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MODEL FOR EXTENDED METHODOLOGY FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING WITH ASPECTS OF QUALITY ASSUANCE

-FINAL-
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1. Introduction

The project “TowaRd market-based skills for sustAlNable Energy Efficient construction” is EU funded project under HORIZON 2020 programme, topic: Construction skills, Type of action: CSA Coordination and support action.

Overall objective is to increase the number of skilled building professionals according to recommendations from National qualification roadmap (http://buildupskills.mk/images/Publikacii/Roadmap/EN_Roadmap_BUS-MK.pdf) concerning two priorities, training of 4,500 building professionals and blue collar workers and overcoming barriers for implementation of EE measures in operation and maintenance.

Three specific objectives are set up as:

(1) Upgrading two qualification schemes for technicians, building managers and engineers and development of large scale of training schemes for 5 blue collar qualifications and two RES occupations (designers and installers) by establishing the Knowledge Centre for support in development of sustainable EE market-based construction skills with annual capacity to replicate it to 10 training providers and 600 qualified construction workers (200 through training and 400 through recognition of previous learning);

(2) Increasing awareness of building professionals for use of Building Information Modelling (BIM) tools, in order to achieve the desired multidisciplinary approach in construction that should result with reduction in the gap between designed and actual energy performance through improved quality of construction in specific projects and to achieve measurable energy savings and improved quality of indoor environment;

(3) Improved market recognition of skills in the building sector and enhancing collaboration across different professional groups and introducing methodology for mutual recognition of skills with three EU countries (Greece, Slovenia and Croatia).

The TRAINEE consortium consists of 6 partners, 5 from Macedonia: ECM - Economic Chamber of Macedonia; ZBK Kreacija - Association of business and consultancy; UKIM Ss Cyril and Methodius University, with the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technologies; EIM - Engineering institution of Macedonia; AEC - Adult Education Centre; and 1 partner from Spain: BIM Academy-WITS Institute from Barcelona.

The project will produce five categories of deliverables (products): (a) Publications (study, survey, report); (b) RPL Methodology; (c) Training programs and materials; (d) BIM software; (e) Assessment procedures.

This document is Deliverable # 2.4 and it presents the comprehensive document describing the process of recognition of previous learning – RPL in general manner,
which can successfully be implemented for any occupation including the occupations related to construction. The Methodology that is developed is build upon the previously developed methodology for recognition of previously obtained nonformal and informal learning, for five occupations in construction sector, related to implementation of energy efficiency measures, developed and successfully piloted during BUS pillar II project BEET [www.beet.mk]. This is upgraded document describing the process of RPL in general manner and it can easily be used for recognition and validation of skills that correspond to higher levels of NQF, namely level V and level VI. Special aspects for quality assurance target not only the process of RPL, and the procedures for implementation, but also the whole system that enables recognition of previously acquired knowledge and skills. The document will be the basis for developing the system for RPL within the Knowledge and skills management Centre, established within TRAINEE project, where piloting of the developed Methodology will be conducted. Therefore, a complete set of documents, forms and guidelines for implementation of the process will be developed and structured in the deliverable D2.5 RPL assessment materials, which represents complementary document to this one.

### 1.1 Glossary of key terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>The official approval of achievement standards, including qualifications or unit(s) of a qualification, usually for a particular period of time, as being able to meet particular requirements defined by an accrediting agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accredited qualifications</td>
<td>Qualifications which have been granted approval by an accrediting agency or body as having met specific requirements or standards of quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrediting agency/body</td>
<td>Accrediting agencies/bodies are those competent bodies (such as national qualifications agencies, national accreditation agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies with the responsibility to approve qualifications) that manage program and qualifications accreditation under national legislation. Accrediting agencies function within a quality assurance system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Achievement standards         | Statements approved and formalised by a competent body, which define the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved. A distinction can be made between competency, educational, occupational or certification standards:  
  - Competency standard refers to the knowledge, skills and/or competencies linked to practising a job;  
  - Educational standard refers to statements of learning objectives, content of curricula, entry requirements and resources required to meet learning objectives; |
Assessment standard refers to statements of learning outcomes to be assessed and methodology used;

Occupational standard refers to statements of activities and tasks related to a specific job and to its practise; and,

Certification standard refers to statements of rules applicable to obtaining a qualification (e.g. certificate or diploma) as well as the rights conferred

Certification

The process of issuing a certificate, diploma or title of learning outcomes formally attesting that a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard

Certification schemes

Certification schemes are competence and other requirements related to specific occupational categories. Certification schemes may result in a certificate indicating that the person has fulfilled requirements, or be included in a qualification

Certifying and/or awarding body

Body issuing qualifications (e.g. certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognizing the achievement of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure

Competence

Competence is an ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes:

- Cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially;
- Functional competence (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area;
- Personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and,
- Ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values

Competency standard

Statement approved and formalised by a competent body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved. Competency standard refers to the knowledge, skills and/or competencies linked to practising a job

Formal learning

Learning that takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma. This includes the systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education.

Informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning may be unintentional from the learner’s
### Learning outcomes

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.

### Non-formal learning

Learning that takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships). It may cover programmes to impart work-skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers. Very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured online learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public.

### Occupational standard

Statement approved and formalised by a competent body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved. Occupational standard refers to statements of activities and tasks related to a specific job and to its practice.

### Provider

An organisation that plans and delivers education/training and assessment services that often leads to the award of qualifications or components of qualifications.

### Qualification

Qualification is a formal certificate issued by an official agency, in recognition that an individual has been assessed as achieving learning outcomes or competencies to the standard specified for the qualification title, usually a type of certificate, diploma or degree. Learning and assessment for a qualification can take place through workplace experience and/or a program of study. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labor market and in further education and training.

### Qualifications framework

An instrument for the development and classification of qualifications (e.g. at national or sectoral level) according to a set of criteria (e.g. using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes.

### Qualifications systems

Qualifications system includes all aspects of a country’s activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labor market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and...
Quality assurance is a component of quality management and is focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled. In relation to education and training services, quality assurance refers to planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in the design, delivery and award of qualifications within an education and training system. Quality assurance ensures stakeholders’ interests and investment in any accredited program are protected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality assurance framework</th>
<th>A set of principles, guidelines, tools and standards that act as a reference for guiding the consistent application of quality assurance activities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Quality indicators</td>
<td>Formally recognised figures or ratios used as yardsticks to judge and assess quality performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality principles</td>
<td>Overall intentions and direction of a quality framework or an organisation with regard to quality assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality standards</td>
<td>Technical specifications which are measurable and have been drawn up by consensus and approved by an organisation recognised at regional, national or international levels. The purpose of quality standards is optimisation of input and/or output of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality assurance system</td>
<td>Quality assurance system includes all aspects of a country’s activity related to assuring the quality of education and training. These systems include the following elements:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Clear and measurable objectives and standards, guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;</td>
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<td>- Appropriate resources;</td>
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<td>- Consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;</td>
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<td>- Feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement; and,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Widely accessible evaluation results</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Formal recognition is the process of granting official learning outcomes status to skills and competences either through:</td>
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<td>- Awarding of qualifications (certificates, diploma or titles) as a result of assessment, or</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Granting of equivalence, credit units or waivers, validation of gained skills and/or competences.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social recognition is the acknowledgement of the value of skills and/or competences by economic and social stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referencing</td>
<td>Referencing is a process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the national qualifications framework and that of a regional qualifications framework</td>
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</table>
Registering agencies are those competent bodies responsible for approving education and training providers, e.g., national qualifications agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies. Registering agencies function within a quality assurance system.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Registering agency</th>
<th>Registration of providers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Registering agencies include formal acknowledgement by a registering agency that a provider meets relevant quality standards. Under NQFs it is usual for a provider to be registered in order to deliver and assess accredited programs and issue awards. Some agencies differentiate between the two processes, e.g.:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Formal acknowledgement that the provider meets key generic standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Formal acknowledgement that the provider meets specific standards related to the provision of teaching, learning and assessment of a specific program</td>
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Validation

A process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard. It consists of four distinct phases: (1) identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual, (2) documentation – to make visible the individual's experiences – (3) a formal assessment of these experiences and (4) recognition leading to a certification for example a partial or full qualification.
1.2 Purpose of the Methodology

People are gaining knowledge every day, and this happens always and everywhere. Every experience gained leads to new skill, knowledge and / or competence.

