



Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning: Country Practices

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ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING: COUNTRY PRACTICES¹

Twenty-two countries² have helped to build up the OECD's knowledge base on recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The various documents produced, including the 22 background reports drafted by the countries concerned are extraordinarily varied and informative (www.oecd.org/edu/recognition) and this paper seeks to concentrate on their essentials. It is thus the internal perspective of countries which is considered here.

This paper describes national circumstances as viewed by the countries themselves while also casting light on their practices. It is based largely on the country background reports and sets out the policy responses developed by each country. It thus focuses on the practices of countries and regions and, as far as possible, includes quantitative data or refers to pilot projects. The idea is to see how countries and regions relate recognition to ongoing challenges, whether of a societal nature or connected with the labour market. Indeed, in preparing their own policy responses many countries are looking beyond their borders and on occasions far afield – as in the case of Australia which is following the Bologna/Sorbonne Process – and striving for international excellence. In the European Union, for example, the many existent or emerging systems are already having a broad impact on the preferences of its member states and other countries. Herein lies the importance of a paper on national practices and the contexts in which they have been introduced. The examples provided draw on different country practices without claiming to be exhaustive.

The paper consists of two sections. The first reviews contextual factors, at least in so far as they may influence in one way or another systems for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, especially in terms of their potential role as catalysts or inhibiting factors in recognition procedures. It then offers a description of how systems are organised, with their legal frameworks, procedures, technical arrangements and possible pilot programmes. The sections are structured by topic. Depending on circumstances, the paper includes entries by country or by topic where viewpoints are similar.

The context as a catalyst or inhibiting factor in recognition

The national or regional context is an all-important consideration but one hard to pin down. It may account for the introduction of a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, whenever a particular situation requires policy responses. It may be the outcome of shrewd recognition policies. And it may above all be a factor stimulating public action. In any event, it cannot be dismissed. It is an inescapable reality for everyone concerned and the field visits clearly reveal that, other things being equal, a context characterised by stability if not affluence is highly conducive to recognition. It will thus not have escaped the attention of well-informed readers that the economic situation prior to the crisis at the end of 2008 – and perhaps even more so since then – is for example more favourable in Norway than in most other countries in the study. Norway possesses key natural resources combined with a tradition of development and reliance on human capital. Concepts such as the sustainability of the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes and the financial support on which it depends are so conditioned by the overall economic situation that they constantly have to be borne in mind.

¹ This report was prepared by Patrick Werquin of the Directorate of Education.

² South Africa, Germany, Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Canada, Chile, Korea, Denmark, Spain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Netherlands, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, Slovenia and Switzerland.

Furthermore, the countries that volunteered to contribute to the knowledge base on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes comprise a very mixed sample. While crucially important, the fact that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may be adapted to all contexts also points to the need for caution as regards what the present study can teach us. Thus Denmark, Chile or Australia have low or even very low unemployment rates (3% in the case of Denmark) but their economies are not comparable. Some countries have high rates of employment and low levels of long-term unemployment, which are conducive to a return to employment. Few countries constitute homogeneous entities. For example, major inequalities exist between urban and rural or outlying areas in which a large proportion of poor people are concentrated and where unemployment rates may be close to 30%. For a variety of reasons, Slovenia also appears to have a transitional economy, with far-reaching changes on the labour market, including the emergence of high unemployment levels. Other issues are linked to traditional factors, with Canada still very interested in the idea of competence and with pioneering provinces such as Prince Edward Island.

Somewhat naturally, data related to demography, the labour market, human capital development and formal education and training systems provide the appropriate context for describing practices in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Demographic decline has forced a reconsideration of all strategies for creating and identifying human capital

Demographic decline is a feature of most countries taking part in the study, even though South Africa, with 50% of its population aged under 25, Chile and Mexico appear for now to be notable exceptions. The most pertinent trend as regards the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is the fall in the number of pupils, students and workers or, rather, people of working age. On the one hand, the effort to maintain enrolments in the formal system of education and initial training appears to be largely compromised, with many educational institutions struggling to do so or even fighting for survival. The most resilient or threatened institutions are turning to adults to boost their intake, and increasingly use the recognition of learning outcomes as an attraction. On the other hand, as there are ever fewer young people entering working life, the deficit in modern human capital and highly skilled personnel has to be offset by reliance on adults, either within or outside the country. Here again, the recognition of learning outcomes may be an option for enabling them to become qualified or to re-qualify. The labour market and the need for it to function effectively are apparently a major concern, and one of the most frequent justifications for systems that recognise non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

In Switzerland, attention is drawn to the need to increase and diversify the foreign population of working age. However, it is simultaneously noted that the cultural mix fuelled by the high level of immigration is giving rise to social challenges and challenges as regards educational practice. In Scotland, the fall in population is creating difficulties because certain types of workers, in terms of age and skills, are in short supply. This definitely accounts for reliance on approaches involving the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Greece is experiencing a decrease in its gainfully employed population but seemingly does little to boost its workforce with immigrants, and there are few elderly workers. The problem thus remains intact. In Australia, the ageing of the population is viewed as such a critical challenge that the Council of Australian Government (COAG) is attempting to raise the proportion of adults with the skills and qualifications that are both necessary and sufficient for them to successfully enter the labour market. This is a highly proactive approach and, in October 2006, EUR 504 million were invested in meeting the demand from employers who want a highly skilled workforce (Skills for the Future). Adults aged under 25 are receiving EUR 1 806 to complete a year or a level 2 vocational certificate. Korea is anticipating major problems over the next 18 years, particularly given the unparalleled “massification” of its tertiary education over the last three decades. In addition, the country witnessed a rapid growth in immigration between 1995 and 2005, when its foreign population rose from 270 000 to

740 000. It stood at around one million at the end of 2006. On average, 20 000 foreign workers arrive annually on the Korean labour market. Canada is struggling against the fall in its birth rate, given that its impact already appears to be affecting pupil enrolment in primary and secondary education.

Several distinctive features of this general picture should be emphasised. For example, while demography does not yet pose a problem for South Africa, it is worth noting that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has been specifically used to remedy injustices attributable to the policy of apartheid between 1948 and 1991. Such recognition has therefore been one of the strategies for restoring balance among various groups in the population. Canada also represents an interesting demographic case, as the demography of the First Nations and Métis people is much more dynamic than that of other groups, especially in certain provinces such as Saskatchewan. They are thus becoming an essential driving force in recognition.

The main demand for systems for the recognition of learning outcomes comes from the labour market

The labour market is typically the focal point for some of the overriding concerns of the present time in the economies studied. These concerns have been strengthened by the crisis at the end of 2008. Unemployment, skills, competitiveness, employability, labour market integration and productivity are terms often featuring in official statements.

Another set of concerns stems from the existence of groups in the population which are regarded as requiring greater attention. For these groups which are targeted because they are at a disadvantage in terms of education and training in particular, and more broadly for all stakeholders in the labour market, there is a strong demand for strategies, or even simply procedures, that are capable of rapidly satisfying labour market needs. The idea of speed is essential here, and recognition stands in natural opposition to training on an initial assumption expressed by countries with varying degrees of clarity, namely that the time needed to train is long and does not therefore correspond to time in the labour market, which is often much shorter. Supposedly faster, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is thus clearly one of the strategies studied by countries. Moreover, the latter are very clear about the link between the recognition of learning outcomes and the labour market, but a range of different motivations stand out to an extent that varies from one country or region to the next. The remainder of this section summarises these different approaches and the practices adopted by countries. While all the issues involved are related, they are dealt with separately to simplify the account.

The *labour market* is by far the most frequently considered topic in the reports submitted by countries for the present study (see the background reports, www.oecd.org/edu/recognition). Belgium (Flemish Community) took it as its main concern and adopted a pragmatic approach. The aim should be to match skills and labour market needs and thus angle the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes towards skills in short supply on the market, while offering employment opportunities to disadvantaged groups, thereby achieving two aims at once. Italy emphasises the importance of involving the labour market authorities in matters concerned with learning (what might be termed “bilateralism”); indeed, in this respect, its collaboration would appear to be exemplary, as borne out by the management of its participation in the OECD activity. In Spain, the distinction between academic qualifications (*títulos*) and certificates (*certificados*) reflects a distinction between the Ministries of Education and Science and of Labour respectively, the upshot of which is nothing other than possible labour market access. In Chile, the labour market is such a central concern that the National System of Labour Competences Certification (NSLCC) administered by the *Chilecalifica* programme is an essential component of the continuing training and lifelong learning system in general. At the same time, it is also a system for accrediting professional skills and competences. In Slovenia too, the labour market and professional competences are essential, so much so that the NSLCC is monitored by labour market stakeholders. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in Slovenia is specifically intended for workers to be placed and

promoted in employment. In Mexico, the non-working population (retired people, the housebound or handicapped) are the main focus of political attention.

The labour market is central also because it is a place for the *production of non-formal and informal learning situations*. Employers in all countries without exception are quick to point out that the most important non-formal and informal learning probably takes place at work. This is crucial in explaining why they logically often demand more direct involvement in devising the standards used in a recognition process, especially if it leads to certified qualifications. As far back as 1997, a Norwegian report concluded that the workplace was the location at which most learning occurred. The committee responsible for this report drew up recommendations and, in 1998, proposed that each employee should be entitled to study and awarded a special recognised status. A national system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, including the documentation of these outcomes, was proposed. Finally came the idea that one should be entitled to reach free of charge the level corresponding to the end of upper secondary education. This idea has since been taken up repeatedly in other places, without it always being possible to budget for the expenditure required.

Another point linking the labour market to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is the need to deal with the *skills shortages* that occur when the demand for knowledge, skills and competences exceeds the supply. In general, this results in a situation in which large numbers of job vacancies go unfilled, even though the general unemployment rate may often be high. The link between the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and skills shortages is self-evident in virtually all countries and the disarmingly simple reason is that *knowledge, skills and competences are often present but are not visible because they are not recognised*. For example, they are not certified. This is all the more important given the fact that often, as in Spain, the job creation rate is higher for skilled posts, such as those involving proficiency in new technologies. Slovenia seems to have many non-qualified workers, although they appear to have a level of performance meriting the award of a qualification. Slovenia also suffers from a shortage of semi-skilled workers. In Ireland, it is thought that even partial resolution of this problem of skills shortages would lead to a more appropriate matching of supply and demand.

In Hungary, the formal education and training system does not seem to be in a position to evenly and sufficiently produce the knowledge, skills and competences required by the labour market. Greece draws attention to skills in new information and communication technology, which are a problem above all in rural areas and among disadvantaged social categories – as in Austria since the end of the 1990s – as well as to social skills, all of which are vital in obtaining a job. In Australia, sectors such as building works, manufactured products, tourism and the health professions are felt to be in poor shape, so much so that the COAG is targeting them for action. The Council has signed agreements with the Australian states and territories in an effort to increase the number of workers with *recognised qualifications*. Queensland and Western Australia have used recognition of prior learning (RPL) as a means of dealing with skills shortages. Victoria has witnessed the setting up of 13 skills stores, on the basis of an idea from Queensland known as “Skilling Solution Shopfront” which offers learners advice. Finally, in South Australia, registered training organisations (RTOs) have been directly involved. Norway, Austria and Iceland clearly report shortages of skilled workers in the health sector. Austria also adds tourism to the list of sectors in difficulty, noting that some regions are more affected by the shortage than others.

In Canada, there is a persistent shortage of cross-functional skills, such as the ability to work in a team, communication and management in sectors that include health, construction and energy. The political response has been the Strong Economy for Canadians programme. A concrete example of these difficulties is provided by Saskatchewan, a victim of its proximity with Alberta, which has the most strongly growing economy in Canada; and many young people, especially from aboriginal groups (First Nations) do indeed go and work in Alberta. The challenge for Saskatchewan is thus to retain these young people whose skills would serve it well. Another challenge is to reverse the trend and attract immigrants to

Saskatchewan. The pressure facing its health, transport, oil and gas sectors, not to mention agriculture, is indeed very strong. The shortage is such that on occasions, as in Switzerland, training is offered by major groups in the computer industry. In Korea, such groups even award recognised certified qualifications. Generally speaking, these certificates represent an interesting case because they compete with qualifications awarded in the formal education and training system under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, and it is not uncommon for them to have greater currency. The most likely reason for this is that users know exactly what these certificates correspond to in terms of content. Perfect visibility is synonymous here with recognition and thus with value. This point is worth remembering in the implementation of systems for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The opposite also occurs, even if far less frequently, when there is a glut of graduates. For example Italy reported that, in 2005, 3.7 million tertiary education graduates were in jobs that did not match their qualifications. As so often in Italy, this reflects the fact that the labour market integration of its young people poses a problem. The opposite may also occur if the labour market needs fewer graduates than skilled workers with a secondary school leaving qualification, as in the Czech Republic. It may also be noted that, in the Netherlands, getting and keeping a job appears to depend more on mastering the occupation concerned than on a person's level of qualification, even if this point remains very ambiguous in that the Dutch labour market is always ready to accept very highly qualified personnel.

The more general nascent problem of a mismatch in the supply and demand of knowledge, skills and competences is apparent in many of the examples below. Denmark refers to the fact that demand fails to absorb the supply. In Slovenia, there are many disparities between the supply and demand for skills and above all many regional differences, given that there is little occupational mobility in the working population. This problem of mismatch occurs typically when there is little information about the local workforce or workers that should be recruited. In theory, it is both a personal problem (workers are less effective in their jobs) and a macroeconomic problem (the economy is less effective overall). Many countries are studying these matters closely, and view the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a partial solution to the difficulty of ensuring the visibility of knowledge, skills and competences. The Czech Republic is a notable exception, as there is no question of acting to correct supply and demand, doubtless because the country appears to experience a situation in which the two are already well matched.

Similarly, there is a *shortage of personnel per se*, irrespective of whether or not this means qualified personnel, even though many background reports and players encountered during the field visits tended mistakenly to confuse the two situations,³ doubtless because most countries confront both types of difficulty. A partial solution to this kind of shortage may be to bring non-working people back to the labour market. However, that means giving them knowledge, skills and competences that they probably lack, since otherwise they would be on the market. Training thus tends to be regarded as the solution. Yet it is here that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes appears to be a credible alternative or complement to training. If so, the aim is “solely” getting them to appreciate that they have the knowledge, skills and competences needed. It is this second solution that is the focus of this paper. A venture in Australia, which relies on an inter-ministerial approach by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA), is to extend the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes to migrants to help them collect points for their entry visa to the country, and thus partially overcome the shortage of personnel. In Iceland, the building works sector, with few special requirements in terms of level achieved in the formal initial system of education and training, experienced strong demand for workers. In Germany, the problem – while not apparently a general one – does appear to be acute in

³ The shortage of personnel is a problem relating to an insufficient number of available workers. Skills shortages reflect a lack of certain knowledge, skills and competences.

certain sectors or for certain types of enterprise in which there is a shortage of personnel with a high level of university education.

Another point clearly linking the labour market and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is the fact that entry to certain *regulated professions* depends on possession of a certified qualification. By means of recognition, it is possible to certify the learning outcomes of those keen to practice such a profession without necessarily having to undertake a potentially long and costly period of training for the qualification required. Iceland has long sought to adopt this approach. However, it is authorised solely as far as a certain level in a few countries, such as the Netherlands or Ireland, in which the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes enables learners to satisfy some – but only some – of the entry requirements. The United Kingdom labour market is not very regulated. It would be interesting to test the hypothesis that there is a relation between weak labour market regulation and delayed possibilities for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. According to the latest figures, regulated professions in Canada account for 15% of the working population. This represents a considerable challenge which the recognition of learning outcomes, if it leads to certified qualifications, may help to overcome.

Furthermore, many countries have adopted official policies regarding *key competences*, some of which may also be acquired – or even primarily so – outside the formal education and training system. In Ireland, literacy, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, innovation and creativity are among those identified in the National Skills Strategy (2007). Slovenia has drawn up a list of ten competences. In Mexico, the *Consejo de Normalización y Certificación de Competencia Laboral* (CONOCER, or Council for the Standardisation and Certification of Professional Competences) has co-ordinated a group of experts for the purpose of identifying the basic competences, which are reading, writing, verbal communication, mathematics, locating information, applying technological principles, interpersonal relations, special relations in an organisation and decision-making ability. In Korea, it is noted that highly qualified people do not always possess the competences necessary to “operate” in enterprises, because they lack the experience and proficiency that their firm requires daily. Nine sectors in Chile need to increase the number of qualified workers. Chilecalifica is dealing with these sectors with the idea is to introduce programmes for the assessment of the requisite professional skills. The approach has the merit of being very pragmatic since it involves the identification of skills specified by the labour market.

Denmark lists ten key competences, namely literacy, learning to learn, decision-making, creativity and innovation, social skills, communication, intercultural skills, citizenship, everyday health and hygiene, and environmental skills. These competences are occasionally described as capable of driving social progress. Many countries claim that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes results in more mature citizens. Switzerland refers to citizens who are more aware of world values. Another central aim of recognition there is reportedly good general knowledge and access to a third language. Key competences in Denmark are all the more interesting for the fact they may potentially be acquired through self-learning; here again, this naturally leads back to the concerns of the present paper. On the other hand, such competences may be problematic as people with only modest qualifications will find them harder to develop than the highly qualified. The Danish perspective is plainly that a job in which one learns a lot may compensate for a lack of formal education. Once more, this offers food for thought. All in all, the literature on key competences is somewhat perplexing as there are as many lists of key competences as there are specialists who refer to them. However, the need for experience appears to be included in all lists either in outline or specifically. It may well be that many of the competences indicated are not necessarily learnt – and not necessarily taught either – in the formal system.

The question of *productivity* is an issue in many countries but few draw attention to it. Hungary states that the average number of hours worked is high, a probable indication that productivity is not high enough although improving since the transition period of the early 1990s. Yet it is recognised as a foremost

concern in international competition. The United Kingdom notes that its employment rate is high but that its productivity remains low. On the other hand, attention is often paid to *employability*, and especially the employability of young people who have left the initial education and training system. The difficulty in securing the labour market integration of young people is generally attributable to a problem of qualifications and skills. However, concern in this respect tends to focus on initial education rather than on adult learning and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However, the large number of young people who leave the system with no qualification that they can turn to good account should stimulate a reappraisal of this approach and the inclusion of a component involving experience and the recognition of those outcomes. In Chile, participation in the formal education and training sector conditions labour market participation: 40% of people with just basic education are active in the labour market; the rate rises to 80% in the case of those with education. Furthermore, just over half the adult population is at the lowest level in literacy (level 1). In Scotland, it is emphasised that competences are a factor contributing to individual employability and also underpin public competitiveness, however much it may also be said that competences as basic as numeracy and literacy appear to pose a problem when the country is attempting to achieve the skills necessary to generate knowledge. Scotland finally highlights the need to provide workers and potential workers with transferable skills.

The labour market is a natural impetus for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Norway highlights the persistent conflict of interest between the labour market, which seeks workers who are rapidly employable as well as productive, and the education system which is more committed to the principle of producing knowledge, skills and competences, however long it takes. In the same vein, Austria states that employability is important but emphasises that education is more important. In short, Norway identifies the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a possible solution to this dilemma, no doubt because experience and its recognition are the concepts closest to the meeting point of education and employment. In Austria, the government programme of January 2007 is mainly concerned with employability and social integration. Provinces such as Tyrol organise skills appraisals with information and discussion workshops (on content, benefit, monitoring and personal ability). A final discussion on professional goals closes the sessions. There are plans to introduce an “educational passport” or “school passport” and to develop a modular system in initial vocational education programmes in the health sector.

Unemployment is clearly one of the topics to feature alongside those noted above. In South Africa it is a major problem, primarily affecting young people aged between 20 and 30, as well as non-skilled persons, notwithstanding the shortage of skilled or highly skilled workers. In some sectors in which the workforce has customarily consisted of women, there is a strong demand for semi-skilled workers. People who find it hard to obtain a job also have literacy-related problems. One of the difficulties identified is the low level of entrepreneurial culture. Slovenia, one of the countries in the study that best exemplifies a transitional economy, has recently experienced high rates of unemployment. As in Belgium (Flemish Community), Slovenia is making the labour market and qualifications the central focus of its process for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The approach is pragmatic and long-standing: in 1993 in the case of tertiary education and in 1996 for vocational education, legislation sought to adjust the results achieved by the education and training system more effectively to the needs of the labour market, with education and training standards linked to the latter.

Mobility – and above all *occupational mobility* (involving a change of occupation) – is reported to be on the increase everywhere, although Hungary notes that there is not much mobility in its labour market. It more often results from necessity, because of unemployment or relocation, than from an independent decision, but many countries report it nonetheless. And it will still give rise to a demand for assessment of the real knowledge, skills and competences of workers. Switzerland refers clearly to this kind of mobility, except perhaps for occupations linked to education, health and the construction industry.

Policy responses for the target groups of public action

While there is general agreement about the fact that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may be beneficial for all levels of the population, many countries are examining the possibility of using this approach to deal with the problems faced by certain groups likely to be especially vulnerable to professional or social exclusion because they lack significant knowledge, skills and competences or, more precisely, recognised knowledge, skills and competences. Thus many countries describe their *groups at risk*, and their policy responses when to a greater or lesser extent they rely on the recognition of those learning outcomes.

Many countries are accordingly trying to help people with a modest level of *literacy*, a concern often but not necessarily associated with immigration (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000). Canada wishes to strengthen language proficiency. It is a central concern in Denmark which has several initiatives to promote the teaching of Danish. Austria provides German-language courses for asylum seekers. There is nothing specific in these measures on part played by the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in providing for greater proficiency in the written language. It is more a question of establishing the initial level of literacy to adapt future provision to optimal effect. For example, Belgium (Flemish Community) has many programmes for its target groups: people aged over 50, immigrants, young people at risk of professional and social exclusion, the handicapped and those skilled to only a modest level.

Immigrants are the focus of special attention in general and in the area of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in particular. In fact, migrants do not necessarily have a low level of education and training. Recognition of their hitherto invisible knowledge, skills and competences, is thus a possible line of development in Belgium (Flemish Community), Austria, Ireland, Hungary or Korea for example. It is an important issue in Canada where the question of international migration is compounded by that of migration between provinces; for example, Saskatchewan uses prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) to retain individuals attracted by the dynamism of neighbouring provinces such as Alberta. Canada is also an interesting case because of its aboriginal populations for whom recognition appears to be more suitable than education and training in accordance with western methods. Experience is an essential concept for the First Nations. For Denmark, the question of non-European immigrants is important.

The educational level of migrants is far from uniform. In Switzerland for example, immigrants have either a very low or very high level of education. It would seem also that their level of general knowledge is higher on average than that of people of Swiss origin. In any event, the political authorities pay close attention to them with the aim of including them in the category of skilled workers. In Iceland, they are increasingly involved in lifelong learning and are represented in sectors such as the food processing industries, tourism or fishing.

