

Getting Effect of VPL

In terms of Benefits for each Individual Applicant

Manual for VPL Professionals



Erasmus+ Effect VPL

Project title:

Effectiveness of VPL Policies and Programmes for Labour Market Inclusion and Mobility – Individual and Employer Perspectives

Anne Lund and Bodil Husted, VIA University College

Getting Effect of VPL in Terms of Benefits for each Individual Applicant. Manual for VPL Professionals
2019

This publication is based on research and contributions from the project partners:

Alexandra Lis, Jagiellonian University in Krakow and Ewa Bodzińska-Guzik, Joanna Łuszczki, Regional Labour Office in Krakow, Poland

Özlem Ünlühisarcıklı, Bogazici University; Dilek Erzurumlu, Bogazici University and Sinem Atakul, Istanbul Medeniyet University, Turkey

Franziska Laudenbach & Eva Anslinger, University of Bremen

Bodil Mygind Madsen and Margit Thordal, SOSU East-Jutland, Denmark

Bodil Lomholt Husted, Jeanette Lindholm and Anne Lund, VIA University College, Denmark

Photos: SOSU East-Jutland, Denmark (page 4, 14) VIA University College, Denmark (page 18)

Content

Introduction	5
A close look – which types of benefits for the individual?	7
The VPL Professionals	10
The meeting with the individual in the VPL.....	11
Guidance.....	15
The assessment.....	19
Information, overview and coherence.....	22
Design of the VPL procedure.....	23
A closer look at the institutional arrangement.....	26
Creative co-creation together with the applicant	27
Quotations.....	28



Introduction

When asking persons, who have had their prior learning assessed, what was the benefit? The reply would often be like: *“It made my job options much better”* or *“I got started on my education, which improved my job chances”*.

However, quite many individuals do not experience any - or if any, then just minor benefits.

This Manual provides ideas and recommendations for the issue of increasing the effectiveness of "Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) in terms of improving possibilities for the individual's benefits. The Manual primarily focuses on benefits in terms of: labour market inclusion, enhanced employability and further learning opportunities.

Not simple one-to-one causalities

It is not realistic to expect that one specific VPL procedure or method should generate benefits for the individual VPL user better than other VPL procedures. One cannot count on simple causalities of method-effect. On the contrary, VPL implies a complexity of various contexts which either work well together, or which – in some instances might interfere with each other.

For each person, who undergoes a VPL, the VPL in itself represents one step among many in a lifespan, where the labour market and / or the education or training programme, which the person is approaching, equally provides a great importance for the potential benefits compared to the prior learning outcome he or she already has achieved. These elements cannot easily be separated when it comes to determining the essential factors for such benefits.

For some individuals, the VPL forms a first step on a pathway, prepared by the employer, for enabling them to keep their jobs. Or, the VPL might be a first step towards the desired education to get the job, they look for.

“My boss knows my skills and suggested it”

Whilst others, for instance migrants, confronted with barriers to the labour market, experience these to be so high that none of the competences they

“It was my dream to study”

bring, count in the new country. Here, the VPL is one out of many attempts to find an entrance into the labour market.

Basically, VPL is linked to diverse institutions, like for instance units for quality assurance, public job centres, branch committees, independent assessment units, centres for career guidance or educational institutions.

For the individual, the potential benefits of the VPL also depends on what can be brought into effect within the specific institutional framework, in which the VPL is carried out. Within the context of an educational institution, a VPL might result in a shortening of the education for the student, or a VPL carried out by a branch committee might result in a certification for a job within the occupational field. However, it is important to stress that these benefits are not necessarily the results. The potential for securing a coordination or cooperation across sectors pose either the success or the opposite for bringing the benefits of the VPL into effect. Therefore, when talking about the relationship of effectiveness of VPL and individual's benefits, the coherence of the VPL process – i.e. the continuity and the interrelationship among the institution being responsible for the assessment and the employers to recruit or to provide further education and training for their employees, is of great importance.

You might say that, the chances that a VPL provides benefits for the individual appear in the intersection of the person's individual lifespan and the institutional framework of the specific VPL arrangement.

