivalents APEL (*Assessment of prior experiential learning* but also *Accreditation of prior experiential learning*) and APL, (*Accreditation of prior learning*) are only few of the versions found in the literature. However, the differences are not just of a terminological or geographical nature: for example, the differentiation, very frequent in the United Kingdom, between APEL and APL, is used by some authors to distinguish the generic recognition of prior learning (APL), from the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) or prior certified

²³ Invalsi (National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System). Member of the PRIN 2007 working group established by the chair of Adult Education, Professor Alberici, Roma Tre University, institution in charge of the project *The validation of professional and experiential competencies in adults willing to be (re)integrated in university, in a lifelong learning perspective*.

learning (APCL). There are also various syncretical forms, for example *Assessing and crediting prior learning*, a version of APL.

The study is made up of two essential parts: the first offers an overview of the phenomenon, taking into account normative-institutional and theoretical-methodological elements that contribute to shape the practice of experiential recognition in the British academic context; at the end of the first part, the choice of some case studies will be explained with instruments and procedures for experiential validation which will also find place in the second part of the study.

1. British institutional framework

Because of the absence of common laws on the recognition of informal and non-formal learning among Member States (Ecotec European Inventory, 2007²⁴) the British institutional framework appears rather fragmented. The practices of experiential validation, emerging from a *bottom-up* approach, are hence inscribed in a series of reference frameworks developed in the academic and vocational training contexts, where, traditionally, the autonomy encouraged has produced a proliferation of different methodologies²⁵.

Each geographical area of the United Kingdom has or plans the implementation of reference frameworks for qualifications: in Scotland and in Wales such systems are almost complete and include measures for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning. In England and Northern Ireland the reference frameworks are still being defined, but they plan nevertheless to incorporate in some measure also non-formal and informal learning, although it is still unclear whether a specific methodology to coordinate the validation policies at national level will prevail.

Said fragmentation entails a plurality of methods of experiential accreditation, so it is not possible to speak of a univocal British approach: the activities classifiable under APEL are part of a continuum ranging from recognition practices of an informal kind to highly formalized procedures.

²⁴ <http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/2007.html>

²⁵ A survey carried out in 2000 by the Learning from Experience Trust, revealed that universities have adopted APL for accrediting prior knowledge at university or departmental level, or both (Evans, 2000).

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The following paragraphs offer some data and historical background on the introduction of the experiential validation practices and attempt to give voice to the different APEL inclinations and methodologies in the United Kingdom, without claiming to be exhaustive.

1.1. APEL catchment area in the United Kingdom

In academic year 2007/08, the number of first degree full-time entrants was 302,875, of which 63,600 adults, totalling 21%²⁶. If we consider the total of first degree entrants, said percentage reaches 26,5%, which corresponds to 93,325 “mature” students on 352,400 entrants. In academic year 2000/01 the total number of entrants was 322,610, with 74,865 students aged 21 years and above, totalling 23,2%.²⁷

The adults returning to the higher education circuit constitute the catchment area of choice for the procedures of experiential validation.

The geographical context examined features specific guidelines aimed at promoting the entrance of adults in the university system, within an extremely uneven and diversified landscape (Ecotec European Inventory, 2007). In Scotland and Wales, the recent Credit and Qualifications Frameworks plan to establish methodologies to include also non-formal and/or informal learning. In England and Northern Ireland, instead, a process of improving the reference frameworks is currently underway, and the current methodologies to recognize informal and non-formal learning take on the most disparate forms: for example, the APL (*Accreditation of Prior Learning*) is a methodology specific for the public sector of higher education (and the institutions of *Further Education*²⁸), whilst the RARPA (*Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement*) is a methodology used chiefly in the public sector of adult education.

²⁶ Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency, data available at http://www.hesa.ad.uk/performanceIndicators/0708/t2a_0708.xls. Entrants aged 21 years or above are considered adult or “mature” students.

²⁷ Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency, data available at http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/pubs_archive/student_00_01/main_tables/tabel_3a.xls.

²⁸ According to Eurydice, *Further education* (FE) is “full-time and part-time education suitable to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age (16 years), including vocational, social, physical and recreational training”, Source: Eurydice, *Il sistema scuola-lavoro in Inghilterra*, available at http://www.indire.it/lucabas/lkmw_file/scuola_lavoro//Sistema_scuola_lavoro_Inghilterra.pdf

1.2. Diachronic analysis of the validation of experiences

According to some authors, in the United Kingdom the spread of practices of validation of experiences has different dynamics and reasons.

According to Evans, the validation of experiences and learning finds its roots in the works of the *Learning from Experience Trust* of the 1980s (Evans, 2006). The first attempts to introduce the APEL model in the universities of the United Kingdom date back to 1979. It is essentially a British translation of the American PLA (*Prior learning assessment*) model, which promptly influenced the policies pertaining to the obtainment of professional qualifications both in England and in Scotland. An example of this are the English and Scottish qualifications systems (*National Vocational Qualifications* and *Scottish Vocational Qualifications*), both launched during the late 1980s, which stress that the recognition of credits for a qualification should be independent of the mode, duration and location of learning.

According to Colley et al., APEL practices can be traced back to and find their roots in the first feminist movements of the early 1970s (Colley et al., 2003). The demands voiced by those movements were basically centred on the request of recognition of learning that also women working daily as housewives could acquire, despite said competencies generally not being taught nor accredited by the English universities, pointing to manifest gender discrimination in the higher education system.

However, the feminist branch of studies, centred on the concept of *empowerment*, does not seem to prevail: Garnett, Portwood and Costley maintain that a decisive impulse for APEL practices comes from two parallel fronts, that never intersect: on one hand, the expansionist era of higher education in the 1980s and '90s; on the other, the field of vocational training encapsulated in the *National Vocational Qualifications Framework* (Garnett, Portwood, Costley, 2004).

A very similar position is that of Storan, according to whom the introduction of APEL practices in the United Kingdom appears to be an answer to the demographic changes and the increasing demand for qualified personnel (Storan et al., 2003): at the start of the 1980s a lack of 18 year-old entrants in the universities led to higher education being available to a public, adults especially, previously excluded from this type of training.

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The United Kingdom demographic trends, shown in the following tables, seem to confirm the hypothesis that the spread of the accreditation of prior experiences is due to causes tied to the ageing of the population: an audience of “mature” students could in fact compensate for the demographic decline registered in the under-16 age group.

Table 1 – Distribution of the population in the United Kingdom – Mid-2005 estimate.

Country	Population	Percentage of total UK population
England	50,431,700	83.8
Northern Ireland	1,724,400	2.9
Scotland	5,094,800	8.5
Wales	2,958,600	4.9
UK	60,209,500	

Source: OECD, 2007

Table 2 – Population of the United Kingdom (in thousands) divided by main age groups – 1978-2004.

Year	Under 16	16- 64/59	65/60 and over
1976	13,797	32,757	9,663
1986	11,645	34,725	10,313
1996	12,018	35,498	10,649
2004	11,646	37,064	11,125

Source: OECD, 2007

More generally, the spread of APEL in the United Kingdom has received a strong impulse from the government policy of incentives to higher education, to enable the access of 50% of the population of 18-30 year-olds by 2010 (OECD, 2007).

In this context the recognition of informal and non-formal learning is a way to generate evidence of the accreditation of units of knowledge and competencies included in the qualification requested. The emphasis on the construction of accreditation evidence engendered two main consequences: the first, positive, was the full integration of the accreditation processes

(*Accreditation of Prior Achievement*, APA, as they were called at the time) within the processes for the recognition of qualifications, increasing their status and conferring new legitimization on the accreditation; the second, less favourable, is the simultaneous reduction of the accreditation to a mere evidence of an individual's competencies, with subsequent loss of attention towards the reflective and constructive aspect of the portfolio, but also towards the support given to the candidates.

It is probably owing to this positioning of the accreditation that the potential users have started to consider the related processes of construction of the portfolio long and laborious, which explains the reduction of the number of accreditation requests. However, no official data are available to support these claims.

The European policy of *lifelong learning* has been a further driving force for the development of APEL in the United Kingdom. With the Bologna Declaration of 1998 and the creation of the European Higher Education Area, 31 European states launched the policies for *lifelong learning*. (DfES, 2003). For the United Kingdom too, the so-called Bologna Process acted as a driving force by giving financial support to measures and activities supporting the wide participation of the adult population to higher education. The process became a concrete reality in 2000 with the Lisbon meeting, during which the Commission received a clear mandate to identify strategies and measures to support lifelong learning. In the Proposal of 2000 and in the following 2001 Communication, the Commission translated those principles in priorities, including the priority to value learning acquired in contexts and forms other than formal.

Simultaneously, in the field of vocational training, the 2002 Copenhagen Declaration stated the priority of developing a system of principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, so as to ensure greater comparability between the different European systems. Hence, the Commission has all the legislative instruments to carry out its mandate: a conceptual framework for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning that takes into account vocational training, secondary, post-secondary and higher education.

The first project to be financed by the Commission using community funds was the *Transfine* project, whose purpose was to create a European architecture for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in all formal educational institutions. During this phase, vocational training appeared to be better suited to face the challenge posed by the recognition

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of competencies acquired outside the formal educational circles, owing both to the greater experience of the Commission in the field of training, and to the greater articulation of the university system, to which autonomy had added further managerial complexity.

In the United Kingdom, vocational training and university training have for a long time followed parallel paths: whilst the now almost obsolete *National Vocational Qualification Framework*²⁹ is also a system for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning, the two discourses do not intersect. In other European countries, instead, the debate on the recognition of vocational and experiential competencies in the field of vocational and academic training occurs in a more coordinated way, as a contribution to solving common problems: the reduction of the time and cost of studying, the promotion of greater competencies and new qualifications, extension to higher education for greater social inclusion, flexibility in the labour market, mobility of workers within the European borders.

The 2003 DfES (Department for Education and Skills of the United Kingdom) report highlighted that, despite the common practice of experiential validation in higher education, the results were still not homogeneous: whilst the near totality of the new universities of the United Kingdom and two thirds of the most ancient ones apply APEL procedures at institutional or departmental level, several aspects still pose problems. They include: the resistance of the academic milieu and the professional corporations; the scarce knowledge and understanding of the procedures on behalf of the entrepreneurs and potential users; the length and difficulty of the procedure, which often makes the full course preferable; the higher expectations for APEL students than for those who attend regularly; more complex costs and financing. Therefore, a separation between policies and concrete practice seems to emerge.

A statistic seems particularly alarming for the policies supporting APEL: in the academic year 2000/01, approximately three-thousand students of the United Kingdom were admitted to a programme of higher studies with just the ordinary diploma³⁰, and as many started a programme

²⁹ The passage from England's NVQF to the QCF – *Qualifications and Credit Framework*, applied in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, should take place by December 31st, 2010 (Source: QCA – Evaluating the QCF: Year 1 Report, 2007).

³⁰ The GCSE (*General Certificate of Secondary Education*) is a qualification obtained in a specific subject of study, usually English, Science and Maths, by students aged between 15

of postgraduate studies with diplomas or qualifications inferior to the bachelor's degree. The universities that admitted these students to their courses have to some extent taken into account their informally acquired experience.

The fact that in the same Academic Year only 689 students in all of the United Kingdom produced APEL qualifications in order to access the first year of higher education, could lead to the conclusion that the potential candidates themselves do not make enough use of the APEL procedures.

However, measuring the scale of the APEL phenomenon in the United Kingdom seems highly problematic. The rare instances of large-scale surveys provide far from univocal data. With an approximate 80% of universities who declare using APEL procedures, the number of students appears to be an elusive statistic: two-thirds of the 107 universities that replied to a 2000 survey each have less than 100 APEL students, hence approximately 7000 candidates (Merrifield 2000 in Garnett et al., 2004); according to a more recent survey, by the SEEC, in the 27 responding institutions "the number of part-time students averaged 120 per institution [...]. Whilst the number of APEL full-time students averaged 46" (SEEC, 2002)³¹.

The conclusions of the DfES 2003 report are not very encouraging for the supporters of experiential recognition in the United Kingdom:

...APEL in its informal form is quite common but not transparent, not easily promoted, conservative in its impact and concentrated in certain kinds of institutions and certain kinds of courses. The formal version is a minority activity that has little impact on academic processes in higher education: it does not challenge the status quo in any way and leaves the admissions process, the teaching and learning process, assessment and the award of qualifications largely unaffected. It remains marginal in terms of numbers, its implications for practice, and its impact on the norms and values of the institution. It is not marketed in any major way and is largely

and 16 years-old in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. GCSEs are a prerequisite for A levels, required in order to be admitted to university.

³¹ The SEEC (South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation & Transfer, currently including also universities in the South of England) is a non-profit inter-university consortium established to promote the accumulation and transfer of credits (CATS – Credit Accumulation and Transfer) in the United Kingdom.

confined to particular areas of the curriculum (especially nursing). It is also under-theorized as a topic in learning theory, sociology or policy studies.³²

This self-criticism of the British system for recognizing prior experiences is well-matched with the praise that the very same report bestows upon other European and extra-European countries, which have developed different systems, founded on solid norms and connected to the citizens' rights to access higher education even without the prescribed qualifications.

1.3. Normative reference frameworks

With the aim of bridging the existing gap between the education/training sector and the higher education sector, the new millennium coincides with a process of reforms and inter-sectoral dialogue currently underway in the United Kingdom, which will result in the *Qualifications and Credit Framework* for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and in the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England*. The QCF is being implemented since 2007 through a series of field studies, and, as far as the HECFE is concerned, it has its roots in the FHEQ (*Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* of 2001), and there is currently a draft second edition. In England, the university qualifications framework will be effective as of Academic Year 2009-10.

The timescale for the implementation of reforms in the United Kingdom influences the publication of reference frameworks, which is inevitably temporary.³³ The complexity is also caused by the regional versions of the reference framework and by the levels featured (4-8 in higher education, similar to levels 1-8 of the QCF). Furthermore, the different versions of the document are not obligatory for the university institutions³⁴.

In order to encourage the exchange of experiences between education, training and academic institutions, in 2005 the competent ministry promoted the *Joint Forum for Higher Levels*. Said organization, to which the main agencies and the interested parties within the British reference frameworks are affiliated, has launched a series of guiding principles for a

³² See the essay *Apel in Europe: radical challenges to the idea of a university*, DfES, Research Conference 2003, p. 89.

³³ For constant updates, visit the QAA website <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/default.asp>.

³⁴ For the interaction between QCF and FHEQ, refer to the QAA website: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/FHEOCreditStatement.asp>.

common approach to credits. The purpose is to facilitate the work of the border operators, i.e. of those who deal with qualifications at exit of the system of education and training and entry in the academic sector.

Simply put, the British system is based on the credit unit (corresponding to 10 hours of learning), to account for the average amount of time a student has spent to achieve a specific level of preparation. The difficulty levels are eight for the QCF and four for the university reference frameworks, whilst there are three types of certification, classified on the basis of the number of credits necessary to achieve them: the award, which can be translated with “recognition”, requiring 1 to 12 credits in order to be obtained, the certificate (from 13 to 36 credits) and the diploma (above 37 credits). The tables illustrating the QCF levels are supplied in appendix 1.

The aim of the new British reference framework is to give greater width and flexibility to the qualifications system and to recognize a wider range of learning experiences. The unit of credit also allows limited learning units to be certified, thus helping the candidates in constructing the portfolio and the desired qualification. A further objective is to improve the recognition of learning and competencies gained in informal and non-formal contexts. In Scotland, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) was established in 2001 to acquaint employers and individuals with the whole range of Scottish qualifications and the way in which they interact. In contrast with what occurs in the rest of the United Kingdom, in Scotland the reference framework is valid for higher education and for lower level qualifications (OECD, 2007).

2. Theories on validation

Given the eminently pragmatic nature of the procedures of experiential validation in the United Kingdom, created and organized on the basis of a *bottom-up* process, we deem it necessary to provide the main definitions of APEL found in the literature before beginning the theoretical treatment.

2.1. Definitions of the process of recognition

According to Harvey, APEL is the formal recognition (based on a professional evaluation) of learning acquired from prior experience, generally not connected to academic contexts (Harvey, 2004-8). According to the author, APEL is similar to APL (*Accreditation of Prior Learning*), in

that both involve the recognition of prior experiences; however, at least in Great Britain, there is a theoretical distinction between the two terms: APEL embraces a broader semantic territory in that the experiences it refers to can be of any type and can be carried out in any context. For Harvey, who quotes the *Learning from Experience Trust*, in the United Kingdom APEL is the accreditation of experiential learning, i.e. the awarding of credits for learning based on prior experiences acquired through the workplace, in community learning or through voluntary activities. This type of learning had never been evaluated prior to the APEL procedure, nor was the learner awarded credits. By converting informal learning into certified learning, APEL provides an economically advantageous route to the obtainment of a qualification. It is an important practice for those who, through the experience gained on the workplace or in life in general, have acquired knowledge, analytical skills and competencies similar to those acquired and certified in academic contexts.

The APEL procedure ensures that what candidates have learned is professionally evaluated and accredited with the same thoroughness applied to Higher Education.

According to the British agency QAA (*Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education*), the process of identification, evaluation and formal recognition of prior learning and results is known as “accreditation” in the higher education sector (QAA, 2004). In its guidelines, the Agency uses the expression *accreditation of prior learning* to encapsulate the range of activities and approaches used formally to acknowledge and establish publicly that some reasonably substantial and significant element of learning has taken place. Such learning may have been recognized previously by an education provider, hence constituting a form of *prior certificated learning*; or can have manifested itself as a result of a candidate’s reflection upon experiences gained outside the formal education and training systems, hence taking on the definition of *prior experiential learning*. The recognition usually results in a certification of acquired learning, and the related credits can lead to the obtainment of a diploma or a qualification.

Again according to the QAA, the British universities use one of the following expressions to describe their approach to accreditation:

- *accreditation of prior learning* (APL);
- *accreditation of prior certificated learning* (APCL);

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- *accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL);*
- *accreditation of prior certificated and/or experiential learning (AP[E/C]L);*
- *accreditation of prior learning and achievement (APL&A).*

Learning and results accredited through these procedures feature one or more of the following characteristics:

- have taken place in the past and have been assessed and certificated;
- have been acquired in a work/community-based or related setting, although they are not a formal part of such activities;
- have occurred prior to the formal higher education programme on which an applicant is about to embark;
- are taking place simultaneously with participation in a higher education programme, but are not a formal part of such path;
- are the result of a candidate's experience and critical reflection, but not of a formal path of studies at university level.

What is being accredited are the results of learning or the achievement of learning, not merely the experience gained. This is a fundamental aspect of the QAA definition: a candidate, for example, can have worked as a manager for a multinational company but not have developed all the competencies that a given course of study requires in order to award a qualification in business administration. For this reason, APL procedures usually exclude the accreditation of:

- achievement of learning that occurred as a planned outcome of the higher education programme the student is enrolled on;
- learning resulting from formal teaching, a work or community-based (work or community-related) placement, group work or independent study designed as an integral part of the programme, which are usually assessed in that context;
- the acknowledgement of experience alone.

QAA places a strong emphasis on the evidence demonstrating that experiential learning has taken place.

Another British institutional organization, the *Qualifications and Curriculum Authority*³⁵, uses a different expression to illustrate what is basically the same concept: RPL, *recognition of prior learning* (QCA, 2008). For the QCA, the recognition is the process of documenting, assessing, validating and certificating learning gained outside the formal education and training system. The QCA's choice is dictated by the search for neutrality with regards to the many definitions of recognition also examined above, each of whom contains emphases on particular elements of the process. It is interesting to stress how in this context, for an awarding organisation, there is no fundamental difference between the RPL recognition process and the assessment of learning of a regular course of studies: the candidate must in fact possess the same requisites set by the standards for formal qualifications. The only difference lies in the route taken to achieve said objectives. If anything, the QCA warns, it is necessary to stress that the process of validation of prior experiences is an alternative route and an opportunity for the candidate, not a shortcut towards the desired qualification.

The timeframe necessary for the validation appears to be a critical issue: on one hand, the recognition offers the opportunity to be accepted into universities also to individuals who do not possess the formal requisites for access; on the other hand, a validation route which is too time-consuming could dissuade these potential users.

However, there is another interesting aspect of the QCA guidelines: that of the methodology adopted for the recognition. The full definition of RPL given by the Agency is in fact:

A method of assessment (leading to the award of credit) that considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and do not need to develop through a course of learning.

In addition to the already mentioned emphasis on the evidence needed for the recognition, the Agency specifies that it is a summative and certificative assessment, rather than a formative assessment. The

³⁵ This organization is linked to the training and education sector. Recently, the United Kingdom has felt the need to establish a dialogue between this sector and that of higher education. The result, with regards to the validation of experiences and the transfer of credits, is summed up by the 2005 joint document of the Joint Forum for Higher Levels, propaedeutic to the drafting of the Qualifications and Credit Framework and the Higher Education Credit Framework for England.

summative nature of the validation of experiences could constitute an element for criticism of the British model proposed by the QCA: taken to its extreme consequences, the summative use of assessment could lead to ignore the important process implications underpinning a more formative and reflective use of the related instruments.

Therefore, for the QCA, the heart of the matter is the comparison of an individual's knowledge, skills and competencies against the QCF (*Qualifications and Credit Framework*) standards, which correspond to single units of assessment. This correspondence, elsewhere defined as "mapping", is a concept interpreted in different ways, as shall be shown in paragraph 4.2.6 related to the assessment of the portfolio.

The third interesting element of the QCA guidelines is that there is potential for recognition of a whole qualification, albeit with some exceptions³⁶. It is even envisaged that some units of assessment may be certified solely through RPL.

In the QCA guidelines the individual is the central element and the driving force behind the whole process: the choice of pursuing a whole course of studies, or to opt for requesting recognition, is devolved upon the single learner. The very idea of using an explicit language in that sense, preferring expressions such as "claiming credit" (recognition request) to the more technical expression implied by the acronym RPL (recognition of prior learning), highlights this position on behalf of the British system. This choice could harm procedures, in that the less autonomous individuals are the very ones who could benefit more from the accreditation paths, provided that clear and detailed communications and procedures of *counselling* and support to candidates are established, both before and during experiential recognition. These elements are described by the QCA as central, in order to enable the candidates to make reasoned and rational choices on the type of certification route to follow and in order to support such route. This means having appropriately trained staff, both within the companies, and within the awarding organizations. Although regulatory documents exist in this context³⁷, one can imagine the considerable innovative effort that the QCF imposes.

³⁶ This applies to particular cases, such as licenses for carrying out a particular profession requiring a license to practice, health and safety requirements, regulated professions, or very specific placement requirements.

³⁷ This refers in particular to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* compiled by the OFQUAL, an organization operating within the QCA, 2008.

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Appendix 2 features the key principles guiding the recognition of learning within the British framework for qualifications.

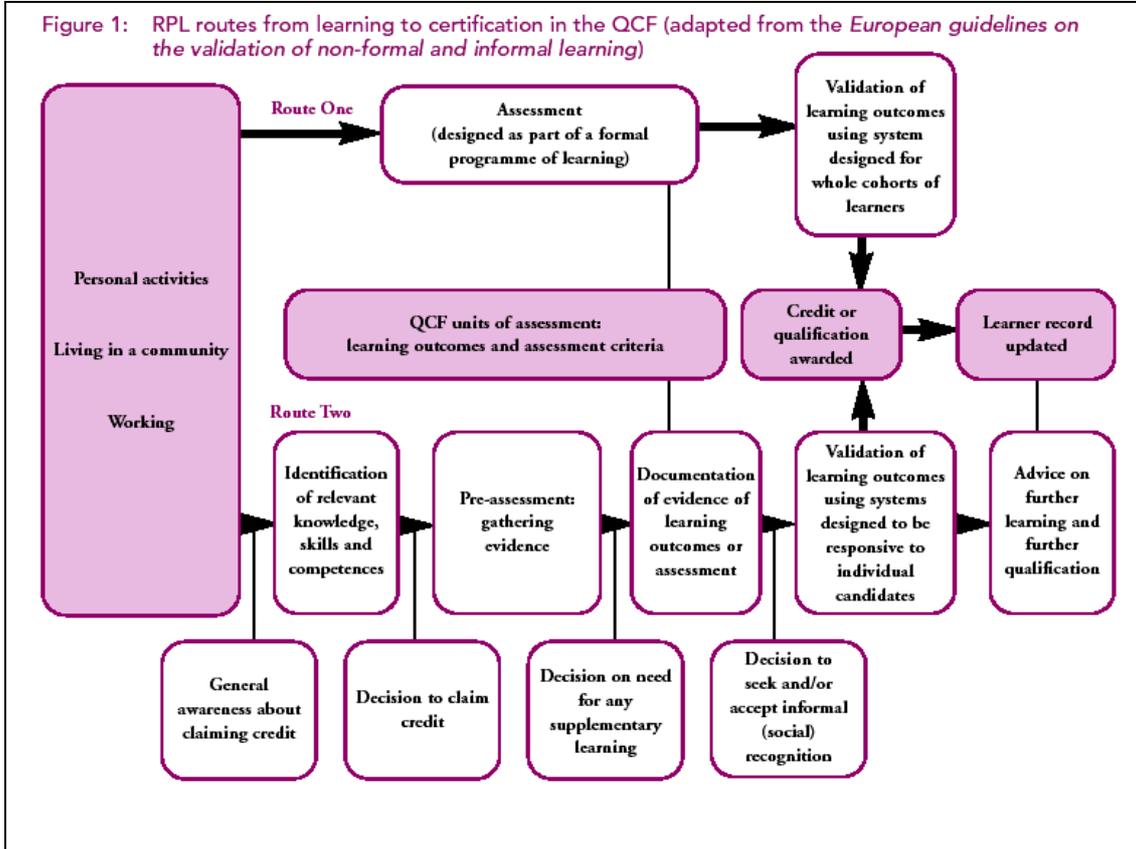
2.2. Stages of the recognition process

In England, as previously mentioned, the reference body for the validation of experiences is the QCA. The Guide Lines set forth by this Authority state that the process begins from the very moment in which the candidate opts to request the validation of his/her experiences.

