

UNESCO International Meeting “Linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks: North-South collaborative research”

Summary Report and the Way Forward

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in collaboration with the Centre for Lifelong Learning Strategies (ECI) of INHolland University, the Netherlands, and in partnership with the French National Commission for UNESCO, organized the UNESCO International Meeting “Linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks: North-South collaborative research” from 11 to 12 March 2010 in Hamburg.

The aims and the agenda

The aim of the meeting was to better understand issues on policy and practice concerning the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning (RVA), and how RVA can be better integrated into qualifications frameworks in different national contexts. The agenda was organized around two central themes: (1) Reviewing current practices, sharing practical examples, exploring different national and international developments; (2) Discussing the future research agenda and related institutional capacity building as well as establishing the research network, by bringing the North and South closer together into research partnerships.

Participants

The 30 participants included experts and officials from governmental organizations from more than 20 UNESCO Member States from all world regions. UIL’s Interagency Advisory Group was represented by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), the European Training Foundation (ETF), and the Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning (VOX), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the French National Commission for UNESCO.

Day 1: Focus on the context and its diversity

The inputs and discussions made very clear that not only in the developed countries, particularly Europe, but also in a growing number of developing and emerging economies, RVA and NQFs are high on the political agenda and becoming a practical reality. From the point of view of the European countries, RVA is more and more turning into an important part of lifelong learning, of qualifications systems and frameworks, and of great importance for human resource management. RVA is gaining relevance not only with regard to education and training policies, but most importantly in relation to themes like poverty-reduction, job-creation and employment and social inclusion.

In developing countries, recognition mechanisms and frameworks are being established in the context of the certification related to skills development

frameworks. These systems are developed with an eye to a future in which learning outcome-based national qualifications are expected to support the much needed reforms in education and training and facilitate nationally standardized and transparent, internationally comparable qualifications. RVA can be the proper tool in this process in helping people to link any kind of relevant learning experience to a certain qualification that in its turn can help these same people to get a job, to change from one work to another, to integrate specific groups into society, and many other reasons.

Although the design of National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) vary from country to country (connecting the vocational system to higher education; promoting mobility between industrial sectors), there was a clear need expressed to complement NQFs by having explicit and holistic lifelong learning policies that manage to recognise a broader range of learning experiences and support access particularly to those target groups that are in most need of continuing education opportunities and retraining, and enable stronger links between the adult learning sector and the formal education and training system.

Day 2: The way forward

Even though North and South presented completely different contextual features, there was nevertheless agreement that collaborative research would be helpful in clarifying and making transparent:

1. How RVA can be supported by learning outcomes-based NQFs?
2. How non-formal and informal learning was being compared to learning in formal settings?
3. What is the added value of linking RVA and NQFs?
4. How RVA, in the spirit of partnership with different stakeholders, could facilitate learning access and progression?
5. Other areas of importance revolved around the importance of clarifying the purposes of RVA, and questions of how to keep a balance between summative and formative assessment, make assessment reliable and valid, introduce legal and institutional frameworks, link RVA to other related tools such as guidance and counseling and credit accumulation and transfer, and clarify the impact recognition and frameworks were having.

On the question of how to implement the collaborative North-South research, it was agreed to focus on a strategy of:

(1) **Participating in Peer Learning Activities (PLAs)**. These Peer learning activities are thematic conferences in which those countries that are interested in the specific theme can join and debate working papers that will be based on the themes that were identified during the March International Meeting in Hamburg. Project leaders will write these working papers on the basis of the three themes decided upon in Hamburg, namely:

- Policy objectives and Purposes of RVA-NQF linkages
- How to do: development and implementation of RVA-NQF

- Results and impact

(2) **Participating in National Stakeholders Meetings (NSMs)** organised on a national basis.

- a. Each partner sets up a national stakeholders group, consisting of the relevant stakeholders in the fields of RVA and qualifications framework such as representatives of Ministries, employers, trade unions, citizen-organisations, schools, guidance-organisations, etc.
- b. Two national seminars will be organised in which the findings resulting from the Hamburg meeting will be debated, commented and enriched. At these meetings the working papers of the PLAs and/or national documents can be discussed in order to formulate the 'next' steps on a national level in linking RVA to qualification frameworks of lifelong learning. In the first NSM, countries should expect to get input for the PLAs. At the second NSM at the end of the project, countries should be able to present their findings and get commitment from all stakeholders".

