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# Interim findings report up to March 2019

Lead partner: CIT

## Deliverable 5.1

September 2019

Dissemination Level: Public

## Contents

OVERVIEW .....	4
INTERIM REPORT .....	7
METHODOLOGY .....	9
EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS.....	9
COLLECTION OF DATA FOR THE PROJECT.....	11
1. DETAILED MAPPING PROCESS TO ESTABLISH EXISTING PRACTICES AND CONTEXTS .....	12
2. FIELD TRIALS CONSISTING OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SELECTED INTERVENTIONS .....	12
3. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION- COLLECTIVE CONSIDERATION OF POLICY IMPACTS .....	13
SUMMARY OF PARTNERS AND PLANNED ACTIVITY.....	14
BELGIUM (FLANDERS) .....	14
ICELAND.....	15
NORWAY.....	17
IRELAND.....	19
PLANNED INTERVENTIONS.....	20
TRANSVERSAL SKILLS.....	22
TOOLS TO BE TRIALLED IN THE VALIDATION .....	22
BELGIUM (FLANDERS) - TOOLS.....	22
ICELAND - TOOLS.....	25
NORWAY - TOOLS.....	29
IRELAND - TOOLS.....	29
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODULE .....	30
BELGIUM (FLANDERS) - TRAINING .....	32
ICELAND - TRAINING.....	32
NORWAY - TRAINING .....	34
FINDINGS TO DATE .....	35
DATA FROM NATIONAL ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS.....	35
BELGIUM (FLANDERS) – NAG FINDINGS.....	35
ICELAND – NAG FINDINGS .....	47
NORWAY – NAG FINDINGS.....	50
IRELAND – NAG FINDINGS .....	52
DATA FROM FRONTLINE AND GUIDANCE STAFF .....	53
BELGIUM (FLANDERS) – STAFF FINDINGS.....	54
ICELAND - STAFF FINDINGS.....	61
NORWAY – STAFF FINDINGS.....	64
IRELAND – STAFF FINDINGS .....	73
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS .....	77
APPENDIX 1: ROADMAP VPL INTAKE FILE PER CANDIDATE - FLANDERS .....	79
APPENDIX 2 : TOOL REPORTED ON BY THE AGENCIES FOR INTEGRATION AND CIVIC INTEGRATION: EU SKILLS PROFILING TOOL81	

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 VISKA Project Interventions .....	
Figure 2 Extent to which VISKA has contribute to enhanced cooperation (Belgian NAG) .....	38
Figure 3 Views on Continuation of the Network (Belgian NAG) .....	39
Figure 4 Views on the Value of Validation (Belgian NAG) .....	40
Figure 5 Views on the Importance of CPD for VPL Professionals (Belgian NAG) .....	43
Figure 6 Views on the impact of Policy (Belgian NAG) .....	
Figure 7 Views on the Responsibility for Policy (Belgian NAG) .....	
Figure 8 Views on factors to improve validation (Belgian Staff) (n=7) .....	55
Figure 9 Views on Factors to improve communication (Belgian Staff) .....	56
Figure 10 Views on the Potential impact of VISKA outputs (Belgian Staff) .....	57
Figure 11 Views on the potential benefits of the VISKA outputs (Belgian Staff) .....	58
Figure 12 Challenges Presented by Validation Tools (Belgian Staff) .....	59
Figure 13 Importance of CPD (Belgian Staff) .....	59
Figure 14 Views on Policy in Relation to Validation (Belgian Staff) .....	60
Figure 15 Role of Participant in VISKA Trials (Norwegian Staff) .....	65
Figure 16 Level of Satisfaction with Interpreter (Norwegian Staff) (n=13) .....	67
Figure 17 Views on the value of the VISKA outputs in Furthering Validation (more than one possible answer) (n=18) .....	70
Figure 18 Who would benefit most from criteria for transversal skills? (n=18) .....	70
Figure 19 Views on who would benefit most from Validation of Prior Learning CPD module. More than one answer possible (Norwegian Staff) (n=18) .....	70
Figure 20 Views on who would benefit most from Skills assessment tools? More than one answer possible (Norwegian Staff) (n=18) .....	71
Figure 21 Views on who would benefit most from Quality Assurance Guidelines? More than one answer possible (Norwegian Staff) (n=18) .....	71
Figure 22 Views on Importance of developing a tool for facilitating VPL (Norwegian Staff) (n=18) .....	72
Figure 23 Views on Importance of professional development for Frontline Staff in the validation of prior learning? (Norwegian Staff) (n=18) .....	72
Figure 24 Views on the extent to which existing Policy supports Validation (Norwegian Staff) (N=18) .....	73

Figure 25 Views on the importance of a tool to support validation (Irish Staff) .....	74
Figure 26 Views on the challenges associated with the integration of a tool into the validation process (Irish Staff).....	74
Figure 27 Views on whether the tool supported the learner in the Validation Process (Irish Staff).....	75
Figure 28 Views on how the tool supported the learner (Irish Staff) .....	75

#### LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 VISKA Project to Date in Numbers .....	6
Table 2 Development of Agreed Learning Outcomes for Staff CPD .....	32
Table 3 Summary of NAG Activity .....	35
Table 4 Summary of Interventions (Belgian NAG) .....	36
Table 5 Summary of views on Network (Belgian NAG).....	37
Table 6 Summary of Views on CPD (Belgian Nag).....	42
Table 7 Views on Policy (Belgian NAG) .....	44
Table 8 Numbers of Frontline Staff Involved in VISKA.....	53
Table 9 Views of Frontline Staff (Belgium, Iceland) .....	54

## Overview

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The Visible Skills of Adults (VSKA) is an Erasmus+ Key Action 3 Project, filed under the call priority theme of “Employment and Skills: validation of informal and non-formal learning in Education and Training.” The project partners aim to address the European policy priority of diminishing skills mismatch by making knowledge, skills and competences of adults more visible through consideration of the practice of validation of informal and non-formal learning and implementation of field trials.

In particular, VSKA addresses the need to make the skills of low-qualified adults, migrants<sup>1</sup>, asylum seekers<sup>2</sup> and refugees<sup>3</sup> more visible, in order to enhance their employability, improve their access to education and training offers and support active engagement in society. Along with unemployed and low-skilled or low-qualified adults in general, these target groups are currently at a disadvantage in European societies and could benefit from improved access to validation services and from more holistic validation arrangements.

The VSKA project plans to implement and evaluate five interventions, agreed by the partners and applied to the current processes (in the respective national contexts) for the validation of prior learning. The interventions have been developed and agreed with a view to making the knowledge, skills and competence of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and adults with low skills<sup>4</sup> levels, more visible. While there will be differences across the participating countries in relation to validation policies, practices and infrastructures; the focus of the project team will be to learn how the chosen interventions, when enacted, can bring about real change, for individuals and systems and to collate the learning from the project to contribute to a broader policy agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> The UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants defines a migrant worker as a "person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national". It is generally considered that the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned.

<sup>2</sup> Asylum seekers are people seeking protection as refugees, who are waiting for the authorities to decide on their applications. They are legally entitled to stay in the state until their application for protection is decided.

<sup>3</sup> According to the Convention and Protocol relating to the status of refugees (1951) 'A refugee ... is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.' (UNHCR, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the project proposal reference is made to low-skilled adults. The project team and indeed the nature of the project clearly recognises that this target group is likely to have many valuable skills and that it would be more appropriate to consider this group as those having low, or no, formal qualifications. This recognition is at the core of the project

The five planned interventions are as follows:

**Intervention 1:**

Developing and extending regional/national networks and partnerships to include policy makers, social partners and practitioners working on the validation of NFIL

**Intervention 2:**

Extending / adapting tools used in the validation of NFIL – includes digitisation as well as customisation for use with specific beneficiary groups and enhanced quality assurance of validation processes

**Intervention 3:**

Creating a common set of criteria for the documentation and assessment of transversal skills, able to be used with one or more adult learner groups

**Intervention 4:**

Training and / or Capacity building for guidance counsellors and other frontline staff working on the validation of NFIL, including with specific adult beneficiary groups

**Intervention 5:**

Improving access to and awareness of validation services and support among specific adult beneficiary groups

The research questions which these interventions and the analysis of the data arising therefrom will seek to answer are:

- 1. To what degree did partners achieve the implementation aim across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at local, regional and national and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?**
- 2. What outcomes were achieved for what groups, and to what degree?**
- 3. What factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?**
- 4. What policy-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?**

The work of the project team to date has included an indepth analysis of the context in each country in which the interventions will be undertaken. A summary of the activity to date in numbers is as follows:

TABLE 1 VISKA PROJECT TO DATE IN NUMBERS

<b>NUMBER OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN NATIONAL ADVISORY GROUPS</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>NUMBER OF NAG MEETINGS HELD:</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>NUMBER OF TOOLS TRIALLED IN THE VISKA PROJECT:</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>NUMBER OF LEARNERS INVOLVED IN THE TOOLS TRIALS</b>	<b>1,075</b>
<b>NUMBER OF GUIDANCE / FRONTLINE STAFF INVOLVED IN THE VISKA ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>118</b>

The findings presented in this report arise from and are aligned to the interventions agreed across the various project sites. The evaluation of the project is undertaken in a number of stages. The first report D2.2 represents the Pre-intervention state in each participating country and is available at: <http://viskaproject.eu>

This interim report D5.1 'Report on interim results of VISKA 3 country field trials' some of the on-going data collected during the course of the interventions which are phased a little differently in each of the countries and the deliverable 5.2 'comparative Report on final results of VISKA 3-country field trials' will provide the collation of the findings and will link the research results to the research questions.

## Interim report

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This interim report addresses the implementation of the field trials and the emerging data at this point in the project. The background to the project including the legislative, policy and practice landscape in each of the partner countries was detailed in D2.2 Literature Review and Country Needs Analysis<sup>5</sup>. D2.2 provided an overview of the discourse surrounding the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) at a European level as a basis for the project interventions, a synopsis of the appropriate European literature and was informed by the relevant local and national literature of the partner countries, namely Belgium-Flanders, Iceland, Ireland and Norway. A mapping process to establish existing practices and to guide an analysis of the individual country needs was undertaken. The responses of each of the country partners is summarised providing a vital baseline on existing processes, procedures and resources for the validation of prior learning and a structure through which to explore the lived experiences of key stakeholders. The important contextual information explored in D2.2 will support the evaluation of the interventions and their impacts. It is acknowledged that each partner country has individually identified the particular interventions with which they intend to engage, wholly or partially, as part of their planned field trials<sup>6</sup>, as well as the appropriate target population and size for their intervention focus where appropriate.

This Interim report provides a brief synopsis of the planned interventions in each country, the target group and the anticipated outcomes for the adult learners. It summarises the data collected to date in alignment with the five project interventions and provides some interim findings.

The report is structured in the following way;

Section 2 of this report provides a brief overview of the methodology and the structure of the research and evaluation processes in line with the original project proposal. Section 3 briefly describes the project partners and their overall planned activity in relation to the project aims and objectives. This section gives an insight into the variation both between partners and their planned activities. Section 4 provides a detail of each of the planned interventions and also seeks to illustrate the relationship between those interventions and the various project stakeholders. Where appropriate the different planned activities of each of the partners in relation to the different interventions is explained and quantified. Section 5

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<sup>5</sup> Available from the project website : <http://viskaproject.eu/results/>

<sup>6</sup> Field Trials will be undertaken in Belgium (Flanders), Iceland and Norway. In Ireland the key policymakers and stakeholders forming the National Advisory Group will provide feedback and contributions on the practices and policy implications of the project activities and findings and there will be some opportunity to collect information on the use of a Skills Profiling Tool which will feed into the overall project outputs and outcomes.



provides a flavour of the findings to date from the perspective of the national advisory groups, the frontline staff and the learners, respectful of the different contexts in which the information is provided by participant country. Finally, Section 6 summarises the next steps in the project.

## Methodology

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This section summarises the research and evaluation methodology and how the evaluation protocol is being supported and implemented in each participating country. The methodology is influenced by the complexity of the project aspirations and by the variation in the contexts for the project in practice. In summary the research and evaluation activities of the VISKA project had a number of objectives. It was intended to support the field trials or interventions by guiding the development of an evaluative framework, through both formative measures and a summative assessment of impacts. Another objective was to extract evidence and analysis that would contribute to future policy and practice progression in validation processes.

### Evaluation design and methods

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In developing the methodological framework for VISKA the realities within which the project would be undertaken were influential.

- The project context in each of the project partner countries including variations in:
  - Target cohort for the project intervention – influenced by the policy aim and environment
  - Target cohort size
  - Economic and social imperatives for the project
  - Legislative and regulatory framework for VPL
- The project partners in each country have varying roles and responsibilities in relation to VPL
- Partners have selected the interventions in which they will take part and which are relevant for their organisations and their setting
- The project resources are finite and are rightly focused on the implementation of the interventions and the identification of transferable policy implications rather than the research and evaluation.

In addition, the make-up of the project partnership and therefore the practical ability to undertake the implementation of the field trials changed during the course of the project which added to the complexity of the task.

As indicated in the proposal document it was not anticipated that an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation could be achieved, nor indeed might it be desirable in the circumstances. It was clear at the proposal stage that the identified target cohorts for the interventions would not be a

representative sample of the available population subgroup within the country but would be chosen with reference to economic imperatives, skills gaps, accessibility, willingness and coherence. Indeed, it was also clear that these imperatives might change during the course of the project.

A (modified) **Realist Evaluation** approach has been adopted which allows the contexts for the interventions enacted under the project to form a real background to the interpretation of the findings and the project focuses on the collection of rich information around the practice setting which contributes to the later extraction of value in the policy domain. This interplay between the contexts and the actions comes to the fore throughout the project. As propounded by Pawson and Tilley <sup>7</sup>—the question in Realist Evaluations is: *What works, for whom and in what circumstances?* Generally a realist programme theory specifies which mechanisms (changes or interventions in our case) will generate the outcomes and what features of the context will affect whether or not those mechanisms work to achieve a desired or anticipated result. Ideally, these elements (mechanisms, outcome, context) are reflected on at the evaluation design stage, as it enables to design the data collection to focus on testing the different elements of the programme theory.

In adopting the Realist Evaluation approach the VISKA project team considered the relevant aspects of the context such as the legislative and regulatory setting, the views of the stakeholders of the Viska project as well as conducting a pre-trial SWOT analysis across the five interventions. The interventions had been agreed by the project team at the proposal stage with a view to the desired outcomes and the research methods include collection of both qualitative and quantitative data sets. Realist evaluation provides a structure to explore change brought about by an intervention by referring to the actors who act and change (or not) a situation under specific conditions and under the influence of external events (including the intervention itself). In the VISKA project, the project partners are embedded in the social reality of their particular context and that influences how the intervention is implemented and how actors respond to it (or not). The project partnership adopts an open and collaborative approach which recognises the project partners as experts within their own context and practice setting. To ensure the work is completed in an efficient and cost effective manner CIT has leveraged the experience of JD Carpentieri - through a subcontracting arrangement - whose expertise in the design of interventions, deployment of field trials and research and evaluation frameworks for the ongoing *Guidance and Orientation Pilots for Adult Learners (GOAL)* project has been of considerable value in reviewing materials and providing guidance on process steps and the research

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<sup>7</sup> Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (1997). Realistic Evaluation. Sage.

and evaluation methodology. Two of the partners of the VISKA project were partners of the GOAL project so their expertise in policy experimentation projects has also been leveraged to ensure efficient transfer of knowledge and practice.

## Collection of Data for the Project

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The interventions in the project proposal are phrased in very general terms and the project team has worked to find common activities that can be the basis for the collection of comparable data arising from the varied field trials that are planned. However, the project team and the research and evaluation partners have been sensitive to the different contexts and differing challenges experienced by the partners in relation to VPL, while keeping to the fore the requirement to make a policy contribution at a local, national and European level. This has resulted in a very collaborative approach to developing the framework for research and data collection throughout the project. It also has informed the evaluation focus of the project in line with the Realistic Evaluation ethos.

The research protocol document and research instruments were developed collaboratively by the project partners, following from data collection workshops to enable consistent and comparable data gathering during the development and trial of the various tools and the field trials of the VISKA project. It also supports the collection of rich and valuable information from all project participants based on their experiences of the project.

In addition to the defined common and comparable data to be gathered by each of the field trial partners it was recognised that there may well be local and national nuances which impact the implementation of validation within partner countries providing the rich context for the Realistic Evaluation Process. Data related to these specifics will also be decided upon and gathered locally and interpreted in the context of the local situation as well as extrapolating potential impact for Europe as a whole, where appropriate.

The target groups for the field trials are not generally numerous enough at each location to allow statistically significant conclusions to be drawn. It is also recognised that the field trial participants are not likely to be fully representative of the migrant, refugee or low skilled population across Europe or, indeed within the partner countries. These populations tend to change from time to time in response to local and international pressures and the target cohort for the project will be generally in line with the aims of the participant country at the time of the project proposal. However, the findings and conclusions of the project will be based on the empirical data gathered from the field trial participants, frontline and guidance staff, the National Advisory Groups (NAG), and importantly from the project partners themselves

in the partner countries. In all cases the project partners will be working with adult learners who for one reason or another will benefit from opportunities to have their learning recognised and validated and this will provide valuable transferable learning for others.

Together the project partners have considered what information can be collected, from whom and at which stage in the project. This is summarised in Figure 2 below. The project partnership considered at the proposal stages the potential sources of information and the mechanisms by which information could be collected and shared. As detailed in the Proposal the project essentially has three main stages:

1. Detailed mapping process to establish existing practices and contexts.
2. Field trials consisting of implementation of selected interventions.
3. Analysis and evaluation – collective consideration of policy impacts.

There are also a number of important sources of data and information which will be significant before, during and after the project activities. These sources include:

- Members of the National Advisory Groups and other key stakeholders and policy actors
- Frontline and Guidance staff involved in validation of prior learning
- Clients and learners accessing or seeking to access validation services
- Members of the project team in each partner organisation

#### 1. Detailed mapping process to establish existing practices and contexts

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The detailed mapping to establish existing practices and to set the baseline 'as is' for the project was conducted by each of the project partners within their particular context. The research and evaluation partners provided the research protocol document and research framework for the submissions by each partner. The detailed mapping report included the perspectives of the different stakeholders included in the Viska project which include the support worker and the policy maker. A pre-trial SWOT analysis across the five interventions were also conducted in the four partner countries. The purpose of this was to ascertain areas in need of development which may be addressed through Viska. Field Trials consisting of implementation of selected interventions

Depending on the source of the data, the size of the target group and the stage in the project consideration was given to a number of different tools and methods by which data could be collected and shared. Both quantitative and qualitative data sets were anticipated and to ensure mutual understanding and consistency a data collection methodology workshop was held with the various partners. A handbook

was developed to support the processes and to address issues related to ethics, data protection and other common items of concern. The data collection methodologies of most interest for the project team include: interviews, focus groups and surveys or questionnaires.

Again working collaboratively a complete question set was developed in October 2018. This document provided clear templates which had been agreed by the partners would form the basis of the Interim and Final reports (D5.1 and D5.2). The guideline provided detailed questions to be asked of stakeholders, staff and learners and the appropriate time throughout the project duration. Recognising that the partners would be working in various languages survey questions were provided but a survey instrument was not mandated, question guides were provided for focus groups and interviews; but it was recognised that the context and setting would require some flexibility for each of the partners.

This report is a summary of the information collected to date and it recognises that the partners are at various stages of completion with the field trials and the data collection exercises. Where appropriate information has been presented in quantitative or tabular form using mainly descriptive statistics and in other cases quotations are provided at this point.

Due to different implementation frameworks, different interventions of interest and different target cohorts the timeframe for the collection of data as well as the data collected varied across the consortium. There were also issues in relation to the deadlines which had been agreed for the collection of information for this interim report and in relation to the consistency of the data to be collected across the partnership.

## 2. Analysis and Evaluation- collective consideration of policy impacts

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The main analysis of the data emerging from the project will form the basis of deliverable D5.2 which is the synthesis report of the VISKA project. Qualitative data from the various focus groups and interviews will be analysed through a thematic framework. The topics for that analysis will be informed by the guides which had been developed and will have particular relevance to policy implications. The project partners will be key to ensuring that the information has been appropriately interpreted, that the context for the intervention and the resulting data is well-described and that any conclusions are appropriately drawn. This will ensure a robust and reliable output.

The following four questions underpin the VISKA evaluation:

- **To what degree did partners achieve the implementation aim across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at local, regional and national and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?**
- **What outcomes were achieved for what groups, and to what degree?**
- **What factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?**
- **What policy-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?**

## Summary of Partners and Planned Activity

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### Belgium (Flanders)

In Belgium (Flanders) the project partner is the Department of Education and Training in Flanders, part of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and responsible for policy preparation and support. A key priority for the Flemish lifelong learning strategy is the connection between education and the labour market. The Higher Education and Adult Education Division of the Department is responsible for the Flemish partnership in VISKA. Participation in the project will enable the team to inform the Minister of Education and the Flemish government about the usefulness and the possibilities of providing an accessible VPL procedure in the general education programmes in the centres of adult education (CAEs) in Flanders, tailored to the needs of the target group.

