KeyCaseNote
Key Competence Network on School Education

EUROPE [3] – 2013
VINTAGE - ONLINE TOOL FOR SELF-EVALUATION OF KEY COMPETENCES IN ADULT AGE

— A. BASIC INFORMATION —

Country:	Italy
Title of initiative:	VINTAGE - Online tool for self-eVauatIoN of key competences in adulT AGE Project Number: 527349-LLP-1-2012-1-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP Agreement Number: 2012-4192/001-001
Coordinator/ Organization:	Learning Community SRL – a private institute for educational research and experimentation
Key competences addressed:	The 8 Key Competences
Type of initiative and channels used for implementation (e.g. curriculum reform introduced through legislation etc.)	Development of a framework, VINTAGE (an Online tool for self-eVauatIoN of key competences in adulT AGE) and of a basic portfolio
Partners:	· ASSOCIAZIONE FORMAZIONE '80 IT: http://www.formazione80.it/ · PLATform Opleiding, Onderwijs en Organisatie BV. (PLATO), NL: http://www.socialsciences.leiden.edu/plato/ · DIE BERATER® AT – Adult education provider: http://www.dieberater.com/ · WISAMAR DE – Body providing guidance and information on Lifelong Learning: www.wisamar.de · Meath Partnership (MCRSDP) IE – Meath Community Rural and Social Development Partnership Ltd: www.meathpartnership.ie · Swedish TelePedagogic Knowledge Centre (STPKC): www.pedagogic.com
Scope: (student/teacher/school level; local/regional/national)	The European Grundtvig Project targeting adult learners, with a secondary target of experts, practitioners and teachers in adult education.
Learning context: (formal or non-formal)	Both formal and non-formal

School education level/s: (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary)	Non-vocational adult education
Target groups:	The European Grundtvig Project targeting adult learners, with a secondary target of experts, practitioners and teachers in adult education.
Time frame: (start and end date)	January 2013 – December 2014
Relevant links:	http://vintage.euproject.org http://www.scribd.com/VintageProject

Key Competences (KC), assumed as a reference model for education and training in Europe (2010 Joint Progress Report), are often acquired and developed in non-formal and informal contexts; this means that they are not assessed or recognised and are therefore not used by adults for their personal and professional development. There is a lack of a KC culture and the value of these competences is not sufficiently appreciated. This is confirmed by the European Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative, which invites the member states and the Commission to "Develop the Europass framework in line with the implementation of the EQF [European Qualifications Framework] and with a view to recording and highlighting more effectively the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by citizens throughout their lives in a variety of learning settings, including by considering the development of a 'personal skills passport' based on existing Europass elements". In fact, the Europass CV format includes sections for the recording of, for example, Digital Competences, or Social Competences, but in a different way from the description of foreign language competences; there is still a lack of specific descriptors for these KC. The VINTAGE project aims to: design a framework for the assessment of KC as well as a basic portfolio to report the results of self-assessment and to develop an online digital tool for the self-assessment of KC. The Project will involve two target groups – 1) teachers, trainers, counsellors and practitioners working in NVAE; 2) adult/elderly learners attending courses in NVAE – with 20 to 50 participants from each partner country (IT, NL, DE, SE, IE, AT).

Rationale/contextual background/motivation for introducing the initiative/reform:

