

Flexible Pathways Towards Professionalisation – Senior Adult Educators in Europe

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Introduction Flexi-Path Edited Volume

“Vom Lernen zum Lehren“ (From Learning to Teaching) was the title of a book published by the DIE (German Institute for Adult Education) some years ago¹, in which a study of the state of the art of research on the subject of teaching and learning in adult education from differing disciplinary perspectives (e.g. sociology, pedagogics and neuropsychology) was published. At that time, the title was indeed provocative: the paradigm shift in thinking about adult education, which took place around the middle of the 1990s, put the spotlight onto learning in all its variations: self-directed, self-organised, informal, non-formal etc. In the (correct) view, that the central action in adult education, namely learning, is only carried out by the learner him- or herself, it seemed that the baby was thrown out with the bath-water. The aspect of teaching, creating a framework, a form and design of the teaching and learning process was virtually blanked out.

Not necessarily because of the book brought out by the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE), but systematically connected to it, ten years after the “paradigm shift” the viewpoint was once again more focused on the teaching aspect. The indispensable competences of teachers, a necessary professionalisation and a regulated acquisition of qualifications were increasingly rediscovered as criteria with which to measure the quality of adult education. Since then, especially at a European level, many initiatives, research projects and concepts have been generated in terms of the professionalisation of those working in tertiary education, which will be named and described in the different chapters of this book. They all serve to outline the fields of work, necessary competences and qualification pathways in adult education. The Project "Flexible Pathways for Adult Educators between the 6th and 7th Level of the EQF" (Flexi-Path), took an especially innovative path in this respect: in collaboration with five European partners; a competency profile and an instrument for the collation and validation of competences in adult education were developed with the aim of facilitating transparency and comparability of qualifications and increasing mobility on the European jobs market. The particularly innovative aspect is the concept of self-evaluation, which enables teachers in the field of adult education to define their own competences in a reflective and differentiated way, and to verify requirements. The basic principle of “self-direction” for learners which prevails in adult education, is also used here, but directed at the teachers. The kernel of the premise of the “Flexi-Path Project” can be found in this enlacement of competence analysis, self-evaluation and own initiative and at the same time also the unique quality of the product or, to be more precise, the products of the project work.

The DIE coordinated the project and based their work on impulses given, along with others, by their Romanian partner, IREA. With this project, several themes have been continued which have three objectives: the increasing professionalisation and

¹ Nuissl, E. (Editor) “Vom Lernen zum Lehren“, Bielefeld 2006

qualification of teachers on the basis of defined fields of competence, the increasing internationalisation of the professionalisation in adult education in the fields of research, development and implementation, as well as the translation of services and tools for an increasingly differentiated practice. The project partners, wherever possible still in international cooperation, will continue their work on the topic of professionalisation of and support for teachers in adult education in the future in different, “flexible”, but also effective ways.

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Part I: *Flexi-Path* The Context

Anne Strauch, Miriam Radtke

Adult Education and Professionalisation – Why Flexi-Path?

The debate about professionalisation in the field of adult education is nothing new. Since the 1970s the issues of professionalisation and professionalism affect the debates in the field of adult education. It is a common understanding that well-qualified staff are needed to support adults in their learning. Across Europe there do exist a few training systems for adult education professionals, which right now do not allow cross-national comparability. But there still is need to contribute to the comparability and transparency of adult educators' competences in order to increase quality as well as to facilitate access and career progress and also the mobility of adult educators on the European labour market. Professionalisation approaches on European level are needed in the sense of the development towards professionalism in adult education, which refers to quality standards for activities in adult education as well as to certain knowledge, skills and attitudes.

