

TIMA-Balt's mission

Accreditation of Prior Learning in VET Teacher Education in the Baltic countries

A Content Evaluation

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TIMA-Balt's mission (2007-2010)

Accreditation of Prior Learning In Vet Teacher Education In The Baltic Countries

A content evaluation

This content evaluation was written by Ruud Duvekot and Marieke Hanekamp for the TIMA-Balt project.



Leonardo da Vinci programme project

Transfer of Innovative Methodology for Assessment of VET Teachers' Prior Learning
Nr. LLP-Ldv-TOI-2007-LT-0004

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets.

World Bank's 2002 Empowerment Sourcebook

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1st page "self validation - http://www.leicestershirehealthyschools.org.uk/self_validation/index.html

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Content

Introduction.....	7
1. Setting the scene for TIMA-Balt.....	9
1.1 Valuing prior learning as the guiding principle	9
1.2 Goals of valuing prior learning	9
1.3 Towards The Learning Triangle	10
2. The project TIMA-Balt.....	13
2.1 Aims and objectives	13
2.2 Partners	13
3. The Evaluation.....	15
3.1 Methods	15
3.2 Analysis	15
3.3 General results	15
Partnership.....	15
The process of APL.....	15
Roles and responsibilities in the project.....	16
Other stakeholders.....	17
The steps in the process.....	17
Accreditation.....	17
Responsibilities accreditation.....	17
Professionalization of APL staff.....	18
Financing APL.....	18
Situating APL.....	18
4. SWOT-analysis.....	19
4.1 General SWOT	19
4.2 Risk areas	19
4.3 Focus on APL-Centre	20
4.4 Output	20
4.5 Personal effects	20
5. Conclusions.....	23
5.1 Meeting the targets	23
5.2 Sustainability of TIMA-Balt	23
5.3 Concluding remarks and recommendations	24
Appendix: the questionnaire.....	27

Introduction

In this content-evaluation the Empowerment Centre EVC (since 2008: **Cofora**) evaluates the project *Transfer of Innovative Methodology for Assessment of VET Teacher's Prior Learning* (TIMA-Balt; LLP-Ldv-TOI-2007-LT-0004). This project was funded by the Leonardo Da Vinci programme, part of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning programme.

The project *Transfer of Innovative Methodology for Assessment of VET Teacher's Prior Learning* (TIMA-Bal - 2007-2010) is based on the assumption that teachers and trainers in the education system are not prepared for meeting the needs of lifelong learning in society. In this project these needs are problematised and linked to a learning strategy for the teacher training systems in the Baltic states. The existing expertise in the Finnish system of teacher training is transferred for this goal.

The aim of the project TIMA-Balt is to enrich the existing VET teacher education programmes in three partner countries – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia by developing:

- Introductory module for Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) to be followed with development of more personalized learning possibilities.
- Study module for APL assessors training.

The target groups are:

- VET teacher educators,
- VET teachers,
- Researchers of education,
- Education policy makers.

The expected project outcomes were:

- A study of APL in VET teacher education systems in partner countries,
- Methodology for assessment of VET teachers' prior learning,
- Study module for assessors of VET teachers' prior learning,
- Trained groups of assessors in three partner countries (LT, LV, EE),
- Introductory module for assessment of VET teachers' prior learning, to be included to existing VET teacher education programmes.

This report focuses on the evaluation of the project's content. First the scene for Europe's Lifelong Learning challenges will be set. This will be followed by an explanation of the need of this project within this European context. This will include a reflection on the aims and objectives of the project and the purpose of this content evaluation. Secondly, we will focus on the methods used during evaluating the project and the outcomes of the evaluation. The report ends with a conclusion and some recommendations for further development of the practice on Validating Prior Learning the project TIMA-Balt originated.

1. Setting the scene for TIMA-Balt

European education policies have emphasized several times the importance of enhancing the performance and quality of vocational education and training (VET). In order to ensure the quality in VET, the skills and competences of vocational teachers have to be improved as well. The emphasis lies on lifelong learning and the creation of flexible learning paths also for VET teachers.

1.1 Valuing prior learning as the guiding principle

The underlying principle of lifelong learning is that *initial education is no longer enough for a lifetime, social-economic career*. It is more important to develop your competencies (skills, knowledge, attitude & ambitions) throughout life by realising that 'your glass is already half filled' and by understanding that everyone always learns in every possible learning environment: formal (school) and non-formal or informal environments (working place, at home). In other words, lifelong learning above all means 'valuing prior learning', i.e. valuing *the Learning* that is constantly taking place and learning *the Valuing* in order to start up learning in an effective and efficient way. Valuing prior learning in this respect is the guiding principle for (designing) lifelong learning strategies.

Practice shows that 'valuing prior learning' is a strong concept giving true evidence of the transition that's going on from the present knowledge society towards the (near) future learning society. Society changes to a learning society where the need for a good balance of power between the main stakeholders in lifelong learning (learning individuals, organisations and VET/HE¹) will be re-created and the learner gets a real say in lifelong learning.

The main societal changes are reflected on five levels:

- a. Economically aiming at getting and/or keeping a job (employability),
- b. Socially, aiming at motivation, reintegration, self-management of competencies and personal development (empowerment),
- c. Educationally, aiming at qualification, updating, upgrading, portfolio-enrichment by means of creating output-oriented standards (learning outcomes and learning made to measure),
- d. A fourth level on which the change is having its impact, can also be distinguished, the civil society, aiming at social activation, voluntary activities, societal awareness & reintegration and citizenship (activating citizenship),
- e. On the macro-level finally, authorities and social partners are responsible for organising the match between these levels by means of legislation, regulations, labour agreements, fiscal policy, training funds, etc.