However – also generic circumstances counts

Being fully aware of the VPL complexity for each single person, as described above, it is the aim of this Manual, to provide inspiration to Guidance counsellors and assessors for how to improve effectiveness of the VPL arrangement in order to ensure the individual's benefits.

The development of this Manual is based on a comprehensive number of qualitative studies on VPL candidates' experience of what came out of their VPL processes. The studies are carried out in Poland, Turkey, Germany and Denmark. Regardless the diversity of VPL systems and frameworks, the experiences and the reflections on the VPL processes are very much the same: what they recognize as benefits, the request of being listened to, the importance of good guidance and a transparent and fair validation.

A close look – which types of benefits for the individual?

Job and possibilities for job changing

What individuals figure as the immediate benefits of their VPL; and what they expect to achieve within a longer perspective is not just a job! A close look at the experience of study case interviewees illustrates that benefits are recognised in terms of job retention at the workplace which the person appreciates together with the aim of securing one's employability within a desired work field, if a job change should be the situation – being for necessity or by own wish. This means that, from the individual perspective, mobility on labour market is regarded a clear benefit.

Career change

For some persons, it becomes necessary to change career, if for instance jobs disappear or if working conditions due to health problems require a change of job function or –area. For other persons the change might have to do with a deeply felt wish for a completely new job.

Valuation and importance

The sense of having your education and experience recognised – not just for the direct relevance of these according to a certain job or education, but furthermore as it addresses a deep sentence of being recognised – as “Yes, I can”. This is indeed valuable not least because of an increased self-esteem and – hereby – the empowerment to change one's own situation.

“The certification of my competences boosted my confidence. I am now much more comfortable doing my job than before.”

When the VPL is linked directly to education, there is a wide range of perspectives to benefits:

A shortcut to securing one's income

When the outcome of the VPL is equal to the recognition of a part qualification - in terms of a shortening of the education or direct access to a job, this undoubtedly represents a major benefit. This counts especially when you are in the situation of losing income during your study and if the education is a mean to gain a better job or to gain a job with a better salary. In this situation, time and less recognition of prior learning bear the risk of the individual's giving up the education.

“As a single mom, I needed the shortening”

To learn and to immerse your-self in a study

Having a shortening of the education due to the VPL is not necessarily the highest motivation for all. For some adults – perhaps short skilled without much experience from school or education, the motivation for being well prepared to exam and to get as much benefit from teaching as possible – or simply the desire to learn more – to immerse into new insights – represent a deeper motivation than a fast track to the certificate.

To make use of one's experience in the education

All professionals dealing with adult students and learners know how valuable it is for the adult to have your experience and competences recognised – not just as the result of a VPL, but also in the sense of being met with your own valuable background to build further on in the course of the education. Being listened to and to be recognised as a competent individual – by teachers as well as by fellow students – form the excellent platform for scaffolding your learning and to further expand new insights in the meeting point of practice and life- experience, whilst achieving also the understanding of new theoretical perspectives. When this is the situation – in a motivating and appreciative adult learning environment - you can say that this is really a benefit, which derives from the effectiveness of the valuation process. otherwise, the negative consequence might result in the feeling of not being met as a competent adult person when having your experience ignored. Such a situation poses a risk for the adult student to drop out from education.

To secure and to change one's life situation

Summarizing, what the applicants – the interviewees – point out as benefits is about securing or changing one's job, or in a broader sense, the benefit provides a step in the realization of the desired change in the person's life-situation. No doubt, this kind of benefit bears the extra positive dimension as this importance helps realizing a deep wish.

However, it is not always the situation that VPL fosters such a high level of self-realization in terms of life change. For many persons, the VPL might be experienced more like a formality, if, for instance a certification due to qualifying for new job tasks is required by the employer or if the assessment of prior learning is a requirement for being able to access an education or training.

Aspects of benefits are manifold. Hence, in order to understand what are actually the benefits for each person, the guidance meeting is crucial for creating benefits.