A lot of different European projects currently deal with the challenge to find ways for the sustainable professionalisation of adult education staff. At the beginning of the debate around quality and professionalism in adult education, the preoccupations and tasks in this sector are mainly linked to the teaching role. But yet in the following years, the scope of the occupational field is extended and various tasks and activities like e.g. counselling, organising or managing are comprised in the field of adult education. (cf. Gieseke 1997; Nuissl 1997). Though the exposure to terms such as "adult education manager" is hesitant as it was still not definite in the 1990s which occupation or job profile represented a "manager" in adult education. Moreover, it is still not explicit which professionalisation pathways qualify as adult educator whether in a teaching or a managing role. To determine criteria for quality, – which is one of the main terms used in the 1990s –, or professionalism in adult education, it is aimed to define standards which adult educators could be geared to and with the help of which the professionalism of staff in adult education could be assessed.(cf. *ibid.*). Various attempts to identify, register and specify adult educator competences are made. Thus, it is necessary to resort to the different occupational fields and training pathways of adult educators to analyse which competences are acquired, adopted and demonstrated in the field of adult education. With the definition of adult educators' competences, the challenge to feature specificity and completeness for the sector emerges. By means of the competence approach, new prospects unfold and adult educators also obtain the chance to demonstrate their competences which have been acquired non-formally and informally.

education as such, but to qualify them in addition for *international* work in this field. EMAE graduates are typically supposed to take up work in an international organisation, to work with European projects or networks and to carry out comparative analyses and research. A typical career of an EMAE graduate may also include going to another European country to work there as an adult educator. European subjects and competences (knowledge of different national AE systems, intercultural skills etc.) are therefore a constituent feature of the EMAE Core Curriculum, and the international dimension is equally reflected in the delivery and teaching arrangements (online courses with students from different countries and with English as the working language, student and teacher mobility),

At the time of writing, the EMAE programme has been fully implemented in the universities of Duisburg-Essen, Florence, Tampere and Timisoara, and several universities are working on the implementation. During the development phase of the EMAE programme the discussion among the partners on the curriculum and competences had been intense and complex, but in the end an agreement on relevant core competences was reached at a comparatively quick pace. The main challenge then turned out to be its implementation. The tasks of integrating the programme into different legal and administrative structures and of establishing it as an economically viable offer on the different national markets proved a major challenge which is still ongoing.

Although AGADE and EMAE are very different in their scope and approach to professionalisation, the two projects share one important characteristic: They developed an internationally agreed curriculum defining core subject areas and competences for adult education staff. The composition of the partnerships, if not covering each single European country, ensures in each case that different concepts, cultures and traditions relating to adult education are represented in the final products so that the curricula represent important steps towards a European standard or reference concerning competences of adult educators.

Mapping the field: The Q-ACT and ALPINE Studies

That professionalisation of Adult Educators started to receive growing attention at a European level – including at EU policy level - can most clearly be seen from two major research initiatives both of which published first results in the year 2008. “**Q-Act – Qualifying the Actors in Adult and Continuing Education**” is the title of a one-year EU-project, which ran in 2007 and built on the earlier work of a European research group that had been established and coordinated by the German Institute for Adult Education. This research group has been active since the end of 2005 focusing their joint work on activity fields, competence profiles and professionalisation pathways of adult education staff throughout Europe. The aim of

the Q-Act project was to summarise and disseminate the (interim) results of this group and to discuss them with a wide European expert audience in the context of a large conference.

Through the activities of the research group – which comprised members from Austria, Sweden, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and the UK - a quite comprehensive picture of the state of the art concerning professional development of AE staff was produced and needs for further research and development were articulated. They are to be found in the final project publication “Qualifying adult learning professionals in Europe” (Nuisl/Latte 2008). The Q-Act project thus produced the first broad overview on the topic in a European perspective. Shortly afterwards this project was supplemented by a comprehensive study commissioned by the European Commission on the situation of Adult Learning professionals in Europe. This study, which went under the name of **ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe**, covered all 27 EU Member States plus Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Turkey and Croatia. ALPINE gathered and summarised available data and findings, including from Q-Act, concerning amongst others:

- job positions, tasks and activities of adult learning staff
- employment situation, career paths and professional development of adult learning staff
- recruitment and labour market for adult learning staff and
- public perception and status of the profession