Although learning usually takes place through formal education, which is always organized, planned and with clearly defined goals, much of the knowledge is acquired through non-formal or informal education. Informal knowledge is often equated with the experience gained from everyday life.

For people, especially adults who are outside the formal education or non-formal education system, the knowledge and skills acquired at home, in the workplace or in everyday experience are more important, relevant and meaningful sometimes than even the knowledge acquired in formal education, education. However, learning that takes place outside the formal education system is not sufficiently understood, nor visible, and therefore not valued sufficiently.

There is a growing awareness (especially in EU countries) that informal knowledge is a rich source of human values, ie capital. Most people are not even aware of their own value, ie. for the capital they possess through their knowledge or are unable to fully utilize it because they cannot prove their abilities and knowledge. Therefore, recognizing and validating the RESULTS of non-formal and informal learning makes human values more visible and therefore more valuable.

This text is a guide through the process of validating informal and informal learning and is intended to:

- Assessors
- candidates and potential candidates
- employers
- accredited training providers

The methodology should help assessors organize and implement an applicable process of validation of knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal education and will provide support to employers and candidates by providing good information and familiarity with the entire validation procedure.

The methodology is an additional training material for Certified Assessor Training to become familiar with key aspects of quality assessment practice, including the principles of assessment and the application of a wide range of assessment methods.

The methodology is suitable for implementation for different occupation, by different sectors, as it is designed in general manner, and can be used as a guidance also for validation skills for different levels of qualifications. However its implementation will differ according to the national legislation set regarding the process of recognition and validation of previous learning.
1.3 Deffinition of Recognition of prior learning

Technological innovations and the availability of more recent information increasingly enable access to knowledge and skills development through informal training organized in non-formal education and through informal ad-hoc learning. Informal learning, which occurs within the everyday experience of both young people and adults, derives from their activities and is not the result of a planned educational process. It is increasingly certain that this mode of learning deserves special attention, primarily because of the place of information education in the Bologna process, as an essential element of the concept of lifelong learning, and because of the ever-increasing need to enable the visibility of knowledge that is often acquired through observation or immediate experience.

Informal learning is especially important when it comes to the workplace, for a number of reasons:

- fosters employment and has a positive benefit for managers and companies;
- develops the skills needed to perform a specific task and plays a key role in transferring knowledge among employees in a particular company;
- provides continuous upgrades with current knowledge and develops skills that are "up-to-date" within the workplace, maintaining a work culture, rather than acquiring knowledge in a rigid mode of specific training.

Therefore, informal education is of particular interest to the corporate community for the purpose of managing knowledge within the organization, as well as recognizing that informal learning is an effective way of developing competencies. These are the reasons for the emergence of initiatives and the development of procedures and methods for validating the knowledge and skills acquired in the informal and especially through the informal form of learning.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is a process through which the candidate's existing knowledge and skills, regardless of the way they are acquired, are evaluated and evaluated against the required competencies required of a given profession. Competences may be in accordance with national occupational qualifications or in accordance with the content of accredited training. This process of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in Europe and the world is often referred to as Recognition of prior learning (RPL), but also Recognition of acquired competences (RAC). The term 'recognition of informal and non-formal learning' itself is used as a synonym for 'validation of informal and non-formal learning'.

According to the EU Report on the Progress of the Non-formal and Informal Learning Process 2012 and the Recommendations of the Council of Europe, the process of non-formal and informal learning validation is defined as:

**Validation of non-formal and informal learning enables candidates to demonstrate knowledge acquired outside formal education and training and to apply this learning in their careers and further education.**
1.4 Background

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been part of the European policy agenda since 2001 when the Commission defined lifelong learning as all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. Since the Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training a series of initiatives have been taken to develop European tools and instruments in the area of lifelong learning:

- In 2004 Common European principles on validation were adopted in the form of Council Conclusions.
- In 2004 the Europass framework was established, including the Europass CV and a portfolio of documents which citizens can use to better communicate and present their qualifications and competences throughout Europe. Other tools for documenting learning outcomes concern the Youthpass for the Youth in Action Programme and sectoral skills and qualification passports developed under the European sectoral social dialogue.
- A major landmark towards the validation of non-formal and informal learning was the adoption in 2008 by the European Parliament and the Council of the Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. The EQF is a reference framework of qualification levels defined through learning outcomes. It has resulted in an ongoing process under which all Member States are setting up their National Qualification Framework and reference their qualifications to the European qualification levels. Through this process qualifications will become more comparable and easier to understand for employers, educational establishments, workers and learners.
- In 2009 the Commission and Cedefop published European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning which provides policymakers and practitioners with technical advice on validation. These focus on different validation perspectives (e.g. individual, organisational, national, European). The guidelines form a practical tool to be applied on a voluntary basis.
- Alongside the other tools credit systems based on learning outcomes facilitate the validation of non-formal and informal learning. For higher education this concerns the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which was developed under the Bologna process to

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facilitate mobility between higher education institutions. For vocational education and training this concerns the **European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)**.

In addition the Lifelong Learning Programme has, since 2007, financed a number of pilot projects which have enabled the development of validation processes and tools in specific sectors or contexts, particularly in vocational education and training and adult education. The European Social Fund has been used in some countries to develop validation systems.

Despite the existence of these European policies, progress in validation has been uneven, irregular and slow throughout Europe.

According to the latest update of the European Inventory of 2016 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning only four EU Member States have a highly developed validation system while a further seven have either a national system in its initial phase or a well-established, but partial, system of validation in one or more sectors.

### 1.5 EU guidelines for RPL

Despite the unfavourable economic and social circumstances many EU countries are currently facing, in which even formal education does not guarantee finding a job, the European Economic and Social Committee - EESC believes that the EU cannot fail to validate the hidden wealth that lies in the experience and skills that people have acquired through non-formal or informal means. This validation could provide opportunities in particular to certain disadvantaged groups (such as women, migrants, young people, older workers). However, it should not create false hopes that they would quickly find a place in the labour market. This requires economic and social policy aimed more at investment, creating quality jobs, and reducing poverty and the risk of social exclusion. These policies must also guide and support the strengthening of education, vocational training and retraining systems.

Based on the above, the EESC has drawn on an important document, the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning of 20 December 2012. It highlights the fact that the validation of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socioeconomically disadvantaged or the low-qualified. The validation of relevant knowledge, skills and competences has a valuable contribution to make in improving the functioning of the labor market, in promoting mobility and in enhancing competitiveness and economic growth.

The key stakeholders with an important role to play in facilitating opportunities for non-formal and informal learning and any subsequent validation processes.

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according to the Council are: employer organisations, individual employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognising professional qualifications and in assessing and certifying learning outcomes, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers, and civil society organisations.

As set out in the Council Recommendation of 2012, by 2018 Member States must have in place, in accordance with national circumstances and specificities, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to:

- have knowledge, skills and competences validated which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning, including — where applicable — via open educational resources;
- obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, partial qualification, on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences (…).

According to the Council Recommendation, and based on the official guidelines set by European Training Foundation – ETF, the arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning should include the following elements, as appropriate, whilst allowing each individual to take advantage of any of these, either separately or in combination, in accordance with his/her needs:

- IDENTIFICATION of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
- DOCUMENTATION of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
- ASSESSMENT of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
- CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, as credits leading to a qualification, or as otherwise deemed appropriate.

European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning from 2009 (and the recently updated version from 2015) have been written for individuals and organisations that are responsible for establishing, developing, implementing and running validation. Those involved operate at various levels (European, national, sectoral and local) and in various contexts (public, private and voluntary sectors, education and training, and labour market services). The aim of the guidelines is to clarify the conditions for carrying out validations and to make stakeholders aware of their options at different stages of the process.
The fundamental principles underpinning validation:

- Validation must be voluntary.
- The privacy of individuals should be respected.
- Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed.
- Stakeholders should be involved in establishing systems for validation.
- Systems should contain mechanisms for guidance and counselling of individuals.
- Systems should be underpinned by quality assurance.
- The process, procedures and criteria for validation must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance.
- Systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek balanced participation.
- The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.
- The professional competences of those who carry out assessments must be assured.

