The development of recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) mechanisms as well as national qualifications frameworks (NQFs)

Pilot Workshop on Developing Capacity for Establishing Lifelong Learning Systems in UNESCO Member States

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Definition of RVA

- The recognition, validation and accreditation of skills, knowledge and competence against quality assured and standards of education and training.

- Special emphasis on mechanisms to recognize prior learning from informal settings; and

- Equivalent learning from non-formal programmes for purposes of certification, qualifications and access to and progression within formal learning systems.
RVA is an integral process

Together with:
- Qualifications frameworks
- Credit transfer systems
- Involvement of all stakeholders
- Information and guidance and awareness raising

- …recognition of non-formal and informal learning is a potential mechanism to promote continuous learning, employability, empowerment and personal development and it is an alternative route to qualifications for adults and young people
RVA is an integral process

- The overall purpose of Recognition validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning is to promote a society offering lifelong learning for all, by building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- The European Commission document on ‘Communication on Lifelong Learning’ (2001) defines the core concepts as follows:
  - **Formal learning** is typically provided by an education or training institute; it is structured and leads to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.
  - **Non-formal learning** is not provided by an education or training institution and typically it does not lead to certification. However, it is structured. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view.
  - **Informal learning** results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured. Typically, it does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but, in most cases, it is non-intentional (or ‘incidental’/random).
Context: trends at present

• Coping with Globalisation
• Growth of flexible labour market
• Demographic developments
• Less involvement of government and less public funding
• Learning cultures are changing
• Individual demands quality work, life and learning
Context. Solutions so far:

- Paradigm change: from industry to knowledge to learning outcomes:
- Shift from mere provision to assessment and certification and accreditation;
- Progress towards knowledge-based societies and the need to develop more complex competences; raising competence levels;
Challenges in developing countries

- **Need to go beyond basic learning;**
- The poor have acute knowledge and learning needs to cope with globalization
- **renewed interest in all sub sectors of the education sector.** Awareness that waiting for the achievement of universal coverage of primary education will not do, as many children, youth and adults need to have alternative access programmes linked to overarching frameworks (access, relevance, achievement)
- **Majority of the workforce is active in the informal sector (self-employed and micro-enterprise sector) yet education and training, especially TVET, does not address the needs of informal sectors and targets only those in formal sector.**
Challenges

- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning and NQFs seen as a way to reform education and training systems.
  - limited pathways
  - difficult transitions
  - ever growing number of dropouts
  - Certificates contain little information on competences
  - Fragmentation of training of the variety of providers
  - Limited qualifications and career routes
  - No comparability with other certificates.
  - Need to go beyond the mere communal validation of knowledge to a more public and national system of validation
  - Basic and non-formal education needs to be included within NQFs in order that ladders and bridges avert dead ends.
Learning in a learning society is about

1. Raising awareness of the value of learning
2. Recognition of competences
3. Validation of competences
4. Development of competences
5. Embedding lifelong learning in all domains
Concepts:

**Competence**=
the ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development)

**Learning outcomes**=
the set of knowledge, skills and/or competencies and individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal
The nature of RVA

- The glass is always half filled
- It is about competences and learning outcomes
- Valuing learning in all domains and contexts
- Two main perspectives: summative and formative
- It is a learning partnership of the learner, the working context and the learning system.
- It is about social recognition: whether learning outcomes have value and are used in society
- Recognition does not necessarily mean a high level of formalisation, but it needs some continuum of outcomes from self-assessment (port-folio) to full certification (important for quality assurance)
Pioneering work done by other organisations

- The Centre for the Development of Vocational Training of the (CEDEFOP): Validation of prior learning
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): Recognition of Non-formal and informal learning
- International Labour Organisation (ILO): from skills development to skills recognition
- The Leonardo Network: the Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL)
Critical questions

