



## Case Study template

### A) General Part

<b>General</b>	
Case Study Title	Implementation of a testing instrument for the validation of psycho-pedagogical competencies of adult educators ( <b>Validpack</b> )
DIALOGUE thematic group	<b>Quality</b>
Date of the case study	20.09.11 – 20.12.11
<b>Contact Information</b>	
Name of the institution	<b>Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH)</b> , Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Philosophy
Location/country	Thessaloniki/Greece
Size of the organisation/ Number of academic/research and non-academic/administrative staff	<p>The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is the largest university in Greece. The University Campus covers some 23 hectares close to the centre of Thessaloniki. It comprises 7 Faculties organized into 33 Schools, 5 faculties with only 1 school each, as well as 4 independent Schools (a total of 42 Schools). Some educational and administrative facilities are located off campus for practical and operational reasons. More than 81.500 undergraduate and postgraduate students study at the Aristotle University, 72.140 in undergraduate programmes and 8.360 in postgraduate programmes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Teaching and Research Staff numbers 2,207 people (767 professors, 452 associate professors, 618 assistant professors, and 370 lecturers);</li> <li>• the Scientific Teaching Staff numbers 65; and</li> <li>• the Special Laboratory Teaching Staff numbers 259 people.</li> </ul> <p>This is further supported by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the 240 members of the Special Technical Laboratory Staff for teaching services; and</li> <li>– the 961 members of administrative staff.</li> </ul>
Website	<a href="http://www.auth.gr/home/index_en.html">http://www.auth.gr/home/index_en.html</a>
<b>Abstract</b>	
Key words	Validation, psycho-pedagogical competencies, adult educators
Please provide a short abstract of the case study	This case study is about the testing of <b>Validpack</b> instrument that takes place between the 20th of September and 20th of December 2011 in Adult Education Centres (KEEs) and CVET Centres (KEKs) in Thessaloniki area. Validpack (validation of psycho-pedagogical competencies of adult



educators) is a research product in the form of a handbook that consists of the validation instruments designed within the VINEPAC project (<http://www.vinepac.eu/>). Validpack consists on the following instruments: mind map, reflection on biography, reflection on competences, “attachment”, observation checklist, interview grid, validation sheet. In addition to these validation instruments, the Validpack contains some useful guidelines and indications for adult educators on how they should approach this validation process. The handbook gives detailed explanations on how to use Validpack as a validation instrument and how to be validated as an adult educator. Validpack is directed to all educators and vocational trainers with more than one year (or 150hrs) of working experience with adults. Validpack is organised around three main validation steps: (i) self-evaluation, (ii) external evaluation and (iii) consolidation. The validation is complete only after all the three steps have been taken. The testing of Validpack instrument consists of two (2) sessions. During the first session of testing a facilitator presents the Validpack instrument and then the adult educators/trainers will have to take a look on the instrument and give their feedback on it at first sight. Based on a list of short questions the facilitator guides through this session. Finally, the facilitator collects the feedback. During the second session of testing, the adult educators/trainers work closely with the Validpack instrument for a two weeks period, time in which they have to reflect on the three parts of the instrument (to analyze the design, the content and the structure of the instrument) and especially to focus on the first part (to apply the self-evaluation part on themselves). The facilitator again provides all the instructions for this testing session. After the two weeks period, the facilitator will meet the trainers (on face to face meeting or on virtual meeting) in order to collect their feedback based on a grid designed for the purpose. The testing phase of Validpack instrument ends with a written report in which the facilitator summarizes the results of the two testing sessions according to a reporting grid.

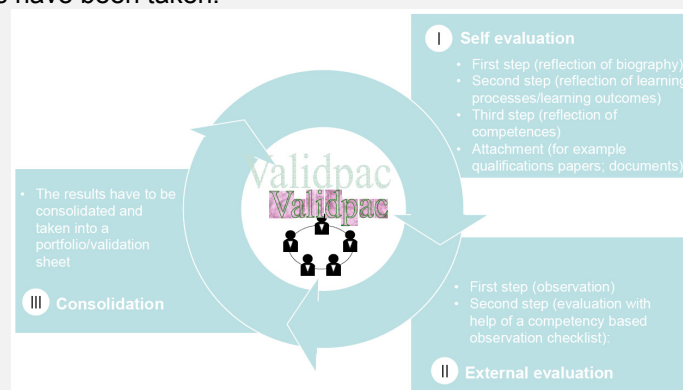
## B) Specific Part

The following part depends on each thematic group, outlining strengths and weaknesses of the chosen situations.