The VPL Professionals

All the professionals, who take part in a VPL has a number of functions and roles in relation to the applicant:

To inform about VPL, i.e. the legal framework, the practical VPL arrangement and assessment criteria towards job-and educational standards

To guide the applicant:

- to provide career- and education guidance
- to guide for the identification of the applicant's competences – within a broad (divergent) perspective
- to guide for the identification of competences towards a specific subject or a certain set of qualifications and competences - within a narrow / specific (convergent) perspective.
- to guide for the documentation of competences and /or for a test
- to guide the applicant, after the VPL for the planning of next step in terms of realizing applicant's decisions.

To assess applicant's competences towards a certain subject.

To certify and **to register** in order to formalize applicant's recognised competences.

In addition, there are tasks for preparation and quality assurance of VPL, i.e. design of procedure for applicant's presentation of competences, documentation requirements, development of tables and - not least – to determine the acceptable indicators for a competence? *See more about this below.*

All these functions might be in the hand of one single VPL professional or the functions can be arranged in a shared responsibility of more professionals, with a separation of the guidance- and assessment functions. Furthermore, the functions might be placed in different institutions, which point at the necessity of securing the coordination of these functions.

Altogether, the listed functions constitute the entire arrangement for the applicant's VPL and likewise, these functions generate the assessment and the recognition. In the end, it is the results of this assessment and recognition, which in various forms turn out as benefits for the applicant.

Below, we move on to the direct meeting between the professional and the applicant.

The meeting with the individual in the VPL

Who are you? What do you represent? Which is your VPL role?

Many applicants are unfamiliar with VPL. They do not know which tasks and which authority the professional, they meet, possess. Is he an examiner? Does he represent an authority? And which? How does she deal with the information, I give her?

Because of all the applicant's considerations, it is very important that you, being the VPL professional, make a good presentation of yourself, that you explain the aim and commitment of the organisation, you represent and - not least – what is your specific role in the VPL?

To summarize, what can the applicant expect from you?

Listen

Professionals dealing with guidance and counselling know how valuable a validation dialogue can be for the individual and how a good dialogue, in it-self, might have an impact for the person's chance to reflect the essence of the dialogue in her lifespan perspective. Having realized this, quite often the validation process does not offer much time for the person to tell and to reflect.

When people, in their midlives, have the opportunity to tell about work life experience – linked to their entire lifespan, rich stories are conveyed. The stories present experiences, which are clearly valuable for the persons, but, sometimes, an additional outcome of a good dialogue could also unveil key experiences, which they were not as much aware of – or they did not by themselves recognize these as valuable. When resources are available for a good dialogue, the VPL professional plays an important role in supporting the individual's recognition of such experiences.

“I was surprised. This conversation influenced my awareness, assessment of what I like to do and what I would not like to do”

In VPL, methods are often distinguished in terms of:

- (1) The *divergent* dialogue which helps the applicant widen her potentials and to explain about her experiences and competences within multiple fields of occupation,

- (2) The *convergent* dialogue, in which the VPL professional assists the applicant in reflecting and explaining what he is competent to in terms of specific job standards and requirements.

The key-difference of these two perspectives could be defined as the act of listening and searching for whatever appears in the applicant's explanations. This is the *divergent* perspective.

With the *convergent* perspective, you are listening – and 'selecting' in order to identify specific signs of competences.

Nevertheless - regardless perspective – listening with a very open mind, an appreciative approach and the professional curiosity is decisive! Likewise, as the VPL professional, you must always be sensitive to notice sign of competences.

First – it is about listening!

Listening means

- Listening to, what the applicant tells and what she chooses to expose
- Listening to 'half' or down-graded statements. Such statements might be a source to detecting something valuable for the applicant
- Listening to the applicant's entire story – as the applicant constructs the story by linking elements to an entity, which is meaningful for her.

Listening also means:

- allowing yourself to keep silent: let the applicant talk, remain silent when the applicant stops or makes a break in his story to reflect – and you should feel comfortable whilst waiting for the applicant to continue his story
- be present and confirm: keep an eye-contact, nod, say 'yes' and reframe your understanding of what you have heard – ask if your understanding is correct?

