DEVELOPING TEACHERS' EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT SKILLS (TES)
Agreement No. 2006-FI-06-B-PP-160703

WORK PACKAGE 2

DEVELOPMENT OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND TRAINING MODULE

A Framework for Developing Teachers' Assessment Skills

European Policy Context – Lifelong Learning

From the Lisbon European Council strategic declaration of March 2000 onwards, vocational education and training (VET) has been perceived as the prime means of making the EU the "most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion." Improving the education and training of teachers and trainers was seen not only as an essential means but a priority towards achieving the Lisbon goals (EC Communication 2001a).

Given that European economies are increasingly knowledge-based, European policy endorses the need to promote and develop a culture of lifelong learning among all its workforces. The EC Communication *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning* (November 2001b), however, makes it clear that lifelong learning itself should not be confined to the narrowly vocational. The objectives of lifelong learning include "<u>active citizenship</u>, <u>personal fulfilment</u> and <u>social inclusion</u>, as well as <u>employment-related aspects</u>."

Achieving these potential goals requires, as the same Communication acknowledges, the creation of a culture in which learning is valued:

> *Creating a culture of learning requires that the question of how to value learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings, must be addressed in a coherent way. Enabling citizens to combine and build on learning from school, university, training bodies, work, leisure time and family activities presupposes that all forms of learning can be identified, assessed and recognised.*

Such a cultural shift demands that

> *A comprehensive new approach to valuing learning is needed to build bridges between different learning contexts and learning forms, and to facilitate individual pathways of learning.*

Whilst the individual and social results of learning are acknowledged, it remains true that a good deal of subsequent European policy declarations has emphasised the vocational importance of education and training. The Copenhagen Declaration (November 2002) identified strategies for

improving the performance, quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training. Those processes were further identified and emphasised in the Joint Education Council/Commission Report (February 2004) on the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. Developments proposed in that report were endorsed by the European Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training, the European Social Partners and the European Commission at their joint meeting in December 2004. The resulting Maastricht Communiqué (2004) again stressed the priorities for VET as the encouragement of reform, supporting the development of lifelong learning, and the development of trust between key players and between countries.

One of the priorities set in that Communiqué was:

> *the examination of the specific learning needs and changing role of vocational teachers and trainers and of the possibilities of making their profession more attractive including continuous updating of their professional skills. Teachers and trainers should be supported in their essential roles as innovators and facilitators in the learning environment.*

The recent Helsinki Communiqué of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training (5 December 2006), in reviewing its priorities and again calling for "More attention [to] be paid… to the image, status and attractiveness of VET", identified a range of issues. Among those, specific attention was drawn to:

- promoting the recognition of non-formal and informal learning to support career development and lifelong learning

In relation to the priorities directed at meeting the need to improve "the attractiveness and quality of VET", the same Communiqué called for:

- highly qualified teachers and trainers who undertake continuous professional development
- active partnership between different decision makers and stakeholders, in particular social partners and sectoral organisations at national, regional and local levels

To these general reflections upon the learning culture must then be added the specific dimension provided by the European Council Draft Conclusions on informal and non-formal learning (May 2004b).

Among the Conclusions reached by Council and Representatives of the Governments of the Member states was a statement of Common European principles "to encourage and guide the development of high-quality, trustworthy approaches and systems for the identification and validation of non-formal and informed learning."

Those principles were gathered under the following four headings:

- *Individual entitlements*

  The identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should, in principle, be a voluntary matter for the individual. There should be equal access and equal and fair treatment of all individuals. The privacy and rights of the individual are to be respected;

- *Obligations of stakeholders*

  Stakeholders should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competencies, systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and

informal learning. These should include appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Stakeholders should provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.

- *Confidence and trust*

  The process, procedures and criteria for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.

- *Credibility and legitimacy*

  Systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should respect the legitimate interests and ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders.

  The process of assessment should be impartial and mechanisms should be put in place to avoid any conflict of interest. The professional competence of those who carry out assessment should also be assured.

Formal, non-formal and informal learning

From this brief examination of the European policy context, it is clear that the assessment of learning is central to the valuing of learning itself and its spread as a cultural enlargement of lifelong learning. Learning includes formal learning, together with informal and non-formal learning. Though there is some interaction between the last two categories it is helpful to have some common understanding of these terms.

The European Commission (2001), developed the following working definitions:

- formal learning is typically provided by education or training institutions, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading 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, in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. 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 (in terms of learning objectives, learning time and/or learning support). Typically, it does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases, it is non-intentional (or incidental/random).

The key distinction in these definitions is between formal and non-formal learning, both of which offer structured learning opportunities, and informal learning which is not structured. The subsidiary distinction is between formal and non-formal learning as an intentional learning activity, and informal as (in most cases) non-intentional.
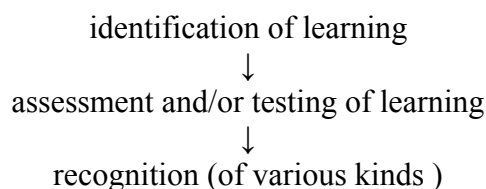
There can be no absolute distinction between non-formal and informal learning. Even within the non-formal learning opportunity, as structured by learning objectives, there may be other incidental but valuable learning which takes place. What matters is not whether learning was derived from either non-formal or informal opportunities, or whether learning was intentionally or incidentally

derived. What matters is the ability of the individual to make that learning explicit, and then the capacity to apply that learning to the professional roles and responsibilities of the vocational teacher or trainer. The application of that learning may be applied both to current and prospective teaching and training roles and responsibilities.