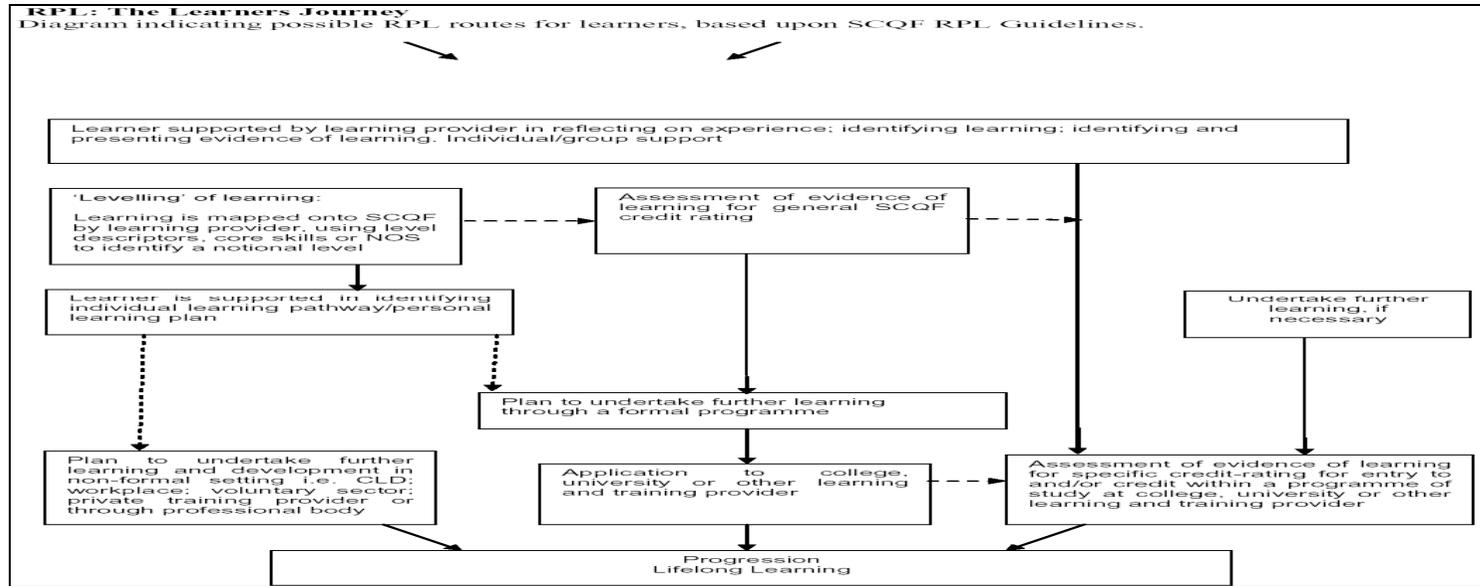
According to this institute, two are the roads open to the assessors, as shown in the following figure: a) a standardised assessment applied to a cohort of learners, also open to RPL candidates; b) an individually tailored process adapted to the needs of a candidate, providing evidence to show that he/she has mastered the contents of the QCF assessment units.

If the candidate chooses to follow the second route, he/she will have to take a series of 6 subsequent stages:

- 1) information, request for help and advice both for clarifications concerning the procedure, and to learn its administrative and economical aspects;
- 2) self-assessment and collection of the elements of proof to support the credit claim;
- 3) assessment and documentation of the elements of proof to support the credit claim with relation to unit standards (on behalf of authorized awarding organisations);
- 4) awarding of credits by an authorized awarding organisation and their transcription on the candidate's personal record;



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- 5) feedback to the candidate on the result of the assessment and orientation for continuing the learning path;
- 6) possible appeal of the candidate against the awarding organisation's decision.

In Scotland the procedure followed is very similar. The following figure shows the possible Scottish route³⁸.

2.3 Theories referred to in the British validation processes

It seems useful to develop this paragraph in a diachronic perspective, in order to account for the evolution that the first attempts of a theoretical systematization of APEL have underwent over time.

In the United Kingdom, at the start of the new millennium, the literature concerning APEL seems to have a descriptive and prescriptive nature and, as has already been seen also in the conclusions of the DfSE 2003 report, rarely the authors attempt to explain the practice by referring to theory. With the exception of the theories on adult learning, in particular Kolb's experiential one or the references to Paulo Freire³⁹, the attempts to frame APEL within the context of learning theories have been few. The result has been a proliferation of hybrid practices of experiential validation, which find their roots in a plurality of theories implicitly considered.

An exception is the University of Stirling in Scotland, where, already at the start of the 21st century a pedagogical model for involving weak individuals was being experimented with through the Guiding Circles: this model, imported from Canada, adopts a holistic approach to promote vocational or academic development through activities promoting the physical, mental, spiritual and emotive well-being of the individual⁴⁰.

One of the first attempts to fill these gaps is Harris' reference to socio-cultural and constructivist theory (Harris J., 2000). In contrast with behaviourist and cognitive perspectives, the situated approach takes into account the contexts in which learning processes occur. In this perspective knowledge does not originate exclusively in the individual's mind, nor is it a product of individual sense making; it is rather a co-construction, through

³⁸ Source: OECD *Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning - Country Background Report - United Kingdom*, September 2007.

³⁹ References to Donald Schön and reflective learning are rarer.

⁴⁰ The current APEL offer of this university tends however to follow the already beaten track of institutions in England, i.e., a fundamental alignment with the Scottish reference framework for qualifications, which has a summative nature. For further information, refer to the website <http://www.quality.stir.ac.uk/ac-policy/Recognition.php>.

social interactions mediated by cultures, which are also situated in a definite space-time.

Some features of the teaching-learning process take shape: education of an abstract nature is superseded by relational learning activities, in which the culture of the context is more significant than the task itself; the transfer of learning to other contexts is highly problematic, in that the environment contributes considerably to forge the meaning that the participants give to a specific concept; the very learning objectives are subject to interpretation and the same task can be decodified differently depending on the subjects involved. Since social and dialogic-type learning are at the core of this approach, individual and group performance become inextricably linked. As in the cognitive perspective, in this perspective metacognition is important, but its conceptualization takes on different undertones: it is conceived predominantly as knowledge about the social context and the strategies of group learning.

Lave and Wenger go as far as theorizing that meaningful learning, being largely unintentional and acquired through participation, cannot be taught. For this reason there is a radical rethinking of the process of learning-teaching: if the aim is to propose a participative process of co-construction of knowledge and competencies, the curricula prescribed and programmed as sequences of learning material, just like the learning outcomes, cannot be set and planned in advance. What is more, the assessment of learning cannot have the same levels of grades or points for all the subjects.

In this perspective, learning is a multiple representation guided by the activity and mediated by the languages of the actors involved: the system of symbols that each one brings to the construction is what allows the actors to share the meanings assigned socio-culturally.

Traditionally, according to Harris, APEL practices are based on the theory of adult learning and on Kolb's theory of experiential learning in particular. APEL practices which are inspired by this theory are inscribed in the constructivist psychology paradigm: individuals construct their learning by assigning sense to experiences through reflection, the exploration of new routes and portfolio evaluation. Despite being inscribed within this theoretical field, some APEL practices adopt typical aspects of cognitive theory: an example of this is the use of taxonomies (such as Bloom's), mind maps and metacognitive strategies.

However, according to Harris, the development of the national reference frameworks for qualifications (NVQ) and of national standards has yielded new APEL practices: recognition of experiences is still possible, but basically solely through a comparison with the precodified reference

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standards and with the expected final learning outcomes. Candidates are requested to compare their own knowledge against external assessment criteria. By doing so, it is possible to rapidly register, assess and accredit competencies to make them usable in practice. These approaches have the greatest affinities with behaviourist theories, but the situation is not so clear-cut: the practices which make use of authentic assessment (also called assessment “for learning”) could also be classified in the field of the situated approach; those cases where there is an emphasis on the transfer of learning to new situations would be situated within the symbolic cognitive approach; the pedagogic process, at least intentionally, could be defined constructivist when it refers to active learners, teachers/facilitators or mentors.

For Harris, it seems clear instead that APEL practices are not inspired by a situated approach and this appears paradoxical, if one takes into account that prior learning took shape in a particular past situation and is connected to the specific context from which it emerged.

In 2000, Harris imagined some avenues of theoretical reflection generated by APEL practices informed by the paradigm of *situated cognition*:

- *Apel and communities of practice* – In keeping with Lave and Wenger, APEL could constitute the harbinger of a community of practice, for example academia, having the objective of promoting a greater participation of students to the broader professional community;
- *Power relations and constructions of meaning in APEL practices* – Recognition practices could play a role in the system of power relations, through reflection of the actors involved in the process: a question to be raised could be, for example, in what way external circumstances, problems and challenges forge the existence of a specific individual at a given moment in time and how said experiences have been acknowledged by the wider social organization; another aspect worthy of reflection could be the way in which the actors involved construct meanings in the field of the recognition process, at what cost and with what expected results;
- *Reflections on the importance of the learning context* – The recognition process could also be an opportunity to reflect on the relationships between learning and socio-cultural phenomena: rather than relating what knowledge he/she has learnt through a certain

experience, the candidate could answer questions such as “What did it mean to learn this/that in this/that context?” or “What did the context value and why?”;

- *Intersubjectivity and APEL* – APEL practices could encourage reflection on intersubjectivity in active, participatory and relational terms, thus stimulating metareflection on learning subjects and contexts, not merely on strategies for learning contents.

In 2003, a broad review of the British literature relating to informal and non-formal learning highlighted instead the risks inherent to an experiential accreditation system based, even at that time, on approaches typical of audit and accountability, which inevitably tend to focus the attention on learning aspects that are more easily measurable and hence standardisable (Colley et al., 2003).

The authors describe the theoretical contributions of the feminist movement during the first accreditation attempts, basically of psychoanalytical derivation and tied to the consciousness-raising movement of the 1960s and 1970s in a perspective of *empowerment*. It is significant to read the list of competencies recalled by a housewife who summed up her experience during an APEL procedure⁴¹; however, the excessive focus on the workplace as a source of learning by some of the women involved in the process, tended once again to devalue the role of the women at home, with a subsequent tendency to refusal and alienation on behalf of the interested subjects.

These first approaches refer to both psychoanalytical theory, and critical pedagogy, since the focus is on the benefits for the female participants, their well-being and self-confidence. As for the tensions between informal APEL practices and formalized practices as in the audit approach, the conclusions reached by the review are destined to leave the mark: the excessive formalization of APEL procedures threatens to modify the very nature of what is being assessed, i.e. learning. And this aspect is relevant both for who is informed by the critical-cultural paradigm and the very authors of the assessment approach encouraged.

⁴¹ The responsibilities included in the CV of one of the participants, a full-time housewife, are: planning and preparing nutritious food; creating comfortable home environment; providing necessary care and nursing in times of illness; planning cost-effective ways within family income to provide housing, clothing, nutrition and entertainment; ensuring upkeep of home when necessary; managing transport; liaising with doctors and teachers; developing and sustaining social – friend/family – relationships through socializing, correspondence and telephone contact.

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That the assessment of prior experiences be informed by solid statistical-type principles is one of the most consistently applied theoretical bases in this geographical context. The most widely accepted criteria are the ones already identified by Wailey in 2002 (Wailey in Garnett et al., 2004):

- Validity – relating to the match between the evidence presented and the learning outcomes claimed;
- Sufficiency – relating to sufficient breadth of evidence, including reflection, to demonstrate the achievement of all the outcomes claimed;
- Currency – demonstrating that what is being assessed is current learning;
- Quality – relating to the evidence demonstrating the required level of learning achievement.

A year later, Garnett, Portwood and Costley stated that in the United Kingdom it was necessary to update also the nomenclature concerning the accreditation, so as to embrace the concepts of Learning, Recognition and Development⁴². According to the authors, in fact, APEL is seen primarily as an instrument for the recognition of credits, for admission to university courses, and experiential learning is interpreted mainly as past achievement without consequence for future achievement; instead APEL could be used as an instrument for the individual's development, in a proactive and productive sense, unlocking, enhancing and making usable his/her (hitherto unrecognised and possibly tacit) knowledge and skills. In this instance the APEL procedure could give a significant contribution to the recognition of intellectual capital useful to a range of interested parties: individuals, educational institutions, companies, trade unions, employers, professional associations, public authorities. APEL has a vast potential for individual and social development. APEL is seen instead primarily as an instrument of recognition rather than a process of development. The authors conclude by introducing a "productive" APEL model called LRD (Learning, Recognition and Development), shown in the following figure, based on the principles of inclusion, coherence, collaboration and sharing. The quest

⁴² Garnett J., Portwood D., Costley C., *Bridging rhetoric and reality: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) in the UK*, UVAC University Vocational Awards Council, 2004.

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for the productivity of the intellectual capital by using APEL (or the LRD model) must involve all the shareholders.

In the diagram there are three main groups that constitute the active sectors of the LRD model:

- The Lead Agency;
- The APEL forum and general stakeholder;
- The Specific Stakeholders. They also provide shared funding.

The accumulated efforts of these three groups bring about benefits in the form of targeted outputs to:

- Individuals;
- Organisations;
- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

4, 5 and 6 provide differential feedback to the three main groups. A further sector (7) cuts across 4, 5 and 6 and has overarching benefits, including benefit to the State.

What Garnett et al. stress is the unexpressed potential of APEL in the United Kingdom: from mere procedure recognizing what the individual has already “done” (in the past), to a driving force opening up “new possibilities” for the promotion of socio-economic interests in the future of the individual and the community, with a shift towards socio-economical theories and human capital.

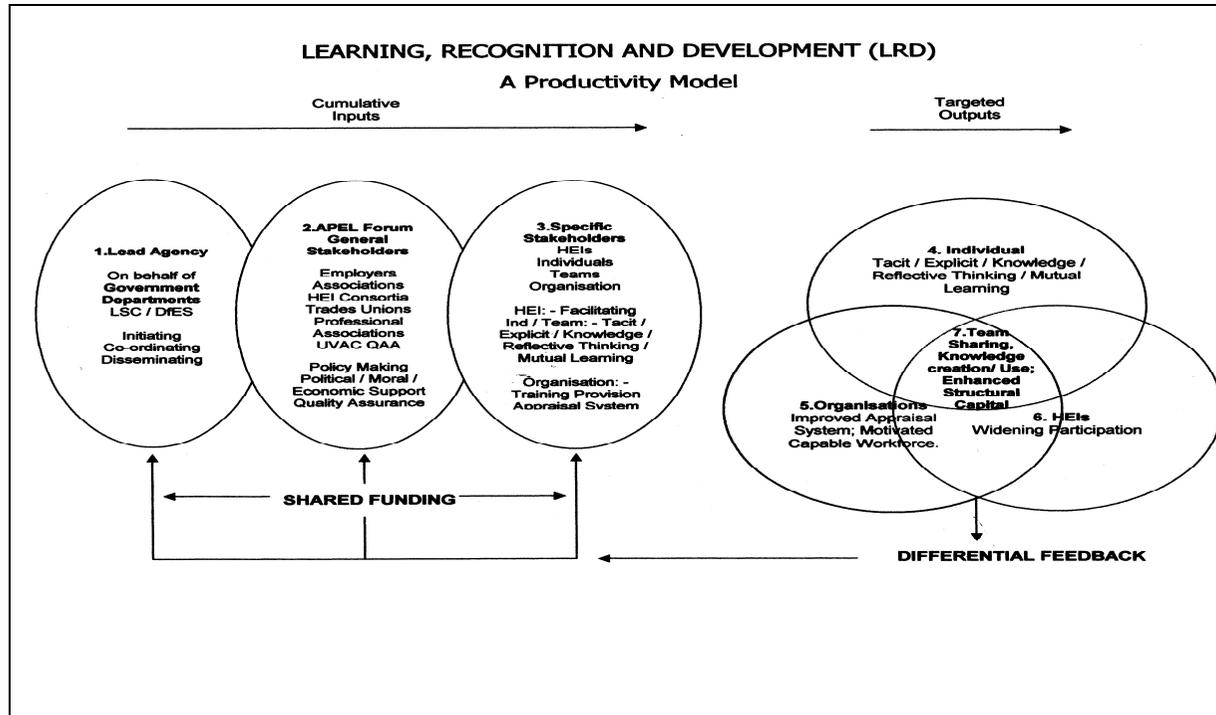
Several years later, Duvekot and Konrad shifted the theoretical discussion concerning the practices of experiential validation to the European level (Duvekot, Konrad, 2007). This does not seem fortuitous: isolated within the confines of the United Kingdom, APEL procedures no longer appear informed by theory, but rather by summative-type assessment practice, typical of the Atlantic approach, which seems to prevail over the rest. The authors, who are very optimistic concerning the assessment’s ability to act as motivating driving force for the individuals requiring an APEL procedure, express themselves as follows:

...a successful system for ‘valuing learning’ able to open up the traditional learning system will at least have to comply with three conditions. Assessment standards should aim at ‘civil effect’ for the sake of formative goals; the quality assurance of the assessment procedure has to

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be efficient, clear and transparent, and, finally, access has to be easy for individuals...

Competence-based learning and prior learning assessment will (...) make learning more a matter of fun again, since learning will be made more to measure. The motivation of the learners will therefore be much higher. For teachers and schools, this will then also be very stimulating and inspiring. In this sense one could state that learning will not only be a matter of employability but also of enjoyability! (Ibidem).



It is worth to point out that in the official British documents no particular focus has been placed on the first of the three conditions that the authors describe: the “civil” effect of assessment practices. Concepts such as accountability and audit appear in fact to prevail, in particular over the theories of *empowerment*. The alliance between the academic and entrepreneurial sectors, and between politics and administration seems to have left little space for the individual who from many quarters is evoked as the focal point of the process, but who runs the risk of remaining excluded because of the disadvantaged starting conditions.

3. Methodologies, instruments of validation and SEEC guidelines

According to a recent OCSE survey, in the United Kingdom the adoption of the new qualifications system has entailed an approach that overturns the traditional division between learning acquired in formal, informal and non-formal contexts: recognition is based in fact on the results (*learning outcomes*) rather than on the modalities or the sites of acquisition (*achievement*) of learning and competencies (OECD, 2007). This approach blurs the distinction between formal, informal or non-formal learning, with a clear impact on recognition.

Since the responsibility of the validation of experiential learning is passed on to the single university institution, the methodologies and instruments used are also not standard, even though the portfolio tends to impose itself especially in the context of APEL procedures.

The following synoptic table summarises the current offers of experiential accreditation in the United Kingdom gathered from the Transfine project (Storan J., Saunders D., Johnson B., Thompson R., O'Hagen C., 2003).

The table reveals a rather diversified situation within the geographical area considered, starting from the aims of APEL: In Wales, the genesis and the development of the accreditation procedures also take into account the European influences on the debate on validation. In England and Northern Ireland, on the contrary, it seems that the movement surrounding APEL has instead followed different routes from the outset, with previously cited considerable North American influences and a very pragmatic approach concerning objectives and subsequent procedures. Scotland seems to use an approach which is more centred on the individual, as can be deduced from

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the aims that the validation procedure involves, centred on valuing the individual and not solely on the credits to be recognized. The developments of the QCF, however, tend to conform also the Scottish approach to the audit model predominant in the United Kingdom.

In sum, the table shows that in the United Kingdom procedures are not univocally accepted and that the practice of credit recognition (if present) lacks stabilization, either because of an excessive bureaucratization discouraging the candidates, as is the case in England, or for the lack of resources and the reluctance, on behalf of the academic institutions, to promote this form of access to university for the very strata of population that could be advantaged from it, as is the case in Scotland and Wales.

In Northern Ireland the debate surrounding APEL has highlighted some critical issues, such as the risk of a mechanistic and almost business-like use of the credit system, opening up new horizons of sense for those who produce and use these procedures. One questions the theoretical flaws of the methods used, which end up ignoring the situated nature of learning and competencies, and this is in stark contrast with the different experiences and sites where the candidates have gained these. In this geographical context, two particularly critical areas in the development of APEL policies emerge: the vast conceptual diversity and the important structural deficits.

Although the framework is rather fragmented, it is still possible to highlight some methods and instruments used transversally for accreditation in the British regions. The portfolio and the written reflections are amongst the most widespread instruments, together with the recognition of credits gained through prior learning.

According to a 2002 SEEC report, summarizing a survey concerning APEL practices in the institutions adhering to the consortium, the English universities use APEL competitively, with the aim of attracting new catchment areas. For this reason, internal practices and procedures are usually not made public, so much so that the consortium itself has given up on the idea of creating its own APEL database (SEEC, 2002). However, the report provides plenty of useful information concerning the practical applications of the model in the UK.

The material gathered from the institutions that took part in the survey can be classified in two major groups: a) normative documents with rules and procedures; b) handbooks for the academic staff and the students. The following data, extracted from the SEEC report, illustrate the use of APEL procedures in the English universities.

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Table 3 – Synoptic table of the offer of experiential accreditation in the UK.

	<i>England</i>	<i>Northern Ireland</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Wales</i>
Where	HE (unevenly distributed between for example: FE, Professional Education, i.e. nursing, midwifery, Business and Management, engineering, teacher training)	HE, FE, Vocational training, Nursing, Social Work	HE (patchy) – both under- and postgraduate, work based training.	HE/FE/OCN (Welsh Assembly is taking steps in support of APEL)
Purpose	Credit, access to HE, access to HE and credit, professional body, recognition/requirement, recognition of work based learning.	Access to HE, Access to HE with credit, work based learning recognition.	Self-valuing, recognition of professional work based skills within qualifications framework, course entry, accelerate progress, credit deficit	Recognition in FE and HE including practice based provision (Nursing, social work), credit bearing, alternative entry, whole qualification at under- and postgraduate.
What is being assessed or accredited?	Work based learning, learning outcomes, specific credit	Voluntary and youth work leading towards accreditation, community based learning (child care, computing)	Knowing how learning is being assessed as if it were that type of learning	Learning outcome unit modules, WBL, records of achievement, progress files, professionally certificated learning, and individual learning experience.
Methods	Various, portfolios, reflective reports/essays, challenge, tests, CVs, simulators	Credit records, presentations	Reflective essays, portfolios, prior qualifications	Various, credit Common Accord, Progress files in FE/HE

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Who	Trained APEL assessors (academic staff) workplace assessors.	Academic staff, trainers	Academic Staff, Accredited professional trainers and educators	Teachers, trainers, internal verifier
Systems and Structures for APEL	SEEC code of practice, QA process, wide use of formal systems as part of the assessment and examination system	Institutional based HE systems within NICATS, NVQ framework	Institutional based systems in some HEIs, Heath professions, Accreditation systems plus some other professional bodies	National qualification framework (9 levels) HE level descriptors, credit based NVQ framework
Number of APEL systems operating in your area (multiple)	HEIs use one system in respect of their programmes, professional bodies also have systems sometimes directly linked to HEIs	NICATS, NVQ, HEI systems	HEI Systems, SQA	Both inter and intra systems are operating in HE, professional associations operate their own system (nursing, social work)
Flexibility and user friendliness	Systems rated as moderately to highly user-friendly by providers		Inflexible, bureaucratic, very user unfriendly	Moderate to high
Main strengths of APEL system	Systems were seen as: rigorous, transparent assessment processes, allowed many different forms of learning, part of normal processes of assessment and quality assurance.		No system as such and little strength in current arrangements	APEL seen as part of widening access to LLL national policy, distinction between APEL and APL, proposed credit common accord, seen as important.

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Main weaknesses of APEL System	Too bureaucratic, resource hungry, time consuming, lacks credibility for some.		Lack of resources, seen as a marginal activity and not mainstream.	Perception of fragmentation between different sectors offering APEL, absence of a unified credit framework, no specific policy framework for APEL, staff resistance as APEL is seen to be a threat to entry requirements, labour intensive.
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Source: *Transfine*, 2003.

3.1. Rules and institutional governance

The regulations of the SEEC institutions provide information on the portion of credits acquirable via APEL on the total number of credits required for a qualification, rules applicable at undergraduate or post-graduate degree level, institutional policies and procedures in force.

Of the 27 universities that responded to the survey, the vast majority (19) has developed its own APEL policy at departmental or faculty level. Only 6 universities apply a *governance* at central level, but also in these institutions the procedures and processes are decentralized at departmental level.

Not all the university structures offer APEL opportunities: it is mostly the health faculties (15) that offer these procedures, followed by 9 teacher education faculties and 7 Business and Management faculties. Other structures interested in APEL include the faculties hosting programmes of continuous professional development, of social services, of law, of technology and *lifelong learning*.

It is interesting to observe that the universities do not use APEL exclusively to recognize learning, but also as a basis for recruitment, advice and guidance and for support services to the students.

Formally, APEL practices usually find place in official documents concerning courses on offer or subject to validation or monitoring.

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References to APEL can be found in university institutional documents concerning teaching and learning policies, in collaborative and professional development programmes.

However, for an external observer the crucial question is “what proportion of an award can be based upon APEL?” For this question too, there is no univocal answer: the English universities are placed on a continuum ranging from recognizing credits sufficient to cover a level 1 award (basically, exclusively for the minimum QCF qualification level), to the recognition of an entire course of studies. Both of these are extremes and used by a tiny minority of institutions. Many institutions allow up to 50% of the award through APEL, but what varies is the interpretation of said proportion, depending on whether it is an undergraduate or postgraduate award. It is possible to state that the APEL proportion is inversely proportional to the level: for example, maximum 66% can be accredited at undergraduate level and maximum 33% at postgraduate.