These two studies put together quite a large amount of available data and information. However, both studies were very clear in their assessment that reliable data were on the whole scarce, scattered and, above all, not comparable throughout Europe. Both studies referred to the high degree of heterogeneity of the adult education sector as a whole and found that this heterogeneity was reflected in equally diverse working conditions and contexts of the staff and in the training and professional development arrangements and approaches that could be found throughout Europe. Both studies stressed the need for further research to fill the existing data gaps, for example concerning actual job profiles and competence requirements of adult educators. Both studies also identified several major challenges for the professionalisation of the sector on a European level. And, finally, both studies concluded by proposing a number of recommendations for future policy action, such as notably the development of European competence standards and frameworks as common reference tools in order to enable greater transparency and comparability between countries.

Altogether, while it can safely be said that these initiatives marked an important step in the European discourse on professionalisation, it is nevertheless obvious that this step had much more the characteristics of a start rather than a conclusion.

Validation of prior learning of adult educators – The project VINEPAC

Adult educators who have undertaken a formal training or obtained a formal qualification in adult education are still an exception rather than a rule in most countries. Nevertheless many adult educators do possess relevant competences which they have acquired through work experience or in informal or non-formal learning contexts. In some countries, e.g. Austria and Switzerland, adult educators have the possibility of having such informally acquired competences assessed (against a given standard) and certified by a competent authority. At the European level no such possibility exists since neither competence standards nor adequate procedures have been established to allow for such validation. A step in this direction was taken by the European project **VINEPAC – Validation of informal and non-formal psycho-pedagogical competencies of adult educators**, which ran from 2006 to 2008 with the support of the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

VINEPAC was coordinated by the Romanian Institute for Adult Education (IREA) and had partners from Germany, France, Malta and Spain. The project sets out to develop a portfolio tool (“**Validpack**”) which should help adult educators to become more aware of the competences they possess and make them visible to others by documenting them and having them assessed by an external evaluator.

The tool foresees a validation in three steps:

- self evaluation: reflection and documentation of one’s own learning biography and acquired competences with the help of a mind-map and a standardised evaluation sheet
- external evaluation, which is meant to increase the objectivity of the validation results: The external evaluator conducts an interview with the candidate and observes a total of three hours’ teaching practice. The results are documented in a standardised evaluation sheet and in a holistic appraisal in narrative form.
- consolidation. The results of the self-evaluation and the external evaluation are compared and discussed between the adult educator and the evaluator. Where there is disagreement concerning the assessment of individual competences these should be further clarified and an agreement should be reached. The results of this consolidation process are documented in the final standardised validation sheet and signed by the candidate and the evaluator.

Similar to the AGADE project (and different from the EMAE) the VINEPAC project focuses specifically on competencies that are related to a teaching role in adult education. For the purpose of the validation the relevant competencies have been grouped in the following categories:

Raluca Lupou

The Common Competences Profile

Diversity and heterogeneity of adult learning staff across Europe: need for standardisation?

The nature of work and employment is changing rapidly and persistently. As a result, there is an increasing emphasis on lifelong formal and informal education and training as a critical component in ensuring a highly skilled workforce that maintains and demonstrates currency of knowledge and skills. The driving forces in this domain are the adult education staff and their professionalisation is high on the EU agenda due to the diversity and variety of this professional group.

The adult learning professionals and the validation of prior learning are identified as key issues in various European policy documents and initiatives such as the Commission Communication on Adult Learning “It is never too late to learn” (2006), which urged member states to put in place initial and continuing professional development measures to qualify people working in adult education. The professional qualification of adult educators is seen as a key precondition for the quality of educational provision for adults. However, the initiatives that have been taken to improve the professional situation of teaching staff have so far concentrated very much on school teachers or teachers in initial vocational education, not on adult educators, in spite of their heterogeneity.

There are few European or national programmes providing education and training at Bachelor level for adult educator. A significant number of adult educators have BA diplomas in different professional fields and they deal day by day with adults and their learning/development by fulfilling different roles on the job: trainer, teacher, counsellor, manager, evaluator, curriculum-developer, policy-maker, decision-maker, responsible for human resource development etc. In spite of obvious scarcity of BA level programmes in adult education, the Master offers tend to become more popular and widely spread. The concrete example of the European Master in Adult Education (EMAE) initiative is eloquent in this sense as it has set up a network consisting of partners from Germany, Italy, Spain, Romania, Denmark, Czech Republic and Finland.