1. Why do we need to recognise non-formal and informal learning?
2. How do we recognise?
   - the systematics
   - the processes
3. What are the results and impact?
4. What lessons can be learned so far?
5. What needs to be done?
WHY? The rationale

- **Learner’s** entrance into the formal system
- **Learners’** eligibility in the labour market
- Potential for effective human resource management for **enterprises**
- **Society.** Transfer of skills between different spheres (education, work, home and community)
- Reduces inequalities in participation
Why? Recognition generates four different types of benefits:

- economic benefits by reducing the direct and opportunity costs of formal learning and allowing human capital to be used more productively
- educational benefits that can underpin lifelong learning and career development
- social benefits by improving equity and strengthening access to both further education and the labour market, for disadvantaged groups, disaffected youth and older workers
- psychological benefits by making individuals aware of their capabilities and validating their worth
Why?

- Recognition supports lifelong learning by recognising a broader spectrum of learning taking place in formal, non-formal and informal settings.

- Recognition offers opportunities to young people and adults to make the best use of their previous learning experiences. This entails granting to individuals flexible access to learning opportunities.
Why?

• Through granting of exemptions and credits recognition widens access to education.
Why?

• Recognition broadens the variety of disciplines and programmes available to disadvantaged groups and therefore allows people from all parts of the community to achieve certifications and qualifications across a range of levels.

• Recognition is an important instrument of comparison across the formal, non-formal and informal learning sectors which is designed to eliminate discrimination against people who gain competences from outside the formal spectrum of the education system.
Why?

• Recognition is used as a way of meeting part of the requirements of new qualifications in areas such as home- and early-childhood-care and the tourism industry. Many of these work domains have lacked qualification profiles even though they contain a great number of practitioners with valuable and qualification-worthy experience.
Why?

- Through the validation of prior learning, individuals tend to become motivated to continue along the path of further education and skills training. It is the recognition of one’s own capacity to learn that induces an ongoing desire to seek further learning. Reducing individuals’ study time or giving them the option of acquiring formal qualifications based on the recognition of their prior learning motivates a greater number of people to participate in education and training, with the added benefit that the individual may spend less time in informal education.
Why?

- Even where certification is not the primary goal, making competences visible through instruments such as the lifelong learning passport, benefits both individuals and organisations.
Why?

• For the society as a whole, identification, assessment and recognition of learners’ acquired competences can simplify the transfer of skills between different spheres (education, work and the home) which can improve the allocation of social resources.

• Finally, for those who have experience in the informal economy, particularly in developing countries, recognition promotes personalised training in collaboration with all stakeholders.
Objective level
• EFA goals/Equity issues
• Credibility factor
• Market economy
• Knowledge society

Subjective level
• Important for self-esteem
• Self-awareness
• What counts as learning in our vision of the world?
• Making sense of the world by acting consciously
• “Cognitive justice”
Why? In policy terms: Recognition together with NQFs, credit transfers is an important policy tool

- Non-formal and informal learning – learning that takes place outside formal education institutions – can be a rich source of human, social and personal capital. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning makes this human, social and personal capital more visible and more valuable to society at large.
- Recognition can allow people to complete formal education more quickly, efficiently and cheaply by not having to enrol in courses for which they have already mastered the content.
- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning can also help employers and workers to get a good job match and help displaced workers to inform future employers about their skills.

- **In the North**
The promotion of a lifelong learning society after initial education; efficiency in education and training system; skills shortages

- **In developing countries**
thrust is basic literacy skills and non-formal education where basic educational needs are not being met through formal channels and the level of skills-knowledge in the community is relatively low.
How? A precondition for RVA is the existence of reference for learning outcomes. NQFs are instruments of articulation and equivalency. Features

One is the *competency standards* for qualifications at different levels, which provide a clear and transparent reference for individuals who plan to start, or move to, different learning and career paths.

The second is *education and training institutions* that attempt to *accredit individual’s prior learning as part of the requirements for obtaining a qualification.*
How?