The VISKA project is embedded in the European policy priorities formulated in Upskilling Pathways and runs along with the efforts of the Belgian government in making a decree on validating non formal and informal learning and making a decree 'Integrated Quality framework' (both for professional qualifications). The VISKA project aligns with the decree on adult education to give adults more learning chances and it serves to give some policy advice on the implementation of Art 63 §3 of the decree: foresee the possibility for people, subscribed in adult education, to obtain a certificate of the course of AGE (additional general education) on basis of VPL, without lessons.

The VISKA project intervention in Belgium will provide 474 low qualified adults with the opportunity to obtain a diploma of secondary education through a VPL procedure. VPL allows low qualified adults to obtain a certificate of the course of additional general education (AGE). This certification, combined with a certificate of a professional qualification, leads to a diploma of secondary education, situated at level 4 of the National Qualification Framework (NQF). AGE is a modular course, with attainment targets that have been put in place by the Flemish parliament. The goal of the VISKA project interventions in Belgium

is to draw more attention to the importance of general education and a general educational qualification<sup>8</sup>. It is important to provide adult learners with a second chance to obtain a qualification since research has shown that a diploma of secondary education will improve their employment and employability opportunities and leads to more sustainable employment. Furthermore, it can lower the barrier to success and increase the confidence and self-esteem of the adult learners.

For the VISKA project in Flanders a validation of prior learning (VPL) procedure is organised in seven selected centres of adult education across the Flemish region, all of which offer the modular AGE course. These centres use a common VPL scenario and registration form prepared by the VISKA-team in Flanders. In these procedures, results previously obtained in formal education and participation in exemption tests can lead to a shorter time to graduation/certification, in the context of the modular AGE course. The data collected and the analysis of that data will inform a policy recommendation regarding VPL for low qualified adult learners in Flanders.

Local guidance counsellors support the adult learners during the VPL-procedure according to the instructions in the roadmap (Appendix 1), which has been drawn up by the VISKA-team in Flanders, in consultation with the adult education centres. An (intake) interview is planned with every adult learner.

The target group for the field trials in Flanders are low qualified adults who do not have a secondary education diploma, which is situated on level 4 of the NQF. More specifically, the learners are 18 years or older, have the Belgian nationality (or can prove their legal residence in Belgium). Based on data collected earlier in the VISKA project we may assume that the target group will mainly consist of adult learners born in Belgium (around 75%) along with other adult learners mostly coming from the Netherlands, Morocco, Russia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Turkey.

## Iceland

ÍÐAN Fraedslusetur, Vocation Education and Training Centre is a non-profit education and training provider supported by the Federation of Employees and Unions. A leading provider of continuing education offering diverse in-house and company courses including certified programs for qualified

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<sup>8</sup> In Flanders an 'educational qualification' in adult education is actually the combination of a professional qualification with a certification AGE. This combination leads to a diploma of secondary education. A **professional qualification** describes the knowledge and skills an individual needs to exercise a profession. An **educational qualification** gives an overview of the knowledge and skills an individual needs to start further studies, to participate in society or to exercise a specific profession. In this report the term **educational qualification** only signifies VPL for additional general education.



professionals in the crafts and trades. ÍÐAN has been heavily involved with the implementation of validation of prior learning in Iceland. ÍÐAN processes applications on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications in regulated trades founded in the EU Directive 2005/36/EC. In the VISKA project ÍÐAN Fraedslusetur operates as a delegated body of the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. ÍÐAN's hope is that the project will contribute to the development of a recognized system to improve the status of migrants in the Icelandic labour market.

The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) in Iceland is owned by the social partners in Iceland and has a tripartite agreement with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MESC) on tasks in adult education including coordinating a national strategy on validation of prior learning on Upper Secondary School level education for people with little formal education. The ETSC also operates as a delegated body for the MESC in the VISKA project. ETSC operates in accordance with a service contract with The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and administers the Education and Training fund for adult education. The main responsibility of the ETSC is to make curricula for adult education, develop a national strategy for validation of prior learning, increase quality in Adult Education and develop counselling and guidance services. ETSC works through contract with 14 lifelong learning centres around the country, including ÍÐAN, on the abovementioned focus areas.

The role of the Centre is to be a collaborative forum of the founding parties for adult education and vocational training in cooperation with other educational bodies operating under the auspices of the member associations. It targets those who have not completed the upper secondary level of education. In 2017 the target group comprises approximately <sup>9</sup>23% of the Icelandic labour force. The objective is to enable individuals who have not graduated from the upper secondary level to obtain an education and improve their position in the labour market, which complies with the focus laid e.g. in European agenda for adult learning and Europe 2020.

In Iceland there will be 50 participants in the VISKA field trails. Working with the recognised 4 step process in validation<sup>10</sup>, some will complete the first two steps and others will go on to steps three and four depending on their situation and needs. The EU skills profiling tool will also be tested. Career counsellors will offer guidance and advice to all participants before, during and after the process, whether they complete the whole process or not. The project work in Iceland will include reaching out to the potential participants, providing introductory information on the VPL process and access to career counsellors.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.hagstofa.is/talnaefni/samfelag/menntun/menntunarstada/>

<sup>10</sup> Identification; Documentation; Assessment; Certification

The project aims to work with a total of 50 Polish Migrants without recognised qualifications in Iceland. Entry requirements into the VISKA field trials in Iceland will be limited to those who are registered in Iceland and can show at least 3 years of work experience in carpentry, house painting, diet cook and hotel housekeeping with 6 months of working experience in Iceland. A part of the group will go through process of validation against Transversal Skills. The learners will have reached the age of 23 years and the required language skills for participation are Polish, English or Icelandic.

Depending on the chosen pathway, participants can receive an overview with validated credits recognising their skills and competencies towards a shortening of a study path (national curricula), receive a job standard certificate or Transversal skills certificate. So the outcome can be oriented towards education and training attainment or towards employment objectives. Knowledge, skills and competences in specific trades will be validated according to the Icelandic National curriculum towards a qualification at EQF level 4. For non – national curricula-based validation such as in Transversal skills and housekeeping a certificate can be linked to the National and European Qualification Framework. It should be noted that Transversal Skills and VPL towards Job standards are not recognised by the formal school system.

In Iceland the main target group in the VISKA trials is likely to aim towards formal qualification built on the National curriculum – helping to ensure that individuals with existing experience and competence can have those skills recognised. During the VPL process additional competences may be revealed. However, it is important to stress that the VPL process in Iceland focuses on the individual participant.

## Norway

Skills Norway, the lead partner of the VISKA project is the Directorate for Lifelong Learning under the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. In addition to responsibility for National Overview of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, Skills Norway promotes access and participation in formal, non-formal and informal adult education and supports quality development of validation processes.

Skills Norway is responsible for curricular and pedagogical issues relating to the teaching of Norwegian and socio-cultural orientation to adult immigrants and coordinates the career guidance field in Norway. Skills Norway is the current national coordinator for the European Agenda for adult learning, the Electronic Platform Adult Learning Europe (EPALE) and for the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (Nordisk Nätverk för Vuxnas Lärande, NVL).

In Norway, potential candidates will get information about VISKA in the five participating integration reception centres. The centres are managed at municipal level. The trials will include the two first stages of VPL for all candidates, they will get guidance and counselling and be supported in the process of identifying and documenting their competences. For those who are able to and wish to go through the full validation process, stages 3 and 4 (assessment and certification) will be organised and conducted by regional providers at upper secondary level.

Trials will be planned in consultation with local actors and the tools for self-registration in the VPL process will be introduced in cooperation with the Directorate of Integration. A training module for frontline staff will be developed and offered in collaboration with the experienced practitioners in this space. Interpreters will be used where needed. The Validation Process will be conducted by regional Adult Education Centres.

The project participants in Norway will be refugees who are seeking or in the process of being granted asylum and residence permits in Norway. They will have signed up to be accommodated and to take part in activities in special integration reception centres, which provide housing and full-day programmes of various integration activities. Initial data indicates that nationalities are mostly Syrian, Eritrean and Turkish. Languages are Arabic, Tigrinja, Turkish, some English, and for some, basic Norwegian also. Participants' level of education varies, but people with a completed HE diploma will not be part of the trials, as they go to another recognition system. Many have some schooling and it is anticipated that they will also have skills and workplace experience.

The benefits to the participants will include guidance and counselling which will build their confidence and self-esteem through helping to identify competencies. Candidates who go through the full VPL procedure can, if approved, attain a certificate of competence (at upper secondary level). These certificates are awarded to recognise that an individual has achieved certain sets of objectives (learning outcomes), either full or partial subjects, within an upper secondary curriculum. Additional gaps in knowledge / competences must be addressed before a full certificate can be obtained. Candidates can also go straight to work with the certificate of competence as proof of the competences that have been validated, although it is not a full qualification. As these certificates are issued after VPL in the formal system, they can be used either to bridge the candidate to further education and training or to certify their competencies which can then be used to gain employment.

## Ireland

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In Ireland QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) is an independent State agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland. QQI has a broad remit across education and training in Ireland. In the area of quality assurance, QQI is responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance in further and higher education and training providers in Ireland. As a VSKA project partner, QQI operates as a delegated body of the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland and hopes to disseminate useful and practical information on international approaches and good practice to the recognition of prior learning of adults. The VSKA project will facilitate efforts to develop a national policy in this area and to build a network of practitioners through which localisation of approaches and tools can be achieved. The VSKA project is timely as a significant national project, TOBAR, implementing VPL with specific cohorts in ten ETBs is providing a natural vehicle for dissemination and exploration of issues being raised in VSKA as well as consolidating progress in the implementation of VSKA nationally.

In Ireland while there will not be field trials with potential learners under the project there will be an opportunity to interact with key stakeholders through the National Advisory Group for VSKA and this will provide an informed basis for contributions on policy and practice. In addition, some feedback on the use of the European Skills Profiling Tool with adults in Ireland will be included in the overall project findings.

Cork Institute of Technology, the research and evaluation partner of the VSKA project, is a leading higher education institution based in Cork City on the south coast of Ireland. CIT and its antecedents have been associated with education in Cork and the broader region since the 1830s. The Institute offers a wide range of flexible full-time and part-time higher education courses (at all levels up to and including PhD) in art & design, business, engineering, humanities, music, maritime studies, and science & information technology. CIT has been at the forefront of the practice of RPL in Ireland for over two decades and has contributed to the policy discourse at national and local level. In VSKA CIT will lead in mapping, needs analysis and the experimentation protocol and in data collection, analysis and reporting. The project will leverage the expertise and experience of the previous Goal project and takes a collaborative approach.

## Planned Interventions

The VISKA project proposal details 5 interventions which are to be implemented by the partners in the field trial settings. The interventions were agreed by the implementation partners at the proposal stages.

### Intervention 1:

Developing and extending regional/national networks and partnerships to include policy makers, social partners and practitioners working on the validation of NFIL

### Intervention 2:

Extending / adapting tools used in the validation of NFIL – includes digitisation as well as customisation for use with specific beneficiary groups and enhanced quality assurance of validation processes

### Intervention 3:

Creating a common set of criteria for the documentation and assessment of transversal skills, able to be used with one or more adult learner groups

### Intervention 4:

Training and / or Capacity building for guidance counsellors and other frontline staff working on the validation of NFIL, including with specific adult beneficiary groups

### Intervention 5:

Improving access to and awareness of validation services and support among specific adult beneficiary groups

Taken together it can be deduced that these interventions impact directly on a number of aspects of validation. **Intervention 1** - the development and extension of networks - goes to the context within the country or region and is intended to bring together actors from different organisations to act as local advisory and subject matter experts – this will inform both policy and practice. Each country has established a National Advisory Group for the project and these groups act as both directions setters and sounding boards for the project activity. **Intervention 4** which focuses on training or capacity building for front line staff or guidance counsellors who interact directly with potential learners will bring forward a

discourse on what training might be needed and should contribute to the conversation on any specific challenges that might arise from the groups under consideration in this project in each of the trial sites.

**Interventions 2 and 5** are the ones that are likely to impact directly with the potential beneficiaries. Improving access to and awareness of services is probably an aim that is approached with a certain degree of caution to ensure that expectations are not raised that cannot be met. The adaptation and trial of digital tools provides an opportunity to explore a means of facilitating the identification and evidencing of skills and competences at an individual level. **Intervention 3** provides the opportunity to have a broad discourse leading ideally to a common understanding of Transversal Skills and an exploration of how a recognition of these skills might benefit the learner either within a learning context or in the workplace domain. Figure 1 below is a visualisation of the interfaces where these interventions may have the most significant impact.

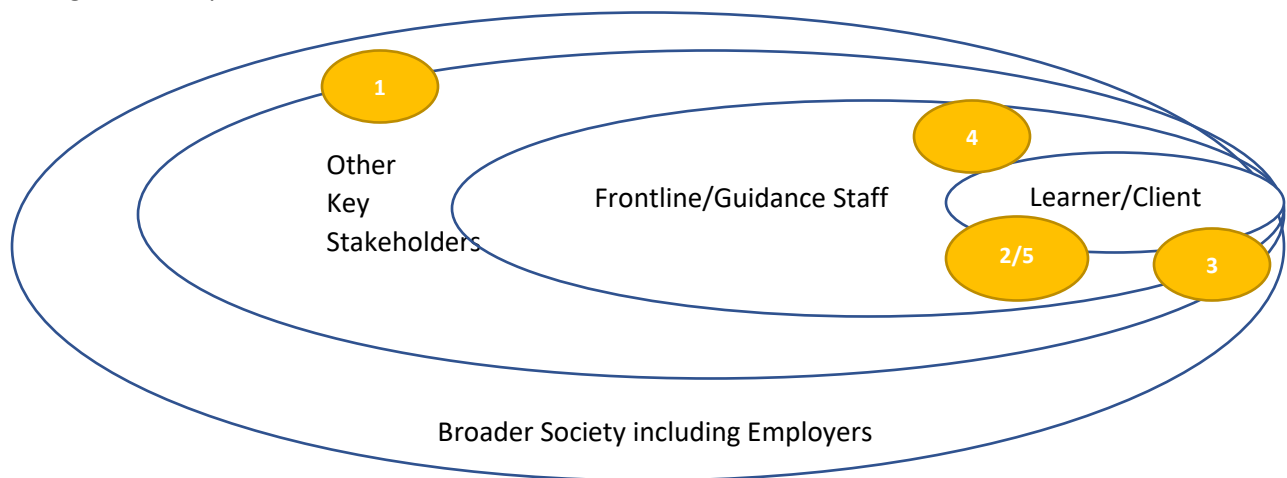


FIGURE 1 VISKA PROJECT INTERVENTIONS

Figure 1 graphically demonstrates where the five interventions interact with the various target audiences and to whom they are of most relevance. Intervention 1 which aims to develop networks is shown at the interface between the project actors and broader social partners. Intervention 2 which relates to tools to be used in the validation process and intervention 5 which is about raising awareness of the opportunities presented by validation are shown at the interface between the learner and the frontline or guidance staff. Intervention 3 which relates to a common understanding of transversal skills is shown crossing all of the project interfaces as it would impact on the learner, the frontline staff, the policy and practice of VPL as well as the broader society. Finally, intervention 4 which focuses on training and capacity building will impact mainly on the frontline staff but also on the learners.

## Transversal Skills

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Following from these interventions the partners have worked to produce a document on Transversal Skills and a common set of criteria for assessment of those skills. The resulting document D3.2 'Criteria for Assessing Transversal Skills'<sup>11</sup> developed under work package 3 under the leadership of the Icelandic Partner ETSC, provides examples of how these skills might be included in the validation of employability skills.

## Tools to be Trialled in the Validation

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The planned trials include the use of tools to support learners in the validation process. As the partner organisations have differing roles within their countries and regions their experiences in trialling their chosen tools also differ. In the first instance they have been asked to identify the tool to be trialled and to provide some background information to support a comparative analysis at a later stage.

## Belgium (Flanders) - Tools

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VISKA Flanders selected seven participating centres (from a total of 40 adult education centres (CAEs) offering the course of Additional General Education (AGE) for the field trials). Attention was drawn to several criteria: distributed over the Flemish region; representing different educational networks; centres that differ in the number of course participants; small vs large centres offering the course of AGE. VISKA received their voluntary participation to take part in the field trials. The centres participate at the project on their own expenses, they are not financed by the VISKA project.

The Federation of Second Chance Education (SCE), the umbrella organisation comprising all adult education centres providing the course of AGE, developed exemption tests for the course of AGE, which are shared on a digital platform to be used by all centres of adult education offering the course of AGE. The centres all signed a covenant with the Federation wherein they agree to use these tools.

However, this approach has some limitations. The Federation SCE has no legal basis and no authority to impose regulations to the CAEs. Consequently, the directors of the CAEs have great autonomy concerning the use of tools, the development of intake documents and the policy on VPL. The interviews with directors and guidance counsellors, before the field trials, gave us insight in the current policy of the VPL procedures that take place in the different CAEs. It was noticed that during the identification phase the registration of indicators, that can be of an opportunity for VPL for the adult learner, differs from centre

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<sup>11</sup> Available on the project website: <http://viskaproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Criteria-for-assessing-Transversal-skills.pdf>

to centre. There are not only differences in what information they collect but also in the extent to which the registration is formal rather than informal.

The transparency in communicating about VPL also differs considerably from centre to centre. More attention and guidelines to support a transparent and understandable communication tailored for the target group is needed, especially for the instructions for the VPL candidate regarding the VPL-procedure, which is used in the specific centre and the information about the VPL content of the different modules.

The CAEs also have their own interpretation on definition, procedures and expectations about VPL, which makes it difficult to guarantee the quality of VPL across the CAEs. A tool for self-evaluation based on a common VPL policy is needed to extend the quality policy regarding VPL in CAEs. We can therefore conclude that the knowledge on VPL, especially for the target group of low qualified adults and what VPL for educational qualifications can mean for the target group is very diverse and rather poor. There should be a focus on the uniformity in a broad sense for VPL in the CAEs. A common definition and policy, with its focus on quality assurance, on VPL is essential.

In order to transcend this fragmentation, the VISKA team, together with the staff from the CAEs developed a uniform intake document and a roadmap, with more practical information on how to use. The intake document was based on documents every single CAE already uses for the intake of the candidates and through consultation of the directors and guidance counsellors. This resulted in the use of a uniform intake document which has the same structure and questions for the seven participating centres.

One of these participating centres is currently working with a digital self-assessment tool. The content of the online intake is adapted to be similar to the face to face intake. However, the digital tool used in this centre additionally contains more deeper information regarding learning problems, personal background, failure anxiety and so on. Because of the voluntary participation of the CAEs and not to burden them extra, VISKA decided to use the digital tool that already exists, instead of requiring them to use a new developed digital tool to prevent lost time and therefore extra costs. For the processing of the data from the use of the digital tool only the 18 questions that are aligned with those used in the face to face processes were taken into account in order to ensure comparability. It is important to note that there is also a face to face interview following the use of the digital tool.