Fewer immigrants are arriving in Canada but they are increasingly highly qualified. Their proportions vary from one province or territory to another. There appears to be a somewhat unusual correlation between age and level of education, since the best educated tend to be older and their proportions are growing. In Canada, social disparities remain marked; for example in Saskatchewan around 6% of aboriginal peoples (First Nations or Métis) have a degree compared to 15% for non-aboriginal groups. Moreover in Saskatchewan, a province that tends to symbolise Canadian concerns, young people are often forced to work part-time (36%). Even those aged between 15 and 24 who work full time often have a low salary (2004 figures). Finally, unemployment is highest among young people – between 12 and 14% since 1984.

Even if it is claimed that *poverty* is scarce (Germany, Austria, Denmark) or declining (Ireland, Netherlands), poor people in general and poor workers in particular are often described as potentially

interested in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as in Korea. In Austria, this appears to be primarily the case of women, foreigners and persons aged over 65. Poverty – and considerable income inequality – is in any event the most discriminatory feature of the countries covered by the study particularly among those markedly affected by poverty, such as Mexico, Chile or South Africa. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is regarded as an interesting possible approach given that, in Chile for example, there is a strong correlation between income and level of qualification, even though unemployment as such appears uncommon. Poverty has declined with the re-establishment of democracy. Finally, as is often the case, poverty in rural areas is much greater than in urban ones. Without referring to poverty, Denmark also targets young people aged 15-25 in regions in difficulty. Hungary draws attention to the Roma, even though the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is not really viewed as an appropriate response to their circumstances, as in the Czech Republic.

In the Netherlands, the Empowerment Centres EVC Foundation is concerned primarily with the *unemployed*. It aims to make full use of the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes by personalising the labour market integration of the unemployed and all vulnerable groups, including young people threatened with social exclusion, non-native women, all those returning to working life after a long absence, refugees, immigrants, former prisoners and the elderly. The approach is fairly similar in Iceland, where the aim of such recognition is clearly to improve the labour market situation of those with a low level of formal education (as in Hungary); ongoing pilot projects tend to suggest that the emphasis is on personalisation – individuals and their needs – rather than on target groups. However, the two approaches are not inconsistent since they focus on the individual as a unit within a group whose members face common difficulties.

The Skills for the Future programme in Australia is concerned with many groups, among them the long-term unemployed, the elderly, workers with few qualifications, non-working people, aboriginal groups, women wishing to join or return to the labour market, handicapped persons, single parent families, war veterans, voluntary workers and young people on low incomes. Indigenous groups in particular are only marginally involved in the programme, apparently because they consider the process too complex. In Australia too, the focus on the individual is especially marked, as in the Netherlands or Iceland. In Australia, it is associated with the individual's membership in a target group, in that the country is seeking to develop assessment practices for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, so as to overcome the difficulties faced by the members of some groups.

In the United Kingdom, and especially Scotland, the disadvantaged groups are the elderly, single people with children, immigrants and those with neither a job nor enrolled in education or training, known collectively as NEET (Not in Employment Education or Training). The presence of groups at risk is central to the lifelong learning strategy in Scotland. Other groups in need are women entering or returning to the labour market, the elderly, those with no qualifications and immigrants. One recurrent theme therefore is that “experience counts” which is in fact the name of the programme specifically intended for elderly learners in order to achieve an optimal distribution of human capital. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has also worked extensively with many professions.

In Greece, three groups take priority, namely women, elderly workers and persons at risk of social exclusion, especially in rural regions. Apparently, the groups that might gain most from the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are the long-term unemployed, immigrants, women, young people aged under 25 and elderly workers. Occasional reference is also made to prisoners. In Norway, the main group at risk consists of those receiving social benefits. From 1996 to 2004, this group increased from 18% to 27% of the population. Prisoners are also mentioned, the aim being to keep them informed, and the Ministry of Education is thus running a pilot programme. Germany too reports the existence of

only a few target groups: those aged over 50, the unemployed and – a point worth emphasising – immigrants whose children leave school less well qualified than those of German origin.

The situation in Mexico is unusual compared to that of other countries in the study. First, it exports its workers, mainly towards the United States, more than it takes in immigrants, even though it is a destination for migrants from the rest of Latin America en route to the United States. Next, poverty is far greater, with a very imbalanced distribution of wealth. More important, therefore, are the questions of people who are not gainfully employed and of dropout from the education system (many adolescents are at work), both of which are interrelated as everywhere else. School dropout is truly a critical challenge in Mexico, and the ingenious programme known as MEVyT (an Education Model for Life and Work) can only remedy the problem to a very limited extent given the size of the population, the largest of any Spanish-speaking country in the world.

Austria has made it possible for non-traditional learners to gain admission on an exceptional basis to the final dual vocational apprenticeship examination (LAP). The aim is to give a second chance to those who leave school prematurely. This is a wholly legal option enabling persons with no formal qualifications – as a rule those who have attended school for less than nine years – but who have experience, to obtain a recognised labour market qualification. It is worth noting that immigrants, who might be naturally eligible for the scheme, do not often appear to benefit from it.

In South Africa, the main target consists of those who were excluded from access to education and training opportunities under apartheid and those whose knowledge and skills were developed experientially and through political struggle but not recognised in the formal system. The RPL policy in South Africa is also aimed at different segments of the labour market, *e.g.* teachers, nurses and construction workers who were excluded from professional and technical qualifications in the past and who now require these qualifications to be employed and registered. In addition, South Africa is considering strategies to award “advanced standing” qualifications, or admit people to extended curricula so as to prevent renewed mistreatment of those who have already suffered injustice. This might affect under-skilled adults such as nurses or teachers. And a natural target for action of course also comprises all persons who do not satisfy the preconditions for entering the formal system of education and training.

In Slovenia, the leading beneficiaries of the 1998-2000 Phare Mokka programme have been the unemployed, particularly those who left school early, as well as more elderly unemployed persons or the long-term unemployed. However, the real target group appears to comprise workers without any qualifications and especially those with considerable experience. They are involved in training activities which one may reasonably assume do not lead to certified qualifications. Yet such people are the most vulnerable group in the labour market, above all when the economy is being restructured. These situations reveal the importance of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The aim is to offer stability to those who possess knowledge, skills and competences but who have received no recognition. In Slovenia, this is also regarded as an opportunity for people who prematurely left the formal education and training system to receive help in returning to formal courses that lead to certified qualifications, which the Phare Mokka programme also sought to provide. Slovenia definitely views the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a possible way of tackling such concerns.

In Spain, a large proportion of the population is not professionally qualified to a very high level, such as the many young people who leave school early. As there are only limited opportunities for adult learning, these people form a natural target group for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as do the unemployed (including the long-term unemployed), young people, the handicapped, victims of terrorism, women, persons aged over 45 and those threatened with social exclusion. Recent changes to the law have sought to hasten progress towards greater awareness of the problems of these groups and to offer them solutions incorporating the recognition of non-formal and informal learning

outcomes. This might also involve the development of modular provision and access to a title or certified qualification.

While Canada has stated that it has no special surveys available, certain groups are clearly potential targets for public action, including people with differing abilities, women, visible minorities, persons whose mother tongue is neither English nor French, single parents, persons receiving assistance from the social welfare system, the unemployed, those from the First Nations and Métis, immigrants, refugees, the inhabitants of rural areas, and those who live in Canada's Great North. The approach involving the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes could be more appropriate for all or some of these people even – and above all – if they have not been educated in the formal system. British Columbia concentrates on the aboriginal population. It has thus established an Aboriginal Special Project Fund (ASPF) which received CAD 11 million between 2001 and 2005 and CAD 2 million for 2006-07. The Fund is for aboriginal students and includes review criteria for PLAR-type assessment. Saskatchewan has also run schemes for certain aboriginal groups. Saskatchewan further adds that women are among the target groups for public action, together with immigrants and elderly workers. Of apparent interest is a small-scale programme involving learning portfolios in the agricultural sector. In Alberta, aboriginal peoples are also among the target groups, along with persons aged over 25 (including many women), rural inhabitants and immigrants, some of whom are well educated. In Manitoba, community studies on possible barriers to participation in the new economy have revealed that aboriginal populations were particularly ill-prepared for it.

Finally, Canada is a fascinating example for the development of a theory concerning the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Indeed, its approach seems essential and probably the only one possible when “western” learning methods do not work, as is clearly the case for aboriginal people. The distinctive features of aboriginal learning methods at the workplace in particular should stimulate the development and use of different experiential methods of learning and recognition (the idea is also being studied in Australia). Between 2006 and 2008, CAD 818 000 was spent on initiatives to improve prior learning recognition processes in Saskatchewan. Furthermore, learning for pleasure and as part of leisure-time activity appears to be well developed in Saskatchewan. Clear signs of this are the fact that libraries are very well attended, which is bound to have a very significant impact on the success of approaches based on the recognition of personal learning outcomes.

The formal education and training system

The formal system of education and training constitutes an essential contextual element. Indeed it is often taken as a reference point – most notably in terms of its standards or assessment methods – in organising a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is also often described as part of the lifelong learning system. Moreover, all countries have developed a policy stance *vis-à-vis* lifelong learning, such as the Pact of Vilvoorde in Belgium (Flemish Community) in order to draw up a strategy. It is worth considering the concerns of formal education and training systems for insight into the challenges facing recognition of this kind. In Switzerland for example, women remain for longer than men in the formal education and training system following the completion of compulsory education.

In Switzerland at least, this preponderance of women in the system is partly attributable to the development in tertiary education of fields of study for which they have long tended to enrol. More women than men also enter tertiary education in the Czech Republic. The United Kingdom emphasises that the small numbers of people reaching the level of upper secondary education is a disadvantage, and would like to exploit the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes to raise the skill levels of the population. The *Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione dei Lavoratori* (ISFOL, or Institute for Vocational Training) in Italy has revealed that people who think their skills are inadequate are those

reluctant to embark on training. In Greece, a formal qualification is so important that the country might be receptive to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However, it is not yet certain that Greek society is ready to accept this type of qualification.

These contextual elements are important, as the particularities of the formal education and training system have a bearing on the emergence and development of systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In Switzerland, Germany and Austria, learning at work, a key constituent of non-formal and informal training, is an integral part of the local culture; Germany for example highlights its system of continuing vocational training which it classifies as “non-formal learning”, as it is very widely used and regularly praised.

Also as regards structure, some countries have made a little more headway in preparing their education and training courses in terms of learning outcomes, as opposed to the learning process and established inputs (duration, course content). Denmark and Norway are good examples even though it is quite clear from the field visits that the discussion turn very soon to the length of study periods, especially when determining how provision is to be organised. However, the approach is proving constructive, even if attitudes are changing slowly and the stakeholders are still somewhat focused on defining courses in terms of inputs and processes.

Furthermore, certain features of the formal system are such that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may sometimes be preferred. Hungary reports that its formal system is not yet flexible enough. In Belgium (Flemish Community), it does not provide for all qualifications needed on the labour market, which accounts for reliance on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a credible alternative. By contrast, the initial formal system is reportedly excellent in the Czech Republic, so much so that most young school leavers hold a recognised qualification. It is thus unsurprising that the country is not yet really envisaging the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as securing a second chance to qualify is not a significant issue. Recognition goes beyond this since, among other things, it is affected by the problem of jobs changing over time and the likelihood of people forgetting what they have learnt. Yet the position is of interest because employers in the Czech Republic have greater confidence in the qualifications awarded by the formal system. It is emphasised that this applies in particular to qualifications in computer science.

In Australia, the extensive availability of formal vocational education closely linked to the labour market has meant that the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes has not become quickly operational, or at least less quickly than expected. Yet Australia is one of the very few countries to plan specifically for a qualifications system that covers all types of learning, whether formal or otherwise. The formal vocational education system has thus just created two new qualifications, namely the Vocational Graduate Certificate (VGC) and Vocational Graduate Diploma (VGD). As the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may very clearly lead to full qualifications in vocational education, the formal system is becoming receptive to non-formal and informal learning. Australia is thus hoping that people will be able to reach master’s and doctoral level via the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in vocational education and the award of the VGC/VGD. Exactly the opposite is occurring in countries in which a certain amount of rigidity prevails and some qualifications cannot be obtained by means of such recognition. In the Czech Republic, for example, it is still not possible to obtain the *maturita* by this means, so the recognition of non-formal and informal learning cannot be used to circumvent the preconditions for admission to tertiary education. Yet paradoxically, the enrolment of part-time learners in post-secondary and tertiary education in the Czech Republic is increasing. The people concerned are employed but have returned to learning, and work part-time as they do not wish to lose their jobs. Besides indicating the positive impact of a qualification on employment, this also demonstrates that recognition may sometimes be an appropriate course of action in the Czech Republic for those without the *maturita*.

In South Africa, many young people leave school very early. Between the ages of 15 and 18, they do so for many reasons, including early motherhood, financial restrictions, adolescents supporting their family, serious illness, or because school is far from home. Half the population of Chile is barely literate. However, university education has expanded markedly but with a shortage of provision in certain fields such as the training of technicians. This lack of specific training for which there is great demand means, on the one hand, that there is a high dropout rate in tertiary education and, on the other, that it is difficult to find work. Moreover, Chile has established a programme for quality improvement known as *Mejoramiento de la Calidad y la Equidad de la Educación Superior* (MECESUP), since employers know little about quality in tertiary education, particularly in technical fields. In Slovenia since the beginning of the 1990s, the emphasis has been on adult learning, and Hungary reports that the enrolment rate in continuing training and adult learning is low compared to other European countries: the attractiveness of vocational training is to be further strengthened in Hungary. A particularity of the Slovene approach is the emphasis on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. While the period from 2002 to 2004 witnessed a glut of graduates with degrees in the doctoral or master's category, there are still not enough qualified young people leaving general or technical secondary education. It has also been reported time and again elsewhere that longer courses of study do not necessarily correspond to demand in the labour market, with the result that 18% of university graduates are employed in unskilled jobs. Furthermore, the 2006 study *European Practice Assessment* (EPA) revealed that 16% of the working population had no academic or vocational qualification. Slovenia considers that this obliges it to examine closely procedures and processes for the recognition of learning outcomes. Spain faces similar problems with, for the most part, a lower average level of education than in other OECD countries; it has thus introduced tests that can be taken on the basis of recognised non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

A painstaking examination of the formal education and training system is necessary because the system may constitute a major barrier to the establishment of a system for recognising such outcomes. A factor often highlighted is indeed the (excessively) overbearing nature of formal provision. In countries in which obtaining a qualification from the formal system remains, as it were, a *sine qua non* for entering lifelong learning or the labour market, as in the Czech Republic with the *maturita* or in Spain, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has little chance of winning over learners and potential users, as the formal hurdle is unavoidable. In particular, it may deter prospective learners who are alienated from school and conventional learning. In Hungary, this dominance of the formal system broadly influences assessment processes in the system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, which is still dominated by the summative approach at the expense of the formative approach although there is an emerging shift towards the latter.

The structure of the formal learning system and the sociological structure of those involved are therefore far from negligible factors in establishing arrangements for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Within this overall setting, two sectors, namely tertiary education and vocational education, often come to assume special significance, given their importance in terms of enrolment levels and the accumulation of human capital consistent with the aims of national development.

Many countries have seen their tertiary education systems adjust to the decrease in the number of students who enrol on completion of upper secondary education – their natural pool of human resources – by increasing the possibilities for admission among people who in principle do not satisfy the necessary preconditions, although Chile would probably not be one of those countries, as non-formal and informal learning outcomes are not recognised by its tertiary education system. In Switzerland, the situation is somewhat different too, as the aim of opening up tertiary education to the greatest number is more commonly highlighted as the reason for reform, with demographic trends cited less often. In Iceland, demographic changes have not really affected tertiary education admissions policies. Institutions have always been free to assess non-formal and informal learning outcomes for admissions purposes.

Generally speaking, the demographic downturn is regarded very favourably by tertiary education institutions which view the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a means of overcoming the paucity of the conventional source of students in terms of numbers and attracting new students. In Scotland, the majority of universities have coped well with restrictive demographic trends and the SCQF is being developed in partnership with Scottish universities and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAAHE). The higher education authorities acknowledge that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (RPL) may increase the number of graduates. The recruitment of non-traditional students is viewed as beneficial both to themselves in enabling them to develop personally and professionally, and to institutions which can use it to broaden their recruitment channels and networks. However, it should be emphasised that some traditional Scottish universities are against the idea of RPL, considering that it devalues the very nature and quality of qualifications. In their view, credits can only be obtained following formal curricular studies. In the Netherlands, tertiary education institutions have to diversify their programmes so that it is easier for non-traditional students to enter them. The corresponding budget is obtainable in accordance with one of the three regulations described elsewhere. In Ireland, there are credit exemptions in tertiary education and, since 1990, in continuing training. In Hungary, the government is clearly aiming to take account of vocational learning outcomes when admitting students to formal tertiary education. In Slovenia, the Act of 2000 was extended in 2006 to tertiary education in order to accommodate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

In Australia, as in Italy, the number of credits that learners may obtain through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is restricted. At the University of South Australia (UniSA), those wishing to secure such recognition have to do a full year of studies. Prior to the generally positive NIFU-Step study (Brandt, 2002) in Norway, there was a certain amount of scepticism about recognition of this kind as a means of entering university. According to the study, the persons seeking recognition had achieved entirely satisfactory learning outcomes and were, if anything, more motivated. In Norway, each tertiary education institution is legally free to decide whom it can enrol on the basis of recognised non-formal and informal learning outcomes or exemption from examination, with the result that each adopts different procedures. In Italy, tertiary education reforms in 1998 and 2005 have sought to establish a more inclusive and open system.

At the beginning of the 1970s in Korea, there was widespread strong demand among the population for entry to tertiary education. Places were limited, and difficulty in securing admission was especially acute among the poor. The government responded in concrete terms by setting up the Presidential Educational Advisory Council (1989) which established a System of Academic Degrees Acquisition through Self-Education (*Dok-Hack-Sa*). Ten years later this was expanded with the introduction of the Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS). The idea was to enable people to accumulate their learning outcomes. Essentially focused on tertiary education, the system has been very popular in Korea for some 30 years. Germany has a system for exemption from the preconditions for entry to tertiary education, which is based on recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In Belgium (Flemish Community), tertiary education regulations became more flexible in 2004 when the Community engaged with the Bologna process. Since then credits acquired outside formal educational settings have been authorised. In 1997, South Africa published its White Paper on education under the Higher Education Act. It sought to transform democracy into a non-racial system in the spirit of official statements on lifelong learning, at least in higher education. A central idea was to provide for lateral and vertical mobility in the higher education system.

Policy responses in the area of *vocational education* are also highly significant. The sector is essential in Greece, where 75% of its funding comes from the European Social Fund (ESF) but there is no scope in this context for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In Italy, the *Istruzione e Formazione Tecnica Superiore* (IFTS, or the system for education and higher technical training) has existed since 1999. It is a practical method for validating learning outcomes, with the three stages of

guidance and counselling, assessment, and certification/recognition. The aim is for students to secure access to training for a certified qualification or to special training. Besides IFTS, four Italian regions (Tuscany, Valle d'Aosta, Emilia-Romagna and Piedmont) have enacted laws to promote methods of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes and awarding credits. However, there are differing levels of involvement with Piedmont (or at least its executive committee) seemingly less committed. The law in Emilia-Romagna is the clearest and most specific in terms of principle, and has introduced personal entitlement for all and a *Libretto* (booklet for the training of citizens). It even refers to “self-learning”.

Germany has arrangements for exemption to enable people to enter vocational education on the basis of recognised non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Decrees on the regulation of adult learning published in Belgium (Flemish Community) between 1999 and 2007 enable the measurement and assessment of acquired competences to be used in particular to shorten subsequent training. South Africa has a law on post-secondary vocational education. However, developments seem to be slower than in higher education. At the time of the field visit to South Africa (beginning of 2008), there were still no official documents to guide the introduction of RPL policies for post-secondary vocational education institutions. In Chile, vocational education is at the core of the system as regards nine sectors of activity. In Slovenia, the Act of 2000 limited the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes to professions needing skills acquired by the end of upper secondary education. Canada has no national policy for vocational education. Moreover, hardly anywhere other than British Columbia offers a series of assessments for people seeking a vocational trade qualification in the commercial sector.

The political system as a catalyst or inhibiting factor

Generally speaking, the political system does not stand aloof from matters concerned with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and lifelong learning. This was very clear from the *great variety of systems* in countries covered by the study. It is essential to appreciate the different roles of the federal, regional, provincial, cantonal, county or municipal levels in order to grasp fully where and how decision making occurs, especially as regards decisions about the possible introduction of a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Certain key challenges for recognition are confronted at regional level, as in Australia where the states and territories are mainly responsible for quality assurance. This also often applies to vocational education which is (for example) the preserve of the cantons in Switzerland and the regions in Italy.

A strong regional structure may create imbalances, for example when some regions are more active than others and as a result more attractive, whether because of determination to tackle problems head on, or just a more favourable economic situation. This applies to Switzerland where the canton of Geneva appears to be expanding faster than others, and Canada where Alberta is especially attractive. The same is clearly true of Mexico, unquestionably a large country with considerable cultural diversity and economic, social, demographic and educational differences, as well as somewhat marginalised regions like those in the south (Chiapas, Oaxaca) and states more to the forefront such as Nuevo León. Cases of imbalance are also attributable to different aims: in Norway a study by Vox, the Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning, has identified two types of aim depending on the county concerned. Some counties are seeking to increase the level of locally available skills and the flexibility of workers, while others are more concerned about regulations and laws.

The *local management* of a certain number of matters is traditional in the Netherlands, and implementation of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is no exception. This also occurs in Switzerland in which the cantons are responsible for such recognition, even though the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OFFT) is entrusted with circulating the information. By adopting this local-level approach, Switzerland claims to have avoided restrictive national control.

Other countries are undergoing a decentralisation process, such as the Czech Republic in which certain responsibilities have been transferred to the regions.

In theory, a politically decentralised system with decisions taken at local level is conducive to grass-roots management of specifically local concerns, because the information is more reliable and knowledge of the field an asset. However, such a system may also give rise to marked inequalities in that regions which are more active in this way may offer more numerous and attractive opportunities for training and recognition. There is evidence for this in Spain, where the system of Autonomous Communities established by the 1978 constitution tends to complicate the picture, creating major inequalities, with people in Galicia far better provided for. The constitution established a decentralised state model, with responsibilities shared between the central government administration, the Autonomous Communities and local administrative authorities.

