



**LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME**  
**European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Projects**  
**Transversal Programme**

**Key Activity 1: Policy cooperation and Innovation**

**Deliverable 4C**  
**Report analyzing and valuing of the**  
**20 case studies by the Sector –**

(both representatives of the educational  
sector/awarding bodies and representatives of  
industry)

**Project Acronym:** VALLA  
**Project title:** Validation of All Lifelong Learning in Aquaculture  
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## **Section A. INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND**

### **1. Introduction**

This deliverable seeks to gauge the impact of the Case Studies on the sector, giving the view of these interested bodies on the value of the exercise, the methodology employed and the relevance of the spread of courses in the Case studies.

### **2. Importance of Case Studies in VALLA project**

The Case studies are exemplars of different types of courses which at present lack formal validation/ accreditation in both VET and HE education. Because these are often formative educational experiences rightly regarded as valuable, it goes without saying that the case studies are at the heart of the VALLA project. The partnership has throughout the project seen their existence, and their role as providing potential guidelines for the sector, as constituting the project's most important justification. It is therefore not inappropriate to reiterate some of the points made in the WP5 report.

#### **2.1.1 Relevance of VALLA Tool Design in performance of Case Studies task**

The VALLA online Tool was conceived as a highly effective support mechanism which would be able to deliver specific guidance and genuine assistance in the form of appropriate course templates available online. These generic templates were specifically designed to help users create descriptions of sectoral training (mobility placements, short term training, workshops/conferences, on-the-job training) in terms of Learning Outcomes. The software underpinning the templates was designed to support users and to ensure, as far as any software can do so, compliance with EC policies in respect of the EQF initiative.

### **3. Learning Outcomes Approach Resume**

#### **3.1 Learning Outcomes as Paradigm Change**

Learning Outcomes in education provision are in themselves an important paradigm change because of the way in which they shift focus from teachers/trainers to users. Learning Outcomes explain what a learner is expected to know, understand or be able to do at the end of a learning process, and as a result, learners become more motivated and more actively involved in the learning process. They are then better able to see what is offered in a particular course and how this links with other courses and programmes. In this way, Learning Outcomes also increase transparency and accountability because when used correctly, they provide a framework within which formal and informal learning can be recognised and accredited (for the purposes of study, training, employment, mobility). Thus they provide a basis for the exchange, credit transfer and recognition of qualifications between different countries.



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### 3.2 Pitfalls to be avoided in introduction of Learning Outcomes

Notwithstanding these positive aspects to Learning Outcomes, a cogent case can be made against their over-hasty introduction. Although (perhaps because?) the creation and implementation of learning outcomes is a highly complex and difficult process, they are frequently met with strong and widespread scepticism by higher education staff. They are often viewed as a threat that will dumb down education and constrict academic studies by reducing them to mere 'Tick box' training and rote learning. Stephen Adam is not the only one to argue caution "*These objections should be taken seriously, as learning outcomes, if poorly conceived and badly implemented, can damage education.*" (Adam, 2008). CEDEFOP makes a different point, though equally powerfully, stating bluntly that "*Strong disjunctions traditionally exist between HE and VET. In many countries the framing of HE qualifications and VET qualifications are separate, and there is institutional reluctance and technical difficulty in bringing the two into closer alignment.*"

### 3.3 Best Way Forward

There is thus no simple and correct way forward as much depends on the local situation and conditions. It is a matter of local and national autonomy exactly how they best might practically be introduced with the appropriate mix of top-down and bottom-up measures.

In the case of the aquaculture industry, the Learning Outcomes were based on a list of agreed competences drawn up via a bottom-up approach in which industry and academia worked in unison. The outcome of this cooperation led to a mutually acceptable Master List of competences.



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## Section B. CONSULTATION PROCESS

### 1. Focus of consultations and tasks addressed

The VALLA partnership clearly had to address issues outlined in Section A and did so by its consultations with both industry and the educational sector in an attempt to gauge reaction to the VALLA Case Studies, the methodology which was used to create them, and the relevance of the spread of selected courses.

### 2. Organisation of consultations and case studies selection

The choice of case studies was made in consultation with industry, educational and awarding body representatives. They were selected to exemplify the needs of both industry and vocational education: professional short training courses, mobility exchanges, 2-day workshop for industry, on-the-job training. After the online tool was developed, more consultations took place, again both with industry and the educational sector.

These related activities culminated in a joint exercise in which the learning outcomes from the case studies/exemplars, covering HE, VET, formal and informal learning), were presented (as described in detail below) to several European awarding bodies which were also responsible for creating National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs), and, in tandem, were presented to the members of the largest Producers' Association in Europe (Federation of European Aquaculture producers-FEAP). This consultation process, if successful, would then authenticate both the VALLA process and its products.