**1. Tool tried out in the field trials: Paper Survey form for Registration of VPL (face to face interview)**

- **Background to the tool:** Paper format developed in collaboration with the participating Centres for Adult Education in the VISKA trials. Not previously used in this form.
- **Language:** Dutch
- **Used Independently by learner:** No. The tool is designed to be used while supported by staff
- **Number of Sections / Elements:** The tool facilitates the identification phase through sections which help to identify school, work, motivation for accessing validation and validation of any prior qualifications. It provides a section for the registration of qualifications through documentation any of prior learning and allows registration of the outcomes or results of the exemption tests. There are 18 questions in all and it is estimated that the process takes on average 15-20 minutes for the interview supported identification phase. The duration of the intake depends strongly on the personality of the adult learner, his/her failure anxiety and stress, his/her language level, former studies.
- **Costs:** There are no additional costs or software requirements for the organisation or the user
- **Number of users for the trial:** 311 adult learners

**2. Tool tried out in the field trials: Online form for Self-Registration**

- **Background to the tool:** Online format that is already used in the CAE slightly adjusted so it consists the same information as the face to face tool. Not previously used in this form.
- **Language:** Dutch
- **Used Independently by learner:** No. The tool is designed to be used while supported by staff
- **Number of Sections / Elements:** The tool facilitates the identification phase through sections which help to identify school, work, motivation for accessing validation and validation of any prior qualifications. It provides a section for the registration of qualifications through documentation any of prior learning and allows registration of the outcomes or results of the exemption tests. There are 18 similar questions to the face to face tool to make comparison possible. Because of the more extensive digital tool (explained above) the average time to fill in the digital registration form takes longer (average 25-35minutes).
- **Costs:** There are no additional costs for the organisation or the user but an internet connection and browser is required.
- **Number of users for the trial:** 163 adult learners

**3. Tool tried out in the field trials: Exemption tests**

- **Background to the tool:** The Federation of Second Chance Education has developed a wide range of exemption tests for the course AGE. The CAEs find them on a platform for use and agree to use these tests (covenant with the Federation).
- **Language:** Dutch
- **Used Independently by learner:** Yes. Teachers however will be available when the adult learner has a question/problem
- **Number of Sections / Elements:** it depends on the subject of the exemption test. There is an exemption test for every module of a subject, which is part of the course AGE.
- **Costs:** The use of the tests are free for the CAEs and the adult learner. The development is based on voluntary engagement from teachers of the CAEs.
- **Number of users for the trial:** 361 adult learners

In addition to the work under the VISKA project the EU Skills Profiling tool has been reported on in Belgium under another project. The Flemish Public Employment Services (PES), FEDASIL (Federal Agency for Asylum Seekers) and the Agencies for Integration and Civic Integration were involved in this regional project. In Belgium Flanders, the EU skills profile tool is mainly used as a guidance to what education or training is best suited for the candidate. This is reflected in the general observations and feedback from the organisations involved in the @level2work10 project (a summary of the findings is included as Appendix 2 of this document)

## Iceland - Tools

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IDAN follows Quality Assurance measures recommend by ETSC that are founded in European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. The added value in VISKA is working with these guidelines on a new target group focusing on migrants. It has been pointed out in the latest executive summary<sup>12</sup> on validation of non-formal and informal learning that progress and development is needed to reach disadvantaged groups including migrants. The tools used here in Iceland to date have been developed for an Icelandic audience. Now we are taking our national tools and testing them on our migrant target group. We are working with the VPL process towards three different standards; VPL towards national curricula,

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<sup>12</sup> Cedefop (2015). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/008370>

towards job standards and towards Transversal skills. In addition to this we are also testing the Digital EU skills profiling tool.

Extensive work has been conducted with The Educational Research Institute of the University of Iceland in regards with the data collection. IDAN conducts most all the data collection through digital means, though the VPL assessment tools are done by more conventional means, paper. IDAN and ETSC organised a pilot test that included five professionals in the field of education. In conjunction, five migrants tested the digital EU profiling tool under the guidance of a career counsellor.

### 1. Tool reported on : EU Skill Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals

**Background to the tool:** EU Skill Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals. An open resource on the internet coordinated by the commission. Launched in June 2017. For third country nationals – documentation of skills and next steps.

**Language:** EU- skills profiling tool is available in all EU languages (except Irish and Icelandic) and in Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Sorani, Somali, Tigrinya and Turkish

**Used Independently by learner:** The tools used are done both independently by the learner and with the support of the frontline staff.

**Number of Sections / Elements:** The tool can be used as a basis for a CV. It is available on line. It identifies competences. There are 13 transversal skills presented and people asked if they “like” using the skill. Number of questions are approx. 130 and takes 1-2 hours. One can document various job experience. Literacy, numeracy and driving skills are also addressed. One can identification document as evidence.

**Costs:** The participant does not have to pay for his/her participation. However, it should be noted the cost is substantial for the institutions.

**Number of users for the trial:** Aim – 5-10

### 2. Tool to be Trialled: Portfolio and Professional self-assessment form

**Background to the tool:** Portfolio and professional self-assessment. This is a national form used for documenting competences when validating against learning outcomes in curricula on upper secondary

school level. The form is always the same but learning outcomes/standards are inserted for each profession/educational pathway. Shorter versions in the form of “screening lists” are available on the website [www.næstaskref.is](http://www.næstaskref.is). The form itself is presented and given to people entering the VPL process in a screening interview with a career counsellor. One can also review them with a counsellor. The tool is designed to be used with guidance from career counsellors and professionals in the field at hand but can be used independently. This is usually paper – pencil, but some fill it out as a word document. The material be saved from the tool and used elsewhere. The content of the tool is a part of the national VPL systems tool and is customised for VPL against curricula on upper secondary school level.

**Language:** Icelandic and translated into Polish as a result of VISKA.

**Used Independently by learner:** The tools used are done both independently by the learner and with the support of the frontline staff.

**Number of Sections / Elements:** Portfolio is one section. Regarding the professional standards it is based on how many subjects are within the curricula. The portfolio part can be used as a CV (divergent). Competence in the profession is the focus in the self-assessment against standards (convergent). Documents are gathered on prior learning, courses etc, and work (salary slips etc). In the portfolio part there is a section on competences derived from leisure-, social- and voluntary activities where transversal skills can be addressed. Estimated time for the process is 2-4 hours for the participant.

**Costs:** The participant does not have to pay for his/her participation. However, it should be noted the cost is substantial for the institutions.

**Number of users for the trial:** Aim 35

### 3. Transversal skills tools (including a portfolio form)

**Background to the tool:** A slightly different version existed where the focus is on employability skills. Used for documenting and assessing those for people on social welfare and job seekers. The tool is only used for specific projects. The tool designed to be used and supported by staff – career counsellors and experts from the labour market. The tool focuses on transversal skills and evidence. The portfolio part can serve as a basis for CV. The transversal skills are documented linked to the job experience of candidates and social-, leisure- and voluntary work plus education.

**Language:** -English as a result of VISKA and translated to Polish as a result of VISKA.

**Used Independently by learner:** The tools are used both independently by the learner and with the support of the frontline staff.

**Number of Sections / Elements:** 15 standards available produced in the VISKA project. But, 4-6 will be chosen to test in Iceland. The number of questions depend on the standards chosen, sub-standards can be from 2-4 under each standard. Estimated time for the participants is around 12-20 hours.

**Costs:** The participant does not have to pay for his/her participation. However, it should be noted the cost is substantial for the institutions.

**Number of users for the trial:** Aim 5-8

#### 4. Validation against job standards/criteria

**Background to the tool:** The job standards derive from a competence analyses process from the ETSC. Stakeholders in the sector have developed learning outcomes/criteria which are suitable for the workplace based on the competence analyses. A portfolio for documenting competences (divergent) is also used as an opening and can serve as a basis for a CV.

**Language:** Icelandic, English and translated into Polish as a result of VISKA.,

**Used Independently by learner:** The tools are used both independently by the learner and with the support of the frontline staff.

**Number of Sections / Elements:** The list has three main competence categories with 31 sub-standards.

**Costs:** The participant does not have to pay for his/her participation. However, it should be noted the cost is substantial for the institutions.

**Number of users for the trial:** Aim –5

## Norway - Tools

In Norway there are a number of existing tools which support the identification and documentation of the learning of migrants and refugees. These tools are outlined below and have been trialled within the Norwegian context for Viska. Tool to be trialled: The Norwegian self-registration tool for asylum seekers

- **Background to the tool:** The tool has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research and has been customised for asylum seekers by Skills Norway, in cooperation with the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). The objective of the tool is to provide the municipality with a basis for individually adjusted activities targeted towards social inclusion and professional qualifications.
- **Language:** The tool is available in 14 languages: Albanian, Arabic, Dari, English, Farsi, French, Kurmanji, Kurdish-Sorani, Norwegian, Oromo, Pashto, Russian, Somali, Tigrinia.
- **Used Independently by learner:** The tool is intended to be used independently by the learner. However, many learners need support from a staff member.
- **Number of Sections / Elements:** There are seven elements: Personal data, Education, Language, Digital skills, Driving licence, Work experience, other. The tool focuses on competence identification, transversal skills and job-related competences as basis for career guidance and making plans for following actions, as for instance VPL, work life training and further education. There are 39 questions in total. Not all learners answer all 39 questions. Some of the questions are routed, so that the previous answers decide how many questions that follow. It is estimated that it would take approximately 45 minutes to complete.
- **Costs:** The tool is publicly funded and is available free of charge for the user, however a specific login is required as well as access to an internet browser.
- **Number of users for the trial:** 150 adult learners are foreseen.

## Ireland - Tools

In Ireland, a trial was initiated by QQI with some organisations active in the Vocational and Education sector. As QQI is not an implementation partner of the VISKA project their focus is on trialling the EU Skills Profiling tool to present findings which can be compared to the results of other implementation partners.

Tool to be trialled: European Skills Profiling Tool

- **Background to the tool:** An open resource on the internet coordinated by the commission. Launched in June 2017 for third country nationals to facilitate documentation of skills and next steps.
- **Language:** The tool is available in 30 languages
- **Used Independently by learner:** The tool can be used independently but also can be supported by guidance and other front-line staff.
- **Number of Sections / Elements:** 8 sections with 130 questions
- **Costs:** No cost to the client or support provider
- **Number of users for the trial:** 32

## Professional Development Module

In terms of identifying training needs and developing and offering an opportunity for training for staff involved in validation there is little uniformity across the partnership. For example, in Norway training is already provided for those involved in supporting validation by local educational authorities. However, the Norwegian partners have identified an additional need that is not addressed by the current provision which relates to the role of an interpreter in the validation process. In Iceland the frontline staff in VISKA will attend a course focusing on additional aspects for Validation services linked to specific migrant needs, including for instance multicultural competences, how to work with interpreters and the tools for validation.

In Belgium (Flanders) it is the responsibility of the Director of CAE to organise training according to their policy objectives and training needs of the staff. CAEs can ask for training at the Pedagogical Advisory Services (demand driven) or CAEs can consult private organisations. Therefore, the Belgium partner is not authorised to develop or organise training sessions. In Belgium the VISKA activity regarding the Professional Development Module will focus on discussing training needs for VPL for educational qualifications with relevant stakeholders.

To date the VISKA project partners have conducted training needs analysis and have identified in D3.3<sup>13</sup> twelve learning outcomes as a training module for frontline professionals.

The module developed under D3.3 is summarised as follows;

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<sup>13</sup> Available on the project website at: <http://viskaproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Training-module-for-frontline-professionals-in-the-VISKA-project.pdf>

### Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences for the full course are listed below.

#### Knowledge

On successful completion of this module the learner will be able to:

- describe the validation process and main principles as presented in the EU guidelines
- describe effective methods and quality measures applicable to validation processes
- identify diverse ways of assessing skills
- identify multicultural competences underlying services for various target groups (including migrants)
- explain the interpreters' role and tasks

#### Skills

On successful completion of this module the learner will be able to:

- define ways in consultation with peers and experts about where and how to obtain the additional knowledge needed
- prepare for working with interpreters and communicating via interpreters
- recognize appropriate tools for VPL participants based on knowledge of the aims and content of various tools (e.g. EU- Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals, Portfolio forms, Self-assessment forms etc.)

#### Competences

On successful completion of this module the learner will be able to:

- support the quality of VPL (based on the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning)
- identify the importance of impartiality, fairness, validity and reliability in assessing competence
- show positive and supportive behaviour and promote constructive communication in their work
- identify solutions to issues that may arise in the validation process

Three **key learning outcomes** were identified across the project consortium as key in any VPL CPD module and are listed below.

- Describe the validation process and main principles as presented in the EU guidelines
- Describe effective methods and quality measures applicable to validation processes
- Identify diverse ways of assessing skills



## Belgium (Flanders) - Training

In Flanders, as previously mentioned, training needs can only be discussed with the guidance and front-line staff and the Pedagogical Advisory Services. The following were the outcomes identified by the Flemish partner for discussion with the relevant stakeholders.

The framework with the learning outcomes to be discussed in Flanders are:

- Knowledge
  - describe the validation process and main principles as presented in the EU guidelines
  - describe effective methods and quality measures applicable to validation processes
- Skills
  - define ways in consultation with peers and experts about where and how to obtain the additional knowledge needed and how it can be enhanced
  - identify the importance of impartiality, fairness, validity and reliability in assessing competence
  - identify solutions to issues that may arise in the validation process
- Competences/ attitudes
  - support the quality of VPL
  - show positive and supportive behaviour and promote constructive communication in their work

## Iceland - Training

It is envisaged that during the course of the VISKA project training will be offered to staff including guidance counsellors, assessors and other front-line staff. The staff have previously been trained in validation processes during a two-day training course funded by the state through ETSC. The frontline staff will attend a course focusing on additional aspects for Validation services linked to migrant needs, for instance multicultural competences, the role of the interpreter, how to work with an interpreter, the tools for validation etc.

TABLE 2 DEVELOPMENT OF AGREED LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR STAFF CPD

<p>Learning Outcome: On successful completion of this module the learner will be able to:</p>	<p>Identified through needs analysis conducted with Guidance/ Frontline staff (select all the Learning outcomes that apply)</p>	<p>Identified as necessary by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● National advisory group</li> <li>● Experienced practitioners</li> <li>● Viska Partners</li> <li>● Other? (List)</li> </ul>
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<b>KEY COMMON Learning Outcome:</b> describe the validation process and main principles as presented in the EU guidelines	This is the basic course which we have had since 2008 and all VPL staff must go through. The LO's were identified with stakeholders, based on pilot project experiences, as well as EU and international material on quality in VPL.	Stakeholders in various sectors, experienced practitioners, adult learning experts and international resources on VPL quality issues.
<b>KEY COMMON Learning Outcome:</b> describe effective methods and quality measures applicable to validation processes		
<b>KEY COMMON Learning Outcome:</b> identify diverse ways of assessing skills		
identify multicultural competences underlying services for various target groups (including migrants)	Yes.	Experienced practitioners and VISKA – staff.
explain the interpreters' role and tasks	Yes.	Experienced practitioners and VISKA – staff.

### Skills

On successful completion of this module the learner will be able to:	Identified through needs analysis conducted with Guidance/ Frontline staff	Identified as necessary by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National advisory group</li> <li>Experienced practitioners</li> <li>Viska Partners</li> </ul> Other? (List)
define ways in consultation with peers and experts about where and how to obtain the additional knowledge needed	Indirectly, small networks in IS support this LO.	Experienced practitioners and VISKA – staff.
prepare for working with interpreters and communicating via interpreters	Yes.	Experienced practitioners and VISKA – staff.
recognise appropriate tools for VPL participants based on knowledge of the aims and content of various tools (e.g. EU-Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals, Portfolio forms, Self-assessment forms etc.).	Yes.	Experienced practitioners and VISKA – staff.

### Competences

On successful completion of this module the learner will be able to:	Identified through needs analysis conducted with Guidance/ Frontline staff	Identified as necessary by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National advisory group</li> <li>• Experienced practitioners</li> <li>• Viska Partners</li> </ul> Other? (List)
support the quality of VPL (based on the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning)	Yes, as a part of the basic version – see explanation for the key LO's.	
identify the importance of impartiality, fairness, validity and reliability in assessing competence	Yes, as a part of the basic version – see explanation for the key LO's.	
Act in a positive and supportive manner and promote constructive communication in their work	Yes, as a part of the basic version – see explanation for the key LO's.	
identify solutions to issues that may arise in the validation process	Yes, as a part of the basic version – see explanation for the key LO's.	

## Norway - Training

As mentioned, training for validation is already conducted in Norway for validation practitioners, guidance and front-line staff. The intention of the additional training offered under the VISKA project was to build on and enhance the knowledge of those staff in working with migrants and refugees as the target audience and their respective interpreters.

### Knowledge

On successful completion of this module the learner will be able to:

- identify multicultural competences underlying services for various target groups (including migrants)
- explain the interpreters' role and tasks

### Skills

On successful completion of this module the learner will be able to:

prepare for working with interpreters and communicating via interpreters.

## Findings to Date

### Data from National Advisory Group members and key stakeholders

As part of the interim results at this point in the project the opinions of the National Advisory Group members and other key stakeholders were sought. They were asked for their views of the five interventions of the VISKA project and the impact or potential impact on practice and policy. The areas of most interest were around networking, the value of validation, importance of transversal skills, the importance of Continuing Professional Development for staff involved in validation, the potential tools to support the validation process and the barriers and relevant policies.

TABLE 3 SUMMARY OF NAG ACTIVITY

<i>National Advisory Groups</i>	<b>Number of Members</b>	<b>Number of Meetings</b>
<i>Belgium (Flanders)</i>	16	NAG: 5 meetings sub-group NAG: 11
<i>Iceland</i>	12	4 meetings
<i>Ireland</i>	23	4 meetings
<i>Norway</i>	7, representatives from the Ministry of Education and Research and all involved Directorates, including Skills Norway	4 meetings

The responses from the advisory groups and other key stakeholders vary depending on the particular context within the country in question, the target group for the VISKA project team within that country and the specific interventions actioned in the field trials. For this reason the format for the responses was flexible and the data collection processes were undertaken in terms of what was appropriate for the particular setting. The following sections summarise the views collected from the advisory groups by each of the project partners.

### Belgium (Flanders) – NAG Findings

The NAG network brought together relevant stakeholders in the field of education policy makers and educational practitioners regarding VPL for educational qualifications. The composition of the group and the possibility for the group to have consultations on a regular basis gives an opportunity to debate on VPL for educational qualifications. It is important to share a common definition and vision on VPL, based on current European and national literature review, and to support the actions going on in the field trials. All stakeholders, policy makers and practitioners, will profit from a supported vision on general adult education for target groups. Validating non-formal and informal learning for educational qualifications

can empower the self-esteem of low qualified people and can shorten their learning path to obtain a diploma of secondary education. A diploma of secondary education gives more chances to obtain sustainable jobs.

The national advisory group consists of members of the Education Inspectorate (1), the Pedagogical Advisory Services (6), the Federation of Second Change Education (2), AHOVOKS (Flemish Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Grants, section Curriculum (1), the Examination Board secondary education (1), DET (department of education and training (4), 'Learning Shops' (guidance and information centres for adults (1) and the Flemish Education Council (1), with meetings twice a year. In the NAG, the progress of the work on the different interventions are discussed. The VISKA team has presented the objectives for each intervention and discussed them with the members of the advisory group. The national policy objectives are listed below

TABLE 4 SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS (BELGIAN NAG)

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Objective</b>
<b>Intervention 1</b> <i>Networking</i>	In order to come to a transparent VPL procedure, more structural consultation with VPL providers (centres for adult education and the Examination Board of secondary education) must be initiated. These consultations should enable coordination with regard to VPL and the application of agreements on a larger scale.
<b>Intervention 2</b> <i>VPL tools</i>	To formulate policy advices regarding the quality assurance of the exemption tests and the VPL procedure (four phases).
<b>Intervention 3</b> <i>Transversal Skills</i>	Flanders has not drawn up any actions at European level.
<b>Intervention 4</b> <i>Professionalization Frontline staff</i>	Establishing clear VPL guidelines for centres will lead to more awareness and therefore more attention for professionalism with regard to VPL. The importance of quality assurance is emphasized
<b>Intervention 5</b> <i>Access to and awareness of VPL</i>	More unambiguity regarding VPL can contribute to a better access to and better communication about VPL.

In addition to the meetings with NAG, meetings with key stakeholders to ensure that the final policy advice of the VISKA project for Flanders is well supported by all stakeholders, were also held. Most of these meetings took place before the start of the field trials. The objective is to support, in a more theoretical way, the installation of the VPL procedure for AGE-courses and to supervise the progress of the field trials. There were meetings with the education policy makers (AHOVOKS – section Curriculum and Examination Board Secondary Education/ Inspectorate/ dept of education and training) on a regular base to find a common agreement on the process of the project, and bilateral meetings with the Examination Board of

Secondary Education, Education Inspectorate, AHOVOKS and the Federation of SCE to gain insight into the views on VPL and to capture the expertise of the different stakeholders in the project.

At this stage of the project, there are already some positive outcomes of the regular meetings of (parts of) the national advisory group.

- The VISKA team has reached the commitment of the Examination Board of secondary education to share their experiences with the Federation SCE in valid and reliable tool development.
- If, in the future, VPL for educational qualification is regulated, validating non formal and informal learning has consequences for the autonomy of the directors in the different CAEs. The Pedagogical Advisory Services will participate in the debate as VPL is a part of their regulatory/legal commission.
- The representative of the 'Learning Shop'<sup>14</sup> in the NAG underlined the importance of more transparency on VPL (definition, vision and communication) to facilitate a better orientation and guidance of targets groups.
- The NAG defined the need for an independent coordinator to continue the network in a more structural way. They agreed that DET would be the most appropriate coordinator.

Some Quantitative data extracted from the focus groups (or surveys or interviews) with key stakeholders is presented in the following tables / charts.

TABLE 5 SUMMARY OF VIEWS ON NETWORK (BELGIAN NAG)

<b>Views on Networks</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<i>Has there been greater collaboration due to VISKA?</i>		
<i>Belgium (Flanders)</i>	100%	0%
<i>Is there a need to continue the Network</i>		
<i>Belgium (Flanders)</i>	87,5%	12,50%

The stakeholders unanimously agree that there is a greater collaboration due to VISKA. Before VISKA there already was a lot of collaboration between the CAEs within the Federation SCE, but because of the VISKA project ad hoc consultation moments took place between the Examination Board and Federation SCE, the two providers of VPL in Flanders. The existing networks will also be intensified through VISKA.