### 1. Context:

Please present the general background (“landscape of experience”) of the activity and in which institutions, organisations, units or sectors the case took place.

The fact that often job relevant competences are not covered by traditional qualification documents is an opinion shared among practitioners, researchers and decision-makers involved in adult education; as these competences have been acquired in less traditional and official learning contexts and through a variety of working experiences, they become difficult to standardized and validated, especially as in different countries there are different contexts. However, the attempt to validate or accredit prior learning is common: the accreditation of previous & experiential learning (APEL), the French „Bilan de compétence” – not limited to a specific profession, the Swiss Qualifications book „CH-Q”, the German „ProfilPass” or the German „skills analysis”, are only some of the examples used to validate job relevant competencies in Europe. Generally speaking the validation of competences can be described as a process of competence identification, competence measurement and competence assessment that can be done using different methods and instruments. A lot of competences that are job relevant have been developed in informal and non-formal learning contexts. This also applies to the competences defining the adult educator that frequently go unrecognized. A lot of adult educators and trainers interact with adults in a didactical way without an explicit qualification (i.e. a higher education degree in education or pedagogy or andragogy or didactics) for their activity. Most of them have acquired their specific psycho-pedagogical competencies for dealing with adults on the job, through working experiences, during on-the-job trainings, through voluntary work or simply by dwelling with adult learners. According to the above mentioned social and economic new developments and challenges in Europe „Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Psycho-Pedagogical competences of Adult Educators” (VINEPAC) project<sup>1</sup> responded to the European needs by initiating and developing specific measures, instruments, strategies for recognition, validation and certification of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings and contexts – especially for adult educators and trainers. Within this framework **Validpack**, a package of validation instruments, creates a framework for the documentation and the evaluation of competences of adult educators and trainers, no matter whether they have been acquired in formal, non-formal or informal learning contexts. Validpack is organised around **three main validation steps**: (i) self-evaluation, (ii) external evaluation and (iii) consolidation. The validation is complete only after all the three steps have been taken.



During the process adult educators and trainers have to prove the indicated competences that define/are

<sup>1</sup> The main aim of the VINEPAC (RO/06/C/F/TH-84201) project (<http://www.vinepac.eu/>) was to create a set of instruments for the validation of real competences of adult educators. Adult educators here are defined as trainers. The VINEPAC project team focused on trainer's competency profile as this is the main and more frequent role performed by adult educators in general. A trainer is defined as a person designing and running/ performing teaching activities. The validation of competences of adult educators on European level makes a contribution to professionalisation of adult educators in Europe and to quality management in the field of Adult Education in Europe.

specific for their psycho-pedagogical role. This can either happen through self-evaluation and/or through external evaluation. On the one hand some of the most important competences needed in adult education are not directly observable, but can be proved through self-evaluation. On the other hand, some competences cannot be easily self-assessed, but they need to be observed by an external evaluator. It is important to mention here that the VALIDPACK instrument was developed by the VINEPAC consortium, but it was not tested widely. IREA the co-ordinator of the VINEPAC consortium on its course for capitalising VALIDPACK developed a new project consortium called CAPIVAL. Through this project IREA appointed the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) through Prof. G. K. Zarifis of the department of Pedagogy, as a National Contact Point (NCP) for testing VALIDPACK and pointing at the issues that need to be addressed in order to optimize the instrument and its applicability as a product of research in the wider sector of adult and continuing education in Greece. IREA subcontracted AUTH and with the assistance of Prof. Zarifis who himself operated as the coordinator of the testing process and a facilitator but also as a trainer of six more facilitators (4 postgraduate and 2 doctoral students of adult and continuing education with long experience in the area and a strong pedagogical background) VALIDPACK was tested in Greece. The testing of VALIDPACK took place between mid September and end of December in six Adult Education Centres (KEEs) and six Continuing Vocational Education & Training Centres (KEKs) in Thessaloniki city centre and the greater area. Each facilitator contacted two (2) adult educators and trainers from each centre (12 adult educators and trainers participated in total). The testing was structured in two sessions:

