

## **Evaluation of the last Meeting of Refine**

**(16 - 19 November 2005, LUMSA University Rome, Italy)**

The last meeting of Refine Project included 52 participants of the different projects. This showed that the members of the project were highly interested in the result, the experience of the participants and the continuation of networking.

The session was structured as following:

First there was a general discussion on VALIDPASS on the basis of a paper of Refine (REcognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education) under the aspect of a first draft of a final proposal to the European Commission.

There were working groups on special topics (see programme) and there was a general discussion at the end of the meeting, including the remarks of the evaluator.

To remember the target of Refine was:

1. Test the tools of EUROPASS in a real situation.
2. Make a proposal (VALIDPASS) to the EU for the use of these tools.

### **1. Testing the tools of EUROPASS in a real situation:**

The reports of the coordinators are mostly already existent and the basis for target No 2. Experiences of all kind with the existing tools of EUROPASS have been put down in these reports. Some tools have proved to be very relevant, some could be changed and other tools should be added. In any case, these reports are the bones for the proposal VALIDPASS. Open questions have been selected out of the reports and analyzed by the coordinator Pat Davies, and included in the first draft of the recommendations.

### **2. Making a proposal (VALIDPASS) to the EU for the use of these tools.**

VALIDPASS is somehow the sum of all activities of Refine members, shown in the first draft for the European Union.

Along the first draft Pat Davies gave a summary of the results of Refine which were transported into the recommendation.

The most important issues, which have been pointed out by nearly all reports:

1. The first priority was seen in the necessity of advice and guidance. The implementation can differ from the specific situation or in other words who is the person you are advising. Besides the personal approach, another possibility could be advice in form of short training programmes, etc.
2. All the instruments like counselling and advice have to be varied according to the target group and the goal of flexibility and adaptability. Not everybody gets everything, there has to be a selection of tools, a change of language and the kind of questions depending on the

target group. It is important to find out which documents are the most appropriate for which candidate. The existing EUROPASS tools are of course the most relevant and generally accepted. But not in all cases are they fulfilling the necessary requirements based on the experiences of the Refine project.

The new VALIDPASS tools fill in the gap. But they are seen as part of the process and as some kind of step one in a modular structure in which you can individually decide what is useful in a specific case. This first step could give people confidence to go to the next step and finally claim for credit or diploma or access to Higher Education, etc.

3. Principles and a code of conduct have to be developed. Some ideas were presented from the UK on the topic of Ethical guidelines and common principles.

### **3. Some aspects on the VALIDPASS tools**

- EUROPASS lacks a forward looking perspective which is seen as absolutely necessary in the whole process. The key question is to find out the reason why a person applies for validation at all.
- It has to be pointed out that learning and the analysis of learning is going to be validated, not the experience.
- It was an open question whether learning in paid professional work or voluntary activity should be looked at differently or in the same way. Is there any difference? Or should you look at it in a holistic way, i.e. that you cannot separate where you learn either professional, individual or in volunteer dimension. In the end, all learning has to be combined and looked at. Maybe there are some political issues which are relevant for this question, e.g. concerning acceptance on the labour market.

### **4. Comments of the Sectors**

Following the introduction and discussion of the first draft there were three statements prepared from the different sectors.

#### **1. The vocational Sector**

- The representative of the vocational sector agreed to the results of Refine in general as shown in the first draft, especially the necessity of advice and guidance.
- They pointed out a special problem in this sector. Low qualified jobseekers and long unemployed need a special help to identify their skills.
- In the vocational sector they also found a strong intercultural difference between their candidates. There was often the question where to draw the line between public and private interpretation of skills. It must be the choice of the candidate what to declare.

#### **2. The youth and voluntary sector**

- The representative of the sector also agreed to the results of the project as a whole in general and added the intercultural aspect of one of great importance. Intercultural

diversity is different to express and to value. In any case, it is much more than just language competence. It was an open question if one could develop common tools to value intercultural competence.

- The need of more mobility was in general accepted, but there was an urgent need to promote more mobility in this sector.
- Youth leaders for example are doing highly professional work today, though it is registered under the category of voluntary work.

### 3. Adult Education

- The representative of adult education pointed out that the need of more guidance is absolutely necessary in this area, because of the diversity in target groups, the very different backgrounds of applicants and different levels of education.
- The existing tools are in their opinion too much dedicated to employability. There is a greater need for developing more self-esteem and confidence.
- In general, in adult education it was a big problem to analyze experience and connect it with learning.
- The sector had a lack of feedback from adult education institutions in the process of the project. The reason could be that it is sometimes not clearly defined what an adult education organisation is. Is it more vocational or NGO? There are many different labels and contexts which prevent a clear profile.