### 1.6 Status of RPL in Macedonia

Republic of Macedonia is stepping the road toward European education system. The introduction of the Bologna process and the establishment of the credit transfer system in higher education were followed by harmonization of the National Qualification Framework with the EQF, ratified at the beginning of 2016. The next step is to establish a system for validation of prior non-formal and informal learning. This process is governed by the Adult education centre as the responsible institution for lifelong learning - LLL. The programme for introduction of the process of VNFIL on national level by 2022 is developed.

In order to establish large scale training schemes, the Project BUILD UP Skills BEET has made pioneer steps toward introduction of the process for validation of previous non-formal and informal learning in Macedonia, becoming an example of a success story in the country, but also in the region. The developed Methodology for implementation of the process of recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a comprehensive, detailed and concise document (fig. 1) describing the whole procedure of evaluation of informally obtained skills of building workers.
The process of recognition of prior learning as very new and unknown in the country was promoted by announcing the benefits for candidates — Reasons to choose Recognition of Prior Learning:

- A much shorter process than a conventional training, resulting in the same qualification;
- Validated qualifications increase employability;
- It means valorization of previous knowledge, skills and experience;
- Qualification can be acquired without formal training;
- The certificate is identical to the one obtained through formal training;
- Lack in certain competences can be remedied through partial or modular training.

The designed process for Recognition of Prior Learning within BUILD UP Skills BEET is a six-phase process, and is fully compatible with the recommendations for necessary phases of VNFIL issued by the European Training Foundation –ETF (fig. 2).
Figure 2 designed process for Recognition of Prior Learning within BUILD UP Skills BEET

A certification body was established within the project that was in charge of issuing certificates, in accordance with the standard EN ISO/IEC 17024:2012, ‘General requirements for bodies certifying persons.’ It acted as an authorised body for certifying persons in the framework of the project, for certification of trainers and certification of workers during the RPL process.

It is essential to have a person-oriented, transparent evaluation process, in order to ensure a high-quality and trustworthy procedure. The process of recognizing building workers’ previous skills was endorsed by most of the construction companies in Macedonia. It was received with a considerable acceptance rate, although it was a rather new and unfamiliar process in the country. The construction companies’ and workers’ interest in the possibilities for certification rose continually, especially as the promotional campaign was repeated. In addition, many applications for RPL were received after the project ended. An overall result was 967 certified workers, which was a huge success.

2. The process of RPL

2.1 What does RPL mean?

RPL is the process for recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. Learners may already have Credit Points from formal learning awarded to another qualification or learning programme.

Using RPL for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning involves a review of past experiences. Learners reflect on their experience in order to discover and then express what these experiences have taught them. RPL is a process through which learning gained from experience can be recognised and used. It also includes learning gained through non-formal learning and training programmes in the
workplace, in the community and in the voluntary sector. People can gain a range of knowledge and skills through:

- family life (home-making, caring, domestic organisation)
- work (paid or unpaid)
- community, voluntary or leisure activities
- key experiences and events in life.

There is no restriction on the type of experience that can provide someone with knowledge and skills – even negative experiences might have led someone to learn something about themselves. RPL is about recognising that all experiences can provide a basis for learning.

The RPL process can help people to value and build on the learning they have gained informally. RPL enables learners to realise what they have learnt through their experiences and to demonstrate this to others. It reveals the learner’s potential and capacity to learn from future experiences.

This recognition may allow individuals to go on to do more study or training if they choose. It may also help someone if they are, for example:

- planning their career
- planning their personal development
- wanting to take a more active part in their community.

### 2.2 RPL – benefits for individuals, providers and employers

**Benefits for individuals**

RPL can be used by a wide range of people either to help them re-enter learning or to contribute towards a programme of learning. Through RPL it may be possible to make a claim for Credit Points in the formal E&T system which can reduce the amount of time needed to achieve the required learning programme or qualification. Those who might benefit include:

- people who have been out of the education system for a long time and/or who may lack formal qualifications
- adults returning to education
- unemployed people looking for a way to demonstrate their learning to prospective employers
- people wanting to improve upon existing qualifications
- those wanting to re-train or change careers
- students at colleges, higher education institutions (HEIs) and other learning and training providers
- people who have taken non-formal learning or training in the workplace or through community-based learning
- people who have gained a range of skills and knowledge through volunteering or through activities or projects
- school students who have been involved in extra-curricular activities.

People wishing to claim RPL may not have a strong academic education - but they do need to be keen to learn from and about their own experiences and about themselves. It is important to stress that recognition is given for what has been learned from experience and not for the experience itself.

RPL can be used where learners can demonstrate that through their experience, they have already gained the relevant knowledge and skills required for particular units of a learning programme or qualification or for a particular job role.

RPL reinforces the concept of lifelong learning as it helps individuals to:

- Think about the learning they have already achieved and plan how to build on this learning to meet their personal and career goals
- Get a place on a programme at a college or university or learning and training provider, if they don’t have the normal entry qualifications but can show that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding
- Gain credit towards a qualification to shorten the normal period of learning by evidencing that they already have the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for particular parts of the programme or qualification (e.g. units or modules)
- Increase their self esteem by recognising their achievements in learning
- Plan their career development and educational path
- Identify areas of competence and areas requiring further study.

RPL can help people to consider their options and make decisions about the direction they want to take. The experience of using RPL benefits learners in the following ways:

- Learners will have the opportunity to reflect on what they have achieved so far through their experiences in terms of their learning and skills
- Learners will think about their goals and what they need to do in order to achieve them: e.g. do a training course, pursue a vocational award, join an educational programme at college or university or other learning and training provider, apply for, or change, jobs
It also helps to build confidence – it enables learners to identify the learning they have gained through experience, recognise their strengths and value their achievements. This can motivate a learner to continue learning.

**Benefits for learning and training providers**

RPL benefits learning and training providers in a range of ways as it can:

- Enable greater retention of learners
- Widen access to a range of learners
- Increase participation of learners from non-traditional learning backgrounds.

**Benefits for employers**

RPL can support employers by:

- Helping to identify employees’ skills effectively
- Helping to identify skills gaps in organisations
- Helping to identify appropriate training opportunities
- Reducing the time required in employee training due to minimised duplication of learning
- Increasing motivation and interest in workplace activities on the part of the employee/learner
- Generating new ideas and developments for the organisation as a result of the employee/learner reflecting on work activities.

As a result, employers may find that RPL can lead to increased employee retention and reduced recruitment and training costs.

### 3. Methodology

The methodology for implementation of the described under topic 1.6 was designed as pioneer example for developing a system for E&T which also includes the inevitable process of validation of informal and non-formal learning. This process was designed for the case of the project BUILD UP Skills BEET and aimed recognition of skills for implementing measures for energy efficiency of construction workers. The current document will offer a more general insight and guidelines for implementing the process of RPL, for different qualification levels, for different occupations and in different contexts. Therefore it will in fact use the basics of the developed Methodology for RPL within BUILD UP Skills BEET, but it will be upgraded for higher levels of qualification and with proposed measures for quality assurance.
3.1 Phases of the process of RPL

The designed process for Recognition of Prior Learning within BUILD UP Skills BEET was a six-phase process, and is fully compatible with the recommendations for necessary phases of VNFIL issued by the European Training Foundation –ETF (fig. 2).

The multiple outcomes of validation, ranging from formal qualifications to enterprise-internal proofs of acquired competences, are all united through their efforts to increase the visibility and value of the learning taking place outside classrooms. To clarify the basic features of validation, the recommendation identifies four distinct phases:

- **Identification**
  Validation necessarily starts with the identification of knowledge, skills and competence acquired and is where the individual becomes increasingly aware of prior achievements. This stage is crucial as learning outcomes differ from person to person and will have been acquired in various contexts: at home, during work or through voluntary activities. For many, discovery and increased awareness of own capabilities is a valuable outcome of the process.

- **Documentation**
  Documentation will normally follow the identification stage and involves provision of evidence of the learning outcomes acquired. This can be carried out through the ‘building’ of a portfolio that tends to include a CV and a career history of the individual, with documents and/or work samples that attest to their learning achievements. Validation needs to be open to various evidence types, ranging from written documents to work samples and demonstrations of practice. This evidence must provide sufficient insight into the learning outcomes acquired: simply listing job-titles or positions will not be enough. The portability of evidence is crucial and requires some degree of coordination at national and European level. A situation where every validation provider...
Assessment

Assessment is normally referred to as the stage in which an individual’s learning outcomes are compared against specific reference points and/or standards. This can imply evaluation of written and documentary evidence but might also involve evaluation of other forms of evidence. Assessment is crucial to the overall credibility of validation of non-formal and informal learning. In some cases, certificates based on validation are perceived as inferior to those awarded by traditional courses and programmes. To counter such perceptions, which in some cases reflect the relative novelty of validation, tools and processes must be presented in as transparent a way as possible. Building mutual trust is closely linked to the existence of robust quality assurance arrangements ensuring that all phases of validation, including assessment, are open to critical scrutiny.