As a professional, you know that the act of listening is not just easy. It is a key guidance activity that constantly requires your attention and your self-critical reflection if you are actually doing what you expect yourself to do.

Working with VPL involves interaction with many applicants. All together, these meetings tend to provide a *recognition of patterns* of what you have 'met before' and as such, these patterns contribute to the creation of your pre-understandings. Nevertheless, it is important for you as the VPL professional to remind yourself that each applicant is an individual with his own specific narrative in terms of background, potentials, desires and dreams; therefore, *asking* is just as relevant as *listening*!

Ask the applicant

Some applicants talk and tell spontaneously about their prior learning whilst others are more reluctant and feel more comfortable with questions from you. They expect you to ask the relevant questions, maybe they do not like to take too much of your time, or perhaps, they are simply not used to a situation of being in the centre.

- Ask openly and motivate the applicant to unfold her story. Ask directly: please tell me, about *where....* about *what and about how....* These different orientations of the questions inspire the person to explain and thus to help the person elaborate her presentation in a way that makes it easier, in the next phase, to pinpoint and to systematize in order to help identifying potentials and paths to be followed.
- Ask clarifying questions: "Tell me more about...."
- Investigate what the applicant seems not to pay attention to: "You just mentioned – could you explain more about this?"
- Ask the applicant what is important for him and ask why this is important? This gives the applicant the opportunity to go deeper into his story.
- Ask questions, which you know are essential for the VPL, to make sure that the applicant has had the possibility to focus and to explain what has an importance in the assessment of her competences.
- At the end of the dialogue, you can ask the applicant if she believes she has told all? Or if there is more she wants to add.
- In the dialogue, your questions have the function of letting the applicant talk and explain. Do not interrupt with more questions! Be aware that you ask questions that are comfortable for the applicant – to motivate her.
- Avoid questions that make the applicant feel uncertain.

Throughout the entire VPL procedure, asking questions, listening and being very precise and clear about your role and function is of utmost importance. However, be aware that this takes place in terms of, basically, two different types of relationship to the applicant, i.e. when you *guide* the applicant and when you – or another VPL professional - *assess* the applicant's prior learning.



Guidance

As mentioned above, we distinguish between - at least – five various forms of guidance in relation to VPL:

- 1) education- & career guidance
- 2) guidance to support the applicant in the wide identification of competences (*the divergent approach*)
- 3) guidance to support the applicant in the specific identification of competences in relation to a certain topic or to a set of competence requirements (*the convergent approach*)
- 4) guidance for the documentation of her competences
- 5) guidance for the further application of the recognized competences – in job or education.

Guidance in the identification and documentation of competences

The precondition for an applicant to have his competences validated is that the competences are identified /mapped and that the applicant is able to document these. Hence, guidance for 2) and 3) is a key issue in the VPL procedure.

As a minimum, there must be a clear and easy accessible guide, written or a video. Even when you offer a dialogue, a written and video-based guide is a very helpful tool for the applicant to know precisely, what she must do and for her to check if she is able to perform the requested documentation. Such guidance material makes the process easier for both the applicant and for the professional.

If the only guidance resources, offered for the applicant, is the written guide or a video, you must be aware that some of the VPL applicants might have difficulties in reading and understanding the language or the terminology.

This could be the situation, either because the guide language is not the mother tongue of the applicant's or the problem could be dyslexia. In both situations, be aware that they need you or another professional to help them understand the written guide

Irrespective the background, it might be difficult for applicants to identify their own competences and to understand those competence requirements which is part of the validation. The guidance dialogue – for the identification of competences is the important resource for this VPL phase.

The guidance introduction for the identification of prior learning consists partly of the guidance counsellor's presentation of competence requirements, partly in making the applicant explain how and in which contexts she has practiced competences similar to the competence requirements. In the guidance conversation, applicant's description of competences is the key focus. Development of a mind-map to visualize the overview is often a good support for the candidate's reflection.