<sup>14</sup> Dedicated organisations (often called learning shops) are specialised in guiding people to a better employment situation through improved access to education and training programmes and the labour market.

*“VISKA can play a facilitating role in overcoming current issues and also play a prominent role in the awareness of the importance of VPL with the stakeholders.”*

*“Through the Federation SCE there was a lot of cooperation between the CAEs which provide AGE-courses. The VISKA-project did lead to better consultation with the Examination Board.”*

*“First steps in cooperation CAEs and Examination Board have been taken.”*

*“By bringing the Federation SCE and the Examination Board together it is possible to obtain a better alignment”*

*“The international perspective broadens the view. Furthermore, existing networks and contacts around VPL of AGE will be intensified through VISKA.”*

Despite the stakeholders’ strong belief that there is a greater collaboration, the degree of collaboration could be improved. To the question ‘to what extent has VISKA contributed to a better cooperation?’ the average percentage was 55%.

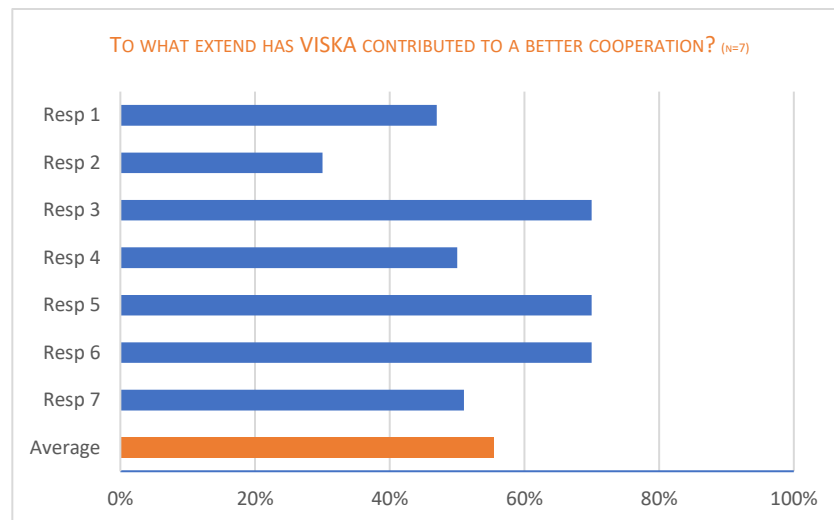


FIGURE 2 EXTENT TO WHICH VISKA HAS CONTRIBUTE TO ENHANCED COOPERATION (BELGIAN NAG)

To obtain a better cooperation there has to be a framework for agreements but as long as the VPL regulations don’t change, those agreements will be non-binding, according to the stakeholders. One of the stakeholders states that in order to build up the consultations in a structural manner, the different authorities must be determined and an independent coordinator is desirable. This could be a task for the Department of Education and Training. In addition to the Examination Board and the Federation SCE, it is also desirable that the Pedagogical Advisory Services are involved, because VPL is part of their assignment.

*“Although CAEs and the Examination Board of Secondary Education have a fairly different target group and sufficient students, the cooperation between CAEs and the Examination Board could be optimized”*

*“The contacts have been improved, but not much has been achieved yet.”*

*“In any case, I think that you have achieved greater cooperation, the extent to which, it is important to me that I have an insight into ‘is that achieved on the workplace’ .... to what extent that interaction is realized there, I have no insight into that and it does not reach the NAG either. If it were, it would sharpen the motivation, .... , activates new initiative, these are things that are absent here now.”*

*“So we can conclude that it has led to better cooperation, but the extent to which can be much better.”*

Participation in the NAG did not lead to a consensus around validation for a small majority of the stakeholders (55,56%). This to no surprise of the VISKA-team, because the focus of the NAG-meetings was not on achieving a consensus but to emphasize to not only respond to professional qualifications, but also to educational qualification for AGE. By discussing this question during a focus group, the stakeholders stated that a consensus has not yet been developed, but that the VISKA-project can indirectly lead to a consensus eventually.

*“VISKA has not really contributed to a consensus around validation, but I am not saying that I have not gained certain insights, ... but I do not think it has led to concrete changes, additions.”*

*“VISKA did not directly contribute to this, but the fact that it is being brought in by Flanders, in a particular research project that also has a European character, so in a broader sense, leads me to believe that this will have a supporting effect and will therefore lead to a consensus more implicitly. I believe that it will implicitly lead to an improver to validation.”*

*“Just seeing that there is no consensus around it, I think that will have an activating effect”.*

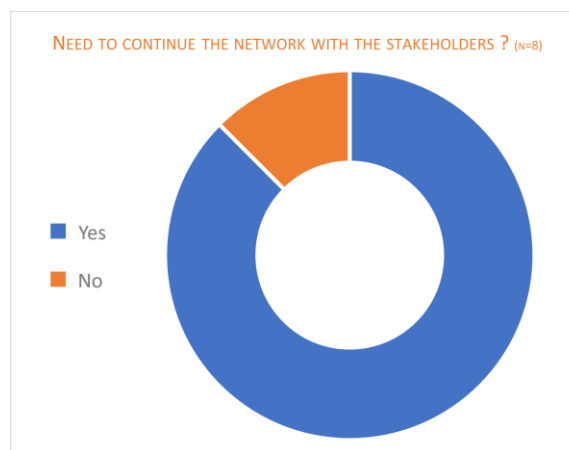


FIGURE 3 VIEWS ON CONTINUATION OF THE NETWORK (BELGIAN NAG)



As to whether there is a need to continue the network we expected a unanimous “yes”. There was however a stakeholder who did not feel the need to continue the network.

In conclusion, we can say that because of the network the stakeholders really gained from concrete initiatives for more cooperation between the two official VPL – providers for educational qualifications. The VISKA team has reached the commitment of the Examination Board of secondary education to share their experiences with the Federation SCE in assessment development / valid and reliable tool development. The stakeholders are also more aware of the importance of VPL and believe that the VISKA-project can eventually implicitly lead to an improver to validation. It is also important to continue the network after VISKA, because although there is already a better cooperation, not much has been achieved yet. However, not all stakeholders see the need to continue the network. The VISKA-project is not a priority for the members of the NAG which has consequences on the participation degree from the members of the NAG.

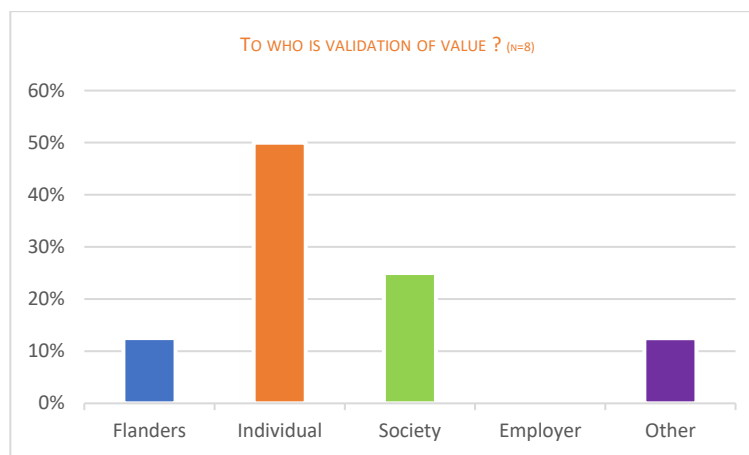


FIGURE 4 VIEWS ON THE VALUE OF VALIDATION (BELGIAN NAG)

In Flanders the stakeholders say that VPL is the most important for the individual (the learners) (50%), but they also find it of value to the society (25%) and to a lesser extent the country (12,5%). One stakeholder summed it up nicely (answer ‘other’):

*“For the individual it is of value because he can obtain a diploma more quickly, find a job faster or even go to higher education. It also can increase his self-esteem. For society and therefore Flanders it is of great value because competences of people will become more visible and more people will participate in lifelong learning. Even employers will gain from*

*it, because it gives more opportunities in finding people for jobs for which there are not many candidates at the moment.”*

In Belgium/Flanders, the transversal skills are implemented in the attainment targets of education. The output D3.2 was not a main objective of VSKA in Flanders. While Flanders initially did not plan to partake in this discussion and intervention, our involvement has increased. The VSKA Flanders team has cooperated with the partners and delivered input in the broader discussion. In Flanders these transversal skills are included in the current attainment targets. The attainment targets of the course ‘MACUSA’ (Society – Culture – Cooperation course) were passed on to the partner countries and used in the document ‘criteria for transversal skills’ (deliverable in work package 3). At Flemish level, VSKA has conducted a number of interviews with teachers (n=6) of the module ‘MACUSA’ to learn about their experiences and the possibilities they see on how to test (soft) transversal skills competences in a VPL – procedure for educational qualifications and with the aim of gaining a better insight into the possible reasons for the absence of exemption tests for these modules. Some ‘MACUSA’ attainment targets are evaluated in a process-based manner. This means that information is collected during the course of a project, programme or activity and therefore the process is being evaluated and not only the result at the end. During VPL, the product is evaluated and this does not work for all transversal skills. The Examination Board also indicates difficulties in validating soft transversal skills. The question that arises here is whether it is possible at all to validate soft transversal skills through exemption tests or VPL procedures.

We did however discuss the Transversal skills output in a meeting of the NAG. A majority of the stakeholders (71,43%) felt that all transversal skills were included in the common definition. 28,57% missed the items ‘Learning how to learn’, ‘Wellbeing’, ‘Entrepreneurship’ and ‘Taking initiative’. A majority (71,43%) also pointed out that a uniform framework and criteria for validation of transversal skills are important. They do find it important that an assessor still has some degree of autonomy.

*“A uniform framework offers the opportunity to, in a structured way, reflect on an innovative approach to education.”*

*“A uniform framework is important, but it has to be a framework with still enough autonomy for the assessor.”*

Given the role of the Flemish Ministry Department of Education and Training (DET) to respect the autonomy of CAEs in CPD, we could not provide a training module ourselves.

The CAE are responsible for the professionalization of their staff. The Pedagogical Advisory Services of their respective umbrella organisations can provide support to the centres. Because of the great autonomy granted to the CAE with regards to the validation of prior learning, there is a great difference in awareness between them. This, in turn, means that the training needs differ between them as well.

We discussed the interest of training courses and potential learning outcomes for VPL for educational qualifications with the members of the NAG, especially with the Pedagogical Advisory Services in Belgium-Flanders, as they are the leading organization providing educational support to the CAEs. They agree with the need for more initiatives for professionalization on VPL.

They see different reasons for the current status of poor professionalization initiatives:

- there is no legal basis in adult education for VPL for educational qualifications
  - o It is not a hot topic on the policy agenda of the directors of CAEs
- Professionalization is demand driven by the CAE
  - o The Pedagogical Advisory Services are dependent from CAEs
- Substantial savings on the financial resources of the Pedagogical Advisory Services by the beginning of the legislature 2014-2019 led to less initiatives.

In this context, the main goal for VISKA in Belgium-Flanders is to focus on raising awareness about the necessity of training in the context of VPL, in particular assuring the quality of the procedures. The stakeholders decided that

- the current exemption tests, used in the CAE, are the basis for the VPL -procedure in the VISKA – project
- the Quality kit made by AHOVOKS is a reference point for the quality assurance

TABLE 6 SUMMARY OF VIEWS ON CPD (BELGIAN NAG)

<b>Views on VISKA outputs</b>	<b>High Importance Placed on CPD</b>	<b>Specific LOs relating to interpreters and cultural aspects needed</b>
<i>How valuable was the CPD module?</i>	Question asked: What importance do you place on CPD for trained mentors/...	
<i>Belgium (Flanders)</i>	85,71% high 14,29% mediocre 0% low	not applicable for Flanders

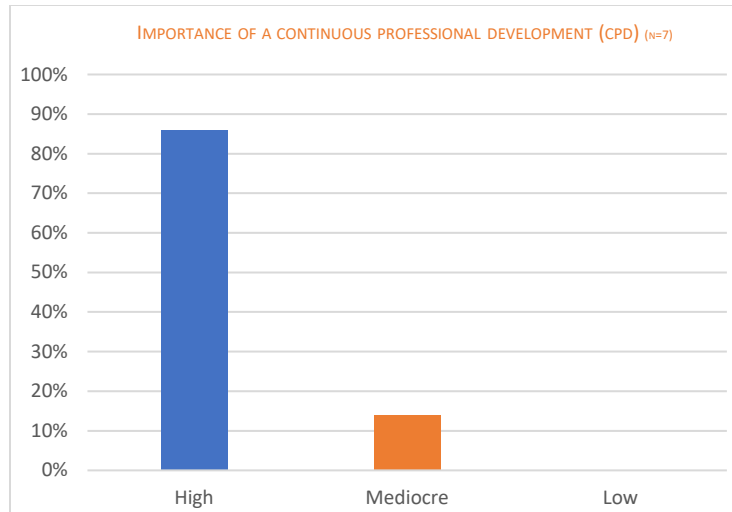


FIGURE 5 VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CPD FOR VPL PROFESSIONALS (BELGIAN NAG)

The stakeholders recognise the importance of professionalisation of frontline staff (85,71% high importance, 14,29% mediocre importance). The Pedagogical Advisory Services specifically confirm that more actions are indeed needed in the professionalisation of VPL for the staff of CAEs.

In a focus group the stakeholders discussed how the professionalisation might be supported and what could be barriers to enhance the professionalisation. What is strongly pointed out is that the task of professionalisation mainly lies with the Pedagogical Advisory Services to ensure its uniformity, but that it can also be arranged by other facilities that offer professionalisation on VPL.

*"Professionalisation is now taking place in the centres, but it could be organised by the Pedagogical Advisory Services so that it happens in the same way everywhere. On the other hand, I think that specific matters can be supported by the Pedagogical Advisory Services, but also by other facilities that want to offer a professionalisation, such as the Federation SCE.*

*"The professionalisation must be developed partly globally but also partly specifically (locally)".*

At the moment the professionalisation mostly happens in an informal way because of the lack of an overarching and centralised policy and therefore the lack of a structural approach. Because of that, there is insufficient support, there are not enough resources/ staff and too little is known about VPL for AGE to provide professionalisation in a formal way. Precisely because it now happens in an informal way with a

lot of autonomy of CAEs, the stakeholders assume that resistance will play a big role in enhancing professionalisation. If professionalisation is clearly framed, the stakeholders expect that the resistance is of a short-term nature.

*"The barriers associated with this are resistance for sure, humanly speaking, people have to keep up with the material and retrain themselves, and the centres that threaten to lose autonomy".*

*"Resistance usually is temporary. If the framework is clear, the resistance is temporary, if the framework is not sufficiently clear, i.e. 'with ears and hooks and eyes' through which one can slip, then this will also happen."*

Ideas about what the content of the professionalisation can be and how to approach were given in an open question of a survey sent out to the stakeholders (n=7):

- clear guidelines for the assessors
- creation of a network of assessors and developing common tools
- e-learning led by the Pedagogical Advisory Services
- annual meeting for all involved with VPL

A focus group with the members of the Pedagogical Advisory Services, with regard to the learning outcomes of a professional development module on VPL, has not yet taken place. It is too early at this stage to give more information on the VISKA outputs for this item.

TABLE 7 VIEWS ON POLICY (BELGIAN NAG)

Views on Policy	Belgium (Flanders)
<b>Do current policies support VPL</b>	57,14% yes 28,57% no 14,58% yes and no
<b>Could Policy Change make VPL for educational qualification more accessible?</b>	yes
<b>Where would responsibility for the policy change lie?</b>	85,71% government 14,29% local (CAEs)

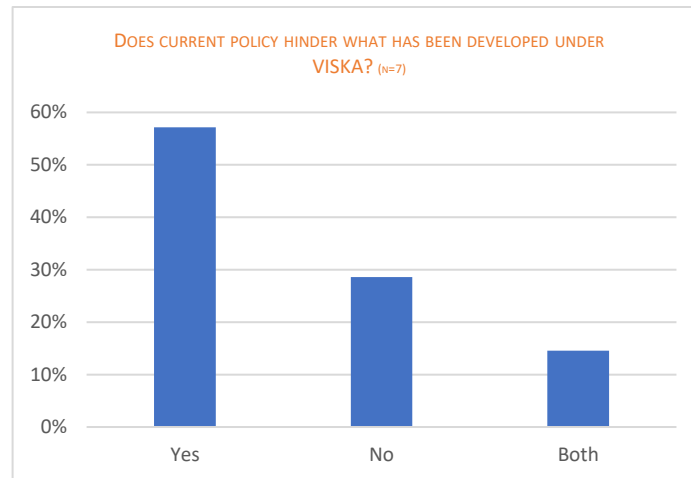


FIGURE 6 VIEWS ON THE IMPACT OF POLICY (BELGIAN NAG)

All stakeholders agree that there is a lack of legal basis for VPL procedures for educational qualifications. It only focuses on professional qualifications. At the moment it is not possible to hand out an official certificate for the course AGE through VPL and there is no overarching framework for quality standards. Also pointed out in a focus group is the fact that the Belgian Parliament is currently making new attainment targets for secondary education. It is important to monitor the similarity between the attainment targets to be reached in secondary education (Examination Board) and in the course of AGE in CAEs. Unfortunately, there is no view on this yet. This could be a reason why there is a lack of decretal basis for VPL for educational qualifications

*“Before you start VPL, you have to agree on what we want our adults to be able to do in this domain and maybe that is the reason why VPL for educational qualifications is not yet a priority, just because we can't and first have to wait for the modernisation of secondary education and the first curriculum files.”*

There is one stakeholder who strongly believes that VPL will become more widely known because of the VISKA-project and that the initiatives are possible within the current legal framework, but mainly prepare for the extension of the framework.

Because of the current decree and the autonomy of CAEs regarding the exemptions, VISKA Flanders can only give recommendations.

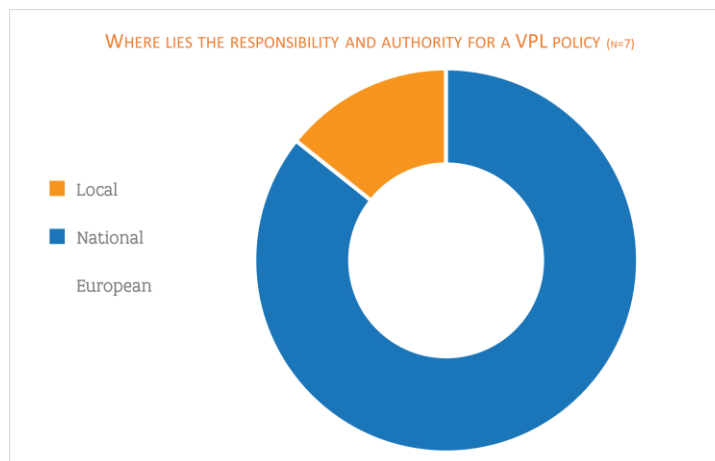


FIGURE 7 VIEWS ON THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR POLICY (BELGIAN NAG)

According to the stakeholders the responsibility and authority for a VPL-policy mainly lies at a Flemish level (85,14%). To the question ‘What policies or changes to policy are required to enhance VPL for educational qualifications?’, asked in a focus group, the stakeholders state that there should be workable instruments of high quality available somewhere. It forms a basis on which you can build. Some instruments are already available, but quality control is lacking. This requires specialization. Resources should be made available for specialized people to develop instruments and have them validated. Validation can be a task of the education inspectorate. The government can also provide resources to guarantee the quality of the instruments, more specific the exemptions test.

*"It seems a good idea to me to also give project resources to people with a specific background and say ‘you work out everything regarding the social modules, the others regarding scientific modules, you regarding MACUSA’ ... then you have covered the whole surface and you have that validated in one way or another, either by inspection, ...".*

*"It seems to me that a certain specialization is recommended, instead of having one CAE test everything, split them up according to specialization.... At the moment the specializations are mainly focused on professional qualifications and not on educational qualifications"*

*"This could be possible as well... Include the release of resources to appoint a person across the centres to check the quality of exemption tests."*

Cooperation between all providers of VPL, sharing expertise and instruments should be more structurally regulated.

*"Why is there no cooperation now? Because we see each other as competitors". The exchange of materials, knowledge could mean so much. Give people the opportunity to sit together and produce things together."*

## Iceland – NAG Findings

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Validation of Prior Learning and discussion are a part of the educational culture in Iceland. The VISKA project itself is an addition that has broadened the scope, so the relevant parties are already aware of what validation is. The conversation is deeper and there are new areas that have not entered into the discussion before within Iceland. It is a new experience in the Icelandic context to apply validation to migrant workers and those who do not speak Icelandic. Validation of Prior Learning is already a part of the operation of workers unions but through VISKA this is with a new audience.