Certification

The final phase of validation is linked to the certification – and final valuing – of the learning identified, documented and assessed. This can take different forms, but is commonly the award of a formal qualification (or part-qualification). In enterprises or economic sectors, certification may also involve issuing a licence allowing the individual to carry out specific tasks. Whatever the case, validation reaching the stage of certification requires a summative assessment officially confirming the achievement of learning outcomes against a specified standard. It is crucial that this process is managed by a credible authority or organisation. The value – or the currency – of a certificate or qualification acquired through validation largely depends on the legitimacy of the awarding body or authority. The use of summative approaches for validating non-formal and informal learning needs to be strongly linked – preferably integrated – into national qualifications systems. Some countries have chosen to issue separate certificates or qualifications for non-formal and informal learning. While this might be appropriate in some settings, there is risk of creating A and B certificates where those resulting from validation are seen as inferior.

3.2 The centrality of the individual

The first European principle for validating non-formal and informal learning puts the individual at the centre of the process. It insists that the process of making visible the full range of knowledge, skills and competences held by an individual is carried out in a way that remains voluntary and that the results of validation remain the property of the individual.

Whether the context of the validation process is work, social communities or higher education, whatever the purpose, the individual is always at the centre. Validation systems need to acknowledge the fact that it is the choice of the individual to decide to take the first and crucial step to explore the possibilities of at least documenting their learning.
Communication strategies about the benefits of validating non-formal and informal learning, explaining how the system works, can motivate the individual to take control of the process. Individuals who engage with validation as a candidate benefit from personal outcomes such as improved confidence and self-esteem. These soft outcomes may help an individual to gain access to formal education and/or employment, or simply to take on more variety or responsibilities within their current role in society.

### 3.3 Counselling and guidance

Learners and employees are likely to be more effective in recognising their prior learning if they are given support to identify how their previous learning links with the requirements for the job role or the qualification or learning programme against which they are seeking recognition.

It is not possible to establish a single process for validation that will accommodate the needs of all candidates. It is widely accepted that the system needs careful tailoring to the needs of the individual and this is, at least partially, achieved by providing information, advice and guidance at the right times.

It is clear that even before a decision is made to seek validation, candidates need to know what is the added value, what to expect, what standards have to be met and what form the evidence of learning outcomes needs to take. Similarly, at the end of validation, or of certification, evidence suggests a candidate will want to know of potential routes to further qualification that are available.

The whole process of validation is between these two points where candidates will need information, advice and guidance on such things as:

- timelines for validation
- costs
- procedure
- forms of evidence of learning outcomes
- sufficiency of evidence
- quality and standards
- presentation of evidence
- assessment and how best to approach the process
- support available
- appeal procedure.

Timely access to information, advice and guidance is essential: ICT-based systems offer many advantages to users as well as providing effective tools for information exchange between candidates and counsellors.
3.4 RPL in different contexts

RPL as process is not to be limited to a particular institutional context. While it is most commonly found within education and training, making it possible for individuals to acquire a formal qualification on the basis of non-formal and informal learning, validation is also carried out by several institutions and stakeholders outside education and training: labour market authorities, economic sectors, enterprises and voluntary organisations. The multiple outcomes of validation, ranging from formal qualifications to enterprise-internal proofs of acquired competences, are all united through their efforts to increase the visibility and value of the learning taking place outside classrooms.

The VET sector has been a main proponent of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe. Its close relationship to the labour market and strong traditions in work-based learning has aided validation. Widespread use of learning outcomes and competence-based standards has also supported developments in VET and standards are normally aligned with occupational standards that are easier to relate to previous work experience. It is reasonable to expect that the VET sector will continue to play an important role in validation. Validation is particularly important to adult education and training and as a way to support lifelong learning. The 25 to 45 age group is mostly the main user of validation, indicating that these arrangements play an important role in aiding transitions from employment to education and back. In many countries, adult education providers play a key role in implementation. Validation is far less common in relation to higher education qualifications than VET. Higher education institutions are normally more autonomous and determine the scope and possibilities for validation on their own.

Open educational resources OERs are seen as important supplements to traditional education and training programmes, reducing overall cost, increasing accessibility and allowing individuals to follow their own learning pace. They are seen as a way to deliver high quality (world-class) teaching to a broad group of learners. For all these reasons it is important to consider how the outcomes of this learning can be appropriately documented and assessed and how current practices on validation can take them into account.

However, a significant part of what can be termed competence assessment in enterprises will fall outside the definition of validation offered by the recommendation. While these activities, for example linked to recruitment and personnel development, European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning seek to increase the visibility of prior learning, results are often the exclusive property of the employer and cannot be used freely by the individuals. For the individual employee the outcomes of these processes only partly add value to their learning experiences. The workplace is a key learning arena and the active involvement of enterprises is critical for further developing national systems for validation. One possible approach would be to promote more systematic intervention at sector or branch level, for example by introducing common competence frameworks and standards, acting as reference points and supporting transfer of
skills and competences. The involvement of small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) in validation represents a particular challenge, reflecting limited resources and capacities. SMEs face a continuous battle to upgrade skills and competences and would benefit directly from sector-based frameworks supporting validation, contributing to internal human resource developments as well as strengthening the portability of employees’ skills and competences.

A key challenge is to ensure the transferability of the outcomes of a skills audit. There is a tendency for skills audits to be carried out in isolation from other forms of validation (as normally linked to qualifications and education and training systems). Given the emphasis of the recommendation on the four phases of validation, it will be important to consider the relationship between (mainly) employment-led skills audits and (mainly) education- and-training-led validation arrangements. Two issues are particularly relevant: the extent to which employers will recognise and trust the format in which the outcomes will be presented; and the extent to which the outcomes of the audit will be accompanied by a training or development plan.

The voluntary (or ‘third’) sector plays an important role in promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning. Non-governmental organisations involved with adult and lifelong learning exemplify this, as do organisations working in youth sectors. All these organisations see non-formal and informal learning as important outcomes of their activities that need to be made more visible. The distinction between identification and documentation, on the one hand, and assessment and certification, on the other, is important in this particular context. It is commonly asserted that learning experiences from voluntary work should be valued in their own right and not assessed according to standards developed for formal education and training. Validation in the third sector might also include recognition of social and civic competences as well as soft and life skills gained in informal and non-formal settings, and through activities organised by the third sector (i.e. volunteering).

### 3.5 RPL assessment methods

According to the guidelines the methods used for validation of non-formal and informal learning are essentially the same tools used in assessing formal learning. reflects the individual specificity and non-standardised character of non-formal and informal learning. When used for validation, tools have to be adopted, combined and applied in a way which Tools for assessment of learning need to be fit-for-purpose.

A broad classification of the assessment methods is given below. Some specific validation processes may make use of more than one of these approaches to achieve greater validity, reliability, fairness and fitness for purpose of results.

#### 1. Debate

Candidates can, by taking part in debate, confirm their capacity to sustain a considered argument and demonstrate depth of adequate knowledge of a subject. The debate also offers a context where they can demonstrate communication and social skills.
2. Declarative methods

Here candidates make an evidence-based statement about their learning by responding in writing to preset criteria designed to help them be evaluative. The ability to use critical reflection is important and therefore this method is used in conjunction with other methods that have more independent evaluation built in.

3. Interview

Interviews may be particularly useful in areas where judgement and values are important. Interviews usually accompany other tools for a more complete assessment of a candidate and to allow for commentary and clarification.

4. Observation

A third party assesses the candidate’s behaviour in a particular setting: there is an opportunity to observe real practice. Assessment criteria are set in advance. This method does not proscribe collaboration with colleagues or fellow learners. Depending on the context, it may be complicated to set up and can be time consuming and costly.

5. Portfolio method

A portfolio is an organised collection of materials that presents and verifies skills and knowledge acquired through experience. It is of particular relevance to validating non-formal and informal learning because it allows the individual candidate to contribute actively to the collection of evidence and also offers a mix of approaches strengthening the overall validity of the process.