The guidance to the applicant on how to document the competences depends on the categories of competences to be validated. Documentation needs to be conceived in a wide sense:

- diplomas from educational institutions
- proof of employment from employers,
- the applicant's personal written documentation, for instance CV and descriptions of his competences
- the applicants' presentation of prior learning in the validation interview
- results from tests and assignments.

Altogether, the aim of this guidance is to secure that the applicant is fully aware of what to present and how to prepare for the interview, test or assignment.

Offer a broad guidance counselling

Some applicants do neither wish nor need education- and career guidance, a wide identification of competences or a guidance counselling on how to proceed after the VPL (see above, guidance forms 1,2 and 5). This is of course the right of the applicant. Still, this should be offered as qualified guidance for these areas also bear the potential for the applicant to successfully get a job, make a job change or attend further education and training.

Education- & Career guidance is based on a well-established and broadly published foundation of theory and methods. Hence, this guide does not include a further presentation of these. Education & Career guidance is often closely linked to the applicants' broad identification of competences, in which process the applicant becomes aware of his prior learning outcome that might form the platform for having an education or for following a new direction of career.

Guidance counselling in the wide identification of competences opens up for the applicant to view her work-life and lifespan experience within the perspective that both areas have contributed to her development of a multitude of competences.

A very useful method for supporting such acknowledgement and insight is to motivate the applicant to tell her occupational, educational and lifespan stories and to provide sufficient time for her to do so. What was the work and the tasks about? What was she specifically good at doing and what did she like the most?

Guidance for this kind of identification – or mapping to use another word – can usefully be done in terms of two parts of the guidance conversation. Between, the two parts of the guidance conversation, the applicant further develops her description and thus she will probably memorize more experience and understanding of where she developed her competences. Here, mind mapping could be a valuable tool.

Hence, in some instances, the guidance for the next step after the VPL, could just be pure informative with the aim of making sure that the applicant knows where to go in order to move further on. However, of course, this could also be Education-& Career guidance based on the potentials, which appear for the applicant after the VPL.



The assessment

Fair and transparent assessment

The assessment must be fair in the sense that the applicant experiences, that exactly her competences and *not* her personality – or maybe cultural background is part of the assessment. The criteria for fulfilling the required competencies must be reasonable as also objectives, and assessment criteria must be transparent for the applicant.

The basis for a transparent assessment is prepared for the applicant when he or she is well informed in the guidance counselling prior to the VPL process, as it should also be checked if the applicant clearly understands objectives, requirements and assessment criteria. During the assessment, the assessor can explain how the assessment is made. Furthermore the assessor can present the assessment tools which will be used for the assessment. After the assessment, a thorough feedback contributes to making the assessment transparent for the applicant.

Interpretation of standard

In many cases, there are no well-defined objectives or standards for what is precisely required to fulfil a certain competence. Within each single competence areas, traditions are established for determining what is considered valid knowledge and which methods should be used.

As a professional, the challenge is to accept, that objectives and standards can be fulfilled in several ways; furthermore, to practice the pragmatic approach that knowledge and skills which works in concrete and relevant contexts can be as valid, even when these are not exactly the same as knowledge and methods taught during a formal education.

As the VPL professional, it is your responsibility to explain precisely what determines the competent practice. This implies that you as the professional must interpret objectives and standards. Throughout time, assessors increase their understanding of what appear as competent practice and thus contribute to new interpretations – while at the same time you must assure that the assessed competence is equivalent with the formal objective.

Relevant background for assessment

What forms the valid background for documentation to the assessment?

The applicant's documentation might consist of the elaboration of *which* work tasks she has carried out in various jobs. *How* she has carried out the work tasks; *what* she has produced and by which means and methods; *what* has she been responsible for; which results came out of this responsibility – and – altogether – which reflections and considerations does this elaborated list make her do? In this sense, the elaborated documentation forms a retrospective, linguistic documentation. The documentation can be *oral* as well as a *written* text, prepared by the applicant.

Linguistic documentation can be structured in terms of an interview guide and by tables. The advantage of this type of documentation is that you, as the VPL professional, will ensure that the applicant is asked the important questions.

