

A POLICY OF OPPORTUNITIES INBEDDED IN A COMPETENCE-ORIENTED APPROACH IN FLANDERS

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Introduction

“A life of learning”: the discussion on life-long learning is a hot topic on both European and Flemish policy agendas. Translating this into an integrated policy with specific measures is somewhat more problematic. This is not illogical, given the high aspirations concerning life-long learning and the container concept which life-long learning has now become. In the mean time, all kinds of variations on the theme are emerging, depending on where the emphasis is placed – “life-wide learning”, “living and learning”, “learning to live”, etc..

In this article, we examine some aspects of the debate concerning life-long learning. Our starting point is the search for an integrated approach for adults from the perspective of the individual and his/her aspirations and needs. Moreover, we take as our basis an equality-based approach for all citizens and, more particularly, for underprivileged groups.

In the first section, we examine the social context: international developments, the problems surrounding participation in life-long learning and its added value.

In the second section, we outline a framework from which an integrated approach to life-long learning can be pursued. For this purpose, two tracks are plotted – career guidance and the recognition of acquired competences.

Finally, we present a number of challenges and bottlenecks to an integrated approach to these two tracks.

1. Social context of life-long learning

1.1 Developments in an international perspective

International research has shown that Belgium is a highly qualification-oriented country, compared to other countries. This means that competences, in the form of knowledge and learning, are always given their value through qualifications awarded by educational players (J. Bjørnåvold, 2000; D. Van Damme, undated).

However, a number of *developments* are beginning to affect this qualification tradition. These developments reduce the value of the qualification and place more emphasis on demand-oriented competences and life-long learning.

Firstly, the broad social development into an information society and a knowledge economy puts into perspective the absolute and life-long value of qualifications and focuses attention on life-long learning. This development has consequences for the position of formal education on the training market, where formal education is gradually having to share its position with other operators and with non-formal learning paths.

Secondly, developments are taking place on the labour market. Changes involving technology and the organisation of labour require flexibility and a high level of applicability of transferable competences. The economic situation also has an influence, leading to differences in the significance of qualifications.

These developments point to the importance of a competence-oriented approach by individuals, not only to increase employability on the labour market, but also for personal development in a broad social context.

Various *European countries* have begun to look for systems in which a competence-oriented approach has a place and where learning is encouraged. Various practices have been developed – some of which have been institutionalised – by assigning a “value” to all forms of acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes. The reasons for this growing interest vary (I. Vanhoren, 2002):

- the rapid developments in society and on the labour market put the absolute and life-long value of qualifications into perspective. Not only is life-long learning emphasised, but the value of life-wide learning is slowly but surely being underlined. Learning is no longer the monopoly of formal education;
- from the perspective of life-long and life-wide learning, models and practices are established as instruments to combat social exclusion and duality in society;
- life-long learning and the recognition of competences as instruments for improving the general level of qualification of the workforce are of strategic importance in socio-economic policy;
- a competence-oriented approach is used in access to and mobility on the external labour market, in particular in counselling those with few qualifications – it is seen as a lever for particular target groups;
- the transitional labour market means that people find themselves more often in transition periods and therefore at key moments in their careers; a competence-oriented approach to career guidance is appropriate in this context;
- competence management is an essential component of human resources policy in companies, both in recruitment policy and in transition policy;

- the recognition of competences leads to the avoidance of “double training”: a more rational way of dealing with knowledge production can save on training costs;
- a changing pattern of values regarding labour and the quality of life requires a different approach to people and their career histories.

Europe has also paid particular attention to competence-oriented thinking and life-long learning. In its “White Paper on education and training” (1995), the European Commission referred then to the importance of the recognition and transfer of competences as an instrument for the development and acquisition of new knowledge. Within the setting of the European Summit in Luxembourg (1997), life-long learning and increasing of training were for the first time introduced as central themes in employment guidelines. The European Council of Lisbon (March 2000) reinforced this process by stating that human capital is the supreme good and must form the core of EU policy. In the conclusions of the European Council of Feira (June 2000) the member states are asked, within the scope of their powers, to define consistent strategies and practical measures to promote life-long learning for everyone. The memorandum on life-long learning from the European Commission (30 October 2000) draws more practical lines for doing this. One of the lines, “assessing the value of learning activities” is translated into the following objective: “to improve considerably the ways in which participation in and the results of learning activities are perceived and valued, especially in terms of non-regular and informal learning activities.”

At the European Council of Barcelona (March 2002) and in the Copenhagen Declaration (2002), actions are formulated – similar to the Bologna process for higher education – for the fields of vocational education and training, including information and study counselling, the recognition problem (transparency and comparability, transfer and the recognition of professional competences and qualifications and principles for validating non-formal and informal learning in terms of competences) and quality assurance.

It is clear that economic and social developments are the driving force behind ideas concerning life-long learning and competences and that European policy sets out a number of anchor points in this respect.