There is more emphasis in general on the topic in relation to wage negotiations. There has been a call for definitions of validation criteria for wage negotiations. Discussions are general when it comes to wage contracts rather than specifically focused on migrant workers. There is interest in Validation of Prior Learning against specific jobs and Validation of Prior Learning against salary decisions and there is an opportunity to implement that into the experimental project. A need for some sort of a reward or benefit for the workers going through the validation process has been identified.

In relation to the building of consensus around validation in the Icelandic National Advisory Group there has not been an agreement around validation, but it has become embedded in the discussion (within unions) in regards with the adult learning arena. The current system is being made more inclusive; however, some of the members of the National Advisory Group are unsure if this is the case.

Continuing the VISKA collaboration has been identified as important in Iceland. It is possible to build on the project's ground work and experience to continue to expand this offer to migrant workers so they can utilise their experience in the labour market. The Education and Training Service Centre and IDAN-education and training centre will continue with the project. Workers Unions could also proceed with the VISKA project. There is an official policy in Iceland that migrants should benefit from their education.

There is a need to extend Validation of Prior Learning to university education. The future aim and development could be that people with higher level education get assessment according to their university education, if they choose to do so (Note: for formal learning this is available through ENIC/NARIC services at the University of Iceland).

The fundamental concept of lifelong learning and in valuing life-wide learning often differs from the traditional academic approach to learning. The academic approach is that people should start at ground zero when they arrive in Iceland. It will take time for the lifelong learning approach to education to



translate between these two worlds. But it also happens that people come here and want to leave their old lives behind, including the education.

It would be an improvement if there was some sort of a consistent investigation process and systematic recording of the basic education which people have when they enter the country. As it is, the Directorate of Labour is the only official body that keeps information on the education of unemployed workers.

There is no one place that keeps information and no systematic documentation of education records in Iceland, however this would not be a unique situation. The registration is not automatically implemented. For people in the health industry records on education are kept at the Directorate of Health, you might find the records for university educated immigrants in the Industrial Affairs Committee of Iceland, for engineers, technicians, architects and so forth. Statistics Iceland now has a registry for those who receive validation within the certified trades. But, the current validation system includes only a small proportion of migrant employees on the labour market. There is a great need for the VISKA project in Iceland and it is very important that the project does not isolate within certain trades or fields of work.

The project is not far enough ahead to decide on the value of the criteria developed for Transversal skills. Even if we have not reached the end it is very important to continue to develop Transversal skills validation processes. We need to prepare for the fourth industrial revolution with emphasise on Transversal skills and soft skills and use the full framework for skills. It is possible to define soft skills on many competence levels, but then the training would take place in the workplace, when you know what is expected of you and what the job actually entails.

It is very important to connect the discussion to educational politics. It is very important to differentiate between technical aspects, and when there is a call for a political resolution. Sometimes the conversation gets too focused on technical solutions when there really needs to be a discussion and focus on the policy lines, the politics of education. Here it is important to let the fourth industrial revolution pull us forward.

There is a distinction between the validation system itself and the learning and developmental process of this project, since sustainable funding for the continuation of the additional tasks and product which derive from the VISKA project (different outreach, translations, interpreter services etc). Current national funding through the Education Fund (Fræðslusjóð) is available but additional funding would be needed to reach and include migrants to a broader extent. That would be a governmental decision. There is a need to increase enrolment in Upper Secondary Schools in the Technical College in Reykjavík and increase the

services available to these students (migrants). As it is the additional services in the school system also need funding.

The project has given good hope but it has been surprising to find out how much effort it has been to reach people to participate in the project. To reach foreign workers seems to be harder than reaching Icelanders. Different language is not the only barrier and there are also some differences in mentality and culture. The biggest thing to learn from this project is how much effort needs to be put into recruiting groups of foreign employees into the validation process.

It is also possible that it will take more time to introduce the process for different groups. It took time and effort to introduce the validation process to Icelandic employees. Participation in the project is varied between different sectoral groups. Future aims need to take that into account and design and prioritize according to target groups. There are 55 pathways to validation open already, against the national educational curricula and against job criteria. The demand for validation is different depending on different pathways. Some Icelandic groups of workers are very hard to reach also.

The VISKA project is paving the way for people into schools and continuing learning through Validation of Prior Learning. An active conversation has already begun, and preparation work for enrolment procedures has also already begun in some schools. There is no lack of will, but a system needs to be implemented to ensure the validation process can lead to a full qualification with the full cooperation of the school system.

The project itself speaks to the policy of Iceland implementation of immigrant policy. As such there should not be big hindrances. The mentality and attitude towards the project is very positive in general. It is possible that some obstacles might arise, for instance if the schools would decline to sign more students into their programs.

There is hope that a process will be implemented for a direct collaboration between schools and the labour market. There is a big group of people that can benefit from validation, but to this day we are declining applications for validation because the applicant does not speak Icelandic and all the school programs that should support them are in Icelandic. In Iceland there is the official policy that everyone has a right to education, but of course it is a hindrance when foreign migrants are led through the process of validation but after that they reach a halt, especially in the rural areas.

To meet the demand and need of migrant workers there is a clear need to develop a validation process for Transversal skills for higher level education. If the validation is only available for secondary

education, we are automatically excluding certain groups from the validation. The future prospects of the implementation of the project itself depend on government policy and implementation and the conversation with the educational system and the local governments in different areas of Iceland.

## Norway – NAG Findings

Several of the National Advisory Group participants think they have little basis for saying whether the VISKA project has influenced cooperation and/or networking in the VPL field as yet. This group does not see directly what happens in the field in practice. They suggest that expert staff at a lower level, closer to practice, would know more about a possible effect that the project has had on cooperation and networking.

In NAG's opinion VPL has probably become more visible for staff working directly with the target group. They think that in all likelihood, the project has also contributed to making the VPL field more visible generally. The NAG also functions as a network and has contributed to increased competence and knowledge about VPL among group members.

*"It is highly likely that something happens, since when entering a project, one naturally becomes more engaged in the specific topic of the project. The VPL field has perhaps become more visible which it absolutely had not without the project. The NAG is also a kind of network after all. The existence of this group has at least contributed to increased knowledge about VPL for the members. And maybe also in situations where the topic is discussed at one's workplace, then maybe one can have some influence."* NAG member

A consensus has not as yet been developed around validation in the NAG as the network participants started with varying levels of previous knowledge of VPL. This NAG has been established for the VISKA project specifically and will not be continued after the end of the project. NAG suggests that following on from the project it may be relevant to set up local networks, closer to the practice field, and in that case, funding would be required. As an advisory group for a project the NAG has a defined starting point and a defined end. NAG suggest that it would probably be more relevant for a possible future network to involve more local actors and to support their cooperation.

NAG points out that if VPL meets the needs of the target group, that is; offers possibilities to gain from relevant competence at an early stage, it is very useful for society, employers and individuals.

*"Obviously, it is very useful if one manages to reach this target group. One knows that not all of those who live in reception centres, either in integration reception centres or other reception*

*centres, are in the target group for the Viska project. But if one manages to reach those who are in a position to benefit from a validation process and transition into the labour market it is invaluable.” NAG member*

NAG acknowledges that initial assessment and support takes place at an early stage and thereby provides realistic information about the possibilities and opportunities in the short and in the long term. NAG points out that experience from the VISKA project may contribute both to policy development and to further development of the national VPL system. In Norway, through the Viska project VPL is tried out with a target group which had not had access to VPL previously (because of the required use of Norwegian in the VPL process). If it is successful, it is natural to transfer the outcomes into policy. NAG comments that some regions place more value on VPL than others and this project could provide a really exciting impetus for developments in this space. As it aligns well with the new strategy for integration that is underway there is an opportunity for this to develop and achieve more as part of something bigger.

NAG supposes that the need for competence development for staff will probably grow, in order to reach the new target group, along with general competence development to assure quality in the practice. They point out that continuous professional development for VPL staff is important. NAG mentions that VPL might be included as a regular element in professional development for teachers. There is still some scepticism towards VPL in working life. Therefore, it might be important that professional development for VPL becomes part of a system in which credits are given, in order to increase its status and perceived seriousness.

*“Even though VPL has been around for close to twenty years, there are still a lot of people who somehow suspect that this is a kind of easy way to get a qualification. For this reason, one must counter it by showing regularly that quality is looked after. This could for example be an existing education which in fact should be obligatory for all those involved in VPL, but we do not have any legal authority to require this now. So, we can only recommend, but it is very important.” NAG member.*

NAG suggests that possible policy development should be considered when the project is over. Early intervention with VPL could be an important result as to policy development. The set-up of VPL has to be more transparent and possibly improved. One obstacle to developing VPL for this target group in Norway is the supply of qualified interpreters as well as the need for more awareness of VPL among those who can benefit from it. There are also considerations of the costs and resources required to ensure that it is effective and assured. To enhance the VPL system, some changes are necessary at policy level. VPL must be made more visible at policy level. Funding and resourcing are challenges. NAG points out that the

Regulation of the Education Act must be amended if it is to be possible to perform VPL in another language than Norwegian or Sami. The five regions participating in the trial have been exempted from the Regulation.

NAG finds that experience from the project in Norway could be relevant at European level. An established system, like they have in Norway, is of great importance to successful VPL. Experience from providing VPL early in an integration pathway could be very useful elsewhere in Europe also. Making the results and the experience from the project visible will be important.

*“The fact that we are in different countries and have different ways of performing VPL, and different educational requirements and so on calls for specialised national solutions. But the general ideas of early intervention, using interpreters and other things would be transferable.”*

*NAG member*

## Ireland – NAG Findings

The NAG as a network was viewed as useful and is a model used across the system nationally to resolve and progress important issues. While it introduced new elements such as initial teacher education networks, practitioner, provider, learner representative bodies, statutory agencies and government departments together, it was acknowledged at the NAG meeting of November, 2018 that in order for real progress to be made, co-ordination is required at national policy lead-level, anticipated to be the Department of Education and Skills. In other words, the NAG could forge, support and stimulate connections among and across key stakeholder groups, but could not resolve key issues requiring ministry-level leadership and decision-making power.

The Transversal Skills document arising from the VISKA project consortium was viewed as an interesting and pertinent discussion document among the wide range of other discussion documents under consideration nationally, including ESCO, EU Core Competencies, national work on transversal skills within the implementation of new programme validation policies by ETBs and ongoing work on implementation of new awards and standards policies and skills identification tools such as ‘Understand my Journey’ which also maps soft skills using a mobile phone device. It was felt that it was important to map soft skills and a view was expressed by one participant that it was important in some way to be able to quantify them from a statistical perspective. There is interest in the outcomes of the field trials in this area and in further consideration of the relevance of outcomes to the national context, through discussion among the relevant range of stakeholder groups and networks. Essentially collaborative consultative processes were

seen as a critical part of continuing successful address of delivery of transversal skills within national systems and processes, including VPL.

The NAG discussion and the consideration of VISKA issues and outputs was influenced by some contemporaneous national projects across further education and training in Ireland, such as TOBAR, where ten ETBs have implemented VPL services with Defence Force personnel leading to the development of an infrastructure for service provision, a range of innovative tools to facilitate skills audit and assessment, staff training, support and development approaches, and approaches to Quality Assurance both systematically and specifically. This work energized and inspired interest nationally and enabled real consideration of VISKA outputs and issues, without which there might have been far less context and comprehension. Others felt that collaboration had grown because of the range of national policies and funding requirements, including economic policy directions, strategic plans and goals nationally that have been identified.

It was felt by these participants that for normal training purposes, this CPD module would not be appropriate to meet needs in the national context. CPD nationally should operate on three levels, ie to raise awareness, address practical skill needs and provide specialist skills including of additional support needs. People need practical skills in the application of RPL. Working with an interpreter was acknowledged as an additional challenge. It was felt overall that the objectives were not appropriate for this national context; however, CPD and initial training were viewed as very important. While this had overall consensus, it was not regarded as necessary to be reflected in obligatory certification, as these requirements would vary according to both individual role and organizational demand. Training could be live, organic and technologically driven, but also delivered face to face. Design of national systems should start at the adoption of principles in order to guide practice, and then address the relevant business process in order to get practice up and running. Provision and development of training and CPD would be assisted by funding policy compacts and broader environmental requirements.

## Data from Frontline and Guidance Staff

In looking at the number of frontline and guidance staff who were consulted as part of the field trials and interventions of the Viska project, the table below outlines the numbers per country.

TABLE 8 NUMBERS OF FRONTLINE STAFF INVOLVED IN VISKA

Belgium (Flanders)	73
Iceland	14

Ireland	10
Norway	21

TABLE 9 VIEWS OF FRONTLINE STAFF (BELGIUM, ICELAND)

Frontline Staff Views	Belgium (Flanders) (n=7)	Iceland
Enhanced Awareness and Understanding of VPL by applicants	28,57%	VPL is well established in Iceland for locals but needs more discussions and introduction about VPL for migrants.
Educational providers more aware and more active	71,43%	Vocational schools are well aware of VPL - established system is in place to enrol and support participants. No systematic procedure in place to support migrants.
Improved Cultural Acceptance	42,86%	Cultural acceptance is the key and this is done by accepting the individual regardless of gender, country of origin. It is also important for locals to understand better the educational system and background of the participants.
More funding or more resources	85,71%	Need for both funding and resources. As is, the VET schools at full capacity and limited resources to support migrants
Better inclusion of employers	28,57%	Implement VPL in workplace for all (employers and employees, locals and migrants). Preventing misconception and prejudice towards VPL through awareness campaign and dialogue.

## Belgium (Flanders) – Staff Findings

It is important to know that during the VISKA-project the number of the frontline staff questioned were not always the same. Before the field trials we sent out a survey to the directors and coordinators of all the CAEs offering the AGE-course (n=40) to gain insight on the use of and policy on VPL in their centres<sup>15</sup>. The seminar we held regarding a CPD module was attended by some coordinators and guidance counsellors (n=27). When we talk about results of the CAEs participating in the field trials we only questioned the coordinators/guidance counsellors (n=7) of these CAEs. We also interviewed six teachers (n=6) who teach the course 'MACUSA'.

### *Frontline staff: directors/ coordinators (n=40)*

An online survey (June 2018) for directors and coordinators (n=40) of the CAEs on the use of and the policy on VPL in their centres mentioned a weak awareness for more professionalization on VPL. A minority of

<sup>15</sup> These centres did not all take part in the field trials (only 7 did) but the 40 centres are informed on a regular base of the progress of the project and where possible involved in the content (eg seminar)

directors of CAE, questioned in the survey, are unsure whether the professionalization on VPL should be considered as an obligation for the centres. There is no common definition nor a standard procedure for VPL. In the current context directors of CAEs have great autonomy in qualification/certification, as determined in article 35, §2 4° 5° of the decree of adult education from 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007.

Frontline staff: coordinators/ guidance counsellors (n=27)

Based on the seminar held in November 2018 and the online evaluation survey afterwards for frontline staff about the European VPL principles (European guidelines for validating formal and non-formal learning, CEDEFOP) and the importance of a good quality assurance (e.g. quality kit), here some views on what is required to improve validation in practice according to the frontline staff.

The evaluation survey shows that there is a lack of knowledge and awareness of the principles of the European guidelines on VPL and the quality kit. Most of them mentioned their intensions and interests to increase their knowledge about the subject. The seminar was experienced as very enlightening by the audience.

*“The explanation was very enlightening to me and it encouraged me to reflect on the current operation of our centre. Regarding giving information to the adult learners about the preparation of exemption tests, I was always reluctant. Now it is clear to me that it is necessary and from now on I’ll do this.”*

Frontline staff participating in the field trials: coordinators (n=7)

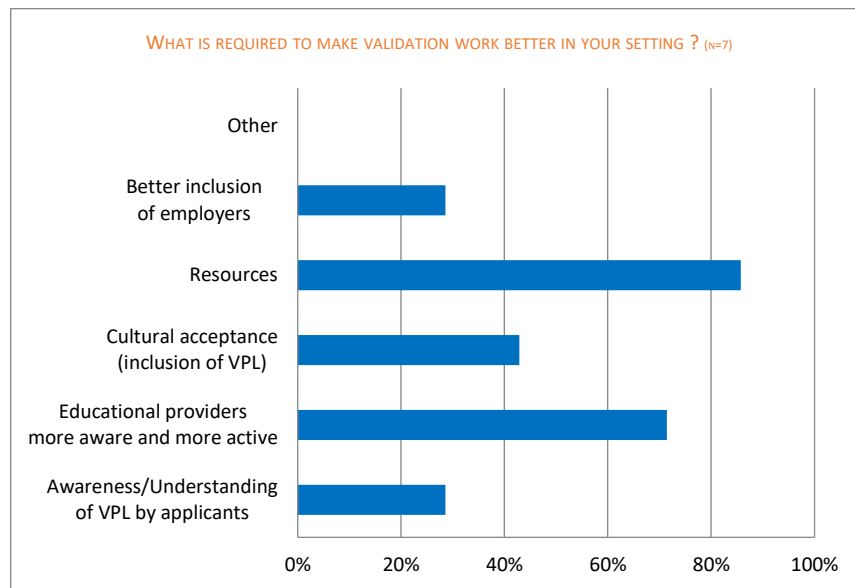


FIGURE 8 VIEWS ON FACTORS TO IMPROVE VALIDATION (BELGIAN STAFF) (N=7)



An opinion shared by the vast majority is that there is lack of financial support for a consistent VPL offer (85,71%). At this time, CAEs do not receive funding for VPL. Currently, a major reform of public funding of adult education is approved by parliament and is due to be implemented starting from September 2019. As of today, the impact of this reform on VPL in adult education remains unclear. It is also important that the educational providers of VPL are more aware of VPL and have a more active role (71,43%).

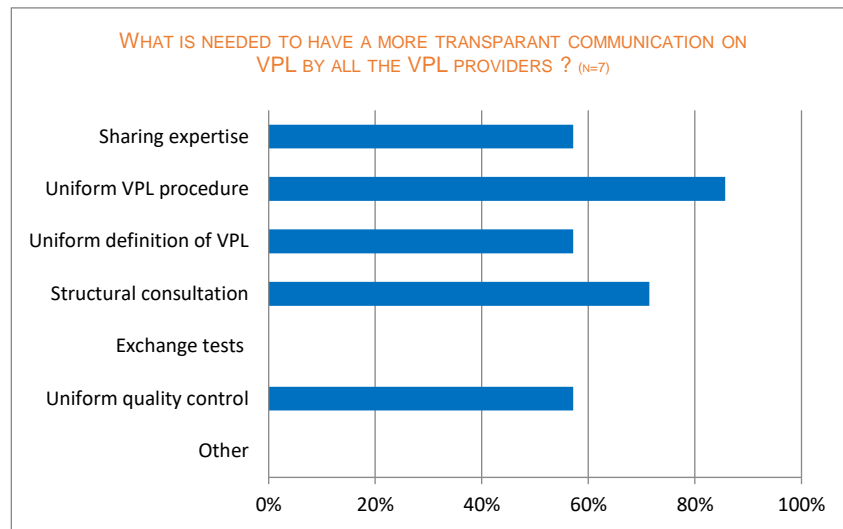


FIGURE 9 VIEWS ON FACTORS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION (BELGIAN STAFF)

A uniform VPL procedure (85,71%) and structural consultation (71,43%) is needed to provide a more transparent communication by all the VPL providers. A uniform definition of VPL is also important for a more transparent communication (57,14%) as well as a uniform quality control (57,14%) and sharing expertise (57,14%).

The greatest advantage of a more transparent communication by all VPL providers is more unambiguity and clarity for the applicants. A shorter and more efficient way to a diploma is also mentioned.

*“Applicants get the same treatment in relation to VPL.”*

*“Clear communications of the VPL procedure to the applicants, because now CAEs cannot provide a conclusive answer about which exemptions they can get.”*

As mentioned before VISKA Flanders doesn't have the authority to install a CPD module, because the autonomy lies within the centres. The VISKA team did however hold a seminar (n=27) to focus on raising awareness about the necessity of training in the context of VPL, in particular with regards to assure the

quality of the procedure. VISKA Flanders also questioned the frontline staff of the participating CAEs (n=7) to point out their views on the professionalization of their staff.

