Introduction

VPL is about empowerment, employability and lifelong learning
Ruud Duvekot, Bénédicte Halba, Kirsten Aagaard, Sergij Gabršček & Jane Murray

People are constantly learning everywhere and at all times. Not a single day goes by for everybody without – consciously or unconsciously - acquiring additional skills, knowledge and/or competences. For people outside the initial education and training system, adults in particular, it is very likely that this learning, taking place at home, at the workplace, at school or university, while volunteering, or elsewhere, is more important, relevant and significant than the kind of learning that occurs in formal settings. Non-formal and informal learning – learning that takes place outside of the formal education and training institutions – can be a rich source of human capital development. Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) – especially of non-formal and informal learning outcomes - makes this human capital more visible and more valuable to both the involved persons as well as to society at large. It's not a question of whether this role can be filled-in by the systematics of VPL, it's more a matter of when

The rise of VPL within lifelong learning policy
Already before the 1990s many initiatives across the globe focused on developing and implementing VPL-enhanced lifelong learning policies for various social and economic perspectives. These initiatives primarily aimed at linking learning needs to national qualification systems. The 1990s however saw a major change in this kind of policy-making. The *Maastricht Treaty* of 1992 (Maastricht Treaty, 1992) set the tone for this change. It arranged education to be more than a national issue. It provided space for the development of European education policy aiming at assisting the development of European citizenship, knowledge exchange within the European (vocational) education and training and integrated education policy for supporting social and cultural goals. The European Union was to play from that moment on an active, supranational role in education policy by providing exchange programs and opportunities to study abroad, developing innovative educational projects and including a framework for general issues, such as the issue of international recognition of (prior) qualifications. This final issue was to be the spring board for the policies on VPL.
This treaty wasn't however yet the major breakthrough towards a more integrative interpretation of the lifelong learning concept. This only occurred in 1994 by widening the focus on lifelong learning towards the so-called human dimension of learning by the European Round Table of Industrialists. They called for lifelong learning not to be treated anymore as 'a poor child in the education chain' but rather as a shared responsibility between individuals, employers and the government. Both employers as well as governments were encouraged to create the necessary, sustainable framework for the

enlarging the availability of adult education programs, a reliable system for transferring credits between institutes of learning and a multi-faceted cooperation between learning institutions, business and local authorities to facilitate access to adult education (ERT, 1994).

At European level this challenge was answered with the *White Paper on education and training* (EU, 1995a). It provided a contribution by acknowledging - amongst others – the value of acquiring competences acquired in non-formal and informal situations. These competences were deemed essential for optimal performance on the labour market and in social functions and most of all in favour of individual entitlement of learning as was announced for 1996 to be the European Year of Lifelong Learning: *"The aim is the promotion of personal development and sense of initiative of individuals, their integration into working life and society, their participation in the democratic decision-making process and their ability to adapt to economic, technological and social change"* (EU, 1995b, p.2).

The change of mood in favour of linking economics with social approaches to lifelong learning, was affected by a strong linkage with work-based learning outcomes. UNESCO, therefore, continued to adhere to its broader view of lifelong learning. In 1996 the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century chaired by Jacques Delors was installed. This commission published in 1996 its report 'Learning: The Treasure Within'. It brought the social approach again to the fore. Lifelong learning was defined "*as the adaptation to changes in technology and as the continuous process of forming whole human beings -their knowledge and aptitudes , as well as the critical faculty and the ability to act . [-] Learning Throughout Life is a continuous process for each human being and adapting or adding to his or her knowledge and skills, and his or judgment and capacities for action"* (Delors 1996, pp. 21-22). The emphasis was clearly tuned (again) at the autonomous development of the individual.

Delors cum suis based their views on education in general and their focus on the continuously developing individual in particular on a future scenario in which education was to be based on four principles (ibidem, pp. 86-97):
- *Learning to know* - mastering learning tools rather than acquisition of structured knowledge.
- *Learning to do* - equipping people for the types of work needed now and in the future including innovation and adaptation of learning to future work environments.
- *Learning to live together , and with others* - peacefully resolving conflict, discovering other people and their cultures, fostering community capability, individual competence and capacity, economic resilience, and social inclusion.
- *Learning to be* - education contributing to a person 's complete development: mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality.