Another key element is the admission criterion: often the assessment of APEL is on the basis of a pass or fail and only very rarely is it graded or given a percentage score. The consequence of this choice is that APEL credits are usually excluded from the calculation of the total credits of those degrees requiring marks, as is the case for postgraduate awards, and this can penalize APEL candidates as they continue their studies.

3.2 The accreditation procedures in the staff handbooks and student guides

The SEEC institutions student and academic staff handbooks include the procedures adopted and examples of portfolios for the presentation of experiences.

An example of an SEEC handbook is provided below. In general, a handbook contains the objectives that the university institution aims to pursue offering this validation of experiences modality, a glossary of the technical terms adopted and a description of the process of recognition of prior credits in keeping with university regulations⁴³.

⁴³ In the Anglo-Saxon world, Advanced Standing refers to a procedure according to which, via the recognition of credits acquired in another institution, it is possible to begin a new path of studies starting from a higher level than the one at entry.

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Table 4 – Example of a staff and student handbook.

Example of a staff and student handbook
<i>Contents</i>
<i>Introduction</i>
<i>Purpose of AP(E)L</i>
<i>Definition of terms</i>
<i>Process for Advanced standing and AP(E)L within the regulatory framework</i>
<i>Proportion of credit awarded via advanced standing</i>
<i>Calculation of honours classification</i>
<i>Operational stages for the process of accreditation of courses</i>
<i>Conclusion and references</i>
<i>App.1 Faculty Marketing strategy for course accreditation and AP(E)L</i>
<i>App.2 Guidelines for implementation of advanced standing</i>
<i>App.3 APL and AP(E)L information sheet</i>
<i>App.4 APL/AP(E)L Information booklet Student</i>
<i>App.5 Fees for APL/AP(E)L</i>
<i>App.6 Portfolio Pro formas for completion by students</i>
<i>App.7 Portfolio guidelines Student</i>

Source: Seec, 2002.

Usually an APEL handbook comprises also practical information on the portion of credits acquirable and on the procedure to be followed for the recognition.

In the cases examined, the university charges a cost for the accreditation process: sometimes it is a fixed price which is complemented, for the candidates admitted, by the cost of the number of credits recognized; in other cases the university charges for APEL a fee equal to a percentage (up to 40%) of the total cost of the course of studies⁴⁴.

The handbooks also contain the forms for the registration of the candidates and examples or advice on the procedure for compiling the portfolio, which is perhaps the most widespread instrument. However, there is no standard procedure: even when documents are similar in structure and title, approaches and choices relating to APEL are profoundly different.

⁴⁴ No statistical data are available on the impact of the minor cost of APEL compared to a traditional course of studies, but it appears that some universities have succeeded in encouraging the participation of weak strata to higher education. However, the debate on the quality of education warns against the danger of a devaluation of university training via APEL if the accreditation procedures are not rigorous. Hence, also the calls for systems of quality assurance, inspired by the QCA principles in appendix, can be inscribed in this framework.

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It thus seems useful to provide a series of questions that each university engaged in the process of recognition should consider before carrying out an APEL policy in the United Kingdom:

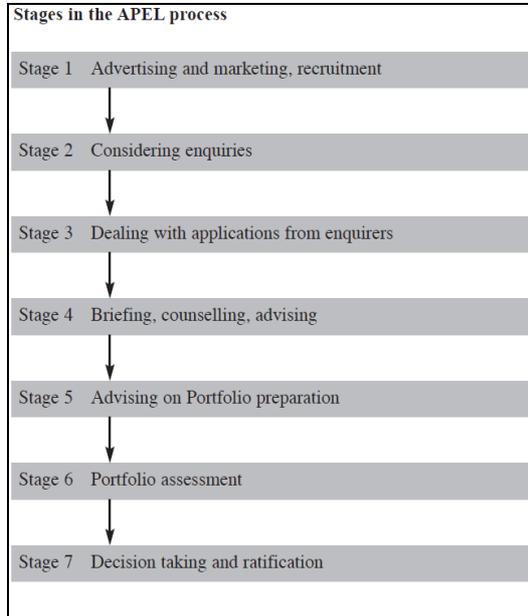
- How much APEL will be allowed within the awards offered?
- How will it be assessed? Pass/fail or with grades/percentages?
- How will modules, which have been subject to APEL be considered within a classification scheme?
- How will APEL be treated within the validation and review process?
- What constitutes a 'quality-assured' APEL process?
- What is the relevant reporting and committee structure?

In order to provide an answer to each question, it is possible to follow the stages of the recognition process outlined by the SEEC.

A summary of the SEEC guidelines is provided for each stage, together with information on procedures and information gathered for administrative, statistical and quality assurance purposes. Each stage implies that the figures involved in the process, at the administrative and academic level, are regularly identified, and that a role with specific objectives and the most appropriate training to provide the accreditation service, are clearly set out for said figures.

Table 5 – Stages in the APEL recognition process.

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Source: SEEC, 2002

3.2.1. Stage 1: Advertising and marketing recruitment

In the UK, universities are equipped with a department for institutional marketing and advertising. It is hence common to find APEL mentioned in the marketing and positioning strategy pursued by the institution. A founding element of the strategy is the choice of the target groups to which the APEL message should be addressed: not only future, part- or full-time students, but also those who are attending or will attend 'short' courses, and the institution's own staff, especially administrative. A number of institutions refine the group further to target a particular sector e.g., nursing/health education, or employees of companies or organisations with training needs. The identification of the target group/s to which the message should be addressed is an essential element in the planning/marketing phase and the APEL procedures are no exception. At this stage the message will have to raise awareness of the existence of APEL, describing the benefits to the target group, and will have to supply information on how to enrol. The choice of the medium via which the advertising message should be spread is important: institutional or

departmental website, institution prospectus, course/programme information, student or staff handbooks and student guidance/counselling information packs are some of the examples of the advertising material used. Also the university personnel appointed to establish the first contact with the prospective clients will have to be appropriately informed: academic and administrative staff, receptionists and telephonists, students representatives, librarians, recruitment/admissions officers, tutors, are some of the examples.

3.2.2. Stage 2: Consideration of enquiries for APEL

In the UK, it is regarded as good practice for the recipient of enquiries to act in a friendly, knowledgeable manner. Therefore, the role and responsibilities of the person(s) receiving the APEL enquiry must be clearly defined. The institution will have to decide on a policy for dealing with enquirers. For example, students already enrolled on a programme may ask information concerning the APEL process or how to apply to academic staff or tutors: staff should gain in-depth knowledge of APEL mechanisms, in order to, among other things, give appropriate advice to the student.

For performance evaluation purposes, it will also be useful to record number and type of enquiries; the applicant's contact details (date and mode of enquiry; date of initial response and by whom; date information/details sent, how and by whom). Performance statistics include the periodic (monthly?) production of a summary of response times.

3.2.3. Stage 3: Dealing with applications

It is important to make clear to whom the APEL application form should be sent: for instance, applications from:

- enrolled students go through the Course Leader
- prospective students go to the Institution/Faculty/Department APEL Co-ordinator
- organisation/company clients to WBL/Commercial/Marketing Unit

The APEL scheme will not be appropriate for all applicants and there will generally be a need to sift them. However, with an appropriately designed application form there should be sufficient information and detail in the relevant format to enable a trained APEL person to make a preliminary assessment, so as to establish

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- if the applicant is likely to be awarded credit and can proceed with the APEL process
- if more information is required before a decision to proceed can be made
- if the applicant is unlikely to be awarded credit and cannot proceed further

The interim decision should be sent in writing to the applicant within a set period of receipt of the application, say 5 working days. The response could also include the number of credits potentially obtainable by the applicant. In the case of b) and c), especially c), the applicant should NOT receive a response which is discouraging or which is capable of being interpreted as a barrier/hurdle especially for those wishing to enter or return to study. Conversely, where decision a) is reached it must be stressed to the applicant that any statement on level and volume of credit is purely advisory and in no way should be regarded as binding, and the APEL person will give the applicant an outline of the next steps in the APEL process.

Once the application has been accepted, the APEL person (at times identified as APEL Manager) assigns the APEL applicant an adviser, within the university, to guide him/her through. It is important at this stage to ensure that the person in charge of the APEL process, and the administrative staff receive proper training so as to be able to record the application, reception of the appropriate fee, the decision and the notes of the various university appointees who will be tracking the candidate's application.

In addition to the information mentioned above, data to be recorded includes the initial indication on the volume of credits obtainable. The student's record card should also contain information pertaining to the APEL application.

3.2.4. Stage 4: Briefing, counselling and initial advising

Once the matriculation fee has been paid, the candidate is formally enrolled. At this point the APEL Manager assigns the student to a briefer/adviser and an assessor. Usually the two figures do not coincide: the APEL adviser takes the applicant through the validation and the production of evidences to be included in the portfolio. Student and adviser will have

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to arrange a first meeting to discuss procedures. This first discussion can be a one-to-one or group meeting, depending on the human resources that the university can invest on APEL: the adviser takes a group of candidates through the next stage of portfolio preparation. It is important, particularly with applicants who are return to study students and will be unused to speaking in public, to make the session as friendly and welcoming as possible.

The group discussion might well have the following pattern: 1) introduction of the adviser, presentation of the candidates and brief outline of mutual expectations 2) background to the institution and the APEL process; 3) role and responsibilities of a) adviser b) student; 4) meaning of credit, credit tariffs, credit levels, qualification descriptors; 5) evidence: what constitutes evidence, evidence to meet learning outcomes (specific credit) and setting own learning outcomes (general credit); 6) APEL module; 7) agree an outline 'learning contract', with copies for the student and the adviser; 8) agree date, time and place of the first meeting , one to one, between student and adviser with a clear remit of the purpose and material which each student will have to produce.

In this phase it is important that the adviser has the 'authority' to sign the 'learning contract' with the student, so as not to delay the process with further scrutiny and decision making by the APEL manager.

The APEL adviser should be an 'expert' practitioner of APEL, having full knowledge of credit, credit frameworks, APEL, WBL, roles and responsibilities of advisers AND assessors. The adviser will need to be fully aware of the institution's APEL processes including time scales, deadlines and fee structure, including the institution's regulations on APEL. In particular, it will be the adviser's responsibility to explain to the student the amount of credit allowed at different levels, the modules for which APEL is NOT allowed and also how the decision on the APEL portfolio is recorded, i.e., pass, graded or a percentage score (and the consequent impact upon the way in which a degree is classified).

To ensure the quality of the process, at this stage it is useful to prepare a learning contract outline, the adviser's notes of briefing meeting, a student feedback form detailing the documentation received and for collecting information of a qualitative nature on the usefulness of the first meeting with the adviser, a possible summary report from the APEL manager. It is advisable that a copy of the signed learning contract is lodged with the APEL Manager so that the progress of students can be logged and

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monitored, thereby providing an audit trail should the external examiner or an internal/external QA auditor wish to investigate.

3.2.5. Stage 5: Advising on portfolio preparation

During the first group meeting or just after, the APEL Manager will send a written letter with the name and contact details of the personal adviser appointed. It is advisable to include in the letter also information concerning the roles and responsibilities for the student and the APEL adviser. The student should contact the adviser to begin the preparation of the portfolio. The initial one-to-one meeting can consist of 1) getting to know each other; 2) going through the APEL claim in detail, giving initial feedback on the strength of the student's claim; 3) devising and agreeing a 'learning' contract; 4) discussion of the style, form and format of a portfolio of evidence; 5) agree a work schedule including dates for future meetings.

During the meeting it is the adviser's task to ensure that the student has a full understanding of the APEL process, also of its organizational aspects. In particular, at the end of the meeting, the student must understand the definition of credit, how the volume and level is determined and the need to identify the learning outcomes or the learning that has been evidenced.

At this stage it is essential that the APEL adviser explains what constitutes evidence and the need for it to be valid, reliable and current. Thus, the student will begin to assign parts of the learning experience to different parts of the APEL claim. This process is often referred to as 'mapping' the evidence of learning on to the learning outcomes of the claim.

At this point the student can begin to explain those parts of his/her experience he/she is intending to use as evidence of learning, and the adviser will elicit further details or clarification and will ascertain if there is evidence of any other learning that the student may not realise has taken place or can be 'counted' towards the claim. The original claim may be amended. The adviser will advise the student of the strengths and weaknesses of the claim, indicating the areas where it is believed that there is sufficient evidence and those that appear rather thin.

If at this stage the adviser believes that there may be insufficient evidence then they will discuss ways in which further evidence can be produced, maybe through a 'learning contract'. At this early stage, any

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learning contract will be only in outline and will undoubtedly be amended as the portfolio of evidence is produced.

The student must be made aware that when the assessor ‘marks’ the portfolio, he/she will be looking at the strength of the evidence vis-à-vis the learning outcomes put forward in the APEL claim. Therefore the student has to be clear on what and how to present the information.

Table 6 – Typical APEL portfolio structure

<p>An APEL portfolio will typically include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Claimant’s personal details;- CV (some institutions require this to be presented as a record of significant learning experiences);- Current job description (if the claim is for learning from work, this may require the claimant to develop a job description where no formal one exists e.g., some forms of voluntary work);- The claim for learning, articulated in terms of learning outcomes and identifying any programme units for which exemption is being sought. This may also include the volume and level of credit being claimed;- Evidence of the learning achievement claimed.

Source: Garnett et al., 2004

The claim will begin with a statement of the volume and level of credit, general/specific and the names (and institution’s reference codes) of any modules for which exemption is being claimed. This can then be followed up, maybe in tabular form, typically on 1 side of A4, by a listing of the learning outcomes in column 1, with a summary of the evidence in column 2. Although portfolios are the most commonly used form of presenting evidence of learning, there are other situations where different evidence is appropriate, most notably artefacts, e.g., a piece of sculpture. This will be followed by an overarching conclusion.

The student must be reminded that credit is awarded NOT for the experience per se but rather for the learning derived from that experience. The student will need to reflect on the learning in a manner consistent with the level of credit being sought: for example at HE1 Level 1, the reflection will be recognising the learning which has taken place and correctly identifying it in terms such as ‘describe’, ‘understand’, ‘do’. Whilst at

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higher levels still, the student will need to call upon the works of various authors as a basis for critical reflection. Finally, the student may be asked to provide a reflection of the learning as a whole.

The adviser will be providing formative assessment with relevant feedback on each section of the portfolio as and when it is completed, but the summative assessment will be carried out once the portfolio has been completed.

By dividing the work involved into 'bit size' sections, the student is not daunted by what might seem to be the enormity of the task. The adviser and the student will meet several times, preview the work to be done for the next meeting and agree on a date (deadline) for submission, which is as binding as any deadline (hand in) date faced by students elsewhere in the institution. The guidelines therefore must provide a variety of examples of the type of evidence which is relevant and should also clearly show the basis on which the portfolio is assessed.

In this phase of collection of evidence and preparation of the portfolio, the key players involved are mainly the candidate and the adviser, both the initial group meeting adviser and, if different, the one-to-one adviser. At this stage, the student must know that the adviser and the assessor are two different figures: in some institutions the assessor of a candidate can be another candidate's adviser.

The adviser needs to be an expert in all aspects of APEL: counselling, advising and assessing and hence requires the training to act in these roles. In addition, normally the adviser will need to be a subject expert with a clear knowledge and understanding of the meaning of learning outcomes applicable at different credit levels. However, some institutions see the advising as a process and as long as the adviser has access to a subject specialist, they do not necessarily require the adviser to be an expert in the subject.

The adviser keeps a record of all communications with the student, including telephone conversations. Some institutions require the advisers to copy their on-going reports within a set time-period of e.g., 3 days to the APEL manager.

Once the portfolio has been 'signed off' by the adviser, it is the student's responsibility to ensure the portfolio is delivered to the appropriate person, often the APEL administrator, who notes the date and issues a receipt to the student. Most SEEC universities base the assessment

purely on the portfolio, while others require it to be supplemented by a viva voce.

Documents for quality assurance purposes may include:

- adviser's notes of meeting (s)
- copies of formative feedback
- student feedback form(s)
- summary report(s) from the APEL manager

Performance statistics could include:

- response times
- turn around times for formative assessments
- adherence to institutional deadlines

3.2.6. Stage 6: Portfolio Assessment

The assessment process begins when the adviser 'signs off' the portfolio. It is the student's responsibility to ensure the portfolio is delivered to the APEL administrator, who issues a receipt for the student. Meanwhile the adviser who has notified the administrator that a portfolio is on its way will submit his/her adviser's file on the student to the administrator. In order to plan the workloads of assessors, it is useful if the likely time of submission is given in advance.

The institution will have a policy for assessment of APEL portfolios including:

- whether the assessment will be based purely on the portfolio or supplemented by a viva voce
- whether there will be a second assessor/verifier and
- whether that person 'double marks' all or a sample of portfolios
- role of the external examiner

At this point, the APEL manager will notify the assessor that there is a portfolio to be marked and can be collected from the APEL office together with the adviser's file. The assessor examines the evidence in the portfolio and decides whether the evidence is sufficient (and valid, reliable and current) to justify the claim. Where the claim is for specific credit or for exemption from module(s), the assessor has to be assured that the relevant learning outcomes have been met. However, where the claim is for advanced standing (exemption from a stage or award), the assessor will

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need to be assured that stage descriptors have been met, and, in the main the content has been covered. The portfolio of evidence will be judged on the basis of equivalence, not strict detailed ‘mapping’, with regard more for the qualification (levels) descriptors than for the module learning outcomes⁴⁵.

On this basis, the assessor will annotate the portfolio, especially weak or perhaps missing evidence, suggesting ways in which shortfalls might be remedied. Hence, this phase is more than just a tick box exercise. It features decisions ranging from ‘claim approved in toto’ to the need for more evidence of the learning and where the regulations require, to attend for a viva voce.

The report, together with the portfolio and the adviser’s file are returned to the APEL administrator who will duly note the date of receipt. The APEL manager will communicate the decision, which is subject to ratification by the APEL Board, to the student – a copy to the adviser.

If the student is required for a viva, the portfolio will be returned to the student so that additional work if necessary can be completed and preparations can be made for the viva. The letter inviting the student will detail the form and structure of the interview and who will be present, and in what capacity. At the end of the interview the student will be told of the decision to be confirmed in writing, and which is subject to APEL board ratification. The student will leave the portfolio with the APEL manager.

More often than not the role of the second assessor/internal verifier will be one of quality assurance with regard to the process and not re-assessing the portfolio. In order to do this the verifier will receive

- the student’s portfolio
- the adviser’s reports
- the assessor’s reports (portfolio and viva)

Where there are areas of concern, the APEL manager will relay these in an appropriate manner to the first assessor and also use the experiences as examples in staff development sessions for both continuing and new assessors.

⁴⁵ This appears an important element of the APEL procedures analyzed by the SEEC: it is hence not a case of *mapping* in a strict sense but of equivalence of levels. (SEEC, 2002, p. 51).

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The assessors and verifiers will need to be 'experts' in all aspects of APEL and hence will require training. Although the second assessor/verifier will usually be a subject expert it can be argued that the quality assurance is about process and hence the need for subject expertise is desirable but not essential.

At the end of the assessment, the documentary evidence of the fact that the process has taken place in accordance with the institution's APEL policies and regulations is held by the APEL Administrator and may include:

- assessors report form (filing date, student details, original claim for credit and result of the process, number and level of credits awarded, summary of supporting evidence, names of the adviser, assessor and verifier)
- quality assurance report
- student feedback form(s)

The APEL Administrator logs the movement of the student's portfolio, all the communications with the tutor, the assessor and the quality control, as well as those from and to the student.

3.2.7. Stage 7: The decision and ratification

The way in which institutions confirm the decisions recommended by the assessor and verifier varies. However most have found that a separate APEL Board, acting much in the manner of, and with similar remits to subject/programme examination boards appears to be an appropriate way to receive the 'results'. Board members will include

- APEL manager
- APEL advisers and assessors
- subject representatives from the faculty
- faculty/institutional quality manager
- an APEL 'expert' from another faculty in the institution
- external examiner

The Board members are 'experts' of the institution's APEL procedures and must possess a thorough knowledge of the policies and regulations related to said procedures. The APEL Board acts much in the manner of,

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and has similar remits to subject/programme examination boards. The external examiners will also have to be made aware of the role of APEL within the institution.

Upon reaching the decision, the APEL manager sends a copy of the minutes of the APEL Board to the various relevant parties and sections of the institution, which have to be informed of the decision reached. It is the responsibility of the APEL manager to inform the student in writing of the decision. Records will be kept of where and when copies of the minutes were distributed.

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Table 7 – Training of university staff involved in APEL procedures

Level of staff development and training													
Players v stages in APEL process													KEY A = AWARE U = UNDERSTAND E = EXPERT
stage	marketers	Commercial unit	Telephonist receptionist	Admissions unit	Briefer	Adviser	Assessor 1	Interbal verifier	Course leader	Academic/other staff	Institution APEL Mgr	Faculty APEL Mgr	External examiner
1. Advertising/marketing	U	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	E	E	A
2. Dealing with enquiries		U	A	U							U	U	A
3. dealing with applications		U		U	E				U		E	E	A
4. Advising				A		E	E	E	U	A	E	E	A
5. portfolio preparation				A	U	E	E	E	U	A	E	E	A
6. portfolio assessment		U		A	U	E	E	E	U	A	E	E	A
7. Decision		A		A	U	E	E	E	U	A	E	E	E
8. Ratification		A		A	U	E	E	E	E	A	E	E	E
APEL Strategy	A	A		A	U	E	E	E	U	A	E	E	A
APEL Award regulations		A		A	U	E	E	E	U	A	E	E	E

Source: SEEC, 2002

3.2.8. Staff development

From the stages examined it is clear that a central element of the procedures is the quantity and quality of the human resources destined to welcome and assess the students choosing APEL. Quality of procedures is assured by a careful policy of selection of resources and by internal training of academic and administrative personnel. The table below provides an outline of the APEL areas and the level of optimal personnel training for each of them⁴⁶.

4. Validation experiences at Middlesex University

What has been described up to now can account for the enormous body of literature produced in the UK concerning the recognition and validation of experiences. What is evident, is the fragmentation of offers and procedures on behalf of the university, to the point that a few commentators observe that on this theme much has been written in Great Britain but very little has been accomplished: APEL practices within universities are marginal in comparison with the current offer of higher education (Garnett et al., 2004)

Middlesex University is an exception, owing both to its long experience of validation, and the innovative approach adopted. For this reason, it is useful to close the chapter by introducing the APEL methodology adopted by this particular institution.

It is interesting to highlight Middlesex University's approach to recognition: the university considers work-based learning (WBL) a separate field of studies. This approach has led Middlesex to accredit the whole work experience gained by a candidate, as opposed to just the one corresponding to determined and specific study modules. Middlesex, through the work experience, recognizes above all transdisciplinary and multi-dimensional type learning that is not easily teased out into subject disciplines. This paves the way for new perspectives for APEL: on one hand, awarding general credit greatly *empowers* the individual learner; on the other, it challenges the University monopoly on high status learning (Ibidem). Middlesex answers what could be perceived as a threat by repositioning higher education, which extends its scope beyond the

⁴⁶ Level A = knowledge; Level U = understanding; Level E = expert

traditional offer of courses to high-school graduates, to reach new users, e.g., company employees who obtain university credits on the strength of competencies gained in carrying out their profession or through company training⁴⁷.

It is possible to state that competencies very similar to the broad concept of learning to learn emerge⁴⁸: the reflection on experience, learning and the modalities of acquisition and systematization of knowledge and competencies appears to be the driving force of that ability to learn which finds perhaps in the work experience a rather fertile ground for development. In this sense the APEL procedure can be seen as the completion of a global reflection on learning (as process and product), allowing the candidate to extract from experience and to access the system of credentials which would otherwise be inaccessible.

4.1. *Degrees and experiential recognition: an analysis of APEL methodology at Middlesex University*⁴⁹

At London's *Middlesex University*⁵⁰, the process of *accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)* is framed within an academic area dedicated to programmes of *Work Based Learning (WBL)*, i.e., personalized experiential learning routes, tailored for adult employed learners. In the

⁴⁷ See the Middlesex-Bovis case study illustrated in the report by Garnett J., Portwood D., Costley C., *Bridging Rhetoric and Reality: Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) in the UK*, UVAC (University Vocational Awards Council), 2004, available at: http://www.uvac.ac.uk/downloads/0402_rbp/APEL%20Report%20FINAL.pdf.

⁴⁸ I have mentioned this concepts to call to mind the text by D. Hounsell, "Learning to learn: research and development in student learning", in *Higher Education*, vol. 8, no. 4 pp. 453-469, 1979. On this theme see also Stringher C., "Una mappa di navigazione per l'apprendere ad apprendere", in Alberici A., *La possibilità di cambiare. Apprendere ad apprendere come risorsa strategica per la vita*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2008.

⁴⁹ The Autor of this part is Anna Serbati, Master's graduate in Adult and continuing education at the Faculty of Education of Padova, where she works as a researcher on themes pertaining to adult education, recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning and guidance. (I wish to thank Dr. Barbara Light for her contribution to the essay. Barbara is Principal Learning Development Tutor at Middlesex University and has contributed to the realization of the article as guarantor of the legitimacy of the publication of the information contained within it).

⁵⁰ The text summarizes part of the research conducted for the Master's Degree thesis in Adult and continuing education: "Apprendimento ed esperienza lavorativa: l'approccio inglese *work-based learning*. Il caso della Middlesex University" (supervisors: A. Salatin, L. Galliani).