'Valuing prior learning' as the guiding principle for lifelong learning strategies reflects the change towards a learning society in which the individual learner has and takes more responsibilities for his/her personal lifelong learning process. It also means that the individual learner changes the existing 'balance of power' in learning processes themselves because he/she will be co-steering lifelong learning with his/her own portfolio. In this portfolio, the learning outcomes that he/she has achieved are documented together with the relevant evidence. Such portfolios create a new balance within learning as a process and contribute to the individual's social identity; above all they can show the road to follow for personal development in the context of the organisation and the society.

1.2 Goals of valuing prior learning

The emphasis on learning outcomes is in line with the development of common structures of education and training across Europe and is associated with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Thus Valuing Learning will contribute to the removal of barriers to the mobility of labour. At national level, learning outcomes are a central part of the modernisation of qualification systems and frameworks in order to stimulate economic development and promote social cohesion and citizenship.

The goals of 'valuing prior learning' are as follows²:

¹ With VET/HE we encompass all forms of vocational education and training that are available in public and private learning systems and that can be used for the many purposes lifelong learning offers.

² Based on the outcomes of the Leonardo-researchproject 'VPL2' (NL/05/C/F/TH-81802) in: Duvekot, R.C., G. Scanlon, A. Charraud, K. Schuur, D. Coughlan, T. Nilsen-Mohn, J. Paulusse & R. Klarus (eds.) (2007). *Managing European diversity in*

Individual	Stimulating self-investment in learning; showing learning outcomes; building up a learning biography (portfolio)
Organisation	Facilitating employees' self-investment and articulation of competencies; designing lifelong learning strategies in HRD
VET/HE	Matching learning to real learning needs; offering learning-made-to-measure; focus on learning outcomes; facilitating lifelong learning strategies
Civil Society	Activating citizenship; transparency of learning outcomes (competencies) in the civil society; linkages with other perspectives (qualification, careers)
Macro-level	Responsible for creating favourable conditions for lifelong learning strategies

More knowledge in the actual use of validation is needed in order to adapt, develop or strengthen the necessary validation-services; for, so much is clear now, validation connects all stakeholders in lifelong learning strategies! Goals of valuing prior learning are:

- Stimulating the awareness of the learning individual by offering courses in self-management of competencies & portfolio-build up,
- Helping organisations to articulate their need for competencies and embed this need in pro-active competence-management,
- Making a match between the already articulated demand for competencies on the labour market and the already developed supply of competencies in education/training.
- Preparing the development of new supply of learning-made-to-measure in order to make better matches with the learning-demand deriving from one of the perspectives of validation-models

1.3 Towards The Learning Triangle

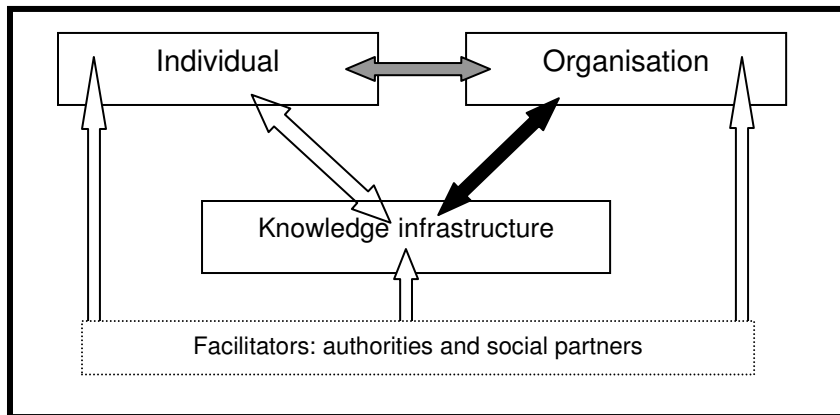
The emphasis on learning outcomes is in line with the development of common structures of education and training across Europe and is associated with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Thus valuing learning will contribute to the removal of barriers to the mobility of labour. At national level, learning outcomes are a central part of the modernisation of qualification systems and frameworks in order to stimulate economic development and promote social cohesion (European Council 2006).

The conditions for creating the learning society in which these benefits can come to fruition are:

- A transparent, output-oriented knowledge infrastructure;
- Creating mutual trust by focusing on the available quality-system based on the judgement of existing assessment processes used by colleges and universities;
- A transparently structured education sector, that allows a flexible flow of participants from one layer of sector to another, both intra- as well as inter-sectoral;
- Universal, transparent and interchangeable procedures and reports on the competencies that have been valued;
- Close relations between educational institutions and their surroundings (enterprises, government institutions, institutions in the field of (re) integration of unemployed into the labour market);
- Creating possibilities for developing and executing individual tailor made learning paths;
- Facilities for financing flexible tailor made individual learning routes, such as an individual learning account;
- Clear communication to citizens about the technical and financial arrangements for education and 'valuing learning'.
- Development of an individual right for portfolio-assessment and career-advice.

In the figures below, the present and the expected balance of power between the three partners are reflected. Authorities and social partners are facilitating this balance by laws and regulations that take away problems for creating flexible and dynamic learning processes of the learning society. Society is moving towards a way to deal with lifelong learning by creating a dominant relation between learner and organisation and a second relation, being the dependency of both 'players' on the services rendered by the knowledge infrastructure.