Although a well recognised need, there has been little attention paid to defining the contents and processes of initial training and the further professionalisation of staff working in adult learning. Well qualified staff are needed to support adults in their learning and yet there are few education/training systems for adult education professionals across Europe (Switzerland, Austria, UK) and these, in fact, do not allow cross-national qualifications comparability and recognition and, thus, mobility on the European labour market.

The standardisation aspect was tackled within various European initiatives and projects, all stating the necessity of a common reference for adult learning staff not only because it would ease comparability and recognition of qualifications and the

mobility of adult learning staff but also because it is intrinsically connected to the quality of teaching and the attractiveness of supply. Furthermore, the introduction of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and the need of Member States to develop their own National Qualification Frameworks in correlation with the EQF levels posed a new challenge (or a new opportunity) for the professionalisation of those involved in adult education: At what EQF level should trainer's qualifications be developed? Should it be level 6? If so, should it be a Bachelor degree?

The Flexi-Path response

In the last years, especially through the Lifelong Learning Programme and its predecessors, several initiatives and projects had the aim of building sustainable European standards and competency profiles for adult learning facilitators. These standards were highly differentiated, according to the role/s and sector/s considered, their future use (training, competence validation, theoretical basis and further research purpose etc.) and economic and social context/s considered. The majority of them failed to reach their original aim of becoming a European referential for the adult educator profession due to different reasons and circumstances but their results represent a very promising base for further discussions and considerations.

The Flexi-Path project was intended to develop a validation instrument for those adult educators who are highly competent but have no formal recognition of their competences. In order to reach its aims, the Flexi-Path partnership was aware that the competence framework the instrument will rely on has to be valid for all adult educators across Europe performing at the 6th and 7th EQF level, independent of their national, cultural context and adult education sector. Through the lifespan of the project "Master", "Manager" and "Senior" level was how the 7th EQF level was referred to during the project lifetime, with a preference for the "Senior adult educator" towards the finalisation of work.

	Knowledge	Skills	Competences
Level 1 . .			
Level 5			
Level 6 The learning outcomes relevant to	advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, take responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts

Level 6 are			take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are	highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are	knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

Extracted section from the EQF levels description (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, 2008)

The Flexi-Path partnership focused on the adult educators at the 7th EQF level. In order to give an overview on this qualification level it would be necessary to mention the link between the Bologna Process (Higher Education area) and the 6th, 7th and 8th EQF levels as stated in the RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, in the references. The references underline the compatibility of the 6th, 7th and 8th EQF levels with the *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*, as following:

*(**) The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna Process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6.*

*(***) The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna Process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7.*

*(****) The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna Process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8.*

The existence of this connection between Master qualifications/awards and the 7th EQF level offers a starting point for the development of the Senior adult educator competence profile. Still, the development of the competence profile of adult educator for the 7th EQF level will acknowledge the fact that, in most cases, a Master's graduate holds the knowledge corresponding to the 7th EQF level, but not always the skills and the competences as they are usually fully acquired in years of practice and experience in the field.

Another important aspect related to the Master programmes in adult education and the competences targeted to be developed is the Master's approach to the adult education field: academic vs. practice-oriented. This trait could significantly change the balance between different kinds of competence (research-related vs action-oriented competences) and their performance level.

Before the competency frame was developed, the Flexi-Path partners reflected on the four areas of a competency model suggested by *Lucia/ Lepsinger 1999*:

A. Determine the objectives and scope of the project. What are the objectives and goals of a competency model foundation? What jobs, functions are to be targeted?

Although the multitude of competence profiles existing in Europe for adult education professionals, the Master adult educator competence profile to be developed in the Flexi-Path Project will not constitute just one more added to the list but the first referential based on EQF indicators and the first common profile for Master adult educator in Europe, no matter the sector in which he/ she performs or the role. Based on this competence profile a European pass for adult educators will be designed to support comparability of their qualifications and mobility on the European labour market.