(3) The PLAs and the NSMs will help in the production of:

- a. A **handbook** for general use by stakeholders and professionals in participating countries that contains a description of necessary expertise and knowledge to strengthen and speed up development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks and lifelong learning strategies based on a learning outcomes approach at the national and sectoral levels. The handbook will be published at the end of the project and presented at the final conference.
- b. **Guidelines** for developing and implementing RVA. These guidelines aim at presenting common principles that identify key issues which are critical to the development and implementation of methods and systems for RVA and used as a basis for debate and continuous improvement of RVA practices at the international level.
- c. **National reports** resulting from the national stakeholder meetings will be compiled in a **global synthesis report**. Each national report consists of the information gathered in this research project on the state of the art of RVA and qualifications frameworks of lifelong learning, the challenges and the programme for addressing the challenges.

(5) **Planning**

- The **PLAs** will be organised between September 2010 and August 2011
- The **NSMs** will be organised between September 2010 and October 2011
- The results will be presented at national stakeholder meetings and international conferences at the end of 2011

(6) **Creating Synergies between regional and international agencies**

The meeting succeeded in strengthening further the knowledge partnerships between the various regional and international agencies of the Inter-agency Advisory Group. There are plans to come up with common reports on specific themes concerning the field of NQFs and RVA internationally.

(7) Other countries that were not presented but intended to come could also be part of the research programme and therefore in the PLAs and NSMs: Indonesia, Chile, Canada, the USA, Australia and Austria.

Highlights of some key messages from each participating country at the International Meeting.

Afghanistan: All the learning and education gained through public, private and NGO training or those who acquire skills in the informal environments go unrecognised. As an ad hoc approach the Skills Development Framework and Occupational Standards have been developed.

Bhutan: While there are numerous activities undertaken as lifelong learning (Community learning centres, resource centers, continuing and distance education there is no means to validate the learning outcomes.

Burkina Faso: “Did you know that the informal sector is the biggest training centre in Africa” (WB). On-the-job-training, self-training and traditional apprenticeships make up 95 per cent of all training. A new paradigm for training is the shift from “the diploma oriented system” to a national qualifications framework with skills profiles and learning outcomes defined in terms of foreseen jobs, and which is partner driven and is easily accessible to all.

Czech Republic: The Act on Recognition of Further Education Results is an important lifelong learning strategy whose major focus has been the involvement of groups such as employers, other ministries than education, and chambers of commerce and unions.

Denmark: A partnership agreement (2007) with social partners enhances the use of recognition of prior learning and acts to aim at creating better opportunities through adult and continuing education programmes for the individual to have his or her competencies recognized in formal education and training. One of the challenges is to get from system level to user level and to develop a better combination of summative and formative approaches.

Finland: NQF has led to an intensified discussion and first steps have been taken to open the framework for recognition of all prior learning. RPL is enabled in national legislation for all levels of education. Finland has a long tradition of competence-based qualifications in which competence acquired in various settings is recognised and validated in competence tests. The primary focus is on broad courses that have learning outcomes defined by a competent authority.

France: Since 2002, France has made its three certification processes more transparent and standardised by creating the national Directory of Professional Certifications. RVA has a strong legal base which gives the right to each individual to have his or her acquired experience assessed, whether profession or personal provided

that the person has at least three years' experience relative to the desired degree and that the experience relates to vocational and professional skills.

Gambia: The development of key skills in the Gambia is crucial to the eradication of poverty. The Gambia Skills Qualifications Framework led by the National Training Authority is responsible for developing skill standards in fields that are important to the economy. In addition to agriculture, electricity sectors, skills standards are being developed in the field of Adult and non-formal unit. Capacity building of actors is a big challenge.

Ghana: Unlike the general education qualifications system the proposed TVETQF allows room for recognition of prior learning and recognition of learning outcomes from workplace learning, informal sector and traditional apprenticeships. The TVETQF also allows transferability and progression to the highest level.