The OECD embraced the idea of lifelong learning as the strategy for the 21st century. In 1996, the OECD education ministers agreed to develop strategies for 'lifelong learning

for all', based on the concept of learning from the cradle to the grave (OECD, 1996). This concept included formal, non-formal, and informal learning:

- Formal learning is always organised and structured, and has learning objectives. From the learner's standpoint, it is always intentional.
- Informal learning is never organised, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint. Often it is referred to as learning by experience. The idea is that the simple fact of existing, constantly exposes the individual to learning situations, at work, at home or during leisure time for instance. It typically does not lead to certification.
- Non-formal learning is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) but with an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view.

The general acceptance of 'Learning: the treasure within' in these years should be seen against the background of the favourable development of the global economy. What UNESCO, European Union, OECD and others envisaged was their concern about the global economy, social inclusion and individual learning with the objectives of making sure that as many people as possible would be able to participate and perform accordingly to the standards of learning in modern society.

From the 1990s to the present age
The world of the 1990s isn't of course comparable with the present age but VPL as a supportive instrument for the citizen as well as for realizing an open learning society has the power to bring VPL-enhanced lifelong learning strategies closer to a practical reality. A lot of effort still has to be made for this approach to be fulfilled. Least of all worries is convincing governments and policy makers on national and international levels on the potential benefits of VPL-steered lifelong learning policies. The biggest challenge is to convince the other stakeholders embedded in the practicalities of learning within sectors, organisations, institutes, etc. to fill in their responsibility in the VPL-process; this goes for employers, trade unions, learning providers and – above all – for the citizens themselves. The agenda for this is already set in various policy programmes of international and national organisations:

- the Europe 2020 Strategy with its focus on building a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy, delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. VPL is embedded in the 'flagships initiatives'. This importance of making the skills and competences gained through life and work experience visible was confirmed in 2012 in a broad public consultation (EC, 2012).
- The OECD Skills Strategy (OECD, 2012) in which 'validation-principles' are crucial for achieving the goals of the programme of filling in the need for skills and competences on the labour market.
- ILO's G20 Training Strategy with a validation-focus in the holistic approach to skills development of wage work or self-employment (ILO, 2010).

- UNESCO Guidelines for Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (UIL, 2012).
- *The Council Recommendation on The Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning* (CEU, 2012) recommending all Member States to have in place, no later than in 2018, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to obtain a full or part qualification on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences.
- The *Education for All Initiative* aiming at bringing the benefits of education to "every citizen in every society" (EFA). In order to realize this aim, a broad coalition of national governments, civil society groups, UNESCO and the World Bank committed themselves to achieving specific education goals.
- The many national and regional initiatives that are apprent across the world in practices of education, training, social and citizenship activities, employability, human resources development and learning as personal development and enjoyability (Singh and Duvekot, 2013; EU Inventory, 2010 & (forthcoming) 2014).

This growing reality can be directly and indirectly supported by (1) implementing the VPL-process and (2) the open mind that VPL brings about by focusing on learning outcomes acquired in formal, infromal and non-formal settings. VPL therewith offers a broad 'window of opportunities' by opening up (lifelong) learning opportunities for all, as a systematic for both reflective purposes aiming at raising awareness and emnpowerment of citizins as well as summative and formative objectives. Since learning is ever more connected to social success in this time of economic difficulties, the focus on VPL as a feature of the changing learning culture in Europe focuses on facilitating self-efficacy and competence-based & outcome-steered learning.

The project "Access to Lifelong Learning in Higher Education (ALLinHE)"
It was precisely the above mentioned need for a focus on VPL that was problematised in the project *Access to Lifelong Learning in Higher Education (ALLinHE)* in the period 2010-2014. The project ALLinHE aimed at turning VPL into a practical access point to open the doors of higher education indiscriminately to any learner. By turning existing VPL-methodology into a multi-targeted VPL-approach not only the effectiveness of VPL was expected to be innovated but also the orientation of higher education (HE) - customer-orientation, lifelong learning culture, professionalising staff - to offering learning opportunities for all, to be stimulated.