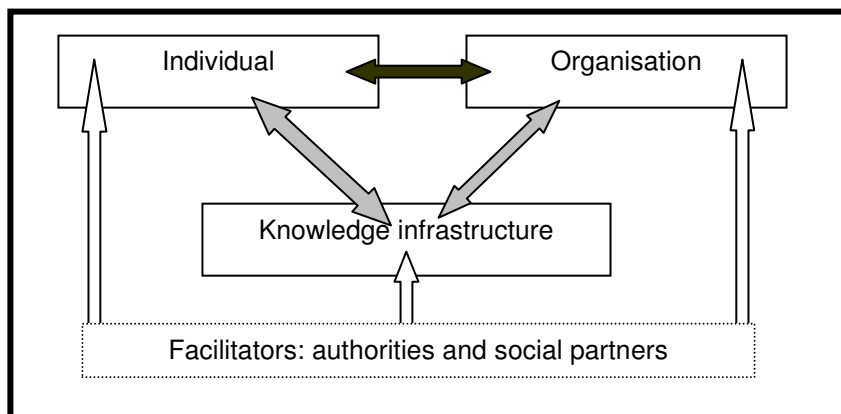
Figure 1: Valuing prior learning in the present knowledge-society



Source: Duvekot & Konrad 2007³

Black arrows point out the dominant relations in both learning epochs. Above you can see the imbalance between the main actors in lifelong learning and the focus on summative goals. Below you see that 'empowerment' as the last transition brings balance in the learning-field. The focus can shift now to the formative goals of learning.

Figure 2: Valuing prior learning in the learning society (situation in the near future)



Source: Duvekot & Konrad 2007

It is in this wider, European context of the Learning Society and its emerging Learning Triangle of the individual learner, the learning organisation and the supporting knowledge infrastructure that the TIMA-Balt project is situated.

³ Duvekot, R.C. & J. Konrad, *Towards a transnational concept of valuing lifelong learning: some practical reflections on developing theory*. Paper for *The times they are a-changin': researching transitions in lifelong learning*. CRL 4th Biennial International Conference 2007, June 22-24. University of Stirling, Scotland

2. The project TIMA-Balt

Not alone did the European context in which Valuing Prior Learning is developing, set the scene for the TIMA-Balt project but also the regional context. At the start of the TIMA-Balt project, there were different starting situations between the three participating Baltic states. In Estonia there were single practices where prior learning was recognized, but there was no overall system, regulating the process. In Latvia some universities and the Latvian Adult Education Association offered teaching programmes accredited according to professional standard, but there were no possibilities to assess and recognize applicants' prior learning, aiming to personalize the learning needs. In Lithuania several researchers of need for VET teachers prior learning assessment, were carried out, as well as the main parameters for the assessment system were described.

Even though the fact that at the start of the project there were differences in the situations between the participating countries, research showed that the needs of the three Baltic states concerning VET teacher education improvement were very similar: there was no possibility to personalize study process for VET teachers in the way of recognizing the competencies acquired in non-formal or informal way. VET teachers learn considerably through self-education and therefore it is important that the acquired competences will be assessed and recognized as a part of a formal qualification (TIMA-Balt project application form 2007).

The assessment and recognition of VET teachers' prior learning has already been implemented at the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences, Teacher Education College in Finland. Therefore, they were selected as a donor partner. Their experience was transferred as innovation, which should improve and enrich the existing VET teacher education programmes in the three receiving countries.

Note that the term used for valuing prior learning in this project was Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). This is the formal procedure in which a candidate can get accreditation of his/her learning outcomes. It is a summative approach; the portfolio is referred to a specific standard and the accreditation consists of a number of credits that can be cashed in at a qualifying institute or school.

2.1 Aims and objectives

The TIMA-Balt project aimed to improve and enrich the existing VET teachers' education in Lithuania (Vytautas Magnus University), Latvia (Riga Technical University Humanitarian Institute) and Estonia (Tallinn University) by developing guidelines for an Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) system. This system had to be included into the vocational teacher education programmes. Consequently, the development of more personalized learning possibilities within VET teacher education, which are taking into account and are based on assessment and recognition of prior formal, informal and non-formal learning of teacher students, should be established.

The following objectives were specified in order to reach the aim of the project:

- Carrying out a study of APL in VET teachers educational systems in partner countries;
- To develop methodology for assessment of VET teachers prior learning, basing on donorpartner (FI) experience;
- To make a pilot training for groups of assessors in three receiving partner countries (LT, LV, EE);
- To develop the introductory module (to a VET teacher education programme) for assessment of VET teachers prior learning.

The expected results of the project were:

- Study of APL in VET teacher education systems;
- APL methodology;
- Study module for assessors of VET teachers' prior learning;
- Group of assessors;
- Introductory module for APL.

2.2 Partners

The partners in the TIMA-Balt project are the Riga Technical University Humanitarian Institute, the Tallinn University (TLU) and the Vytautas Magnus University (VMU).

The donorpartner is the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences, Teacher Education College in Finland.

The partnership tested, piloted and adapted the APL methodology, and create two other project results: a study module for APL assessor training and an introductory APL module for VET teacher education programme. In this paragraph, the three Baltic States will be further introduced.

The Riga Technical University Humanitarian Institute in Latvia (HI) is the centre for training in the subjects of humanities and Vocational pedagogy, and a centre of research in these areas within Riga Technical University. The main responsibility of HI is to provide and develop vocational teacher education in Latvia. Since 1997 two different VET teacher programmes were developed to respond to the VET systems changes: a special vocational teacher training programme (where vocational teachers can study and acquire knowledge and skills in pedagogy, psychology and sociology as well as gain the professional qualification of vocational teacher) and a programme for teachers of vocational subjects (those who have no pedagogical education). (TIMA-Balt questionnaire, 2008; TIMA-Balt project application form, 2007).