### 1. First testing session (20.9.2011 – 30.10.2011)

The main aim of this session was to have a **first impression** of adult educators and trainers on Validpack instrument. After six facilitators were trained by the coordinator, they selected two adult educators and trainers each (12 participants in total). The trainers were active in adult education and/or VET field. Then the facilitators provided them the VALIDPACK instrument and the adult educators and trainers took a first look on it. Afterwards the facilitators collected the feedback from the trainers. This first testing session rolled on a face-to-face meetings. It lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and it was done individually followed by a discussion between the facilitators and the adult educators and trainers. To perform the first session the facilitators needed the following instruments:

1. The VALIDPACK handbook instrument (the online version) that is available at: [http://www.capival.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=53&Itemid=60](http://www.capival.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53&Itemid=60)
2. A short list of general questions (the questions included in the „first impression“ questionnaire for adult educators and trainers were provided by the contractor –in this case IREA– and were discussed between the facilitators and the educators and trainers during their individual meetings. The questionnaires were then filled in by the educators and trainers and were returned to the facilitators).

### 2. Second testing session (1.11.2011 – 20.12.2011)

Once the first testing session has taken place, the adult educators and trainers were given two weeks to work closely with the VALIDPACK instrument (to read it carefully, to reflect on the three steps and especially on the self-evaluation part that they can apply on themselves; to analyze the design, the content and the structure, and to consider the weak and the strong points of the instruments). To perform the second session the facilitators provided them with three more instruments:

1. A letter of instruction for the second testing session;
2. A grid that will guide the meeting with the facilitator;
3. A report grid to collect all the feedback given by adult educators and trainers during the meeting.

After the two weeks period, the facilitators met again the adult educators and trainers in order to collect their **feedback**. This second testing session was also a face to face and it will lasted approximately two hours. Once the second meeting took place, the facilitators wrote a „Testing Synthesis Report“ based on the feedback of the adult educators and trainers. The report was done following the instructions given in a “Report Grid” provided by the subcontractor i.e. IREA.

## 2. What are the objectives and purposes of the concrete action?

VALIDPACK is a unique and innovative package of validation instruments that creates a framework for the documentation and evaluation of trainers' competences, no matter whether they have been acquired in formal, non-formal or informal learning context. The main aims of the action are the following:



1. To assess important adult educators competences;
2. To give space for the documentation of experiences;
3. To build a base for certification upon the validation results;
4. To be wide enough to be used on European level;
5. To document a minimum standard of competences of adult educators;
6. To put adult educators in the position to get across the frontier within Europe;
7. To be applicable for different contexts.

### 3. How does this activity combine insights from research and practical hands-on experience?

VALIDPACK is an instrument for validation of competences and for assuring quality in adult education and vocational education and training based on the experience of those involved as teaching and training staff but have no formal qualifications to prove their psycho-pedagogical competences. As such testing VALIDPACK asks for combining results of relevant research on validation and APEL with individual learning and professional experience of those involved in the testing activity. It is therefore essential that the testing activity is performed in a way that informs both existing research at a European level as well as providing the opportunity to those participating to understand a validation tool that could be applied in the future (based on whether relevant policies are in place) for the benefit of those working in the area without formal qualifications. It is a reciprocal way of informing research on validation of competences by direct application of a validation tool, but also by receiving feedback by those who need validation in order to make the tool more reliable. This of course can have a direct impact both in research on validation (who needs to be validated, for what purpose and how) but also in professional practice in adult and continuing education, given the existence of relevant national policies for quality assurance in LLL, and also provide the grounds on which ULLL can assist to the development and application of similar validation tools.

### 4. Does the institution/sector/unit provide instruments (e.g. ICT or human resources) for the implementation of the concrete action? Which tools were applied?