The project was built on the experiences of universities and higher education institutions to transform into lifelong learning institutions. This was developed in a diversity of local/national realities, related to different national learning cultures in Europe and in South Korea. In this diversity of experiences the project aimed at contributing to the goals of implementing a sustainable competence-based learning culture in which national qualification frameworks can interact with learner centred learning and validation practices for underrepresented and non-traditional target groups.

Furthermore, there was an expected link with strategies for human resources development in which VPL could also be used to match the need for formative development of competences in the contexts of work and volunteering.

The main questions that the project addressed were:
a. How to develop a strategy and a model for a multi-targeted VPL-approach as an effective instrument for facilitating and including underrepresented groups and non-traditional learners as students in higher education?
b. How to create a stimulus for realisation and strengthening innovative lifelong learning strategies in higher education for the sake of ALL in(clusive) HE? Does this mean HE with 'a dynamic VPL-steered open-door policy, an innovative programme for professionalising HE-staff in managing open, customer-steered and flexible HE and – last but not least – enhance an open European learning area?

The project's aim was therefore to create a learner centred and multi-targeted VPL-approach, opening up personalised, formative as well as summative perspectives on HE-levels. The target groups selected in each country differed with respect to national strategies and needs to integrate these groups in the higher educational institutions. In this way a broad range of target group practices provided a broad reservoir of 'best-practices' to draw conclusions on.
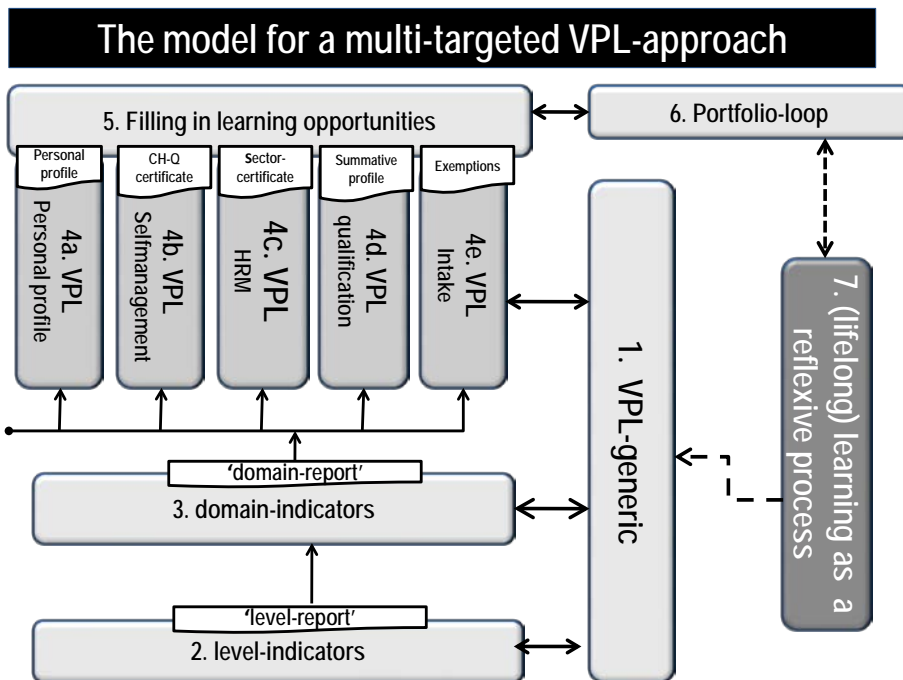
The multi-targeted VPL-approach
When designing a model for VPL addressing responsibilities of individual, organisation and university, the question arises how to link the learning needs of the individual with the (best) available learning facilities of the learning system and/or with the learning demand from the labour system. The premise is that VPL can serve as this linking-pin by focusing on the diversity of the learning goals of the individual:
a. Economically aiming at getting and/or keeping a job (employability),
b. Socially, aiming at motivation, reintegration, self-management of competencies and personal development (empowerment),
c. Educationally, aiming at qualification, updating, upgrading, portfolio-enrichment by means of creating output-oriented standards (learning outcomes),
d. For citizenship, aiming at social activation, voluntary activities, social awareness & reintegration and citizenship (activating citizenship),