The European Council and Commission's Joint Progress Report (2010) on the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme highlights Key Competences (KC) as a reference model for education and training in Europe. The Future of Learning report (2011) by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) designs the conceptual map for the future of learning, focusing on three key terms related to education and training: Personalisation, Collaboration, Informalisation. Together with these three key terms, ICT is the strategic support for the conceptual map. ICT is also highlighted as a support for the documentation and validation of informally acquired skills. The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament (2011) again underlines that: "Key competences are the foundation for lifelong learning and success in individuals' careers and professions. The development of key competences has to continue beyond compulsory education, in both initial and continuing VET. [...] The challenge is to achieve the best possible combination of vocational skills and key competences both to a high standard". KC are often acquired and developed in non-formal and informal contexts, meaning that they are neither assessed nor recognised and are consequently not used by adults in their personal development and professional improvement. Some countries are adapting school curricula in this sense, but there is still a great deal of work to do in the field of adult education, especially regarding the strategies and methods for assessing KC. There is a lack of a KC culture, and the value of these competences is not sufficiently appreciated. This is confirmed by the European Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative, which invites the member states and the Commission to "Develop the Europass framework in line with the implementation of the EQF [European Qualifications Framework] and with a view to recording and highlighting more effectively the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by citizens throughout their lives in a variety of learning settings, including by considering the development of a 'personal skills passport' based on existing Europass elements". In fact, the Europass CV format includes sections for the recording of, for example, Digital Competences or Social Competences, but in a different way from the description of foreign language competences; there is still a lack of specific descriptors for these KC. A great amount of work has been done at European level regarding the strategies and tools for assessing skills and competences; however, adult educational systems are still based mainly on traditional models of external evaluation and assessment is often made by trainers and teachers on the basis of quantitative tests and assigned tasks. This is a critical point, since adult learners often reject this kind of assessment, which they tend to associate with past negative school experience. This also contributes to the lack of motivation of adult learners to return to the educational system, both in continuing education and non-vocational adult education (NVAE) pathways, as noted in the European Guidelines for validating non formal and informal learning (2009). Indeed, participation rates in adult education (25-64 year olds) have still not reached the fixed objective of 12.5% by 2010; the European average is 10%, and seventeen countries (including Italy, Belgium, France and Germany as well as recent EU accession countries) are still below this average (CEDEFOP 2010). The VINTAGE project is based on the idea that it seems necessary to develop approaches and instruments for the development of self-assessment methods and tools. The self-assessment of KC can help adult learners to recognise the competences they have, making these competences transparent and measurable.

A self-assessment tool, user-friendly and available online, can be used autonomously by the adult learner, and can constitute the first step of a more complex process, during which the adult can choose to receive help from teachers and counsellors on the next steps to take (e.g. the balance of competences). Such a tool, based on the European common standards, can be successively developed to enable the validation of KC.

It is planned that the proposed digital tool for the self-evaluation of KC will be built on transparent indicators and descriptors, allowing adult learners to record the assessed competences on their CV, specifying the mastery level determined by the self-evaluation, and to use these results as a base for further learning pathways or in the labour market.

Moreover, the implementation and diffusion of a culture, philosophy and awareness of self-assessment could represent an opportunity to overcome adults' resistance and lack of motivation, and to provide them with real opportunities to develop and update their KC throughout their lives.

Objectives:

The VINTAGE project aims to develop and test an online tool for the self-assessment of the Key Competences (KC), to be used by adult learners involved in NVAE learning pathways. The tool will be implemented according to European standards for the evaluation of competences and previous experience, approaches and practices . The operative objectives are:

· to provide a description of the situation in Europe through research on the KC, and on the strategies for and approaches to the assessment of skills and competences at a European level;

· to develop a framework of the key competences, with a set of indicators and descriptors for the assessment of each key competence and a checklist to guide the self-assessment according to standardised levels;

· to develop, on the basis of the designed framework, the online tool for self-assessment of the KC;

· to test the framework and the tool, in order to review and improve the two products, with NVAE teachers, trainers, counsellors, adult learners and stakeholders. This will be done by carrying out two pilot phases: pilot 1 will be carried out with trainers/teachers testing the framework; pilot 2 will be carried out with adult learners testing the online tool. Each of the pilots will include between 20 and 50 participants from each country involved in the initiative (IT, NL, DE, SE, IE, AT).

· to produce evaluation reports for the two pilots in order to validate the framework and online tool for the assessment of KC;

· to produce guidelines supporting adults in the self-assessment process.

Dimensions targeted by the initiative/reform (e.g. student curriculum, assessment, initial/ in-service teacher education, school autonomy etc.)**:**

The actions of the VINTAGE project will support adult learners in the assessment of their KC, thus identifying the areas in which they need to acquire/develop/improve a cluster of competences. The definition of strategies and instruments according to European criteria will give adult learners real opportunities to develop and update their KC throughout their lives. This will help adults and elderly people who are under qualified by making them aware of the competences they have acquired in non-formal and informal contexts and situations. The assessment tool will be accessible online, making the self-assessment easy and practical; it is designed to be used autonomously by all adult learners, regardless of their level of ICT skills.