This is confirmed by the fact that many countries have introduced the portfolio as a central element in their validation approaches. A portfolio might include documents such as résumés, performance appraisals, references from current and past employers, supervisors and colleagues, and photographs of completed work certified by a referee. If self-employed in the past, a candidate might include evidence of running a business using the skills and knowledge being claimed.

The most important risks in the preparation of portfolios is when applicants prepare these alone or with little mediation from one tutor. One practice that counters such possible limitations is gathering groups of claimants together specifically to share experience and learning from one another, thus enabling all participants to proceed with greater assurance in preparing their own portfolio for validation.

One recent trend is use of digital portfolios. Such portfolios offer the possibility to combine text, audio, graphic and video-based presentation of information. They also offer increased capacity to accumulate data that can provide the audience with greater insights into the achievements and successes of the learner. However, digital portfolios carry potential risks, for example the technological novelty of the product can overshadow the purpose of the portfolio and learning to use the technology itself could subsume the learning opportunities of portfolio construction.
6. Presentation
Here a candidate makes a formal presentation to a panel of experts. This form emphasises communicative and analytical skills as well as ability to structure complex information clearly.

7. Simulation and evidence extracted from work
Here a candidate performs in a structured situation modelled on real life. The method allows for testing complex interacting skills sets. It requires clear assessment criteria and may be costly. There are variations to this popular method, one here a candidate verbally and physically demonstrates their skills. Another variation involves observed role play where actors or peers take on roles to simulate a problem that requires the attention of the candidate.

8. Tests and examinations
In the formal process of validating learning, tests can dominate because of their qualities of wide applicability across populations, low costs and high levels of perceived fairness. In general a test is set so that candidates respond orally or in writing to preset questions (and answers). A test provides direct assessment of specific knowledge and skills. It may advantage candidates with strong written and oral skills and can cause candidate anxiety. Oral tests may be used to check deep understanding of complex issues and ability to explain them in simple terms. Many tests employ a multiple choice and true or false format and many well known tests are pretested across populations so that norm referencing of responses is useful. They are considered more objective than many other methods. This type of test is well suited to being completed, marked and graded by computer. Essays can be used as test items to check the quality and standard of academic writing and use of references, ability to develop a coherent argument.

3.6 Professional competences of practitioners
The recommendation maintains that ‘provision is made for the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process across all relevant sectors. Trust in validation largely depends on the work carried out by ‘front-line’ practitioners and professionals directly involved with validation candidates at different stages of the process. These practitioners cover all aspects of validation and include those that offer information, advice and guidance (orientation), those that carry out assessment, the external observers of the process, the managers of assessment centres/procedures, and a range of other stakeholders that have an important but less direct role in the process. Such professionals should be equipped not only with validation competences but also soft skills such as intercultural capacity. This is essential in reaching out to prospective candidates.

The counsellor must have clear understanding of the validation context. If the candidate aims for a formal qualification, the counsellor should be aware of the
relevant standards and should be able to advise on whether existing evidence is sufficient. The counsellor has to help prepare for assessment, informing the candidate of procedures, how to present evidence of learning, respond to questions, expectations in terms of behaviour, and possible outcomes. This also requires the counsellor to have a thorough knowledge of the assessment process. A distinctive part of the role is independence from the assessment process and ability to offer impartial advice.

Key knowledge and skills of counsellors are:

- Thorough knowledge of the validation process
- Thorough knowledge of the education system
- Capacity to rephrase learning experience into learning outcomes that can be matched with existing standards
- Understanding of the labour market
- A list of contacts (experts) to answer specific technical questions (social partners and other sector experts).

Assessor qualifications and experience are a key element in the quality assurance of validation projects. Assessors are generally required to have a fixed number of years of experience in the respective field; five years is common and assessors could be recently retired professionals, senior managers in the field, expert representatives of the third sector, and social partners or teachers in the specific field, with direct experience in the sector. Training in the validation procedure is also required. Networks of assessors should be set up – where and when possible – to assure professional development and coherent practices.

Key knowledge and skills of assessors are:

- Be familiar with the validation process (validity and reliability)
- Have experience in the specific field of work
- Have no personal interest in the validation outcome (to guarantee impartiality and avoid conflicts of interest)
- Be familiar with different assessment methodologies
- Be able to inspire trust and to create a proper psychological setting for the candidates
- Be committed to provide feedback on the match between learning outcomes and validation standards/references (via support systems)
- Be trained in assessment and validation processes and knowledgeable about quality assurance mechanisms
- Operate according to a code of conduct.
Effective operation of validation processes depends fundamentally on the professional activity of counsellors, assessors and validation process administrators. The preparation and continuous training of these people is critically important. Practice should be a part of a development programme for practitioners. Efficient and effective practices that support the individuals seeking validation.

4. Model of effective RPL process

4.1 Organizational structure of certification body

The internationally accepted standard for organizing certification processes is EN ISO / IEC 17024: 2012, which is the standard for "Conformity Assessment - General Requirements for Persons Certifying". This document and the International Accreditation Forum document, which provides guidance on the implementation of ISO / IEC 17024, recommend the following organizational structure of the certification body, shown in Figure 4.

![Figure 4 Organizational structure of the certification body](image)

Certification body

Certification body implements the process of recognition and validation of previous knowledge and skills according to the working procedures described in the document D 2.5.

The certification body consists of Certification Board, Program Board, Examination Committee and Appealing Commission.
Certification Board

Certification Board is the official body that coordinates and controls the implementation of the process of recognition of previous knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal education. Certification Board is competent to make a decision for issuing Certificate for qualification to the candidates who meet the requirements for validation of knowledge and skills, based on the completed appraisal report, which is submitted by the Programme Board, for each occupation separately.

The decision for issuing Certificate is an official document containing: the number of applicants by occupation and number of certified candidates for each occupation which was subject for validation in the process and a list of candidates for which Certificate for qualification is issued.

Certification Board consists of five members nominated according to their expertise in the field that is subject of validation. Certification Board chaired by the President, elected from among its members. The President of the Certification Board is one of the signatories of Certificates for qualification issued by the Board.

Program Board

Program Board is specialized body that organizes and controls the work of the Examination Committees, that conduct the assessment and evaluation of knowledge and skills of the applicants, for each of the occupations. Program Board consists of fifteen experts in the fields of the different occupations.

The Program Board is chaired by the President, elected from among its members. The President of the Program Board is one of the signatories of Certificates for qualification, issued by the Board.

Program Board defines the necessary knowledge and skills that are subject of assessment for given occupation according to the learning outcomes and prepares a list of questions for the test of theoretical knowledge as well as a list of tasks for examination of practical skills of the candidates.

After the assessment procedure, Program Board prepares a report for the results of the assessment for each occupation separately. The report for each occupation includes: number of applicants for a particular occupation, number of assessment sessions conducted, number of candidates that fulfill the conditions for validating knowledge and skills for energy efficiency. The report also contains a list of candidates who meet the requirements for validation of knowledge and skills, which is submitted to the Certification Board with a proposition for a certification. The report is signed by two members of the Program Board, experts in the field of occupation and the President of the Program Board. Program Board submits the report to the Certification Board within ten days after the assessment of the applicants.
Examination Committee

Examination Committee is a professional body whose authority is assessing the knowledge and skills of applicants in the process of recognition. The tasks of the examination committee are:

- receiving applications from applicants
- completing documents in the portfolio of the applicants
- reviewing of the submitted documents
- evaluation of the submitted applications in organized assessment sessions
- scheduling and conducting interviews with the applicants
- carrying out tests for theoretical knowledge and practical exams of the skills and
- preparing reports of conducted assessment sessions.

The Examination Committee conducts the evaluation process in separate assessment sessions that include no more than twenty candidates.

After each assessment session the Examination Committee prepares a report. The report includes the number and dates of the session, and a list of candidates who meet the requirements for validation of knowledge and skills with an proposition for certification. The report should be submitted to the President of the Program Board within five days after the end of the assessment session.

The Examination Committee consists of three assessors from the pool/register of certified trainers for a given occupation, the members of the Program Board and representatives of employers and/or vocational unions. The Examination Committee is chaired by the President, who is one of the signatories of Certificate for qualification.

Appealing Commission

Appealing Commission consists of three members nominated by the external organization, in case of training providers to be validation institution it is necessary to be a competent national body (Centre for Adult Education).