The subcontractor IREA provided all the necessary material for the testing to be completed:

1. VALIDPACK instrument (online version of the handbook);
2. A short list of general questions (the questions included in the questionnaire for trainers);
3. Reporting templates for both facilitators and trainers (for self-evaluation, external assessment and consolidation as well as for first impression and national report).

For the successful completion of this action AUTH –acting as a NCP– provided all the human resources (namely six facilitators) but also through the person who coordinated the whole process and who was subcontracted by IREA for this purpose, also provided access to adult education centres and CVET centres in which adult educators and trainers who participated in this action were operating. Facilitators were all trained teachers as well as adult educators themselves completing a postgraduate degree or a PhD in adult and continuing education. The facilitators were trained for a week before the actual action begun, by the coordinator who was familiar with using the instrument. VALIDPACK was essentially the tool that was applied (in all three steps) by the facilitators to the adult educators and trainers who participated to this action (12 in total).

### 5. Best practice/ Bad practice:

What kind of results were obtained? What do you consider to be the innovative or interesting part of this concrete action?

What are the barriers (potential and effective) to the full implementation of this action and what are its benefits?

In which sense can this action be useful for DIALOGUE?

#### • What kinds of results were obtained?

The results that were obtained were all pointing at the relevance between the actual validation process and adult educators' and trainers' personal and professional experience. The results were qualitative in nature and referred to the different contexts in which adult educators and trainers acquired or learned



things related to their teaching (training) activity. It does not matter if the acquisition or learning took place in formal, non-formal or informal contexts. More specifically the result referred to the following

- Previous experiences related to their role/position as trainers in adult education;
- Involvement in adult education activities without having an explicit adult education job (consultant, counsellor, coordinator of study groups etc.);
- Opportunities for initial and further professional development they have taken as trainers (courses, peer tutoring, mentoring, study visits, internships etc.);
- Other contexts they found as offering relevant/possible opportunities for the achievement of competences defining their performance as trainers;
- Concrete abilities/skills they can associate with a concrete learning context;
- Concrete activities where they learned/acquired competences/things they now and use in their adult education work;
- Possible learning outcomes of the profession / home / leisure time / work etc.

The results were further highlighted by the use of mind maps which they were used as illustrative reminders, or graphic representation of their thoughts, ideas and reflections. The particular advantage of this method was that their ideas could “bubble” to the surface more easily than is the case if they had to formulate everything in one or more sentences.

• **What do you consider to be the innovative or interesting part of this concrete action?**

The Consolidation step – which is the last step in the validation process, where all results are put together into one single validation document– is the most innovative and interesting part of the case. Normally this step is to be undertaken by an authorized validating institution. However and since there is no such an authority in Greece, AUTH took that role during the testing phase of VALIDPACK. The results of the self-evaluation and of the external-evaluation had to be consolidated. If the participants (adult educators and trainers) met the minimum standard based on the competences evaluated through VALIDPACK, they would receive the validation sheet which endorses their psycho-pedagogical competences. Essentially this can be the document that can be used in their (adult educators’ and trainers’) dialogue with the authorities (upon their establishment in Greece).

• **What are the barriers (potential and effective) to the full implementation of this action and what are its benefits?**

Although there were no barriers as such in testing VALIDPACK, there were two important issues that stand out, one of which could potentially become a barrier. The first issue was that of access. Accessing the people (namely adult educators and trainers) for testing the instrument was a hard demanding process. It was not simply about contacting the participant it was essentially about convincing them of the fact that they need validation since they had no official qualification of any kind that would prove their competency in teaching, training and guiding adults. For some of them this was understood as an inefficiency of the system as there is no validation policy at a national level in Greece. For all of the however the issues that was raised was the degree of reliability of the actual instrument. Depending therefore on the degree in which VALIDPACK will be further developed to include all the comments and remarks made by both the facilitators and the trainers, the issue of reliability maybe resolved. However VALIDPACK as the result of the dialogue between university research and professional practice may not be fully implemented unless a national policy on validation of competences and skills acquired through non-formal and informal experiential processes is established.