Switzerland runs the risk of a kind of *inequality* or injustice if certain qualifications are not recognised everywhere in the Confederation. Just as problematic is the likelihood that the various cantons will have different assessment and validation procedures, or adopt varying degrees of strictness in assessing or determining the level of candidates. There is also the problem of private organisations which may award certificates whose value is not the same everywhere. Finally, some professions regulate access to their titles or qualifications, as well as administration of their award. This applies to architects in Switzerland. In the Netherlands, which is opting for regionalisation, it is conceded that the position of evaluators is not satisfactorily defined and that the quality of the process for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is not the same everywhere. Finally, some institutions do not accept as a matter of course the learning outcomes achieved in others.

In Hungary, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes really began at the local level in the 1990s with the creation of nine recognition centres which drew on French and Canadian experience (with skills appraisal and learning portfolios in France and visits from PLAR experts and familiarisation with the concept of recognition in the case of Canada). With the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) since the beginning of the 1990s, the UK strategy has clearly been a regional one. Indeed, the contrast between the constituent countries of the United Kingdom is quite striking: Scotland and Wales have a clear policy with a special credit system for qualification purposes, whereas England does not really possess a system for regulating the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However, a credit framework is currently undergoing development. Scotland is also considering the operation of its labour market in regional terms but as a single region – given its size – so as to avoid or at least minimise potentially detrimental competition between the two major centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh, at a time when industry everywhere is in decline. Regional policy is seen as a way of combating geographical disparities which are more marked in Scotland. The fight against regional disparities, especially where unemployment is concerned, has involved reliance on structural funds.

Australia also offers a good example of an approach derived from the concept of *learning regions*, which is based on the idea of a networking organisation with numerous partnerships. This provides for cross-fertilisation through the exchange of ideas and practices. In Australia, the clear aim of this kind of approach is to act in the interests of people who are socially disadvantaged. Austria also has a learning regions programme with Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs). However, there may be a problem of consensus about the role of this strategy and the means that should be mobilised. Certainly, very active regions and a proliferation of activities have been involved: they have included an adult education forum in Lower Austria, and several projects based on a training/employment-type approach in Burgenland between 1995 and 1999 with thousands of participants but little co-ordination.

Germany also reports this difficulty. It might even be a significant barrier to the emergence of a system that includes recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In a federal state such as

Germany, there are indeed specific interests and considerable heterogeneity. For example, the national qualifications framework requires thorough consultation and a substantial measure of co-ordination between the federal level and the *Länder*. In Germany, and in EU countries in general, the internal exercise is compounded by the approach adopted by the EU, with the identification of key competences, the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning and Europass. The Canadian system with 13 provinces and territories is also highly decentralised, though the territories are slightly less autonomous than the provinces. Thus the qualifications awarded in one province are not necessarily recognised in another, whatever the method of learning, formal or otherwise. In fact, there are 13 systems of education and vocational apprenticeship and 13 different and separate qualifications systems. At the time of going to print, agreements providing for greater mobility of workers are almost due to be finalised. Also receiving close consideration is the concept of a national qualifications framework as a sort of umbrella framework recognised throughout the whole country, over and above the provinces and territories in which particular qualifications are awarded.

Decentralisation or, at least, extensive *freedom* may be a way of furthering initiatives and creating innovation, as in Norway where Vox has purchased the “competence passport” concept from its designers, who worked on a limited geographical scale, in an attempt to transform it into a national device for use by anyone and anywhere. In Italy, the most successful pilot projects and systems have been regional ones. Regions such as Basilicata, Valle d’Aosta, Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont, Venetia and Trentino-Alto Adige have been directly involved in defining the policy and strategy to promote the national qualifications framework using standards based on learning outcomes. Some regions, such as Emilia-Romagna, have also worked on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes for the award of credits to gain admission to the formal education and training system, or to obtain a full qualification.

It is unusual for the decentralisation of certain areas of authority not to have some effect on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. For example, in Italy, the regions responsible for laying the foundations of the system are searching for mechanisms easy to put into practice without greatly affecting the existing system of education, vocational training and qualifications, which they are therefore seeking rightly or wrongly to protect. In South Africa, the decentralisation which followed the first free elections in the mid-1990s led to the establishment of Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) and National Standards Bodies (NSBs).

In Spain, the economic changes of the last decade have meant that greater flexibility is now expected of learning and qualifications systems. Spain is thus giving thought to a possible policy framework for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as a symbol of this greater flexibility. This has been under consideration since 2000 and the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning.

Other catalysts for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes

The existence of a formal education and training system with *modular programmes* might act as a catalyst in developing a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This is because it would offer learners who need it a form of training as close as possible to their requirements without any loss of money or time. Theoretically speaking, modular course design is very well suited to such recognition since, in a somewhat general approach, recognition would be a means of identifying what candidates know or can do and, therefore, any shortcomings that still need to be remedied. As these would most probably be just partial weaknesses, provision for learning would have to be organised so as to impart solely the knowledge, skills and competences that are lacking. Only modular provision enables this to be done at reasonable transaction costs.

In Switzerland, modular course design is organised and regulated by profession; it is still not very widespread, although often the subject of debate (OECD, 2003). In Iceland, national programmes have recently been converted into electronic format in order to make it easier to modularise learning.

Modularisation is under way in Hungary, where it is being devised in conjunction with the development of a credit transfer system. In Denmark, work on the national qualifications framework is associated with modular programme design and the drafting of programmes with due regard for learning outcomes. In Germany, recommendations have been prepared subsequent to the 2002 Education Forum. Proposals in Germany for modularisation in vocational and tertiary education are intended to facilitate the pursuit of studies and acquisition of qualifications, and to provide for linkages between formal and informal learning. Modular course design exists in Chile; the idea is to use it for improved understanding and control of the skills required in the nine important sectors and to develop appropriate training programmes.

The existence of *standards* to take account of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may also constitute an incentive to recognise them. In Italy, for example, the idea is that the existence of a national learning standard – even a minimum one – and/or an employment standard would make it possible to use a system of units (credits) that could be awarded for skills or competences on a cumulative basis. In Italy, this is considered to guarantee quality. In Belgium (Flemish Community), the existence of national standards is regarded as essential. In South Africa, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is responsible for standards and produces a great many, with a strong emphasis on quality assurance.

Among matters to have generated heated controversy, thus revealing the state of attitudes surrounding the issue, is whether the “transcript” awarded to successful candidates should include an indication to the effect that their qualification was obtained through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Korea and the Czech Republic both indicate on the actual transcript that the examination was taken in accordance with legislation on the recognition of learning outcomes in continuing education. Australia does not do so, as this would be viewed as stigmatising the learners concerned. Neither do the Netherlands, Iceland and Austria. In Germany, the *Externenprüfung* examination for external candidates now enables some 30 000 annually to receive exactly the same certificate as those who have taken the examination following a vocational apprenticeship in the Dual System.

Concerning the qualification transcript, in Canada, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have also firmly decided against a specific reference to “PLAR” or any similar indication. However, Ontario and Manitoba keep the information on file internally. In Nova Scotia, the only community college for post-secondary education marks the letter “C”, for credit, on the certificate to indicate the use of PLAR. Saskatchewan highlights the twofold reaction to this practice in the world of work. While some employers are impressed by what PLAR can achieve, an academic institution may refuse the transfer of credits. This is a sign that academics remain very reluctant to recognise non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In Saskatchewan too, it is pointed out that the SIAST has decided not to include any specific indication on qualification transcripts, partially in recognition of the value the institution places on learning through experience and also to avoid possible stigmatisation limiting credit transfer opportunities for successful candidates. This could be construed as a sign (were one needed) that some tertiary education institutions do not believe in recognition. Even where transcripts lack any special indication, it is of course theoretically possible to keep track of someone’s previous career. The risk that people may be stigmatised, therefore, is not eliminated as the students concerned may still be identified and, if need be, refused. Furthermore – and again with reference to Canada – a study in 1999 on the aboriginal peoples of British Columbia revealed that they generally learn English informally. Yet these self-taught individuals are apparently not regarded in the same way as those who learnt the language at school, which is indicative of a type of stigmatisation.

In Ireland, in general, there is no indication given in the certificate awarded on successful completion of a recognised programme of how the learning has been achieved (whether formal, non-formal or informal). This accords with the requirements of the Diploma Supplement and the Certificate Supplement. The approach is somewhat the same in South Africa, in which there is no specific indication regarding the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes on either the transcript or the set of course notes. Information on RPL achievements is kept in the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD)

which relies on the data submitted by the various education and training quality assessment bodies (ETQAs). In some sectors extensive and accurate information on RPL achievements exists, while in others SAQA encourages ETQAs to do the same.

It should naturally be borne in mind that the question of a written indication on the transcript is not applicable in a country such as Greece which does not award any qualification based on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Neither in Hungary is there any full qualification obtainable by means of such recognition. Also worth noting is the interesting case of the Netherlands in which a recent trend likely to encourage more widespread change has occurred. While in the past it was customary to provide no information about the methods of acquiring knowledge, skills and competences, it would appear that there is now a tendency to employ a certificate (the *Ervaringscertificaat*) which describes people's experience and is thus based largely on their non-formal and informal learning.

A national qualifications framework is often described as a key element in developing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, and the emergence of a system *per se*. In many countries, including EU countries, these frameworks are still being prepared, although in Ireland, South Africa and Australia, their development is at an advanced stage. Their relevance to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes stems from the fact that qualifications included in the national qualifications framework are generally recognised and accepted by professionals and other final users. Embedding recognition of non-formal and informal learning within a broader national qualification gives immediate legitimacy. Furthermore, national qualifications provide transparency: people know where they are going in terms of learning, recognition and qualifications, while employers know who they are recruiting. A further reason why the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and national qualifications frameworks are intrinsically related is that both are based on the concept of learning outcomes as opposed to inputs.

However, while the existence of a national qualifications framework may facilitate recognition, it is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for it to occur. The United States has no national or state frameworks, yet the credit transfer rate between short (two-year) and long (four-year) tertiary education institutions has been very high – as in Norway – and for a long time, doubtless because the tertiary education market in the United States is highly competitive. In addition, all these institutions enrol a great many students, or award them credit, on the basis of recognised non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Besides Norway, Korea is also still without a qualifications framework. Yet there too a high transfer rate is observed between institutions located outside the capital, Seoul, and those within Seoul. In Korea, there is only a very loose connection between the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and the qualifications system, although recognition is being developed in conjunction with the qualifications framework.

Many countries nonetheless stress that a national qualifications framework is important in fostering the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This applies to the Czech Republic whose national framework has been the subject of publicity campaigns targeting employers and prospective candidates for recognition. Furthermore, the 2007 Act states that the framework and recognition are always intrinsically linked. The same relation is described as vital in Belgium (Flemish Community) for achieving what is termed the Recognition of Acquired Competences (RAC); the recommendations of the RAC group in VIONA (Flemish Interuniversity Research Network for Labour Market Reporting, 2001-04) are very clear in this respect. In the Netherlands, in which the national qualifications framework has been in place since the beginning of the 1990s, the system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes appears to be at a more advanced stage, even if it has only become firmly structured since 2000, demonstrating that a framework may act as a catalyst. Furthermore, Ireland remains one of the most progressive countries in terms of national qualifications frameworks that include recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

There is no national qualifications framework in Iceland. One is being developed in Hungary, with the aim of including it in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It should become a central mechanism in this country's strategy, as it is intended to improve transparency, labour market adjustment and flexibility (with the use of job descriptions). For the time being, there are sectoral qualifications frameworks (national register of vocational education and multi-cycle qualifications in tertiary education): the aim is to establish a unified framework. In Greece, nothing in the national qualifications framework provides a basis for the certification of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The United Kingdom has had a national qualifications framework since 1997. It has been subject to internal criticism on the grounds that it could be more transparent, more consistent, less bureaucratic and easier to follow. In short, it should be closer to the needs of employers and members of the public. It should provide in particular for progressive recognition, stage by stage, as someone gradually accumulates learning outcomes, and non-formal and informal learning outcomes in particular. It does not do enough justice to the diversity of individuals, even though the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is by its very nature a process in which each person is regarded as, so to speak, a special case. In Scotland, the approach based on the recognition of learning outcomes (RPL) is directly linked to the development and establishment of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Adopted in 2001, it is geared to the recognition of all learning outcomes irrespective of the learning context, formal or otherwise. Indeed, one of the functions of the SCQF is to broaden public attitudes so that all credits have the same currency whether obtained by formal means or the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

In Australia, the former Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB) has drawn up *National Principles on Operational Guidelines for RPL* for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (RPL), which point to the organic link between the two concepts. Furthermore, it appears as though this Board had some leeway in organising and promoting recognition. Italy emphasises the importance of a qualifications system that would enable one to recognise and record all knowledge, skills and competences that are indeed acquired. As to the qualifications framework, it was initiated in 2006 following the impetus provided by the European framework. It should be fully completed in 2010. In Denmark, there is a national qualifications framework which is described as important for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In Mexico, this recognition is expressly linked to the MEVyT qualifications framework.

In Germany, the national qualifications framework (known as *Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen*, abbreviated to DQR) is undergoing development. It was on the 2007 policy agenda and was the subject of a specially created working group. The intention is that it should be harnessed to the EQF, as is also the case in Austria. Work on the DQR began following the first draft of the EQF which is meant to improve the transparency and visibility of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Meanwhile, work is continuing on the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) which is considered the best link between the various sectors of education. The national qualifications framework is regarded as essential in South Africa too. All qualifications in the framework are based on learning outcomes. It was established in 1995, at the same time as the SAQA. Both were part of the extensive and detailed reappraisal that followed the first free elections. Education and recognition (RPL) were immediately linked to the idea of readjusting the distribution of opportunities. At first, not everyone agreed with the approach. As regards standards, however, the appropriate organisations, namely the Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) and National Standards Bodies (NSBs), became operational from the outset in 1997 and remained so until 2006. A comparison between the former qualifications and newly established ones reveals an increase in the number of qualifications at levels 3, 4 and 5. There is however a need for higher level intermediate qualifications in the fields of manufacturing, engineering and technology and EU funding has been made available to support their development.

In Chile, the NSLCC is considered vital. There is no national qualifications framework but this is being discussed, as Chile is seeking to establish one. Nine sectors of activity – including fisheries, gas, electricity, wine growing, mining and tourism – are at the heart of concerns about qualifications. But the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has not been taken into account in the qualifications system, which is not based on learning outcomes.

In Slovenia, no national qualifications framework has yet been drawn up. In addition, its promoters are anticipating barriers if it is developed. However a few foundations have been laid and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is considered to be among them. It is interesting to note that, contrary to other countries, Slovenia considers that the existence of practices for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is going to encourage the establishment of a national qualifications framework rather than *vice versa*. The barriers are of several kinds, including the lack of visibility of certificates, the fact that these learning outcomes are not really built into the formal education and training system, trade union apathy, and no strong connection between job remuneration and the qualifications obtained through recognising the outcomes. In short, Slovenia lacks any consensus about the equivalence required between qualifications obtainable in the formal system and those awarded through the recognition of such outcomes. That said, one hears the usual arguments for establishing a national qualifications framework, including faster access to qualifications, the possibility of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes and of returning to the formal system, especially in the case of groups targeted by public action. In Spain, there is no framework but there is a catalogue. Spain is working to develop a national qualifications framework that will bring together all separate accreditation and qualifications systems, with a first group involving the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, and a second the recognition of formal learning outcomes in the national education system. Spain attaches special importance to the conditions governing eligibility for accreditation and the award thereof.

Another potential spur is a *credit transfer and accumulation system*. However, examination of the country background reports shows that not all countries share the same level of requirements regarding initial plans for such a system. South Africa acknowledges that it is not yet at this stage because its system is still not fully inclusive and does not yet take all providers and forms of learning into account.

All countries have a credit transfer system, but sometimes in its simplest possible form; in the Czech Republic, it applies solely to tertiary education. By contrast, the country does have a partial credit transfer system in continuing vocational education, as in the fields of health and social work. The institutions concerned are the Ministry of Education and the professional associations. In Iceland, the Ministry of Education is alone responsible for developing a credit transfer system. This was also one of the first steps taken in Hungary during the reform of institutions at the start of the 1990s. The credit transfer system there is viewed as a means of modernising the way education is organised.

While there is no national credit transfer system in the United Kingdom, regional or local systems exist. Credit transfer dates from the establishment of the UK Open University in the 1970s. The leading UK pioneer of notional time is the Open College Network, while the former CNAAC (Council for National Academic Awards) used as a reference the concept of full study year in which one year was equivalent to 1 200 hours and 120 credits. Austria too has no general credit transfer system but a few special procedures exist particularly in the case of vocational education, in order to reduce the training period. As regards further education and higher education in Scotland, credits are administered by universities following assessment by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) in the case of post-secondary education and by the higher education institutions (HEI) for higher education. Assessment is relatively formal and is conducted in three stages with a right of appeal in the event of failure. The system is one based on the notional time required in principle to obtain a credit (equivalent to 10 hours). The SCQF has produced guidelines for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (RPL). All sectors wishing to develop recognition (RPL) may use these guidelines which may be accessed online.

In Australia, things are a little more complex in that, while guidelines exist and provide the whole system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes with a measure of consistency, there is not really a unified credit transfer system. The *credit matrix* of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) is the concept closest to such a system. The term “matrix” avoids use of the expressions “credit system” and “credit framework”. It could be adopted nationally for all sectors. In Norway, there are no credits in upper secondary education. In tertiary education, there is no overall arrangement, as credit transfer is organised in a local and specific manner, notwithstanding ongoing discussions to standardise approaches. Credit transfer is theoretically possible in Italy but there are no national standards. This is no doubt the main barrier to the development of a national system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However credits exist in the IFTS system, as well as in tertiary education and both these systems appear to operate.

In Denmark, credit transfer systems are organised by educational sector but the practice is relatively limited. However, the country is considering improvements. In Korea, credit transfer is regarded as a means of furthering the modular design of learning programmes. One novel development has been the Learning Management System (LMS). In Korea, credits are related to learning time which is doubled when learning is not formal. In Spain, it is possible to accumulate partial accreditations in order to obtain vocational training qualifications and certificates of vocational aptitude. But credits cannot be accumulated and transferred for non-formal and informal learning. However (non-formal) continuing training is organised in notional hours.

In Germany, credit transfer is not the norm, except perhaps in the context of EU initiatives such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), but that relates solely to short course tertiary education institutions and the universities (including those for applied sciences). In tertiary education, the credit transfer system was introduced at the end of the 1990s. In practice, it enables vocational qualifications and work experience to be taken into account. The credits enable students to complete their courses faster. In the future, Germany is planning to limit the maximum proportion of transferable credits to 50%. However, these new procedures are not yet fully transparent. ECTS-type credit transfer, which has been established in tertiary education, has not yet come to fruition in vocational education. However as this has a highly developed formal structure in Germany, the country has begun the work required on the transparency and comparability of credits and qualifications under ECVET. The important point is that Germany has clearly stated that it is waiting to complete this work on ECTS and ECVET before organising procedures for taking account of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and making them official. In Belgium (Flemish Community), the Flemish qualifications structure is being established in 2009. However, many projects have been tested since the beginning of 2007. In this context, Belgium (Flemish Community) emphasises the “civic effect” which concerns the part played by qualifications in securing access to the education and training system or a job. As a general rule, no credits are awarded for non-formal and informal learning outcomes. On the other hand, since the decree for improving flexibility in tertiary education, the latter has introduced the award of credits on the basis of the ECTS system. Slovenia too has based its developmental activity on the EU programmes.

In South Africa, the SAQA is combating a compartmentalised approach to individuals and their learning. The idea is to conceive of a whole and not its constituent parts. The approach is an interesting one as it takes account of the context. In South Africa, the national qualifications framework in its current form is not quite yet a credit transfer and accumulation system (CAT), even though the recognition of learning outcomes (RPL) has led to progress in parity of esteem among learning providers. The framework is a system based on credits and the number of notional learning hours. In Chile, there is no credit system for non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However the 2003 MECESUP has made it possible to initiate a credit-based approach.

In Canada, most institutions have policies and procedures for the award of credits which limit the maximum number of credits obtainable on the basis of recognition (PLAR). In Ontario in particular, there is plenty of scope for obtaining credits but the system is described as rather complex. In Saskatchewan, the University of Saskatchewan has introduced a policy known as “Challenge for Credit Policy” which can be used to check what students know compared to existing standards. The University of Regina has established a recognition policy (PLAR) and recognition has been credited in several fields of study. The SIAST has implemented a policy for recognition of prior learning for PLAR and transfer credit which applies to all its certificate and diploma programmes. In British Columbia, the approach varies depending on the programme and institution. Generally speaking in Canada, most universities do not distinguish between credits obtained in tertiary education institutions or through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (PLAR), probably because this is not possible. In any event, decisions regarding credits are at the discretion of institutions, so they are counted differently from one province to another, one institution to another and even one programme to another. They tend to be expressed as a number of nominal hours. In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick universities, one full unit, or one credit, is worth between 60 and 80 hours. In the SIAST, 20 contact hours are equivalent to one hour of credit. The universities allocate three time credits per course with one time credit equivalent to 15 contact hours. These calculations are somewhat complicated, not to say wearisome.

The role of the labour market as a natural recipient and indeed a major “purchaser” of individuals who rely on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has already been noted. It is thus not surprising that the market naturally encourages such recognition. For this reason, it is interesting to review, albeit rapidly, the *sectors or professions that may create an inward flow*, given their definite need for knowledge, skills and competences.

In Switzerland, sectors such as banking, the production of industrial machinery and computer equipment are in demand. The Netherlands has sectoral agreements because the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes there is seen as potentially capable of stimulating continuing training. The recognition of these outcomes is not an end in itself, but a means of eventually making good progress through the long-term development of individuals and their human capital. As part of its strategy for lifelong learning, Scotland emphasises the role of experience in coming to the rescue of certain professions in difficulty, because they lack competent staff given the growing knowledge economy. Five skills are in special demand, namely understanding, practical skills, cognitive skills, communication (including numeracy) and autonomy (including teamwork and interpersonal skills). These skills are also intended to empower people to be active and responsible in society. More broadly speaking, Scotland highlights the need for them to have “transferable employability”. The concept is not new and relates to knowledge, skills and competences which may be (re-)used in different settings and jobs. In addition, Scotland firmly emphasises the positive contribution of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in enabling workers to develop generic cognitive skills so that they can work in different contexts, learn new occupations and perform well in new jobs during their working life. Furthermore, the SCQF is working with the regulated professions, such as those governed by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

Greece appears to fear skills shortages in pioneering professional sectors such as new information and communication technology or foreign languages. It would seem therefore that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should quickly get under way there. In Korea, as in many countries, possession of a bachelor’s degree (or equivalent qualification) is a necessary condition for certain professions as clearly stated in law. In Belgium (Flemish Community), some occupations have relied on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, including bus driving, call centre work, industrial painting and crane operating. The health sector is also experiencing demand, given attempts to reduce the study period. Belgium (Flemish Community) represents the typical case in which the labour market is calling for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes because of a lack of qualified personnel from the formal education and training system.