Appealing Commission should consider and decide considering the appeals by the applicants referring to the process of recognition of previous learning for energy efficiency, conducted by the Examination Committee. The decision is submitted to the President of the Certification Board for further action.

Issuing certificates

Certification Body certifies the qualifications obtained for any of the occupations for which the process of RPL is conducted. Certificates issued by the Certification Body are signed by the President of the Certification Board, the President of the Program
Board and the President of the Examination Committee. Certificates for qualification contain the title of the occupation and a description of competencies listed in the Certificate Supplement, representing the summarized learning outcomes.

### 4.2 Procedure for implementation of the RPL

The following is a summary of each of the stages of the process of recognition of prior knowledge and skills learning acquired in non-formal and informal education, according to the model proposed in the BUILD UP Skills BEET project and upgraded in the TRAINEE project (Fig. 5).

![Figure 5 Detailed description of the content of the stages of the process of recognition and validation of previous knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal education](image-url)
Identification in practice

Activities in the first phase, IDENTIFICATION, aim at creating the content of training for upgraded occupations and identifying the competencies needed to gain qualifications. This stage also involves establishing a list of required knowledge and skills that are subject to evaluation, specifically for each occupation, regulated by the standard of upgraded occupation. This stage also aims to introduce the general public to this process, the opportunities it offers and the whole process that it consists of. This stage ensures that information is available and the potential candidates are animated through a proper promotional campaign.

Documentation in practice

The DOCUMENTATION phase consists of application process implemented in several calls. It is of the utmost importance to maintain access to information and openness to support and guidance for applicants in gathering the necessary documentation, evidence, etc., when creating their own Portfolio that applicants submit when applying.

The candidate's Personal Portfolio should contain the following documents (Fig. 6):

- Contact information sheet
- Certificate of work experience
- List of evidence provided and evidence of competence
- Agreement / Statement on the voluntary implementation of the recognition and validation process

Figure 6 Contents of the Personal Portfolio of a candidate applying for RPL
Evidence of competences that a candidate can provide is:
- work history
- Certificates of completed trainings
- photos of realized objects / works
- technical plans of completed works
- a list of skills he / she possesses
- a list of tasks that he / she has accomplished
- Certificates of membership in professional organizations, etc.

Assessment in practice

In the ASSESSMENT phase, the evaluation procedure takes place. According to the ETF and CEDEFOP recommendations there are several different methods that can be used for evaluation persons competences in form of knowledge and skills for certain occupation. Based on the practice from the project BuildUpSkills BEET and previously developed and piloted Methodology for RPL for implementation of EE measures in construction, TRAINEE suggests that the process of RPL not to be focused only on one assessment method but rather to use individual approach for different occupation and for different applicant/learner. Thus the assessment phase should consist of different pathways for guiding the evaluation and obtaining certificate.

In general, for each occupation, competence should be evaluated based on the theoretical and practical knowledge and skills and they should be assessed according to the following scheme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Subject of Grading</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Theoretical knowledge</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Practical skills</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evaluation also should evaluate work experience with a number of points, which are incorporated in the practical skills section.

For example, the number of documented years of professional engagement in the field requiring recognition of qualifications may be valorized up to a maximum of 25 points as follows:
The minimum requirement for applying for recognition of skills and knowledge is 3 years of work experience in the area of interest.

The evaluation procedure is preferred to consist of the following steps, which can be applied individually or in combination with each other, depending on the candidate's competences and the evidence provided (Fig. 7).

1. Opening PORTFOLIO and application materials
2. Interview
3. Theoretical test
4. Practical exam

The methodology for conducting the evaluation enables a positive decision to be made on the recognition of the candidate's competences by evaluating the evidence attached to the application (declarative method), which is presented in the candidate's personal portfolio or after the interview (debate and interview method) with the candidate.

If, after reviewing the Candidate's Portfolio (method of portfolio) and conducting an interview, his or her abilities need to be validated, he or she may go for a test of theoretical knowledge (test and examination) and/or a test of practical skills relevant to the upgraded profession (presentation and simulation). The implementation of these exams is described below.
Testing theoretical knowledge

Didactic test consisting of two sets of questions:

- 10 questions about the basic knowledge of the candidate related with the occupation
- 10 theoretical questions specific to a particular professional qualification.

Each of these tests consists of 10 questions with three possible answers, of which only one is correct.

Each correct answer is awarded 1 point for the EQ test and 3 points for the correct answer to the test with specific questions for a given occupation. Wrong answer or lack of answer equals 0 points.

For the process of theoretical testing candidates are provided with Guidelines for Conducting a Theoretical Test (Document A2, attached). The exam committees that conduct the theoretical knowledge testing work according to the Procedure for Implementation and Evaluation of Theoretical Test (document P2, attached).

Practical Skills Exam

Candidates are provided with Guidelines for Conducting Practical Skills Assessment (Document A3, attached).

The exam committees that conduct the practical skills exam operate according to the Procedure for the implementation and evaluation of the practical exam (document P2, attached).

When conducting a practical exam, applicants should receive appropriate instructions and an explanation of the procedure. The practical task, on the basis of which the practical skills are evaluated, selects the candidate at random from the pre-prepared tasks by the exam commission.

In order to take the practical exam the organizer should provide:

- the tools, equipment, materials needed to complete the task,
- personal protective clothing,
- other personal protective items needed, characteristic of a particular qualification.

Certification in practice

Following the evaluation procedure, the next stage of the process of recognition and validation of previous knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal education is the adoption of a Decision, which gives a positive or negative decision to certify the candidate's previously acquired knowledge and skills.
The decision to issue a qualification certificate is made by the Certification Board, on the basis of a proposal from the Examination Committees, submitted through the Program Board.

The result of the process of recognition of prior learning acquired in non-formal and informal education, which depends on the type of decision taken - positive or negative, may be the recognition of previously acquired knowledge and skills and the issuing an appropriate certificate, or directing the candidate to retraining to acquire the knowledge and skills that are lacking in the candidate's overall competencies or attending full training.

The Certificate of Qualification is issued based on the Decision of the Certification Body of the E&T institution/system.

5. Effectiveness of validation process

5.1 Comparability of validation process

In order to have higher value and international recognition of validated learning outcomes in different countries, it is very important to have comparable processes for validation at different levels and in different contexts. Although the development and establishment of systems and procedures for validation of non-formal and informal learning - VNFIL across EU has started almost a decade ago, there are still isolated and peculiar procedures, that it has been said that the national and regional methods and systems developed so far can be considered ‘islands’ of validation. Lack of system comparability makes it difficult for individuals to combine learning outcomes acquired in different settings, at different levels and in different countries.

Validation practice for informal and non-formal learning should be compatible with the main elements in the 2004 European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the European principles for quality assurance of education and training, and the recommendation for a European quality assurance reference framework for VET in order to ensure international trust between different validation and qualification systems.

5.2 Quality assurance

Quality assurance processes across Europe set benchmarks for validation procedures. The European principles for quality assurance in education and training can increase cross-national trust in these validation processes. Quality assurance is a component of quality management and is ‘focused on providing confidence that

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quality requirements will be fulfilled’. In relation to education and training services, quality assurance refers to planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in the design, delivery and award of qualifications within an education and training system. Quality assurance ensures stakeholders’ interests and investment in any accredited program are protected.

The basic principles for quality assurance in EU qualification systems, based on the Recommendations on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning² are as follows:

• quality assurance policies and procedures should cover all levels of education and training systems;
• quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions;
• quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions or programmes by external monitoring bodies or agencies;
• external monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review;
• quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes;
• quality assurance systems should include the following elements:
  (i) clear and measurable objectives and standards;
  (ii) guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;
  (iii) appropriate resources;
  (iv) consistent evaluation methods including self-assessment and external review; (v) feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement;
  (vi) widely accessible evaluation results;
• international, national and regional quality assurance initiatives should be coordinated to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis;
• quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the community;
• quality assurance guidelines at community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.

Key Aspects of Quality Assurance

The certification process includes issuing a certificate, diploma or list of learning outcomes testifying that the candidate has been assessed and validated by a competent body against a pre-defined standard. Assumed within this process is that a candidate has undertaken learning, either through formal learning or through less formal contexts such as work or personal activities. Critical to this definition is that:

- The individual’s knowledge, skills and wider competences has been judged against criteria such as learning outcomes or standards of competence;
- The certificate is issued by an agency which has public trust and competence;
- The certificate is recognised and trusted by other parties in the labour market and/or further education and training sector.