B. Clarify implementation goals and standards. What are the intended results of the project? How will we know when we have achieved them?

The adult educator competency frame developed within Flexi-Path is expected to be wide enough, so that all adult education professionals identified at Senior level will be able to find their professional competences in it, but specific to cover competences related to various roles and sectors of adult education. The present competence frame was designed to cover different adult learning professional profiles at the 7th EQF level and to facilitate flexible and alternative pathways for transfer and recognition of competences.

C. Create an action plan. What tasks are involved and who is responsible for carrying them out?

The Flexi-Path partnership intends to develop this competence frame by undertaking the following steps:

- identification of professionals performing at Senior level in adult education
- comparison and analysis of their competence profiles and identification of the common competences, existing in every such profile

D. Identify individuals who meet, exceed or fall below established performance criteria. What does successful performance in this field look like?

Adult learning professionals at the 7th EQF level are identified by the Flexi-Path project team to be those professionals who have management responsibilities and roles at different adult education organisational levels (institution, department, programme, project etc.) and in different adult education sectors: training/ facilitating

learning, competence assessment, guidance and counselling, human resource development in companies etc.

Challenges and solutions

In addition to the competence model criteria above, the Flexi-Path partnership also identified other critical issues standing at the basis of a valid and relevant competence frame for 7th EQF level professionals:

- *Who is going to benefit from/ use the competence frame?*

Setting the user groups represented a first step towards the development of the competence frame for 7th EQF level AE professionals. The potential user-groups or beneficiaries were identified by taking into account the need for such a competence frame (and, consecutively, a validation instrument based on it) in different sectors/contexts:

Final considerations

The diversity of competence frameworks and profiles existing in Europe for adult educators can only emphasise how important common referential is for understanding and linking adult educators' qualifications in a society that massively promotes mobility on labour market and exchanges between member states.

Within this multitude of competence frameworks, Flexi-Path distinguishes itself as an innovative, complex and validated referential for adult educators that has the potential to advance solid input in the European professionalisation picture of adult education. Its strengths come from the multiple contexts in which it can be used, being general enough to fit different national settings but specific enough to comprehend the various realities of the field of adult education.

In spite of being developed as a self-assessment instrument it can provide proof of its usefulness and validity also in continuous professional development strategies and curricula development for Master or vocational programme.

Encouraged by the very positive reactions from the field, the authors of the Flexi-Path Toolkit and competence frameworks are confident that Flexi-Path will promote a reliable complementarity to the professionalisation of adult educators in Europe.

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Compilation of a Self-evaluation Toolkit for Senior Adult Educators

This chapter charts the progress towards the projected outcome and the factors and processes that moved it to finally becoming a Professional Development Toolkit. This needs to be seen in the context of the overall objective of creating flexible pathways between levels 6 and 7 of the EQF.

In addition to exploring the steps and processes leading up to the publication of the Toolkit, it also offers some thoughts for its early use and aspirations for future development.

Perspectives on Vocational Qualifications

Based on their own experience the authors brought to the project personal perspectives concerning the progressive development of vocational qualifications in UK adult education, or more particularly the education of adults. These qualifications have seen a range of changes over the years which might be described as incremental. Fundamental to them has been the 'employer' focus which has directed the learning outcomes in particular ways. The overall framework is nationally determined with government involvement but the accreditation devolves onto dedicated agencies that work within a set of centrally determined standards.

During the 1990s there were two distinct UK bodies dealing with adult learning; one leaning more towards youth work and community development, the other to more structured vocational preparation. The ECA was fortunate to be involved in consultations at the point where these two significant strands were being brought together. It was our perspective then, and this has to some extent been borne out, that adult education sits exactly at the interface between these two territories and was likely to benefit from the overall process of integration.