Nonetheless it is clear that:

- the assessment of any one of these forms of learning carries implications for the assessment of other forms of learning

- elements of learning achieved in any one form may be combined and supplemented with learning derived from other contexts of form

- the assessment of all forms of learning should adhere to the overall principles of validity, fairness, and reliability

- the accounting of all forms of relevant-to-purpose assessment may require the development of routes (or pathways) to achieving stated outcomes other than the traditional

- assessment procedures must be able to 'measure' learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences – and any or all of these in combination

- and that such assessment may require the development of new tools and methods for establishing the level and range of individual learning

The concept of Lifelong Learning has clearly helped to identify and validate these three different ways in which learning takes place. Learning includes acquiring new knowledge, understanding, skills, and competences but can be gained in a variety of ways: through involvement in formal education and vocational training of course but also through personal and social experience. What concerns us here is how such experience can be recognised and how the learning derived from it may be identified in relation to a particular job or vocation.

<div align="center">

identification of learning
↓
assessment and/or testing of learning
↓
recognition (of various kinds)

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For an organisation offering validation of informal and non-formal learning, the aims must surely be

- to provide a more flexible/swifter learning route towards qualification;
- to avoid duplication of learning;

- to have prior learning valued and accredited.

However, for the process to have value and currency the assessment of such learning must be measured against external standards, requirements, or criteria.

As the diagram indicates, perhaps the first task may concentrate on *identification.* Identification refers to the processes by which informal and non-formal learning is made visible. A suitable process results in making explicit the knowledge, skills, and competences already achieved, and

shows how such learning has been applied, or can be applied, to the professional role of the individual. Ways in which the identification of informal and non-formal learning can be achieved are briefly discussed below but it may be useful to revisit some core questions and values surrounding the concept of assessment.

What is assessment?

In the same way we need to define the different ways in which learning takes place, we need also to share a common understanding of assessment. In this project we define assessment to be:

> *a systematic and communicative process of collecting evidence and information about student's competences and skills and using that evidence and information for supporting professional growth and for making decisions about those competences and skills in relation to assessment criteria.*

Again, within the context of lifelong learning there are new challenges here for teachers and trainers searching to identify and validate knowledge, skills and understanding gained outside formal settings.

Why do we assess?

Assessment has had during past years a number of different functions. From the early history of assessment activities *making comparisons and selections* between people have been essential functions. Behaviouristic paradigm of learning has emphasised the *control* function of assessment. Recently assessment has been seen as a powerful tool for *guiding* learning process and *supporting* professional growth and development. This focus of assessment is connected to the constructivist paradigm of learning.

In this project our aim is to develop such kind of assessment methods which will not only control student's existing competences, skills and knowledge, but will also support his/her professional growth and development in the framework of lifelong learning. *Thus the purpose of assessment activities is to recognise, acknowledge and chart the learner's competence both as a learner and as a student heading for the certificate in question.*

What do we assess?

In this project the main focus is agreed to be on assessing *the prior formal, non-formal and informal learning* of adults who want to have their competences acknowledged and certificated. This kind of assessment usually takes place at the initial phase of assessment process. It is diagnostic by nature but it has also other meanings. I.e. in Finnish vocational adult education system this kind of assessment takes place at the first of the three phases in personalisation procedure.

The nature of the object we assessing can be understood in different ways. There seems to be distinction between "competency" approach and "competence" approach on the matter. Competency can be defined as a functional ability to perform a part of multifunctional activity. Many times this kind of approach is leads to as long lists of descriptions of operational skills and knowledge. Accordingly the assessment procedures tend to be focused on limited skills and they are also assessed separately. Competence can be seen as repertoire of competencies. It can be characterized as a capability to carry out certain tasks in different contexts or as a capability to act meaningfully in a certain context. As such it is a wider and more holistic concept and has contextual

nature. Competence approach also leads to more holistic assessment practises. The focus of assessment shifts from the parts of activity to the activity itself. In this project the *competence approach is preferred.*

The scope of *assessment covers as well the vocation specific skills and knowledge* and *the generic competences* - such as cooperation and interaction skills, motivational skills, adjustment skills, learning and development skills, and socio-cultural skills.

How do we assess?

Assessment methods depend on the function of assessment. When the aim is to make comparisons and/or selections between people we usually apply norm-referenced assessment and use the methods that provide such kind of evidence that enable us to make comparisons. Norm-referenced assessment may demonstrate people's relative standing, but it says very little, about what they can actually do. Traditional, quantitatively interpreted examinations and tests serve the purpose of norm-referenced assessment as assessment methods. Objectivity, measurement and standardisation of methods are the keywords, when talking about norm-referenced assessment.