Tallinn University (TLU) is one of two Universities in Estonia that provides VET teacher training. The first VET teacher training curricula was put into practice already 20 years ago. TLU is an active partner in the VET teacher training policy decision making process, such as composing VET teacher's occupational standard, teacher training strategy etc. The aim of TLU is to offer a modern and competitive education of the highest standard at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral levels, to facilitate research and to disseminate human and democratic values throughout Estonia society. Tallinn University has committed itself to the strategic goal of becoming an international research university with a strong social conscience and a flexible and collegial environment for learning and personal growth, where considerable academic freedoms guaranteed to both the students and the faculties are balanced by strict quality requirements. (TIMA-Balt questionnaire, 2008; TIMA-Balt project application form, 2007, TIMA-Balt evaluation 2009).

Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) is one of the six universities in Lithuania providing VET teacher education programmes (both initial and continuous). VMU, in cooperation with Sheffield Hallam University (UK), developed the first modular programme for VET teacher education in Lithuania in 1997 (under the Phare programme). The Centre for Quality of Studies is a department at VMU, and it carries out research, consultations, and educative activities and participates in projects related to quality assurance and enhancement issues.

The *Centre for Quality of Studies* is the coordinator of the TIMA-Balt project and is responsible for assurance of project management as well as quality of the project results. (TIMA-Balt questionnaire, 2008; TIMA-Balt project application form, 2007).

3. The Evaluation

An evaluation is, according to the Evaluation Guidance Note for Leonardo Projects (2002), a 'structured exercise to collect information about a project or activity, learn from it, judge the degree of progress made against a set of predetermined criteria, review implications for future action, and draw conclusions about how to improve'. An external evaluation has the purpose to form an opinion on the quality of the project on the basis of self-evaluation report and additional data. This external evaluation focuses on the content of the project.

3.1 Methods

The content evaluation was performed on the basis of a questionnaire sent out to the partners at the end of the project's time-table. Up to that moment the project's findings and results were monitored at a distance.

Apart from this monitoring and the questionnaire there were two occasions where the TIMA-Balt partners were interviewed on their progress: at a partner's meeting in Kaunas in April 2008 and at an international conference in September/October 2008 in Finland. In both occasions a master-class on VPL was given by the Empowerment Centre EVC.

The questionnaire consisted of 18 open questions about the intentions of the partnership, the process of the assessment, the roles and responsibilities in the process of APL at different levels, the different steps in the process and so on. See [appendix 1](#) for the questionnaire..

Next to the questionnaire and the monitoring, also additional data, like the TIMA-Balt project application form (2007) and the TIMA-Balt questionnaire (2008), were used for the content evaluation.

3.2 Analysis

The filled-in questionnaires were grouped per theme. Every answer from a partner in a specific theme was compared with the answers of the other partners.

Every theme was summarized and a selection of quotations was highlighted. The summaries and some of the quotations were collected in this report.

3.3 General results

Partnership

The general objective of the TIMA-Balt project was to improve and enrich the existing VET teachers' education in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and to develop more personalized learning possibilities within VET teacher education. To reach this goal, a partnership was formed.

The main intention of the partnership was to create the possibility to assess non-formal and informal learning achievements of VET teachers by establishing the methodology for the assessment of the prior learning and the study module based on this methodology. All partners underlined this main intention in the questionnaire. It appeared that, besides this main intention, the partnership also offered the opportunity to get acquainted with the Finnish experience and to learn from the good examples and practices from the project partners.

The process of APL

The process of Assessment of VET Teacher's Prior Learning (APL) was organised as follows.

First an analysis was made of several good practices on the experiences of assessment of VET teachers prior learning in EU countries. This made clear that the APL-expertise and -experience in the Teacher Education College of Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences in Finland fitted in with the objectives of the partners from the Baltic countries.

It was decided and agreed that the Finnish experience could be transferred as an innovative practice, which would improve and enrich the existing VET teacher education programmes in the Baltic partner countries.

As a first step, after getting acquainted with Finnish methodology, it was foreseen for all project partners to formulate requirements for APL methodology adaptation and carry out **a situational analysis** in a study on the national context of APL in VET teacher education systems.

After carrying out this study it was planned to develop and experiment the APL methodology for the assessment of VET teachers basing on the experience of the donor partner – Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences. The Lithuanian team organized for instance in this project phase local groups of

APL assessors and supported their training. Also foreseen was an APL module for assessment of VET teachers' prior learning, to be developed and implemented as an introductory module into the specialised modular study programme for teachers Vocational pedagogy at Vytautas Magnus University.

The sustainability of the project results referred to the actual needs to improve the existing study programmes for VET teachers in the partner countries – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The results of the situational analysis already showed a similar situation in the partner countries regarding the needs for innovation of the VET teacher education systems:

- in each of the “receiving” countries the existence of professional standards for VET teachers,
- also the existence of modular study programmes,
- no practice of accreditation of prior learning achievements, nor a possibility to personalize studies for experienced VET teachers, based on the accreditation of their prior learning and their remaining learning needs,
- the high degree of transferability of the Finnish partner's expertise, transferring the methodology and good practice of APL as an innovation to the Baltic partners and in that way helping them to improve and enrich their VET teacher education programmes.

Consequently, at the end of the project's funding, the sustainability of the project's results is expected to be safeguarded by all three receiving partner countries by them having trained a group of APL assessors as well as access to a well experimented (and documented) module for APL assessors training. In this way it is projected that the innovative methodology of APL for VET teachers can sustainably be implemented in the Baltic countries. The resulting programmes can even be enriched with an introductory module to 'working with APL' and with defining individual learning needs of VET teachers themselves (in being APL-professionals).

Apart from this, the ideas of the TIMA-Balt partners even go further. From the outset of the project, it was the desire of the coordinating team to be able to prepare a follow-up project on the basis of the results of TIMA-Balt. The content of this follow-up project will be decided upon at the end-conference.