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British university object of the case study in fact, along with traditional university routes, there is the possibility for employed persons to obtain an academic title through a path of studies centred on their profession (paid or voluntary) with the supervision and the theoretical contribution of the University.

Learning accredited by Middlesex University recognizes a high level of knowledge that has taken place outside the academic walls. This means that the student must begin a process of reflection on the knowledge he/she has gained, by means of an *assessment* on how it was gained, synthesizing and systematizing said knowledge. This process can lead to the identification of knowledge that has been gained but left unexplored, not so much in the formal field of the subjects learnt, but rather in the experiential field of knowledge acquired on the workplace or through public relations. Only this awareness enables the professional/researcher (or more appropriately the *practitioner/researcher*, i.e., the professional who is also a researcher of his/her learning path and of the relative instruments) to identify his/her own needs and plan his/her learning path negotiating it with the university and the home organization.

To paraphrase Knowles⁵¹, the adult person is motivated to invest energy to the extent he/she thinks that it will help him/her carrying out tasks or dealing with problems he/she has to confront in real life; adults learn new knowledge, abilities, skills and values much more effectively when they are applied to real life situations.

Brennan and Little⁵² stress that the process of *accreditation of prior experiential learning*, legitimized in the United Kingdom since the 1980s, has been extremely important to accredit, in the academic field, knowledge gained in other contexts and is now taking on an even more important role from the cognitive and reflective point of view: the construction of a portfolio (usually this is the instrument adopted for APEL) requires rethinking, assessing and summing up one's own experiences, hence it is in itself an indicator of academic skills. Whereas at first the accreditation of prior experiential learning was a means for accessing a more advanced stage of a normal academic route (because the student showed to master the contents of specific study modules owing to prior learning), subsequently a

⁵¹ Knowles M., *Quando l'adulto impara [Adult Learning]*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1996

⁵² Brennan J. and Little B., *A review of work based learning in higher education*, DfEE, Leeds, 1994

series of personalized programmes of study, based upon the general credits acquired through APEL, took shape as paths centred on the workplace and on an individual's professional needs. Most of the time, there was in fact no similarity between an individual's needs and the academic courses, so each student built his/her own personal path, based on the study, reflection and production of real changes in his/her professional life, usually in contexts presenting some problems.

At Middlesex University, the *Recognition and accreditation of learning*⁵³ phase takes place at the heart of the study programme and coincides with a request to the university by the individual that learning gained previously elsewhere, on the workplace or through previous courses or voluntary activities, etc., be recognized. This allows the obtainment of a university title in a shorter and more targeted timeframe (recognition of prior learning by Middlesex University accounts for up to two thirds of the credits requested for the academic path as a whole) as regards the expertises of the adult students opting for these paths. For those who still do not have a clear idea of how to move in the professional context and who still have not identified the areas to focus on, the APEL phase is a moment of reflection and discovery, yielding a *learning outcome* that is itself the product of new learning, coinciding as it does with the full realization of one's own level and needs, which are tied to those of the professional context. Instead, for the individuals having a particularly high professional experience and a clear perception of the point of departure and destination of their own learning process, it is possible even to access higher university titles without having obtained lower ones: for example, there are people who, after completing the APEL process, have been admitted immediately to the level of *postgraduate qualification*, without having previously obtained an *undergraduate qualification*. Once this phase has been completed, if students do not wish to carry on with a WBL programme they can receive a document recognizing their own credits and possibly use it to enrol into normal academic courses, having previously discussed this with the *programme leader*. If they wish instead to move on to the following phase of programme planning, provided they have been admitted to a certain path of studies with an estimated percentage, the

⁵³ The description of the programme derives from the analysis of: Portwood D., Costley C (Middlesex University), *work based learning and the university: new perspective and practices*, SEDA paper, London 2000

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students lay out and explain their following path, clarifying with what instruments they plan to undertake a careful research on their workplace and how they plan to act on the situation using one or more projects; the programme requires in fact that the students engage in autonomous learning with their communities of practice and are able to choose and study a phenomenon pertaining to their workplace. Finally, the last module of the *work based* programme consists of the formulation of the project/s that must include a *literature review* section as theoretical basis of the planning.

Hence, at the beginning of the APEL procedure, as mentioned previously, the students are required to develop the ability to re-think their own experiential learning and to identify the areas they want to request recognition for: a detailed description of said areas supported by appropriate proof (written *evidences* such as certificates received, projects accomplished, work documents, letters from supervisors,...) will enable to assess the quality and level of recognizable credits and to plan how to obtain the remaining ones.

The second skill that students develop through WBL routes is that of reflecting holistically on their learning: a coherent *programme plan* originates from the general arena of the different learning areas and proceeds towards more specific elements on which to build the project.

The third skill that students develop is that of, to paraphrase Schön⁵⁴, reflecting in action, reasoning on why the student chose to act in a certain way and on the consequences of said choice, constructing dialogue through action: for example, in the context of the process of constructing the APEL portfolio, this not only means describing prior learning, but also reasoning on why it could be worthy of academic recognition. Far from being passive receptors of pre-packaged information, as is often the case in the development of prescribed academic routes, with this process the students become personally responsible of the learning process.

As far as this first phase is concerned, I'd like to move on to analyse in detail the *Recognition of prior experiential learning* procedure by investigating the instrument that Middlesex University supplies its students with as a tool to support their work-based learning path⁵⁵. The university has designed *resource packs* for every level of studies and every phase of

⁵⁴ D. Schön, *Il professionista riflessivo [The Reflective Practitioner]*, Dedalo Editions, 1983

⁵⁵ *Resource pack to accompany Work Based Learning Recognition and accreditation of learning (WBS2802)* compiled by Middlesex University, 2006.

the programme. In this case it is a text allowing the student to make a *claim for academic credit*, i.e., to request recognition of competencies based on previously obtained learning (courses taken, but, above all, work experience gained and knowledge related to it).

The module is articulated in various phases related to the weeks of the first semester of attendance of the WBL programme. The content of the module as a whole consists of the personal experience of the student, which he/she has critically assessed and organized following the *guidelines* provided by the academic institution and found in the *resource pack*. The meetings (in person, on-line, single or group), i.e., the *tutorials with the adviser*, which constitute the support given to the candidate, are an essential component of the path: the adviser's task is to support the student with any issues he/she may have. The adviser knows the APEL procedures very well, as well as the university requirements for APEL, the formats, the technical terms featured in the documents, the relationship between learning fields and the evidence required; it is the adviser's task to examine the documents submitted to him by the student, to suggest other transversal areas, recommend bibliographies of reference materials, regularly monitor the preparation of the portfolio (to check that there are no formal mistakes or mistakes relating to the understanding of the process, but also to put potential anxieties or concerns relating to APEL to rest). It is the adviser's duty to ensure that the student completes the exercises provided by the *resource pack* to facilitate the understanding of the tasks to be carried out: among the most useful exercises featured is keeping a logbook, which has the aim of being what Schön calls a conversation with the professional world or with the world outside the profession, i.e., a reflection on how professional problems are dealt with, on possible *tutorials* attended, books read, or websites consulted, with the aim of identifying the knowledge, skills and competencies required and those needing to be further implemented during the work based learning programme.

Let's now move on to examine more in detail the structure and the assessment procedures of the portfolio, the instrument used by the individual to showcase the learning he/she asks to be recognized as academic credits: it is initially assessed by the adviser who, as first *assessor*, can request the presence of the student in order to obtain clarifications and explanations and to discuss the amount of creditable credits (the most common procedure identifies the *academic adviser* as the first person to assess the request). Subsequently, the adviser takes the

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portfolio through a process of moderation supervised by the *module leader* (if the latter does not possess the knowledge required for the assessment he/she can contact an external examiner); the assessment is subsequently approved by an *accreditation board* that decides how many credits to assign and at which levels of the study programmes.

The portfolio is made up of different parts, each with specific objectives:

- 1) **curriculum vitae:** drawing up a CV is useful to various individuals: to the student to begin reflecting on the learning areas he would like to see accredited and which are obviously closely linked to his/her professional experiences; to the *programme adviser*, who, having read the CV, can help clarify the above mentioned learning areas, and, lastly, to the *assessor*, for whom it represents an introduction to the individual to be assessed and his/her professional context of origin, enabling the assessor to detect the competencies that the candidate might possess.

Of course, the student can submit a CV he/she has prepared recently for job interviews, however, in this context, the student must add all the work experiences, including voluntary and unpaid work and leisure activities previously pursued, which are not always present in a normal CV, but that are very important in this context because they are potential sources of further knowledge.

- 2) **job description:** it has the aim of outlining the current professional role, including related responsibilities and goals reached. A formal description derived for example by a job description can be a good starting point, but the student must then enhance it by including as much information as possible, possibly with references to other positions held during the last year of studies. The job description must describe: the hierarchical position the duty occupies within the company organization chart, the responsibilities (along with the number of employees), the value of the resources used, the contingency management margin, the normal daily tasks and their attendant importance (possibly with a clarification of the competencies and skills required), possible unusual activities or duties, possible training experienced for the profession in question (with related data, duration, themes).

- 3) **possible academic credits previously gained:** their inclusion is useful both because some of them can be certified and because, even if they cannot be certified, they might have been useful for the acquisition of competencies significant for the accreditation. The recognizable credits are the ones from courses taken at Middlesex University or other universities (for example, to obtain credits for a Bachelor degree at level 1, 2 or 3, the student could use courses taken for a sub-degree qualification such as a Certificate or Diploma) or recognized higher education courses at HE level 1 or above or at level 4 and 5 of the NVQ.

Usually, courses dating back to more than 5 years are not taken into account; however, they still can be listed in the CV or in the learning areas in connection with the related competencies. The student should supply as many details as possible about the certifiable courses and the attendant certificates representing the “*evidences*” on the basis of which the *assessors* can assign credits that will be added to the ones accredited for the learning areas.

- 4) **learning areas:** are the core of the portfolio because they form the request of accreditation of prior experiential learning which replaced the attendance of university modules; the student should reflect on past and present goals and select the ones in which he/she has made significant progress as far as learning and developing new competencies or increasing the already existing ones are concerned. While the CV and the job description refer to what the student has *done* in the past, this area has the aim of clarifying what the student has *learnt* in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies resulting from said experiences; furthermore, another important difference is that what is required is not a chronological but a thematic reflection on the student’s experience, including in the same category skills which are related even if they might result from different experiences.

In order to achieve approximately ten titles relating to the different areas, the student can consult the NVQ programmes or the academic ones pertaining to his/her work and study subject (the ones the student would enrol in if he/she were to choose to follow a normal programme of academic studies) to get an idea of how to clarify some competencies; moreover, it is useful that the student ask him/herself continuously questions such as “what objectives of

personal and professional growth does this project have for me?”, “how much time will it take me to complete the programme?”, “what criteria does the activity have to meet to be considered successful?”, so as to keep the situation always under control and maintain a high level of motivation even during the more difficult moments. In any case, even during said moments, the student is supported by the *programme adviser*, and it is advisable to submit to the latter the original list of learning areas identified before beginning to develop them.

Obviously, there is not an only way to go about writing the learning areas: they can be subdivided in macro areas and subsequently specified in sub-areas or directly listed as small groups. Furthermore, for the *undergraduate* (hence not for the master’s and PhD degrees) levels there is a compulsory area set aside for “*transferable skills*” such as career planning, learning skills, communication, teamwork, numeracy and information technology (that can be clarified in an area apart or be included within other areas), in which the candidate must state and demonstrate to possess the afore-mentioned transversal competencies deemed indispensable.

Each learning area must include an explanation of how the student has acquired said learning and why it has been important in the context of origin, with possible references to the CV and the job description; each learning area must also include possible training experiences connected with the profession and provide an accurate analysis of the learning. It consists of the description of related knowledge, skills and competencies and an explanation of how they were useful in that professional context and how they can be useful in various professional situations, including voluntary work: the aim is to identify the intellectual activities required by one or more situations, hence what decisions were taken, what were the determining factors, whether and how to repeat the use of this competence.

- 5) **Evidence:** in order to allow the *assessor* to accredit the competencies and for him/her to decide the appropriate level of credits to be attributed, it is very important to supply proof of what has been described in the learning areas.

The candidate can provide the most disparate forms of evidence: photographs or videos, audiocassettes or CDs, written documents such as

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plans or projects carried out, including attendant objectives and results, monthly or annual reports, certificates, correspondence with colleagues, seniors, subordinates, clients, statements signed by seniors, tangible products created. *Case studies* where the student relates a specific episode occurred, with details and a report describing what new learning has occurred in the context examined (especially when there is no physical evidence of the learning), must also be included.

It is the student's duty to ensure that the use of the material provided as evidence of his/her learning is permitted by the ethical rules of the student's professional context, possibly avoiding to mention people's names when inappropriate (especially in the case of minors or disabled persons).

Each *evidence* must be supported by a brief note explaining why the student has chosen said material and in what way it complies with the criteria of *validity* (relationship with the specific learning area), *authenticity* (reference to the student him/herself as the author or actor of the material), *currency* (the *evidence* must be recent and account for a skill currently present), *sufficiency* (ability to cover the whole area or most of it) and *reliability* (possibility of repeating the competency in other circumstances).

The completion of the APEL module also requires writing a "*reflective essay*", i.e., an essay where the student reflects on his/her own learning, focusing first on the experience achieved and then on its theorisation in the portfolio. Obviously this activity is based on the theoretical contribution of Schön and Kolb, whose work the students are strongly encouraged to read. The essay serves the purpose of stating the motivations and the willingness to enrol in a WBL programme of studies, it hence aims to be a reflection by the candidate on the meaningfulness of picking up pieces of his/her own personal and professional life and expressing them and on what the learning outcome of these activities has been.

The reflection develops self-knowledge and is much more than a simple assessment of the quality of the student's learning, generating independence and awareness.

Both portfolio activities and *essay* must be prepared within the time limits set, the student will receive written feedback about them from the *adviser* and, subsequently, a quantitative assessment concerning the number of academic credits that have been recognised.

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At this point, if the student wishes to move on to the next *Programme planning* phase, he can do so during the following semester by contacting his/her *programme adviser*.

The recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning has the aim of valuing what has been learnt and giving it visibility to promote the social and economical inclusion of individuals on the strength of their own competencies. In the context of the *validation of non-formal and informal learning* Colardyn and Bjornavold⁵⁶ identify the following European objectives: answering the individual learning needs by means of valuing also the *learning outcomes* achieved following non-traditional routes, through flexible access to the educational institutions and recognition of individual competencies also from the labour market. Said recognition should also be seen as part of the strategy to develop economic performances, through a more conscious management of the intellectual capital.

The aforesaid APEL methodology can potentially benefit all the stakeholders involved: it can benefit the student/worker because he/she can obtain a title without having to give up the profession and increase knowledge, competencies and skills to foster possible professional development, also through the motivation resulting from this personal process of becoming aware of his/her own abilities.

Having a person who devotes time and study (supervised by the university and hence of a high level)

to the resolution of a real problem and the improvement of professional procedures can benefit the organisation: the climate of collaboration resulting from the candidate's relations with his/her colleagues can generate learning within the organisation. Lastly, it can constitute a benefit for the university because it offers an image of modernity of procedures and of fairness of access to *higher education*.

The procedure has undeniable strengths but it also poses a few problems that, to paraphrase Boud⁵⁷, are real challenges: firstly, there is an institutional pedagogical issue, tied to the change of paradigm inherent to the procedure. Because APEL is a model based on experience, the concept of learning, along with the concept of teaching, varies considerably. The

⁵⁶ Colardyn D., Bjornavold J. (2004), *Validation of Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning: policy and practices in EU Member States*, European Journal of Education 39 (1).

⁵⁷ Boud D., Solomon N., Symes C., *Work based learning: a new higher education?*, SRHE and Open University Press, Buckingham 2001.

modalities and the meaning of the certification, the methodologies used, the mechanisms of assessment and quality assurance are all subject to change. The university is required to break out of its inherent self-referentiality, establishing partnerships with the organisations, certifying experiential competencies gained in the professional context: the academic institution, far from being the sole possessor of knowledge, must hence set up new roles for its teaching staff, so that it can switch from the role of *teacher* to that of *mentor* and *assessor*, offering support to self-learning and to self-reflection on learning. The latter aspect can lead to question whether the candidate is able or not to undertake autonomously a reflection as deep as to bring to light disciplinary and transversal competencies possessed (which requires great awareness and maturity), that can be recognised within an academic path, in lieu of credits gained by attending traditional courses.

Hence, being supported during the process of construction of the portfolio is of key importance; it is significant not only from the point of view of certification, but also from the formative point of view, in that the individual is guided and supported throughout the analytical introspective journey.

The realisation that processes that are so highly personalised require the university to invest considerable resources, both in terms of personnel training and of university time devoted (the in person and distance exchanges are, with the exception of some group seminars, mostly of the *one-to-one* mode), also comes to the fore.

However, the predominantly crucial aspect is the issue of assessment: the APEL instrument must be valid, both in terms of actual validity (i.e., the competencies recognised to a candidate using a process of *accreditation of prior experiential learning* must be verified with the same thoroughness applied to a traditional student), and of face validity, i.e., the credibility of the device in the eyes of the public opinion.

The clarity and transparency of the *learning outcomes* to be reached for every module and the *assessment* criteria are of fundamental importance for the positive outcome of the procedure and for the actual positive outcome of the recognition of credits. In order to reduce subjectivity to a minimum in the assessors' assessment, Middlesex University follows a rigorous scheme of credit attribution specifying their quantity and levels; the latter being indicators of the depth, complexity and autonomy of the study carried out by a student enrolling in the APEL module (as well as the other

modules). The approach used by the assessors is to state what the *learning outcomes* of each module (for each of the modules constituting a title) are at different levels of difficulty and depth and they have to be understood as a continuum where every level contains the previous ones: this ensures the greatest objectivity of the assessment of negotiated modules which, in contrast with normal academic courses, do not feature the same contents and the same examination modalities for all students. An element that is not employed by Middlesex University (if not in rare cases), in contrast with other models (e.g., the French one) is the presence of external professionals in the examination board: this can be another means of ensuring the objectivity of the assessment, accompanying the opinion of the disciplinary and method teachers with the opinion of a content expert who carries out his/her profession in the area the candidate belongs to.

These modalities are an attempt to face the high degree of contextualisation accompanying the knowledge to be analysed and certified: belonging to a work group or to a community of practice creates an acculturation of the worker to the characteristics of that particular group, which inevitably influences the process of study (including individual study) and of personal reflection to state competencies.

According to Avis⁵⁸ it is necessary to decontextualise knowledge because it is through the dialogue between the different knowledge domains that an individual can develop competencies and learning to manage different contexts in different moments.

In light of these observations, the APEL methodology applied at Middlesex University represents undoubtedly a very interesting element of study to reflect upon with a view to creating an Italian instrument for the recognition of experiential learning. Of course, the focus of interest is tied to the fact that APEL represents an instrument for personal/professional development, with which it is possible to retrace learning and project it in a future perspective, thus answering the need of the individual to grow professionally and the need of the workplace to have prepared and motivated individuals. In order to understand the scope of the phenomenon, I think it is appropriate to conclude by stressing that, to date, the individuals using the procedure in order to obtain titles from BA to

⁵⁸ Avis J., *Work-based Learning and Social Justice: 'learning to labour' and the new vocationalism in England*, in VV.AA., *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 17, No. 2, June 2004.

Doctorate in Professional Studies (i.e., from three-year undergraduate degrees up to postgraduate degrees) are about a thousand; moreover, Middlesex University is continuing to carry out research and experiments to implement an APEL model allowing to obtain a whole academic title, without the need to attend additional courses or modules.

5. Conclusions

To conclude this overview on APEL practices in the United Kingdom it is possible to identify a few elements of synthesis.

First, the lack of a univocal normative reference framework, the accompanying drive to development originating from abroad (the United States) and the *bottom-up* approach in the establishment of APEL practices are factors that have led to a stark differentiation in the issuing processes on behalf of British universities. However, said factors have ended up producing a sort of theoretical conformism, with procedures being for the most part of behaviourist derivation.

The initial opportunities originating from the feminist movement, but also from liberal theories on adult learning, have been replaced by a summative assessment that rarely makes it possible to exploit the full APEL potential for individual development. In this regard, the stimuli deriving from socio-constructivist theories of situated learning are particularly interesting, as they emphasize the candidate's reflection during the whole validation path and which can constitute an enrichment (*empowerment*) of the individual if inclined to understand the dynamics of his/her learning (learning to learn for *lifelong learning*).

During its development, APEL has however benefitted from strong *top-down* impulses, deriving from government policies for *lifelong learning* and the access to higher education. The universities have seen these processes as an opportunity to attract new catchment areas to counter a negative situation from the demographic point of view. The fact, then, that in the UK the very quantification of the APEL phenomenon is difficult, while the Anglo-Saxon literature on the subject appears endless, suggests that these practices might be the product of a careful policy of territorial marketing of universities, instead of a real opportunity for developing an individual's potential.

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The same socio-economic-type approach called for by Garnett et al., does not seem to have taken root: the development of human capital remains difficult if the policy of marketing of universities or a *top-down* state-controlled approach on behalf of the government for access to higher education are at the core of the process.

As long as the individual will continue to be at the centre of the process only on paper, while in practice the procedures for candidates are arduous and chaotic, it is doubtful if APEL can spread in a truly widespread way: for many it seems easier to choose the path of a full course of studies, rather than the long and wearisome path of the exemption from parts of it.

Lastly, the fact that in most cases assessing experiences means tracing a map of direct and neutral correspondence between requisites of level and evidences provided by the candidate, with a particular emphasis on the concept of “evidence”, does not point to a truly beneficial use of APEL for the applicant.

To sum up, it is the very individual who is almost absent, numerically evanescent, perhaps owing to a difficulty in identifying the personal advantages of using APEL. However, one should bear in mind the interesting perspectives opened up by a “profound” use of APEL such as the ones finding place in the University of Middlesex.

APEL could be a truly extraordinary resource for developing the skill of learning from experience. Let us consider a recent definition of learning to learn:

“regulating function of learning, procedural in nature, increasing the managerial ability of specific learning situations and conferring to the individual an increasingly greater power of control over methods, times, and spaces of his/her learning experience situated in different contexts. It marshals different energies and produces knowledge on learning by means of variations in the learning experience. Learning to learn is tied to self-regulated learning, inclinations to learn, the affective-motivational and the social dimensions of learning, in an evolutionary perspective and for the full length of life”⁵⁹.

In addition to the clear procedural feature, the definition provided also contains the productive element of learning to learn, considered as a process creating knowledge of one’s own learning. The way in which an individual produces said knowledge is not exclusively by transforming (in

⁵⁹ Stringher C., op. cit. pag. 111.

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an experimental sense) his/her way of learning, but also by reflecting critically on what has been learnt during diversified experiences, which is exactly what occurs during an APEL procedure aiming at similar results.

A concept which could also be applied to our Italian context. Provided that it is carried out over a reasonable period of time, the reflection induced during the APEL guidance can empower the candidate with a new self-awareness, an awareness of his/her specific abilities, but also an awareness of the aforementioned learning to learn that remains the key for an effective and lasting *empowerment* in all fields and contexts of adulthood: “at home, at work, in education and training”, to quote the Recommendation of the European Parliament’s definition of learning to learn⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competencies for lifelong learning*. The document is available at the following website: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:IT:PDF>. Last accessed April 25th, 2010.

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QCF LEVELS. Source: Ofqual - Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework, 2008.