However, the function of the assessment activities in this project is not to make comparisons or selections between people, but to recognise the competences, skills and knowledge and - at the same time - to promote lifelong learning by the *guiding* learning process and *supporting* professional growth and development. Portfolios, observations, discussions and interviews, reports and learning tasks made for earlier purposes are some examples of suitable assessment methods. Self-assessment is a vital part of this kind of assessment process.

The assessment material – the evidence – is mostly qualitative. In order to keep the assessment process and the decisions trustworthy, it is important to have criteria against which the observations can be compared. Thus the assessment is criterion-referenced. Instead of objectivity, this kind of assessment process and the use of the methods mentioned above, rely on the principle of *intersubjectivity*. This means that the result – "the truth" - is reached by communication process, in which different participants can have a say about the matter to be assessed. Self-assessment is a starting point in this process.

Some good assessment practices to consider

The concept of 'recognition of prior learning' is commonly used to cover identification and recognition of studies completed earlier, competencies acquired earlier and knowledge acquired outside the formal education system. When accreditation of formal learning is considered, we find various methods of credit transfer systems (partial transfer, one-to-one transfer).

In this project we concentrate on non-formal and informal learning and the methods and tools to identify it and recognise it. Non-formal and informal learning plays a major role when it comes to opportunities for people to gain skills and competences, also vocational, needed in the knowledge society. Volunteering is an important activity to make learning opportunities available for all, especially for those who fall out of the formal educational sector or who have difficulties entering the labour market. Immigration and age discrimination on the labour market have created new challenges for the vocational adult education to find ways to integrate or reintegrate these specific groups into the working life. It has been discussed that voluntary work should be recognised as an important means in the development of vocational skills and there should be tools to accredit it, one

example would be the "volunteer pass", also included in the ideology of European lifelong learning process.

Higher education institutions have already developed systems for the accreditation of prior learning, but the vocational sector, especially in Finland, is now tackling with a new challenge through the Decree on Personalisation (issued by the National Board of Education). The decree states that the vocational adult education institution is compelled to take the prior learning of the applying student into account when personalising his or her study plan or qualification path. Similar challenges are in the core of interest of vocational adult education all over Europe.

It is important for people, who so wish, to have the results and outcomes of their prior learning recognised. The key concept is based on the fact that "learning is learning whenever and wherever it took place". How do we make the learning and prior acquired competences visible?

Several different tools have been in use and should be included in this description of good practises.

It should be mentioned that in this project we have looked at the assessment tools from the perspective of assessing the vocational student, but similar tools could be used in assessing the competences of the vocational teacher trainee or teacher. When applying any of these tools it should be remembered that an increasing number of learning difficulties have been identified in adult learners and the tool in question should be modified to the specific needs of the student.

- (Structured) interview

  It is sometimes easier to have the student talk about the past experiences than to have him or her write about it. The structured interview should be documented, either taped or typed.

- Direct observation of vocational / working or teaching competences

  When possible, this is an excellent way to "see the student in action". This also makes it possible to focus on people skills, which can sometimes be difficult to assess.

- Self analysis/self assessment of professional knowledge and skills

  When identifying prior learning and skills, a self assessment is a good means to analyse the past experiences in relation to the skills and knowledge they have provided. This tool might need the teacher's guidance and structured working methods as not all students are used to assess their own competences. A tool helping self assessment should be considered.

- Mapping of personal learning needs

  In the learning process and identification process it is important that the student recognises his or her personal needs to learn more, to have more work experience or other skills

- Preparation of individual / personalised learning plan

  The personalised learning plan should be based on the recognition of prior learning and supoort the student's path towards qualification

- Submission of detailed training plan taught by the individual

- Preparation of report on personal experiential learning

Written documents are good ways of making the teacher's aware of the past experiences of the student as well as his or her own awareness of the learning process. This should be used if the student is capable of expressing his or her thoughts in written form, otherwise the report could be videotaped or recorded.

- Submission of a portfolio/dossier

Portfolios are widely used to demonstrate documented vocational competences. Portfolios can take the form of a learning portfolio, a portfolio of personal or vocational development process or a qualification portfolio, where all vocational competences are documented and it serves as the basis for assessment. Vocational portfolios include, for example, documented work history, diplomas and certificates or prior studies, different work samples, reports, interviews, essays and self assessment in various forms.

Portfolios provide a good assessment tool for the recognition of prior learning as the compilation can be personalised and the contents reflect the student's own experiences and portray him or her in their own individual way, if the portfolio can take different forms in addition to the traditional "paperportfolio" in a folder or binder. Modern portfolios could also be in digital form or in any form making it possible for the student to express his or her vocational identity in the best suited way.

- Tests, essays or other formal methods of identifying prior learning

It is acknowledged that learning can take place in a wide range of circumstances: the workplace or living space of the learner. Thus these circumstances can be viewed as rich learning environments. It should be emphasised that to maximise the opportunity to optimise the learning in different circumstances, the assessment tools should support this process. Ie. it is an inevitable consequence that equal recognition must be given to learning whether it is gained formally or non-formally or informally.