India The challenge is that skills frameworks must move now to a system of equivalence to diploma and degrees. Capacity building of stakeholders and shortage of trainers is a problem. The soon to be established National Vocational Qualification Framework and the implementation of ILO recommendation 195 on framework for recognition and certification of skills are steps in the right direction.

Jordan: Questscope, an international nongovernmental organization, ensures that non-formal programmes that mainstream dropouts into General Equivalence Diploma also enable learners to progress into the governmental Vocational Training Institutions just like students from formal educational system with 10th grade Certificate.

Malaysia: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is practiced by six approved open universities which practice the open entry system. While the MQF is oriented towards higher education institutions, a national strategy of lifelong learning is needed to support target groups underrepresented in post-basic education and those with some post-basic education but requiring training.

Mauritius: It is worth mentioning that candidates claim RPL against an NQF qualification and that care has been taken that the qualifications issued through RPL is the same as that obtained through formal education. RPL is limited to level 2 and level 4 up to now. Mauritius Qualifications Authority is the lead organization in implementing RPL in PAN African countries.

Mexico: Mexico's overarching NQF includes various types of qualifications from all subsystems of the education and training. CONOCER promotes, coordinates and regulates the National (Labour) Competence Standards System (NCSS) When recognition practices are linked to qualifications frameworks, three key questions are of significance: Are we generating value to firms and workers? Contributing to achieving growth and competitiveness? Responding to the demands of our productive, social and government sectors in terms of human capital needs?

Namibia: A big challenge is the provision at secondary education to those who cannot be accommodated through the conventional schools because of limited capacity. The Namibian College of Open Learning has therefore been created to provide an alternative pathway to secondary education. RPL at NAMCOL facilitates entry to post-secondary programmes. There is still a perception that knowledge and skills are only attainable through the conventional system.

New Zealand: One of the objectives of the Tertiary Education Strategy is to ensure a coherent and reliable system of qualifications, learning recognition and credit transfer. It is rare for RPL to result in the award of an entire qualification. More commonly a

person will receive some recognition of credit, be allowed entry into a course, or be granted an exemption from some course requirement. Non-formal education and training can be recognised, validated and certified. Apprenticeship training is now a part of the structure of NQF.

Norway Adults without prior upper secondary education have right to have their prior learning assessed towards the national curricula. Those with more than five years of work experience may obtain a trade and journeyman's certification by validating their documents. Enrolment in higher education is also possible based on proof of learning. All this has been the result of Competence Reform (1999) that – a result of the national wage negotiation between the state and the social partner that give adults opportunities to acquire education and training to improve their qualifications.

Portugal: The National Qualifications System and its various elements (RVCC system, New Opportunities Centre and the Catalogue of Qualifications) are designed to improve the certification (academic and vocational) levels of adults over 18 years old. A major challenge is to change popular misconception about the value of informal versus formal learning, training, and certification.

Republic of Korea The Korean Academic Credit Bank System is relevant for a person who wishes to acquire bachelor's /Associate degree by recognising informal learning outcomes as credits. In addition, through the Accounts for Lifelong Learning every citizen is eligible to plan RVA for Human Resources Development in communities and in companies. The Korean Qualifications Framework will make it possible to design further pathways (vocational to academic; community college to university college, transfer non-formal learning outcomes to qualifications etc.).

South Africa: The impact of NQF-RVA linkages could potentially be very big, particularly where a history of discrimination, employability and skills shortage are critical factors. We believe that the implementing of RPL should be expanded and driven through a national co-coordinated strategy and should receive proper funding for it to have a massive impact.

Syria: Literacy classes have been linked to skills development and learning pathways are created that permit adults either to appear for exams and return to mainstream, or join technological literacy courses, which focus on adult learners' skills and learning via the internet. Much emphasis is paid to the professional development of teachers.

Trinidad and Tobago: Widening access is now a priority for many institutions through bridging programmes, evening classes, work-based learning, on-the-job training and distance learning and prior learning assessment. This is due to easy educational progression offered through government funding to link education system horizontally and vertically. Workforce surveys inform educational institutions. TTNQF spans both vocational and academic qualifications.

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