## **5. General Discussion**

In the general discussion open questions arose to the represented paper as well as to the reports of the sectors.

- One of the difficulties of the final proposal was seen in the problem that similar questions give different answers, e.g. depending on the target group.
- EUROPASS is an individual portfolio and at the same time an official document. Which function can VALIDPASS have in this context? Probably you need another strategy, i.e. it has to be accepted officially in context to EUROPASS. At the same moment, it can help people to prepare documents for EUROPASS and open doors.
- VALIDPASS has to be integrated into the European qualification framework (EQF). EQF already has the task of validating formal and informal learning, VALIDPASS could offer additional tools.
- It has to be integrated into the policy of the European Commission on “Key Competences in Lifelong Learning”. In this context, the question was discussed in how far EUROPASS – hopefully in future in connection with VALIDPASS – has not only in an economic, but also a social integration and development perspective.

The session ended with a reflection of the question “What are your dreams?” and there were hopes like:

- Everybody should have the chance of getting all information.
- To find ways to select reliable skills for the validation process.
- To have a formal system of validation we can rely on.

## **6. Working groups**

Some impressions of visits to five working groups:

### 1. Working Group “With a little help from my friends”

A Norwegian colleague was introducing the working group, pointing out that there is hardly any structure on advice and guiding concerning RPL, so at the moment there main goal is to discuss self-awareness and transfer of learning before there will be a reliable structure.

*Comment:* What has really happened in Europe up to now? Maybe the experiences in England and France are the exceptions and the rest of Europe is still in the development procedure.

### 2. Working Group “Self-Evaluation”

The Introduction of this working group, led by an adult educator, began with an adult education method. She asked a participant of the working group to tell a story. The storyteller had to point out the skills which were developed and possible difficulties. The participants of the working group identified as well skills developed in the story and added skills which the storyteller had not identified as such.

*Comment:* We as participants of this conference, why shouldn't we also be treated as learners, confronted with attractive methods...

### 3. Working Group “Advice and Guidance”

In contrast to the first working group, we were confronted with good practice of advice and guidance in the French context, which is clearly developed very sophisticated. There were a lot of questions on technical matters like duration of the process, prices, the function of the jury, the average age of the ‘client’, the average age is forty and there are men than women applying.

*Comment:* As there were quite a number of English experts in the working group, we found out and they admitted that they did not know very much about the French system....

### 4. Working Group “National Guidelines”

This was a report of the Scottish model, which differs from the English model and was quite difficult for a continental participant to understand. Some perspectives: New universities are more interested in the APEL-process; Postgraduate programmes are easier to handle, because they underlie the regular quality assurance process, so the APEL-process is in accordance with the mainstream quality assurance process.

*Comment:* In working group three and four, two models were presented from countries which are very advanced in the APEL-process. It would have been interesting to hear where there is common ground and where and how and why they differ.

#### 5. Working Group “Culture and Practice”

Is there a single glossary in Europe for meanings or have different countries different meanings for the same word or do countries not even have the word?

For example Estonia does not have the word ‘validation’. There was a very lively discussion on definitions, definitions which were taken from the Collins English Dictionary or from the CEDEFOP Glossary. Do we all agree? Or is the reality that the legal framework gives the definition and response to the meaning? What relationship is there between language – meaning of words – and European policy. All participants of the working group agreed that we should have a common definition, but the discussion is a very old one and progress is very slow.

*Comment:* There is still a long way to go to find a common definition of words and meanings we will use in the context of APEL – And this area is only a tiny, tiny part of understanding in united Europe.

#### 7. Some personal, final comments

The draft as a result of the reports of the working groups was an excellent overview of the topic, giving an answer – sometimes in form of questions – to many questions. The time for discussion was extremely short and though the general agreement to the draft was great, it would have been safer for the coordinator to have a more detailed discussion. It would certainly be helpful to send comments still later on to be considered for the draft.

The working groups gave an overview on different systems on the one hand, and on the other hand they discussed specific problems. That was certainly very interesting, but I am not sure in how far it supported positions in the draft and how the result of the working groups can be included.

But as it was already said in Kaunas, this was a very ambitious project and to tell you the truth, I never expected a result as good as it has been presented on the basis of the reports.

I regret that I could not really do a more profound evaluation. I would have liked to put questions on the process and on learning of the participants of the project. What have they learned from one another? How have they learned? What was the learning outcome of the transnational cooperation and what the main problems?

Sorry, my comment is very modest, but congratulations to the outcome and hopefully VALIDPASS will become reality in the European education area to fulfil the goal: Making learning visible!