

Interactive dialogue 'Call to Action'



Picture from left to right: Fons Leroy, Andrina Wafer, Louis Vervloet, Martina Ni Cheallaigh, Olafur Grétar Kristjansson, Brikena Xhomaqi

An animated discussion between Martina Ni Cheallaigh (EC – senior policy advisor apprenticeship and adult learning), Fons Leroy (former Head of Public Employment Service, Flanders), Olafur Grétar Kristjansson (Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture), Louis Vervloet (General Director ESF, Flanders) and Andrina Wafer (QQI, Ireland and also VISKA partner) took place in the afternoon, moderated by Brikena Xhomaqi (Director LLL-platform).

The discussion started with two questions:

What can we learn from the VISKA project?

How can we use the results of the VISKA project in future policy?

The person from the Icelandic national ministry mentioned that it's important to bear in mind the national context. You need to be sensitive to what cultural identity is and how people feel about themselves in a different cultural setting. You can't just proceed based purely on the experience that you gained in your previous work. Working with an entirely new target group (e.g. Polish immigrants) means you have to approach them in a different way. In Iceland the Polish people came to work – not to study -, they didn't even know where validation stands for. You have to 'fetch them', to 'look for them'.

The former head of PES in Flanders refers to the Strategy of the Public Employment Services in Europe, approved by the Commission, which states that all the member states of Europe are in a transitional labour market. One of the building blocks that is needed in a transitional labour market is the shift from Agencies of Public Employment Services with job seekers to Career Development Agencies. There is one common language for all European member states, being the language of skills and competences. The culture of skills and competences guarantees that people can build their own career. Those skills and competences should be made visible by using the same language. This is the biggest challenge: how to make skills visible? Not only through this sort of more formal ways of validation and certification. We need

a broad approach, where skills can be made visible through testimonials of employers and colleagues, peers... (e.g. platforms like linked-In). Of course, for some people we need validated skills and procedures in a more formal way. He underlines the need of an integrated approach of validation for all people who want to be active on the labour market, not only for target groups. We need a close collaboration between actors of both sectors – Education/Training and labour market/Work –, using a common language of skills and competences in career guidance of people.

The senior expert on VET and adult learning agrees that validation is about everybody. However, the VISKA project is interesting because it looked maybe on those who need their skills and competences to be recognised most. We have to be sensitive to individuals' needs. There are lots of lessons from VISKA to transfer to other countries. We need these procedures now and we need to multiply them to many more people by taking up some of the methodologies and some of the results or transfer the results directly to other public administrations and employment services, and by going with new projects. The VISKA project pointed out that guidance counsellors are really important. We need them in. The VISKA projects shows that there is not only a variety in people, there is also a variety in levels of competences to validate.

The ESF director agrees we have to look for the broad approach, for partnership. He doesn't feel the need to use validation only to get a diploma. You need the world of employment, entrepreneurs, colleagues,... . Procedures are far too formal if you want to reach workers. Workers do not come to formal procedures. You have to 'fetch them'. More informal and indirect procedures are welcome.

There is no such thing as the European culture. But there is also no limit for the labour market on the state boarder. We are the European Union, we have to have something recognisable for all. Recognition of diplomas takes years. For validation we need to have something quick, not too formal. By following the formal way, we never succeed in welfare and employment. Skills are changing every several years. We need a way of working that goes swift, smooth but clear.

The person from Quality and Qualifications in Ireland replies that 'swift and smooth' are lovely words until something goes wrong (refers to the crises in Ireland). Quality and care really matters in validation. Partnership is important. What VISKA can bring in in terms of upgrading validation arrangements is the principle of accomplishing practice with research and with careful documentation and observation. One of the things which was missing in the national advisory groups was the learners' voice.

e.g. The Linked In platform doesn't look at qualifications or layers on learning outcomes. They look for skills on using semantic analyses, look for evidence of skills. We need close collaboration between both stakeholders for the region and the employment sector, and for employees and citizens, but it is not the only way forward.

Fons: If we need a culture on LLL we need different approaches, using light systems and more heavy systems, according to the expectations of the client and labour market issues and employability issues,... . A culture needs a broad approach, where people can identify themselves with the emphasis on skills and competences.

Martina: isn't that in a way the purpose of the 4 stages in the validation process for those people who need a quick access to the labour market (Identification and Documentation stage)? Sometimes people need qualification certificates. Lifelong learning is important, but it is not the only way.

Louis: It must be possible to give qualification 'on demand'. Employers know the skills and competences of their employees. Those competences have to be listed so that the public employment systems can be worked with those lists, when it is needed. Swift, smooth, and with quality.

'Is validation of prior learning the interest of the individual of the interest of the employee'?

The answers were divers.

- It's in both, depending on the circumstances, and the situation. It depends if you look at it from the perspective of someone in a Lifelong Learning Pathway (individual) or from someone who has to get a job (employee).
- LLL perspective is important, but it is only one stage on your pathway.
- It's always in the interest of the person. If you meet the individuals' needs, if you bring the passion, you release the best employee ever the entrepreneur, the inventor, the innovator It's a process of empowering the individual.
- It benefits both, the individual and the whole society. This is, as VISKA has shown, especially important for people who come as immigrants to our countries. It's important to bring forth their knowledge and skills so that anyone can benefit from it.
- It's always a tailor-made approach with at one side the perspective of the individual and at the other side the perspective of the labour market, the society. We need collaboration, partnerships between education and labour market. The European pillar of social rights, art. 1 is all about lifelong learning: make sure people can acquire new competences and maintain competences and skills. We need to work together to a LLL – society which is good for everyone. It should be an essential service for people, to build their own sustainable careers.

Is there a need for a career education centre in order to inform and guide adult learners between different education and training centres?

Fons: We have to look from objectives, and we have to look from the perspective of the individual.

We need a common approach supporting sustainable careers with common building blocks and a common language. We should have a common view on career guidance development and then we are working with the same building blocks.

Martina refers to what Upskilling Pathways tries to do for the low skilled adults to give opportunities to achieve basic skills. It is essential to foresee guidance all the way. Guidance must be embedded everywhere. Guidance services in the public employment services and in adult education centres are all part of it. The fact of networking is also very important in this project.

Olafur: the organisation of the form isn't important. It's the career guidance itself that is important and the trust built between the individual and the guidance counsellor. Follow the person through the entire project.

What policy lessons is transferable to Europe?

Fons: The world of education and training and the labour market and career guidance have to make a common draft: how to implement art 1 of the social rights?

Louis: The evolution in LLL is partnership, hope, trust and transparency when both sides sitting around the table. Policy and practice have to go together in a close relationship.

Olaf: Thanks to all the people working in VISKA, this brings us to the fact that when initiatives are to succeed you need people to do the job, you need a vision on policy. You keep the eyes high and see the mission.

What's going on on European level?

Martina

- The Commission is implementing the pillar
- The recommendation on validation on 2012 has been evaluated and leads to the discussion how we take validation forward
- There are also new Call on Erasmus+
- ESF has also funds.

Finally Brikena summarized the day:

We see a lot of diversity on validation:

- There is no one size fits all.
- It's a big challenge to find a common language and a common understanding between partners and stakeholders that are involved.
- The language stays a major issue, for all students, not only for target groups.
- We have to keep the learner in the centre. Don't forget the role of the learner itself in defining the process we take the learner too.
- It's important to define the role and foresee training for the guidance counsellors; assessors; interpreters

And now we have to find ways to bring the results of the project to the EU and to the national agendas.



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