The framework presented below, gives the floor to VPL as such a multi-targeted linking-pin. It shows the theoretically possible modes of VPL that are applicable between the three primary actors in the process of lifelong learning. These modes or connections mainly occur in 'dialogues' between two of the three stakeholders; sometimes however a 'trialogue' between all three is possible or necessary to communicate on the specificities of a (lifelong) learning strategy.
All stakeholders in these 'dia- or trialogues' can optimize their learning-needs, -facilities and/or –goals, depending on the nature of the individual's need for learning (or development). In this resulting variety of approaches an equal variety in forms of mutual

cooperation occurs. The framework represents therewith an integrated, multi-targeted approach to creating lifelong learning opportunities for all. The different validation-modes in the framework aim at linking any desired potential learning effect of the individual to tailor-made learning facilities in close relation with the given context and state of the art in someone's personal development process.

The model for a multi-targeted VPL-approach

5. Filling in learning opportunities

6. Portfolio-loop

Personal profile	CH-Q certificate	Sector-certificate	Summative profile	Exemptions

4a. VPL Personal profile

4b. VPL Selfmanagement

4c. VPL HRM

4d. VPL qualification

4e. VPL Intake

1. VPL-generic

7. (lifelong) learning as a reflexive process

'domain-report'

3. domain-indicators

'level-report'

2. level-indicators

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The framework shows itself in an integrated approach in seven steps:

1. **VPL-generic** documents, organises, ranks and compares existing standards from learning (qualifications or vocational standards) and working (occupational standards) in a competence-databank.
2. The second step is about **level-indicators**. Scanning persons for their potential in general on a vocational education (VET)- or higher education (HE)-level. This step consists of a cognitive self-assessment. The questions are based on generic level-descriptors. Output is a general overview of the (potential) personal, cognitive level.
3. The next step on **domain/sector-indicators** builds on the preceding step. It links persons to more specific learning-domains and adds sectoral perspectives. The questions are based on qualification-descriptors and labour-market (sector) descriptors. Output is an overview of the personal potential measured against learning-domains & sectors.
4. The actual validation-modes are operationalized in the fourth step:

a. ***VPL-personal*** is a divergent approach in two different modes; both modes are about making transparent the totality of someone's learning outcomes:

    i. The mode 4a is a personalised programme for making up one's portfolio. Recognition and documentation of all learning outcomes (so far) is at stake here. The desired effect is the empowerment of the individual, in the sense of a strong notion of self-awareness and personal value in relation to a pallet of social opportunities to be engaged in.

    ii. The mode 4b is a group training-module for self-management of competences. This training is contextualised, depending on the background of the group members. Output is a certified personal portfolio with a personal action plan. The empowerment of the individual is here also at the heart of the group-process. The possible next steps to be taken by the individual are however reflected upon by the other group members, which results in a stronger activation of taking up personal, social opportunities than in form 4a.

b. ***Formative VPL*** is a convergent approach; it's about making transparent where someone stands when measured against a formative standard (HRM-standard; workbased/sectoral). Output is a certified professional report on work-related learning outcomes with an advice for further learning steps. If expected, an extra module for helping an organisation to formulate its function-profiles can be applicated; on the basis of these profiles the demand-articulation of an organisation can be 'negotiated' with the employees.

c. ***Summative VPL*** is a convergent approach in two different modes; both forms make transparent where someone stands when measured against a summative standard (VET-qualifications). This approach leads to an overview of the value of prior learning outcomes when someone chooses for a specific qualification:

    i. VPL for qualification in mode 4d is exploited as an independent assessment-procedure before one decides to enter a school or university in which the validation report can be accepted and can lead to a shortened course or programme.

    ii. VPL for intake in mode 4e takes place after the decision of subscribing to a course or programme has been made. It is exploited as an intake-procedure for the validation of all prior learning outcomes within the desired course or programme. In this mode VPL directly leads to exemptions.