• **In which sense can this action be useful for DIALOGUE?**

This particular action is useful for DIALOGUE for two reasons:

1. The first reason is that it highlights the relevance between a research based quality assurance instrument like VALIDPACK to adult educators’ and trainers’ professional experience focusing on competences that were acquired in a non-formal or informal manner.
2. The second reason is that it stresses the need for the development of validation policies (where these do not yet exist) as part of the existing broader LLL strategies either at national or regional levels. On these grounds the University (as a LLL relevant structure) could play a leading role in their implementation by delivering the appropriate instruments that will guarantee quality in adult education and VET settings.

This will eventually strengthen the role of the University as a LLL stakeholder and further support the dialogue between research, practice and policy making.

6. Are researchers and practitioners directly linked in this activity?

- If yes, how are they linked and what are the communication and interaction processes?
- If they do not communicate directly, how are findings from research connected to practical activities and vice versa?

Researchers (facilitators) and practitioners (namely adult educators and trainers in this case) were directly linked from the beginning as the facilitators had to guide them through the whole process of using the validation instrument. The last step however '**consolidation**' was probably the one that revealed the quality of their communication and interaction. This was made clear for three reasons.

**1. Reflection**

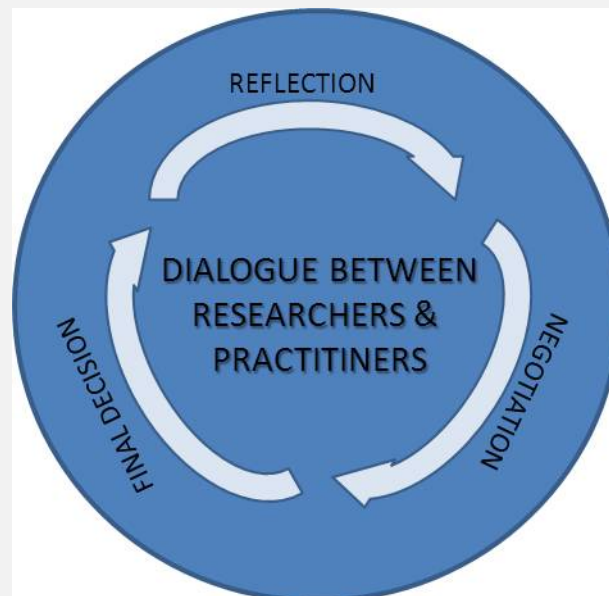
This was the first reason as consolidation demands a degree of reflection on the self-evaluation and the external evaluation processes. Both the facilitators and the trainers had to think about the issues raised by the questions to which they had to respond, to make sure that the results of the self-evaluation and the ones of the external evaluation match, and to check if there are any gaps between the self-evaluation results and the results of the external evaluation as well as to identify what caused these differences.

**2. Negotiation**

This is the second reason. During this phase within the consolidation step which is dedicated to a free discussion between facilitators who also acted as external evaluators and the trainers, both sides had to clarify any discordance regarding the level of the trainers' competences. Depending on the answers to the questions they had to respond, both sides were entitled to bring arguments in favour of their choices or to emphasize the proofs upon which they based competence ratings.

**3. Final decision**

This is the last reason. After the negotiation phase, a common agreement regarding the level of all competences was reached. The final result of the validation process was duly recorded within the validation sheet which consists of the table used already (in self-evaluation step and external evaluation step) for competence assessment and rating. This validation sheet represents the summary of the self-assessment and the external evaluation and was filled in by the external evaluators together with the trainers, as beneficiaries.



7. Which elements would you identify as easily transferable to other institutions in different regional and national contexts?

The **external evaluation step** is probably the one that could be more easily transferable to other authorized institutions in the adult education and VET area as well as national authorities such as ministries. This is simply because only authorized persons are allowed to do the external evaluation

within the validation process. The criteria for the external evaluator established through common agreement between the developers of the Validpack are the following:

- the evaluator should have recent, relevant and proved experience within the area of training;
- the evaluator must have graduated a post university programme in adult education;
- the evaluator must be able to plan and organise the evaluation process, to develop the evaluation, to analyse the data and to decide the level of each competence of the trainer and to record and report the evaluation results.

