

REFINE

**Vocational Training
REPORT
April 2005
English version**

**(This is an update of the
report of November 2004)**

REFINE

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

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1. Introduction

The context

The accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) is gaining territory in Europe. Some countries, for example, Norway, France or Finland are already at the point of standing back and reviewing their practice and sharing their experience. Other countries, rather hesitant until now about the recognition of informal learning, have begun to think about it. A strong indicator of this is Germany, a country proud of its strong tradition of the learning in a “dual system” and rather hesitant about APEL, will undertake in 2005 within the framework of the CEDEFOP a study visit entitled « Definition and recognition of informally acquired skills » !¹

As a result of the TRANSFINE, project, REFINE aims to contribute to the creation of a common methodological framework for the recognition of the non-formal and informal learning. The sub-group « vocational training » is focusing its work on the recognition of professional and vocational skills acquired in non formal and informal conditions by vocational training providers.

This preliminary report is based on the feedback available in October 2004 and updated in April 2005

The methodological choice

In order to allow each partner to contribute to the proposal of the methodological framework, independently from its experience level with the APEL, we have chosen a « bottom-up » methodology: the partners test existing tools² with the candidates, and record the results on a specially designed form (candidate form).

Users, candidates and testers can speak. Their comments will serve as a base for the elaboration of our proposals about a common framework of tools for the recognition of the of experiential learning.

2. The 2004 – 2005 issues

Towards a shared language and common terminology

One of the lessons from the TRANSFINE meeting in Brno in 2003 consisted in accepting and understanding the difference as a source of mutual enrichment. Rather than lamenting the absence of a common language and shared terminology, it is more appropriate interesting to take the opportunity to explain one's own practices and the underlying concepts to the partners during our meetings. The challenge: to make progress towards a common terminology and understanding through the sharing of experience around the testing of existing tools.

Assessing the existing tools

Language Portfolio, EuroCV and Diploma Supplement are tools for with the education system, and were not designed for the purpose of APEL. Insofar as the design of a future methodological framework must be based on data coming from experimentation in the field, we take as our starting point existing available instrumentation. Our objective is to gather for each tool an exploitable number of evaluations (comments, improvement suggestions from candidates and testers), in order to assess the usefulness of the tools in the APEL framework.

¹ Catalogue CEDEFOP Study Visits, page 20

² Language Portfolio, EuroCV, Diploma Supplement, in some cases tools peculiar to each country or organisation.

A certain number of partners have chosen not to test European tools, but their own tools. We will integrate their results by taking into account the design of the tool.

Romania opted for « Dialang », a level test for 14 European languages, developed with the support from the European Commission, and available free online³ This choice of a level test can seem surprising, but it leads to a very interesting reflexion: could we imagine *European* online auto-assessment tools for other vocational skills?

Analysis and synthesis of the data

The analysis of the feedback on the testing and the reports from those who participated in the work groups will promote the development of well grounded proposals. These proposals will be developed during 2005 and will be presented at Rome.

3. Common Tools – the results

Diploma supplement : « In a lifelong learning course, there is no final test ! »⁴

We have the feedback from two candidates (Italy) who have tested the diploma supplement. Although the very low number of candidates does not allow any firm conclusion, we can assume that this tool, designed to improve the legibility of the diplomas and others certifications, will not be used in the framework for APEL. The reference to the formal scope (studies level) seems to be a brake on the expression of informal « acquis » which are often hardly comparable with a study level. As one of the candidates said, the main problem of the diploma supplement is the fact that « in a lifelong learning course, there is no final test. » The question is could we and/or should we develop an equivalent record based on the learning acquired in no-formal and informal situations.

The European CV : « It's nice to see the whole person in one document »⁵

Twenty-two candidates (Italy, Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland) tested the EuroCV in vocational training institutions. The first key point to note is the absence of local specificities; the points raised were common to all the countries.

Among the positive aspects, the candidates stress that the professional experience appear before education and training. The tool is perceived as being very comprehensive. Taking into account personal and organizational skills (« the candidate has to think about life experience ») is considered as interesting, even if these headings seem to be too complex (« difficult without a tutor or further explanation »).

Testers noticed that the tool is difficult, even impossible to complete by persons with a low level of qualification (« people without good skills »). A Greek study suggests that being trained at job search techniques (including writing a CV) greatly improved the ease with which the candidates completed the CV and the quality of the finished CV⁶.