### 3. Meetings with National authorities in several EU countries

Meetings with National authorities in several EU countries both regarding higher education (HEA) including Universities and vocational education/training were scheduled with the aim of demonstrating i) the VALLA methodology developed to map a sector, ii) the specially designed computer tool and iii) the case studies with particular emphasis on focus on work placements, short training courses, industrial workshops and mobility exchanges. The overall aim of these meetings was to see whether all three features above could be used for evaluating and validating unaccredited sectoral training/competency. Section C gives a summary of the results from the meetings which point out both the positive and negative aspects of the VALLA methodology demonstrated.

### 4. Meetings with Industry and Producers' Associations

The Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP) is a key member of the VALLA partnership and has played a leading role in developing the Master List of Competences, the occupational and functional maps for aquaculture. It has also disseminated information concerning the ongoing work of the project, and was



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responsible for organizing the consultations with industry at its regular meetings with the heads of national producers' associations (29 countries).

Results from its latest AGM, held in Bordeaux in May 2010, are given in Section D.



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## **Section C CONSULTATION PROCESS (educational/national/awarding bodies)**

### ***Belgium***

In Belgium institutional experts (see VALLA WP5 report for details) from Ghent University and Ghent University Association were asked for feedback on the VALLA methodology and results.

The experts expressed high appreciation of the VALLA online course tool, commenting that it is a genuinely practical instrument in an area of growing importance as yet not tackled by numerous predominantly descriptive initiatives.

- the applicability of the VALLA tool is determined by the degree it produces descriptions that match ECTS (and in future also: ECVET) prescriptions.
- Although the generic approach of the tool is acknowledged (being non-sector specific), the integration of the competency list and the functional map into the tool would be an asset in the field of aquaculture

Both experts expressed the view that the WAVE and VALLA projects have made a very significant contribution towards the development of a sectoral qualifications framework in aquaculture. The strong European-wide endorsement achieved by the project was yet another favourable aspect. The main challenge remains the level descriptors for the competences, which do not form part of the project remit.

### ***Ireland***

In Ireland two meetings took place: i) with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and ii) the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) (details in WP5 Report).

- The NQAI commented that the VALLA project had produced very useful results.
- The occupational map will be a reference tool, with the basic steps on how to describe a sector and which key functions and competences exist within the sector, which are independent of any political educational system in place.
- In a long and difficult process, the VALLA project has come far and is going in the right direction.
- The VALLA tool is very useful as it not only describes training in the appropriate format, but has taken precisely the same steps as are being taken by qualification awarding bodies.

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) commented:

- the VALLA methodology and tool are a good start for describing programmes and acceptance by accrediting institutions.

The sole criticism voiced in Ireland is in effect a back-handed compliment to the usefulness and effectiveness of the tool and is worth quoting in full: “when using the tool,



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people might get lazy in describing Learning Outcomes, not putting the effort of the thought into it" (I.McKenna).

### **Norway**

Several meetings took place in Norway with the University of life science (UMB) and National authorities for both higher education (HEA) and vocational education/training, and the Ministry of Education and Research. Joint comments (in order to avoid repetition) from UMB and the national authorities on the mapping of the aquaculture sector:

- A very good tool
- makes everything very transparent
- a useful aid for developing courses for the aquaculture sector
- a very interesting tool, especially the part describing learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and evidence required.

The criticism raised concerned evaluation issues, which fall entirely into the remit of the awarding bodies themselves and cannot per se be part of the VALLA project.

The Ministry of Education and Research (see WP5 for full details) made the following comments:

- the project was carried out in very good and detailed way.
- a good exercise for people in the sector.
- the methodology used has high transferable potential to other similar sectors, perhaps even different sectors such as humanities and history
- accurately described work positions and required competences.
- the tool looks good as well as being useful for teachers because they have to focus on learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and evidences for achieving the learning outcome.

### **Scotland**

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is a VALLA partner, and the project made full use of the procedures they use to describe courses in terms of Learning Outcomes. Their highly professional comments are obviously a significant validation of the success or otherwise of the VALLA tool and methodology, as they were not involved in any way in the design and development of the online tool.

- The SQA recognizes that the generic nature of the Tool means that it can be readily adapted to any occupational sector to offer the opportunity for employers and training providers to select the key competencies required by its workforce to create Outcome-based training programmes/courses suited to their needs.
- As the Master List is based on identified industry competencies, we can further see how the Tool may be used to evaluate prior experience and/or informal training.
- The consultation process which took place with key stakeholders, employer and



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employer representatives, education and training providers and professional bodies is paramount to the accreditation and credit rating of any qualification/programme.

- We acknowledge the methodology used by the VALLA Partners to develop the Online Tool. The Partners have demonstrated that this is clearly based on Occupational and Functional Mapping of the sector, the prerequisite to the development of occupational standards of competence for an industry. This is a tried and tested methodology and is used by SQA to develop, accredit and validate qualifications.
- The development of a set of comprehensive case studies at the Dublin Workshop further reinforces the content of the Occupational and Functional Maps and demonstrates how the Tool can be used effectively to evaluate both formal and informal learning and experiential learning. This is very valuable in determining existing skills and knowledge of individuals within the workforce and to identify future needs.