In Canada, the nine essential skills used by the federal government and several provinces are reading, comprehension, numeracy, writing, verbal communication, teamwork, continuing learning, thinking (problem solving, decision making, critical ability) and use of a computer. In British Columbia, the list of skills covers 200 professions. For the tertiary education institution Douglas College, the main idea is to recognise essential skills and reduce the stigma faced by learners if they use the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes to gain access to regulated professions, or even traditionally closed ones. There are many other initiatives, such as one concerned with essential skills for aboriginal groups. In Canada too, there is no backup mechanism, such as a credit system, to record the key competences obtained through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Yet many provinces are making progress by combining key competences and PLAR. This applies to Prince Edward Island where a learning portfolio is available. It pays special attention to the skills essential for learners to develop a career plan. In British Columbia, the Ministry of Education enables students to record their competence level and obtain a card describing their strengths, along with areas requiring improvement. Finally, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges has established a system for describing the competences needed to work, including an assessment of key competences for employability. In this way, employers may identify shortcomings and organise appropriate training.

Other apparent inhibiting factors and risks in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes

The preceding sections have shown that there are many good reasons to pin faith on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Yet the systems entailed have difficulty in getting off the ground on a grand scale. This is indicative of hesitancy which must thus be explicable. An examination of the documents submitted by countries points to the existence of potential inhibiting factors which, if they are underestimated and not dealt with, are potential barriers to developing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes for as many people as possible.

For example, *collective agreements* have an important part to play in discussions, as they often improve the transparency of the distinction between qualification and certification. In countries with such agreements, certification (in the form of a diploma or transcript) is only one constituent of the qualification, itself defined as an ability to apply skills in a given professional context. Collective agreements are thus the mechanisms for establishing the further characteristics needed over and above certification (for example those linked to age or experience) for someone to be deemed qualified.

It is true that, if collective agreements are clear about salary scales or if there is customarily *wage negotiation* with qualification levels taken into account (for example), then it may be worth holding certified qualifications. Yet the fact remains that most employers reject this kind of argument, and many countries emphasise the likelihood that employers will object to making the recognition procedure official because they are afraid of having to increase the remuneration of successful candidates. The debate could go on forever, because it is no less true that workers are potentially more productive – and thus more profitable – after completing a recognition procedure. A wage increase might thus be justified in terms of economic theory. For all that, it represents an additional burden for those employers who still do not regard training and recognition as an investment but a cost.

Be that as it may, there have been many signs of progress since the end of the 1990s, particularly in Denmark, as a result of significant developments regarding the definition of competence in collective agreements. However, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is still at an intermediate stage and thus not a central issue in negotiations. In Austria, collective agreements refer to the principle of learning outcomes solely in the case of non-university researchers, a very limited market. In Spain, these agreements generally recognise two types of learning, namely informal learning and courses for continuing training. In Ontario (Canada), where trade unions tend to be militant, there are pilot projects

to place the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes at the centre of discussions. In Slovenia, there is no collective bargaining except in the transport sector.

Another inhibiting factor often described is *cost*. While the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is often presented as a cheap alternative to training, it would seem that it cannot be made to work cost-free. The issue of cost is clearly identified as a problem in all countries. There are two interesting findings in this context. The first is that the source of the cost often varies from one country to another. Some people refer to personnel costs, especially in information and guidance centres, in particular when the staff concerned are specifically responsible for supporting eligible candidates. Here, attention is drawn to the fact that some groups need considerable attention, which means spending much time with them. Moreover, some countries or regions limit the time to which candidates for recognition are entitled, as in Valle d'Aosta, in Italy.

Second, there is the cost of assessment. This would appear to pose more problems in some countries than in others, as in Mexico for example, where cost appears to be a big barrier for candidates. Mexico has thus decided to involve enterprises in funding recognition procedures. On occasion, the cost of recognition may also be deliberately ignored to a certain extent, either because this is expedient, or because countries rate the well-being of people higher than the cost incurred by the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However, little evidence is available on the full costs – and benefits – of recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The lack of *transparency* regarding the qualifications available and the links between them remain a barrier in some countries. Even where there is a national qualifications framework, the problem may sometimes persist, as the authorities freely admit, as in the Czech Republic which is trying to make the national qualifications framework more transparent for users.

There is no doubt whatever according to virtually all players, and particularly those in the field, in the 22 countries covered by the study that the main inhibiting factor is the *outlook* or the *omnipresence of formal approaches*. In many countries, numerous players doubt whether the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is feasible (in the Czech Republic they include salaried staff, employers and education specialists). In some countries awareness that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a possibility/opportunity is relatively low.

When the first attempts at the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes emerged in Hungary at the end of the 1990s, employers were more than sceptical. They considered that qualifications obtained by this means lacked the *currency* of those awarded in the formal system. In addition, they found the process too long. The first reaction in Australia was rather similar. Critics raised the problem of parity of esteem. On the contrary, those with low-level qualifications tend to be attracted to qualifications and diplomas, as long as they do not have to undertake formal education to acquire them, (OECD, 2007a; Recotillet and Werquin, 2009). Some countries are also beginning to realise that the process of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is not necessarily short and that time may be lost: Australia proposes much more observation at the workplace to avoid unduly long assessment processes. Italy very clearly emphasises the socio-cultural aspect that attaches much more value to formal learning. In Korea, non-formal and informal learning are perceived as closer to academic qualifications than vocational ones, which only partially resolves the problem of how they are acknowledged on the labour market. However, in Korea, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is not regarded as threatening for universities or employers. On the other hand, tertiary education institutions are not yet accustomed to recognising credits from other institutions. There is thus probably a slight resistance. In addition, regional and national universities may sense a threat if the number of learners who use the ACBS increase, because that may lead to a decrease in the number of traditional students and a reduction in financial support for them.

Mexico is so aware of this problem that its *Dirección General de Acreditación Incorporación y Revalidación* (DGAIR, or Directorate-General for Accreditation and Validation), *Dirección General del Bachillerato* (DGB, or Directorate-General of the Baccalaureate in the Ministry of National Education) and *Centro Nacional de Evaluación para la Educación Superior* (CENEVAL, or National Centre for the Evaluation of Higher Education) have made a co-ordinated effort to try and get higher education institutions to realise that they could accept non-traditional students. In Germany, all challenges for ECVET and the national qualifications framework relate to issues of this kind, in terms of acceptance. The *Länder*, the workers' associations and the professional associations suggest that there is still plenty to do in terms of developing understanding. A determined effort is needed to define terms and identify target populations and the number of candidates for acceptance. Furthermore, in Germany, the problem of registering skills has not been resolved. It is a controversial subject, especially in academic circles, a sign that the recognition battle is proceeding, so that in Germany sights are set more on the future with many projects undergoing development. As has been noted, one of them is for a credit points system, while another seeks to measure skills for results, and a programme of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG, or German Foundation for Research) is dealing with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The experience in Austria appears more positive. No stigma seems to be attached to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, even though qualifications obtained in the formal system are the most in demand. From the experience of Slovenia, one can appreciate the difficulty of the task and the time that will be needed to complete it. Today, the focus is still on the future. Yet the aim of a 1994 research project at the Ministry of Labour was to develop and establish a qualification system that would be independent of the method used to acquire knowledge, skills and competences. Yet all those with a say in the matter rejected the idea of taking account of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This parallel route alongside that of certified qualifications was massively rejected on the grounds that it would undermine the formal education system and also threaten the transparency of qualifications. Fifteen years later, Slovenia still awaits an all-inclusive system which, for now, is limited to post-secondary education. Academic knowledge is regarded as too complex for ready inclusion in a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Indeed, the social partners have stood aloof from the idea, apparently from lack of conviction. Those who promote the recognition of those learning outcomes in Slovenia have responded by declaring that the solution could involve developing a national qualifications framework to allay the fears of everyone concerned. The development of a competence-based modular system is also viewed as a possible solution in vocational education.

In South Africa, the limited capacity of the current education and training system is struggling to find a solution to the large-scale nature of the problems of access and recognition. Most of those who require these opportunities do not have the resources to pay for them and so bursaries and massive state funding would be needed to make them possible. Over and above these identified risks are psychological barriers as everywhere else. Education and certification providers in particular do not necessarily properly understand precisely what the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (as reflected in RPL) entails and especially the procedures associated with it. There is an apparent need for simplification. The problem is that RPL candidates may be regarded as poor if too much attention is paid to what they are unable to do, rather than what they know or can do. This is a problem encountered in many countries; recognition should seek to uncover strengths rather than identifying weaknesses. However, there is apparently no clear-cut evidence that candidates for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in South Africa are stigmatised.

In Spain, the data reveal that participants are above all qualified to an intermediate or higher level. The perceived risk is thus that individuals with low-level qualifications might not gain from the unquestionable advantages of an approach involving recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The fact remains that these problems of outlook represent a real stumbling block in all countries and at all levels, and doubtless constitute the main barrier. It is thus just as well to refrain from being over-ambitious about the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, to avoid the likelihood of inviting criticism. Its detractors are many in all countries – as the field visits also unquestionably revealed – and only too ready to pounce on one false step as grounds for opposing the very principle of such recognition. In other words, while it is conceded that this kind of recognition is not a panacea, it is as well to be aware of the fact early enough to avoid promising too much and being found wanting.

Many countries do indeed report that they tend to be *inflexible* in their unwillingness to accept that non-formal and informal learning might have the same currency as learning in a formal context. In Switzerland, this position is fairly clear, since it is stated there that the democratic process would not accept types of learning that were not formal. In the Czech Republic, the fear of awarding qualifications that would not be socially accepted is explicit, to the point of envisaging a worst case scenario in which diplomas awarded following recognition of non-formal and informal learning would be confused with those awarded to candidates in the formal system. Also mentioned is the possibility that the awards created would be like blank cheques and cause difficulties *vis-à-vis* diplomas available in that system.

The counterpart to lack of flexibility is often reportedly the problem of *lack of motivation*. This applies to the Czech Republic where employees and employers alike are described as unenthusiastic about committing themselves to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In Ireland, some employers, such as those in the building and hospital sectors or in need of skilled labour, are more motivated than others.

A further attitudinal problem stems from the fact that the idea of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is tantamount to stating that one *controls* who learns what, when and where, because the person concerned is assessed. This lacks credibility in countries such as the Czech Republic, in which personal learning has to remain private. The argument is interesting but hard to accept if one considers that it is outcomes that are assessed with no regard, at least in principle, for the method of learning. Yet this kind of remark is proof that work concerned with communication on the concepts and indeed the terminology remains necessary. In Scotland, employers are described as having to be persuaded of the usefulness of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, for example by clearly explaining to them the real benefits for each employment area in turn.

In Korea, it would seem that tertiary education admissions policies are more concerned with recognising the formal qualifications of foreigners than non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Canada is fighting to gain acceptance for the recognition of these outcomes (in PLAR) in the world of education.

The previous sections concerned with the practices adopted across countries and regions clearly indicate that the context – as often the case – is very important, not to say decisive, where culture and attitudes are concerned. External observers are confronted with a multitude of situations that depend on economic circumstances no less than on local culture. The overriding interest of an approach involving the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is that it draws attention to a great many hitherto unsuspected individual and community resources. Yet it is also a source of difficulty, as the investigation is far from straightforward when one lacks a perfect grasp of the context, which is hard to achieve when looking at five continents. Be that as it may and following on from the contextual factors and their relation to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, it now remains to consider the practices of countries and regions as regards governance and technical organisation. It is to these matters that the next section is devoted.

Governance, practices and technical organisation

Historical origins, culture or tradition in the recognition of learning outcomes

The previous section has explained how context or practices (or both) may be natural incentives, as well as sometimes inhibiting factors, in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The theoretical justifications for such recognition are many and the practices – even where scattered – unquestionably exist. However, they did not get under way everywhere in either the same period or with the same intensity and, here again, it is instructive to examine the historical differences between countries.

In Iceland, recognition practices are more readily favoured by professional sectors which view them as more objective, than by academic circles which consider them to be more subjective. This may be because Iceland formerly possessed a system providing for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in sectors suffering from labour shortages. The regulation was that at least ten years of practice (skills and experience) were required even without formal qualifications. This practice dating from 1920 and noteworthy for the assessment of work experience has today fallen into disuse.

While the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the United Kingdom is underpinned by longstanding tradition and extensive cultural influences, it was in 1980 that it really took off with the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). This system for the accreditation of experience is meant for adults seeking a qualification or certification, and especially for the unemployed, so that they can identify jobs for which they would be eligible. In tertiary education, the former Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) provided for credit transfer. In 1986 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) were established along with their counterparts in Scotland, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a strong campaign to publicise APL. Then 1991 witnessed the introduction of the Investors in People standard (IiP), one of the main aims of which was to enable non-formal and informal learning to be taken into account. IiP was a great success. In Scotland too, the first signs of recognition date from APL at the start of the 1990s. At the outset, it aimed to help those with low levels of qualification to gain admission to tertiary education, education *per se*, or vocational training. In tertiary education, APEL was the preferred approach with credits acquired by means of learning portfolios. However, the recognition of learning outcomes in APL or APEL appears to be a marginal and limited approach, doubtless because it is perceived as too time-consuming given its complexity. The perspective is indeed twofold with a summative approach (assessment from an academic angle, as it were, or for progress towards continuing training) coupled with a formative approach (non-formal and informal learning as a transition to formal learning and the acquisition of credits). In Scotland, the two processes are clearly linked so that learners can package their learning, control it and profit from it, for example in developing their careers.

In Norway, a committee was established to examine the grounds for a policy for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Among its main conclusions was the need to proceed with caution in the light of a potential financial risk. Norway is moreover regarded as a pioneer in many areas of lifelong learning and especially the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, with the 1952 Vocational Training Act under which examinations could be taken by craftspeople on the basis of their experience (the so-called “Practice Candidate Scheme/Route”). This practice continued unchanged until the 1999 *Kompetansereformen* (Competence Reform) gave it a legal framework. It should be noted that Norway’s adult learning tradition dates from 1840. Furthermore, Nordic culture enables much to be made of non-formal and informal learning. A typical example is provided by the *Folkehøgskolene* (people’s academies) in which teaching methods advocating a holistic view of students have been largely based on dialogue and experience. One year in an academy today leads to credits usable in tertiary education. It may be noted in passing that recognition of the years spent in these people’s academies probably saved them from total extinction, as until quite recently they operated under what were virtually

voluntary arrangements without the award of credits. Hit by repeated crises and youth unemployment, most students came to adopt a utilitarian view of education and especially tertiary education, and saw little further interest in spending/wasting time in these academies. Their enrolments thus went into free fall, which the award of credits was able to halt. There is also a long adult learning tradition in nearby Denmark. However it was the 2000 reform, amended in 2003, which really introduced the assessment of learning outcomes (as the Assessment of Prior Learning), primarily in order to provide for shorter training periods and the inclusion of immigrants in the labour market. Hungary has also nurtured a certain tradition in this area since, as early as 1980 it became possible to secure exemption from the preconditions for admission to adult learning.

It was in the 1970s that Spain turned to these matters with the aim of encouraging entry to tertiary education, subject to age requirements, and creating appropriate tests for this purpose. The idea was to authorise unrestricted applications whenever this was justified by experience. A second stage occurred in 1990 with the *Ley Orgánica General del Sistema Educativo* (LOGSE, or General Organic Law of the Education System). In accordance with the LOGSE, tests were devised for adults to obtain vocational education qualifications or titles at intermediate and higher levels. Conditions of eligibility were governed by length of service at work, which had to be at least two years. The concept of assessing vocational skills was included in the catalogue established by the law of 2002.

Italy emphasises the fact that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has been a priority for ten years. In Greece, the action taken has been too recent so there is no cultural background or temporal perspective, unless one refers back to Plato who clearly described what was at issue in *Laws*. In Germany too it dates from the end of the 20th century with a strong foundation in the EU programmes. In South Africa, it can be traced back to 1995, with the first free elections for readjustment purposes after apartheid. In Mexico, it is the 1993 *Ley General de la Educación* (LGE, or General Law of Education), amended in 2005, which enables adults to obtain validation of their knowledge by sitting tests as “free candidates”. Several draft laws published between 2001 and 2005 also attach importance to recognition. This draft legislation remains very general but it constitutes a working basis. In Slovenia, the initial action dates from the 1990s, with the development of adult learning and the fall of the Berlin Wall. The programmes are clearly inspired by British experience, with initiatives such as APEL taken into account. Slovenia has also turned to the European Union and its documents on lifelong learning. Yet as far back as 1978, Slovene labour law referred to “professional skills acquired at work”. However, recognition procedures based on experience tended to be narrowly defined, relating solely to enterprises. It is thus doubtless unsurprising that major policy developments still under way in Slovenia – and especially its NVQ-type approach – are concerned with the labour market.

At national level in Canada, a service involving the assessment of learning outcomes (PLA, or Prior Learning Assessment) has been in operation since 1994 as part of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) which has since been renamed. A national conference was held to identify demographic, technological and migratory changes (among others). However, one can only really refer to the development of PLAR in Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan. Pilot projects existed at the very outset in 1978, such as those at the Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology at Hamilton, Ontario. Significant breakthroughs occurred between 1978 and 1983 in sectors such as nursing science, dentistry and the system for the care and education of very young children. In 2001 a policy framework for PLAR came into existence in Manitoba in the three sectors of post-secondary education, advisory services and industry. Quebec developed a PLAR-type approach in most post-secondary institutions from 1982 onwards. In 1985, it became possible to obtain credits for non-academic learning. In 2003, colleges in Quebec received the same level of funding for recognition (PLAR) as for traditional provision. In 1989 in Ontario, a PLA network was formed from pioneering institutions. In 1992, there was even a PLA Secretariat with facilitators operating on a full-time basis. From 1993 onwards in British Columbia, PLA standards and a PLA guide were introduced for public institutions of post-secondary education. In

Newfoundland and Labrador, 1994 witnessed the development of a PLA provincial policy. In Manitoba in 1995, funding was awarded for PLAR in post-secondary institutions. The Ministry of Education provided support for PLA in Prince Edward Island in 2002. In Saskatchewan in 2002, the first initiatives at SIAST came to fruition, in particular with the setting up of a website. Arrangements for PLAR slowly got off the ground in Alberta in the 1990s. A selection of best practices was published in 2005 and a provincial strategy was established in 2007. At Halifax in Nova Scotia, a PLA centre was set up in 1996. It is the first independent collaborative organisation with firm roots in the university community and consists of six universities in all.

Good practice– operational systems, interesting ventures and pilot projects

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is such a novel subject, so to speak, that it is sometimes hard to get one's bearings among the many national practices. This section briefly takes stock of operational systems and innovative ventures and practices as a prelude to subsequent sections which examine country practices from different angles, including governance, quality assurance, information and guidance, or the nature of the legal framework underlying the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

In Spain, the qualifications most associated with such recognition today are the compulsory secondary education diploma and vocational training qualifications. In Slovenia, the law on vocational qualifications introduced NVQs, which were established in 1999 and then confirmed formally in the laws of 2000 and 2003. Assessment and recognition are intended solely for adults and involve direct assessment, and in particular simulation, and/or learning portfolios. In the Czech Republic, the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV) has controlled the EPANIL programme under the European Commission's Leonardo da Vinci programme. The Netherlands has operated extensively on the basis of individual projects in order to make progress in controlling the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The country has described a large number of completed or ongoing projects which constitute an excellent knowledge base for understanding many mechanisms which may account for the success or failure of such recognition in this or that context.

In 2005, Ireland introduced a pilot project with nine providers, help from the Further Education and Training Award Council (FETAC), and some 50 participants. The aim is simultaneously to undertake the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes with a small group of providers, to identify good practice and problems, and to exchange experience as regards what works well. In Hungary, the 2001 Adult Training Act has generally made the assessment of prior learning outcomes possible as an individual right of new entrants. In a pilot project, 53 training institutions have tried written or oral tests developed in various contexts.

In Australia, the project of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA, 2005) involves five enterprises and has shown that two factors are important in the successful recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (understood as RPL). First of all, the right conditions have to be satisfied (including on-site assessment in the enterprise, and trust between the candidates and evaluators). The potential advantages both for candidates and the system (savings, flexibility of the approach) should also be highlighted. Where this occurs, enterprises appear to be more favourably inclined towards recognition. In Norway, the 2003 National Validation Project provided the basis for a survey of evaluators and supervisors. It revealed that the documentation had a positive impact on candidates, especially in enabling them to raise their self-esteem. In addition, virtually all evaluators and supervisors (90%) experienced a need for training, particularly in the area of quality assurance. Furthermore, 80% of candidates rated their experience positively as useful or very useful. The great majority (90%) stated that evaluators identified their competences very effectively. These empirical data from the field lend weight to the argument often repeated here that supervision is an essential aspect of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning

outcomes, especially in the case of learners who are problematic or not very inclined to give a good account of themselves. In tertiary education, the findings are a little different, as the approach is more flexible. It is based on the learning portfolio for example, and credits are awarded locally by tertiary education institutions.

In Italy, there are many local experiments and it is difficult to refer to the situation at national level without citing regional actions, some of which are excellent as in Emilia-Romagna, Marche or Valle d'Aosta. However, many national agreements exist alongside regulatory agreements, such as IFTS. In Korea, essentially two programmes are in operation and relate to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. First, there is the ACBS run by the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), which is based on the law on the recognition of credits. Second, there is the *Dok-Hack-Sa* system based on the law of the same name. Both systems come under the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. The aim of *Dok-Hack-Sa*, run by the Korean National Open University (KNOU) is to award bachelor's level degrees, with recognition being used for course exemptions. The objective of the ACBS is to provide for the award of short (two-year) or long (four-year) tertiary education diplomas.

In Mexico, essentially two programmes exist which are based on agreements with force of law. On the one hand, there are Agreements 328 and 379 which are concerned with basic education and supplement Agreement 286 relating to the upper secondary education diploma of *Bachillerato*; on the other, Agreement 357 provides for the award of a bachelor's level degree in the area of pre-school education. As already noted, age requirements exist and the application process is fairly complex and strict. In fact, it is Agreement 286 which introduces the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, whether academic or professional. This agreement has a legal status imparting currency and validity to the qualifications awarded. In addition, it is the result of Mexican public policies seeking to raise the general qualifications level of the population. It is the main instrument possessed by the country for implementing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. From this standpoint, several national programmes have been introduced since 2001 under Agreement 286. In Canada, the PLAR approach dates back some time and, as will be seen, is strongly developed in Canada, especially in certain provinces. Canada is currently working on a credit transfer system and also a national qualifications framework.