Roles and responsibilities in the project

In the TIMA-Balt the roles and responsibilities in the project were expressed on the level of the project organisation and on two implementation levels in the process of APL: candidate's and employer's level.

1. At the project management's level, Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) coordinates the TIMA-Balt projectteam which includes both managerial personnel as well as the APL-experts of the project partners. This team takes responsibility for interim and final reports, as well as for finalizing the project and the quality of project results. The managerial team provides consultation for project partners on financial management and other administrative questions. The experts take active part in finalizing the work of the project partners (content-side). Internal monitoring of the project is organised by giving partners questionnaires and forms for self assessing their input to the project activities.
2. The APL candidate is one of the active actors in the APL-process. The initiative of the process remains in the hands of the candidate. He/she shows the interest to go through the APL procedure before entering a specific VET- or HE-programme; after that decision he/she receives an advice (or an intake) from the counsellor about the preparation and participation in the APL procedure in the light of a specific standard chosen in the procedure. The candidate is responsible for collecting all materials needed for building up a portfolio and presenting those materials to the assessor and experts. It is important that the candidate is well informed about aim, principles and process of APL. This information function appeared in this project to be one of the essential functions of the APL system.
3. The opinions of the projectpartners differed on the responsibilities of employers in the process of APL. One partner stated that it would be solely a matter of debate between university and student. Another partner however thinks it's crucial to make the employers of VET teachers also a stakeholder in the APL system, by giving them advisory and expert roles. Another reason to make them part of the process is the fact that employers in the education sector will (partly) finance the APL-procedures for their staff. In this context it is relevant to mention that research on motives and goals for entering APL-procedures shows that employers are a very important factor in the process,

being not only the financiers but also the ones that provide the context for the development-steps after the APL-procedure has been finished.⁴

Other stakeholders

According to the project partners, on top of the above mentioned three levels, also the government, the social partners and Brussels have a role in developing, implementing and structurally embedding APL in the education sector:

- The government in its role of policy maker, legislator and financier of public education, prepares the laws that steer development and implementation of APL in the education sector. This role differs from one country to another: in Lithuania the education institutions are given partly freedom for creating their own systems and procedures. In Estonia, the government steers the process more by giving general recommendations for the development of APL system(s).
- In the case of Lithuania, the social partners are invited to take part in the training for assessors and in the assessment itself as external assessors. These roles are connected to the expertise of the social partners in the context of the working places of APL-candidates. Social partners are more active in the sector of VET than in HE. It is also a university's task to involve social partners more and to inform them of APL and its content.
- Brussels initiates and supports the research and cooperation in developing APL systems. By creating such systems on national levels it is very important to have professional contacts with other institutes in other countries, to have the opportunity to get to know, study, select and adapt examples or good practices, to update the knowledge base in the field of APL, to participate in international research events as well as to make the new professional contacts. Brussels gives that opportunity.

The steps in the process

The partners in general apply the APL- process in the following stepping-stones:

- Gathering information and offering counselling to the candidate. The candidate has to inform the counsellor against which standard he/she wants to be measured and accredited for his/her prior learning. The counsellor has to give the candidate appropriate information on the documents and proof's needed.
- For the final intake, the assessor provides the final advice on the effectiveness of using APL for the specific candidate, based on the general findings of the candidate (showcase or quick scan,)
- Assessor gives the candidates (portfolio) guidance. This guidance is about how to collect and present the materials needed to fill in the portfolio. The general structure for the portfolio (the format) was developed in the TIMA-Balt project,
- The candidate presents his/her portfolio to the assessor(s) and/or the expert's committee. The assessor(s) and the expert's committee have to agree on the nature and the content of the final examination,
- Final decision: after the candidate's presentation the exam committee will present their final decision on the outcomes of the APL-procedure.

During the TIMA-Balt project the methodological guidelines and the qualitative approach to the APL procedures, like the structure of the procedure, have been described. The Handbook for assessor is developed for the sake of resource material for university staff, working as APL-assessors or –guider.

Accreditation

By Accreditation of Prior Learning all partners understand “the process of identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of prior formal, informal or non-formal learning experiences”.

Responsibilities accreditation

The responsibility for the accreditation of prior learning is different in the three partner countries. In Estonia, the head of department within the institute or university is responsible for the APL process. In Latvia however there is a specific commission for VET teacher certification approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia. In Lithuania, the responsibility for the accreditation of prior learning is shared between the Centre of APL of an institute or university (responsible for APL documentation, consultations and methodologies) and the committee of the certain study programme (responsible for the concrete APL procedure within the certain study module).

4 Borghans, L. B. Golsteyn & A. de Grip (2006) *Meer werken is meer leren*. 's-Hertogenbosch: Cinop.

Professionalization of APL staff

In Lithuania and Estonia, the APL assessors are university teachers or professors of the specific degree-programmes where APL is being applied. They get a special training on working in APL-procedures. This training usually lasts one day and is presented in the form of a seminar. There is no diploma attached to this training.

Financing APL

In Lithuania, the institutions that are implementing APL procedures, partly finance the procedure; the rest is covered by the APL candidate. In the case of Vytautas Magnus University, the APL candidate pays for the assessment procedure 75 euro; the consultation process itself is financially covered by the university.

In Estonia, the costs are for the student, but the price of the procedure differs between APL-suppliers.

Situating APL

Only in Estonia the student has the opportunity to use APL during the admission-procedure for entering a university. The candidate has to inform the university at the start of the spring semester (February) and present the necessary documents and certificates for getting access to APL.

Depending on the degree-programme, the list of necessary documents and certificates may differ.

In Lithuania a VET teacher educational programme 'Vocational Pedagogy' is running, but this programme lacks the possibility to choose those modules which best correspond to individual learning needs.