5. **Follow-up**, or turning the output of one of the VPL-approaches into lifelong learning action. The actual learning is by definition flexible in form (classes, digital, work-embedded, etc), content (modular, integral) and environment (at home, at work, in university, dual, etc.). This action can, depending on the kind of VPL-approach chosen, be focused on:

- Personal competence development in a variety of learning opportunities for strengthening someone's performance in private life, work, citizenship, volunteering or a university-programme.
- Formative learning steps in a professional context. The sectoral or HRM-standard sets the goals for further learning outcomes. It can focus on updating or upgrading a qualification, applicable to the HRM-standard.

- Summative learning steps in a university-centred process. The aim is to get either a qualification or gain competences from a specific qualification programme.
6. The **portfolio-loop** is essential in determining the need for investment in "human capital". Successively (1) the learning goal in relation to the context is fixed, (2) the portfolio is taken as the basis for the steps to be taken, (3) this portfolio is validated, (4) the portfolio is than enriched with the outcomes of the recent learning trajectory and (5) finally the updated portfolio is taken as a fresh starting point for anticipating upcoming learning questions. The whole process of VPL-steered learning therewith begins and ends with the portfolio. This is called 'the portfolio-loop'.
7. The final stage in the framework is managing the dynamics of the portfolio for the sake of **reflexive learning**. The continuous process of portfolio-documentation, -validation and –enrichment is providing 'the fuel' for this self-management and leads to a pro-active attitude towards learning and personal development.

"VPL it is, once again!"
The present publication provides both answers to the project-questions as well as insight in the development of the multi-targeted VPL-approach for vulnerable groups in systems and in countries across the globe. As the companion to the 1st VPL Biennale in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (March 9-11, 2104), this book presents evidence-based case-studies and transnational studies and benchmarks for strengthening the application of validation of prior learning as part of lifelong learning strategies, for the benefit of all, in particular for those who are in danger of social exclusion. All contributions present their own story, showing the diversity of VPL and its contribution to implementing lifelong learning strategies in any given country and context. They either tell a more general story or a more specific one. The goal is to learn from this diversity.

In the 1st chapter, *Ruud Duvekot* presents a general framework for developing and implementing the systematics of Validation of Prior Learning in a given context. Nowadays, in the on-going transition to the learning society flexible, continuous and more adaptive learning is required to keep the citizen viable on today's labour market. Staying on top of this development is vital for all actors: individuals, trade unions, schools, universities, employers, legislative and regulatory bodies. Never before in history the individual - or the citizen - got the chance to gain so much control in steering one's career through learning as is the case in the learning society. It is the systematic of VPL that offers this 'window of opportunities' with its focus on opening up learning opportunities on people's own demand. This contribution seeks to answer the crucial question how to activate VPL as an effective instrument for linking competences and credits in lifelong learning that appeal to individual learners and the other stakeholders in learning and working contexts?

The chapter of *Per Andersson* discusses experiences as a basis for admission and particularly eligibility for higher education. The discussion is illustrated by examples from the case of Sweden, a country that has applied measures for widening access to higher

education since the 1970s. Particularly the focus is upon the 25:4 scheme, a measure that gave recognition to experience by granting basic eligibility mainly based on life and work experiences – 25 years of age and 4 years of work experiences were the main criteria for granting basic eligibility. The chapter also presents results from a survey among 25:4 applicants, a study which was focussing their experiences of application, admission, entering higher education, and drop-out or completion. The concepts of institutional, situational, and dispositional barriers towards participation are employed to discuss the results.

Hae Young Lee and *Young Sang Ko* provide insight in the learning culture of South Korea in which the further development of VPL could go well together with the present reforms in vocational (higher) qualifications systems. The gap in South Korea between the labour market and HE creates societal instability and unemployment and ironically, this enhances a skills mismatch that forces young people to seek more education and forces employers to invest more in job training for new recruits. The links amongst vocational (higher) education, the labour market and industry could be strengthened in South Korea. It is known that the learning culture of a country determines strongly how RPL/VPL is conceived and operated (Duvekot et al., 2005). The learning culture of South Korea is in this respect predominantly perceived as a model of social selection. Experts believe that the reform of vocational qualifications systems such as the National Competency Standards (NCS) and the National Qualification Framework might play a critical role in adopting VPL. However, with respect to this reform several issues require attention such as the modularisation of learning programmes/courses comparable to NCS, the development of learning outcomes-based curricula and assessment tools and the development of a transfer system amongst NCS-based academic programmes/courses and the Academic Credit Bank System.