The changes that the Project aims to make are:

· the development of a tool for self-assessment that contributes to making previously acquired competences transparent;

· to enable these competences, once recognised and assessed, to be used for working or learning, fostering the personal, social and professional improvement of adult learners;

· to provide a format of a basic portfolio supporting the registration of the assessed competences and the effective completion of sections of the European CV related to "other competences";

· to develop a framework of indicators and descriptors showing common standards and criteria for the evaluation of key competences, such as those that exist for foreign languages;

· to provide an online tool that will allow the assessment of competences acquired in non-formal/informal contexts, and that are otherwise not recognisable or certifiable.

Overall approach (e.g. holistic – existence of an overarching strategy, or targeted approach focusing on a specific dimension etc.)**:**

The Project is based on one of the main liberal principles of adult education: the diffusion and implementation of a self-assessment culture. The online tool for self-assessment of key competences represents an instrument to guide adult learners towards an awareness of the competences and learning outcomes that they have acquired, whether in formal, non-formal or informal contexts. The exercise of self-evaluation helps people to develop their critical thinking abilities, to be able to identify skills and abilities that need to be developed or acquired and to make visible the attitudes and competences that they possess, while providing a support for continuous development. All of this enables adult learners to better interpret the world, to be more flexible and to face continuous challenges with an increased awareness and capacity to take decisions.

Self-assessment, rather than formal evaluation based on external judgment, places the individual at the centre of learning processes and systems, taking into account the value of the biographical history of the person as a whole. This is even more important when discussing adult learners. To make such an assessment possible, it is necessary to build a level of awareness of personal identity, in order to better answer and react to the learning stimulus proposed by formal, non-formal or informal experiences. Self-assessment represents a support for motivating adults to learn; adults will mainly learn when they feel it is necessary. The digital tool for self-assessment also provides a method that can be used by adult learners as a support for identifying new areas of learning and personal development. This can contribute to the enactment of the key messages of the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, thus improving the efficacy of policies for lifelong learning (Memorandum 2000; Europe 2020).

Detailed explanation of the key competence/s concerned:

All eight KC cited in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC), are covered by the VINTAGE project.

Specific subjects concerned or cross-curricular approach:

No specific subjects are concerned. Key competences are in fact transversal to specific subjects.

How the initiative/reform is being implemented (e.g. process followed, political commitment, consultation with stakeholders and their respective roles, incentives for stakeholders, dedicated funding, teaching material, definition of goals and standards, assessment and evaluation mechanisms, impact on teacher training/professional development and school practices/leadership, scaling-up approach, based on research/evidence? etc.):

VINTAGE adopts a bottom-up strategy of implementation of the proposed innovation. It begins with adult education centres that are partners in the Project and that are interested in the use of the proposed framework of self-assessment of key competences.

The two planned pilot phases of the Project, which target adult learners and practitioners, experts and trainers, represent an opportunity to involve the target audience.

Nevertheless, the involvement of the national EUROPASS references represents a top-down approach to the implementation and use of the proposed solutions.

Present stage/phase of implementation:

The 'Status Artis' analysis, which reports on existing European standards, practices, tools and technological devices for the assessment and recording of KC in adult education at a European level has been completed.

This is the research phase that is necessary in order to collect information about the scientific debates, practices and the current situation in the field, taking advantage of existing solutions and integrating them into the design the framework of self–evaluation, followed by the digital tool.

Pedagogical issues (issues related to how key competences are being taught to students and how are teachers being prepared to teach them):

The digital tool for the self-assessment of KC is conceived to be easy for adults to use without the support of teachers and experts. Nevertheless the design of guidelines supporting the process of self-assessment can also be an effective support for trainers.

What works well (to identify enablers)**:**

> We feel that what works well is the innovative approach to self-assessment in adult education outside of the formal education context and the comprehensive inclusion of all eight key competences.

Challenges and how these are being addressed (to identify obstacles and solutions)**:**

> The spread and development of both the culture of KC and of self-assessment in non-vocational adult education (NVAE) has been a challenge. There is still a widespread prejudice about self-assessment and the culture of self-evaluation is not well developed. Furthermore, the culture of KC is still the responsibility of technical staff dealing with such matters.
>
> The VINTAGE project intends to meet this challenge by designing a common European framework for the self-assessment of KC in NVAE. Research on the 'Status Artis' highlights that there has in fact been no previous similar and systematic practical experience on these issues. Many initiatives provide maps of the how far the KCs have spread in Europe, or present digital tools for one specific competence, yet European documents and international reports (OECD, PISA, etc.) have not yet been able to provide such a common European framework for the self-assessment of KCs in NVAE. This is why the Project was recognised as having great value in terms of innovation.
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> The quality of the consortium, made up of the representatives of adult education centres, educational research institutes and universities, guarantees the impact of the Project. Dissemination and exploitation of results are envisaged as the key actions in order to meet this challenge (See below: Communication of the initiative/dissemination of outputs and activities).