Both in Lithuania and in Latvia the APL-procedure is not yet part of the intake of a specific degree-programme

The APL module, being one of the results of the TIMA-Balt project, is expected to become the general intake-module for degree-programmes.

4. SWOT-analysis

For the sake of the content evaluation a questionnaire was sent to the TIMA-Balt partners. On the basis of the answers from the partners to the questions the following SWOT-analysis was possible.

The questionnaire (see the appendix) was used for:

- A general analysis of the project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats,
- Signaling risk areas for the mission of TIMA-Balt,
- A specific focus on (setting up) an APL-centre in the respective Baltic countries,
- Listing the output of the project,
- Describing the personal effects of the project on the respective partners.

4.1 General SWOT

The general SWOT showed in general the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats:

Strengths	Weaknesses
The project supports the development of lifelong learning on European level.	Different interpretations of the aims of the project caused different approaches to the quality of and commitment to the project process and results.
The project theme is urgent and important and has a lot of external interest and benefits.	Different backgrounds and thinking caused communication problems.
Despite of the diversity of the learning cultures in the partners countries, the shared belief in APL and the practical outcomes, showed that diversity isn't a problem to implementing APL.	
Cooperation between different countries and partners with rich experience in the field of APL, the opportunity to get to know the process, context and thinking of APL in different countries.	
Opportunities	Threats
To develop the theme (APL in VET teacher training) further, develop follow-up project ideas, for example creating e-possibilities for APL procedures for specific study programmes.	Legislative changes are necessary in order to recognize competencies acquired in non-formal or informal learning and to implement the project results at national level.
Several professional contacts have been made for possible cooperation in implementing APL.	The actual use of the projects outcomes, for instance the handbook for assessors, has to be secured for further use. Commitment from the partners is necessary and needs a sustainable valorisation-strategy.

4.2 Risk areas

Two main risk areas for further developing and implementing the mission of the TIMA-Balt project could be distilled from the answers to the questionnaire:

1. The most important risk area to the mission of TIMA-Balt is to transfer the innovative products on policy levels of the universities/institutes and on national level, and even further into practical use on the 'working floor' of teacher training programmes. This is relevant since it is quite common practice that the recognition of scientific products on the different policy levels is a long term process. Looking at the needs of the learning society, it is however essential that the projects outcomes will be picked up quickly and get embedded in practical instruments and broaden the access to teacher training-programmes. Therefore, while disseminating the project idea, progress and outcomes, policy makers will be invited to participate in upcoming project events and will be acquainted with the project outcomes and their meaning to improving the quality of VET teacher education. Commitment from the universities and institutes is quite essential for this valorisation.
2. The other risk area is that the potential beneficiaries of the project outcomes (VET teachers) are poorly informed about the possibilities to choose the education programme that fits their learning needs best. So they might face the danger of not getting a good grip on their own, personal lifelong

learning process with its personal responsibilities and tasks and – moreover - might miss the opportunity of learning to work with the diagnostic assessment processes of APL and have to restrain themselves to the traditional, sanctioning assessment-methods. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the strategy of informing the primary beneficiary group, revealing the meaning and usefulness of APL, and motivating them to organize their learning process in accordance with their individual learning needs; the meaning of this is *to make teachers the practitioners of what they should preach to their students, colleagues and other lifelong learners.*

4.3 Focus on APL-Centre

Another strong feature of the project was the shared understanding amongst the partners that (setting up) a professional APL-centre, attached to the university/institute, could strengthen the implementation of APL in the degree programmes, as a way of broadening access and innovating the form and content of the programmes. With respect to the national diversity in learning culture, an APL-Centre could in general carry out the following activities:

- Expand coordination with Department of VET in the Ministry of Education and Science and VET schools` administration,
- Consult, plan, and organise the APL procedure for interested persons,
- Initiating the development and improvement of APL methodologies,
- Initiating the monitoring of the APL procedures,
- Train staff members to act in the role of APL adviser or portfolio-guider,
- Train staff members to act in the role of assessor,
- Invite and instruct candidates for APL,
- Advise, intake and assess participants,
- Initiate and organise courses on APL for pedagogical personnel (potential assessors) of university,
- Execute APL-procedures and award the outcomes in advice on documental or credit forms,
- Cooperate with other institutions with interest and/or experience in implementing and developing APL systems,
- Disseminate good practices and opportunities of APL to targetgroups,
- Carry out research in the field of APL for the sake of creating a solid knowledge base for APL..

4.4 Output

The qualitative output of the project is:

- An innovative study module for understanding and working with the recognition for prior learning,
- Dissemination of results of research in the field of APL via the special issue of the scientific journal 'Quality of Higher Education';
- Strengthening the competences in the APL field;
- Development of a module for assessors;
- Development of didactical competences for working with APL;
- An APL module in VET teacher training curricula on portfolio assessment.

The quantitative output of the project is:

- A group of 4 trained APL assessors;
- 2 study modules;
- 2 handbooks in 2 languages;
- A number of cases and articles.

4.5 Personal effects

The project has had several personal effects for the partners. All partners stated that their universities/institutes would like to provide APL procedures, want to train APL experts and want to broaden the staff with APL assessors. The partners confirmed that they became more aware of the benefits of APL. They are committed to APL as a way of working that will also have effects on their own way of learning and working. They want to become APL assessor and understands the added value to implement APL if one would have 'done' an APL-procedure him-/herself. None of the partners had to be convinced of the perspectives of APL because of this project. It was the chance of strengthening their knowledge and insight in APL that mattered.