The basis of trust with awards issued rests with the quality assurance arrangements put in place by a competent body.

Principles of quality assurance

Quality assurance systems may have explicit or implicit principles which inform the processes deployed by policy makers and/or competent bodies. The trustful Quality Assurance Framework should reflect on the following principles:

- **Transparency and accountability**: Transparency and accountability are two key principles of good governance. Accountability refers to legal and reporting requirements whereas transparency relates to timely, reliable, clear and relevant public reporting of processes and performance.

- **Comparability**: Comparability refers to the acknowledgement that quality assurance measures may vary across countries and internally to a country’s system. However, these measures need to be based upon comparable standards and expectations.

- **Flexibility and responsiveness**: Flexibility and responsiveness refer to quality assurance measures being flexible enough to foster innovation and flexibility of provision, and not built solely on a compliance or punitive model.

- **Balance and integration**: Balance and integration refer to quality assurance systems balancing set standards and the protection of the interests of stakeholders, with encouraging continuous improvement and innovation.

- **Continuity and consistency**: Continuity and consistency refer to providing continuity to maintain the confidence of stakeholders and being consistent in application.
Minimum standards: This refers to education and training systems using set standards for both inputs and outputs.

Assurance and improvement: Assurance and improvement refer to quality systems providing assurance of standards and promote improvement in delivery and outcomes.

Independence: Good governance also includes independence of decisions and actions and avoiding conflicts of interest.

Subsidiarity: Subsidiarity refers to quality assurance activities and judgements being made close to the delivery of education and training.

Outlining principles in vision and mission statements for competent bodies, making public policy statements and decisions, and ensuring engagement by key stakeholders in policy directions will assist in promulgating and communicating these principles.

Elements of quality assurance

There are different experiences and different approaches to quality assurance. However, the elements for quality assuring in education and training systems generally include:

1. The education and training product through the approval of standards (such as educational and/or competency standards as well as for certification of a qualification)

2. The training and/or assessment providers through approval processes based upon provider infrastructure, financial probity, staff qualifications and experience, management systems, delivery and assessment systems, and student support systems

3. The education and training processes through the auditing of provider processes and outcomes, including student learning and employment outcomes and student and user satisfaction levels

4. The learning outcomes through control, supervision or monitoring of assessment and graduation procedures and outcomes

5. Provider or system-wide evaluations of education and training quality, including evaluations by external agencies

6. Provision of public information on the performance of provider, such as program and unit completions, student and employer satisfaction.

It is not always the case that all these aspects fall to the responsibility of one competent body within a country; however, the majority of functions listed above will be the responsibility of each competent body. Relevant competent bodies for various elements should be able to demonstrate that there is in place:

Strong governance arrangements. Governance can be defined as: “...the set of responsibilities and practices, policies and procedures, exercised by an agency’s
executive, to provide strategic direction, ensure objectives are achieved, manage risks and use resources responsibly and with accountability”.

- Quality management system that applies to all of its functions, for example, approval of qualifications or competency certification schemes, approval of assessment providers.

- A means for addressing stakeholder complaints.

### 5.3 Quality indicator data

The quality assurance of E&T depends to a large extent upon the availability, validity, reliability of data about the practice and outcomes of E&T. To be able to monitor performance and provide evaluative reports relies heavily on the system having strong data collection and data standard.

Generally speaking, indicators of quality tend to be classified according to inputs and outputs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Input indicators include:</th>
<th>Output indicators were noted as:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- endorsement by industry, professional and occupational groups of the relevance and levels of achievement standards;</td>
<td>- ‘assessment outcomes, and assessment audit outcomes for units and qualifications;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- endorsement by providers of the quality and utility of achievement standards;</td>
<td>- records of program delivery, student activity and student assessments;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- information on the capacity and experience of provider staff, the effectiveness of financial and management systems, and the quality and relevance of provider facilities and equipment;</td>
<td>- student completion rates, satisfaction levels, and destinations – including employment rates, and rates for different social and occupational/industry groups;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- information on the content, style and quality of delivery of providers;</td>
<td>- information on the use of skills within the workplace;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- information on provider student support services, facilities and systems;</td>
<td>- employer and other user satisfaction with graduate outcomes; and,</td>
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<tr>
<td>- information on enrolment entry requirements and procedures;</td>
<td>- evidence of the accuracy of information systems, systems to identify skill needs and the identification of the needs of vulnerable and/or other social groups’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- patterns of student enrolments in relation to policy objectives;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- investment by providers and staff in professional development, facilities upgrades, quality assurance systems, and other innovations;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- enrolment levels and patterns for providers;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- the comprehensiveness, relevance and accessibility of information systems; and,</td>
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<tr>
<td>- mechanisms to identify areas and types of skill needed by industry.’</td>
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Competent bodies should have a strategy in place for data collection according to an agreed data standard to enable it to perform evaluation and reporting functions.

5.4 Quality assurance in the system for Recognition of prior learning

Competent bodies for implementation of the procedures for Recognition of prior learning should comply with the general principles for quality assurance for education and training systems, previously explained. Competent bodies need to consider how their quality assurance system demonstrates the six elements listed above, or how these elements are applicable for new developed or re-designed certification schemes.

1. Development of the E&T product

Within any E&T system, there are multiple options for the construction of achievement standards, including:
- Competency standards are statements of knowledge, skills and/or competence linked to a job.
- Occupational standards are statements of activities and tasks related to a specific job and its practice.
- Assessment standards are statements of learning outcomes to be assessed and the methodology to be used.
- Certification standards are rules for obtaining an award and the rights conferred.
- Educational standards which are statements of learning objectives, content to be addressed, entry requirements and resources required.

An E&T system may use a mix of these standards or focus on one or two, for example, competency or occupational standards.

For those competent bodies who adhere to ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons, certification standards are termed “certification schemes”. Under this ISO Standard, a certification scheme includes scope of certification, job and task description, required competence, and prerequisites. In addition, this ISO Standard requires the development of the certification scheme to include appropriate experts, prerequisites, job analysis, assessment guidance and examination content, and any re-certification requirements. This final requirement is an intrinsic difference between qualifications systems and that of competency certification systems adhering to ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons.

The key focus of developing standards is ensuring that they are relevant and current for industry.
2. Approval of training and/or assessment providers

The approval of training and/or assessment providers is one of the key functions of competent bodies. However, approval processes could be voluntary or compulsory and limited to:

- Private providers, especially if approval of public providers is assumed
- Assessment providers only, with training providers being an open market.

Approval requirements can be documented in guidelines, legislation or regulations, or quality standards.

For those competent bodies that adhere to ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons, outsourcing processes are to include a legally enforceable agreement and the certification agency is to:

- Take responsibility for all outsourced work
- Ensure that the body conducting the outsourced work is competent and complies with requirements
- Assess and monitor the performance of these bodies conducting the outsourced work
- Maintain records to demonstrate that the bodies conducting the outsourced work meet all requirements
- Maintain a list of bodies conducting the outsourced work.

3. Monitoring of E&T processes and provision

Monitoring of E&T processes and provision can include evaluation of quality indicator data (such as gender ratio, student teacher ratio, outcomes through reviews of student assessments as well as qualification progression and completion rates, employment outcomes, user satisfaction, continuation of further study) and audit or review methodologies of the provider’s management system and implementation. Audit reviews could be conducted on a cyclical basis, with the option of different cycles for different categories of providers. Audits can be scheduled in different ways, for example, as a one-off major review or undertaken at short notice. Competent bodies would need to have clear guidelines on:

- Data to be collected, including a data standard
- Quality criteria or standards for providers of assessment services (which may include training services) that are auditable
- Monitoring arrangements, and registers of actions taken against poor performing providers, for example, sanctions and closures.
4. Learning outcomes through control, supervision or monitoring of assessment
and graduation procedures and outcomes

Quality assurance of assessment can take a variety of approaches and each E&T
system may implement these approaches in various ways, including:

- Controlling assessment:
  - Centrally developed assessment instruments and centralised
    administered assessments
  - Centrally developed assessment instruments, RTO administered
    assessments but externally judged
  - Combination of externally developed and administered assessment with
    RTO developed and administered assessments

- Monitoring assessment decisions:
  - Centralised collection of assessments and assessment decisions
  - Providers self-monitor and report

- Managing assessors:
  - Criteria for suitability and professional development of assessors
  - Register of assessors
  - Re-certification of assessors.