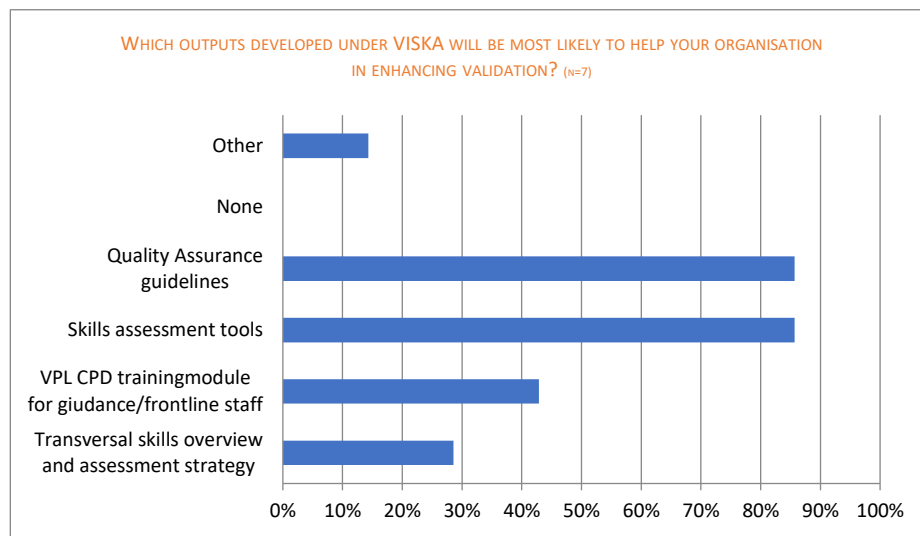


FIGURE 10 VIEWS ON THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF VISKA OUTPUTS (BELGIAN STAFF)

The CAEs will benefit the most of a skills assessment tool (85,71%) and quality assurance guidelines (85,71%), according to the frontline staff. A training module will also be very helpful (42,86%). One member of the frontline staff also sees the usefulness of an output to validate existing tools.

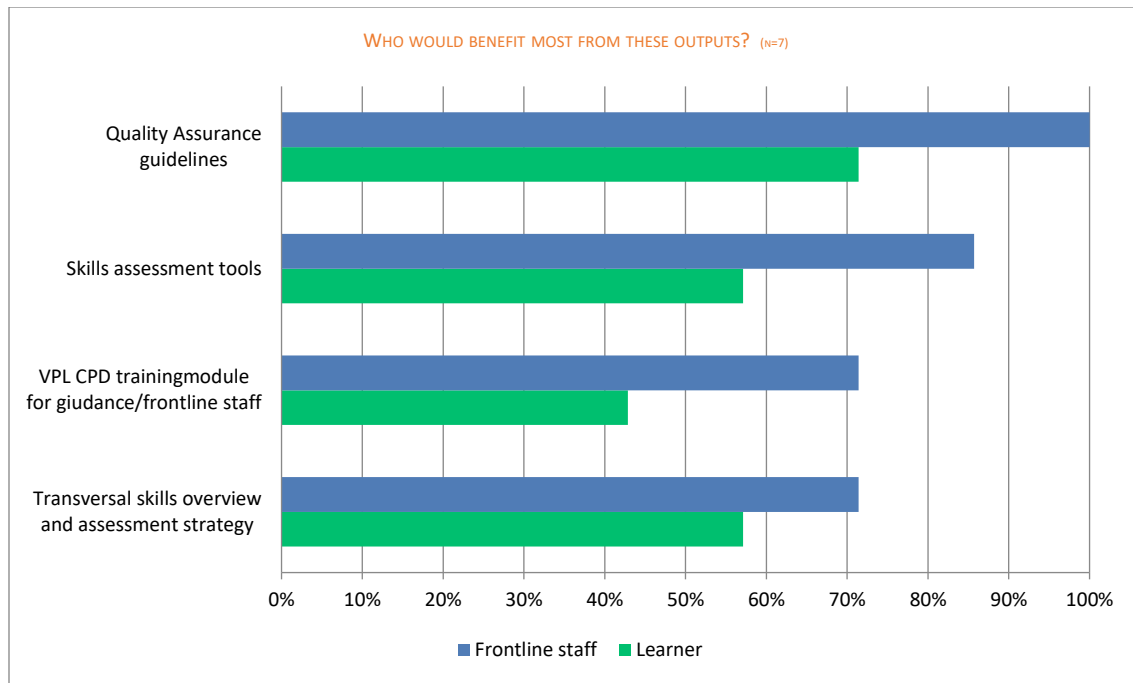


FIGURE 11 VIEWS ON THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE VISKA OUTPUTS (BELGIAN STAFF)

To the question ‘Who would benefit the most from these outputs’ it is very clear that the frontline staff would benefit the most from all of these outputs. The results also confirm that there is a great need for quality assurance. The frontline staff also sees the importance of the outputs for the learners for most of the outputs. Most of the respondents marked both ‘Learners’ and ‘Frontline staff’ (80% for transversal skills overview, 71,43% for quality assurance guidelines, 66,67% for the skills assessment tool and 60% for the VPL training module).

The frontline staff recognizes the importance of developing tools to enhance a uniform VPL procedure but most of the frontline staff do not feel it is of high importance (57,14% mediocre).

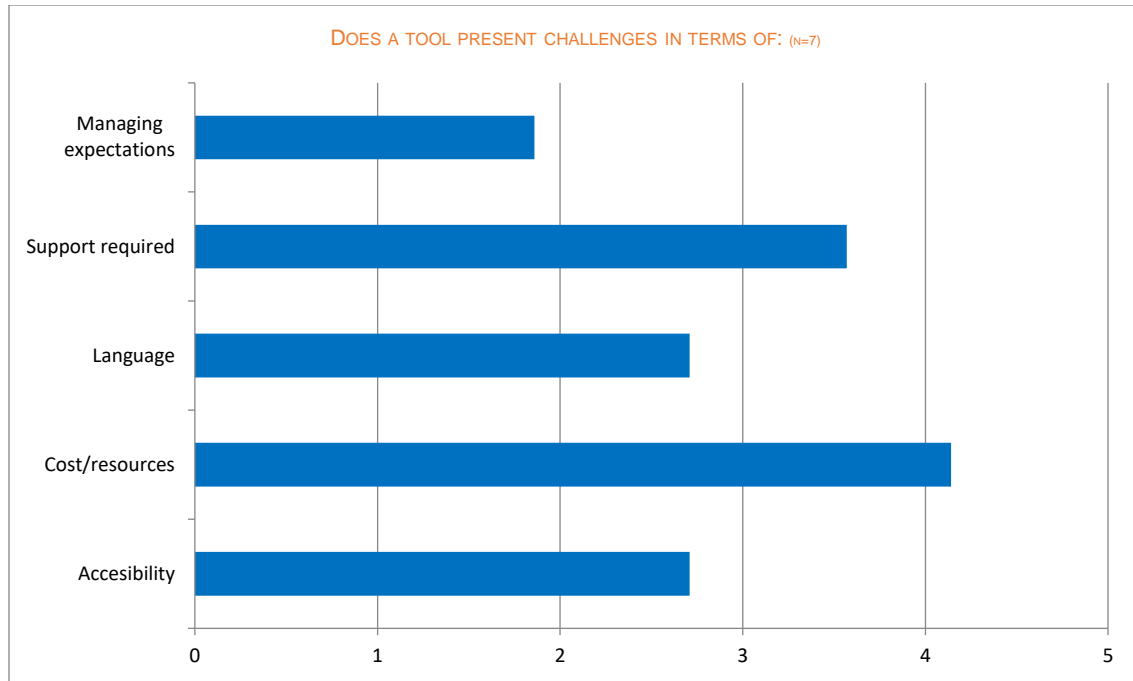


FIGURE 12 CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY VALIDATION TOOLS (BELGIAN STAFF)

The frontline staff expects that resources/cost will be the biggest challenge for such a tool. On a scale from 1 (least challenging) to 5 (most challenging) it scores a 4,14. Support will also be required (3,57). Managing expectations will be the least challenging (1,86) according to the frontline staff. Other challenges will be the completeness and the interpretation by the supervisors of the open questions.

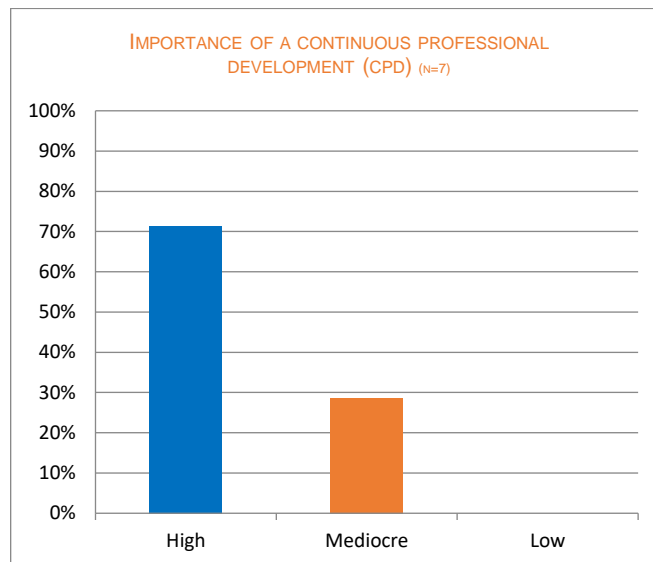


FIGURE 13 IMPORTANCE OF CPD (BELGIAN STAFF)

The frontline staff recognises the importance of professionalisation of frontline staff (71,43% high importance, 28,57% mediocre importance). When asked to identify three areas for development the frontline staff gave the following areas:

- separate compensation for developers, supervisors
- resources to compensate for the time invested
- time to be able to go through the whole VPL procedure
- validity of the exemption tests
- insight into the VPL procedure
- conducting interviews with applicants

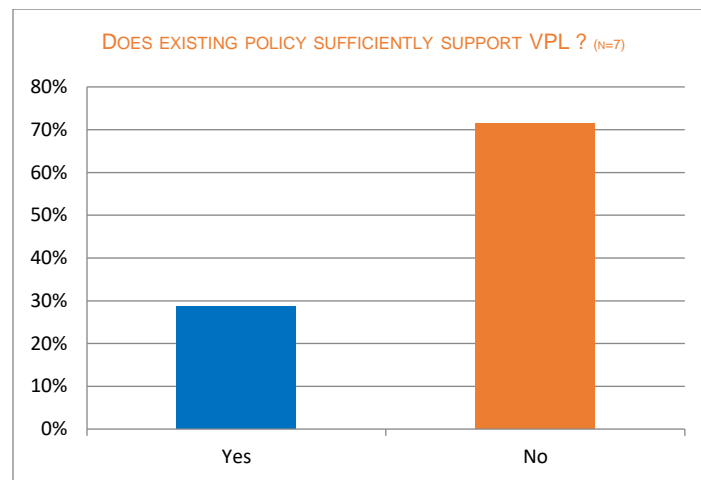


FIGURE 14 VIEWS ON POLICY IN RELATION TO VALIDATION (BELGIAN STAFF)

According to the majority of the frontline staff, the existing policy does not provide enough support for VPL (71,43%). When asked about what policy recommendations they would make to support VPL, the need for a transparent decree, adequate resources and quality control is strongly pointed out by all of the frontline staff.

*“There should be a transparent decree on VPL with quality control from the Department of Education.”*

*“ It is important to get some sort of recognition of the efforts by the centres through the allocation of sufficient resources and support (e.g. validation of exemption tests).”*

A focus group with the participating centres was held in December '18 and January '19. The data are being processed and the outcomes will be reported in the final report.

## Iceland - Staff Findings

In looking at what is required to make validation work better in Iceland there were a number of factors or considerations identified. As in the Norwegian field trial, IDAN and ETSC also used an interpreter in the validation process. It was discovered that although it really makes a difference to have a qualified interpreter it would be an improvement if the translator involved was trained in the vocabulary of the trade or is a professional trade worker who speaks both languages. It was evident by the IDAN and ETSC partners that there is a lack of awareness and understanding of VPL among potential applicants in Iceland.

Validation is only the start of a longer process and what happens after the validation needs to be taken into account in the initial stages of planning. There needs to be a progression pathway in place so that people have visible and real opportunities after the validation process. There are discussions going on with some of the Upper Secondary Schools to enrol the project participants after the validation process.

The discussions centre on how to proceed into the school system and support people to finish their education. The question also arises as to who will provide sufficient translation services for those who go into the school system aiming at completing studies and other services they will require. There is an urgent sense of need of purpose with the validation among applicants and therefore the challenge is how to bridge the current gap between the educational system and the validation process. People who enter the validation process have expectations to be able to finish their education based on their validation results but might not have the Icelandic language skills required. Cultural Acceptance which is the inclusion of VPL into your daily setting through systems and processes is key. It would be valuable for frontline staff to have an introduction to the structure of the educational system in Poland to better understand what it entails. Education varies between countries.

In considering the involvement of employers and the consideration of their needs support for workers from employers is required and can make a difference in outcome for the workers. There are several indications that reveal that support is lacking in some workplaces and in some instances there is the risk of exploitation or restriction of workers. It should be acknowledged that in order to build engagement in this area that employers need to see the benefits in sending workers to the validation programs.

Language skills were identified as being important in the validation process, further consideration was given to some other strengths or skills that support an individual through validation. Some of the workers

involved in the field trials in Iceland have never worked in Poland and some of them have extensive experience and bring evidence (e.g. photos) of the work they have done. The front-line staff and guidance counsellors have found that what they learn from this project is transferable to other lines of work. The preparation class for frontline staff involved in the VISKA project was considered very useful. Some examples of lessons learnt included, to learn to focus on the person who is speaking and not view the translator more as a tool in the conversation.

There needs to be sufficient support from employers to create a positive learning environment in the workplace. It can be very helpful in the validation process to actually see what work participants have been doing and to create conversations about how tasks are conducted. As the evidence of prior learning may not be documented or supported through formal references participants are encouraged to bring photos of their work if they have them.

Workers from Poland are encouraged to describe their work environment and projects they have worked on earlier to make the conversation with the assessors more informed. Sometimes participants working in carpentry from Poland have only worked outside of Poland in Iceland or Scandinavia.

In looking at developing more transparent communication in the validation process in Iceland consideration is required as to how this can be achieved with the learner maintained in the centre of the process. One suggestion is to prepare them for the interviews for example by showing them an example video of the interview with frontline staff. This has the benefit of providing them with the insight as to what the validation interview is and for them to feel more secure. This has the added benefit for the front-line staff as they are required to consider what they need to ask or seek clarification on within the validation interview. The video can also be used as a benchmark for staff who are less familiar or experienced in validation.

A second suggestion to ensure transparency in the process is that there is no delay of results from the validation interviews as the participants get their results at the end of each validation interview.

In considering whether participants may worry that the validation process may lower their prospects, this does not arise as participants know that everything is confidential and the employer will not get the results. A third party does not have access to the results. The assessors have good interview techniques and have the professional capacity to lower stress levels of the applicants. The experience in the VISKA project will help in developing the validation with other groups.

The existing training and tools are considered sufficient to support the learning needed for validation staff. It was commented that there is a need to update some of the validation tools, for instance the self-assessment list; although it is considered to be concise, accessible and valid for its purpose.

It was stated that the whole of society benefits from the VISKA project and its outputs and that the individual leaves with more awareness of his/her trade in the labour market after the validation process. There are benefits for all parties involved in the validation process in Iceland including participants, assessors and frontline-staff

It was reflected by staff involved in the validation process in Iceland that an office is maybe not the best place for the assessment interview to take place. It could be more beneficial if it took place in a carpenter's workshop or in a school setting with access to building material and tools. The validation would become more accurate in a setting where tools and materials are available. The process would become more hands on in relation to each part that is used.

The involvement of employers in the process and in examining what hinders the VPL process from taking place in a real workplace is mostly the cost that it would entail. Another solution would be if there was a mobile tool box available at the office for the purpose of simulating the work environment. For instance, with different samples of wood to show to the participants. The use of available handbooks for trade work could also be of support which could be made accessible on a computer for frontline staff and participants for review.

One of the areas identified as requiring careful consideration is that of **managing expectations**. In the Icelandic context there are most likely underlying expectations for better salary and more job security linked to the validation process. The purpose of the validation is carefully explained in the beginning, including that no one can have all their skills validated and there is no way of knowing beforehand the equivalent worth of education each applicant will get. It is rare that applicants are disappointed but more often they are more eager to take on studies than anything else. Expectations can be a positive motivational factor.

All actors involved in validation need to take part in a two-day course coordinated by the ETSC before the work on VPL projects. Therefore, all frontline staff involved in the VISKA project have undergone that basic training. But competences of staff need to be kept fluent and up to date. It is of high importance and a necessity that all actors involved in the validation process come together and review methods and tools



together, considering the self-assessment lists and other tools involved in a systematic way. That would encompass a certain type of professional development.

In considering if existing policy is sufficiently supporting the validation of prior learning in Iceland, it was identified that there is a discrepancy between government policy and what is happening on the ground. Schools agreed to increase enrolment of migrant students, but it is the experience of the front line staff that their applications are not accepted. There is an official shortage of professional craftsmen in the country, but applicants are not being enrolled into the schools. It is the opinion of front line staff and guidance counsellors that the existing policy in Iceland is lacking in substance and application.

The progress in the Educational system has been stagnant for many years. There needs to be a systematic application of policy and procedure in this regard. Fundamental problems like school accommodation for increased number of enrolled students need to be resolved. The current percentage of migrant craftsmen workers in Iceland is close to 40% of the total craftsmen workforce, the government needs to respond to their needs for education and validation thereof.

There also needs to be more public discussion about validation and focus on raising general awareness of the possibility of entering the validation process. A general introduction to validation in the media could help raise public awareness along with proper funding of all elements of the process. It is important to consider that it is more economical to validate migrant workers' competences than to have them start from zero in the school system. The VISKA project itself is worthy of news covering, that in itself is a way to enter a discussion from a positive angle.

In driving policy forward in Iceland responsibility lies with the government. There is a tendency for projects like VISKA to become irrelevant in the Ministry of Education and in the Ministry of Industries and Innovation. It would be beneficial if a government personnel became a spokesperson for the project, including the potential impact and importance of focusing on the validation of prior learning. Due to skill and workforce shortages, Iceland truly need the inclusion of available migrant workers in the workforce.

## Norway – Staff Findings

In the context of the Norwegian field trials the following fig.3 depicts the staff who were consulted for their views on validation of prior learning . As can be seen from the chart below the majority were career guidance counsellors in a school or learning centre. The second dominant group were from administration or management. Assessors were also consulted as to their views of validation.

Three persons had not been actively involved in the Viska trials and did not answer the rest of the survey

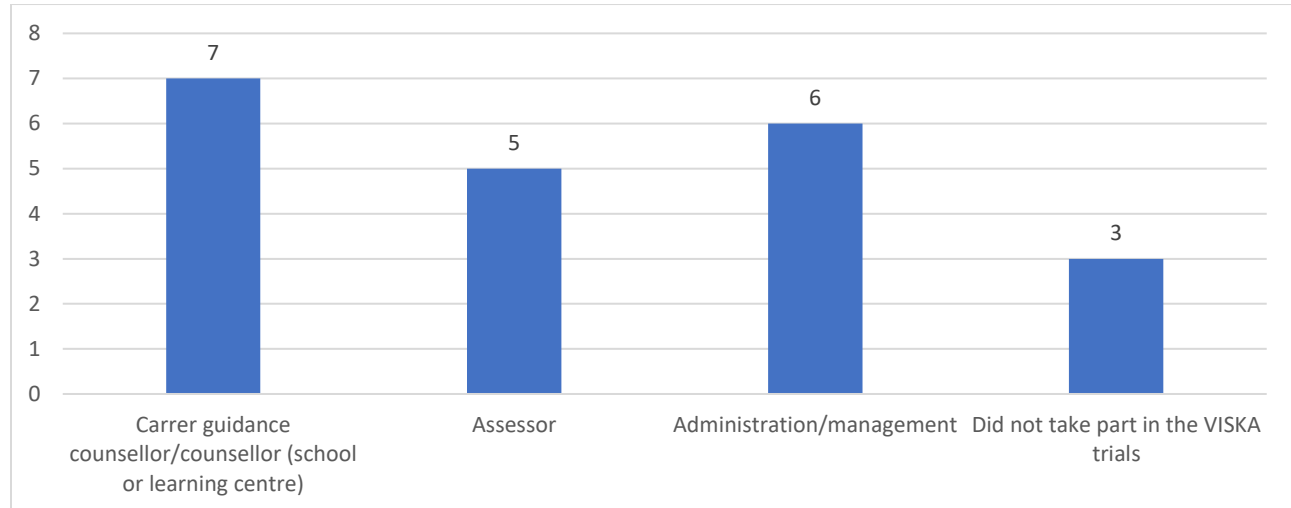


FIGURE 15 ROLE OF PARTICIPANT IN VISKA TRIALS (NORWEGIAN STAFF)

In considering what has been innovative as part of Viska, the views of the respondents have centred on a number of factors. The first of these is the importance of considering VPL in the early stages of the integration process for migrants and refugees. This is to give the candidate a realistic picture of the future possibilities, to set up concrete plans and motivate for a specific profession. The role of career guidance in this process was highlighted by the participants in the focus groups.

In looking at the benefit and impact of the Viska project for this stakeholder group then they stated they would not have worked with this target group at this early stage without the project. It was identified as being useful for the county (regional) education authorities to get to know more about the competences that refugees bring with them and how this can be used as a basis for completing vocational education and training (VET) in Norway. In addition to the education opportunities which can emerge from competence identification, there is also the opportunity to make competence of asylum seekers visible to businesses/companies regardless of language differences.