### **Greece**

In Greece two meetings took place, the first in December 2009 with the Ministry of Agriculture, which is responsible for projects involved with the occupational mapping of aquaculture, and another in April 2010, with a team from the Greek Accreditation of Qualifications Department (EKEPIS) (see WP5 report for further details).

In the light of the Greece's recent commitment (February 2010) to establish a National Qualification Framework, the EKEPIS team felt that they could benefit from the pioneering work carried out by the VALLA partnership. It was suggested that further meetings should be held, to broaden the audience and to include open discussion on the following issues:

- the methodology of sectoral mapping
- the presentation of the online tool to help develop Learning outcomes-based courses
- the harmonization of existing quality assurance systems and credits awarding systems
- the value of the tool in transferability of Validation and Accreditation of Life long Learning credits among EU countries.



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## **Section D. CONSULTATION PROCESS**

(Industry, Producers' Associations)

In May 2010, 16 members from FEAP attended a regular Annual General Meeting held in Bordeaux where the FEAP secretariat presented the occupational and functional maps for aquaculture as developed by the VALLA partnership (which of course includes FEAP itself). Countries representatives came from Belgium, Croatia, Czech Rep, Cyprus, Faroe Islands, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Turkey and the UK. Their overall impressions were very positive. They were impressed by the way the functional map was presented in an easy, suitable and fashionable format. They are sure this kind of tool is excellent to show and explain to any relevant authorities the complexity of the sector, which in several countries is still unknown.

5 country representatives (Spain, UK, Malta, Germany, Faroe islands) undertook a detailed check of those case studies which involved unaccredited sectoral learning. These members of the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers, selected from different EU and non EU countries and from different species' farming sectors, gave unanimously positive feedback on the courses elaborated through the Valla online tool. They reported that the courses were clear, well structured, giving an accurate overview of the skills and knowledge to be acquired by the learner. Some cases were perhaps too technical, because it was not always easy to determine at which level the technique is required. But in a general manner having all courses built on the same model was very understandable by everybody. From the comments received on one of the 'on-the-job training course': "If such a document was recognized more people would be keen to go on training. It would push them to be trained".

Concerning the elaboration of workshops online, they found it helps the teacher to build a Course. The tool allows the organizer of the workshop to build sections (units) – no matter the length of the workshop – and for each section to list exactly what he expects the audience to know having followed the section (Learning Outcomes). Final comment from industry: the VALLA tool is thus a perfect tool for any sector to be used in that respect.



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## Section E. Conclusions

### 1. Occupational and functional mapping

- All of the bodies consulted were in favour of the occupational and functional maps developed for the aquaculture sector.
- One particularly positive feature was the direct involvement of the industry.
- The methodology has the potential to be transferred to other similar sectors.
- It is especially useful for course developers of courses as it gives a view of the industry and what they need, though it can only give a snap shot of the industry at the point of time when developed. It must be able to incorporate new trends.
- functional and occupational mapping of a sector along with detailed descriptions of learning outcomes has not been often carried out previously.

### 2. The VALLA tool

- All the industry representatives, the national authorities and universities consulted like the developed software, which they see as a good practical instrument for describing non-formal, informal and formal learning.
- Since describing learning outcomes also is quite new the tool also provides helpful guidance for course developers without experience of Learning Outcomes.
- The workshop where the software tools were demonstrated showed that it was very difficult for untrained trainers to use learning outcomes without support and guidance.
- What was especially difficult was to relate the outcomes to the correct EQF level. The terminology used for the different EQF levels is included in the software but the National authorities and higher education institutions would like even more to be included in the software.
- The software makes the whole process very transparent, a very positive feature.
- the VALLA tool is a perfect tool for any sector

### 3. Validation of lifelong learning

- There were no comments on this issue from the industry sector
- How lifelong learning is validated varies between EU countries but all seem to have such systems. Validation of generic skills is quite often carried out, but not for sector validation (apart from formal courses which are accredited in ECTS).
- One important factor that came up in the discussions with national authorities is the financial aspects of qualification awards. Approval of non-formal training as a result of fulfilling required learning outcomes may have great consequences for the salary of the applicant. The issue of quality control is therefore of paramount importance especially as far as validation of prior learning as is finding the evidence to support the claim that the applicant has actually achieved the required learning outcome.



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#### 4. Finally

- Very few countries have calibrated a sector framework against National Qualifications Frameworks and gone on to link the national framework with EQF levels which shows that the process not has come very far and that this exercise is difficult when it comes to practical implementation. There is a real challenge to define the actual learning outcomes needed for different occupational and the different EQF levels.
- This challenge has been addressed by the solid achievements of the VALLA project.
- The Case Studies do indeed show that it has been possible to establish common reference points across a sector and the generated course descriptions should enable qualifications authorities partners to use the reference grid of the EQF as intended (as a translation device which makes it possible to position and compare learning outcomes throughout Europe and throughout the sector).



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