The interview guide and tables must contain open questions, enabling the applicant to add his experiences.

When it is about skills, the assessment background might be a practical test and when academic skills – then a written presentation and reflection.

Competences can also be documented in terms of a presentation of products, made by the applicant. Besides, the applicant can submit diplomas from education and evidence of occupation and volunteering to proof that she has undergone education, that she has been employed or carried out voluntary work.

As the professional, it is important to make sure by yourself and to be explicit of what you are looking for and what you pay attention to among the applicant's different forms of documentation.

Pay attention to the applicant's information and documentation

Review the applicant's documentation together with the applicant. Agree about the essence and specific focus of each document and explain to the applicant which importance the documented activity has for the validation of the competence.

“I felt she answered for me without even looking at my papers or my face”

Add also if you do not attach importance to an activity, so that the applicant is aware of what counts and why.

Feedback on the validation

The experience of the feedback might be special for the applicant. This is where another person assesses and recognizes her as competent. Hence, the feedback is essential for her self-confidence and her decision to move on with education or job.

To make the feedback useful for the applicant, it must be well-founded, so that the applicant is confirmed in her understanding of what she is competent to. Similarly, the feedback must provide also the argument for not recognizing a competence, so that she understands what she needs to learn. In case a competence is not recognized due to a formal requirement, it is important that the applicant is informed specifically about this to make her understand that not her prior learning, but a formal requirement is not fulfilled.

Information, overview and coherence

Information in advance

Inform the applicant about the VPL process. Forward clear and easy understandable written information about:

- Where and when to attend til first meeting
- The entire VPL process step by step
- Which papers and documentation to bring
- Which kind of results from the VPL can be the situation? What happens after the VPL? And how to proceed for the applicant if her competences are not recognized?

It is recommended to use a visual model of the VPL procedure including all steps.

Proper information provided in advance ensures the applicant a safe feeling, which helps her perform what it takes for the validation.

Create coherence and linkage with the next step

In case, more VPL professionals are involved in the process, when for instance information, guidance and assessment is distributed to more professionals, it is very important that the applicant is guided to the next step. It is equally important that the documentation of prior learning, developed by the applicant is forwarded to the professional, responsible for the next step in the VPL process – with the applicant's acceptance and in due respect of the personal data, in order to avoid for the applicant that explanation of prior learning should be elaborated again.

Even in well-functioning procedures, information can get lost during the process. To increase the coherence in the VPL process, you can ask the applicant, which information do you have about the procedure? Which parts of the process have been carried out until now? How is your understanding of the result? Make sure that you are aware of the applicant's purpose and aim concerning the VPL result. Ask the applicant what could be VPL benefits for her, so that you as the professional can guide her further on.

Design of the VPL procedure

Design the procedure from the applicant's perspective

The entire VPL procedure forms the basis for providing benefits for the applicant

From the VPL institution's perspective it might be the rationale to design the procedure in order to ensure a fast flow in the management with a minimum of actions to finalize the validation as quick as possible. For the applicant too, flow in the process it is of equal importance to assist the applicant move from step to step and to have the certificate without unnecessary waiting time.

Nevertheless, the design of the VPL procedure also requires an attention on the applicant's perspective, which among others implies the understanding that a VPL process is not always a linear process.

During the VPL, the applicant becomes aware of own competences as well as options for job and education which was perhaps not obvious for the applicant prior to the VPL. Hence, a VPL procedure, which provides the basis for the applicant's benefits, must take into count that the competence field and perspective could change during the VPL.

Basically, from the applicant's perspective the following elements is of great importance: 1) relevant and sufficient information, 2) sufficient guidance, 3) appropriate time resources in the assessment stage in order to secure that the documentation is properly recognized. Furthermore, that the applicant receives a clear and transparent feedback.

Finally, professionals must be aware that, even when the procedure is designed with the aim of fulfilling these basic requirements, the applicant might not feel him-self fully acknowledged.

A simple way of keeping applicant's perspective during the VPL procedure is – occasionally, to interview individuals on how they experienced their VPL process and how they expect possible benefits in terms of the VPL.