In considering the self-development of the validation participants during the field trials of the Viska project in Norway the respondents found it interesting to see how candidates gradually develop the ability to talk about their own background and show what they are able to do. Frontline staff and guidance counsellors involved in Viska found that it is useful that practitioners working with VPL are challenged in their way of thinking and performing VPL, especially in vocational education and training.

In examining what worked well in the Norwegian context, the assessors have been successful in revealing the candidate's skills and competences and make the candidate feel valuable and appreciated. Many

assessors have chosen the workshop as an opportunity to consider VPL towards curricula in Vocational Education and Training, making it possible to reveal both the candidate's practical and theoretical competences. Another positive outcome of the collaboration of the different stakeholders in Viska is that it has made cooperation between local actors in the county involved in Viska work well. It has been easy to transfer case files of migrants and refugees between them.

One of the fundamental changes in the Norwegian system through Viska has been the inclusion of the role of an interpreter which has worked very well. This has contributed to successful communication and, as far as stakeholders are aware, correct information being transferred. However, the use of interpreters in the process highlights the challenges linked to interpreting professional vocabulary for those who have been outside the national system to date.

One of the major positive outcomes of the closer collaboration between stakeholders is that the candidates start to qualify for the Norwegian labour market earlier than today. Local PES wishes to contribute to the positive impact of the field trials by providing relevant work practice or jobs for these candidates. In reviewing the progress to date of the field trials and the preparation for the validation process for migrants and refugees in Norway one of the reflections has been that it took too long to clarify whether the organisations had sufficient resources in place to respond as effectively as was expected.

Another reflection has been that it has been demanding to create efficient processes for the project work with the number of actors involved. It is time consuming and is resource demanding to collect information across different systems and organisations. The timing between decision making, signing of contracts and operative work has been challenging for those involved in the Norwegian field trials. There appears to have been challenges in communication with other actors involved in the candidate's program and some reported a lack of openness in cooperation between the professional communities involved in Viska. This may in part be attributed to a greater importance being placed on processes unrelated to those of validation and Viska. It was also commented that in terms of informing potential opportunities for the target learners some of the initial mapping of competences from the Integration Reception Centres could have been more thorough.

The feedback received by those who worked with the Viska candidates was that most candidates felt they got to show and express their competences, and some candidates had hoped for better results from their validation. In one instance the wrong curriculum was selected which had been picked up on however it was not rectified in a timely manner. In relation to the readiness of the participants, some VPL

professionals commented that the candidate should have been given more time to prepare and should have been given necessary information and the opportunity to study the curriculum before the VPL procedure. Some VPL professionals commented that it should be possible to give full approval of competences through vocational testing alone for candidates with extensive competences in their profession. The inclusion of an interpreter was a positive step in the process however they did struggle with professional terminology at times. In some cases, time was given to the interpreters to study the curriculum before the session however this did not guarantee success.

The knowledge of the frontline staff and guidance counsellors as to the possibilities of VPL was limited at times which may indicate the need for further training and development in advance of participation in validation processes and procedures.

13 of 18 had used an interpreter. The figure shows to what extent they were satisfied with the use of interpreters during trials.

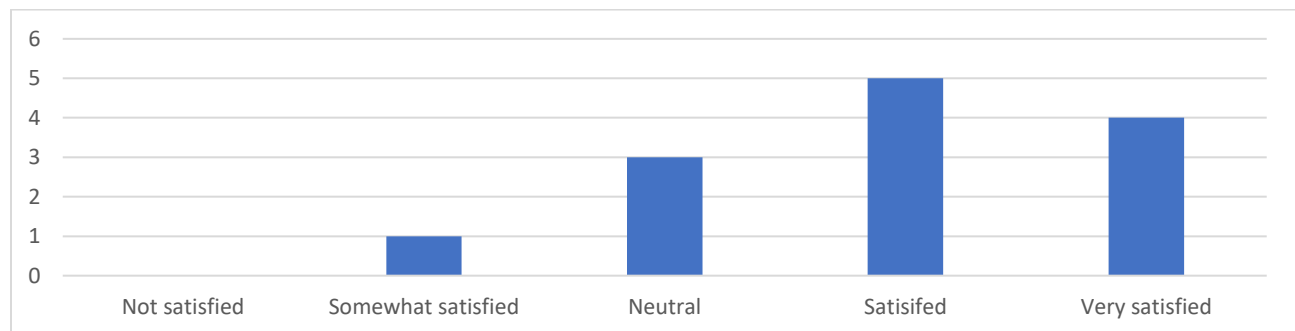


FIGURE 16 LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH INTERPRETER (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=13)

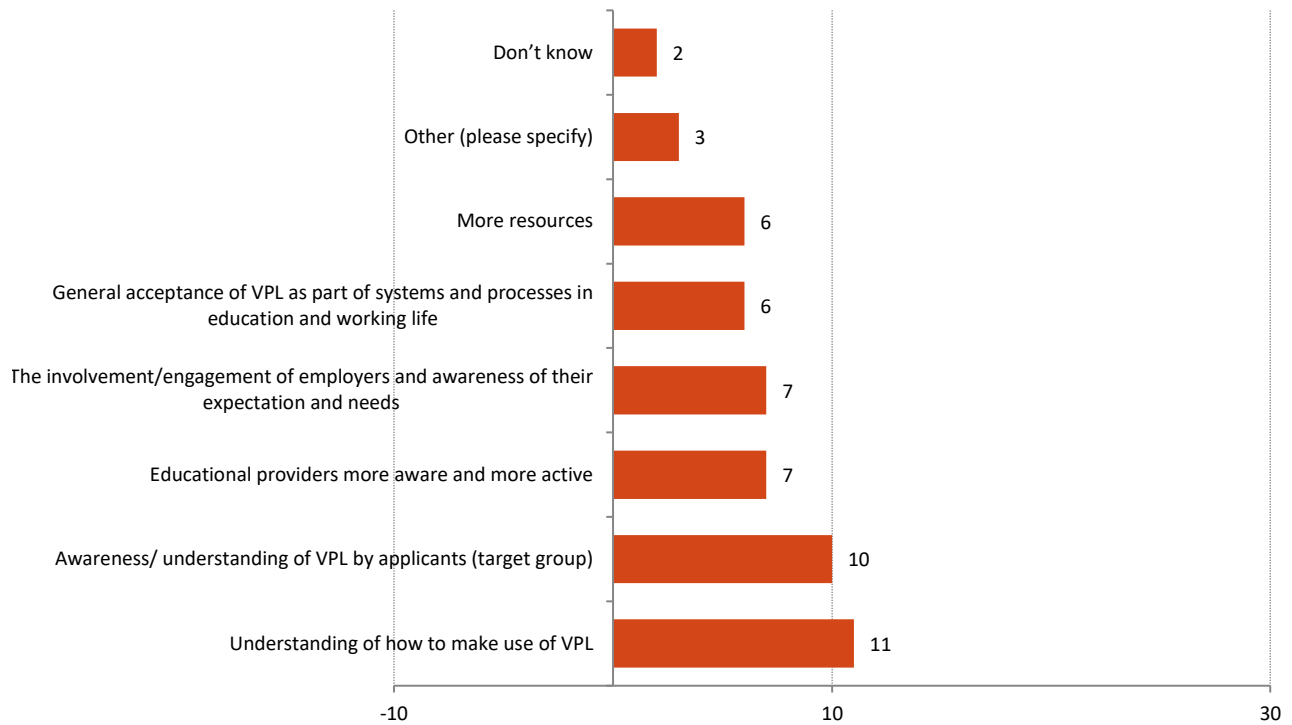


FIGURE 17 SUGGESTIONS TO ENHANCE VALIDATION (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=18)

This graph depicts the elements which would help validation to work better in their setting. Understanding or how to make use of VPL and awareness of VPL by applicants were seen as those required to enhance the use of validation in their setting.

In determining what is needed to have more transparent communication on VPL by all the VPL providers, time and resources were identified as the top requirements. This could require the transfer of resources to give the county/region the opportunity to do a good job. As a suggested follow up to the field trials a seminar should be arranged for all actors in the VISKA project to exchange experiences, address system challenges and look to counties/regions with successful solutions.

There are broader challenges which counties/regions and participants face in terms of the structures of VET and whether VPL enables entry and progression through the system which may vary from the traditional approach. To enhance cooperation, one of the counties invited all VPL assessors participating in VISKA to a common training in the use of interpreters in VPL. In this gathering, a constructive exchange of experiences about how to best reveal the candidate's competences occurred. This activity was very

well received by the assessors, so this is something this county will continue to do for assessors outside of the Viska project. The county is also planning for an evaluation with exchange of experiences during the VISKA trials which may include input from the interpreters who were involved in the field trials.

In order to embed validation at this early stage in the integration of refugees as part of the ordinary provision in the counties, extra resources for cooperation and information need to be committed as more stakeholders and systems are involved than usual. This will also ensure that the flow of information is secured. In looking at future work more focus is needed on mapping of competences and prior work experiences. This will make the process more straightforward in terms of identifying what subject or towards what VET curriculum the candidate should be validated.

In Norway, the Integration Reception Center (ICR) has not been involved in selecting the candidates for VISKA as this has been done by the career guidance professionals from the career centres. In the opinion of frontline staff, a closer cooperation between ICR, career guidance centers and education providers would be positive.

Beyond education opportunities, industry and organisations should be more closely connected to the process of validation to get an understanding about who these candidates are and how they can contribute to local businesses. This would make it even clearer which competences each candidate has, what the working life demands and what education sector can provide as supplementary education and training. In the Norwegian context cooperation has worked well between all stakeholders and determining whether this is beneficial depends on how VPL results are used. It is important that the candidates are well prepared for the validation process and are aware of what is going to happen when they meet for the validation session; why they are there and that this is one step in a process with many steps. The involvement of the interpreter was identified by the frontline staff and guidance personnel as important and that careful consideration should be given as to when and where they should be involved. Some commented that it would have been an advantage with the interpreter present in the same room during a workshop session so they would then have had better opportunities to understand and interpret.

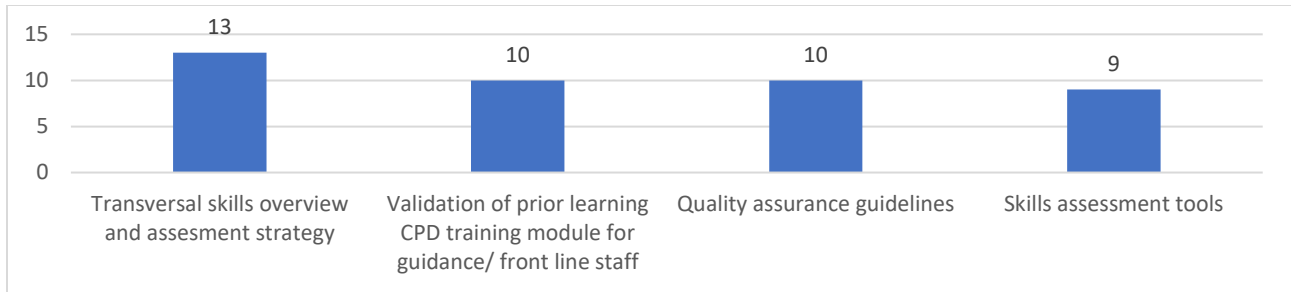


FIGURE 17 VIEWS ON THE VALUE OF THE VISKA OUTPUTS IN FURTHERING VALIDATION (MORE THAN ONE POSSIBLE ANSWER) (N=18)

In considering the applicability and usefulness of the outputs as developed under VISKA the above fig. 6 identifies Transversal skills as the output seen as most useful by the front line staff and guidance for use within their sector. Training and quality assurance guidelines were also identified as being important in furthering validation by those questioned.

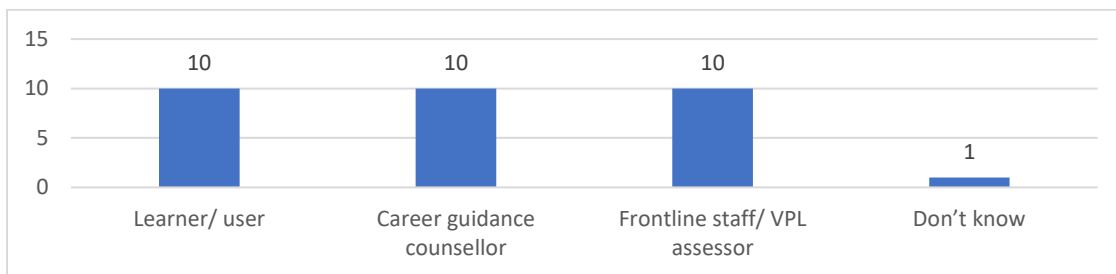


FIGURE 18 WHO WOULD BENEFIT MOST FROM CRITERIA FOR TRANSVERSAL SKILLS? (N=18)

The outcome of this question was interesting as it identified that the criteria for transversal skill would be of equal benefit to all of those involved in the validation process.

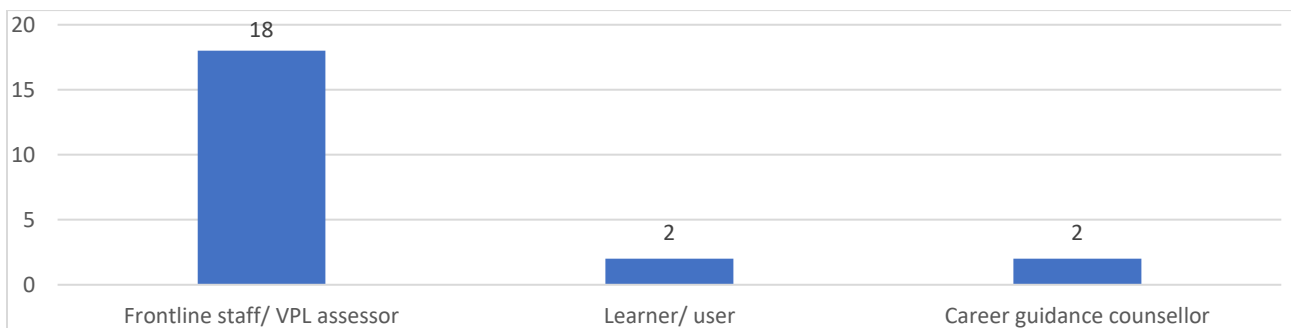


FIGURE 19 VIEWS ON WHO WOULD BENEFIT MOST FROM VALIDATION OF PRIOR LEARNING CPD MODULE. MORE THAN ONE ANSWER POSSIBLE (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=18)

The importance of Continuous Professional Development to frontline staff and validation assessors was evident in the responses received to this question. This could indicate the importance of developing the professional capacity of those who are involved in the validation process.

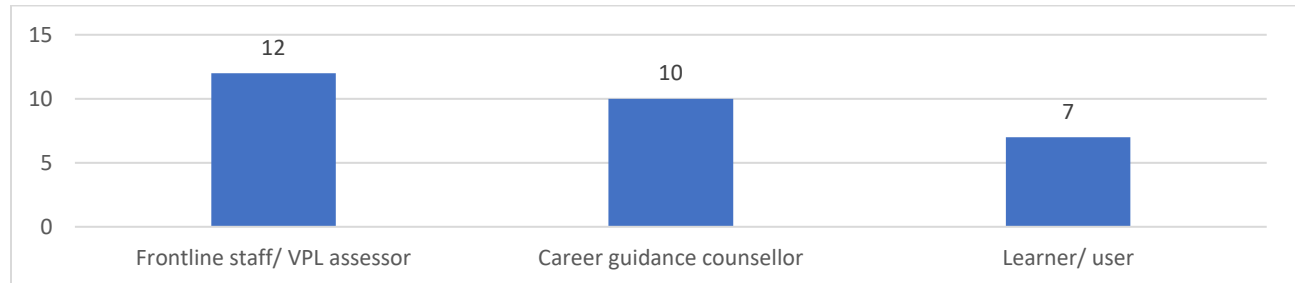


FIGURE 20 VIEWS ON WHO WOULD BENEFIT MOST FROM SKILLS ASSESSMENT TOOLS? MORE THAN ONE ANSWER POSSIBLE (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=18)

(NB! IN THE NORWEGIAN SURVEY THEY USED THE NORWEGIAN PHRASE FOR 'SKILLS REGISTRATION TOOL'.)

The answer to this question is interesting as the benefit of a skills assessment tool or in the case of the Norwegian model the 'skills registration tool' was identified as being for the frontline staff, assessors and guidance counsellors as opposed to the learner. This reflects the comments of those surveyed as to the importance to them in knowing the competence levels and skills of the learners so that they are better able to advise the candidate.

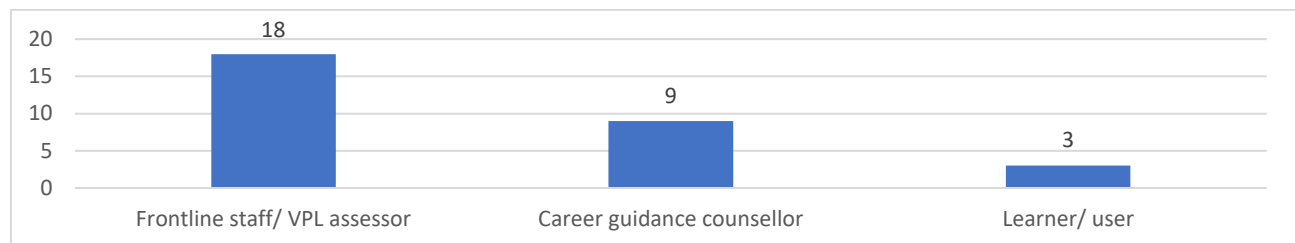


FIGURE 21 VIEWS ON WHO WOULD BENEFIT MOST FROM QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDELINES? MORE THAN ONE ANSWER POSSIBLE (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=18)

Again the staff are identified as being the dominant beneficiary group of quality assurance guidelines. This could indicate the importance placed on quality assurance to ensure consistency and fairness within the system.



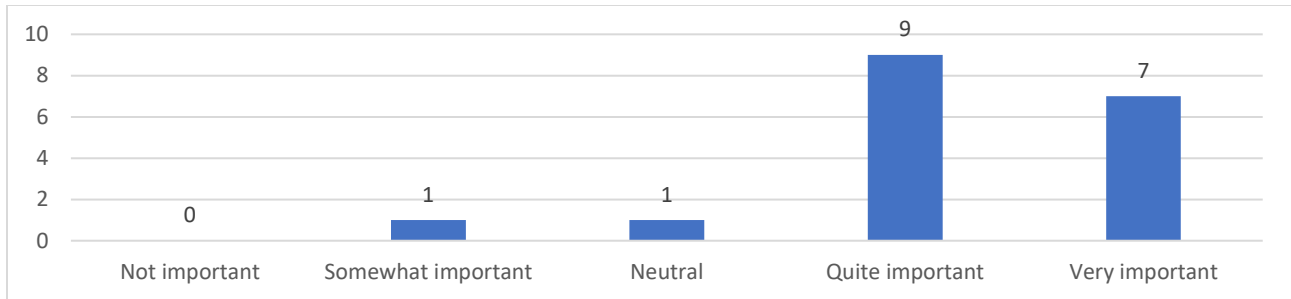


FIGURE 22 VIEWS ON IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING A TOOL FOR FACILITATING VPL (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=18)

The availability of a tool to support validation was seen as being quite or very important by the majority of those questioned. The format of the tool was not closely analysed in terms of the importance of digitalisation to enable the mobility of the learner and their learning and was outside the focus of this study.

In looking at a tool for validation this was further analysed under accessibility, cost/resources, language, managing expectations and support required. The output of this analysis is that cost/resources and language are identified as inhibiting the use of tools in validation.