The personal effects in a matrix:

	Because of this project I personally	Lithuania	Latvia	Estonia
1	Intend to implement APL in my work	Yes	Yes	No
2	Am more aware of the benefits of APL	Yes	Yes	No
3	Don't believe anymore in APL	No	No	No
4	Would like to run an APL procedure	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Want to become an APL expert	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Want to become an APL assessor	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Want to become an APL trainer of assessors	No	Yes	No
8	Think that I can only implement APL if I have run an APL-procedure on myself	Yes	No	No
9	Think APL affects my way of learning and working	Yes	Yes	No

5. Conclusions

In general one can state that the TIMA-Balt-project met its goals, both qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The main questions to conclude with are:

- Did the project meets its targets when having a closer look?
- How to create a sustainable effect?

In answering these questions, a few recommendations can be formulated.

5.1 Meeting the targets

In a matrix one can see clearly that the TIMA-Balt project met its targets:

At the start of the project	At the end of the project
<p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carry out a study on APL in VET teachers educational systems in partner countries - Develop a methodology for assessment of VET teachers prior learning, basing on the donor partners (FI) experience; - Pilot a training for assessors in the receiving partner countries (LT, LV, EE); - Develop an introductory module (to a VET teacher education programme) for assessment of VET teachers prior learning <p>Expected results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Study of APL in VET teacher education systems - Develop APL methodology for the partners - Study module for assessors of VET teachers' prior learning - Train a group of assessors - Introductory module for APL 	<p>Qualitative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Innovative study module, giving the possibility to valorise the recognition for prior learning - Dissemination of the results of research in the field of APL in the special issue of the scientific journal 'Quality of Higher Education' - Accumulation of knowledge and skills in the field of APL - Development of content for a training module on APL - A training for assessors - Development of didactical competences - APL module in VET teacher training curricula, portfolio for assessment of APL <p>Quantitative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The group of 4 trained APL assessors - 2 study modules prepared - 2 handbooks in 2 languages for assessors and for candidates - Number of case studies and articles.

5.2 Sustainability of TIMA-Balt

When looking into the perspective of creating a sustainable effect of the projects results a number of recommendations arise:

- a) On sustainability in general: sustainable impact is expected on the basis of the growth of the number of teacher trainers and teachers involved in APL in one way or another. The project TIMA-Balt should be able to act as a kind of self-generating learning community and link the projects outcomes to the policy of the organisations of the different stakeholders attached to their APL-processes. Through these stakeholders the targetgroups – the teachers and teacher-trainers – should be reached and stimulated to start up self-investment in their own competences and the ones of their students, pupils, colleagues, etc.

- b) On legislation: as one partner stated: “the current legislation does not foresee possibilities of APL”. It is therefore obvious for the partners to link the projects results to the legislators and the social partners. For they can lay a solid foundation for an APL-steered lifelong learning culture. They could for instance strengthen existing legislation on fiscal opportunities for citizens in the field of APL and lifelong learning; another option is to use social funds or training funds for the same purpose of stimulating learning of the citizen. Legislation should focus on:
 - i. taking away the barriers to further education or lifelong learning, and broaden access to learning by facilitating APL.
 - ii. safeguarding the quality of APL as a bridge between personalized learning and degree programmes; the quality of assessors should in this context also be secured by creating a system of accreditation of assessors in VET and higher education.
- c) On implementation: the project results should focus on the practical application of APL at both institutional as well as national levels. For this purpose, the system of APL with all its process-steps should be described in national and institutional level. Without a systematic approach the organization and implementation of the process becomes a difficult task.
- d) On linking APL to standards: Setting standards involves the selection of a standard or benchmark for APL. This standard is dependent on the objectives of the candidate (update/upgrade, personal development, diploma, etc.). The accessibility of a standard is extremely important in taking the first step in the candidate’s self-management. A candidate for APL must work with a clear portfolio, with/without support from an advisor or guider.
- e) On professionalization: the role of the assessor is vital for APL-processes. Reliable assessment is the *matchmaker* between a portfolio, including a personal action plan, and the specific development steps advised by the assessor. In any given model for APL an assessment-policy has three functions: (1) raising levels of achievement, (2) measuring this achievement reliably and (3) organising the assessment cost-effectively.
- f) On managing the diversity: many differences in the ways of working with APL have been discovered between the Baltic countries. By learning from each others development-process, each country could be strengthened in its own implementation of APL. Insight in the diversity of learning cultures and respecting the diversity, brings more success than wanting to create a uniform approach.

5.3 Concluding remarks and recommendations

Improving the match between education and the labour market is essential for the sustainable implementation of APL. Not only will APL contribute to the continuity of educational organizations, but it will also contribute to the form of the education of the future. The education infrastructure must be transparent, flexible and demand-led in order to be able to provide the customised approach required. APL can make a contribution for both teachers that need an update or upgrade on their competencies as well as for the teacher-trainers themselves.

Other learning environments and forms of learning must be utilised more effectively, since APL also shows which learning environment and/or form of learning is best for a particular individual. This could include (combinations of) on the job training, mentoring/tutoring, independent learning, and distance learning, and so on.

As mentioned before, APL forms a useful contribution to the functioning of the labour and training markets, especially for individuals and even more especially for teacher training since teacher training is at the heart of the change in society to a learning culture that is targeted at lifelong learning. APL in this sense never is a goal in itself, it contributes to the desire to develop individuals and to strengthen human capital within organisations. The recognition of prior learning will boost people’s desire to keep on learning, i.e. will promote lifelong learning, since the additional skills could lead directly to the award of certificates or **exemption** from diplomas. The recognition approach can also make visible or recognisable the existing skills and qualifications within or outside the labour process. This promotes the transparency of the many opportunities for learning. The individual learner will not only want to learn independently of the preliminary training circuit but will also be more empowered, knowing better how, what and when to learn, and why he is learning.