Formulating requirements and assessment criteria

Formulation of requirements for standard and objectives of the validation together with the assessment criteria is the decisive element of the VPL procedure design.

When the formulation of these elements are carried out in cooperation among professionals, you improve your understanding of which parts and why you are paying special attention in the assessment process. Furthermore, it becomes obvious for yourself, when you – in the meeting with competent applicants - have to reinterpret requirements and criteria.

Selection of documentation forms

The selection of documentation forms naturally depends on the kind of competences to be validated. In the design of the VPL procedure, the documentation form is closely linked to the formulation of requirements and criteria. How can the candidate document the fulfilment of requirements in a way that makes the professional notice and understand this?

And, vice versa, what is possible to notice and understand from a certain documentation form – and what is not visible? Often, the proper choice will be a combination of documentation forms.

Besides, when selection documentation forms, it is important to make sure, that you can store the documentation in terms of registrations and notes, the applicant's documentation, being either written or videotaped. This is important to make sure that you still have the documentation when you are preparing your argumentation for the validation. Meanwhile, you also need to make sure that retention of the documentation does not form a barrier for you, as the professional, to be fully attentive to the applicant.

Finally, it is of importance in the choice of documentation forms that these also provide the potentials for applicants to document their competences, irrespective of cultural and linguistic background.

Design of tables and requirements for the written documentation

Tables are often used in a VPL procedure. Tables are important in the design of the procedure though applicants' might find them difficult to complete. Therefore, you could involve applicants in the user testing of new tables to make sure that purpose as well as requirements for completion of the tables is clear and understandable.

Provide examples of design for written documentation material. Applicants often ask for examples.

The completion of tables together with the compilation of evidence form a great work for the applicant. Some applicants have the experience, that during the VPL process, their documentation is not read nor used in the process. Hence, you should only ask for specific documentation requirements when these are necessary. Therefore, together with your colleagues, you should regularly reconsider and evaluate requirements for the applicants' information in terms of tables or other kinds of written documentation.

Involvement of professionals

When meeting – throughout time – various applicants, you build your valuable experience. Hence, it is of great importance that professionals being responsible for guidance and assessment are involved in the design of the procedure, that they learn about colleagues' experiences and that they regularly evaluate the procedures, whilst also including new literature about validation in their practice.

A closer look at the institutional arrangement

The institutions, providing VPL, might also be providers of other offers. In such cases, VPL is maybe just a minor task, which means that the institution's main focus together with economical and professional interests are oriented towards other areas; like for instance a branch organisation or an educational institution.

When applicants experience that they cannot have their competences validated or, when the validation does not really provide benefits for them, an explanation might be that standard rules and requirements or unwritten norms prohibit the acceptance of competences developed outside the institution.

Unfamiliarity with VPL and its potentials – not just for the individual, but also for the institution - may be part of the explanation, when institutions keep a practice of not accepting validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In order to realize the individual's benefit of VPL, sometimes the professional has to look towards his own institution and ask: do these people, who carry out a VPL in my institution, really achieve any benefits? Have a look at the rules and the unwritten norms of the institution and make an effort, together with key person in the institutions to critically evaluate the VPL practice. We suggest this, being well aware that doing so might evoke dilemmas among the management of VPL and other tasks of the institution. However, very often, dialogues about dilemmas create new dynamics, which develop the institution and its practice.

Creative co-creation together with the applicant

Validation is a creative process.

The professional is creative whilst listening to the applicant's narratives, when she watch him carry out a task and when afterwards transforming this to competences. It is also a creative process for the applicant, when he, in the meeting with the VPL process, achieves the opportunity to regard his experience and educations within new perspectives and when he identifies, describes and demonstrates them. Moreover, it is a creative process for the applicant to view himself as competent person within new occupational fields – gaining also new options.

When this is successful, a co-creation of the professional and the applicant has taken place.

Quotations

Page

5	Woman and man, Germany
7	Man, Turkey
8	Woman, Germany
11	Woman, Poland
20	Woman, Denmark