



## Report from UK roundtable event.

### Building Learning Societies: Promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning

On 14th May 2014, the WEA in Yorkshire and Humber Region together with UK partner GFTU, launched the UK roundtable event for the “Building Learning Societies: Promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning” project.

The event was attended by WEA, Leeds Metropolitan University, Northern College, Swarthmore Adult Education Centre, Kirklees and Doncaster local authorities, together with representatives from with GMB and GFTU trade unions, UK NARIC, and City and Guilds awarding organisation. We also welcomed Val Harris of the Endorsement and Quality Standards Board for Community Development, Nigel Todd, WEA Ambassador and Chair of Quality Committee at Co-operative College, together with educators and practitioners involved in lifelong and union learning programmes.

The event generated lively discussion around progress towards a truly level playing field, where informal and non-formal learning have the same currency as formal qualifications. There was further debate on the draft main principles for validation, and a consensus that a reflective and empowering model, that puts the learners’ life experiences at the heart of the process is critical.

It was generally held that in England there are gaps in the infrastructure enabling progression from informal learning to formal qualifications and employment. A good practice model was identified in the **Bridges to Learning** partnership between UNISON public service union, the Open University and the Workers’ Educational Association <http://www.bridgestolearning.org.uk/about-us/>

Recommendations from the day included developing a learner-facing toolkit and guidance on validation (Recognition of Prior Learning) using less ‘technical’ terminology, to reach the widest possible audience.

It was also agreed that validation systems need to recognise ‘soft’ skills or life skills gained within and outside work, in informal and non-formal settings.

The four stages of the validation process - identification, documentation, assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning – should recognise different ability levels, and offer different assessment approaches, including the use of reflective models.

It was agreed that skills audits are a potentially useful tool to help people to identify the skills they have, and determine their direction of travel. The opportunity to take part in the process should not be confined to the unemployed, or those at risk of unemployment.

The impact of different funding systems on development of validation practice was also considered, including the current reduction in funding if more than 50% of a qualification is assessed using Recognition of Prior Learning (for learning funded through the Skills Funding Agency.)



It was acknowledged that practitioner training and investment in information, advice and guidance will be crucial for the successful implementation of validation systems. Currently awareness of validation/ RPL opportunities amongst individuals is low.

A priority in moving towards the European recommendations on the validation of non-formal and informal learning is to build on systems that are already in place, such as accredited learning and *europass*. There also needs to be a menu of case studies and good practice examples for each stage of the validation process.

It was agreed unequivocally that validation or RPL should be for the benefit of the individual, allowing for self-determination and empowerment; the development of political literacy and the ability to question and critically analyse situations.