Typology of Reference points for recognition (UIL study)

1. to recognise people according to **standards of education-training system** leading to an already established qualification;

2. or to recognise people against certificates/qualifications that relate to **skills/occupational standards** found in the economic sector;

3. or to systematically organise the two above types of qualifications through a **qualifications framework** that supports the use of learning outcomes, standard setting, curricula and assessment of all learning;

4. **Competency frameworks** conceived specifically to recognise non-formal education or informal apprenticeships, that are found predominantly in developing countries. In these cases references used to support recognition procedures would have to be themselves validated, in agreement with the actors who will have to use recognition procedures within the references adapted to local contexts (UIL Singh 2010 forthcoming).
Qualifications on the NQF

- NQF Levels
- 10: Doctoral Degree
- 9: Masters Degree
- 8: Bachelor Honours, Professional Bachelor
- 7: Bachelor Degree
- 6: Diplomas
- 5: Certificates
### The Scottish Context

#### THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SCQF Levels</th>
<th>SQA Qualifications</th>
<th>Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions</th>
<th>Scottish Vocational Qualifications</th>
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# Proposed National TVET Qualifications Framework (NTVETQF) Ghana

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How? Implementing systems of recognition

- Implementing systems of recognition: critical success factors, and the position of the main actors in these factors within the learning system
  - political determination of states to improve output and develop the economy and society by opting for a competent and qualified manpower (human, social and personal);
  - clarification of the objectives and the identification of those promoting recognition;
  - establishment of a dialogue between actors from the economic world, the education world as well as from civil society;
  - settling the question of human, material and financial resources;
  - establishment of rules and legal framework, taking into account the interests of all the actors and facilitating interaction and coherence of these interests.
  - organisation of economic players by industry and/or professional groupings according to various occupations;
  - political legitimacy and clear public policies at all levels to legitimise trainers, methods and certificates, as well as for setting up frameworks of reference were important factors of success (UIL 2010 forthcoming);
How? Processes of recognition

- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes involves several steps:
  - identifying and documenting what someone knows or can do
  - validating that the person satisfies certain requirements or standards
  - awarding a recognised certification or qualification
  - Recognition is only fully accomplished if the certification or qualification is accepted by society as valid and credible. Ultimately, a recognition process could deliver fully equivalent qualifications to those obtained through formal learning.
How? Processes of recognition

• The five steps to qualification in the French system.
  1. Information provided to candidate by education and training institutions, counsellors, companies or job centres
  2. Verification of claim, choice of relevant procedure advised
  3. Preparation of dossier, collection of evidence or undertaking of tests
  4. Examination of dossier by jury, and, if applicable, practical examination of competences
  5. Assessment of candidate’s claim, provision of feedback and consultation on future pathway
How? Processes of recognition

- **Transparency**
- **Innovation in institutional design**
- **Reliability**
- **Credit transfers**
- **Stages of recognition**
- **Role of Stakeholders**
How? Processes of recognition

- **Assessment**
  - In general, the purpose of recognition is to open assessment up to wider inputs.
  - Summative assessment evaluates what an individual already knows whereas formative assessment takes place during, rather than at the end, of the learning process, evaluating, identifying and further developing an individual learner’s capabilities. As Robert Stake puts it, ‘When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative. When the guests taste the soup, that's summative’ (cited in Scriven 1991: 169).
  - Formative and summative recognition are important for identifying a learning pathway or gaining credit respectively.
How? A range of evidence is used to assess informal or non-formal learning

- applicant’s employment history including records of workplace training,
- confirmation of relevant unpaid or volunteer experience, references from current or previous supervisors, trainers, managers,
- testimonials from customers or clients, and certification and work samples.