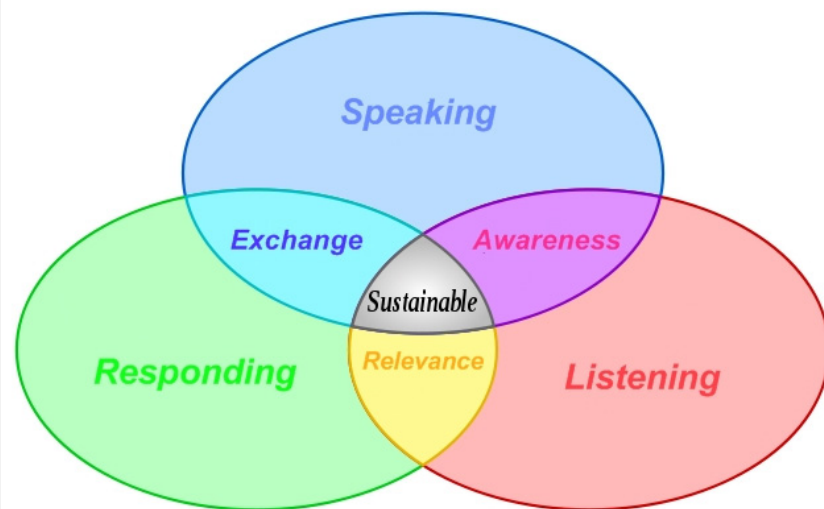
#### 8. Recommendations for dissemination:

Briefly identify the most important points in the case study for other ULLL managers and practitioners – these may include risks as well as benefits.

Please formulate some recommendations for the dissemination on the basis of the case study addressed to the working group and other partners.

- **Most important points in the case study for other ULLL managers and practitioners.**

It is vital to point here that the most important aspects of the study relate to the sustainability of the validation instrument and essentially reflect on the processes of speaking, responding and listening in terms of developing links between researchers and practitioners, but also of exchanging ideas and perspectives, raising awareness and making relevance of the validation process to existing national LLL strategies but also ULLL where this is in place.



- **Recommendations for the dissemination on the basis of the case study.**

Although the case study presented here consists a part of a wider project on validation, it highlights the links that can be developed between researchers and practitioners in the area of adult learning and VET. On these grounds and besides the already established dissemination channels of the actual project, the case study as well as the validation instrument could be a base for dissemination of the dialogue between researchers and practitioners at a national level (in Greece) as part of the broader strategy for quality assurance in adult education and training in Greece. This could take place through the National Agency (IKY) but also through other authorities such as ministerial structures and of course it could be disseminated to other HE institutions active in LLL. The General Secretariat (GSLL) is another channel through which the case study could be used as a basis for dissemination of the dialogue between researchers and practitioners. This is because GSLL is currently developing a National Competency Framework (NCF) to assess learner achievements and performance (mainly in the Second Chance Schools and the Centres for Adult Education). Overall six key competencies (i.e. organizational, technical, cultural, personal, civic, communicative) have been developed to capture the Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes adult learners acquire after their training in each individual program. The NCF is





expected to assess and recognise prior learning. The National Framework focuses on both program evaluation and the accreditation of learning outcomes. Its aim is to improve and monitor quality of educational practice across all Adult Learning and Education Providers (ALEP) in Greece (more than 470 ALE units).

## 9. Additional information. E.g. bibliography, website, publications, reports

[http://www.capival.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=53&Itemid=60](http://www.capival.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53&Itemid=60)

[http://www.capival.eu/images/leaflet\\_en.pdf](http://www.capival.eu/images/leaflet_en.pdf)

<http://www.capival.eu/images/guide.pdf>

<http://www.capival.eu/images/handbook.pdf>

<http://www.vinepac.eu/>

Merle, V. (2004), "Developing an international survey on adult skills and competencies - aims and methodological issues", Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Report, Paris: OECD.

Dolton, P. (2004), "What do policy makers need to know about the skills of young people and the school to work transition?" Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Report, Paris: OECD.

OECD/ Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Directorate for Education (2004), PIAAC Draft Strategy Paper: Policy Objectives, Strategic Options and Cost Implications, Paris: OECD.

*We are intending to put your case study on the website.*

*Please tick here  if you do **not** wish to see your case study published on the project's website*