At the launch of the resulting body we were pleased to hear the description that the intended accreditation framework would act like a 'climbing frame'. By this was meant as allowing individuals to build their skills and knowledge to higher levels and / or at the same to lower levels across different disciplines, according to their employment requirements. This was certainly a worthy aspiration, although not strongly supported by the new body, Lifelong Learning UK, at the outset and never really coming to the fore in its subsequent development.

This background does however represent the long view of thinking about validation of adult education competences within which EQF can be viewed. It was indeed a primary driver when considering the breadth of the engagement with adult educators across Europe for the purposes of Flexi-Path.

Background and Approach to Authorship

The ECA joined the Flexi-Path partnership in October 2008, bringing with it both experience of and a familiarity with the European Adult Education arena, with the successful achievement of two Grundtvig projects and regular attendance at the annual Salzburg talks behind it.

The work that had led to the validation instrument that had been developed throughout the VINEPAC project, in which some of the Flexi-Path partners had been involved, formed a firm foundation to build on. As a base of validating non-formal and informal psycho-pedagogical competences of adult educators, VINEPAC mapped the most important competences needed by front-line adult educators in accordance with current challenges and realities and reunited them in a comparable competency profile. It focused on the psycho-pedagogical competences and developed the following profile structured on the following clusters of competences:

- identification of the characteristics of the individuals/group,
- training management,
- assessment and evaluation of learning,
- motivation and counselling,
- personal and professional development.

This previous work helped to influence the development of Flexi-Path at the beginning of the project. However when we moved into the active phase of the project, as will be seen, it became evident that it was reasonable and welcomed to question some of those assumptions enshrined in the earlier documents. It led us to consider the methodologies that had given rise to those outputs and more importantly to differentiate those competences that might be expected at levels 6 & 7.

The Toolkit in Context

Designing the Flexi-Path Toolkit has seemed to stand broadly in line with professional practice in Adult Education; necessarily changing in response to external conditions, technical and philosophical issues and learners' responses. In normal practice, the policies of governments, directions from management boards, the requirement to stay within budgets as well as feedback from learners and staff, all influence the overall nature of the work and also impact on day-to-day practice. So too in the Flexi-Path Project a range of influences, combined with decades of professional practice of the authors as managers and trainers have shaped the final product.

From the time that the Leonardo funding approval was given for this project, up to the time of preparing the text, a great deal had happened; globally, in adult education organisations and in the project itself. The challenge was to make sure that the result was and is immediately relevant to those currently in the field across Europe.

In writing what can be seen as the key element in the Flexi-Path project, the Educational Centres Association brought together a team that was able to identify the basic elements of the Adult Educators' work at a senior level and to contribute directly from their own experience. Within this team it was an opportunity to work together on an exciting project that made full use of all our combined knowledge and experience as educators and managers.

The reality was that, as we went forward through the life of the project, a series of informed choices had to be made. These were based on our own experience, evidence from earlier stages of the project, the opinions of other Flexi-Path partners and those of a wider circle of colleagues with whom we consulted.

Form and Function

The Toolkit was explicitly designed as a piece of educational material to support someone going through a particular process. Given that the whole project is

predicated on its successful functioning within non-formal adult education, a central challenge was to make this process itself learner centred. This implied that the main author and editor should 'get inside that process' themselves and to think this through from first principles, using their range of experiences in the profession to really consider what the job is all about. So that the statements and the judgements about what really constitutes level 6 or level 7 competency actually come from that personal experience. In addition the opportunities to work with and observe large numbers of Adult Educators both within the UK and across Europe have informed these views.

The evidence from the earlier stages of the Flexi-Path Project together with a certain reading of the Bologna Process suggested that our focus for the validation instrument should be on competences. One justification for this is that 'conventional' degree programmes principally test the knowledge base, which is already one strand in the proposed validation framework. Another was the indication of the wish by Europe's national governments to see higher education qualifications become more practice based and vocationally orientated. This view was supported by colleagues in the higher education consortium, the Staffordshire Lifelong Learning Partnership⁵ (LLP) who were particularly interested in the prospects for recognising these high level competences through modular accreditation. Above all it was the interest of the practitioners who were consulted that spurred us to take this line.