In Germany, non-formal and informal learning are an integral part of the education system and above all the Dual System. Contrary to many countries that are (re)discovering learning of this kind, Germany has, as it were, already institutionalised it. The best evidence for this is that all its continuing training and all adult learning are classified as non-formal learning. However, there is still no precise indication that the procedure for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is becoming formalised. Furthermore, many actions and decisions are at the discretion of the *Länder*. In summary, the recognition of these outcomes is a condition of eligibility and increases the likelihood that experience will be taken into account at the entry point to different programmes of vocational education or continuing training:

- First and foremost, there is the *Externenprüfung*, or external student examination at the end of vocational apprenticeship comprising alternated work and training. Candidates admitted on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes may take the examination without having followed the classes. In 2005, this applied to 7% of candidates for the final vocational apprenticeship examination. Among those 7%, 80% had a job, which is no doubt why they opted for the external student examination. The number of examinations increased from 20 700 in 2000 to 29 600 in 2005. These figures suffice to demonstrate that Germany makes use of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes on a huge scale, without so to speak realising it.
- There is also advanced further training. Here too one may justifiably refer to recognition, as admission hinges on an eligibility mechanism in which the regulation requires that candidates

have a minimum of practical experience in employment before enrolling. Training is provided in 53 courses in industry and business. However, enrolment rates have been decreasing, as around 157 500 candidates sat the advanced further training examination in 1995 but only 125 100 in 2005.

- Since 1972, it has been possible to obtain a vocational qualification thanks to rehabilitation courses. Candidates have to take an entrance test and the precondition is that they should have already completed previous vocational training. Their precise qualification and period of employment may be taken into account. This approach has been widely adopted by the Federal Agency for Employment. Women greatly relied on this system but their numbers have been falling. The success rate is fairly high (80-90% since 2000).
- Recognition is also used in continuing training in computer science. Indeed, given the confusion attributable to the plentiful supply of jobs in this field and its many different qualifications, there was a problem of ready comparability between them. Germany has therefore organised the profession of computer scientist and entry to it. Qualifications have been reformed and credit transfer organised. In particular, it is now possible to cross over into the profession from another occupation if the person concerned can formally testify to at least four years of working experience in the field of new information and communication technology. Generally speaking, this corresponds to an exemption mechanism.
- Finally, recognition has enabled some learners to obtain vocational education modules since 2003.

In Germany again, recognition may provide access to tertiary education. Several possibilities exist. For example, one route is second chance education for adults who are working. They may thus vary how they return to studying in accordance with the restrictions to which they are subject and use their experience. The approach is regulated by each *Land*. In Germany, learning of this kind is classified as non-formal.

Finally, Germany has its *ProfilPASS* (skills profile) which is a very detailed version of the learning portfolio. It is not used in formal learning or employment systems. Its aim is to help people who are developing their skills profile to appreciate their own abilities and skills. In this sense, there is no assessment other than a form of self-assessment. Reference to private assessment is not misplaced, especially in that the person concerned is not obliged to show the profile to his or her employer. At the core of the *ProfilPASS* are the knowledge, skills and competences of the person, and his or her capacity for teamwork and leadership, etc. The employer may be involved and even instrumental in the process of building up the skills profile. This is employer assessment. The *ProfilPASS* approach clearly involves the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes if the individuals concerned share the content of their *ProfilPASS* with their entourage and the employer; on the other hand, it is a version of recognition which is not formalised.

In Austria too, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a means of bypassing the period of formal learning by enabling eligible candidates to take the final vocational apprenticeship examination (LAP) on the basis of experience. Recognition thus functions as a special process of admission to the LAP examination – a second chance offered in the light of experience. The approach is the responsibility of the District Administrative Authority. The upper secondary school leaving diploma (from the *Hauptschule*) may also be obtained after a 26-week course classified in Austria as non-formal learning. Finally, the title of “engineer” may be conferred on candidates under certain circumstances, in particular if they have three years of practical professional experience. Moreover, since 2002, arrangements have been made to introduce modular courses for the title of master craftsman.

The work of the European Union has been fairly influential in Austria. For example, in 2001 an EU Memorandum recommended the development of consistent measures and appropriate practices for the development of lifelong learning. Austria thus received recommendations to encourage reciprocal movement and transfer between tertiary education institutions, continuing vocational education and the professional domain. Furthermore, it has developed a learning portfolio. This activity in 2001 also pointed to the need to take measures to encourage the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, especially for those who had assumed responsibilities in the voluntary sector. Yet a further idea was to develop opportunities for adults and appropriate target groups to complete compulsory schooling in deprived regions; this might once more involve recognition of the knowledge and skills of voluntary workers. Austria has since made steady progress along these lines and, in an initiative dating from 2007, is even studying the possibility of assessing the skills of adult educators.

In Belgium (Flemish Community), the most important development concerns the professional competence qualification or experience certificate, which attempts to match the supply and demand of knowledge, skills and competences on the labour market. The experience certificate is an official qualification of the government of the Flemish Community, which is generally recognised by employers in particular. It describes the skills and learning outcomes of job-seekers for their prospective employers. Further interesting initiatives in Belgium (Flemish Community) include the electronic portfolio of the Public Department for Employment and Vocational Training. It offers young people aged 14 to 18 the possibility to give an account of their abilities, language skills, key competences and interests. It supplements EU initiatives such as Europass.

In South Africa, in principle all education and training institutions are meant to establish programmes and procedures for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes (as RPL). In practice, a limited number of tertiary education institutions and private providers have done so. Begun in 2002, the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Skills Education and Training Authority project (merSETA) offers a comprehensive view of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (RPL). It should be noted that it focuses on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) given their all too familiar difficulties as regards human capital development in general and the recognition of learning outcomes in particular. In Slovenia, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is also concerned with this clientele, as it seeks to award the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) to candidates wishing to obtain one who have satisfactorily completed tests involving simulation or observation with a learning portfolio.

In Spain, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is primarily a means of attempting to obtain diplomas in the formal education system. It enables individuals who do not satisfy the normal academic preconditions to take tests and possibly obtain a qualification (*título*) or a certificate of vocational aptitude (*certificado de profesionalidad*). Also noteworthy is the ERA scheme which seeks to further the preparation of a basic standard to determine the preconditions for assessing and accrediting the professional skills of workers, irrespective of how they were acquired. All stakeholders are involved in this kind of procedure. The fact remains that the Spanish system is largely the product of legislation, and the Organic Law of 2007 amending the law of 2001 states that the government regulates the conditions for validating the experience of workers. At the time of going to print, this part of the law does not appear to be fully operational.

Governance

As far as the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is concerned, almost all countries refer to *shared responsibility* among the various stakeholders. This applies to Iceland, Denmark, Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), South Africa or Chile. The economic justification for this form of

governance is often heard in the Czech Republic, Ireland, Switzerland, Scotland or Australia, so that all those genuinely interested have a chance to participate.

In the sector for vocational education and training (VET) in Australia, the government shares responsibility with industry. The latter is charged with developing and revising training packages and with identifying learning outcomes, competence standards and available qualifications. The government handles fund raising and is responsible for quality assurance via the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). In tertiary education, institutions are authorised to accredit their own courses and maintain academic standards. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) is responsible for conducting university audits.

The emphasis placed by Denmark on shared responsibility is attributable to the high degree of decentralisation. The same is also somewhat true of Belgium (Flemish Community) in which responsibility for higher education has been transferred to the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education and Study Grants (AHOVOS). Three ministries in Belgium (Flemish Community) are primarily responsible for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, namely the Ministry of Education with its programmes for accessing higher education, the Ministry of Labour with the experience certificate, and the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport with the learning certificate and competence qualification. The model in Chile involves equal participation by the central government, enterprises and workers, with shared funding. Public institutions are responsible for supervision, but in accordance with “market principles” meaning that relatively little supervision is entailed. The reference to shared responsibilities in Austria is attributable to the essential role of the social partners.

In South Africa, many institutions are considered to have a key role – the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Employment, the SAQA, the Council of Higher Education (CHE), the National Skills Authority (NSA) and the Skills Education Training Authorities (SETAs) – as well as labour market players, enterprises, interest groups, learning/recognition providers and non-governmental associations. Mention is made of co-operative governance which accounts for the idea of shared management. That said, the wide variety of players may result in complex decision making, and decisions may sometimes be inappropriate. The role of the SAQA is essential in furthering access, mobility and the progression of learners within the education and training system and their careers. Given the unusual nature of its recent history, South Africa also highlights recognition as a means of restoring equality.

Notable exceptions to situations of shared responsibility are reported by Hungary, Norway, Italy, Korea, Spain and Slovenia, in which governance is described as *centralised*, even though the social partners also assume a few responsibilities in Slovenia. Responsibility is referred to as centralised because of the leading part often played by the public authority, especially in that the laws are drafted by the Ministry of Labour whose contribution is decisive. In the case of tertiary education in Denmark, reference is made instead to the important role of the public sector given the central part played by institutions in assessment procedures. This indeed is a non-traditional but noteworthy extension to the central role of government. England is an interesting case as the leading role is occupied by the industrial sector.

Canada exemplifies one of those rare instances in which the situation has significantly changed. When PLAR was initiated, the public authority was mainly responsible but in fact the reality now is more a model in which responsibility is shared, given the commitment of all the provinces to PLAR. The fact that some provinces represent a model with shared responsibility reinforces this still further: in Saskatchewan, this is because the education institutions assume a high degree of responsibility for assessment, and in Manitoba, because private individuals, government, the universities, short course tertiary education institutions and adult learning centres all have a part to play. However, New Brunswick has a model in which the public authorities lead, as does Nova Scotia. In this complex overall picture, Quebec represents a

mixed model. PLAR activities at the secondary and college levels are decentralised but operate under a legal and regulatory framework, whereas universities are autonomous in this field of activity.

The extent to which the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is open to the private sector varies. There are a few private initiatives in the field of assessment in South Africa. In Switzerland private bodies have a prominent role – they are responsible in particular for the skills directory – but this is apparently an exception, a situation that may be attributable to cost problems. For example in the Netherlands, private institutions at which it is possible to follow courses for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are more expensive, because those institutions often prescribe training that they provide themselves. This incidentally raises the question of control, since it is not hard to envisage the potential for abuse in a system in which training providers insist on the need for compulsory further training because they are also responsible for assessment.

Official national policies and legal framework

Few governments offer their citizens a *declared and persuasive policy position* on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, which seems consistent with other essential messages such as those concerned with lifelong learning, skills or employability. Many countries do adopt an official strategy for lifelong learning with official statements regarding its benefits, but few make similar pronouncements specifically about recognition itself. On the other hand, recognition is often one of the mechanisms activated – or meant to be activated – in promoting lifelong learning.

South Africa has a clearly formulated set of policies and principles for the recognition of prior learning that forms part of its development of a National Qualifications Framework and which, among other things, is designed to open second chance opportunities for those who were refused access to education and training in the past. Canada also has a learning directive which catalogues needs and/or all measures that should be taken to promote non-formal and informal learning, but other such cases are uncommon. For example, there is nothing of the kind in Iceland. By contrast, the role of the social partners there is decisive when the aim is to carry out institutional or technical changes concerned with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. For the years from 2006 to 2009 in Norway, recognition has been based on an agreement between the trade unions, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO): enterprises have to document the experience of employees and their working practices.

In Greece such concerns are not in evidence, except possibly within the Adult Education General Secretariat, the aim of which, among other things, is to link up formal education, non-formal and informal learning outcomes and the labour market. In Switzerland, the topic of recognition of non-formal and informal learning is apparent in cantonal legislation. In some countries, systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning have clearly been initiated by the government rather than the social partners. This applies to the Czech Republic and may require the preparation of a vast national consultation to create interest and involvement among those who represent final users and the demand.

The Netherlands relates the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes to the EU Lisbon Process and states clearly that all learning is of value. A combination of formal learning and non-formal and informal learning is considered optimal. In Ireland, it is stated that recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a key factor in raising the skills level of the population. In Slovenia, the policy aims to foster non-formal and informal learning, make its outcomes visible and, in official statements, ensure that they are socially accepted. In Scotland, the SCQF produced guidelines in 2005-06. Since 2006, the Scottish Executive (government) has studied the possibilities offered by the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and is seeking to outline the main features of its future policy. No agreement has yet been reached between the Scottish Executive and the trade unions.

Over and above their official positions which might help local initiatives to acquire legitimacy, many countries have a *legal framework* to map out the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In the Czech Republic, the law of 2007 states that anyone interested is entitled to have his or her non-formal learning outcomes recognised and obtain the corresponding certified qualification. This applies in particular to immigrants who might possess knowledge, skills and competences but not necessarily the corresponding qualifications.

The Netherlands has no special legislation in this area but, instead, three regulations which are a means of obtaining subsidies for the regions, the institutions of higher education (HBO) and employers/employees. With its 1999 Qualification Act, Ireland established a legal framework which clearly recognises the fact that one can obtain a full qualification without going through the formal system. Until then, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes was primarily a means of securing exemptions. Few countries offer the same possibility. Indeed, obtaining a full qualification solely through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is possible only in Norway, South Africa, Denmark and Ireland.

In Norway, the legislation entitles everyone to recognition of their non-formal and informal learning. From 1999 to 2002, the National Validation Project was entrusted with establishing the foundations of the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in conjunction with the Competence Reform. The Norwegian legal framework is based on the law on primary and secondary education, as well as the law concerning tertiary education. In Iceland too, a special provision in the law on entry to secondary education provides a legal reference. Many discussions and reports in Denmark have emphasised the importance of non-formal and informal learning, and the assessment of any corresponding learning outcomes. The principle is that people should be guaranteed access to lifelong learning, including their retraining where appropriate and their participation in formal education. In November 2006, the text of the law was made public and the law itself implemented in 2007. This legal framework encompasses three concerns as follows: clarifying the preconditions for admission; preparing a plan to reduce the length of studies; and encouraging made-to-measure provision so that full or partial qualifications can be obtained, with or without further training. One of the six principles enshrined in this law enables candidates to obtain a full or partial qualification. In South Africa, according to SAQA regulations, all qualifications included in the national qualifications framework may be obtained in whole or in part through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The law of 2002 in Spain states that, in the case of special vocational education, the level of secondary education has to be reached, and that for tertiary level studies, the upper secondary school leaving diploma is required. However, these academic preconditions are no longer necessary if candidates pass tests organised by the education authorities. The law of 2007 amends the 2002 legislation to include university access and recognition for those aged over 25. The system is devised to accommodate four areas of provision. The first concerns admission by examination to intermediate and upper secondary education, as well as a university entrance examination for those over 25 years of age. The second enables full or partial qualifications to be obtained. The examinations concerned are for the compulsory secondary education qualification, the vocational training qualification, the certificate of vocational aptitude and the intermediate level certificate. The third is for acquisition of the secondary school leaving qualification. And the fourth relates to the standard for vocational skills acquired through professional experience. Finally, Spain has adopted an interesting approach by testing the law in practice prior to its implementation.

Lifelong learning is not regulated by law in Iceland. Neither is there a legislative framework for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However, certain laws, such as the one that has governed upper secondary education since 1996 enable people to enter education at that level if they

demonstrate their ability in academic and professional areas. It is this provision and not a special law which constitutes the basis for recognition.

The law of 2001 in Hungary, which established the legal, institutional and financial framework for adult education contains certain regulations on the recognition activity of training providers at enrolment. While there is still no legal framework in Greece, the country is among those in which a law will probably be necessary for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes to develop, as too in Belgium (Flemish Community) in which such a law has been passed. Indeed, Greece is historically very keen on drawing up written grounds for action. Germany is another country without a clear legal framework for the recognition of these outcomes. Here, international measures such as the EQF are generating interest in recognition. Although lacking a uniform legal framework, Austria has many different mechanisms (including skills balance and verification of qualifications). The government programme for the 23rd legislature contains measures for improving information and guidance for adults in the formal system. Among the aims are to improve the scope for reciprocal mobility and transfer between tertiary education institutions, as well as for credit transfer.

Only regional initiatives have occurred in Italy. The country has nothing comparable to what has been done, for example, in the United Kingdom with APL, even though the UK system is occasionally criticised for not being inclusive enough, since many qualifications awarded are not indicated in the national qualifications framework. In Italy since March 2000 and the agreement between the government and regional authorities, the role of experience has been constantly highlighted. The law of 2003 provided for the “booklet for the training of citizens” which incorporates the idea of documented evidence and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. It has since been tested in certain regions.

In 2002, Chile established Chilecalifica, which is not an institution but a programme. It brings together three ministries – Education, Labour and Economic Affairs – and considers, among other things, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the technical field. The programme is a response to firm demand from the world of work for information on the nature and quantity of available qualifications. It reflects a somewhat pragmatic demand-driven approach quite similar in basic respects to the one adopted in Belgium (Flemish Community). In Slovenia, the law of 1998 introduced the Phare Mocca programme which, between 1998 and 2000, resulted in the establishment of procedures for assessment and recognition for the unemployed. However, the 2000 law on vocational qualifications led to reliance on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, with the specific aim of enhancing employability.

As is often the case, Canada lacks a national framework but mechanisms to support recognition (PLAR) exist at all government levels, with pilot activity in some provinces. Both Saskatchewan and Manitoba have a policy framework. A framework of this kind appears to be undergoing development in Alberta and Nova Scotia. More specifically, Saskatchewan has a framework that allows the post-secondary education sector to practise this type of recognition on an autonomous basis. Institutions are responsible for their own recognition and for validating non-formal and informal learning. A framework for recognition (PLAR) has existed in Manitoba since November 2001, the idea being to increase recognition in the post-secondary sector. For example, this might be done by strengthening community advisory services at places such as adult learning centres. Another idea is to strengthen the use of PLAR-type approaches in industry. In Alberta the development of a framework is under way. While PLAR recognition procedures in the province are not yet standardised, there are policy recommendations along these lines.

As in many spheres, there are thus clearly two approaches in deciding to develop a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, and in structuring it. The first is based on law and the second on negotiation and the search for a consensus among the social partners. Recognition is no exception. As a result, one can point to very long-standing traditions both in countries which rely firmly on

written legislation, such as the Latin countries, and also in some countries that organise negotiation to secure the broadest possible agreement, such as those in northern Europe.

Information, counselling and guidance

As in many areas, the availability of easy-to-access information and guidance services that provide helpful good-quality information is essential. Some countries have set up special bodies. The NUOV in the Czech Republic is going to be responsible for co-ordinating the development of specialist networks active in the country. This will ensure overall consistency. Websites are also to be established, as in many other countries, along with the use of other media.

In the Netherlands, some 20 regional desks for learning and working are to be set up for the more effective distribution of information on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and learning policies in general. Among its other functions, the EVC Knowledge Centre is committed to sharing its knowledge on the subject through twice-monthly reviews, reports and scholarly publications, the award of prizes with an EVC label since 2002 (the EVC Encouragement Prize), round tables and websites. Other public relations campaigns make use of brochures, advertisements, films, posters and information on best practice.

The 13 skills stores in Victoria, Australia, have been set up to support recognition (RPL) and provide learners with information in line with an idea from Queensland, known as Skilling Solution Shopfront. In South Australia, the Skill Recognition Support Services Unit offers information and assistance to immigrants. It has an inter-ministerial role as it co-ordinates the actions of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST). Furthermore, the Australian Quality Training Framework specifies that RTOs have to circulate clear information. They use a website and brochures, and also organise information sessions and offer advice in interviews. In addition, the RTOs publish extensively on recognition (RPL). The Australian government has produced guides for evaluators and assessment process managers. Bowman *et al.* (2003) suggest that for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (RPL) in vocational education, communication should be developed with an eye to the following: producing simple definitions, enumerating the benefits of recognition for participants; specifying the various stages of the process; describing each stage in detail and implementing it; and briefly describing the different types of evidence to be produced as appropriate. Yet despite an effective system, Australia still feels the need to go further in the area of information and guidance. Moreover, this is an almost universally shared conviction, as few countries are satisfied with their system of information, counselling and guidance even when it is better than elsewhere – a sure sign that the countries have all fully grasped its significance. There is no future for a system as radical as the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes without appropriate communication.

In Norway, supervisors in upper secondary education or advisers in assessment centres provide potential candidates with information. The public employment service is also an important source of information which is additionally available in the counties. Furthermore, Norway has advertising outlets and websites promoting the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Websites also exist at regional level. Above all, there is radio publicity and it seems an interesting idea to reach the greatest number of people, and especially those who do not read or have difficulty in doing so. Each tertiary education institution has a website on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The aim now in Norway is to establish a national source of reference material on and for the workplace, as well as the education system. In Denmark, the 2003 reform is concerned in particular with information and guidance, especially for the benefit of young people who risk being marginalised. Ideally, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes might become a basic entitlement for vulnerable groups.

In Korea, information is the responsibility of the government. As regards the *Dok-Hack-Sa* system, there is reference material in public libraries throughout the country. Seminars are organised for SMEs. Customer service centres exist to inform people about learning in general and recognition in particular. As to the ACBS, there are documents in 16 regional education offices. A special guide has been published and may be consulted online on the Ministry of Education website. Since June 2005 a “webzine” has existed as a sort of electronic magazine for ACBS-registered learners. An original feature in Korea is that the team responsible for information at the ACBS is developing consultation rooms in addition to the information telephone lines already operational.

For the upper secondary education diploma and bachelor’s level degree in Mexico, information websites are hosted by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) and the CENEVAL. It is of interest that some of the information targets candidates for recognition who are resident in the United States, because – as already pointed out – many candidates live there. In Austria, information on “second chance” opportunities is supplied by training providers, education advisers or Internet platforms, depending on the levels and programmes concerned. In Slovenia, information for the general public could reportedly be somewhat improved. Normally, it is the responsibility of the public employment service and the National Assessment Centre. There are 14 dedicated information and guidance centres – they use newspapers, radio, television and websites – but this remains one of the system’s weak points. For the NVQ, a central feature of the Slovene recognition system, there are 292 advisers who inform people about the NVQ validation procedure. Finally, Slovene resource centres (CIPES) deal with vocational guidance. In Spain, trade union organisations are to the forefront in circulating information, with the three levels – national, regional and local – all involved.

Canada has neither a national nor provincial network of information centres. Where organisational arrangements exist, they are found at the local level, often that of the institution. And websites are often visited by people from the United States. Fairly similar approaches are adopted in New Brunswick, British Columbia and Manitoba: five institutions have established websites. In Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour is responsible for co-ordinating prior learning recognition efforts and circulating information. The situation is occasionally complicated by local particularities, as in British Columbia, which has a system of professions regulated by short-course post-secondary education institutions and the associations.