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Entry level	Entry 1 recognises progress along a continuum that ranges from the most elementary of achievements to beginning to make use of skills, knowledge or understanding that relate to the immediate environment.			
	Achievement at Entry 2 reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out simple, familiar tasks and activities with guidance.	Use knowledge or understanding to carry out simple, familiar activities Know the steps needed to complete simple activities	Carry out simple, familiar tasks and activities Follow instructions or use rehearsed steps to complete tasks and activities	With appropriate guidance begin to take some responsibility for the outcomes of simple activities Actively participate in simple and familiar activities
	Achievement at Entry 3 reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts, with appropriate guidance where needed.	Use knowledge or understanding to carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts Know and understand the steps needed to complete structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts	Carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts Be aware of the consequences of actions for self and others	With appropriate guidance take responsibility for the outcomes of structured activities Actively participate in activities in familiar contexts
Level 1	Achievement at level 1 reflects the ability to use relevant knowledge, skills and procedures to complete routine tasks. It includes responsibility for completing tasks and procedures subject to direction or guidance.	Use knowledge of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined, routine tasks Be aware of information relevant to the area of study or work	Complete well-defined routine tasks Use relevant skills and procedures Select and use relevant information Identify whether actions have been effective	Take responsibility for completing tasks and procedures subject to direction or guidance as needed

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Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 2	Achievement at level 2 reflects the ability to select and use relevant knowledge, ideas, skills and procedures to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems. It includes taking responsibility for completing tasks and procedures and exercising autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance.	Use understanding of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems Interpret relevant information and ideas Be aware of the types of information that are relevant to the area of study or work	Complete well-defined, generally routine tasks and address straightforward problems Select and use relevant skills and procedures Identify, gather and use relevant information to inform actions Identify how effective actions have been	Take responsibility for completing tasks and procedures Exercise autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance
Level 3	Achievement at level 3 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, have a measure of complexity. It includes taking responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within limited parameters. It also reflects awareness of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.	Use factual, procedural and theoretical understanding to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, may be complex and non-routine Interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas Be aware of the nature of the area of study or work Have awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work	Address problems that, while well defined, may be complex and non-routine Identify, select and use appropriate skills, methods and procedures Use appropriate investigation to inform actions Review how effective methods and actions have been	Take responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures, including, where relevant, responsibility for supervising or guiding others Exercise autonomy and judgement within limited parameters

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Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 4	Achievement at level 4 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine. It includes taking responsibility for overall courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within fairly broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.	Use practical, theoretical or technical understanding to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine Analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas Be aware of the nature and approximate scope of the area of study or work Have an informed awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work	Address problems that are complex and non-routine while normally fairly well defined Identify, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills Initiate and use appropriate investigation to inform actions Review the effectiveness and appropriateness of methods, actions and results	Take responsibility for courses of action, including, where relevant, responsibility for the work of others Exercise autonomy and judgement within broad but generally well-defined parameters
Level 5	Achievement at level 5 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address broadly-defined, complex problems. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them.	Use practical, theoretical or technological understanding to find ways forward in broadly-defined, complex contexts Analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information, concepts and ideas Be aware of the nature and scope of the area of study or work Understand different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them	Address broadly-defined, complex problems Determine, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills Use relevant research or development to inform actions Evaluate actions, methods and results	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action, including, where relevant, responsibility for the work of others Exercise autonomy and judgement within broad parameters

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Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 6	<p>Achievement at level 6 reflects the ability to refine and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address complex problems that have limited definition. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that are able to underpin substantial change or development, as well as exercising broad autonomy and judgement. It also reflects an understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the theories that underpin them.</p>	<p>Refine and use practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts where there are many interacting factors</p> <p>Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and ideas</p> <p>Understand the context in which the area of study or work is located</p> <p>Be aware of current developments in the area of study or work</p> <p>Understand different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the theories that underpin them</p>	<p>Address problems that have limited definition and involve many interacting factors</p> <p>Determine, refine, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills</p> <p>Use and, where appropriate, design relevant research and development to inform actions</p> <p>Evaluate actions, methods and results and their implications</p>	<p>Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that are capable of underpinning substantial changes or developments</p> <p>Initiate and lead tasks and processes, taking responsibility, where relevant, for the work and roles of others</p> <p>Exercise broad autonomy and judgement</p>

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Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 7	<p>Achievement at level 7 reflects the ability to reformulate and use relevant understanding, methodologies and approaches to address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that initiate or underpin substantial change or development, as well as exercising broad autonomy and judgement. It also reflects an understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives, and how they affect their area of study or work.</p>	<p>Reformulate and use practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts where there are many interacting factors</p> <p>Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and theories to produce modified conceptions</p> <p>Understand the wider contexts in which the area of study or work is located</p> <p>Understand current developments in the area of study or work</p> <p>Understand different theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the area of study or work</p>	<p>Conceptualise and address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors</p> <p>Determine and use appropriate methodologies and approaches</p> <p>Design and undertake research, development or strategic activities to inform the area of work or study, or produce organisational or professional change</p> <p>Critically evaluate actions, methods and results and their short- and long-term implications</p>	<p>Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that initiate or underpin substantial changes or developments</p> <p>Exercise broad autonomy and judgement across a significant area of work or study</p> <p>Initiate and lead complex tasks and processes, taking responsibility, where relevant, for the work and roles of others</p>

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Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 8	<p>Achievement at level 8 reflects the ability to develop original understanding and extend an area of knowledge or professional practice. It reflects the ability to address problematic situations that involve many complex, interacting factors through initiating, designing and undertaking research, development or strategic activities. It involves the exercise of broad autonomy, judgement and leadership in sharing responsibility for the development of a field of work or knowledge or for creating substantial professional or organisational change. It also reflects a critical understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the field of knowledge or work.</p>	<p>Develop original practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts that lack definition and where there are many complex, interacting factors</p> <p>Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and theories to produce new knowledge and theories</p> <p>Understand and reconceptualise the wider contexts in which the field of knowledge or work is located</p> <p>Extend a field of knowledge or work by contributing original knowledge and thinking</p> <p>Exercise critical understanding of different theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the field of knowledge or work</p>	<p>Conceptualise and address problematic situations that involve many complex, interacting factors</p> <p>Formulate and use appropriate methodologies and approaches</p> <p>Initiate, design and undertake research, development or strategic activities that extend the field of work or knowledge or result in significant organisational or professional change</p> <p>Critically evaluate actions, methods and results and their short- and long-term implications for the field of work or knowledge and its wider context</p>	<p>Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that have a significant impact on a field of work or knowledge, or result in substantial organisational or professional change</p> <p>Exercise broad autonomy, judgement and leadership as a leading practitioner or scholar sharing responsibility for the development of a field of work or knowledge, or for substantial organisational or professional change</p> <p>Take responsibility for the advancement of professional practice</p>

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APPENDIX 2

QCA principles for RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning)⁶¹ procedures

The following are the principles for carrying out a recognition of prior learning (RPL) that is effective, coherent and quality-based.

- 1 RPL is a valid method of enabling individuals to claim credit for units in the QCF, irrespective of how their learning took place. There is no difference between the achievement of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of a unit through prior learning and through a formal programme of study.
- 2 RPL policies, processes, procedures, practices and decisions should be transparent, rigorous, reliable, fair and accessible to individuals and stakeholders to ensure that users can be confident of the decisions and outcomes of RPL.
- 3 RPL is a learner-centred, voluntary process. The individual should be offered advice on the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support a claim for credit through RPL, and be given guidance and support to make a claim.
- 4 The process of assessment for RPL is subject to the same quality assurance and monitoring standards as any other form of assessment. The award of credit through RPL will not be distinguished from any other credits awarded in the QCF.
- 5 Assessment methods for RPL must be of equal rigour as other assessment methods, be fit for purpose and relate to the evidence of learning. Credit may be claimed for any unit in the QCF through RPL unless the assessment requirements of the unit do not allow this, based on a rationale consistent with the aims and regulations of the framework.

⁶¹ QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), *Claiming credit - Guidance on the recognition of prior learning within the Qualifications and Credit Framework*, London, 2008.

The recognition and validation of vocational and experiential competencies in France

Luisa Daniele⁶²

1. Introduction

The recognition and validation of prior learning is an increasingly emerging field of reflection and realization of practices also in the Italian framework of active labour policies. In the French context, the January 2002 Social Modernisation Act established a new right: every citizen who has practiced an activity for three years can request the recognition and validation of prior learning to obtain a qualification for vocational training or an academic title. As far as the universities are concerned, this has resulted in the introduction of the right to access undergraduate or postgraduate degrees without having to pass any exams.

In France, the recognition and validation of prior learning, has represented a challenge for civil society, universities and the labour market.

For adult students the value of an academic title obtained through the recognition of prior learning is both symbolical and socio-economical: the procedure for the recognition and validation of prior learning, as developed by French policies, potentially constitutes a powerful factor of personal and professional development and empowerment. By engaging in a process of validation of prior learning the subject has the possibility of being recognized, on the social and professional level, by means of legitimate and certified evidence of the level of competence gained.

⁶² Member of the PRIN 2007 working group established by the chair of Adult Education, Professor Alberici, Roma Tre University, institution in charge of the project *The validation of professional and experiential competencies in adults willing to be (re)integrated in university, in a lifelong learning perspective*.

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Moreover, in the academic context, accessing a procedure of assessment of learning specifically entails seeing one's knowledge, also experiential, recognized by the institution that is by definition the depositary of knowledge: the university.

For the French universities (and in general also for the Italian ones) the key is to follow the European higher education systems and their valuing objectives in developing curricula not only for the basic competencies, but also for the cultural and professional ones (*learning outcomes*) aimed at fostering the employability and the social and labour integration of graduates. Furthermore, to answer the new needs of valuing learning acquired in informal and non-formal contexts, and hence in order not to waste the wealth of knowledge and competencies already possessed by the adult candidates, the French universities have succeeded in developing a system of lifelong and continuing training in addition to the objectives of higher training that are already part of their remit, and in acquiring a new institutional function, that of certifying learning acquired in contexts outside the academia, first of all the workplace, a new responsibility that is added to the traditional ones of teaching and research.

Obviously, for the French universities, what is at stake are the legitimacy and the social credibility of the titles issued; allowing adults to access flexible and streamlined formative university paths starting with the recognition and validation of prior learning, is tantamount to acknowledging that the learning acquired in informal and non-formal contexts has the same value as the disciplinary knowledge developed in the academic context.

However, for the universities, opening up to this new process of assessment and certification has required the implementation of instruments for the regulation, transparency and guarantee of the titles issued via this third route: in addition to the academic and vocational training, the experiential training.

In the French business world, the possibility of accessing a title acquired through the validation of prior learning, calls into question the habitual definition of the workers' titles, traditionally determined by initial training routes.

Obviously, the career and salary trajectories are called into question as much as, if not more than, the formative paths.

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It is clear that, for the businesses, the advantage of accessing recognition and validation of competencies paths rests in the valorisation of the human capital, in the perspective of competitiveness and management of change. Moreover, planning continuous and lifelong training actions shared with the universities, equips the companies with instruments to manage the competencies and reduce the internal costs of continuous training.

Thus, the recognition, validation and certification of learning and competencies are themes of the greatest importance in redefining the relationship between training and employment and between university and civil society.

In fact, the French context, ever since the adoption of the device for the validation of prior learning, is characterized by a return and a development of the reflection on the concept of experience and how it contributes to the development of knowledge, and, conversely, on how knowledge contributes to constructing experience in adults.

2. The policies for the validation of prior learning in France

With regard to the policies for higher education in France, the delicate issue of what role to assign to knowledge acquired in a non formal way, outside the university context, is a constant and recurring theme.

Currently, the devices for the recognition and validation that can be used for higher education are two:

- 1) decree 906 of 23rd August 1985 “Conditions for the validation of studies, vocational experiences or personal learning prior to accessing the different levels of higher education” and that regulates the *Validation des acquis professionnels et personnels – VAPP*;
- 2) decree 590 of 24th April 2002 “concerning the validation of experience from higher education” that provides the *Validation des acquis de l’expérience – VAE* and abrogates the previous 1993 decree concerning the *Validation des Acquis Professionnels*.

3. The *Validation des acquis personnels et professionnels – VAPP*: the 1985 decree

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The decree of 1985 was drafted pursuant to the orientation law (*loi d'orientation*) of January 1984 granting the universities an autonomous statute and explicitly assigning them a third mission: in addition to teaching and research, that of continuous training.⁶³ The 1985 decree guarantees the right to access all levels of higher education to those who do not possess the title required. The candidate (who does not hold a *baccalauréat*) must have interrupted initial training studies for at least two years and be at least 20 years old on the expected date for resuming studies.

The following are all subject to validation:

- any type of training received by the candidate at a public or private training organization, regardless of the assessment modalities, duration and procedures;
- the professional experience acquired through work (whether paid or not), the internship experiences;
- the knowledge and aptitudes (*aptitudes*) acquired in informal contexts.

The decree gives the right to access training at university level following the validation of the candidate's dossier by the dean of the university based on the proposal of a pedagogical commission.

This decree is ascribed to the institutional willingness to promote access to higher education. It is intended in particular for a public of adults who, having interrupted their initial training path, do not possess a qualification. Moreover, the decree was drafted with the objective of harmonising at national level the procedures for access to university training, procedures that prior to 1985 were devolved to the single faculties through the recognition of equivalence between professional experience, studies and personal learning on one hand, and the university disciplinary knowledge

⁶³ Said mission concerning continuous training is inscribed in the field of the policies of adult training, policies developed in universities by the law of 1971 (concerning the *formation des adultes*). Said law was the first to envisage the possibility to develop adult training in universities by setting up specific structures (lifelong training, learning and social promotion centres, etc.) that started in an experimental way to practice the recognition of professional experience for adults seeking reintegration into universities.

on the other. Hence, a series of dispositions that (since 1966) regulated the awarding of equivalences (*équivalence*) assigning them to the single faculties were abrogated, and the issue of adult access to universities is now dealt with at university level.

4. La Validations des acquis professionnels: the 1993 decree

The following step for the movement of reform towards the validation of experiential learning was decree no. 538 of 27th March 1993 pursuant to the 1992 law on higher education. Said normative device introduced important innovations offering the possibility for people with five years' work experience (backed by documentary evidence) relevant for their chosen course of studies to be exempted from some exams. What is assessed is essentially vocational learning (the *acquis professionnels*).

The 1993 decree was the first to feature the new figure of the jury (whereas in the 1985 decree the assessment panel was a pedagogical commission). Said body, which has the task of reaching a decision with regard to the assessment request, is appointed by the person in charge of the course of studies and is made up of university professors and professionals; the external members, the professionals, have a merely advisory power. The decision of the *validation jury*, made up of the afore-mentioned members, is transmitted (in the form of an opinion) to the *course of studies jury* that takes the final decision. The exams possibly recognized, in the form of an exemption, are valid after the candidate's enrolment into university, i.e., after the course of studies jury has received the opinion of the validation jury and has confirmed it (hence the validation jury, in the 1993 directory, has only an advisory and not a decisional power).

Within the framework of the 1992 law on higher education, the 25th March 1993 decree answered the political willingness to develop *continuous professional training*, the objectives of which, at present, prevail on those of lifelong training. This is achieved both by stimulating an adult public to return to University, and by developing paths of studies increasingly connected with the labour market.

Therefore, the 1993 decree constitutes the first instance of an extension of the field of assessment of the university from the knowledge acquired within the academia to competencies and knowledge developed on the

workplace and through vocational training (Cherqui-Houot, 2003, pp. 19-21).

The 2002 Social Modernisation Act introduced, along with the right to validation of experiential learning, an individual right to lifelong training, transferable and collectively guaranteed.

Subsequently, in September 2003, all national and cross-industry level employer and worker organisations signed a national cross-sectoral agreement. Thus, the previous 9th July 1970 agreement was renewed and the Individual Right to Training – DIF (Droit Individuel à la Formation) was introduced with the following objectives:

- developing the level of qualification and employability of the workers;
- encouraging employment;
- encouraging social mobility.

5. The *Validation des acquis de l'expérience* – VAE: the 2002 decree

The 2002 decree removed the last obstacle to experiential certification, making it possible to grant full degrees through the validation of experience, the latter definition including also voluntary (hence unpaid) activities or the activities of militancy in a union or an association, provided that said activities have a direct relationship with the formative content of the course of studies requiring validation. The duration of the experience required has been reduced from 5 years to 3. The 2002 decree abrogates the 1993 decree.

What follows is the introduction of a third set of requirements for accessing professional qualifications or education: in addition to the initial training and vocational paths, and those relating to apprenticeships, the experience path is also recognized.

The members of the validation jury are appointed by the person in charge of the course of studies object of the validation request “on the strength of their competencies, abilities and qualifications and maintaining an equal gender balance”. The jury is made up “for the most part of teachers/academics, but also of professionals whose main activity is entirely unrelated to university teaching and whose competencies are such

as to enable them to ‘recognize a value’, to *apprécier* the nature of the learning gained, especially professional”. Furthermore, the validation jury takes on a decisional role, deliberating on the awarding and the extension of the validation. By means of a deliberation the validation jury identifies the knowledge and abilities it deems have been acquired by the candidate. Said individual right to validation is exercised in the framework of a *validation of experience leave*, allowing the worker to obtain an authorisation to leave work for a maximum period of 24 hours (or three consecutive working days). The authorized bodies, the inter-professional funds are entrusted with financing the validation procedure and paying the candidate during his/her absence.

With the introduction of VAE the legislator also pursues the objective of reforming the certification system, with the aim of making it more transparent and coherent. Therefore, the 2002 Social Modernisation Act led to the establishment of the National Vocational Certification Commission (CNCP) charged with conceiving a National Register of Vocational Qualifications (RNCP).

Within the context of the 2002 decree it is the candidate’s experiential learning (*acquis de l’expérience*) that is the object of academic assessment, without the legislator having provided any definition of *acquis de l’expérience*. Whereas article 134 of the Modernisation Act reads as follows “for the purposes of such validation, all professional skills that have been acquired in performing a salaried, non-salaried or volunteer activity, in direct relationship to the contents of the given diploma or title, are taken into account”.

1) *The stages of the Validation des acquis de l’expérience process*

The dispositions regulating higher education specifically are the Social Modernisation Act of 17th January 2002 (in particular articles L. 616 – 3 and L. 613 – 4, of the Code of Education) and the decree no. 2002 – 590 of 24th April 2002.

In compliance with the 2002 decree, the experiential learning validation path, the inherent procedures, the guidance procedures, right up to the interview with the jury are all responsibility of the certifying body, however, for each validation procedure five main steps can be identified:

- information about the process of VAE;

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- the reception and counselling by means of the individual interview, during which a first definition of the formative project is provided;
- the admissibility procedure;
- accompanying the candidate in preparing the dossier;
- submission to the jury and total or partial validation.

2) *The information*

The person requesting information on the *Validation des acquis de l'expérience* of experiential learning – VAE can request it from the various bodies of information and orientation:

Moreover, anybody can request information from the Points Relais Conseil (PRC). Points Relais Conseil is a network of bodies of information, reception and advice about VAE, established after 2002. The mission of the PRC network is to facilitate the access to the *Validation des acquis de l'expérience*. In these centres it is possible to receive advice from a *conseiller* VAE.

3) *The individual interview and the choice of the validation path*

The individual interview (*entretien individuel*) is a very important and delicate stage, because it is during this phase that the validation path (VAPP or VAE) and the type of certification requested are identified. Thus, to orientate him/herself the adult can rely both on his/her capability of positioning his/her own experience, abilities, competencies and knowledge, and on the *conseiller's* advice.

In order to understand the extent of the complexity of finding one's bearings amidst the vastness of the available certifications, it must be remembered that the certifications amount to 15,000, 11,000 of which pertaining to higher education.

4) *The admissibility procedure*

The adult wishing to see his/her experiential learning validated submits an application to the selected institution for the targeted certification: the "admissibility application" (*demande de recevabilité*). For this reason, he/she submits a dossier called candidature Dossier or *Livret de recevabilité*.

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The “admissibility decision”, taken by the person responsible of the course of studies is communicated to the candidate, who at this point, after having enrolled in university, can submit an “application for validation” accompanied by a “VAE dossier”.

The conditions for admissibility are two:

- the candidate has to justify an accumulated (paid, unpaid or voluntary) working experience of at least three years;
- said experience must be directly connected with the contents (in terms of knowledge and skills) contained in the curriculum of the academic title in question.

The admissibility decision, taken by the person responsible of the university course of studies, has only the effect of authorising the candidate to proceed with the validation procedure; it does not entail any prediction of the success or the extension of the validation, a decision that can only be taken by the validation jury.

The admission application is examined for a maximum of two months from the date of submission. Silence should be interpreted as an unfavourable decision.

5) *Accompanying the candidate in preparing the dossier*

The construction of the dossier requires an accompaniment from the university, in the guise of individual discussions, collective meetings, pedagogical workshops, etc. The decree has not set the duration for the accompaniment path, but on average it lasts 24 hours. In fact, it is important to remember that the worker has the legal right of benefiting from a paid leave from work for a total of 24 hours (leave for the *Validation des acquis de l'expérience* - VAE).

A dossier prepared by the candidate, possibly enriched with documentary evidence concerning formative activities previously carried out is the starting point for the jury's assessment of the knowledge and abilities that the candidate maintains he/she has acquired: “the dossier submitted by the candidate must clarify, with reference to the academic title (*diplôme*) the knowledge, competencies and aptitudes that he/she has acquired through experience. It includes the documents accounting for said

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experience and the duration of the various activities that made it possible to acquire said experience, as well as, if relevant, the certificates corresponding to the training received and the previously obtained titles.” (article 4 – decree 2002 – 590).

The dossier is based on a “declarative principle” (*principe déclaratif*): the candidate declares what knowledge/competencies he/she wishes to see validated with regard to the title requested. The jury, on the basis of the dossier, assesses the “knowledge and aptitudes that he/she declares to have acquired”, omitting, as previously observed, the assessment of competencies, the latter being a field that higher education sets aside for the *assessment* on the workplace.

The dossier is made up of at least three parts (*livret*):

- 1) The first part, or admissibility dossier, concerns the application: in this part the candidate illustrates the motivations to resort to a VAE procedure; he/she synthetically describes his/her training path, professional trajectory, voluntary activities relating to the qualification requested. Above all, in this first document, the candidate must prove to possess the minimum requirement of three years professional or voluntary activity with regard to the title requested. Moreover, starting from this first document it is necessary to produce documentary evidence of the accuracy of his/her statements: certificates from the employer or the person in charge of the voluntary activity; pay slips, contracts and job descriptions, etc. During this phase, the *conseiller* must ensure that the candidate meets the criterion of three years seniority in the professional or voluntary activity described.
- 2) The *livret 2* concerns the experience; in this part, only after having been notified of the positive outcome of the admissibility procedure, the candidate starts to develop the second part of the dossier, which will feature the main activities and tasks carried out in connection with the academic title required and the competencies required to carry out said activities. Said contextualized description of the activities carried out must prove that the candidate possesses the competencies required to practise said duties. In this document the accuracy and the exhaustiveness of the information supplied are crucial.

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- 3) The *livret 3*, optional, contains complementary information: the candidate can enclose his/her own personal and professional CV, with the aim of providing further elements for the understanding of the experiential path.

Each university chooses what form of dossier to adopt, in particular with regard to the second *livret*: a portfolio, a synthesis of learning, a sheet detailing learning acquired in connection with the professional activities, using or not instruments of biographical writing, etc.

- 6) *Submission to the jury and total or partial validation*

The validation jury examines the dossier and the documents it contains. The jury must be made up of a majority of teachers/academics and of individuals whose main activity is a profession unrelated to teaching and who possess the necessary competence to assess the nature of the learning submitted by the candidate, in particular learning connected to the profession. The members of the jury are appointed by the faculty dean according to their competencies, aptitudes and qualifications. The jury must have an equal representation of men and women.

Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that the legislator has put into practice the ethical principle whereby the professionals who are members of the jury and belong to the company where the candidate is employed, cannot take part in decisions concerning a candidate/employee. According to the same principle, also the *conseiller* is excluded from the validation jury.

The professional who is a member of the jury must be informed of the content of the academic title in question and must master the technique of deduction of the knowledge and competencies assembled by the candidate, starting from the activities described.

To that end, the ministry of education organizes training activities for the persons carrying out the validation, usually lasting a day.

The jury reaches a final decision following the analysis of the dossier and the interview with the candidate. In some cases, the jury can request to observe the candidate as he/she carries out his/her professional duties, in a real or simulated professional context (obviously, this is more frequent in connection with higher education titles of a professional nature, the *titres*, and less frequent for the academic titles, the *diplômes*). Furthermore, the

jury determines, in case of partial validation, the lacking knowledge and skills for which the candidate might go through a complementary check up. In this instance no time limit is established to recognize said knowledge and skills and obtain the total validation.

In short, the jury can take one of the following decisions:

- complete validation: the candidate is awarded the academic title;
- partial validation: the candidate must complete his/her learning following the prescriptions given by the jury (exams or supplementary professional or personal experiences);
- refusal: the candidate is notified of the decision.

6. A case study: the procedure of validation and recognition of prior learning at the University of Paris III - Sorbonne Nouvelle

In the website of the university, continuous training is described as one of the fundamental missions of the university: the Paris 3 Continuous Training Office - FCP3 is the structure appointed to receive the return to study applications on behalf of adults, who have different conditions and motivations (unemployed; employees; temporary workers; workers undergoing job retraining; etc.). Companies or civil service are also interlocutors of the FCP3 Office, within the framework of cooperative training actions.

The FCP3 service also works as an educational unit, setting up professional training activities, with timetables tailored to meet the needs of the individual or institutional request (full time, part time, sandwich courses). Moreover, certificates recognized at national level, academic certificates, or certificates of other training agencies, are also issued.

Hence, Paris III offers two channels for lifelong learning: the first is the Resumption of studies channel, and the second is the VAPP – VAE channel. In both cases, the FCP3 Office's role is that of welcoming; of advising; of guiding and of providing individual guidance, by guiding each applicant in the construction of a return to studies project.

The first Resumption of studies channel provides training resulting in a qualification; a *diplôme d'université* – DU or a State-recognized diploma, in the *Licence – Master – Doctorat* framework. In this case it is possible to

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contact the FCP3 Office by sending a pre-dossier REVA (see enclosed documents) where one's own educational and professional path and professional project are described. Following this initial contact, the applicant receives an initial guidance. The intake of students engaging in lifelong training tallies approximately 1,700 enrolled students a year.

As far as the public involved with the VAE and VAPP procedures is concerned, the following table (3.1) shows the trend of the applications and of the validations obtained for each device.

As can be deduced, the number of validations for accessing university courses (*Licence or Master*), i.e., the VAPP – Validation of Professional and Personal Learning, procedure, is much higher than the number of validations directed towards the obtainment of a certification, i.e., VAE – Validation of Experiential Learning.

This confirms the national tendencies whereby in 2006, for VAPP, the validations (in accordance with the 1985 decree), amounted to 11,630 at national level, in higher education, whereas for VAE, the validations of experiential learning amounted to 3,705, of which 1,778 represented certificates awarded in their totality and the remaining 1,927 represented partial validations (Source: Ministry of National Education – DEPP).

In the case of the data pertaining the REVA Office, a drop in validations can be observed over the years, which is due to the decrease of financial and human resources available.

The objective of the guidance path set up by the Paris III REVA Office is to enable each student to define and submit a project of validation of competencies or resumption of studies, coherent with the professional and personal experience gained and with the formative offer existing at Paris III. The guidance to the Validation of Professional and Personal Learning – VAPP, is made up of one-to-one meetings, an informative group meeting and three group workshops: a workshop on the professional project; a workshop to review the path; a methodological workshop for the verification and admissibility of the validation project. The workshops last 2-3 hours and involve 4 people on average.