Flexible Approaches Increase Relevance

Although ostensibly the Flexi-Path Project was divided into discrete work packages, the flexible ways of working adopted prior to and during the writing led to a more integrated approach.

Thus while dealing with dissemination in the middle phase; at the same time evidence was being taken from potential users about their likely ways of working with the final instrument. Equally it was possible to discuss with them the constraints on them of possible approaches which might be adopted.

Later, during the 'testing' phase when a draft version of the Toolkit was already in circulation, work again continued in terms of editing, designing and adapting it as new evidence and inspiration was fed back to us. This approach proved crucial as

⁵ Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Lifelong Learning Partnership

the weeks progressed, for the final testing report was not available until not only the manuscript was completed but all the material was being prepared for printing. Undoubtedly that is an approach that has strengthened the final version and increased its potential usefulness to the intended audience

Wider Engagement

Further meetings and email exchanges widened the circle of contacts and increased the range of experience and contexts from which feedback became available. This allowed the Toolkit to become more wide-ranging while still remaining equally relevant across the extended user-base. It was decided to advocate strongly for an inclusive approach, for example taking prison education and museum learning specialists into account in terms of the competences they are likely to possess. This can be seen to be very much in line with the process of Transfer of Innovation that underlies the whole of the Leonardo funding strand which has supported Flexi-Path

An entirely new section, which was incorporated late in the development of the document, is directed to senior and human resources managers thanks to such advice from practitioners. It stresses the identified values in terms of recruitment, selection, deployment, staff development and team building that have all been recognised by the reviewers. In the light of such insights other sections have been expanded and shaped in similar ways.

Considering the End Users

More subtly expressed but no less significant are the motivational aspects. It has become clear that in a time when institutional and professional pressures are increasing due to financial and geopolitical impacts, leading front-line figures can see themselves as challenged and undervalued. The Toolkit may prove an antidote to the sapping of morale that can result. It is for this particular reason that we asked for the personal endorsement of the Secretary General of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) as the Foreword to the Toolkit; it underpins the message we intend to impart.

The way that the Toolkit has been written against the background described assumes a degree of interaction with the user and therefore a more conversational style has been adopted, hopefully with a tone appropriate to its audience. This sense of the audience; of people with busy and complex professional lives, has also directed the shape of the document and the proposed activities. It has meant that structuring and signposting within the Toolkit became a key issue at a later stage in the writing and

formatting. Its personal nature derives from the need for participants / users to evidence their performance in structurally complex situations over extended periods.

The rationale for this approach is that unlike the 'lower' levels of competency, which can be evaluated readily on a task-by-task basis within very short time scales, the nature of the activities at levels 6 & 7 are complex and extend over considerable periods.

It is based on the presumption that competency is not just knowing what to do, not just knowing how to do it but demonstrating the ability to do the right thing, in the right way, at the right time.

Further that the nature of the contexts; social, cultural, economic, etc., in which adult educators work are so varied that the evidence they are likely to produce will be exceptionally diverse and individual in nature.

This approach was adopted to generate both a sense of working in teams; a critical success factor and also an idea of the value of peer support in creating a professional portfolio.

The front page title deliberately stresses the document's functionality **Designed to Engage**

The design element, as part of making the Toolkit work for the users, is based on careful consideration of the tasks to be undertaken and the contexts in which this might happen. A stipulation was made that the new publication should open flat and that the pages should be fully bound, apart from those that needed to be detachable for copying.

It was decided to provide strong visual cues to support engagement with the text. Then a proposal was accepted that a sample worksheet should appear filled with 'handwriting' to make it appear less daunting than a blank sheet of paper.

Similarly photographs of people were introduced onto the front and back covers showing collaboration with the dominant use of the word 'Toolkit' in the headline.

The plan for photo-copiable loose-leaf worksheets to be held in a back-cover folder aimed to support hand-written responses while the inclusion of a CD with the same material enables direct use and saving files onto the user's computer.

The Toolkit Structure

The Toolkit is divided into three main sections: -