All in all, many countries recognise that they could improve their communication facilities, even where they are already excellent. This is true of the Netherlands and Ireland, and also of Iceland, no doubt because its information and guidance concerning the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is still in a pilot phase. Neither does the United Kingdom have an optimal information system although the UK National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) has partially assumed responsibility for this task and provides information about qualifications obtained outside the United Kingdom.

Inclusive systems – eligibility criteria

Some countries lay down *preconditions* for admission to a recognition procedure, especially whenever it entails highly formalised arrangements. In this respect, recognition systems are not uniformly inclusive. They are nearly always open to everyone but with *eligibility criteria*. Such criteria are very varied, even though often expressed in terms of length of service or experience, most notably of a professional nature or in the field in which candidates are seeking recognition. This comes as no surprise in systems in which the use of learning outcomes, rather than the process of accumulating knowledge, skills and competences, is advocated for assessment purposes. These eligibility criteria should in fact be regarded as a kind of pre-selection, which is often formalised in a sort of first phase in the recognition procedure on economic grounds, as it could be costly for all concerned to commit people with only modest knowledge, skills and

competences to a procedure doomed to failure. That said, the selectivity of this first stage varies from country to country.

Switzerland, for example, lays down clear eligibility requirements, namely that candidates must have at least five years of professional experience in the field in which they wish their learning outcomes to be recognised. The Czech Republic has adopted the same approach, linking it in particular to the motivation of prospective candidates. In Norway, people have a right to recognition of their learning outcomes, and the 19 counties are obliged to enable adults to follow a recognition procedure if they wish. However for admission to university on the basis of recognised non-formal and informal learning outcomes, one has to be aged over 25. Spain also has age conditions for each of its tests. For example, to enter higher level training, candidates have to have completed a full year in the professional field of their intended studies and be at least 19 years old (or 18 if they already hold a technical qualification). At intermediate level, work experience of one year minimum is again required, for those at least 17 years old. Age conditions are also set for vocational qualifications in Spain and, in addition, at least two years of work experience are needed. Candidates have to demonstrate that they have had vocational education (*e.g.* on a placement) related to their desired qualification. To enter university on the basis of recognition they have to be aged over 25. In Greece, candidates have to be European citizens and students or workers in the country in order to take tests in new information and communication technology or modern languages. Eligibility for adult training is dependent on not having completed the normal nine years of compulsory education. In Slovenia, candidates for NVQs have to have reached the age of 18, subject to exceptions. For example, one to three years of experience are required for the title of master craftsman but the criteria vary depending on particular programmes and qualifications. Candidates for the Chamber of Commerce and Industry have to be aged between 35 and 50, with ten years of experience. In Mexico, age criteria are also used for all sub-systems involved in recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, except in the assessment of professional competences by the CONOCER. In Austria, those wishing to take the LAP have to be aged 18 and demonstrate that they have relevant practical professional experience. The evidence required is always expressed in terms of length of service in the field concerned, with at least three years of practical experience for the engineer's diploma and six years for "specialists". Those wishing to take the SBP university entrance examination have to be aged 22, or 20 in the case of candidates with four years of training, including the years spent preparing for the LAP.

Conversely, a few countries act in accordance with the principle of learning outcomes, rather than inputs in the learning process. In the Netherlands, there are no admission criteria except at one Amsterdam school which requires two to three years of professional experience. No formal conditions are set in the United Kingdom either, but institutions must be satisfied that candidates have achieved learning outcomes that can be put to good use.

There are also countries which stand midway between the above two approaches, or which are changing. In Denmark, eligibility criteria are far from universally applied. They do exist in certain cases – in which the conditions are always expressed in terms of number of years in the labour market – but they have been subject to reconsideration since 2007. Until 2005 in Korea, learners had to be Korean to access the ACBS. In April 2005, this condition was scrapped and two foreigners – one of them French and the other Japanese – used the system in 2006. However, to obtain credits based on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, candidates have to have achieved the level of academic upper secondary education. As Iceland is in a pilot phase, no decisions have yet been taken. In Chile, the system is apparently far from inclusive as it is reportedly open solely to employed workers. In the current developmental phase, the unemployed are normally excluded. In Canada, each institution determines the eligibility criteria. In some institutions, candidates have first to enrol as students – probably in order to qualify for certain kinds of funding or for the payment of registration fees – but not in others. In certain cases, course prerequisites exist even before conditions governing eligibility for recognition (PLAR) can be set. Sometimes there are tests of proficiency in French or English. And the regulated professions in

Canada have their own requirements, such as a bachelor's qualification, other levels of qualification, language skills, prior work experience, and/or a clean record. To qualify for exemption in South Africa, candidates have to have completed the final year of upper secondary education. Strict conditions are thus applicable. In South Africa, the best-known restriction remains the so-called residency clause under which 50% of the learning has to involve face-to-face tuition. This condition has existed since 1918, and aims to facilitate credit transfer to satisfy the host institution.

With democracy in South Africa, the new laws have sought to transform education so that it is more inclusive for all learners. Recognition (RPL) is thus viewed as an important mechanism for offering access to those who were refused it for decades. More often than not, therefore, it represents a second chance for those who were left out under the apartheid regime. The two main fears in the country are indeed that the system may not be totally fair and that (RPL) recognition is an overly technical approach too unrelated to the individual and the context. There is thus a long list of criteria to determine what should be a comprehensive approach to recognition (RPL). The individual and personal context should be taken into account, avoiding mechanisms that are purely technical or influenced by technical considerations. In protecting integrity and recognising diversity, the emphasis in South Africa is on what candidates know and not what they do not know. Recognition (RPL) is often seen as a first stage prior to drawing up a learning programme, which has to be established in accordance with the results of recognition (RPL). Importance is attached to aspects such as knowledge, skills and values. Generally speaking, it is felt in South Africa that the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes (RPL) should be flexible and not a straitjacket. Hence, qualifications should be viewed as based on learning outcomes. The idea is to try and accept all candidates at all levels and to establish interconnections between all qualifications, irrespective of whether they are derived from formal or informal learning of an academic or vocational nature.

The aims of recognition – from exemption from preconditions to full qualification

As far as practices are concerned, countries appear to differ markedly in terms of what they regard as the *aims* of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. It would seem that either the various countries face different difficulties or that they have discovered different policy responses to identical problems.

For example, Hungary attaches great importance to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a means of encouraging *access to the formal education and training system* through exemption from preconditions. This approach is common to many countries, such as Iceland, for admission to upper secondary education or to tertiary education. In Norway, recognition may result in admission to primary and secondary education, as well as tertiary education. Besides access to the labour market in Belgium (Flemish Community) in what is a highly regarded system, recognition (RAC) clearly provides for admission to university.

Other countries emphasise the development, use and recognition of tangible *backup* – in its most conventional form a document – for describing a person's knowledge, skills and competences. The many countries concerned highlight the need to identify and document non-formal and informal learning outcomes, primarily so that the corresponding knowledge, skills and competences become visible: for example, there are the *Libretto* in Italy, the *Kompetansepass* (competence passport) in Norway and the *ProfilPASS* in Germany. All such items describe in greater or lesser detail the outcomes of learning, regardless of whether or not this was formal. Many European countries such as Hungary directly use Europass in addition to or instead of their own backup. Germany possesses a great many different "passports" all developed by the private sector, with the *ProfilPASS* one of the most interesting among them. While Norway too has several types of passport, the *Kompetansepass* was the one selected for general implementation. It was purchased from its inventor for use by Norwegian citizens. This drive for

consistency in the different methods of documenting learning outcomes is an important issue in many countries which are seeking to achieve greater uniformity in how learning is encoded, so that prospective users can interpret the data more easily and quickly.

In describing country practices in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, the question of whether a *full qualification* might be awarded solely as a result of recognising such outcomes constantly arises. The question is not without further theoretical implications given the risk that the search for employability, for example, might force countries to award certificates with currency on the labour market but which do not enable candidates to return to studies at a level to which they could reasonably aspire in the light of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The fact remains that few countries provide for the award of a full qualification. In Norway, Australia, South Africa and the Netherlands, it is possible to obtain full qualifications on this basis. The same possibility exists in Slovenia but only in the case of an NVQ.

The Australian approach also concentrates on the acquisition of a qualification, either directly through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (in VET), or after taking further courses on completion of the recognition process, with or without exemption (from a semester to a year). Thus in tertiary education the main function of this recognition is admission, as it is considered hard in Australia to award a full qualification at tertiary level given that the academic knowledge required is not covered by a national standard (which at this level applies to no more than two-thirds of a qualification). In this sense, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is more suited to a full qualification in VET, as the units of competence with respect to expected performance in employment are more effectively codified.

In Denmark, it is possible to obtain a full qualification through recognition but solely in order to become a teacher in primary education and lower secondary education. The approach involves the assessment of learning outcomes (assessment of prior learning) in the *Meritlærer* programme. Otherwise recognition is used exclusively in Denmark for exemption from preconditions for admission, exemption from some courses, or the award of credits. When APL was introduced in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, the aim was more to recognise credits than to obtain a full qualification. In tertiary education in Scotland, there is a limit to the number of credits obtainable through recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, which is calculated using three different methods. For now, one still cannot obtain a full qualification in Scotland on the basis of recognition. However, the idea of making this possible along the lines of the Irish model is envisaged.

In South Africa, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (RPL) occurs in two ways. In tertiary education, it is used for admission to the bachelor's degree programme as well as certificate and diploma programmes. This opens up the programme to candidates who do not satisfy the preconditions. In short, recognition is used in South Africa to gain access, especially to tertiary education, and to obtain credits, particularly in general education and training (GET) and further education and training (FET). In South Africa, candidates may obtain partial or full qualifications.

In Spain, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes offers an alternative route – which the country terms “accreditation” – for obtaining the qualifications of the ministries of Education and Labour. This route involves tests which may be taken by “free candidates” on the basis of recognised learning outcomes (*pruebas*). It is thus a method of assessment for those who have not followed the formal programme and the route through the formal system. In either case, the same qualifications are obtained.

In all provinces of Canada, it is possible for “free candidates” to obtain the General Educational Development (GED). This arrangement is highly acceptable for admission to programmes of post-secondary education and university. Recognition (PLAR) may also be used to obtain credits in post-

secondary education. However, recognition is only rarely used to obtain equivalent ratings in graduate degree programmes.

It is not possible to obtain a full qualification in countries such as Hungary, Korea, Chile or Greece. Some countries which do not offer full qualifications directly do so indirectly. This involves examinations that can indeed be taken by “free candidates” through a procedure for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This applies to Germany which has a very well-developed system to prevent candidates who have achieved the requisite learning outcomes from short-circuiting formal learning in the Dual System of vocational apprenticeship. The same also occurs in Spain which has opted for the system of tests open to “free candidates” on the basis of recognised non-formal and informal learning outcomes (*pruebas*), given that many people lack the academic foundations needed to pursue studies.

Partnerships

In many areas of education and training, it would appear to go without saying that solid shrewd *partnerships* may provide for better access and more rapid development of systems. This applies especially to adult learning (OECD, 2003) in which prospective learners should perceive self-evident links between learning and the labour market, for example, or between certification and recruitment. As regards recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, certain partnerships also appear to be taking shape for the same theoretical reasons.

In Switzerland, a partnership exists between the OFFT, the cantons and the world of work. The Confederation provides a certain level of quality assurance, while the involvement of the cantons means that prospective candidates are offered entry to the system, and the professional associations award qualifications and endorse their value. In the Czech Republic, there is a scheme for getting the stakeholders in education (field groups) and in the labour market (sector councils) to co-operate, so as to link labour market needs to the qualifications awarded by the education and vocational training system; this collaboration might be a focal point for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes if it really took off in the Czech Republic. Indeed, there is another partnership scheme between SME representatives, given that bringing employers together in these initiatives provides for greater credibility. A budget of EUR 10 million has been requested in the Netherlands to strengthen co-operation between secondary education (MBO), the regions, employers and municipalities. In Ireland, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is felt to call for collaboration between the government, education and the regions to avoid pitfalls identified time and again, and particularly the weakness of a system that is too fragmented and that nobody is familiar with or uses.

Iceland has not adopted an inter-ministerial approach. However, 1999 witnessed tripartite co-operation within the world of education, between secondary education, the universities and vocational education. There was broad agreement concerning major forthcoming challenges and two objectives, namely good co-operation and sound understanding. The aim was to encourage the recognition of real skills, to enable people to enter lifelong learning and to shorten learning periods, three topics present in all literature and official documents on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Iceland has also established sectoral partnerships involving, for example, telecommunications, the banks and a university teaching hospital, but for now they represent no more than pilot projects.

The 1999 Competence Reform in Norway may be regarded as conducive to partnerships, as it is simultaneously concerned with the labour market and the education system. It targeted all adults and was set up through interaction between the social partners, the Ministry of Education and education institutions. It was as a result of this reform that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes was enshrined in legislation.

In Mexico, financial partnerships have been formed between the official institutions and enterprises in order to cover the costs of recognition, a recurrent problem in the country. Belgium (Flemish Community) was planning an inter-ministerial body for improved administration, in order to promote the idea of lifelong learning and strengthen the link between education and the labour market. The proposal included the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Besides all the tertiary education institutions involved in South Africa, a few private providers have introduced recognition processes (RPL) but such initiatives remain very uncommon. In Chile, no less than three ministries are involved in the *Chilecalifica* programme. In Slovenia, the Ministry of Labour acts as a driving force and encourages the acquisition of NVQs. The country's administrative authorities for education and labour are jointly working on the development of a single standard.

The government in Canada plays no direct part in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (PLAR). The provinces are autonomous. For example, in Ontario, a 2006 law has sought to remove barriers in regulated professions. It encourages equitable access to 34 regulated professions, with a view to making access to them more transparent and the professions themselves more open. Recognition (PLAR) is part of this strategy. A similar approach is planned in Manitoba and Nova Scotia. Inter-ministerial collaboration is something of a priority in Canada, given the need to involve the federal ministries of Immigration and Indian Affairs. Finally, among the country's many intergovernmental and non-governmental initiatives are the following: the Atlantic Consortium of Provincial Governments, which assists with the assessment of learning outcomes; the Canadian Association of Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA); the Canadian Institute for Recognising Learning (CIRL); the Conference Board of Canada; the Manitoba Prior Learning Assessment Network; the Halifax Prior Learning Assessment Centre; the Canadian Virtual University; and Prince Edward Island's Learning at Work.

Methods of assessing candidates for recognition

Even though the process of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes does not necessarily call for fully formalised arrangements, the nature and method of assessing learning outcomes are central to all discussions in most countries. It is often because the quality of assessment is sound that society as a whole will recognise the resources it uses and any documents awarded. From self-assessment to formal assessment in accordance with the model in the formal system of education and initial training, several methods are used, most often in conjunction. This discussion is often pursued at the same time as several others, including those on standards (their nature and their one or more owners for example) and on evaluators (for example their background and training).

The most widespread method used by many countries – though the Czech Republic is a notable exception – is that of the *learning portfolio*. Electronic portfolios are less widespread, uncommon in Switzerland and under consideration in Ireland. In most countries, the main assessment techniques that exist alongside use of the portfolio are interviews, context-based observation, 360 degree assessment, simulation and questionnaires. The Netherlands has chosen the first three techniques in addition to the portfolio which it justifies on the grounds of cost, desired quality and number of candidates for assessment. The Netherlands is regarded as a pioneer from the point of view of assessment, as candidates are entitled to have their learning outcomes recognised in whichever of the four possible ways they prefer. However, the assessment system itself copies the English system. In fact, the process of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a real personal development plan in the Netherlands. It consists of six stages, namely information from the candidate, an agreement and development plan, a skills appraisal, assessment, the result of the procedure and a future personal development plan. The United Kingdom also makes use of learning portfolios, observation at the workplace and questionnaires. In the United Kingdom, the idea is to adapt the method to candidates and their aims: some are seeking a qualification, while others wish solely to be assessed so that they can then take a course at an appropriate level. Interestingly, work done by the

Learning and Skills Research Centre (2004) reveals that people may be affected by some degree of anxiety during assessment. One way of countering this might be online tests which are probably less “threatening”.

It is doubtless in Scotland that the greatest number and most varied range of methods are used. Traditional methods exist alongside less traditional ones that are very promising. Among them are simulation and observation of practice, mapping of learning outcomes (a sort of summary portfolio or skills passport on the lines of the Norwegian method), profiling, curriculum vitae (Europass or other kinds), learning portfolios, certified voluntary activity, assessment on request (examinations or homework), structured interviews, oral assessment and personal projects. This wide variety of methods is not seen as likely to result in problems of equity or quality in assessment, provided of course that the quality criteria are clearly identified and complied with in each method adopted. There are four such criteria and they are extremely well defined: “acceptability” (or what might be termed “qualitative eligibility”); “sufficiency” (meaning sufficient evidence of considered thought and demonstration of the mastery of learning outcomes); “authenticity”; and “currency” (the fact that outcomes have acknowledged current value). The Scottish approach is noteworthy for variable levels of requirement depending on the type of assessment, and in general whether it is formative or summative. In the case of the first, no formal assessment necessarily occurs. As to the second, assessment is carried out for the award of credits. Furthermore, Scotland has stated that candidates validate recent skills in highly specialised fields, rather than any previously acquired general knowledge. This reflects their likely pragmatism but also the clear reality in Belgium (Flemish Community) and Chile that assessment occurs in response to demand from the labour market.

In Slovenia, the learning portfolio is used to record the knowledge, skills and competences acquired. Candidates receive assistance from a counsellor, which may be followed by an examination. The examination tests the skills and knowledge that are not clear from the portfolio. Practices vary widely depending on the institution concerned and occur at its discretion, while the examination may be written or oral. It may comprise a discussion, reasoning, an interview, reasoning with reference to a document, product evaluation, practical tests, a demonstration, a simulation or role playing. Candidates for recognition in the region of Maribor use a very short learning portfolio in line with the Norwegian method.

In Ireland, a variety of approaches are used, depending on the awarding body, institution or provider and purpose of assessment. For a full qualification, a candidate must demonstrate that s/he has attained the relevant standards of knowledge, skills and competence.

Methods are also very varied in Australia and determined by the assessment bodies. Three very clear methods are observation, interviews, and portfolios. From an experiment carried out in 2004 (Skule and Ure, 2004), Norway emphasises that time and money could be saved by using a work-based competence passport at the outset of a recognition process. It could lead to better communication and even better negotiation with employers, and help evaluators. This very concise (two-page) passport is discussed with employers and signed jointly. Other than that, traditional methods are used, including discussion, learning portfolios (with photographs) and professional tests in which candidates demonstrate their practical abilities.

In tertiary education in Belgium (Flemish Community), there is a two-stage procedure: initial assessment using a portfolio and then assessment in a real situation. Successful completion of the first stage is a precondition, so as to prevent too many failures in the second. Most tertiary education institutions use an APEL-type approach which, by taking special account of experience, enables achieving improved levels of employability. In Belgium (Flemish Community), no assessment occurs at the end of adult learning programmes in the socio-cultural field, and there is no qualification either. However, certificates are being introduced by the SoCiuS research centre to remedy this problem.

In South Africa as elsewhere the assessment resources are the portfolio, publications, references, and varied testimony and evidence, but in an extraordinarily open and dynamic system, these methods are examples rather than prescribed. With concern that the system should avoid stasis, there is no all-inclusive list of assessment methods. Assessments have to be fair, valid, reliable and workable and are organised in three stages in which they are planned with candidates, carried out and then reported on. In practice, this approach may be further subdivided to distinguish between applications, their admissibility, preparation for assessment (identification), assessment (assembling evidence), judgement, moderation and a report. In South Africa, it is part of the policy of tertiary education institutions to ensure that assessment practices are based on learning outcomes (CHE).

In Italy, the main assessment methods are individual interviews structured to a greater or lesser extent and the self-assessment of aspects relating to personal characteristics, by means of tools prepared specifically for assessment. In Greece, assessment in modern languages is based on written and oral examinations. To assess technical skills, interviews and observation are used. According to the new legal framework in Denmark, assessment has to satisfy conditions ensuring that tools, methods and assessment processes inspire confidence, are transparent and can be recorded. Chile launched its first pilot projects in 2005. Vocational skills rather than academic knowledge are thus regarded as the prime focus of assessment, demonstrating that the country is seeking to satisfy a strong demand for labour market skills. Assessment is organised on a chronological basis, with at least three visits to the workplace of candidates. Meanwhile, they are interviewed, with possibly technical interviews or workplace simulations. Then there is the final analysis and a positive decision when it is at least established that the portfolio contains clear-cut evidence and that candidates are not incompetent. A certified qualification is the final validation of the entire process.

In Canada, the most widespread method is the “challenge”. Here, candidates decide that they are at the level needed to take the examination directly without needing to do the courses. The examination should be no longer than three hours. The provinces are relatively autonomous in this area but their practices are fairly similar. Canada also uses the learning portfolio which is defined as an organised collection of headings for checking the existence of someone’s knowledge, skills and competences. Canada is one of the few countries to indicate that the portfolio calls for writing proficiency, lack of which is thus viewed as a potential problem. The other methods used are case studies, drafting, written exercises, multiple choice questionnaires, tests, structured interviews, oral examinations, presentations, keeping diaries, demonstrations, self-assessment, simulation, role playing and observations. These methods all tend to be broken down into four parts that are *i)* written, *ii)* oral, *iii)* involve the assessment of actual performance, and *iv)* the assessment of what candidates have produced. A recognition procedure consists of three separate stages, namely information and counselling with pre-assessment training, identification and checking of learning outcomes, reports to candidates and possible appeals. Fairly recent data appear to show that over half of the candidates (54%) use the “challenge”, followed by the learning portfolio (23%) and the demonstration (23%).

In Saskatchewan (Canada), each institution is responsible for assessing candidates in its own way. The SIAST has developed a ten-stage model for this purpose: direct consultation, application, audit meeting, developing an action plan, payment of registration fees for a course or block assessment, preparation for assessment by the student, SIAST assistance with the “challenge” process, evaluation by the assessor, submission of results to the registration services, and notification of candidates. The means used may include one or a combination of an interview/oral exam, evidence files, standardised examinations, demonstrations, and product assessment research. These are summative methods. Education and training institutions are responsible for quality assurance. In British Columbia, assessment varies from one institution and programme to the next. The province has developed a guide and a framework in partnership with many short-course tertiary education institutions (the colleges), such as North Island College. Where candidates ask for credit transfer, indirect assessments are undertaken over a limited

period. In direct assessment, two options, the “challenge” and the portfolio are available. It would seem that, in this specific case at least, many practitioners consider that the portfolio is the most appropriate resource. This is the finding from surveys in Nova Scotia in which the portfolio is said to enhance self-esteem and self-confidence. In Manitoba, secondary education recognition for adults is organised primarily by adult learning centres. These centres have used case studies, tests, interviews, oral examinations, examination panel assessments, oral presentations, portfolios, narrative accounts and personal diaries, including the “challenge”. In New Brunswick, the community colleges and the University of New Brunswick manage their individual procedures. However, there are guidelines, such as the period during which assessment can be administered, which should not exceed three months. Here again, the means are the same, including learning portfolios and demonstrations, etc. In New Brunswick, applications for PLAR-type recognition are considered very complex. In all, in the provinces of Alberta, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, the concept of assessment is flexible as a result of the very wide range of methods. The fact remains that Alberta has decided to clarify methods and how they are used, and is preparing a handbook on good practice.