Monitoring & evaluation so far/planned, and which methods are being used (e.g. internal/external quality assurance, inspection, national assessments, international tests, self-evaluation, formative or summative evaluations)**:**

> An internal quality plan and standards have been determined for the general implementation of the Project. As concerns the implementation of the framework for self-assessment and of the digital tool, a specific quality procedure and standards will be detailed in the operative plan of the pilot sessions.

Impact (e.g. any planned impact assessment?)**:**

The Project has two different target groups:

· teachers, trainers, counsellors and practitioners working in NVAE;

· adult/elderly learners attending courses in NVAE.

The framework designed by the partnership for the assessment of KC will be evaluated by the first target group (trainers, counsellors, etc.) from each partner country (IT, NL, DE, SE, IE, AT) through at least one focus group session in each country; the focus groups aim to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the framework. This first target group thus actively participates in the definition and perfection of the designed framework. Focus groups provide the opportunity to operatively introduce the aims and content of the VINTAGE project to this target group, motivating and indirectly training trainers to use it. The feedback collected will be presented in local workshops, of which at least one will be held in each partner country, involving both target groups. The trainers involved in this ex-ante review of the framework, will then be involved in the second pilot, directly witnessing the use of the online tool by the second target group (adult learners), implemented on the basis of this framework. The involvement of these key actors will help to evaluate the feasibility of the actions and to further the real impact on the final beneficiaries. Each of the pilots will include 20 to 50 participants from each partner country (IT, NL, DE, SE, IE, AT).

The changes expected to be brought by the initiative are:

· the improvement and diffusion of a KC culture;

· diffusion of a culture and practices of self-assessment;

· the development and sharing of innovative practice in the field of adult education.

The foreseeable impact of VINTAGE on the target groups is significant in terms of a transformation and shift in competence assessment strategies and in terms of a wider involvement of adult/elderly learners in training experiences, with specific attention to the issues of personalisation, the informalisation of learning and the recognition of learning outcomes. Short term indicators are the understanding of concepts that are not easy to comprehend for those who do not work in the field (e.g. self-evaluation, key competences, portfolio, informal learning, etc.), the concrete application of the self-assessment tool and the sharing of experiences and knowledge. Long-term indicators are the acquisition of knowledge and the development of KC by adult learners, the actual application of the tool in everyday adult learning practitioner contexts and the increased motivation of adult and elderly people in training experiences.

The focus groups and workshops described above, along with trans-national dissemination events (coinciding with each of the Project's consortium meetings) and the dissemination and exploitation strategies (see following section) will contribute to enlarging the scope of the initiative and to reaching the two target audiences as well as decision makers or representatives of institutions (municipalities or other public bodies related to adult training). Partners of the VINTAGE project are mainly interested in the adoption of the developed tool, as institutions supplying educational services that are firmly established in local contexts can multiply the impact in the long term, by continuing to use the framework, the digital tool, the basic portfolio, etc.,. The direct involvement of key Institutions directly within the partnership will, in the long-term, enable the adoption of good practices and multiply the impact on the target groups: experts, key actors, learners, stakeholders, policy makers.

In the current European economic context, the potential impact of the diffusion of a culture of key competences and self-assessment appears more meaningful and more relevant, even if indirectly, to continuous education and vocational education and training (VET). This becomes more valuable when linked to the progressive extension of people's working life, due to retirement policy reforms introduced in several European countries.

Communication of the initiative/dissemination of outputs and activities:

The dissemination is implemented through:

· participation in international, European and national conferences (e.g. LINQ, AICA, FOE, EDEN, etc.);

· internet: official VINTAGE website, reserved space on partners' official websites, LinkedIn group, Scribd page;

· pilot sessions: in person and online through web surveys;

· local seminars for the presentation of pilot results;

· European seminars to coincide with each consortium meeting;

· adhesion to existing content-related European networks.

Next steps/follow-up:

The research results, achieved through the 'Status Artis' analysis, represent the basis for the following stage of the initiative, which is the design of the framework for the self-assessment of key competences, followed by the pilot both of the framework and then of the digital tool.