Improved development of individual talents is the most important motivation underlying APL. It increases the opportunities open to the individual on the labour market by highlighting the skills he or

she already has and how those skills can be used and strengthened. This can apply both to those already employed and to job-seekers. And - once more stressing the crucial role of teacher training - the focus in the TIMA-Balt project on teacher training not only showed the understanding of the need for developing APL-methodology but also stressed that APL should start with the teacher trainers themselves. In that way the teacher trainers will act as a role model for sitting and future teachers. And aren't teachers the ones that are the primary actors in filling in lifelong learning attitudes and programmes and linking them to the needs of the Learning Society?

It is as the UNESCO already stated in 1972:

"If learning involves all of one's life, in the sense of both time-span and diversity, and all of society, including its social and economic as well as its educational resources, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of 'educational systems' until we reach the stage of a learning society. For these are the true proportions of the challenge education will be facing in the future."⁵

It's this challenge to which the TIMA-balt project has given an added value. It is recommended to just bear in mind to:

- a. Put the individual learner with her/his portfolio in the position of co-makership.
- b. Focus on learning outcomes instead of learning-input.
- c. Preferably, design the APL-process as a portfolio-based process; i.e. aiming at accreditation and development.
- d. Make sure there is a transparent standard available for APL-candidates.
- e. Competency-systems (diploma-standards & competence-management) must be linked in order for the individual to take a pick where, how and why to enrich one's portfolio.
- f. Lifelong learning is about stimulating the learning triangle: individual (portfolio-build up), organisation (competence-based HRM) and education (output-oriented learning-made-to-measure).

5 Faure, E, F., Herrera, A. Kaddoura, H. Lopes, A.V. Petrovsky, M. Rahnama and F. Champion Ward (1972) Learning to be. The world of education today and tomorrow. Unesco, Paris, xxxiii.

Appendix: the questionnaire

Name partner	
Name respondent	
email	
1. General context: the main changes in the context for the project in your country between 2007-2009	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on the needs in teacher training for this project in your country. - In what way has there been a change in this national context when you look at the start of the project in 2007 and the state of the art in your country at this moment (midst of 2009)? - Has this change anything to do with the outcomes of this project? 	
2. Vision: the intentions of your partnership in this project	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - which intentions did you have originally? - Did these intentions change during this project? If yes, why and how? - In what way has this project influenced you when looking at your vision on teacher training? - What's your definition of customer-oriented programmes for teacher training? 	
3. Mission: the mission of your organisation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What was the impact of this project and its outcomes? - what was the initial mission of your organisation? - Has this mission changed during the project? If yes, explain - How is the accreditation of prior learning embedded in the policy of your organisation? 	
4. The process of Assessment of VET Teacher's Prior Learning (APL)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What was the impact of this project and its outcomes? - how was this process organised at the start of the project? - How did you want to build up or change this process? - Which successes have you obtained? - What didn't went so well? - How are you guaranteeing the sustainability of the build-up or changes in the process? 	
5. The roles & responsibilities in the process of APL (organisation level)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What was the impact of this project and its outcomes? - which roles do you distinguish in the process within your organisation? (assessor, guider, advisor, etc.)? - what are the responsibilities of each role? 	
6. The roles & responsibilities in the process of APL (candidates level)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are your targetgroups for APL? - which role and responsibilities do you distinguish in the process for the candidate? 	
7. The roles & responsibilities in the process of APL (employers level)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What was the impact of this project and its outcomes? - if the employer in the education sector (e.g. a director of a school, etc.) is the one that pays for APL, which role and responsibilities do you distinguish in the process for the employer? - Is there a chance for organising the role of employers in the education sector structurally? And how can this be done? 	
8. The steps in the process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the steps in the APL-process that your organisation offers? (describe: information/marketing; 	

recognition/portfolio; assessment; advice/report)				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which instruments do you use in each step? - Which of these instruments were developed in this project? 				
9. Accreditation				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What was the impact of this project and its outcomes? - who is responsible for the accreditation of prior learning? - Who gives entry to a course, training or programme in teacher training? 				
10. professionalisation of APL-staff				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - how are your APL-professionals (assessors, etc.) recruited? - how are your APL-professionals (assessors, etc.) trained? - By whom (internal/external), for how long and with which effect (diploma or else)? 				
11. Financing APL				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who pays for the APL-procedure? - How much does the APL-procedure cost? 				
12. Situating APL				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is APL part of the intake of a specific programme or an activity of your organisation on its own? - Explain 				
13. SWOT				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the strengths of this project? - What are the weaknesses of this project? - What are the opportunities this project offer? - What are the threats to the effects of this project? 				
14. focus on APL-Centre				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you could design an APL-centre within your organisation: what would this centre have to do; which functions and in which autonomy? 				
15. other roles				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the role and responsibility of the government in developing, implementing and structurally embedding APL in the education sector? - What is the role and responsibility of the social partner in developing, implementing and structurally embedding APL in the education sector? - What is the role and responsibility of Brussels in developing, implementing and structurally embedding APL in the education sector? 				
16. output				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the qualitative output of this project for your organisation? - What is the quantitative output of this project for your organisation? - In what way has this project been the motor for this output? 				
17. personal effects				
	Because of this project I personally ...	yes	no	Not valid
1	... intend to implement APL in my work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2	... am more aware of the benefits of APL	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	... don't believe anymore in APL	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	... would like to run an APL-procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	... want to become an APL-expert	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	... want to become an APL-assessor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	... want to become an APL-trainer of assessors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	.. think that you can only implement APL if you have run an APL-procedure yourself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	... think APL affects my way of learning and working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. remarks

I would like to add the following statements concerning the effects of this project