As has been seen, recognition in Spain is based on the principle of returning to formal learning via an examination open to “free candidates” who have achieved sufficient learning outcomes but do not satisfy the academic preconditions. These examinations are divided into common parts taken by all candidates, and special parts which depend on the particular professional field concerned. Candidates may be assessed in subjects such as textual commentary, the Spanish language, a foreign language or one of the languages widely spoken in Spain. For the titles of technician and higher technician in vocational training, the conditions of assessment are different. Dates of publication and assessment vary. Standards, decrees, the responsible organisation and quality assurance mechanisms are different. This naturally means that assessment methods vary across the Autonomous Communities.

Some countries, such as the Czech Republic, insist on the need for *stability* in assessment from one sector to the next but variations exist, depending on the knowledge, skills and competences to be assessed. Iceland is also working to stabilise its system and reports that assessment there can only become operational in 2009. Recent developments point to the existence of five stages: information on entitlements and the identification of aims; documentation (experience and skills: diploma, job descriptions, qualifications); study of documents (consistency with the criteria actually used); confirmation; and the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences. In Hungary, the assessment of people is described as “variable”. “House tests” are authorised so it is hard to imagine that candidates receive equal treatment. In short, assessment ranges from the Europass-type CV to tests, and includes learning portfolios and practical examinations for qualifications and titles in vocational education. Somewhat unusually, candidates may request not to be assessed, which might lead to inefficiencies, given the impossibility of recognising the results of the process in any way.

There have been very mild attempts to organise *group assessment*, as reflected in one project in the Czech Republic. In Switzerland, Swiss Post (the postal services enterprise) already assesses groups of candidates, while Italy refers to group self-assessment. Canada emphasises the fact that personalised assessment is the most expensive. While a group approach can clearly only apply to certain types of assessment, which might involve written work or collective interviews, as the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a predominantly individual procedure, countries do think about minimising costs. Justifications based on emulation and peer learning are not often mentioned but they are not unreasonable.

A few countries have subjected recognition to time restrictions. These may take the form of a limited timeframe (such as ten days in the year) for registration purposes, as in Mexico, in order to administer the large number of applications. Alternatively, the assessment period may be limited, as in New Brunswick or, to a certain extent in Korea, in which assessment does not necessarily occur at a time convenient to

candidates. Three sessions are held in the year and a committee is responsible for seeing that these assessments are conducted smoothly. In the case of intermediate level qualifications in Spain, candidates are convened for examination once a year, even though education authorities may also occasionally hold *pruebas libres* (“free” examinations). Candidates who fail to be present have to wait a year before they can take the examination again.

There remains the question of the profession of *evaluator*, its precise scope and the appropriate training required. In the Netherlands, it should be noted that there are neither training programmes for evaluators, nor standards regarding the skills that they may reasonably be expected to possess. The EVC Knowledge Centre is thus moving towards a system for accrediting EVC evaluators (in accordance with ISO standards). In actual practice, the situation described in the Netherlands is not uncommon and, in many countries, former teachers become evaluators. Despite the fact that the occupation is a special one, the question of their training is not addressed everywhere. In Denmark, there is no such training. In Norway there is a shortage of evaluators, which is one possible reason why the system of recognition is not firmly established. In Chile, evaluators have to demonstrate ability and competence in the area of impartiality. In Slovenia, they are trained by the National Assessment Centre, with funding from the registration fees of participants. In Canada, evaluators are acknowledged to be the most important cog in the recognition system. In Manitoba, importance is attached to the training of practitioners. Red River College offers two levels of training, namely a 40-hour introduction to the PLAR system and also an advanced 40-hour course on PLAR. The Halifax PLA Centre has trained 20 evaluators. In Saskatchewan, SIAST offers an Advanced Certificate Program for practitioners which is available through distance learning, making it available to practitioners anywhere in the world. As regards the professional skills of evaluators in Mexico, those at the CONOCER have to be qualified in relation to the *Norma Técnica de Competencia Laboral* (NTCL, or technical standard of labour competence) that they have to assess, as well as the corresponding unit of competence. In South Africa, evaluators are required to be “registered assessors” who are trained and meet the minimum SAQA criteria to do assessment in the particular sector (*e.g.* the assessor must be qualified at a higher NQF level than the level at which the assessment takes place). The handbook of good practice in recognition, which is now being prepared in Alberta, will contain a special section on the role of evaluators (particularly those from professional walks of life), of counsellors (who have to encourage the flow of information) and of administrative officers (who have to check transcriptions).

With further reference to professionals in the field of recognition, some countries have, so to speak, invented the new profession of *mentor* or *supervisor*. The role of those concerned lies midway between that of informing and assessing. For example, there are mentors for the *ProfilPASS* system in Germany, counsellors for the portfolio in Slovenia, tutors in Valle d’Aosta and mentors in the Spanish system. It would seem that the success rate in a recognition procedure is very broadly linked to the presence of such a person (see Recotillet and Werquin, 2009, for an example based on empirical data).

Since assessment results in a decision, some countries have established an *appeals procedure* for candidates to challenge the decision reached, in the event of failure. In Chile, such candidates have ten days to lodge an appeal. Greece allows them two years in which to make a second attempt. However, if they fail again, they are obliged to return to learning in a formal setting before they can be reassessed. In Denmark, the new legal framework states that candidates must be able to appeal against the decision if they so wish. In Belgium (Flemish Community), there is an “appeals office” which receives requests from participants who challenge decisions. It is also possible to appeal in Canada and South Africa.

All such methods are inseparable from the notion of quality, and there is not a single country that does not refer explicitly to quality or quality assurance in the description of its assessment methods. Furthermore, in Austria, the quality of assessment is governed by the law on vocational training. Also present is the Office of Apprenticeship which has a part to play as the authority for the LAP.

Electronic portfolio of achievement

All countries describe the possibility of building up a personal *learning portfolio*,⁴ or even an electronic portfolio of achievement, as advantageous for the individuals concerned, since it furthers the identification of skills acquired in the personal, social and professional domains alike. It is a means of enabling people to consolidate and build on their achievements as their personal and professional careers progress. The same activity also constitutes a first written exercise in helping them to access the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and, potentially, a professional qualification. They are thus better placed to make the most of their careers.

In the Netherlands, the portfolio is a very important resource, in particular because the procedures for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes do not always lead to a qualification. In such cases, the portfolio is the only visible sign of recognition. A somewhat similar approach is adopted in Germany, in the case of those who do not take the *Externenprüfung* examination leading to qualification but instead opt for the *ProfilPASS*, arguably the most detailed and comprehensive learning portfolio yet devised. Moreover, the contrast is interesting with Norway which has the most condensed approach. The Norwegian equivalent of the portfolio – the competence passport – has little more than two pages, corresponding to a single sheet. It describes what holders have done in their jobs and requires the signature of the employer. From this angle, the Norwegian approach is more like a certification of activity than a real learning portfolio. For all that, the level of trust in the country is such that the competence passport cannot be and is not challenged, and that it constitutes an excellent employment visa.

In Belgium (Flemish Community), the portfolio is viewed as essential, as the system aims above all to compensate for shortages in qualifications available for the labour market. In the case of occupations open to recognition because of such shortages – for example, that of call centre operator – the “learning booklet” is a means of documenting knowledge, talents, abilities and skills acquired non-formally and informally, in particular in the socio-cultural sector. This is one of the priorities in Belgium (Flemish Community). Another idea is to make the most of skills developed by voluntary workers, as in Austria and Australia. Austria, indeed, has an original approach involving a language portfolio which is under consideration for children, as well as in “academic” secondary education and vocational education colleges.

In Korea, the learning portfolio was required, as well as a short written dissertation, but these practices have been judged time-consuming and scrapped in favour of direct assessment. Examinations are organised and the results converted into credits. In Ireland, it is also very plainly recognised that the portfolio is ill-suited to people’s needs for basic qualifications in the national qualifications framework. Yet it remains the most commonly used resource to date. In the assessment of professional competences in Mexico, all candidates have to build up a learning portfolio, yet here again it is recognised that it may be a handicap for newcomers to the labour market.

As far as the *electronic portfolio* in particular is concerned, its use is not widespread in Switzerland. It is non-existent in Iceland and under consideration in Ireland. Austria was discussing its possible use for voluntary workers in 2006.

Assessment standards

The concept of standards is essential in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. It is crucial during the assessment phase of formalised processes, especially for obtaining a qualification. Some countries have opted to have the same standards, irrespective of the learning outcomes assessed and

⁴ Here, similar terms such as “learning portfolio” or “portfolio” will be regarded as synonymous.

whether the learning itself was formal or not. This is so in Norway where the recognition system uses the same standards, as candidates for recognition are in competition with traditional students.

Assessment standards – or qualification standards – in the formal system have traditionally been the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and this is often its foremost function. Such is the case in the Czech Republic, which is hardly surprising given the position of the formal system in the Czech system of values. However, Czech legislation clearly states that other ministries are asked to take part in devising standards. Many countries in the study confirm this inclination in principle to open up the task to other partners. However, the fact remains that it constitutes an important practical difficulty. The owners of standards are apparently not prepared to accept losing even partial control. In addition, the idea of value in learning is intrinsically linked to the Ministry of Education in the culture of most countries covered. Yet many finer considerations should be borne in mind, depending in particular on the aims of recognition and the nature of academic or professional learning outcomes. Thus the Czech Republic has taken a firm decision to select two standards, one for formal learning outcomes which uses an education and training standard, and one for non-formal and informal learning outcomes which short-circuits this standard and is instead directly linked to the employment standard. The situation is also much the same in Belgium (Flemish Community) and Germany.

In the United Kingdom, academic standards are controlled entirely by the universities but assessed independently by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Occupational standards are governed by National Occupational Standards (NOS). Professional organisations may also develop and administer standards. Sometimes the government itself does so, especially in the area of basic skills such as numeracy and literacy. In Australia, standards are the responsibility of different institutions: tertiary education institutions in the case of academic standards, professional organisations in the case of occupational standards and the Industry Skills Council (ISC) for independent professions. In Austria standards belong to the universities. This seemingly gives them a strong position in negotiations for the development of a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Furthermore, each institution is responsible for its own standards.

In Korea, the Ministry of Education and Development of Human Resources is the authority responsible for academic standards. The Ministry of Labour is responsible for vocational qualifications. Private organisations control the standards corresponding to private qualifications. For qualifications testifying to professional skills, Belgium (Flemish Community) uses the occupational standards of the *Sociaal Economische Raad van Vlaanderen* (SERV, or the Advisory Committee of the Social Partners in Flanders). For vocational qualifications, the Flemish Community uses sectoral standards. Assessment in Spain is based on standards determined by the central government for each diploma and vocational certificate. It is also involved in determining preconditions and in devising validation processes. The standard for vocational training is the *Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales* (CNCP, or the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications). Finally, in Spain everything varies from one Autonomous Community to another. According to some, this complicates the situation for users so that there is a case for national standards.

In Iceland too, academic standards are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Occupational standards are the remit of professional groups. The same applies to Ireland, and the national qualifications framework very clearly facilitates this approach. It is also true of the Netherlands, as it is expressly stated that procedures for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes should conform to the national qualifications system, with the result that the standards are those of the formal sector. In Hungary, the “skills chambers” supervise standards for employment in professional sectors. The Ministry of Education is responsible for all standards in the academic sphere and some occupational standards. Other ministries are involved to a varying extent in certain standards of relevance to them. In Slovenia, universities have freedom of decision as regards their academic standards.

On the whole, all countries have somewhat the same approach in the sense that responsibility for standards is shared in accordance with the educational or vocational sector concerned. The fact remains that certain countries, such as Italy, exhibit a glaring shortfall in terms of standards. This can only block the emergence of a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes that is capable of awarding full qualifications to brilliant candidates with solid experience. The point is also made that recent international developments might lead to compatible standards, if not truly common ones. This issue arises within the European Union while in Chile, too, there is talk of adjustment to international standards in order to boost mobility.

Quality assurance

Quality and the means of ensuring it is upheld are major concerns in all countries in the study. One such is Switzerland. The same also applies very clearly to Australia which regards quality assurance as the best safeguard against stigmatisation. It emphasises how the qualifications system would risk losing credibility if it awarded qualifications through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes when the process was not a quality one. It is precisely to ensure quality that Ireland is aiming for its own process to be transparent, robust and equitable. Of these aspects, robustness is also apparent in Australia. And quality assurance is considered a precondition for establishing a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the Czech Republic.

While some ten countries have a legal framework, only Denmark and Austria refer categorically to quality assurance in their enacted legislation. Some countries are thus far less forthright in their declarations. The Netherlands views quality assurance as a medium-term goal, thereby acknowledging its possible shortcomings. Moreover, the establishment of the EVC Knowledge Centre corresponds to several aims, such as the development of new EVC programmes and achieving improved access to existing programmes, but also the development of a quality model. The Netherlands considers that, in a model of “shared responsibility”, it would be inappropriate for the EVC quality system to be laid down by the government. It has to be the result of serious discussion between all the parties concerned and established through an agreement signed by all. The interesting feature of the Dutch system is that quality assurance is overseen by different institutions, depending on whether the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is academic or vocational. In vocational education, it is controlled by the *Kwaliteitscentrum Examinering Beroepsonderwijs* (KCE, or the Centre for Examination Quality in Vocational Education), by the *Nederlands Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie* (NVAO, or the Flemish-Dutch Accreditation Organisation) in the case of academic recognition, and by vocational branches for the recognition of vocational experience. The KCE is an independent agency which is the guarantor of the quality system in secondary education in general.

The Netherlands draws attention to a three-page quality code prepared in 2004. This lays down several important principles, including impartiality, the competence of evaluators, and the belief that EVC should not necessarily be tied to a training programme, as it has intrinsic value for the individual. The Netherlands repeatedly emphasises, among other things, the usefulness of recognition (EVC) as a career development instrument, along with the “conscientisation”⁵ of the procedure, and the skills that candidates may recognise themselves as possessing.

⁵ This term used in the Dutch report no doubt refers to the concept linked to the educational and political research of Paulo Freire. The aim of conscientisation is to develop the knowledge and resources of groups by furthering a study process which becomes critical consciousness, “transitive” and dialogical, and a potential for “liberation”. Conscientisation is a widespread practice in many countries and especially in South America, which focuses on trust in the “learning” of the oppressed and on the problematising role of the guide who educates-and-learns through dialogue.

In Hungary, quality assurance is associated more with educational or training institutions and with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Training providers are obliged by law to provide prior learning assessment, and checking the existence of this service is an integral part of quality assurance in adult education. In the United Kingdom, many entities are responsible for quality assurance, depending on the sector concerned, such as the above-mentioned QAA. More specifically, England has the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), while there is the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in Wales, and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland. Quality should also be ensured by the Framework for Excellence (FfE) whose development is ongoing in the United Kingdom. In Scotland, quality assurance is at the heart of work on the growth of the knowledge economy, and so naturally also central to the system for assessing non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Providers are responsible for the quality assurance process.

For quality assurance in tertiary education, Australia has a national protocol, even though it is administered by each state and territory. Quality assurance in the evaluation process is one of the four main guidelines specific to recognition (points 6 to 9) among all those established by the AQTF for the RTOs, the states and territories. As regards quality assurance, Australia stresses the genuineness, seriousness and relevance of assessment at any particular time. These factors should supplement efforts to keep the period and costs required to a minimum, while ensuring that information is appropriate and staff are competent. Furthermore, the introduction of a level IV certificate in assessment and workplace training is unquestionably consistent with an improvement in the quality of assessment, in that procedures become standardised. Establishing rules for the profession can only strengthen its role. In 1999, 1 738 professional staff held this certificate and 13 317 in 2005.

In Norway, quality assurance is the preserve of the assessment centres which are the responsibility of the counties. The centres are also responsible for training evaluators. In 2005, Vox organised two-day seminars to foster a common approach to assessment and to standardise practices. There are 788 evaluators throughout the country. Quality assurance is viewed as essential in Norway, particularly because of changes in education structures and the individual nature of recognition procedures. Indeed, only wide-ranging consistency in procedures can ensure equitable treatment for all candidates. Each institution in tertiary or secondary education is responsible for quality assurance, but the *Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen* (NOKUT, or Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) is due to take over this responsibility with the following five clear aims: evaluate institutions by means of a quality audit; perform all authorisations/accreditation concerned with tertiary education; review specific accreditation activities (covering an entire institution, or individual programmes within it); ensure the development of quality in tertiary education in Norway in general; and draw up equivalent ratings between the different institutions, foreign or otherwise, which are outside the purview of the law on universities and short-course tertiary education institutions.

In Belgium (Flemish Community), quality assurance is very important. A “quality label” has been introduced for the certification of experience. The providers have to satisfy certain conditions. In particular, attention has been drawn to quality assurance by the RAC group in the VIONA. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has to be based on a quality procedure determined by the government, with evaluation of the work of the providers every five years. The point of view of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports is that the government cannot yet act as the guarantor of quality. Quality assurance is thus left to the appraisal of the provider. For example, in the case of sport this means the *Bevordering van de Lichamelijke Ontwikkeling, de Sport en de Openluchtrecreatie* (BLOSO, or the Administrative Body for Physical Education, Sports and Outdoor Activities). One interesting point is that the qualifications and independence of the evaluators are regarded as very important in Belgium (Flemish Community).

Mexico too has a qualification for evaluators. In addition, internal controllers check that the evaluation process complies with applicable standards. The process of evaluation, accreditation and certification, along with the DGAIR and DGB are certified to ISO 9001:2000. In South Africa, standards are approved by many bodies for auditing, accrediting and recording standards and forms of certification. Four of them in particular are responsible for quality assurance, namely the CHE, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), the vocational boards, and the agencies in Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA). In Chile the centres for evaluation and certification (CECs), which are private entities, are responsible for quality. This is a typical instance of responsibility for quality being delegated, even though there is a proposal (announced in 2007) for the establishment of a quality commission. In Slovenia, quality is the responsibility of the National Assessment Centre which in this capacity has to train evaluators. There are handbooks for evaluators and networks of providers to exchange good ideas and good practice. In Spain, the Inspectorate for Education is responsible for quality control, which is not surprising, since the essential feature of approaches to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is that they enable people to take examinations to access the formal system (*pruebas*). Finally in Canada training is provided for PLAR professionals, which can only enhance quality. Responsibility for quality lies with the institutions. Only three provinces – Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba – have policy frameworks for recognition (PLAR) and quality assurance. Thought and discussion is under way at federal level on good practice in the area of quality assurance. The aim is essentially to ensure quality in post-secondary education.

In all, the guarantors of quality assurance depend on the systems that countries have established to recognise non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Where recognition is geared to employability and the labour market, stakeholders in the market are responsible for quality. Where it focuses on getting people to return to formal learning, the bodies responsible for quality in the formal system of education and initial training tend to be responsible. However, data appear to be lacking for a dispassionate appraisal of progress in the area of quality assurance and the results that might stem from it, especially as regards the impact on users of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Dedicated or shared evaluation centres

Beyond the assessment process itself, its quality and the standards used, practices regarding the *geography of assessment* are worth observing. Clearly, too many practical restrictions on the places and methods of assessment may deter the least motivated candidates. Furthermore, the consequences of a situation in which some assessment centres are less demanding than others would be worth studying. Finally, the issues of cost and permanence should not be overlooked. If the recognition system is self-sufficient, it is probably more expensive to run than if it is based on existing organisational arrangements and able where necessary to share costs with learning centres. These issues all affect permanence, as a self-sufficient system relies on no outside agency but may encounter financial difficulties and disappear, whereas one anchored in a shared infrastructure is less costly but may be subject to the goodwill of the owner of the premises, which may also threaten its permanence. The “strategy of the cuckoo” is economical but may prove dangerous.

Whatever the circumstances, some countries let candidates choose freely where they will be assessed. Others do not and firmly specify the place concerned, as for example in the Netherlands. The difficulty stems from the fact that most countries face organisational problems because of the relative scarcity of infrastructure and related concerns such as ease of access and equity. Besides, assessment centres cannot necessarily be used interchangeably across all disciplines, and everything may depend on the field in which learning outcomes are assessed. In Greece or Hungary, recognition is very often used for modern languages, so assessment quite naturally occurs in language schools. In Slovenia, the entire system is based on the NVQ, which calls for appropriate tools and materials for assessing (say) a builder. The National Examination Centre regulates assessment and recognition procedures. There are 73 regional assessment

centres which make use of existing facilities and typify the “strategy of the cuckoo”, which in this particular case corresponds to hidden subsidies. Economic theory usually refers to the “free rider”. The approach is highly intelligent since the existing premises are often empty in the evening or on Saturdays. Yet one should remain aware that the system probably only survives because it does not have to support infrastructural costs. In Australia, there are many possibilities, including the RTOs, private agencies, the universities, other tertiary education institutions, the professional associations, private training providers, and national and international organisations.

Few countries have dedicated assessment centres. One that does is the Netherlands with 42 in MBO, 12 in the agricultural sector and 13 in the HBO sector. There are also around 30 centres attached to various foundations or the private sector. In Belgium (Flemish Community), there are dedicated centres – accredited assessment agencies – but only for vocational qualifications. A Recognition Agency also awards qualifications on the recommendation of the assessment agencies.

In Australia, assessing authorities recognise, certify and assess the skills and qualifications of those wishing to settle in Australia in any one of many professions. In general in Australia, the philosophy is based on satisfying local needs. This is the case in Queensland with the Skilling Solutions Queensland programme. The programme was initially introduced wherever the unemployment rate was very high. This closeness to real needs is supplemented by the possibility for learners to access distance learning facilities, which is important for isolated regions in Australia.

In Norway, the counties receive block grants to organise the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes and, in particular, to open assessment centres. The centres also happen to be responsible for quality assurance. There are 121 in the entire country. Most are located in schools providing upper secondary education, in a cost-sharing strategy. In Korea, *Dok-Hack-Sa* alone accounts for 1 149 staff who manage the programme, and 304 examiners. In Austria, there are learning offices, schools, tertiary education institutions and adult learning institutions in all provinces. For the BRP for example, there are 114 possible sites. In some sectors in South Africa, *e.g.* in the construction and insurance sector, RPL advice and assessment centres have been established to facilitate RPL projects related to new industry norms and standards. Chile has 45 accredited assessment centres which are all private. This explains why the draft law delegates to them the assessment of candidates and the award of qualifications as appropriate. The centres will also be responsible for quality assurance.