The candidates for the validation of professional and personal learning – VAPP are adults over the age of 20 who have interrupted studies for at least 2 years. As has already been mentioned, in this case the validation serves the purpose of allowing the candidates to gain access to a specific level of university education and consists in an exemption from some exams.

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The Social Modernisation Act (2002) allows the candidate to enjoy a 24-hour leave from work for the validation of experiential learning. In the same calendar year only one request can be submitted in one university for the same training, while up to three requests can be made for three different titles. The procedure followed by the Bureau REVA can be schematized as follows:

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Tab. 1 – Number of candidatures and validations carried out, years 2002-2006

Year	Requests submitted	Dossiers submitted (A+C)	VAPP and VAE Dossiers validated (B+D+E)	VAPP 1985 decree		VAE 2002 law			
				Dossiers submitted (A)	Validations for access issued (B)	Dossiers submitted (C)	Partial validations issued (D)	Validations of the entire title (E)	VAE total (D+E)
2002	1000	466	402	354	290	112	110	2	112
2003	806	527	440	441	377	86	59	4	63
2004	1004	513	400	407	328	106	58	14	72
2005	1112	510	395	383	319	127	43	33	76
2006	1000	590	336	412	298	178	19	19	38

Source: REVA Office – Paris III

Tab. 2 – VAPP and VAE validation procedure at Paris III

	I Request of information on the VAE – VAPP procedure >>> Informative meeting on the courses of study >>> Definition of the project in a workshop >>> Guidance for drafting the I dossier for the validation 85 and pre-validation 2002 >>>	
Authorization to access a certification and exemption of some credits (VAPP 85) >>>	VAPP Pedagogical Commission >>>	Decides the admissibility of the VAE 2002 request >>>
Enrolment at university >>>	Dossier rejected >>>	Enrolment at university >>>
Continuation of lifelong learning studies >>>	Exit from the validation path	VAE 2002 Dossier and REVA guidance >>>
Degree Jury >>>		2002 VAE Jury >>>
Awarding of the degree		Degree awarded Or Envisagement of supplements to lifelong learning
		2002 VAE Jury

Source: Agnes Veilhan, Bureau REVA – FCP3, Sorbonne Nouvelle.

The recognition and validation of vocational and experiential competencies in Spain.

Viviana Colapietro⁶⁴

1. The context

Knowing and investigating what in the European context has long been consolidated to the extent of being able to speak of “significant experiences” to be held as model both from the normative point of view and the methodological instrumental point of view, can represent a political phase of a possible transferability of shared strategies. The objective criteria of *recognition, certification and validation* of (non formal and informal) learning that support it and enable adults to request them to the formal system of university education, constitute an investment patrimony that could render Europe more competitive and dynamic. Investing in experiential learning gained from the profession and life in general represents a challenge between the formative institutions and the labour market. The effort of defining the issue of certification of competencies in order to stimulate the mobility of study and work starting from the mutual recognition between the Member States (EC directive 89/48) goes as far back as 1989.

Taking as a given the European normative framework in its historical distribution in support of the experiments that have followed one another, I intend to examine in particular the key peculiarities of Spain and of a few

⁶⁴ Member of the PRIN 2007 working group established by the chair of Adult Education, Professor Alberici, Roma Tre University, institution in charge of the project *The validation of professional and experiential competencies in adults willing to be (re)integrated in university, in a lifelong learning perspective*.

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Autonomous Communities (Canary Islands) whose pilot project appears fairly significant, as far as the methodology and presentation of the instruments are concerned.

The recognition, certification and validation require, first of all, a reflection concerning the *transparency* of the certification; the comparability of the methodologies and the compatibility of the instruments; the accumulation and the transferability of the qualifications or, at any rate, of learning acquired through the formal and informal systems. All the above make it necessary to reflect on:

- the formative nature of the experience and, subsequently, on a more complex and comprehensive vision of learning considered informal and non-formal, which acquires the same dignity of formal learning;
- the formative nature of the orientation and the support;
- the choice of instruments and a new vision of the assessment process;
- the need to define new professional profiles and figures to act as interface between the workplace and the university professions and institutions;
- the political, normative and managerial responsibility at more levels, from national to institutional, which represents the access and delivery key of the entire process.

In our opinion, to make sense of the itinerary adopted by many EC States on the recognition, certification and validation of experiential and vocational learning of adults going back to the university educational system or who request the university to recognise their learning with a title, it is necessary to understand the structure supporting the political, cultural and institutional system of a State.

In the case of Spain and the Autonomous Communities, national and regional plans govern, based on European community principles, the architecture of the system of validation of competencies acquired by adults in non-formal and informal contexts.

The clarity on *why validate*, on the *individual responsibility* of the validation request, on the *institutional responsibility* for recognition and

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certification, on the *transparency* and *objectivity* of the process, on the *legitimation* and *marketability* in the social and professional-vocational tissue, on the *choice* of the instruments for the recognition and certification, all represent the tissue, the texture, with their dynamic articulation, of a system integrated between school, university, professional training and the labour market.

The social partners, in fact, play a fundamental role in the development of a policy for life-long training, acting as interface between the different sectors involved in recognising and granting a compatibility also to individual experiential routes, to all learning acquired also in an informal or formal context.

The acquisition and use of common principles to be adopted has the result of guaranteeing quality control, especially in the choice of methods and in the transferability of the models (see Copenhagen Declaration).

In setting the national directives for each Member State, the EU grants autonomy to the legislative reference frameworks, as is the case in Spain, concerning the emerging policies for *lifelong learning*. The “Education and Training 2010” programme led the Barcelona European Council (2002) to state that the thematic *focus* consists chiefly in the improvement of the *quality standards*, which in the adult subject appear very diversified and complex because the systems of non-formal and informal learning within which the subjects gain their experiences are as diversified and as complex. To sum up, there are an experience, a competence, and an acquisition to be legitimized and they in turn legitimize an adult subject in the context of his/her professional marketability within the labour market.

1.1. The policy of lifelong learning

In Spain the policy of lifelong training plays out, as it should, on several fronts. The active labour policies represent the focal point of the policy; the 1994 Labour Market Reform and the ensuing introduction of a greater flexibility in the “labour pacts” between the interested parties and the 1995 Royal Decree concerning the Workers’ Statute, which saw the introduction of

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the “professional groups” classification replacing the previous “categories”, have sanctioned a greater freedom of action between the partners undersigning a labour relationship (see box 1).

Freedom of action, in other words, indicates that the flexibility of an individual’s training is matched by the flexibility of the labour market and this reciprocity overcomes the issue of the rigidity of academic titles (which is, alas, still a problem in Italy).

Box 1 – Preliminary laws for the validation of non-formal learning and their partial or total recognition of titles

1990 – Organic Law 1/1990 of October 3rd – The General Law on the Education System:

- Structures the educational system in accordance with the objective that all adult subjects can acquire and make relevant their basic training and access the separate levels of the educational system;
- provided that the educational administrations periodically carry out tests for the obtainment of academic titles;
- guaranteed that over a 5-year period said administrations continued to make available special tests for the obtainment of the school qualification, with the aim of allowing access to the school cycle giving the same professional value to the title of school diploma gained during the school-leaving examination (comma III);
- provided for the organization of tests for adult individuals to obtain professional vocational titles (art. 53.4)

1991 – Royal decree 986/1991 of 14th June (modified and completed by the *Real decreto 173/1998 of 16th February*) – **Approval of the calendar of the new legislation of the education system:**

- determines that out-of-school learning tests will be administered for the obtainment of the title of Assistant Technician up to academic year 2001-2002 (art. 16.2);
- provides that the educational Administrations can organize tests for the obtainment of the title of Technician and senior Technician, respectively, under the conditions and requirements determined (point 5);
- replaces the pre-existing regulations on “Out-of-School Education Assessment Tests” in order to obtain the title of “Assistant Technician” (*Ley General de Educación de 1970*); as well as for the “Open Tests” to obtain the Title of “Professional Technician” regulated by the *1970 Law*.

1994 – Labour Market Reform

- proposed measures introducing greater flexibility in the context of collective agreements, fostering the mobility of workers, enabling the termination of contracts for economic reasons and lifting important restrictions on part-time contracts.

1995 – Royal Decree 1/1995 on the Workers’ Statute

- regulates Spanish industrial relations.

1999 – Law on the Education System

- regulates initial Training
- transforms a traditional training system into a system certifying competencies, with the involvement of the social partners (especially companies) to define and plan training needs.

2003 – Royal Decree 1046/2003 – Regulation of the sub-system of Continuing Training

- states that the companies who pay the Social Security contributions, and hence the set rate for vocational training, have a credit for continuing training, which is greater for the smaller companies (less than 5 workers).
- orders the activation, for workers, of special programmes concerning training in the transversal competencies, common to more sectors of the production sector.

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I will now move on to retrace the cultural and political course of the training system in Spain from the 1990s up to 2002, year which coincided with the emergence of a new set-up for vocational training and the system of qualifications that, in some ways, has been evolving to the present day (Organic Law of 2006) including, gradually, pilot experiences on the recognition, certification and validation of the *learning* acquired in extracurricular contexts, for example the experiences that took place in some Autonomous Communities (*Comunidades Autonomas* 2007) (see boxes no.1-3-11).

The new Programme of Vocational Training (1998-2002) is made up of the following three sub-systems:

- initial training (*Formacion Profesional Reglada F.P.R.*);
- occupational training (*Formacion Profesional Ocupacional F.P.O.*);
- continuing training (*Formacion Profesional Continua F.P.C.*).

Regulated by the 1999 Law on the Education System (see box 1) initial training shares its institutional responsibility with all the institutions that are part of the national and regional education system. What is interesting for our study is the fact of knowing that F.P.R. (initial) is accessible to all adults wishing to obtain a study title in the field of continuing training, i.e., for their entire lifespan. It is worth highlighting the qualitative change that the above-mentioned Law has produced by transforming a more or less standardised and traditional training system into an open system capable of certifying vocational competencies, according to the profiles required by the social partners in consultation: companies, industrial branches, in a word, the socio-economical arena.

To make all this possible it is necessary, at the outset, to have a clear idea of the instruments and methodologies according to which the training needs and the constantly evolving requests of the market are identified, with the aim of renewing the market itself.

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Box 2 – The training system in Spain

Initial vocational training (FPR)

Objective: preparing young people for the labour market

- Is a responsibility of the Institutions of the national and regional education system;
- Was traditionally a responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC);
- Is regulated by the *1999 Law on the education system*.

Occupational vocational training (FPO)

Objective: facilitating the integration and re-integration of job-seekers by qualifying them

- the administration is entrusted to the National Institute of Employment (**INEM**) responsible for the preparation of the different training programmes and point of reference for a network of national training centres.
- Traditionally it was referred to the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs.
- Is regulated by the *Royal Decree 631 of May 3rd, 1993* governing the Programme for National Vocational Training and the Programme for Vocational Integration (*Plan de Formación e Inserción Profesional – Plan FIP*)

Continuing vocational training (FPC)

Objective: promoting continuing training as a strategic instrument to increase the competitiveness of companies and human resources

- Is a responsibility of the social partners acting in consultation with INEM
- Is regulated by agreements and protocols (see box 6)

It is easy to understand the importance of a consultation between the partners through vertical planning (entrepreneurial sector, industries...) and horizontal planning (territorial fields). The prospect identified is undoubtedly a significant step forward, not only towards certification, but also towards the rationalisation of economic (but not exclusively so) resources. The active policy for occupation is represented in fact, by occupational training (F.P.O.) the objective of which is facilitating the integration or reintegration of those adults requiring a “reinforcement” of competencies acquired previously in other non formal and informal contexts and documented by the System of

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Certification of Vocational Competencies. The Spanish National Institute of Employment (INEM) is regulated by Royal Decree 631 of May 3rd, 1993 (see box 4) concerning the Programme of Vocational Training and the Employment Training and Integration Plan (*Plan de Formacion e Insercion Profesional, PLAN/FIP*).

Box 3 – The laws on the accreditation of competencies of the central administration of the spanish state

2002 – *Organic law 5/2002 of June 19th on qualifications and vocational training/ (Ley de cualificaciones y formación profesional):*

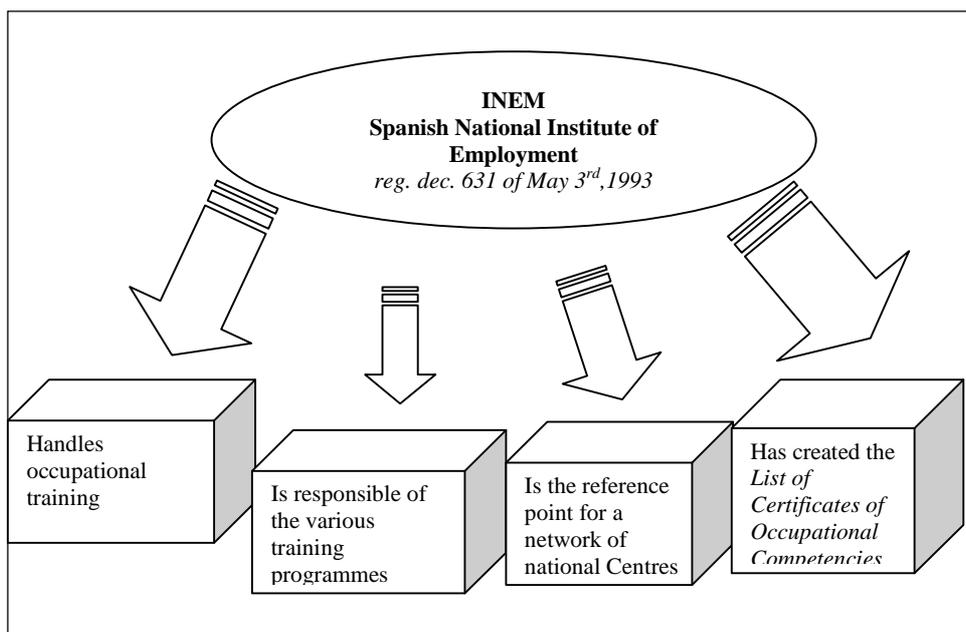
- Follows the directives of the National Vocational Training Programme, approved by the Government during 1998-2002;
- Its objective is creating a **National System of Qualifications and Vocational Training** (SNCFP) allowing not only to integrate the three offers of vocational training taking place in Spain (initial, continuing and occupational);
- SNCFP defines the “Units of competence” and the “blocks of competence”;
- Supports learning acquired in an informal way through work experience;
- Sets two instruments that are essential for the achievement of the proposed materials: the **National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications** which will list professional qualifications of the Spanish productive system according to the appropriate competencies for the professional exercise and a process or device for the recognition, assessment, accreditation and registration of professional qualifications;
- Defines qualifications as a body of professional competencies essential for the profession and the competencies are, in turn, defined as a body of knowledge and skills consenting to carry out a profession conforming to the needs of production and labour.

2006 – *Organic law 2/2006 of May 3rd on Education (LOE)/ (Ley Orgánica de Educación):*

- Sets tests that individuals of specific ages can access, if they are approved, to obtain specific credits or titles;
- Avails itself of the special collaboration, in the field of adult training, of the Labour Administration, as well as of the local corporations and the different social subjects, which entails an appreciation of learning acquired with non-academic means;
- States clearly that adult individuals can achieve their learning by means of teaching activities, regulated and not, and by means of experience, work or social activities; thus, a link will have to be established between the two routes and measures for validation of the two types of learning acquired will be adopted (Art. 66,4);
- Poses a significant insistence on the need to recognize and validate not only learning acquired through work experience but also through experiences in social activities.

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Box 4 - INEM



Adults over 45 who have difficulties finding occupation in the labour market can rely upon Training Centres, equipped with craft workshops, and job placement programmes. The agreement with the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs is sanctioned every three years also with the Autonomous Communities, which have the responsibility of managing training.

Upon shifting the focus of attention from the institution responsible to the subject/object of the action we notice that both in Spain and in the Autonomous Communities it is very important to recognise the existing individual potential for the assessment and validation of learning, and, in said process, experience, as we will demonstrate further on, has a considerable importance.

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All the formative actions carried out by companies, trade unions, business organisations and workers themselves converge in continuing training.

Box 5 – Decrees bound directly to the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning

2003 – Royal decree 942/2003 of July 18th:

- determines the basic conditions that the exams for the attainment of the titles “Técnico y Técnico Superior de Formación Profesional Específica” should fulfil;
- includes the assessment and accreditation of the occupational competencies acquired through work experience or the non-formal training route;
- the above-mentioned process takes place in consideration of the corresponding professional qualifications included in the “Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales”;
- until the corresponding occupational qualification for such competencies is included in the Catalogue.

- Royal Decree 1128/2003 of September 5th:

- regulates the National Catalogue of Cualificaciones Profesionales, which has among its purposes that of facilitating training during an individual’s lifespan through the accreditation and accumulation of professional competencies acquired in different contexts and that of assessing, recognizing and accrediting professional competencies acquired through work experience or a non-formal training route.

2004 – Royal Decree 362/2004 of 5th March:

- establishes the general organization of specific vocational training. The new organization of VT specifies and does not modify its basic structure (set for LOGSE and which LOCE has kept) which it follows arranging in medium and upper-degree training cycles, but it revisits and makes relevant the titles by regrouping them in vocational families in keeping with what set by the Catalogue.

2005 – Royal Decree 1416/ 2005 of November 25th:

- regulates the **Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones**;
- sets (in a single article) that the Catalogue must be used by the reference person to assess and accredit vocational competencies acquired through experience.

- Royal Decree 1558/2005 of December 23rd:

- governs the basic requirements for the *Integrated Centres for Vocational Training*. The centres impart the training offers of the traditionally denominated initial, occupational and continuing vocational training. One of the objectives of the centres, among others, is contributing to the assessment and accreditation of vocational competencies acquired by individuals through work experience and a non-formal route of training and to achieve the official accreditation of said competencies, once the rule regulating the procedure of assessing and accrediting competencies is developed.

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It is based on different “agreements and protocols” (see box 6) which have as common denominator/objective promoting continuing training as a strategy or, better still, as a strategic instrument to increase competitiveness between companies, and to improve and increase the working ability of the single working subjects.

Box 6 – Agreements and protocols on continuing training

1984 Economic and Social Agreement, which recognizes the need to link training and occupation;

1996 Basic Agreement on Vocational Training Policy

- signed by the Spanish government and the social partners
- highlights the need to strengthen functional relations concerning the future National System for Qualifications and the System of Vocational Qualifications
- requires the standardisation of the training curricula offered on the basis of the national system; points to a series of transversal measures interwoven with lines of action set for each of the training subsystems.

National Agreement on Continuing Training (ANFC) allowing the system to be equipped with financial resources at the disposal of companies and workers;

1992 Protocol:

- signed by bodies representing the Spanish industry and the trade unions
- created the Foundation for Continuing Vocational Training (FORCEM) a non-profit organization charged with the management, the monitoring and the technical control of the training initiatives destined to workers;

1996 Protocol:

- represents the consolidation of the commitment of the entrepreneurial and trade union organizations.

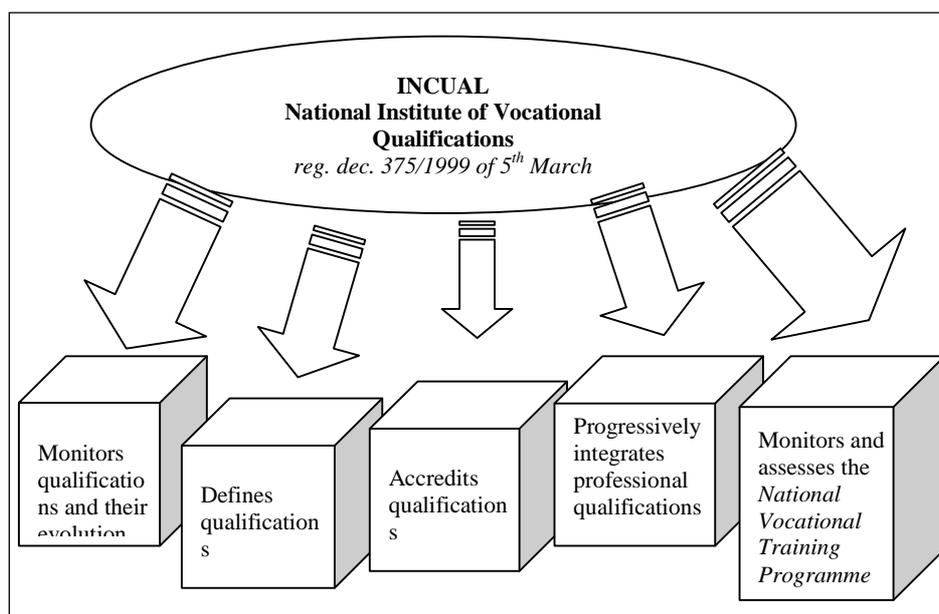
2000 Protocol:

- creates a new Tripartite Foundation between government, companies, trade unions and non-profit organizations with the aim of improving the management model
- introduces training initiatives aimed at companies operating in the social sphere.

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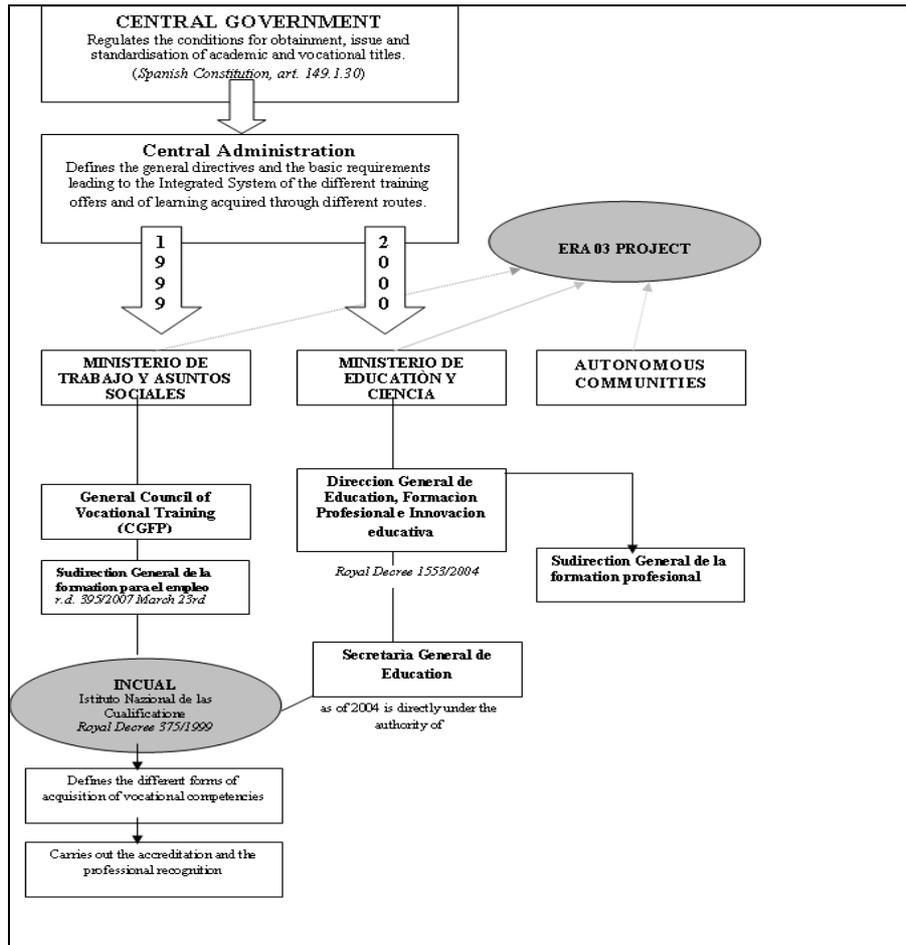
The Programme for Continuing Training, the one developed between 1998 and 2002, becomes a fundamental element of the system of National Qualifications (INCUAL) precisely through the certification of competencies acquired through the workplace. Thus INCUAL, technical support instrument of the General Council for Vocational Training, defines the qualifications in terms of competence, defining at the same time the methodologies and procedures for accreditation.

Box 7 – INCUAL



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Box 8 – The proposing bodies in the model of Accreditation of Competencies



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Box 9 – Principales and objectives of the Spanish legislation

<p>LEY ORGANICA 5/2002 <i>in the labour context:</i></p> <p>Promoting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The integration of the different forms of acquisition of professional competencies;• the need to include learning acquired through the work experience within the acquisition of competencies. <p>Creating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a National System for Professional Qualifications that allows training in the individual's lifespan, continuous. <p>Disciplining:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the system of reciprocity and the system of validation between the subsystems including the work experience. <p>Capitalising upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the work experience and learning, even if the latter has been acquired through a non-formal route.	<p>LEY ORGANICA 2/2006 <i>in the sociocultural and basic training fields:</i></p> <p>Recognising and validating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• learning acquired through social activities*. <p>*Note: The legislation of the Canarian Community recognizes and validates learning acquired through work and social experiences. Learning acquired through social life transcends the strictly professional context (it is not only the professional competencies but also the basic and general ones leading to the secondary school title for adults that are recognized).</p>
	<p><i>in the international field:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• transparency; facilitation and mobility of workers (who have to be competent, but also believe in their competence).

By applying in full the Royal Decree 942 of March 2006, the ICCP answers the needs of the Spanish Government, attesting the professional competencies acquired in the tourism and catering sector, to attain the qualification of Food

The Organic Law 5/2002 of 19th June gives birth to the National Catalogue of Qualifications which sanctions the regulations of the system of recognition and certification of professional competencies acquired through non-formal and informal training processes.