Another tester lamented the absence of space designed for the expression of ethical values, information that can be interesting in the scope of an application to an NGO.

³ www.dialang.org

⁴ words from a candidate

⁵ words from a candidate

⁶ document from « Ergon kek »

As for the usefulness for the employer, the opinions were divided. Some thought that, thanks to the EuroCV, employers have a very complete picture of the candidate's skills, while others thought that the CV is too long. They often suggested the addition of diplomas and certificates.

The European language portfolio: « Not always simple to see the object of the exercise »⁷

The European language portfolio did not arouse particular enthusiasm among the candidates. Even if they acknowledged that the informal learning of languages is taken into account, other very « academic » references such as the number of books read (with author and number of pages...) irritated the candidates, all students of vocational training and in principle familiar with self assessment.

The document was viewed as too long (the language passport as well), not suitable for use in job searching, and somewhat « elitist ».

4. The other tools

Dialang : « Good for self assessment »⁸.

Dialang is a diagnosis test whose main purpose is to inform the learners about their level in one of the 14 languages proposed by the test. It can help in choosing which language exam the candidate is most likely to succeed ; it also includes a section on « self assessment ».

On the whole, the candidates considered that it is a useful tool in several ways: apart from its usefulness in testing the level, it was seen as a source of motivation (the test gives a feed back including advice) and comprehensive. However, they regretted that the test does not give rise to any certificate. In addition, the use of computers may be difficult for a target group that is not familiar with the use of ICT and, depending on the equipment, the connexion delays can be long.

The Finnish skills portfolios : « Providing a deeper and wider picture than the traditional CV »

« The portfolio is like a frame of a picture in which the person draws a picture about his/her skills and knowledge. It is his/her collection of different kinds of documents which he/she believes are valuable and in which he/she has invested part of himself/herself and his/her capabilities. From outside the portfolio may look variable; it may be a cardboard box, a briefcase, cd-rom etc. The appearance isn't important: the production, selection and evaluation process is »⁹.

Finland seems to prefer portfolios: the individual's awareness of his own skills through a work around a compendium (see also the work done by Lauri Savasaari on the « Recreational Activity Study Book system in Finland »)¹⁰.

The compendium, for demonstrating professional/vocational or transversal skills (for example organisational skills), is the basic work, designed to facilitate self assessment, the ability to present his/her skills during a job interview and to adopt a developmental, formative approach.

We do not have precise information about the way in which this compendium is used, although it appears to be somewhat formal, as does as the expected output. JAKK has led a project with using this tool with rural developers.

⁷ words from a candidate

⁸ words from a candidate

⁹ document sent by Jari Alanko following our request to publish information in English about the portfolio.

¹⁰ article sent by Lauri Savasaari.

Czech Republic : questionnaire

The report from the vocational training sector in CZ is still awaited.

England : ethical guidelines for APEL

A comparison of the ethical guidelines with other documents such as guides for advice and guidance (Université de Brest, AFPA, others ?) will be interesting to do during the second year of the project.

Scotland : APEL guide

It will be interesting in the second year to take on board the Scottish concepts of formative recognition and summative recognition..

5. Conclusion

The materials available in April 2005 are very heterogeneous: assessments of European tools open to all the partners, assessments of inaccessible tools for the moment, assessment of an ethical guide.....

However, reading the documents prompts some ideas for consideration in 2005:

- **Open tools:** we note that the existing tools are not adapted for a public with a low qualification level. Academic language, academic references, learned terminology are not very encouraging for a large part of the European population. Insofar as lifelong learning should not be reserved for an elite, tools should be rethought in order to “democratize” them. Any future tool must be available accessible to the whole of the working population.
- **Awareness of skills:** it seems that the construction of a common framework for APEL must be preceded by a common work around the ability of individuals to become aware of their skills *and* to be able to articulate them. An exchange with the Finnish partners seems promising. Maybe a European tool should focus on the development of that ability?
- **Advice and guidance:** insofar as the development of the candidates’ awareness of their own know-how and their strengths and weaknesses cannot be done alone (generally, it is not the case), it is necessary to integrate into our reflections the role of advice and guidance, its aims and its contents.
- **Education and self-assessment:** self-assessment is not part of the culture in most of the partner countries. Lifelong learning depends, among other things, on that ability. Maybe an exchange should be considered between the world of adult training (including the universities), the third sector/voluntary world and the world of formal education around this subject?