Simona Sava, *Claudia Borca & Elena Danciu* state that the need for better access to higher education is widely argued in Europe. Different countries already introduced into their legislation the validation of prior learning outcomes (VPL) as a solution for widening access to different study programs, irrespective of their deliverance at bachelor, master or doctorate level. This contribution discusses how such options can be applied to adult learning professionals (ALPs), in order to provide better access to master levels in countries where such regulation does not yet exists. Different experiences and solutions developed in recent years in this respect are presented.

Antra Carlsen presents in chapter 5 the experience of the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) with networking in adult education as a means of addressing challenges in the Nordic region. The Nordic cooperation and the role of the Nordic Expert Network on Validation within this cooperation is described. This Expert Network is an excellent way of pooling of resources and producing added value to national development work. The Network has developed Nordic recommendations on VPL for decision makers, and has been working with the issues of quality-assurance and competence development in validation. The NVL sets an example for transnational cooperation and development of

policies and instrumentation for lifelong learning ánd VPL that is beneficial to the participating countries. It also creates synergy with other countries through its affiliation with the European Union and other political entities.

Madhu Singh's contribution has two main purposes: to examine the progress made in member states in terms of the *UNESCO Guidelines for the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning* (UIL, 2012) and to highlight some key recommendations for education systems, emerging from the country analysis. The title of her contribution links to the 'Faure Report' of 1972 that defined 'the learning society' as one in which learning is valued by all members of society, in which stakeholders invest in recognising and developing human learning potential and everyone regards people's non-formal and informal learning as a cornerstone of lifelong learning strategies. Faure argued that the educational system would need complete overhauling if the learning society was to be reached. It's in this context where Singh reflects on the development of VPL-systematics, or in UNESCO-terms 'the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning (RVA)'. She analyses the countries where mechanisms for RVA are a introduced as part of wider education reforms. These reforms typically seek to make education and training better reduce the education-job gap but also make lifelong learning a real possibility for individuals.

The article of *Jane Murray* focuses on a UK perspective regarding validated prior learning (VPL) as an instrument for access to Higher Education by two target groups identified as marginalised within European and UK discourses. The selected groups are (i) people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and (ii) people aged 50-plus. Drawing on data compiled and analysed as part of the ALLinHE-project, the chapter opens with a consideration of the European and UK contexts in regard to VPL. Discussion then turns to characteristics of the two selected groups before moving to focus on VPL processes at macro-, meso- and micro-levels in the UK. The conclusion draws together the UK findings in regard to the two selected groups to posit that a varied picture of VPL supporting Access to HE in the UK exists, influenced by an asymmetric power relationship between HEIs and individual citizens, with HEIs the hegemonic partner.

Furio Bednarz and *Giovanna Bednarz* draw on the results of the piloting of the *AllinHE* Model in Switzerland. After the contextualization of VPL practices in Switzerland, the authors shortly present the methodology and the sources of the study, identifying a specific coherent target group (qualified immigrant women), in order to look for convergences and peculiarities of VPL according to 3 diverse modes: VPL as a means for making competences and learning visible, VPL as a means for achieving a qualification, at least a first step in career and lifelong learning pathways, VPL as an entry door to Higher Education. The article takes in account how expectations, goals, processes and outcomes differ from one case to another, putting always learners' narratives at the center, reading institutional impact, strengths and criticalities under this lens, in order to give some relevant inputs for the design of an integrated multidimensional and multi-target VPL- model.

The contribution from *Aino Lepänjuuri and Eila Burns* describes an individual case story of a non-traditional mature (over 50 years) higher education (HE) student with a learning difficulty on his journey to have his skills and competencies recognised in Finnish HE. The process of validation of prior learning (VPL) in the Finnish HE context will be explained and some recommendations based on personal views will be suggested in order to ease and enhance life-long learning opportunities for all learners. Students' individual pro-activeness as well as guidance discussions and inclusive pedagogical practices seem to be key for a successful VPL process for non-traditional learners in Finnish HE.