Finally, protocols for awarding certificates or qualifications can vary:

- Awarding/certifying bodies issue certificates or qualifications
- Awarding/certifying body approves providers to issue on their behalf; with student
  outcomes retained at the provider or at the awarding body
- Awarding/certifying bodies approve providers to issue certificates or qualifications.

For those bodies that adhere to ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment –
General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons, the standard
requires:

- Documented assessment methods and mechanisms, accommodate special
  needs, ensure assessment adheres to principles of validity and reliability
- Established requirements for assessors and approval and monitoring processes of
  assessor performance
- Responsibility for issuing certificates and ensuring that evidence is sufficient to
  grant the relevant certificate.

Competent bodies would need to have clear documented protocols for processes
related to monitoring arrangements, assessment and issue of awards.
5. Evaluations of E&T quality

In any E&T system there are competing demands and allegiances, and agencies should be able to objectively review and reflect on the system, identifying and reporting inefficiencies.

Evaluations require the ability to request or retain quality indicator data, provide reports and information to relevant ministries and to other agencies. The evaluation of E&T quality at a system level provides stakeholders with information as to whether policy is meeting national or sectoral targets or needs. Evaluations could be undertaken using external agencies.

Competent bodies should have the ability to produce summary reports outlining the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments.

6. Provision of public information

For a competent body, transparency is a key principle of good governance. The provision of public information on both the body’s performance and that of the provider performance should provide confidence in the quality assurance systems.

Competent bodies may report activity through various strategies, such as annual reports, registers of actions taken against providers, and website updates. In addition, for those that adhere to ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons, the standard requires the provision of public information related to the certification process, scope of certification schemes, and requirements for entry to certification schemes.

As in any system, providing transparent and clear information about the quality assurance processes of competent bodies to others, both nationally and internationally, is critical to promoting understanding and trust. The scope of the information that competent bodies should consider being included on their websites, in both the national language and in English:

- Legislation pertaining to the certification agency and its role; any legislation or regulations, guidelines related to key processes
- Skills framework and its link to the NQF (if applicable)
- Certification schemes (or qualifications frameworks), related training standards and any re-certification requirements
- Quality assurance strategies documented in guidelines or overviews, including development and approval processes for certification schemes, approval processes for providers of training and/or assessment, monitoring arrangements
- Registers of providers to training and/or assessment, additional outsourced assessment venues, and assessors (if applicable)
- Data and activity reports, including sanctions or closures, Evaluation reports.

In addition, links to labor market data and recognition processes for international labor or student mobility could be included in public information.

To facilitate mutual understanding and trust in each E&T system quality assurance approaches based on common set of Principles and protocols should be used both by:

- Competent body. A competent body is ultimately responsible for all or some aspects of the competency certification system. A competent body may be a qualifications authority, a body responsible for occupational standards development/endorsement, an awarding body or a competency certification body.

- Providers of assessment services. Providers are those that provide assessment services (and possibly training services) and may also be an awarding body or competency certification body.

6.1 Guiding principles for competent bodies

The following principles underpin quality assurance and quality review processes used individually and collectively by each competent body.

**Governance.** Competent bodies have clearly documented governance arrangements that set out the responsibilities and practices, policies and procedures, exercised by an agency’s executive, to provide strategic direction, to ensure objectives are achieved, to manage risks and to use resources responsibly.

**Accountability.** Competent bodies have a legal or reporting framework to evaluate its practices and performance against set criteria. Competent bodies should ensure that results of quality assurance and quality review activities are publicly reported at least annually.

**Transparency.** Competent bodies provide accurate and clear information in relation to their key functions, including processes, standards and performance.

**Independence.** Competent bodies have a mandate, guidelines, processes and practices that ensure independence of different elements of the quality assurance system, avoidance of conflict of interests, and independence of decision making.

**Confidence and standards.** Competent bodies have processes and practices to provide stakeholders with confidence that standards (both inputs and outputs) have been met.

**Continuous improvement.** Competent bodies’ quality assurance approaches ensure the use of a balance of strategies that enhance the provision of services to meet the changing and future needs of stakeholder groups.

**Proportionality.** Competent bodies have quality assurance and quality review approaches that are fit for purpose and reflect the context and diversity of the AMS.

**Flexibility of services.** Competent bodies ensure that protocols are in place nationally to facilitate assessment services or recognition processes for national or international applicants.
Collaboration. Competent bodies collaborate with other competent bodies, nationally and internationally.

6.2 Guiding protocols for competent bodies

The competent body observes the following protocols in managing its quality assurance and quality review activities.

1. A competent body documents and implements a quality management system to address all of its functions, including:
   - Approval and monitoring of achievement standards that includes industry sector participation
   - Approval, monitoring and evaluation of providers of training and/or assessment services based on criteria or standards
   - Monitoring of assessment outcomes
   - Issuing of certificates
   - Records management including a data standard
   - Data security
   - Outsourcing
   - Addressing complaints
   - Reporting obligations
   - Continuous improvement and internal review.

2. A competent body makes public its quality assurance processes, in both its national language and in English.

3. A competent body manages the performance of providers of assessment services through mechanisms such as explicit incentives and sanctions.

4. A competent body maintains public registers for approved providers of training and/or assessment services, and for achievement standards such as competency certification schemes or qualifications.

5. A competent body establishes protocols for international exchange, including commitment to maintaining communication with competent agencies nationally and internationally, as well as participating in international forums, capacity development exchanges and benchmarking activities.

6. A competent body commits to an external review of its performance on a cyclical basis and makes public the findings of the review.
6.3 Guiding principles for providers

The following principles underpin quality assurance and quality review processes used by each provider of assessment services, for example, an assessment provider, or a training and assessment provider.

**Governance.** Providers have clearly documented goals and objectives, governance arrangements and probity measures to meet the relevant competent body’s requirements and legislation. They should have the financial resources necessary for its operation.

**Accountability.** Providers monitor and evaluate their practices and performance against the competent body’s set requirements and using client stakeholder feedback. Providers should ensure that results of quality assurance and quality review activities are publicly reported.

**Transparency.** Providers have accurate and clear information in relation to their assessment and support services for clients.

**Independence.** Providers ensure that they conduct their services (e.g. assessment) with impartiality, with avoidance of conflict of interests and ensuring independence of decision making, especially assessment outcome decisions.

**Confidence and standards.** Providers have processes and practices that ensure that services conducted by themselves or on their behalf meet the required standards and expectations. Provider processes and practices should provide the competent body and its stakeholders with assurance that individual achievement standards have been met.

**Continuous improvement.** Provider processes and practices balance compliance requirements and continuous improvement processes to ensure that their services meet stakeholder and client needs.

**Proportionality.** Provider quality assurance and quality review approaches are fit-for-purpose and focused on ensuring quality outcomes.

**Flexibility of services**

Providers ensure that barriers to assessment services for national or international applicants are minimised.
6.4 Guiding protocols for providers

The provider observes the following protocols in managing its quality assurance and quality review activities.

1. A provider documents and implements a quality management system to ensure that it provides quality assessment services, including:
   - Ensuring appropriate assessment resources, physical resources are suitable for the competency certification schemes or programs
   - Ensuring appropriate levels of competent staff for its assessment services, including professional development
   - Monitoring services through client and stakeholder feedback
   - Valid and reliable assessment outcomes
   - Issuing of qualifications or certificates (if applicable)
   - Records management
   - Data security
   - Outsourcing arrangements
   - Addressing client complaints
   - Continuous improvement and internal review.

2. A provider takes responsibility for all assessment services undertaken on its behalf. Provider maintains a public register of its campuses, assessment centres or venues and provides public information on the performance of these sites.

3. A provider implements access and equity strategies in the provision of services, including inclusive entry requirements, support for clients with disabilities in the learning and/or assessment, recognition of prior learning, and acknowledges assessments undertaken by other quality assured service providers or competent bodies.

4. A provider implements processes and practices to ensure that decisions made are impartial and free of conflicts of interest or undue influence.

5. A provider implements procedures to minimise barriers to assessment services including providing assessments at regular intervals, that the fee is reasonable and transparent.

6. A provider establishes protocols for maintaining communication with the competent body and other providers, participating in benchmarking activities and/or assessment moderation.

7. A provider takes responsibility for the maintenance of its compliance with the quality standards. Provider takes a continuous improvement approach to its assessment services. Provider is subject to external review the findings of which are made public.
References