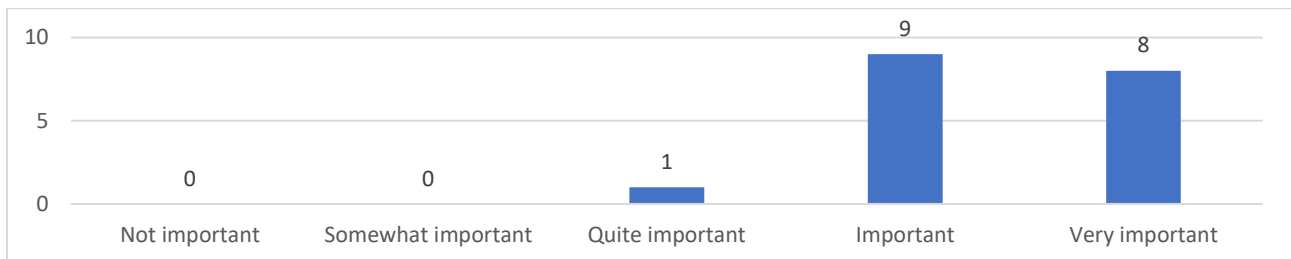


FIGURE 23 VIEWS ON IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR FRONTLINE STAFF IN THE VALIDATION OF PRIOR LEARNING? (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=18)

Not surprisingly, professional development for practitioners are viewed as important by all respondents. To the question 'If CPD is important can you identify three areas for development?' the respondents suggested the following main areas for continued professional development:

- Basic understanding of what VPL is and updating on recent developments in this field
- Acknowledgment of prior learning and how to assess competences as equal and not identical to learning outcomes from the education sector
- Method for assessment, including use of interpreters

- How to provide sufficient and relevant information to potential candidates

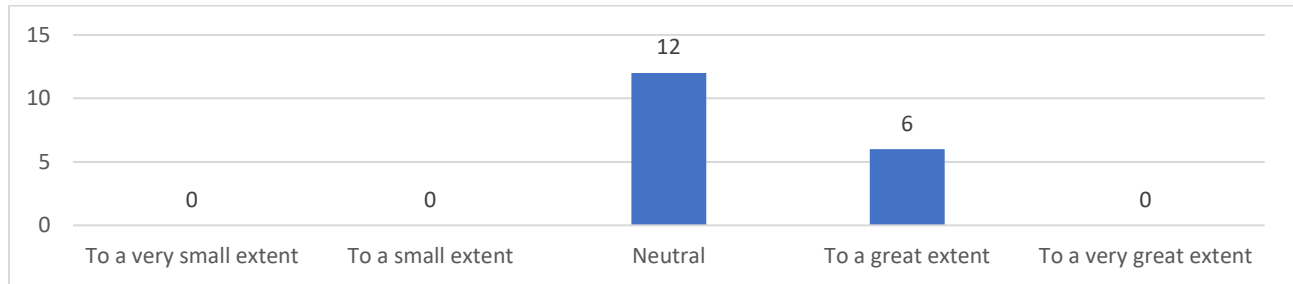


FIGURE 24 VIEWS ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH EXISTING POLICY SUPPORTS VALIDATION (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=18)

It is felt in Norway that existing policy is sufficient in supporting the validation of prior learning however not to a very great extent.

In looking at some policy recommendations which front line staff, assessors and guidance counsellors would make to support validation of prior learning these centre on better communication and coordination at the county/region and public levels.

Through the Viska trials in Norway the use of an interpreter was key to the implementation and development of the field trials given the nature of the candidates and their learning. A change in law is required to ensure that interpreters can be used in this way and that validation can be conducted in other languages and not limited to Norwegian or Sami.

It is currently required that a minimum level of formal education is completed by candidates regardless of the extent of their experience. It was recommended that this requirement should be reviewed.

## Ireland – Staff Findings

In the Irish context the views of the front-line staff and guidance counsellors were sought exclusively for the review of a validation tool.

The initial question posed focused on the importance of developing a tool (digital or on paper) to enable or facilitate VPL in Ireland. As can be seen from the diagram below staff felt that it was very important, however a number of respondents did not see it as being applicable.

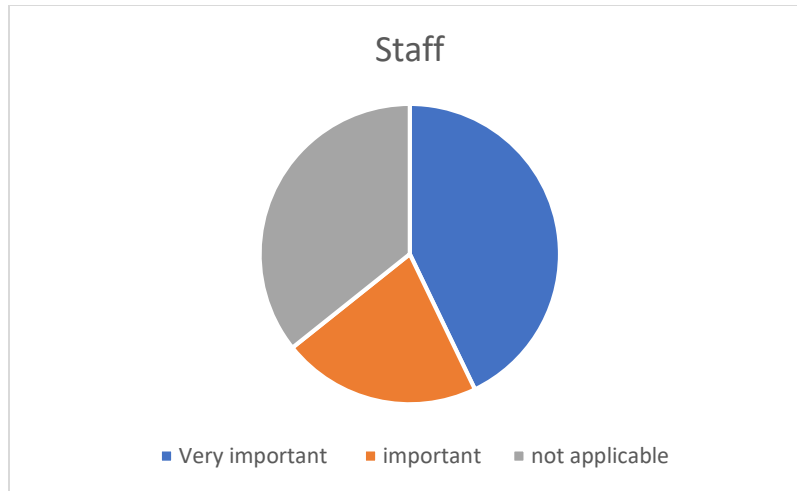


FIGURE 25 VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF A TOOL TO SUPPORT VALIDATION (IRISH STAFF)

In looking at what challenges a tool of this nature presents to guidance and front line staff the following were the findings in the context of the EU skills profiling tool. Resources/ supports and managing expectations were the two challenges which staff felt would challenge the implementation and integration of such a tool into the main provision of the services within vocational education and training in Ireland.

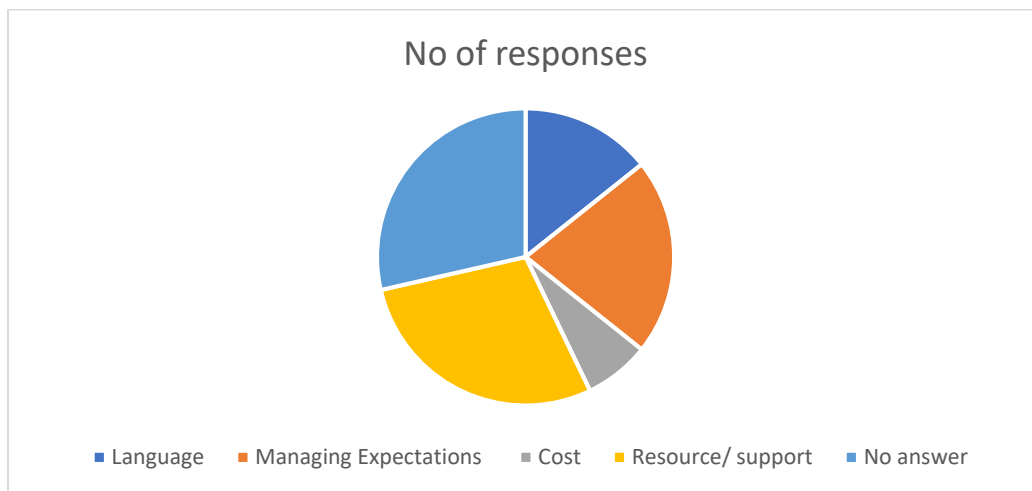


FIGURE 26 VIEWS ON THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE INTEGRATION OF A TOOL INTO THE VALIDATION PROCESS (IRISH STAFF)

The majority of staff who worked with the EU Skills Profiling tool supported learners in using skills assessment tools for validation under the VIKSA project. There was a small minority who did not support or who didn't answer the question.

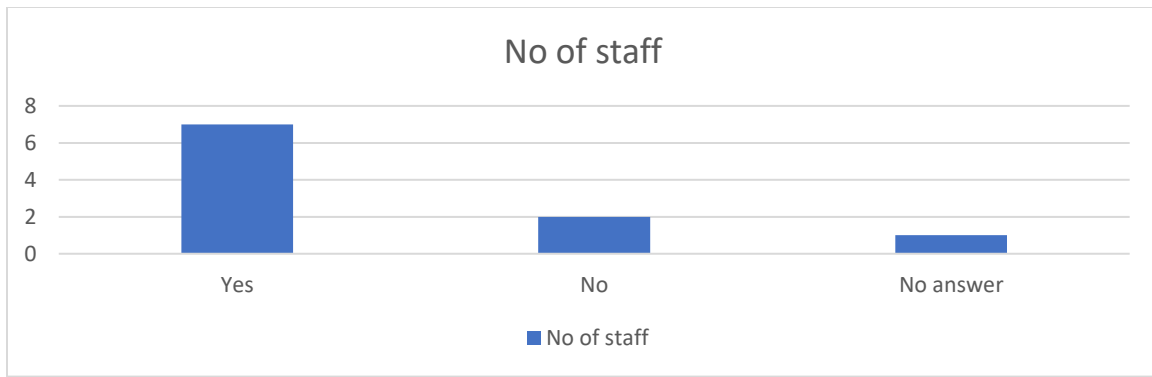


FIGURE 27 VIEWS ON WHETHER THE TOOL SUPPORTED THE LEARNER IN THE VALIDATION PROCESS (IRISH STAFF)

The EU Skills profiling tool was used for the review of tools under the Viska project in Ireland. Other tools had been used by some of the respondents in the past in guiding learners. In relation to these tools some respondents stated that they felt that the task was long and arduous with too many variables. Some felt it was too difficult for a non-English speaker.

In determining how these tools help the learner in the validation process the following chart depicts the answers. As is evident, evidencing learning and helping to document the process were the two factors which were identified as being the most helpful.

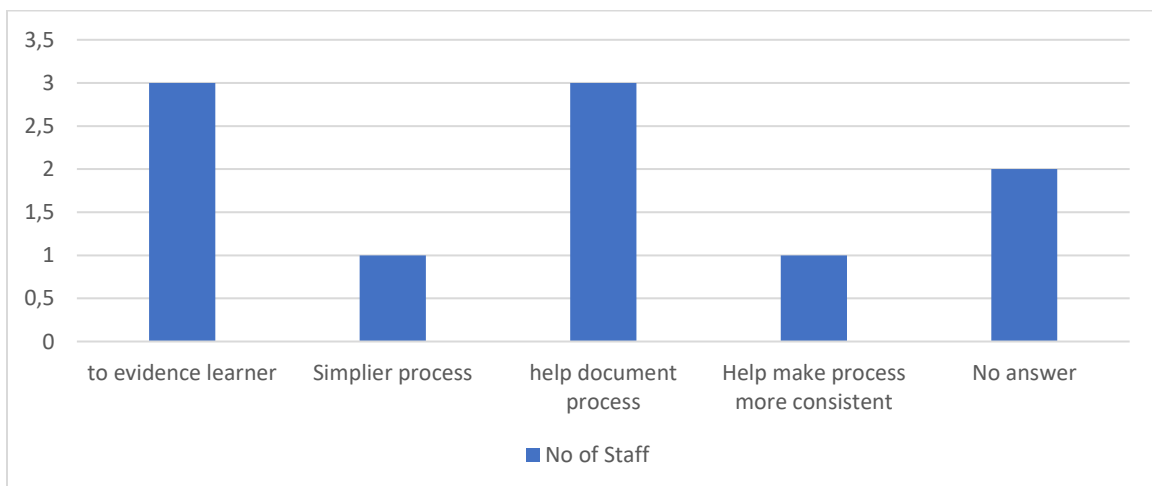


FIGURE 28 VIEWS ON HOW THE TOOL SUPPORTED THE LEARNER (IRISH STAFF)

A majority of staff would also welcome a broader introduction of the validation tool for broader use within validation.

In supporting a broader introduction of the tool, the reasons given included

- Important to highlight that all skills are valid as there is a tendency to place less importance on skills acquired through unpaid/ voluntary work.
- It is very suitable for low level skills
- A broader introduction to skills, transferable skills and what employers look for.

On the contrary, it was felt that the tool was very long with some translation inaccuracies in places.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

The VISKA project field trials are continuing and at this interim reporting stage it is clear that the flexibility in the approach to the evaluation is working well. The differences in participant groups and the different interventions which can be undertaken underline the need for a consultative flexible evaluation model.

Because the information from the trial participants includes pre- and post- trial data collection much of which is not available at this stage, that information will be collected, compared and collated to be presented in report 5.2. It is of importance to note at this early reporting phase the positive contribution of the Viska National Advisory Groups in each of the partner countries in informing, identifying and enacting policy developments. The final project report will add to the findings presented in this interim report and will present the analysis of the project findings as well as the project team reflections on the project and the policy impacts.

While the reporting at this time is limited due to the stage in the project, it is useful to revisit the summary in numbers of the work to date where available information can be usefully collated:

<b>NUMBER OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN NATIONAL ADVISORY GROUPS</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>NUMBER OF NAG MEETINGS HELD:</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>NUMBER OF TOOLS TRIALLED IN THE VISKA PROJECT:</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>NUMBER OF LEARNERS INVOLVED IN THE TOOLS TRIALS</b>	<b>1,075</b>
<b>NUMBER OF GUIDANCE / FRONTLINE STAFF INVOLVED IN THE VISKA ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>118</b>

Returning to the Research Questions which underpin this work:

- **To what degree did partners achieve the implementation aim across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at local, regional and national and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?**
- **What outcomes were achieved for what groups, and to what degree?**
- **What factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?**
- **What policy-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?**

The Deliverable 5.2 will benefit from a more extensive documentation by the partners of the full impact of the interventions for the staff and most importantly the learners and this will provide a rich set of qualitative and quantitative data on which to frame the research questions. However even at this early stage in the reporting on the findings it is clear that not all partners will have achieved the aim of implementing all interventions. In many cases the capacity to implement the interventions was limited by structural constraints. It is also clear that cross-country learning arising from the project interventions will be very dependent on context. For instance, in the Norwegian situation training for validation is already part of a mature system of development for guidance and front-line staff and this is not the case elsewhere. However, despite the differences there is a real sense that the impact of the project will be felt at the level of the learners and the staff and there are real implications for both practice and policy.

While there is insufficient data to analyse the outcomes for the learners at this stage; the outcomes for the particular learners who have been involved in the project will be further considered in terms of their reported experiences and the relevant stage of the validation process. This will be linked to the particular tool or intervention utilised by the particular partner. The project partners have been careful throughout to ensure that interaction with the project does not lead to unrealistic expectations particularly as the particular learners may already be marginalised.

In order to make a meaningful contribution to learning at a European level the focus for the project partners for the remaining months will be on extracting policy level factors associated with improvements in validation processes and lessons to be extracted from the successful (or otherwise) enactment of the interventions.

## Appendix 1: Roadmap VPL Intake file per candidate - Flanders

During the VISKA-field trials, data should be registered from candidates who participate in exemption tests/VPL procedure. Please follow the guidelines described in this roadmap.

### VPL file per candidate

The data collection is related to the different phases of a VPL procedure:

- Identification phase
- Documentation phase
- Evaluation phase
  - exemptions based on validation on prior qualifications
  - exemptions based on exemption tests

The manner of informing candidates on the VPL possibilities they have, is not included in the 4-phases of VPL. Communication actions made by the CAE are gathered earlier, during the exploratory interview. Certification phase is not built in in this data collection.

Please list the time devoted to the identification phase as correctly as possible (point 1.4 of the VPL intake document).

### VPL-data on center level

In addition to the 'VPL intake per candidate' the collection of the following data<sup>16</sup>, based on center level, are also asked:

- How many candidates go through the VPL process?
- How many candidates sign up in the CAE - after going through the VPL process?

### Time registration for conducting and evaluating exemption tests

You are asked to fill out the time you spent on conducting and evaluating the exemption tests. More detailed instructions will follow.

The field trials in your CAE take place from end of May until the end of September / or when exemption tests are blocked.

1 Welcome- and identification phase

#### 1.1 Welcome and information

##### 1.1.1 What?

- The CAE reports the possibility of a VPL procedure for the course of AGE to the candidate.
- The CAE organizes an introductory interview or organizes an appointment.
- The CAE gives the documentation to the candidate.
  - explanation on VPL
  - Information on the content of the exemption tests

The competencies

The configuration of the test

The timing of the tests

##### 1.1.2 Time registration for data collection

Time registration will be measured on candidate level or, when the information phase is collective, an estimation of time spent will be made.

<sup>16</sup> CAE'S are subsidized on number of candidates who signed up, and not on number of candidates who did exemption tests.



## 1.2 identification phase

### 1.2.1 What?

The guidance counsellor of the CAE interviews each candidate and discusses the following components.

- ☒ Registration name and year of birth
  - The name of the candidate should only be necessary for practical reasons and should enable the Center to supply the file at various times. The name will not be digital tracked.
- ☒ School career
  - Compulsory education
- ☒ What's the earlier education path of the candidate?
- ☒ What's the reason of not obtaining a diploma of secondary education?
  - are there other courses the candidate has followed?
- ☒ (Work) experience
  - Has the candidate work experience or other experiences (volunteer work, responsibilities in the youth movement ...) that may indicate already developed competences (e.g. organization and cooperation)?
- ☒ Motivation of the candidate for the course of AGE
  - The candidate is informed about earlier acquired certificates and other qualifications to complete his VPL-file. The guidance counsellor also informs the candidate where to go to obtain duplication of earlier acquired qualifications – if needed, f.i. lost documents.

### 1.2.2 data- and time registration

On the basis of this interview the guidance counsellor completes the registration form. The guidance counsellor measures the duration of the call and writes it down in point 1.4 of the registration form.

#### 2 Documentation phase

##### 2.1 What?

The information gathered during the identification interview will be filled out in the VPL file of the candidate. Enclosed also the certifications and other qualifications from the candidate that can lead to exemptions.

##### 2.2 Data- and time registration

The VPL file of the candidate contains the documents which can lead to exemptions.

#### 3 Assessment phase

##### 3.1 Exemptions on the basis of earlier qualifications

On the basis of the collected data in the VPL file of the candidate the list of exemptions the candidate can get based on previous learning outcomes ((school)report secondary education ...).

The appointments, made under supervision with the federation of Second Chance Education on concordance charts, will be respected.

##### 3.2 Exemptions on the basis of exemption tests

Based on the results of the interview and the qualification documents of the candidate, an overview of the exemption tests the candidate can make is planned.

The exemption tests are conducted conform the agreements made by the Federation SCE.

The results of the candidate on the exemption tests will be filled out in the chart 3.2 'Obtained exemptions by exemption tests'.

At the end of the VPL -procedure will be specified whether or not the candidate accepts the exemptions and when not, the reasons why (e.g. teaching hours are in conflict with the conditions for a benefit).

## Appendix 2 : Tool reported on by the Agencies for Integration and Civic Integration: EU Skills Profiling Tool

The EU skills profile tool was developed by the European Council in the period that many refugees from the Middle East and Africa tried to start a new life in countries of the EU. The EU skills profile tool was not used during the VISKA field trials by Flanders as the VISKA project in Flanders/Belgium focuses on VPL for educational qualifications in centers for adult education (CAE). The EU skills Profiling tool was built to be used at an earlier stage, when third country nationals apply in a host country. This exploratory stage, where VPL candidates can be referred to a CAE, does not belong to the scope of the field trials in Flanders. However, the EU skills profile tool has formerly been used in Flanders during the project @level2work with some high qualified adults. The Flemish Public Employment Services (PES), FEDASIL (Federal Agency for Asylum Seekers) and the Agencies for Integration and Civic Integration were involved in this regional project. In Belgium Flanders, the EU skills profile tool is mainly used as a guidance to what education or training is best suited for the candidate. This is reflected in the general observations and feedback from the organisations involved in the @level2work10 project.

overview of what works and what needs to be improved is summarised below.

- The digital self-assessment tool is widely available, in a wide range of languages. There is no specific cost. A browser and an internet connection is needed.
- Filling out the tool is not attractive, nor does it promote a warm relationship between the customer and the organisation. An individual conversation afterwards can have a positive influence on this.

Even with the most elaborated tools, you won't be able to get a complete picture of the competences and skills of the third-country migrants or refugees. The tool should be guided by a counsellor who can further question the persons professional experience while using methods like STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result).

- To get the best results, the counsellor should know the requirements of the aspired profession. In order to avoid a language bias during the assessment, the interview should take place in the mother tongue or in a second language that the client can use proficiently. The best results can only be attained when the third country migrant's competences are assessed in representative professional work.
- It must be clear how much time filling out the tool usually takes.

The tool is too long in the current form, many clients are going to drop out before the end of the questions.

Drop-down lists for questioning training and work experience are often long and this has an influence on the duration of the tool.

The questioning regarding numeracy, school experience and professional experience goes too far. This makes the completion time long and this level of detail has little added value.

- The survey is mainly about cognitive and affective aspects. Motoric skills, personality traits, technical skills .... are not questioned. Getting a picture of the technical skills of the customer is very desirable.
- The tool would be better with closed questions, which when followed by a positive answer leads to more open questions. This is the case, for example, when questioning professional experience in well-defined sectors.
- The RIASOC model by John Holland could be used to determine a (broad) job target for the client.  
The questions are often asked in a judgmental way.
- Questions about generic competencies lack context: what does a “specific generic competence” mean? The word itself should be clarified by a short text.
- Some generic competences will have a different meaning in a different culture.

Reflecting on yourself in a context of competencies is culture-related: in some cultures it is not part of the school's curriculum and this might be new for the clients.

- The (Third Country Nationals) client needs to know where this information is going to be used: which authorities are going to consult this information. If this may have implications on getting to a longer stay in the country, if this can lead to the refusal of one residence permit, a (provisional) source of income, permission might not be given.
- The purpose of filling out the tool must be clearly stated in advance: is it information that will allow an initial assessment of the situation of the person with regards to the Flemish or Walloon labour market, is it a thorough self-evaluation with the goal of a pathway to work, ...?
- Clarification is necessary on what the next step is after this information collection.
- Uploading documents will not be easy for every client, especially for refugees who left everything behind.