Norway has different assessment procedures within the ‘Competence Reform’ for different education levels and settings, from
- prior learning assessments of an ad hoc kind in higher education;
- dialogue-based methods and assessment of portfolios in Upper Secondary Education,
- to “testing”, interview and demonstrations at the vocational level, and
- charting, documenting and self-assessment in non-formal education course (Mohn 2008).
5. **Applications (summative programmes)**

1. **Second chance school programmes**: adult education referenced to school system; equivalency exam
2. **Entry to higher education**: universities working together; access to higher education courses; work-based learning; articulated credit programmes;
3. **Exemptions from formal programmes**: modular higher education, specific credits;
4. **Labour competence certification**: exceptional procedures to allow those with experience to gain access to exams towards qualifications
5. **Vocational education and training redesign** – creation of qualifications that accommodate outcomes from non-formal and informal learning
6. **Alternative certificates**: language certificates, professional bodies.
Non-credit programmes (formative programmes)

1. Literacy, workplace literacy, family literacy
2. Language training
3. Preparation for adult basic education and upper secondary
4. Bridge programmes
5. Career exploration and personal development plan
6. Workplace education
7. Life skills development programmes
What are the lessons learned? The several opportunities of RVA

- Reflect the heterogenity of cultural, social and economic contexts
- Various top-down and bottom up strategies
- Formative assessment and summative accreditation
- Learning outcome descriptions
- Guidance and counselling
- Purpose to widen participation
- Stimulated supplementary non-formal education and training with enriched teaching and learning practices
What needs to be done to improve recognition procedures? Way forward

1. Improve communication and information about recognition, including through career guidance and counselling services and other services working with job seekers and other target groups.

2. Better integrate recognition processes with lifelong learning policies and encourage a learning outcomes attitude across all learning settings.

3. Simplify and strengthen the procedures for recognition by:
   1. providing a directory of qualifications that can be obtained through recognition processes
   2. enlarging the range of competencies that can be assessed
   3. integrating recognition processes within existing qualification standards and frameworks

4. Ensure that the assessment process for recognition demonstrably delivers valid, transparent and consistent measures of skills and competences by:
   1. putting in place rigorous quality assurance procedures
   2. applying appropriate assessment techniques, including testing
   3. using competent and well-trained evaluators
Food for thought
It is better to focus on:

- **Recognition** as opposed to just non-formal learning. It is easier because it is a **visible process**;
- **Recognition and training** should be complements;
- It is not non-formal training that is important but it is the learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning that matter.
- Recognition does not always mean formalisation;
- **Learning outcomes** are clear links between Recognition and qualifications frameworks.
- Recognition **creates new routes to qualifications**;
- It is not about **awarding undeserved qualifications** to everyone;
- Recognition does not create skills, knowledge and competences (summative); but it is still a learning process and a pedagogical devise for promoting adult learning (Formative).
UIL programme on RVA

- Specific mandate of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning (UIL) for conducting research on Recognition, Validation, Accreditation of non-formal and informal learning (RVA) since 2004
- Interagency Group of Experts
- The International Observatory (under construction);
- The Africa network
- International Survey – Synthesis Report (2005) and Typology of countries (44 countries)
- Linking National Qualifications Frameworks and systems (NQFs) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is such an approach
UIL programme on RVA

- Linking National Qualifications Frameworks and systems (NQFs) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
  - National Reports on the linkages: showing the many roads with their own critical success factors;
  - Partner conferences
  - Peer Learning Activities
  - National Stakeholder Meetings
  - Debate the UNESCO-Guidelines on RPL in National Stakeholder Consultations
  - Overview International best practice
  - Communities of practice of/for developers, policymakers, staff/practitioners (incl.‘handbooks‘)
  - Open source knowledge on methodology and applications
UIL programme on RVA

- The Belém Framework mandated the UIL to work on Guidelines for developing structures and mechanisms for the recognition of all forms of learning (Belém Framework for Action 2009);
  1. The culture of lifelong learning
  2. Guidelines are seen as a way this culture can be established and sustained
  3. Purpose is to assist the different organisations making up the learning society in developing their specific role in the learning society.