Additional information:

The general results of the VINTAGE Status Artis analysis, conducted in six Eruopean Countries by different partners, confirm:

· a general poor repertory of experiences, references and resources focused on KC assessment;

· the weakness of definitions and of evaluation and self-assessment frameworks and approaches based on competences and KC learning outcomes.

· in the various partner countries there is a major focus on defining (and articulating) learning outcomes with reference to the first three KC (communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology), both within the national institutional framework and legislation (including school and VET qualification curricula) and within national and EU research and testing projects.

Cited sources confirm the summarised outcomes. "Although the remaining five 'transversal' key competences were widely seen as relevant, they were less often specified in learning outcomes" (ET2020, 2012). The VINTAGE comparative research confirms the lack of organic approaches and models across countries, across educational levels and learning territories and across the KC. This is even truer for the subject of self-assessment tools and models, something that is confirmed in the recent CEDEFOP study on the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP, 2011) and the Eurydice comparative study on KC promotion and assessment in EU countries (2002).

A relevant Project choice is to define a competence in terms of degrees of learning outcomes specification. The aim of assuming a performance-based assessment approach is to:

· define an analytical and common definition of KC among partners countries (and across learning territories);

· avoid the over-specification of learning outcomes, thereby lowering the risk of competences being reduced to 'atomised tasks' (ET2020, 2012) and supporting a true formative and integrated assessment framework.

Assuming an 'enacted competence-based approach' will allow the elements and descriptors of common competences to be defined, and will help in the design of the main VINTAGE self-assessment framework.

Among the cases envisaged and analysed in the 'Status Artis' report, the use of descriptors and the definition of explicit criteria for measuring competence levels would allow the evaluation to remain objective without betraying the concept of the KC.

A framework (based on static indicators and descriptors) in fact tends to simplify a complex process. For this reason the Project intends to include in the framework a solution that allows a three-dimensional and dynamic representation of the mastery of the assessed key competence while it is performed.. The design of a basic portfolio could be one solution for this, assuming it allows for a recording, summary, visualisation, and description of the results of the self-assessment, and consequently taking into account the competences to be endorsed. The portfolio would aim to collect all the evidence that can authentically represent a competence, making it available for observation and re-observation after a certain time and by external observers.

This basic portfolio could be designed in order to show the levels of mastery of an assessed competence for different levels of complexity; starting from a basic level allowing the collection of papered documentation, up to an advanced level supported by digital devices for the collection of diachronic, multi-channel and dynamic representations of one or more competences.

It is also necessary to take into account the importance of a collective and interactive dimension of the evaluation and self-assessment process as well of the active observation and self-observation. Such an approach appears better than a single static and individual. It could be useful to design a framework that would make available a mechanism of peer evaluation, providing a constant comparison with the outside, through a benchmarking of competences.

A third element refers to the variable of 'time'. A competence is, of course, dynamic. Mastery of a competence can worsen or improve over time. It is necessary to exercise a competence in order to strengthen it. Moreover, self-assessment is a complex process that requires time. Self-assessment could in itself be considered a learning process that requires time and recursive pathways; it is a slow process that produces changes over time. For this reason it is necessary to design a framework for self-assessment that can collect information regarding the status of a competence, but that also allows for (self-)observation, (self-)reflection and (self-)comparison over time.

So far, the collected information and reflections provide a roadmap for meeting the aims of the VINTAGE project and the observed needs through the design of tools and guidelines that support adult learners in the KC self-assessment process and also in making their competences visible, raising their awareness of these competences and making best use of them.

In summary, and in specific reference to the situation in Italy, it is possible to isolate the core elements of a possible framework for self-evaluation that meet the requirements of the VINTAGE aims, which are outlined once again below:

· to offer a guide for the description of the eight competences through a set of indicators and descriptors;

· to design a checklist for the observation and self-observation of key competences;

· to allow and guide each adult to autonomously identify and assess their acquisition of KC on the basis of explicit competences.

VINTAGE SELF-EVALUATION FRAMEWORK HYPOTHESIS

Aim	To evaluate key competences
Model	Performance based
Approach	Autobiographic, narrative, descriptive
Interaction	Collective, including peer evaluation
Tools	Observation checklist with indicators, descriptors and criteria identifying different levels of performance (basic, competent, advanced)
Representation	Three-dimensional
Support	Multi-channel
Time oriented	Dynamic, Diachronic