The article of *Ellen Enggaard* and *Kirsten Aagaard* is based on two case studies investigating the potential of VPL processes in a social inclusion perspective and of VPL as a means to empower the individual. In the Danish context the right to have prior learning assessed is embedded in the educational system. Therefore the educational institutions play an important role in VPL, not only in assessing prior learning but also in dealing with the entire process of validating prior learning.
The first case study focuses on the individual's meeting with the educational system in his wish to gain formal acknowledgement of his prior learning. The authors focus on the potential and the challenges of this meeting and they discuss the role of the counseling in the process.
In the second case study they focus on the meeting between the individual, the work place and the educational institution. The case focuses on the potential and challenges of using VPL as a means in a strategic competence development project initiated by the work place. They discuss the problems and the conflicts of interest that might arise in such a project, where different stakeholders collaborate in a VPL process.
The focus is on meeting points in VPL processes, concerning the mutual process in understanding each other and – more specifically - the mutual interests and perspectives of the VPL-candidates, the educational system, and the workplace.

Bénédicte Halba argues that while Valuing Prior Learning (VPL) has become a major issue in Europe, in France the process of VPL already had and has a long history with the highlight of the 2002 Act dedicated to Social modernization. This act paved the way for assessing professional experiences understood on a broader sense than usual (paid, unpaid and voluntary activities). On the basis of three former projects implemented since 2003 (Vaeb, Va2el and Vab), she illustrates the progress in identifying, valuing and assessing different kinds of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. She emphasizes the added value of the ALLinHE project, focused on people with special needs (50+, migrants and disabled people). In the last part of her article she explains the support to be provided to migrants and councilors to enhance the process of VPL, based on a French experience, in the framework of workshops offered at the Cité des Métiers in Paris (2012-2013).

Deirdre Goggin, Irene Sheridan and *Tim Horgan* report on an interesting case of VPL in industry focused programmes. They argue that as organisations focus on economic indicators and return on investment, their approaches to learning and development opportunities are transformed. In a challenging, competitive climate there is a need to ensure that the long and short term benefits are maximised. The authors describe the experiences and issues raised for Cork Institute of Technology, a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Ireland in implementing programmes developed in partnership with industry which are mutually beneficial and maintain academic standards. It also addresses the enablers, challenges and barriers in customised course development.

Camilla Alfsen describes in het article how Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, has developed guidelines for validation of prior learning towards exemptions in higher education in Norway. The guidelines were developed in 2013 in cooperation with representatives from the sector.
Since 2001, adults in Norway without general admittance certification have a legal right to seek admission to University Colleges or Universities based on validation of prior learning. The law also states that students may seek exemption from parts of the study programme based on their prior learning. Validation of prior learning (VPL) for admittance to higher education is well established. Practice linked to validation towards exemptions in higher education is less well known however. Vox therefore conducted a national survey to find out how many institutions that use this kind of validation and how it is done.
Based on this survey, Vox developed guidelines for validation towards exemptions. This article presents highlights from the survey and the development of the guidelines.

The final contribution in this book from *Ruud Duvekot,* describes and analyses the way in which VPL as a tool for and a vision on lifelong learning strategies is introduced the historical and cultural setting of the Netherlands. While describing the features of development and implementation of VPL in the Dutch setting, not only the necessity to contextualize VPL in order to make it an effective approach ánd tool in lifelong learning strategies becomes apparent but also the way of doing this in a national learning culture with its specific systems, institutes and the critical success factors that prevail in this culture.
The Netherlands presents itself in this way as a case of VPL in itself since it's from the start geared at integrating VPL in running processes of national and sector systems for learning (education, training) and working (human resources management and development). Looking top-down at this integral approach, a good overview is provided of the many responsibilities that need to be filled-in for using VPL to its full potential. The bottom-up view however gives a different outlook on the real, practical issues for opening up VPL to the users themselves, both in qualitative as well as in quantitative terms. In other words, the case of VPL in the Netherlands from above looks fairly well organised. From the working floor of VPL however the image is quite different and raises a few fundamental questions related to opening up and making use of VPL.

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