Such centres do not exist in Switzerland, where the cantons and vocational sectors organise assessment, as in the case of qualifications in the formal system. While in the Czech Republic no similar centres exist, traditional schools and professional associations are interested in this kind of activity, no doubt because of the financial windfall it might represent. Nor are there any such centres in Ireland, where the formal system of education and training assumes responsibility for assessment. In Iceland, schools providing upper secondary education take in candidates, another typical example of the “strategy of the cuckoo”. Denmark too lacks any independent assessment centre. Each education and training institution organises assessment when it is an integral part of a programme offered on its premises. Mexico has no dedicated centres. By contrast, 458 sites do organise adult learning assessment, and it is of special interest that 236 of them are in the United States, given the considerable size of its Mexican immigrant population. Out of the foregoing total of 458, 46 are assessment centres specifically for the *bachillerato*, the upper secondary school leaving diploma, seven of them in the United States. Finally, 83 centres assess candidates for the general bachelor’s level degree and 55 for the bachelor’s qualification in pre-school education.

Canada has no national assessment centres. Post-secondary education institutions are able to offer this service and arrange for assessments. In Manitoba in particular, 17 employment centres and 44 centres for adult learning organise recognition (PLAR). Assessment projects are carried out at the workplace and are directly relevant to the skills expectations of the sector concerned. In Nova Scotia, the Halifax Centre helps

people to build up their learning portfolio. In Saskatchewan, there are no dedicated centres for assessment which is performed by education institutions. In Quebec, RAC is possible in all general learning centres for adults, all colleges for general and vocational education, and all universities. Certain regions also have service counters. The cost of training evaluators is borne by the institutions. In Saskatchewan, a co-ordinating group provides opportunities for post-secondary institutions to integrate their recognition process (PLAR), and to devise a strategy for obtaining economies of scale by sharing tools, resources and best practices. They are also hoping that this will enable them to achieve a greater impact thanks to more portable PLAR results.

Funding, costs and registration fees

Registration or entrance fees represent the share of the costs that is borne by candidates. Cost is an important factor in Greece, for example, as people with only modest qualifications are also those on low incomes as is often the case. For them, the cost is one of money but also of time (opportunity cost). Clearly, the stakes are enormous and a review of country practices here is essential.

In Australia, the assessment fee is calculated in accordance with one of the three following methods: a flat rate, a percentage of the total cost of the recognition procedure (around 50%), or a nominal hourly rate. In general, these costs are assumed by the government, with learners covering solely indirect costs such as transport, photocopies and communication. The United Kingdom has pointed to an increase in costs in recent years. Current reforms and in particular those related to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) are aimed at achieving greater flexibility in assessment so that costs may be reduced.

In many countries a share of the costs is borne by candidates through *registration fees*. However, not all countries necessarily require candidates for recognition to pay these fees routinely, and the overall picture is very complex. Moreover, some countries adopt interesting practices. For example, where there are few candidates in Ireland, the institution covers the fees. In Slovenia, the registration fees of the unemployed are borne by the Public Employment Service, to which employers contribute.

During its pilot activity, Iceland envisaged requiring its candidates to pay but is now to abandon the idea when plans are fully implemented. In the Czech Republic, the registration fees paid by learners for the theoretical part of assessment are lower than those for the practical part – a very plain admission of the extra costs involved in arranging for the real-life assessment of knowledge, skills and competences. The registration fees of candidates are set by the Ministry of Education and range from EUR 30 to EUR 70. In Mexico, registration fees are calculated exactly to cover the costs of the system, although this appears not to apply to the bachelor's qualifications.

In Norway, the counties charge EUR 120-300 in the academic field, EUR 300 for the vocational sector and EUR 1 800 for a vocational examination. In tertiary education, all costs are covered by the university budget. In Hungary, there is no general payable assessment system but there are fees in separate segments of adult training. For example, for the European Computer Driving Licence, the registration fees range from EUR 180 to EUR 240. In Denmark, they depend on the type of assessment. For basic skills they are non-existent, as in the case of *Grundlæggende Voksenuddannelse* (GVU, or basic education) and *Arbejdsmarkedsuddannelser* (AMU, or adult vocational training). General adult learning is paid for with funding on the basis of the time involved. Finally in tertiary education, there are registration fees but also government subsidies to offset them. Danish financial terms are thus consistent with the traditional Norwegian conception of lifelong learning.

In Mexico, the cost rises from nothing in primary education to MXN 1 800 (pesos) for the *bachillerato* (MXN 2 000 in 2004, and falling) when registration is online. For the bachelor's level degree, the cost varies between MXN 505 and MXN 975 for the first phase. The second phase fluctuates between

MXN 6 230 and MXN 16 800; the third between MXN 5 565 and MXN 16 800. The total cost thus ranges from MXN 8 465, in tourism, law or pedagogy to MXN 34 265 in medicine or veterinary medicine. The cost of the bachelor's qualification in the field of pre-school education is MXN 2 000 (for online registration). An apparent problem in motivating people to commit to courses is that the initial investment is lost, in the event of failure or dropout prior to their completion, even where the reasons are valid.

In Austria, there is no special funding. Various stakeholders contribute to funding, including the chambers of commerce, the learning centres or the universities. For admission to the LAP on an exceptional basis, registration fees depend on the time taken to organise the examinations and financial support is possible from the Public Employment Service. Austria reports examination fees of EUR 82 and registration fees of EUR 25. In the case of the BRP, the fees have an upper limit of EUR 200 and, here again, financial support may be available. For the *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* (university entrance qualification exam) the fees are EUR 110, to which is added a variable share of EUR 690 in medicine, EUR 780 in psychology and EUR 930 in economics and social sciences.

In South Africa, there is no regular funding. Institutions bear the costs arising specifically from recognition (RPL). In some cases, they require candidates or employers to pay but not always. However, the national principle that a recognition procedure should always be cheaper than the corresponding full-time formal programme is upheld. ETQA has not established a recognition system of extensive scope and vision and it tends to comprise scattered separate initiatives. One of the few exceptions is SETA-funded recognition with ETQA quality assurance.

In Canada in general, assessment fees are borne by institutions. Other costs (such as for counselling and information) are divided between institutions and learners. In Manitoba, institutions receive money to fund infrastructure. However, registration fees vary widely and may be non-existent or flat-rate amounts for each course. A quite common idea also is that the registration fees for a procedure to recognise non-formal and informal learning outcomes should only be a percentage of those for the equivalent regular course. In Saskatchewan, the SIAST requires the payment of fees for PLAR in accordance with services and, here again, they have to be lower than the cost of the corresponding course. In New Brunswick, the GED cost is free for first-time applicants and rescheduled tests cost CAD 40. The Canadian government bears the cost of these fees unless there is a sponsor, such as the employer. Canada appears to be moving towards an approach in which candidates would cover these costs in the not-too-distant future.

Belgium (Flemish Community), rather like South Africa, upholds the idea that recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should never be more expensive than the corresponding training. Assessment fees range from EUR 590 for a professional or general bachelor's level degree to EUR 770 for a master's degree in the case of candidates without the bachelor's (but only EUR 230 for holders of the latter). An additional EUR 55 has to be paid as administrative fees. As regards skills recognition via the experience certificate, funding comes from the European Social Fund (ESF) even though candidates still pay for a practical test and cover certain fees. For example, the registration fees are EUR 25 for an unemployed person, but EUR 100 for someone with a job. In the case of culture and sports, funding comes from the BLOSO.

The budget in Slovenia was EUR 8 billion in 2004 and is expected to reach EUR 13 billion in 2010. The Ministry of Labour is the biggest source of funding. Some funding is obtained from the Public Employment Service but on no great scale as there are few candidates among the unemployed. In addition, there is a shortage of providers for assessment and recognition procedures. The cost of an NVQ for someone solely on the basis of a learning portfolio is EUR 106. Where its acquisition hinges on assessment, as well as the portfolio, the cost is EUR 143. Costs may also vary with the learning levels attempted, rising to EUR 970 for level 3 and EUR 1 220 for level 4. In Spain too, the cost varies widely and may range from nothing to EUR 70. For the certificate of vocational aptitude, one unit is worth

EUR 35. In the case of other qualifications, the individual cost is EUR 24 for the diploma and EUR 12 for each unit of competence.

Yet it is quite hard to have a clear idea about the funding of systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes and the budgets earmarked for them, as few countries possess detailed information. The Netherlands is one of the few countries with a special government appropriation which was EUR 35 million in 2006. These allocations are for activities involving the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the HBO and MBO sectors. Moreover, the amounts appear to be growing. The government justifies the increase on the grounds that people become more aware of their knowledge, skills and competences when they are engaged in a recognition procedure, which can only have positive consequences for them, the economy and society. For employees in the Netherlands, the costs are shared between employers and the funds for education and development or the local authorities. In few cases do employees themselves contribute to the costs of assessment. Registration fees rise from nothing to a few hundred euros. The most expensive components remain the consultancy time needed for the workshops, practical tests and career counselling. In the case of tertiary education, registration fees may be EUR 1 000-1 250 per participant. In secondary education, the costs and thus the registration fees are not as high. Moreover, they are often offset by the fact that candidates are enrolled as participants in traditional training programmes.

In Norway too, employers have usually paid for continuing training (see the studies by the LO and NHO in the mid-1990s) and, by the same token, for recognition. Furthermore, while the basic state budget provides block grants for education in general, it also has to cover the costs of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. To refer back to the Netherlands, employees may deduct a share of their individual costs for this recognition from their income tax. Employers also secure tax relief when an employee embarks on a recognition procedure. However, a potential disadvantage in the funding system would appear to be that it depends on the target group. That said, the three regulations described above provide a basis for grant support.

Figures for Canada relate in the main to the 2007 budget. The Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) supports actions for the professions, whether they are regulated or not. Three provinces, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, have special funding programmes. In Manitoba, funding is available for counsellors and practitioners of recognition (PLAR) to develop it in industry, with an initial annual investment of CAD 960 000. In Quebec, there is special financial support of CAD 672 000 for 2005-06. Both amounts are slightly on the increase. These budgets are partially allocated to develop the instruments needed for the recognition of learning outcomes. The cost to individuals of the introductory stage and of examining their past learning record is put at CAD 200. In Saskatchewan in 2006-08, CAD 818 000 were spent on action to establish tools and processes for recognition. This budget was used both to extend the number of programmes in which learning outcomes could count towards obtaining credits, and also to develop training programmes for practitioners of recognition. Only the province of Saskatchewan adopted such an approach. Most provinces have no special budget for recognition (PLAR), although British Columbia earmarked CAD 1 million in 1996-97 and CAD 771 000 in 2001-02. At the individual level, fees for direct assessment in British Columbia stand at between 50% and 100% of the cost of the corresponding course.

In Switzerland, the canton of Geneva spends the equivalent of EUR 500 000-570 000 a year on recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, or an average of EUR 2 200-3 400 per candidate. However, these figures take no account of internal OFFT costs. On the other hand, they do include skills appraisal and consultancy fees, as well as extra training. In the canton of Valais, entrance fees are in the EUR 440-2 200 range. Finally, Swiss Post spent EUR 2.2 million on its entire recognition project for 1 500-2 000 persons. In Korea, the total government budget for the *Dok-Hack-Sa* system was around EUR 1 billion in 2004 and 2005. For ACBS, it was almost EUR 4 billion in 2005. In Hungary, the

National Institute of Adult Education has implemented a two-year project for developing and testing software-based assessment techniques in 53 training institutions.

Operational programmes in Chile are few in number and all funded by the government through the Chilecalifica programme. The two major action lines are the National Competence Framework and the System for Assessing and Certifying Competences. Funding for the first is falling slightly, while for the second it is increasing substantially. There is an ongoing debate about diversifying funding sources and drawing on the financial means of candidates, as well as on their enterprises if they are employed and the taxes paid by enterprises (the *Franquicia Tributaria*). Another idea is that costs could be geared to individual employee earnings.

Some countries have introduced forms of *tax relief*, so that funding is indirectly based on the state budget. This is the case in Australia. It is also true of Denmark but subject to certain conditions, such as labour market participation at a lower level of qualification than that corresponding to upper secondary education. It therefore applies to many programmes including those in AMU and GVU. Austria offers tax relief for the LAP, which is thus not specific to recognition, as well as for the BRP. There are no such concessions in Slovenia, Spain, or as a rule in the United Kingdom except in a few sectors such as construction or the media. Deliberation on the subject has lasted quite some time in Chile and the draft law now contains scope for tax relief when the quality, relevance and legitimacy of the qualifications awarded are undeniable. Enterprises may deduct up to 1% from their total wages bill, for assessing and qualifying their workers under the *Franquicia Tributaria*. In Canada, tax relief is also part of PLAR strategy but is not highly developed in practice.

Participation and participants

The preceding sections have shown that recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is often emphasised in the practices adopted by countries and regions for creating and developing human capital. Such practices are many and often promising. Yet all observers comment that, notwithstanding the quality of the systems introduced, the number of *participants* in a recognition procedure remains low. It is therefore important to consider participation more closely and, in particular, the figures involved. In doing so, readers should however bear in mind that the size of the different countries varies enormously, ranging from those in which the population is very large (such as Mexico or Germany) to others in which it is substantially smaller (Slovenia). Countries also have different levels of potential for recognition. In this respect, Norway seems to be in pole position with its 19 associations for adult learning, 435 non-governmental organisations and 633 000 participants in 2006.

Furthermore participants have their own *characteristics*. In particular, the risk of a second “Matthew effect” – as distinct from the first regarding participation in learning itself – in which people most in need of recognition, given their modest level of visible knowledge, skills and competences, would be the have-nots in the system is sometimes noted. Here, there are no clear findings. In Australia, this phenomenon appears to have been identified. In most of the other countries, recognition is presented as an alternative to formal learning which seems in fact less objectionable to people not highly motivated by traditional learning. For example, this trend is confirmed in Belgium (Flemish Community).

In the Netherlands, 20 000-30 000 candidates participate at one time or another each year, basically in secondary education (MBO). The quantitative aims announced in 2004 were an increase from 20 000 procedures for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes in 2006 to 50 000 in 2010. It is intended that half of them should result in the award of a qualification recognised by the sector concerned. However, the system of observation used to monitor the increase in participation is not clearly indicated. The Netherlands hopes to achieve the stated levels through the involvement of all parties concerned, including the MBO in the case of mobility and the HBO for enrolment in tertiary education.

The characteristics of participants reveal that they are often workers seeking promotion and/or other forms of career development. They include a high proportion of early school leavers and unemployed people. In Iceland, 176 individuals took part in the pilot project. In Greek programmes, new information and communication technology accounted for 7 000 candidates in 2006, and there were 103 000 candidates for language examinations between 2003 and 2006. The success rate has been just under 50%. In Australia, those who make extensive use of the recognition system (RPL) are predominantly aged between 20 and 24 (ABS, 2005).

The assessment of basic skills (IKV) in Denmark has accounted for 50 000 participants annually and a budget of EUR 1.2 million. In general adult learning, there are 500 participants annually and a budget of EUR 330 333. From 2001 to 2005 in Mexico, 125 377 learners obtained their primary education certificate, 213 745 the secondary education diploma, and 38 195 the upper secondary school diploma of *bachillerato*. In the best year (2002), 39.2% of participants obtained certified qualifications. In the period from 2000 to 2005, 792 candidates received the various kinds of bachelor's level degree while from 2001 to 2005, 75% of candidates were aged between 15 and 44, and over half were women. The majority (84.4%) of successful candidates had a job when they took their examinations (CENEVAL, 2006). In the case of bachelor's level qualifications, 66% of successful candidates are men, most of them aged 30-44. As regards the bachelor's degree in the field of pre-school education, there were 82 successful candidates in 2005, 93.9% of whom were women.

The proportion of learners in Austria who have secured access to *Fachhochschulen* by the alternative route has increased from 6.5% to 13.5%. Among the providers of non-formal and informal learning for adults, 30% were non-profit associations in 2003, while employers accounted for 26% and education institutions 9%. In 2004, there were 1 100 candidates for the upper secondary education diploma (*Hauptschule*), including learners in target groups and immigrants in particular. In 2006, 23% of candidates for the LAP obtained by recognition were not Austrian citizens. The success rate of foreigners was 91%, higher than the 84% achieved by Austrians. Among those who register for the BRP, 70% are full-time employees. In 1999-2000, the corresponding proportion in the case of the SBP was 55%, with an average age of 31. In Scotland, APEL-type approaches are for prospective higher education graduates who are relatively young. However, the use of APEL for non-traditional students to enter higher education is still not fully established.

The first two kinds of experience certificate in Belgium (Flemish Community), for sales operators or telephone assistance operators, were initially awarded in November 2006. Between November 2006 and July 2007, there were 123 candidates and 80 successful candidates, with 90% of the candidates from public action target groups. As regards certificates awarded by the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports, a recent study has shown that few organisations currently use the learning certificate. Out of 29 organisations consulted, 14 were familiar with this certificate and seven used it. The corresponding figures for the certificate of competence were ten and one, respectively.

Participation numbers in Chile are very low indeed, standing at 40 persons in all in the Chilecalifica programme. There have been a few scattered experiments in the field of modern languages. While in Slovenia there are no studies on participation in adult learning, it would appear that the use of recognition to obtain the NVQ is still not especially fashionable.

In the case of university access for those aged over 25 in Spain, 19 000 candidates were convened in 2000-01, of whom just over 8 000 were successful (a 43% success rate). Out of roughly the same number convened in 2004-05 (a little over 19 000), the success rate had risen with over 10 000 successful candidates (a 55% success rate). As regards intermediate level vocational training, just over 11 000 candidates were successful in 1999-2000 and just over 12 000 in 2005-06. And while just over 3 000 people gained admission to higher-level vocational training by examination in 1999-2000, the figure

rose to 7 796 in 2005-06. Spain appears to have invested considerable effort in opening up this higher level.

In Canada, participation in recognition at post-secondary level is low, even though there are no national data confirming this. Such data as are available come from three provinces. In New Brunswick, a 2004 study on recognition at the University of New Brunswick in the period from 1998 to 2004 revealed that out of 210 candidates in nursing science, art, computer science and education, 66.2% were women. Bachelor of Arts candidates rose strongly in number between 2003 and 2004. In post-secondary education in Alberta, there have been few candidates for PLAR-type credits – between 1% and 5% of students depending on the size of tertiary education institutions. At Athabasca University, 200 students obtained credits by means of PLAR. In Saskatchewan in 1999 there were 559 course “challenges”. As regards Canada as a whole, the publication entitled *The Slice of the Iceberg* found that 65% of participants in recognition (PLAR) were women, and 52% were aged over 30 with an average age of 33. Finally 63% were part-time students. The same publication reports that family responsibilities and employment are the main barriers to securing access to recognition. Canada is the country which most emphasises barriers and problems in gaining admission. Yet the Canadian findings are relatively universal in nature, as obstacles and difficulties are very real in many countries.

In Norway in 2003, 10 500 people were involved in a recognition procedure in upper secondary education, 8 400 of them in a vocational subject (compared with a total of 633 000 learners). Between 2000 and 2005, 60 000 people in all were concerned. In tertiary education, there were 6 000 admissions to a programme on the basis of recognition. The numbers then fell to 2 700 until 2006, which caused some surprise. As in many countries, the health and social sectors have accounted for the most applications (50%); between 50% and 70% of candidates have obtained the qualification.

In 2001 in Korea, 42 536 learners were registered in the ACBS and 4 259 received a diploma. In 2005, the corresponding figures were 193 760 and 17 540. By contrast, the Bachelor’s Degree Examination Programme for Self-education witnessed a decrease in the number of its successful candidates over the same period, which fell from 755 graduates (out of 42 480 registered students) in 2001 to 610 graduates (out of 53 893 students) in 2005. In the *Dok-Hack-Sa* system, 147 candidates obtained the bachelor’s level degree in 1993. The highest number of graduates in this system (1 011) was reached in 1999. Since then, the numbers have decreased. A third of these successful candidates have been aged 20 and 24, and another third between 25 and 29. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is becoming popular and a credible alternative to the formal system in Korea.

Evaluation, research and data

The scarcity of data on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes contrasts strangely with the plentiful supply of figures on lifelong learning. There are even some data on non-formal and informal learning, but data on recognition of the resultant outcomes are very uncommon.

There are no data in the Czech Republic and no special studies in Scotland. Iceland has no data concerning impact, as the recognition system is very recent. In Hungary, users would like to have information on the practices of private and multinational companies. South Africa has no official data. However, a few studies reveal that the potential and scope of recognition (RPL) are still very controversial (DoE, 1999; CHE, 2001). In particular, there are doubts about its ability to hasten the transformation of the tertiary education curriculum. The few studies that exist in Slovenia are hardly ever used. In Spain, research is undertaken almost entirely by the training and employment service in the province of Valencia.

A few studies on the workplace exist in Norway. In Mexico in 2003, Agreement 286 was evaluated by the DGAIR, the institution responsible for it. The following three means of improvement were identified:

periods for convening prospective candidates for examination should not be restricted and should be a little more flexible; the system of online registration should be improved; and the system should be promoted. In 2004, the World Bank strongly criticised the CONOCER system for certifying vocational competences in Mexico. It found that few findings tended to demonstrate that the initial aims had been achieved, for example in satisfying the needs of SMEs. The World Bank also pointed out that the CONOCER lacked a clear strategy for penetrating the qualifications market. Finally, the assessment process appeared too costly. A 2002 study (INEA-SASA database) in Mexico indicated the percentage of participants by declared situation, namely 38.5% were with their families, 15.3% were craftspeople or workers, 11.7% were agricultural workers and 10.2% were service employees. Although quite rare, this kind of survey is invaluable. Germany is also considering the development of a database to record skills. Iceland possesses a system of this kind, which is both an operational system for users and a research database.

In Austria, SBP officials have to prepare an annual report describing the number of qualifications, the results of assessments and the quality of the attendant provision. However this is not concerned with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, but is instead a general practice for monitoring quality. Tyrol carries out studies into the level of satisfaction of participants and their expectations. Many studies exist in Belgium (Flemish Community), including VIONA (2001-04) on RAC or on the national qualifications framework. In the case of the former, VIONA recommends devoting particular attention to special groups in the population and establishing short and simple procedures. The system should also be accessible from the standpoint of visibility and proximity. Finally, it should promote equality of treatment, non-discrimination and measures to protect personal privacy. Many special data also exist on the number of candidates and successful candidates in the various ministry programmes. A similar item is a survey of organisations that are potential users of certificates of the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports.

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