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While in Spain INCUAL is created, at the same time, in the Autonomous Communities (Canary Islands...) the Regional Institutes of Professional Qualifications under the authority of the Employment Council are established, exemplified by the case of the Canary Islands with Decree 43/2003 of 7th April (See box 7) known as Canary Institute of Professional Qualifications (ICCP).

In said decree, what emerges in order of importance pertains to the field of assessment and certification defining its methods and criteria as well as the role of experience in the construction and recognition of the “block of competencies” (art. 5).

Services Technician. The protagonists of the planning round-table for recognition, assessment and validation are ICCP professors, government members of the Council of Education and university lecturers.

Box 10 – The legislation on accreditation system in the Canary Island

Legislation regulating the teaching aspect of Training in the Canary Islands (BOC, 1997)

79/1998 Decree on basic training curriculum for adults (BOC, 1998)

- specifies the objectives, the contents, the criteria of assessment and the teaching methodology that will lead to the certification of adults in Secondary Education.
- Contains what must be taught (the education system) but also what can be accredited.
- Incorporates in the curriculum the *Sistema de Accreditation de la Formacion*, SAF (art. 11) a proper didactic instrument that allows to assess experiences and learning acquired outside formal contexts and to obtain the title based on the VIA (Initial Assessment of the Student) juridical text.

Law 13/2003 of April 4th on “Educación y Formación Permanente de Personas Adultas de Canarias” (B.O.C. no. 79, April 25th):

- sets, in article 2, the principles of “Educación y Formación Permanente de Personas Adultas”.

Legislation for the creation of accreditation systems for 2007 in the field of professional training (BOC, 2007)

Legislation for the creation of accreditation systems for 2008 in the field of professional training (BOC, 2008)

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1.2. The certification and validation of informal and non-formal learning between epistemology and legislation

The Spanish model places itself critically compared to the French and English models, despite agreeing on the basic principle of accrediting all that has been learnt in informal and non-formal contexts. A model is always born of a principle, from theoretical premises which tend to put what has been postulated into practice. Therefore the question is: what are knowledge and competence? And how and with what instruments is it possible to assess them? For France, in contrast with what happens in England, it is not sufficient to quantitatively “add” the different types of knowledge acquired; additional quantification is replaced by the subject and his/her capacity to learn and construct competencies. Other variables to consider are hence the different preconditions according to which the “formative worlds involved” are articulated: academia and the labour market, without omitting the subject in the valorisation of his latent potential.

In our opinion, what is important is to consider the starting point, which constitutes the support during the whole path, up to the completion of the implied epistemology.

In other words, what is the academic model of science and experience in Spain?

Von Humbolt’s university model is based on the premise that science has an inclusive relation which entails that it can only be dealt with collectively. In the production of knowledge, everybody depends from everybody else, the students from the professors and vice versa; if it were not so, science could not be produced. The dialogic and shared solitude fills the academic didactic space (Frühwald, 2003) and punctuates the relational triad students-knowledge-teachers.

Experience has been put forward ever since Plato’s time, determining a division between motivation to learn and learning proper, which continues to this day. We have to go back to the concept of ecology of knowledge (Boaventura do Santos, 2003) whereby knowledge is enriched with many elements drawn from human experience: emotion, intuition, common sense,

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symbolism, meaning of life, in a word, the complexity of learning in every field it might take place and from every field it might be deduced.

Philosophical studies on the experience (Melich, Baucena, Larrose) link the latter to the sense, to the meaning of the event rather than to the transformation produced by the event. The experience-sense combination enables to express new views, neither better nor worse, concerning the formative value of the experience, which enable the dynamic processes of the theory-practice relationship. The dignity bestowed upon the experience is that of giving meaning to things, to doing things, to saying things, a dignity that the academic world plans to finally recognise. We must consider how much space the validation systems give to the experience seen as acquisition and exercise of sense and how much space they give to transformation in the field of market policy. However, it must be said that in Europe the systems of validation tie the experience to the acquisition of knowledge and competencies and, in some cases, of skills and it must also be said that the academic world, especially ours, which is also supported by an ad hoc policy, continues to be very suspicious and fearful in this regard.

Experience can be seen as an attractive strategy trying to tie, and in some European countries succeeding in doing so, the academic world to the production world.

After all, in our opinion, the competencies that many adults wish to see validated are the expression of a complexity integrated between actions in situations (study, work, voluntary experiences) biographies of the subjects (life experiences) and work-related communication and socialisation.

As of 2006, the Lisbon Agenda is considered in many countries, including Spain, an indicator of the policy on education and training that will have to, in 2010, lead EC Countries to draw up a work programme for *lifelong learning* developing tactical and strategic elements, normative references and national action plans.

There is a twofold approach to the problem: there are countries that place a greater emphasis on the social and political dimension moving towards an economy of knowledge, i.e., towards the capitalisation and marketability of ascertained and validated accreditations (from what has emerged up to now we

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are thinking of including also Spain among the latter) whereas others continue to place emphasis on the society of knowledge, hence greater value on formal learning.

In Spain, article 3 of Organic Law 5/2002 of 19th June on qualifications and vocational training expresses the need to recognise, accredit, and certify the results of learning irrespectively from when, where and how they have been achieved.

The project of validation, recognition and certification of vocational competencies (Project ERA 03, 2003) sets up a validation process born in the professional context but applicable to all contexts at various formative levels. What France (Modernisation Law of 17th January 2002) has done for the validation of traineeships encompasses the concept of exemption from some training periods. With the ERA 03 Project Spain partly moves closer towards the French experience, while simultaneously moving away from it. The continuity line with the French experience is the fact that also in Spain the validation of “traineeships” learnt through experience does not have as sole guiding principle the validation of the training model. In this sense, in Spain an individual will be able to obtain also the full recognition of a vocational qualification through the validation process, thus overcoming the concept of validation seen as validation of formative credits or exemption from academic requirements. Instead, the bordering and dividing line between the two models is the fact that in Spain the validation of non-formal and informal learning does not lead to a “university title” but is limited to the field of professional qualifications and, in the case of partial recognition, the path reaches its completion following the formative model prescribed.

Is there a conflict between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge? And, by virtue of the principle of lifelong learning, can the conflict between the recognition, certification and validation of non-formal and informal learning be solved? Experience and experiential knowledge must hence be re-valued, because an individual’s development cannot be gauged according to the amount of knowledge acquired and the progression from knowledge to knowledge.

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In Spain, recognising experience means legitimising non-formal and informal learning regardless of where and how it has been acquired.

In Spain the recognition, certification and validation of experiences has met some resistance especially from the academic world; moreover, the establishment of “new commissions” (with figures such as the assessors of paths) the recognition of traineeships, the orientators/guides, and so on, have different functions from the academic function of teaching and hence open up to new professional figures, to new profiles to be determined.

In the context of the worlds of labour, enterprise, production in general, partnering the prescribed institutions awarding titles of education and training, has an interesting consequence, i.e., it increases the political, economic, and social power. The priority of the enterprises, i.e., of the world of production, is the “yield of the product” rather than the “quality of the process”. The political discourse on validation tends to highlight the importance of competencies acquired in informal and non-formal contexts rather than education and academic training; it paves the way for a university reform centred on the individual/skills/competencies/productivity relationship. Therefore, we can state that in Spain (Organic Laws of 2002 and 2006) the greatest consensus has been between the production and the civil society, with increasing platforms of many adult citizens requiring a place within the current validation system. However, we must refrain from making the mistake of considering validation a gift; it needs regulating principles, instruments and procedures; what regulates Spain as to the most recent laws on the recognition, certification and validation of vocational experiences is constituted by the distinction between the Central Administration and the regional one of the Autonomous Communities (CC.AA.).

As far as the Central Administration of the State is concerned, the greatest impulse has been given by the 2002 Organic Law (for vocational qualifications and training) and the 2006 Organic Law (for Education).

In addition to what has been previously mentioned, the 2002 Organic Law sets two instruments that are essential in order to achieve the objectives identified: the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications and the Register of Professional Qualifications. The former suggests the possible

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competencies required that might be assessed for marketability in the productive system; the latter specifies the professional exercise requiring an implementation of the process of recognition, certification, and validation. In order to guarantee objectivity and rigour, the first is in charge of the second (art.8.2).

The term “qualification” refers to a body of professional competencies acquired in a targeted way and “competencies” is a body of knowledge and skills essential for practicing a professional activity marketable in the production world. By providing a summary of what has been said up to now we aim to help the reader understanding what will follow:

- Learning, for the most part experiential (experience intended as theory of sense and meaning, of knowledge and competence; as theory of knowledge regardless of where and how it has been acquired, highlighting the practical aspects of the experience; as theory of the ability to learn, highlighting the cognitive aspects of the experience) and functional to the labour market requires setting in motion certifying strategies and procedures.
- Learning that has taken place in non-formal and informal situations, or, at any rate, on the workplace, and that constitutes a portfolio of competencies, involves the social partners.
- In the “formative pact” between the subjects and institutions entrusted with the recognition, certification and validation, the identification of clear and transferable methodologies and instruments plays a role of considerable importance.

With the following 2006 Organic Law on Education (LOE) with particular reference to chapter V on vocational training and chapter IX on adult education, the need to recognise and validate the work experience acquired in the work and/or social context is further stressed and insisted upon.

Box 11 – Legislation of the autonomous communities

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In Canarias: - see box 10

Comunidad Valenciana – Law 1/1995

- regulates formative programmes concerning training of adult individuals provides that with the aim of orientating and enrolling each individual in the cycle and in the educational level of basic training of adult persons, the teaching board of the centre will carry out an initial individual valuation, which will include aspects to do with knowledge, experiences, skills and procedures that each individual possesses. This initial valuation will enable each adult person to choose the formative path that best suits him/her on the basis of prior learning.

La Comunidad del País Vasco - “Plan Vasco de Formación Profesional” approved on April 22nd, 1997 and of an **Integrated System of Qualifications and Vocational Training** which is advancing, ever since the *Agencia de Cualificaciones*, and puts them in practice through a specific device of recognition and validation (**Decree 70/2004**) complying with a methodology and regulated procedures (*Resolución of September 27th 2004*).

La Comunidad Foral de Navarra – Agreement of April 4th, 2005 of the Navarra Government:

- sets the directive for the development of the *Sistema de Cualificaciones y Formación Profesional* in Navarra;
- establishes the basis of the relationship between the most representative social and economic agents of the Comunidad Foral;
- serves as the necessary reference for the actions that the different institutional organs dealing with aspects related to professional qualifications or initial, occupational or continuous training carry out.

The rest of the CCAA are beginning to apply the *Royal Decree 942/2003 of 18th July*, even if not with reference to the catalogue of qualifications.

Moreover, as has been previously mentioned, it highlights once again the agreements and protocols between the central government and the Autonomous Communities; the latter, in fact, are still in the experimental phase of application of the normative agreements; these communities include the País Vasco, the Foral de Navarra, the Generalidad de Cataluña communities and the Community of the Canary Islands. As far as the latter is concerned, we will discuss more at length the instruments identified and used during the implementation phase of the experimentation.

We will refer to boxes 2 - with the aim of illustrating the preparatory path, from the 2002 Organic Law up to the 2006 Organic Law, which occurred

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through the 2003 Royal Decrees 942 and 1128; 2004 Royal Decree 362; 2005 Royal Decrees 1416 and 1558.

Therefore, in Spain (and in the Autonomous Communities) the whole legislative path, between laws and decrees, converges on a leading and fundamental objective, which is to capitalize on the work experience of the individuals and on learning acquired also through non-formal routes. It is obviously the (Spanish State's) Central Government's task to give directives on the regulations concerning the conditions for the obtainment and certification of academic and vocational titles.

In this case, the coordination of single-objective actions is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science through the National Institute of Qualifications; the CC.AA., in addition to the question of education and training, are also responsible for the development of a general legislation through pilot-projects and the issuing of titles and certificates, in keeping, however, with the national legislation and with all that has been set by the EU.

The cooperation between the Companies, the Public Administration, the University, the Chambers of Commerce and other training organisms completes the picture of the implication and distribution of competencies.

2. Operational instruments and procedures for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Spain is currently implementing the above-mentioned procedural instruments. The ERA 03 project highlights some of the instruments that the CC.AA. are in the process of applying. To this day, we can regroup them according to three instrumental procedures, which recognise, certify and validate non-formal and informal learning:

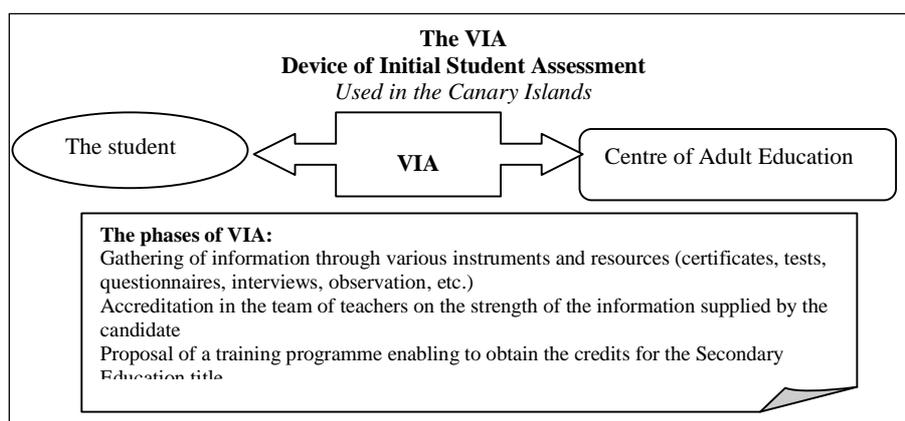
- Competence exams and open exams, tested against programmes corresponding to the type of titles "University access exams" destined to over-25s, in order to gain access to vocational training cycles and to obtain

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the title of specific vocational training technician and higher technician (Royal Decree 942/2003 of 18th July).

- The procedure of validation and recognition of competencies managed by the Vasca Agency for the Assessment of Competencies and the quality of the Vocational training set by decree 70/2004 of April 27th, re-examined and developed in September of the same year, by the Vice-Counsellor of Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning.
- The VIA (*Valoración Inicial del Alumno*) corresponding to the Initial Assessment of the Student and representing a two-way process: of consultation and of assessment, this process can last 2 or 3 weeks. The VIA interacts with the SAF, i.e., the Accreditation System. The VIA is a model used in the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands, in order to appraise the basic training of adult subjects.

Box 12 – The VIA



Note: in general in nearly all the courses approximately 60% of the students are assessed through VIA

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The preparation and gathering of the documents, of the instruments useful in order to certify and validate non-formal and informal learning, is featured in the OBSERVAL (European Observatory of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Leonardo Programme) and involves 24 EC Countries for which it constitutes a database for comparison and compatibility, the latter possibly transferable. Spain, in the person of the general coordinator Tomàs Diaz Gonzàles of the University of Valladolid (see box 13) acts as a leader for the rest of the EC Countries.

Box 13 - OBSERVAL

<p style="text-align: center;">OBSERVAL European Observatory of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning www.observal.net</p> <p style="text-align: center;">General objective: <i>To create a periodically updated database, available within the European Observatory and featuring documents and resources used by the European Countries for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which are accessible via internet</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The sectors of Observal in Spain: The Institute of Qualifications of the Autonomous Communities Universities with <i>Lifelong Learning</i> services Third sector: the worlds of businesses and trade unions Initial Vocational Training (in progress)</p>
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2.1. The case: Canary Islands

In Spain, as mentioned previously, the development of systems and experiences (including the pilot projects for the recognition of competencies) was given the greatest impulse by Royal Decree 375/1999 of March 5th, which, by establishing INCUAL (National Institute of Vocational Qualifications)

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under the authority of the General Council for Vocational Training, has given mandate, among other things, to define the role of qualifications, in terms of the necessary competencies, methodologies and procedures. It is useful to provide a collection of case studies relating to experiences, which can be divided into four procedural phases:

- 1) information and selection;
- 2) orientation;
- 3) assessment and accreditation;
- 4) training route.

A pilot-project in the Canary Islands was sanctioned by Decree 43/2003 of April 7th (BOC 28th April 2003) setting up the Canarian Institute of Professional Qualifications (ICCP) which, structurally, is not under the authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs but of the Canary Islands Training Council.

The aim of said institute is to “set the requirements for the recognition of professional qualifications in the Canary Islands” (art. 3) and it is entrusted with a very important task, i.e., defining the methods and criteria for the assessment of professional competencies, acquired both through training, and through experience (art. 5). The creation of systems for the accreditation of competencies rests instead with the Central Government (box 10).

In October 2006, complying with the Government’s request, the Institute of Professional Qualifications began the procedures relating to the recognition of competencies on the Islands.

Moreover, having considered that the driving forces of the economy of the Islands are the tourism and catering sectors, the Institute prepared a proposal focusing its attention on the qualification of Food Services Technician.

The proposal is known as the *Documento de Bases Metodológicas: Proyecto de carácter experimental para la evaluación, reconocimiento y acreditación en la cualificación de Cocina*, and represents the pilot project for the assessment, recognition and accreditation to be implemented between 2007 and 2008.

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The first step is the establishment of a Commission that:

- analyses the details of the experience;
- prepares the documents deemed useful, protocols included;
- plans the training of consultants capable of carrying out the monitoring and assessing of results.

It is important to understand that there is a difference between the competencies, the evidence pertaining to them, and the referent of the competencies. The first are defined according to knowledge, skills and abilities, the second contain the procedures, experiences and motivations of the individual requesting a professional profile, on the strength of work or life experiences he/she deems to have gained; lastly, the referent of the competencies is the document defining the official professional profile.

What aligns the pilot project of the Canary Islands with the central system of the Spanish government is the consideration of the fact that the recognised and accredited competencies of an individual are the ones he/she has acquired both during his/her professional/work-related lifespan and during his/her personal lifespan, the “personal” experience allowing to assess the ability of learning “to do something” as an autonomous and self-directed process.

As a matter of priority, even before clarifying the systems of recognition, accreditation and assessment of competencies in their strengths and weaknesses, we deem it essential to define their fields, i.e., the formal, non-formal and informal fields representing the “sites” of learning, as far as the statutory support is concerned.

The regulatory framework is made up of the following stages. The first stage is represented by a 1985 UNESCO ruling, articles 47, 54; the second stage is represented by the Hamburg Conference, concerning the implementation of formal and non-formal systems (UNESCO, 1997, article 10); the third stage is the perspective of continuous training (UNESCO, 1997, articles 21, 31; EC 2001, article 17).

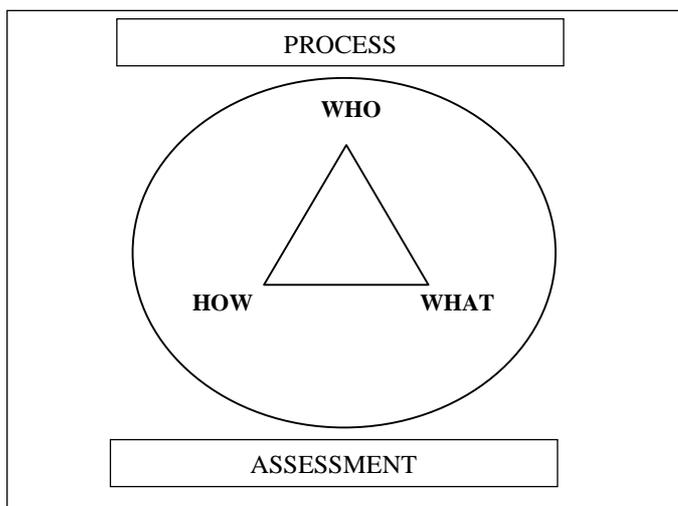
When talking about systems of accreditation of competencies it is necessary to relate and to refer to the systems of assessment having peculiar specificities

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determining the process known as validation. From a methodological and didactical standpoint, the triad resulting has as base what is assessed and how it is assessed and as apex who assesses (box 14).

- *what*: knowledge, skills that might lead to a total or partial reference certification; in the first case access to the title is direct, in the second the competence as regards the title is only partly recognised.
- *how*: a complex process articulated in several phases. The most important phase is orientation, where the candidate (the adult subject requesting it) prepares, under the guidance of a professional adviser, all the necessary documents, including observations, evidence, interviews, curricula... constituting the personal dossier.
- *who*: in general, professionals of the sector for which the certification is required.

Box 14 – The triad of the process



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Some of the strengths are the understanding of the process of accreditation, certification and validation as an important resource to reduce inequalities; as a mechanism for redressing the balance between supply and demand; as transferability that can foster the mobility of workers; as a way of overcoming the immobilism of the formal system of education and training, as a highly motivating role for adult education and continuous training (box 15).

Indeed, promoting national initiatives involving adults and their training paths for lifelong learning also means acting as stimulus to increasingly motivate those who, for various personal reasons, have not been able to obtain official recognition of study or vocational titles.

However, we should stress the fact that the Spanish government is preoccupied with the quality of the processes, which must vouch for the technical rigour, coherence and credibility of procedures in order to account for the reliability, tenability, transparency and marketability of the procedures.

The pilot project concerning the accreditation of competencies for the title of Food Services Technician in the Canary Islands has had two references: the ERA project for the accreditation of vocational competencies (developed at national level) and the accreditation system for adult training and education, that has focused on the accreditation of basic training developed in the Islands.

We have to acknowledge that these two backgrounds have influenced both the planning and the development of the Canarian pilot experience.

The ERA project served as a reference point for the methodologies of planning, documents, protocols and phases. In the Canary Islands, the project was introduced as an experiment in 2007, as an accreditation “model”.

As far as the system of accreditation of adult training and education is concerned, the almost ten years of experience of accreditation for the title of secondary education were invaluable, allowing to test and assess many of the protocols used during the planning process and in particular during the pilot project to ensure the coordination between the institutions and to give the due importance first of all to the training of the professionals involved in the accreditation processes.

Therefore, the dimension of the experiment follows the direction:

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- of the assessment, i.e., of the collection of evidence to assess whether the applicant has the competencies needed for the qualifications;
- of the recognition, meaning that the competencies are compared with the referents of the qualification, regardless of the possibility that they might have been acquired through processes of formal, non-formal or informal learning.
- of the accreditation, which is the final certification through formal and official exams of the qualifications of vocational licence attesting that the candidate possesses the competencies needed for the qualification requested.

The project, developed during 2003-2004, has been structured according to three phases:

- 1) a first stage of awareness and positioning, during which the orientation and the development of the candidate are carried out through a dossier of competencies;
- 2) a second stage of intervention in the context of assessment;
- 3) a third stage of accreditation.

The main documents that have been set up for the experience of development and to support the assessment methodology have been *the guidelines for the candidates* (if the applicant is acquainted with the whole system and the characteristics of the process) *the advisor's Guide* (where the profile, the duties and the tasks of guidance, during the awareness and positioning phase, are defined) and *the Reviewer's Guide* (in which, in addition to the profile and the duties of this professional figure, explains the use of guiding evidence during the process of assessment of the competition).

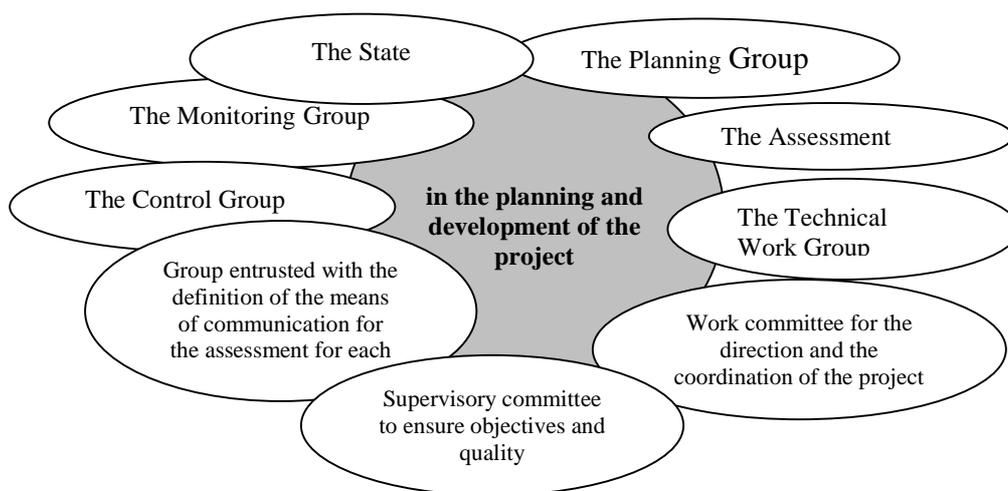
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Box 15 – The Canarian and Spanish legislation concerning the recognition of prior learning

Legal Norms	Content and articles
General Law of Education (BOE, 1970)	Access to University after the age of 25 (art. 36.3) Access to University after the age of 25 (art. 53,5)
General Organic Law on the organization of the Education System (BOE, 1990)	Free access tests for qualifications (art. 52,3, 53,4)
Organic Law on the quality of education (BOE, 2002)	Access to University after the age of 25 (54,6) Free access tests for qualifications (art. 53,3, 54,4)
Organic Law on Vocational qualifications and training (BOE, 2002)	The recognition, assessment, accreditation and registration of qualifications (art. 8)
Organic Law on education (BOE, 2006)	Access to University after the age of 25 (art. 69,6) Free access tests for qualifications (art. 68,2, 69,4) Validation of learning (art. 66.4)
Law on universities (BOE, 2007)	Conditions for the validation, for academic purposes, of the experience related to occupation or training (art. 36)
Labour Law (BOE, 2003)	Vocational and continuous training programmes (art. 25.2)
Law on the education of individuals and on lifelong learning concerning Canarian Adults (BOC, 2003)	Accreditation as a resource, a principle education and the planning programme (art. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 e 22)
Rules regulating partial teaching of Vocational Training in the Canary Islands (BOC, 1997)	Regulates the accreditation systems for issuing the state of access for partial teaching Training.
Decree on the Curriculum for Basic Training of Adults in the Canary Islands (BOC, 1998).	Creates the system of formative accreditation for the obtainment of the title of qualification of Secondary Education for Adults.
Rules for the creation of systems of accreditation for 2007 in the field of professional training (BOC, 2007).	Regulates, on trial, the accreditation for the vocational competencies for the qualification of Food Services Technician
Rules for the creation of systems of accreditation for 2008 in the field of vocational training (BOC, 2008).	Regulates, on trial, the accreditation of vocational competencies for the certificates of Cooking technician, technical services technician, Restaurant and Bar technician, and electrical, equipment and systems technician

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Box 16 - Bodies involved in the planning and development of the pilot project in the Canary Islands



302 candidates took part in the project to obtain accreditation in the following Professions: Kitchen, Restaurant and Bar, Body, Maintenance and Services, electrical energy, household assistance, Barber, Gardner, tile fixer. Of all the candidates distributed among the seven Autonomous Communities who took part in the experiment 235, (78%) obtained full accreditation; 35 (12%) partial accreditation while only 32 (11%) did not obtain the accreditation (source: Technical Working Group ERA Project, 2004: 71). In light of these results, it seems that the feedback has been very positive and successful for most of the candidates, whose expectations have been fulfilled.

On the other hand, as far as the overall assessment of the experience is concerned, the results of this experimental project have allowed not only to define a common framework of action and shared principles, accepted by all

the participating institutes, but, above all, to start developing a practical and accessible methodology, with a high degree of acceptance, that has received valid and reliable instruments to assess the competence of the candidates.

3. Presentation of the most important instruments⁶⁵ used in Spain for the accreditation path

One of the documents drafted by the working group of the Food Services Technician pilot project is the text called *Orientation and Assessment Handbook*, describing the guidelines to follow for the vast process of recognition and accreditation, as well as the use of the various documents.

The handbook contains the work methodology adopted for the entire pilot experience.

As previously mentioned, as set by the regulations, the phases regulating the pilot project are four:

1. information and selection,
2. orientation,
3. assessment and accreditation,
4. the learning path.

We will focus on the orientation phase and on the assessment and accreditation phase, which are the ones most discussed in the handbook, considered a guide for the work of consultants and assessors.

Hence, we proceed with the presentation of the various documents and instruments used by professionals, operators and assessors during these two phases.

⁶⁵ The instruments and materials featured have been extrapolated by Cristina Miranda Santana's and Oscar Medina Fernández's work "*Los Sistemas de Reconocimiento y Acreditación de Competencias. La experiencia piloto de Canarias: acreditación para el título de Técnico en Cocina*", Instituto Canario de las Cualificaciones Profesionales, Gobierno de Canarias, 2009.

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3.1. *The orientation phase*

The orientation phase sees as main referent the professional competence and the figure of the counsellor (*orientador*) charged with the assessment of competencies during the initial phase.

It is a preliminary assessment of the candidate, called diagnostic assessment, which is useful to decide if the candidate can move on to the following assessment and accreditation phase and to prepare him/her to successfully pass it.

Box 17 – The initial questions of the orientator

- What type of job or training can supply sufficient evidence to be associated with the blocks and units of competence or to be considered final abilities of the transversal modules?
- is any form of experience or training acceptable?
- which blocks or units of competence of the title requested are assumed to have been acquired by the candidate, through experience gained on the workplace or non-formal training, before requesting the corresponding accreditation?

In order to answer the preliminary questions linking experience and training to the blocks and units of competence required by the title, the counsellor uses three enclosed documents enabling him/her to rigorously apply what can be accredited to his/her candidate in terms of specific units of competence, blocks and transversal modules.

The first of the enclosed documents includes a list of potential professional categories in which the candidates might find place, along with the related competencies (blocks) on the strength of which, based on the tasks carried out, the candidates can request accreditation.

An example is table no. 1, which highlights, in the right-hand column, the blocks for the accreditation that it is possible to request based on the experience gained (Professional categories and duties).

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Enclosed document no. 2 contains the list of possible training activities already acquired and documented and, as in the previous case, the competencies (blocks) that the candidate can request for the accreditation through training activities. As can be observed from table no. 2, in consideration of the training received (in this case it is a certificate of professional competence) the right-hand column features a summary of the blocks of competence for which it is possible to request accreditation.

Table 1 – Extract from enclosed document 1 on the relationship between job and Units of competence, blocks and modules.

PROFESSIONAL CATEGORIES AND DUTIES	BLOCKS OF COMPETENCE ASSOCIATED WITH THE TITLE
1.....	1.....
2.....	2.....
3.....	3.....

Table 2 – Extract from enclosed document 2 on the relationship between job and Units of competence, blocks and modules.

TRAINING DOCUMENTS RECEIVED (CERTIFICATES...)	BLOCKS OF COMPETENCE ASSOCIATED WITH THE TITLE
1.....	1.....
2.....	2.....
3.....	3.....

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Table 3 – Criteria for evidence to be considered sufficient in the validation of experiences and training process

CRITERIA FOR WORK EXPERIENCE EVIDENCE TO BE CONSIDERED SUFFICIENT	CRITERIA FOR RECEIVED TRAINING EVIDENCE TO BE CONSIDERED SUFFICIENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of autonomy for job performances and contained in the Self-Assessment Questionnaire that contains the set coefficient within the answers. • The work experience must have lasted at least three years, be supported by documents and be related to the title • The work experience must have contributed to the development of the business, must have required unquestionable commitment from the candidate and confirm the competencies acquired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of autonomy for job performances and contained in the Self-Assessment Questionnaire that contains the set coefficient within the answers. • The training must amount to at least 400 hours and be related to the title • The training received must have resulted in the obtainment of a certificate and the candidate must be capable of satisfying the requests of the counsellor

Naturally everything must be duly supported by documents; the use of enclosed documents 1 and 2 is of value only if the candidate has sufficient evidence of his/her experiential and formative path.

It should be clear that said evidence is of no value if the experiences and the training activities do not fulfil the criteria for sufficient evidence, as explained in the third of the enclosed documents, shown in table no. 3.

We must stress that most of the evidence concerning the candidate's competence in the orientation phase is indirect evidence (i.e., obtained during the answers to the Self-Assessment Questionnaire and during the compilation of the Dossier of Competencies); evidence that, in the final analysis, together with the Dossier of competencies, is accompanied by the release of a series of documents, reports, statements and answers from the candidate.

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Box 18 – The orientation phase

Duration: 2 months

1ST MEETING – WELCOME (group meeting)

Participants: *orientador* and candidates (no. 8-12)

Duration: 2 hours

Activities:

- the candidates introduce themselves;
- The *orientador* explains the system of recognition and accreditation of competencies;
- The candidates submit the documents required for the registration stage (Curriculum vitae, report concerning working life, business licences, academic titles, training certificates...);
- The *orientador* introduces and hands out the: Self-Assessment Questionnaire and the Dossier of Competencies;
- The *orientador* gives organizational and logistical information for the following meeting.

2ND MEETING – DIAGNOSTIC INTERVIEWS (individual meeting)

Participants: *orientador* and candidate

Duration: varies depending on the candidate's ability to answer questions about the questionnaire and the dossier

Activities:

- The *orientador* interviews the candidate on the self-assessment questionnaire and the dossier in order to gather evidence for the competition based on each of the units and Blocks of competence and modules
- the counsellor and the candidate associate the work experience and training received (obtained through certificates, diplomas, reports, documents, interviews, etc.) with regard to the blocks of competence and the modules of the Title;
- the counsellor and the candidate verify the applicability in each of the evidence of the criteria for evidence to be considered sufficient featured in enclosed document no. 3 of the handbook.
- The *orientador* concludes with a report on the candidate (enclosed document no. 4) in which the counsellor introduces the candidate to the assessment Report team coordinator and explains the conclusions he/she has reached.

3RD MEETING – THE INTERVIEW (workshop)

Participants: *orientador* and candidate

Duration: varies depending on the discussion

Activities

(The *orientador* has already written the orientation report (points 1,2,3, and 4 final form and the rest of the basic intermediate) and a first draft of the Training Plan and has been announced to the Coordinator):

- The *orientador* acquaints the candidate with the entire orientation path (objectives, methodologies...);
- The candidate gives the counsellor a *Guidance Report* illustrating the evidence for the different blocks of Competence and modules;
- A discussion with the applicant concerning the temporary content of the training Plan featuring an outline of the training path.
- The session ends with the signatures of the candidate, in connection with the corresponding section;
- The workshop ends informing the candidate about the purposes and about the methodology to be followed during the following phase of the assessment.

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Box 19 – The final questions of the orientator and the points to examine

The final questions of the orientator:

- Which units, Blocks of competence and modules can be assessed and certified in the phase that follows?
- what type of training should the candidate acquire from this point onwards to obtain new evidence for the competencies not accredited?

The points to examine:

- The level of knowledge of the candidates in answering the questionnaire and its influence in supplying evidence.
- The compliance of the documents submitted (the evidence) with the conditions of the enclosed documents 1, 2 and 3 of the present handbook.
- Whether further clarifications or consultations with the coordinator of the assessment group are necessary or not.
- Finally, with the approval of the coordinator, the counsellor's analysis results in the orientation Report, which is initially compiled temporarily only in paragraphs 1,2,3, 4 and following, depending on the agreement with the candidates, and which is completed during the next meeting. The assessment group cannot establish an agreement between the guarantor and the coordinator

3.1.1. The instruments of the orientation phase

a. The registration form (La Ficha de Inscripción)

After the opening of the process of accreditation of competencies, the workers interested must submit the participation request. The Registration Form is the first document that the candidate fills in. It contains his/her personal data and indicates that the first selection has been passed, according to the requirements of the announcement.

b. The self-assessment questionnaire (El Cuestionario de Autoevaluación)

The self-assessment questionnaire is an instrument through which the candidate analyses him/herself. It is a path of introspection aimed at making the

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candidate aware of his/her profile and competencies. It makes it easier to subsequently collect the documents required (*Evidencias*).

The questionnaire requires the candidate to quantify for each block of competencies the level of competence acquired on the basis of standards.

Depending on the type of answer, it identifies four levels of autonomy:

- (1) incapable of developing the competence;
- (2) capable of developing it if supervised by a senior;
- (3) capable of developing it with minimum supervision;
- (4) completely independent in the development of the competence.

For example, in table no. 4 we can see the structure of the questionnaire. Each of the questions that the candidate must answer has to be associated with his/her level of mastery of the profession (1, 2, 3, o 4) which reveals whether he/she received (or did not receive) training on this theme. The Dossier must feature sufficient evidence to support said answer. The table shows a weighting number, against which the candidate's answer can be assessed positively or not.

c. The Dossier of Competencies (El Dossier de Competencias)

The Dossier of Competencies is a document intended for the candidate, that he/she uses to organize and systematize the certificates (documents, reports, diplomas, degrees, etc.), to state the competencies he/she possesses and the ones he/she wishes to see accredited. Naturally most of the evidence contained in the document is indirect.

The following information is requested in the Dossier:

- 1) The personal data of the candidate;
- 2) His/her current employment situation;
- 3) The reasons for requesting the accreditation;
- 4) The expectations (personal, training, employment, etc.);
- 5) The difficulties encountered in the Self-Assessment Questionnaire;
- 6) The official studies (formal training);
- 7) The training received (non-formal training);
- 8) The knowledge of other languages (formal, non-formal, informal);

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Box 20 – Registration form

REGISTRATION FORM

PERSONAL DATA:	
Surname:	Name:
Residence:	Date of birth:
Address:	
Locality:	Province:
Phone no. 1:	Phone no. 2:
E-mail:	
Most recent title of study:	
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ENROLMENT IN THE RECOGNITION PROCEDURE	
I enclose the following documents: Original or photocopy (cross)	
Proof of identity	
Certificate of	
Courses and training	
Other:	
Current employment situation: Employed Company:	
Unemployed Since:	
AFTER HAVING CHECKED THE DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED AND HAVING VERIFIED THE DATA STATED, CONCLUDE BY INDICATING THE METHOD OF PARTICIPATION TO THE EXAMS OF THE FORMATIVE MODULES OF THE TITLE, ACQUIRED FROM PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING.	

Full examination for all modules:
 Partial examination for the following modules:

The assessment centre:

Applicant's signature	Place/Date.....
-----------------------	-----------------

Send to: Istituto Canario de Cualificaciones Profesionales

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- 9) The work experience (informal training);
- 10) The processes of self-learning (informal training);
- 11) The reports on the competencies managed by other individuals and institutions;
- 12) The description of the professional life with relation to the competence blocks, units and modules;
- 13) Other useful information.

Table 2 shows an extract of a competence Dossier.

In general, the first three right-hand columns are shared by all the sections of the Dossier.

The fifth column describes the type of document used as evidence (if it is a certificate or a diploma, if it is official or not, if it is a letter or another kind of document, etc...). The sixth column shows the block of competence for which, on the basis of the evidence, the accreditation is requested.

Finally, the number of the last column serves the purpose of facilitating all the bureaucratic procedures, since the same number is written also in the reference document for a rigorous identification.

d. The orientation Report (El Informe de Orientación)

The Report is an instrument to guide the actions of the *counsellor* (who is responsible for the compilation and the signature) and to inform the assessment commission about the candidates and the results of the orientation phase.

In this report, for each competence block, unit, and module it is necessary to record the evidence supplied by the candidate for the competencies and the accreditation requested.

By means of this Report the candidate can find out which are the competencies and the knowledge involved in the assessment and certification phases.

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Table 4 – Extract from the Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Units of Competence	Blocks of Competence, objectives and realization criteria	Level of personal mastery				Weighting	Training YES - NO	Dossier No.
		1	2	3	4			
1.	1st Block of competence:							
	Can you.....?					3		
	Are you capable of....?					3		
	Could you....?					...		
	2nd Block of competence:							
	Can you.....?					3		
	Are you capable of....?					3		
Could you....?					...			
2.	1st Block of competence:							

Table 5 – Extract from the Dossier of Competencies relating to point 7

Evidence on training received (non formal Education)						
Title of the course or formative action	Institute	Year	Number of hours	Type of Document	Block/Module of competence	No.

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In drawing up his/her report the orientator considers the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, the Dossier of Competencies and the various interviews carried out.

The paragraphs contained in the orientation report are:

- 1) The candidate's personal data;
- 2) The agenda of the meetings with the candidate;
- 3) The recording of interviews with the candidates and the counsellor;
- 4) The evidence submitted by the candidate;
- 5) The blocks of competence that the candidate wishes to see accredited
- 6) The modules that the candidate wishes to see accredited
- 7) The candidate's compliance
- 8) The proposal with the guidelines for moving on to the assessment phase
- 9) Comments

3.2. The assessment and accreditation phases

In every system of recognition and accreditation of competencies the assessment phase is of fundamental importance because it states what has been decided previously in the orientation phase as regards the competencies and knowledge of the candidate.

This is a phase involving other professionals, whose task is to express a definitive assessment opinion on the blocks and units of competence and the modules recognised and accredited to the candidate.

The accreditation path does not come to completion with the total or partial acquisition of the credit, on the contrary, the results obtained allow the assessor to prepare for the candidate a formative path answering his/her requirements according to the candidate's life plan.

In the orientation and assessment phases, the candidate must be able to see him/herself as responsible for and protagonist of the process, but must also perceive the assessor as a professional assessing his knowledge, competencies and values in clear and pre-established

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conditions and on the strength of evidence allowing a fair assessment criterion.

Table 6 – Extract from a candidate’s orientation report relating to point 4 (the evidence)

No. (Dossier of Competencies and of Registration at entry)	Satisfactory/Not Satisfactory

Table 7: Extract of the assessment report with regard to point 3 (the opinion)

3. Analysis of the orientation report and the opinion of the recognition proposal			
Cross according to the option selected			
Unit of Competence	<i>Satisfactorily accredited</i>	<i>Integrate with additional evidence</i>	<i>Not accredited</i>
UC 1.			
BC 1.1.			
BC 1.2.			
BC 1.3.			

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Box 21 – The assessment and accreditation phase

Duration: 2 months

1ST MEETING – FIRST INTERVIEW FOR INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT

Participants: assessor and candidate

Duration: 2 hours (an hour spent talking with the candidate and another hour for the assessor to systematize the data)

Activities:

(the assessor has already consulted with the *orientador* and has discussed the different information on the candidate obtained from the orientation report, the Dossier of competencies and the answers to the Self-assessment questionnaire and the results of the interview)

- The assessor welcomes the candidate, introduces himself and begins the interview with a brief informal discussion on the experience of the orientation phase;
- the assessor asks the candidate, with regard to the orientation Report, the motivations and the related documents concerning his/her decision on the subject of the accreditation of competencies;
- the assessor explains to the candidate the collection of evidence programme.

2ND MEETING – INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT TESTS OR EXAMS

Participants: assessor and candidate

Duration: 2 hours (an hour spent talking with the candidate and another hour for the assessor to systematize the data)

Activities:

- The candidate reaches the session after approximately 10 days during which he/she has prepared for the test and has signed the assessment form supplied by the assessor.

The process to be followed can be:

- The assessor receives the candidate in an office or a laboratory.
- The assessor adopts the Guiding Plan for evidence and explains the procedure that the assessment will follow;
- The candidate carries out the test or the exams related to the collection plans;
- After the restitution the assessor comments the exam with the candidate (judgments, expectations, difficulties);
- Finally, an appointment is given to the candidate, within a timeframe not exceeding 10 days, so that he/she can find out the outcome
- The results of the tests are collected explicitly in the relevant collection of Evidence Plan, resulting in the assessment Report (to be compiled in section 4)
- The assessor finishes writing the Assessment Report (introduced in paragraph 5), which is the final act of the process of recognition and of accreditation of the competence.

3RD MEETING – FINAL ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW

Participants: assessor and candidate

Duration: 2 hours (an hour spent talking with the candidate and another hour for the assessor to systematize the data)

Activities:

- The assessor explains the assessment of the test to the candidate;
- The assessor introduces the candidate's report on the way in which the accredited units and/or blocks have been recorded and requests the candidate's personal assessment of the whole process;
- If the candidate has obtained the accreditation of all the units of competence and of all the modules and possesses the conditions for the certificate (access to secondary education or equivalent) the request for the title is communicated to the competent authority, so that the candidate's competence can be publicly recognized as well as recorded;
- If the candidate has not obtained accreditation for every unit of competence and module required, it is at this point that it is possible to complete the accreditation with a training plan, introducing the training path that can lead to the Degree or the title of secondary education.

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3.3. *Gli strumenti della fase di valutazione e accreditamento*

a. The Plan for the Obtainment of Evidence (El Plan de Obtención de Evidencias)

The purpose of this plan is to collect the evidence allowing the assessor to carry out the accreditation procedure for the units, blocks and modules of transversal competence.

The Plan is made up of six sections that the assessor must fill in, assisted by the Guide of Evidence (*Guia de Evidencias*):

- 1) The candidate's personal data;
- 2) The elements used as evidence (if they are not sufficient it is possible to request additional evidence);
- 3) Identification of the missing evidence concerning knowledge, competencies and abilities (*Guia de Evidences 1.1*)
- 4) Identification of the sources and techniques that will be used to gather the evidence;
- 5) Further evidence: description of evidence (*Guia de Evidences 2.1 and 2.2*); competencies, knowledge and abilities inherent in the evidence (*Guia de Evidences 1.2*); assessment criteria (*Curriculum*); control/development list; expected time taken for completion; the tasks for the assessor and the candidate;
- 6) Place, date;
- 7) The Report on the results;
- 8) The content of the assessment form (for the candidates)

The Training Plan is made up of the following sections:

- 1) The candidate's personal data
- 2) The training needs with relation to the units of competence required
- 3) The training needs with relation to the transversal modules;
- 4) The training needs with relation to the condition of access (Secondary Education)

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- 5) The information concerning the centres and the offers
- 6) A commentary
- 7) The candidate's conformity with the training plan.

b. The assessment report (El informe de valoración)

The aim of the assessment report is to certify the unit of competence and the transversal modules that the candidate has been able to prove to have acquired during the entire process. The report collects what follows:

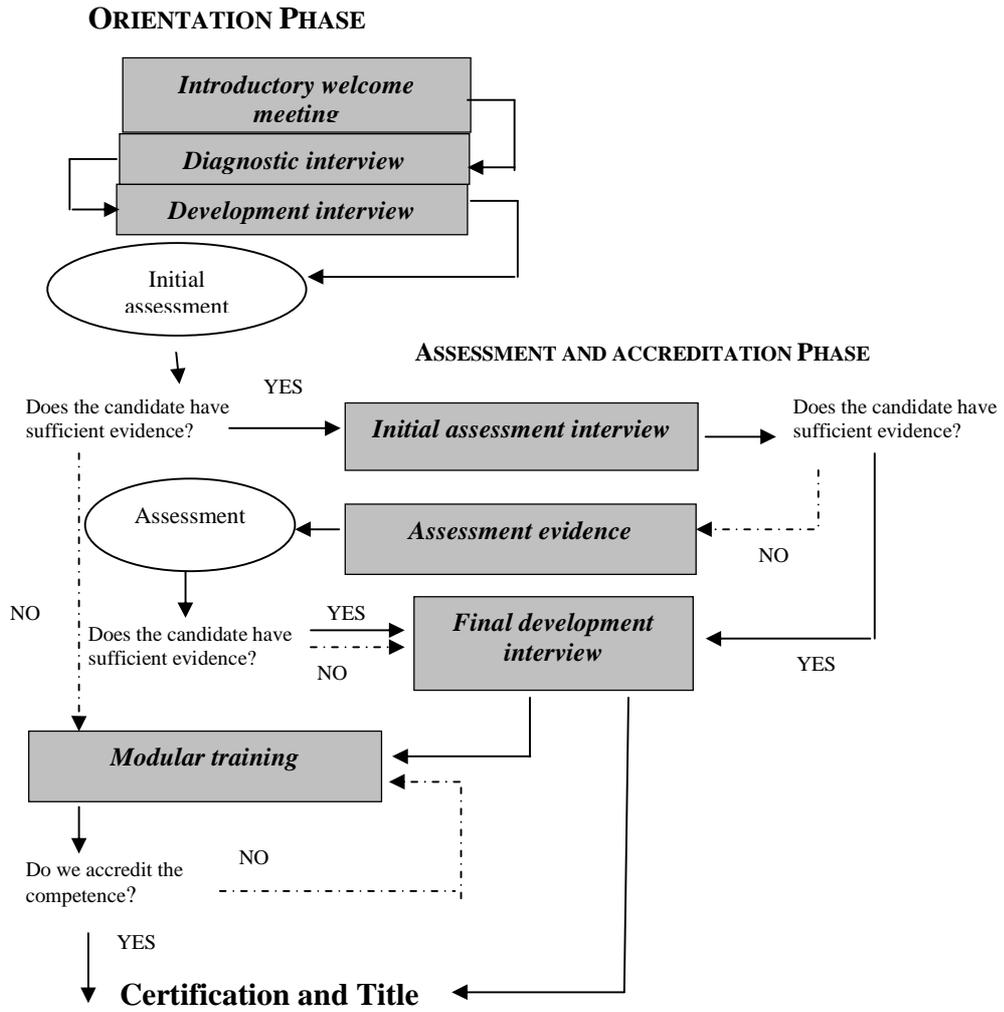
- 1) The candidate's personal data;
- 2) The agenda of the meetings with the candidate;
- 3) The analysis of the orientation report and the opinion on the recognition proposal;
- 4) On the whole, the results obtained by the candidate during the process of acquisition of further evidence;
- 5) A verdict on the eligibility for the assessment and on the accredited and certified transversal modules;

c. The training Plan (El Plan de Formación)

The training Plan is the document used by the counsellor to inform the candidate about the competencies and knowledge detected. It emphasizes where he/she must extend his/her training so as to gain, afterwards, the accreditation and the obtainment of the title. The training plan, by mutual consent between the counsellor and the candidate, epitomizes the formative priority of the subject.

Hence, this is a unique training plan executed in two phases: in the orientation phase it is compiled by the counsellor temporarily and in the assessment phase it is completed by the assessor.

Box 22 – Organization chart for the orientation and assessment phases



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Sitografia

Europa

Bologna Process Website: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>

CampusOne: <http://www.campusone.it>

Cedefop: www.trainingvillage.gr

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA): www.chea.org/default.asp

European Accreditation of Certification (EAC): www.european-accreditation.org

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA): www.enqa.eu

European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE): <http://eurashe.eu>

European Commission: www.europa.eu.int

European Training Foundation: www.etf.eu.int

European University for Continuing Education Network: www.eucen.org

Europass,

<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/hornav/Glossary/GlossaryApp/navigate.action>

Glossario:

Progetto Tuning: <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu>

Italia

Bologna Promoters, sito italiano: <http://www.processodibologna.it/>

Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane: www.cruoi.it

Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione Professionale dei Lavoratori – Isfol: www.isfol.it

Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca: <http://www.miur.it>

Ministero del Lavoro, della Salute e delle Politiche Sociali: <http://www.lavoro.gov.it/lavoro/>

Sito italiano di Diploma Supplement: <http://www.europass-italia.it/scelta3.asp>

APPENDIX

Francia

Legislazione: www.legisfrance.gouv.fr

Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale: www.education.gouv.fr

Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois, Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi:
www.anpe.fr