In *Flanders* the policy concerning life-long and life-wide learning is embodied in the action plan, “A life of learning on the right tracks” (2000). Through this action plan, the Flemish government wants to encourage the development of an integrated policy regarding life-long learning. An integrated approach means that the policy is

embodied via partnership at various levels and with various participants, where the government plays an encouraging and stimulating role.

1.2 Social problem of unequal opportunities regarding life-long learning

Given the developments taking place in society and on the labour market, participation in all kinds of life-long learning is essential for the employability of individuals, as well as for the emancipation of citizens.

Barriers to participation in life-long learning

Participation in life-long learning is not obvious for every citizen. Roughly, we can distinguish three kinds of barriers which restrict participation in life-long learning (H. Baert, 2002):

- financial barriers;
- the knowledge barrier;
- socio-cultural barriers.

The financial barriers relate to the labour market position and financial capacity of individuals, which generate unequal opportunities. In addition, several direct and indirect financial and material barriers can be identified. For example:

- the cost price of training, including the costs of transport and possibly childcare;
- the loss of income which occurs when the training replaces work;
- time constraints: not just a lack of time but also time conflicts, particularly in combination with flexible work;
- practical/organisational barriers related to the accessibility and timing of the training.

The knowledge barrier refers to the shortage of learning competences and learning attitude, coupled with the low educational level of individuals. After all, the added value of a high basic education or an initial qualification is found not only in directly usable competences, but also in learning competences and the learning return perceived by individuals. The highly educated are found more often in instructive environments, have more training opportunities and are expected to develop professionally. This not only has directly visible effects in terms of remuneration and promotion, but the chances of derived effects on personal development are also higher.

The socio-cultural barriers are barriers related to differences in background, environment and culture. Examples of socio-cultural barriers include:

- a limited cultural and social capital: poorer language development, cultural competences, cultural participation or cultural baggage, social networks and contacts, etc.;
- a lack of knowledge and information about the range, possibilities, conditions and facilities associated with learning;
- a vision of learning from a deficit approach: learning is the solution to shortages, not the addition of something new or the accumulation of competences;
- a lack of a feeling of self-determination: the feeling is that one's own (life) history/career is determined by external rules and factors, rather than having the ability to take matters into one's own hands and being in control of oneself;
- a lack of motivation due to negative experiences with education and to a negative cost/benefit analysis in terms of visible return.

Measures for an integrated approach to life-long learning

The answer to the aforementioned barriers is sought in a range of measures. We can subdivide these measures into *three dimensions of measures*:

- facilitating and structural measures;
- measures relating to the learning supply offered by organisations;
- measures relating to the learning demand from individuals.

The facilitating and structural measures are aimed at responding to the financial and material barriers outlined above. The measures are two-part. Firstly, some measures are designed to eliminate extrinsic barriers to participation in life-long learning, such as measures related to mobility and childcare. Secondly, some measures are designed to encourage, such as time credits, training credits, career credits, etc.. These financial and material incentives are not only given to individuals, but also to companies, based on the idea that individuals are the ultimate beneficiaries of these incentive measures.

The measures related to the learning supply offered by organisations affect the knowledge barrier in the first instance, but also indirectly affect the socio-cultural barriers to participation in learning. These are apparently obvious measures, such as the guarantee of the quality of the supply, transparency and harmonisation of the supply. However, these apparently obvious measures are difficult to achieve. After all, the learning supply relates not only to the formal supply of education, but to all types of learning supply in various learning environments.

Guaranteeing the quality of the learning supply in a wide range of organisations and learning environments is possible by awarding quality labels. A quality label then

represents the recognition and equality of (modules of) training courses, independently of the organisation or learning environment where this supply is offered.

The transparency of supply is pursued by making an inventory of the learning supply in all kinds of databases. It is essential for these databases to be updated, and made available and for them to be user-friendly.

Harmonising supply on the training landscape requires institutional and organisational cooperation between the various players who ensure the learning supply. Demand-oriented harmonisation means being able to distance oneself from organisational thinking.

The final dimension of measures are the measures relating to the learning demand from individuals. These measures attempt to provide an answer to the socio-cultural barriers to participation in learning. Two types of measures can be identified: counselling for individuals on (educational) routes and the recognition of acquired competences.

The counselling of individuals essentially relates to helping find potential answers to the career questions of individuals. This counselling can be a basic service in the form of the provision of information and opening up of the supply, in other words, familiarisation with the learning labyrinth. Counselling can also go further towards advising on careers and (educational) route counselling. The methodology of the bespoke measures in the counselling is crucial, given the diversity of target groups with individual aspirations, competences and needs.

The recognition of acquired competences is a measure aimed not only at more employability through the recognition of directly usable competences. The recognition of acquired competences also aims to increase the intrinsic learning motivation and participation in life-long learning by starting from “acquired competences” and not from a “lack of competences” and by acknowledging the value not only of formal learning, but also of non-formal learning.

The following section focuses on the measures related to the demand from individuals.

2. Context for life-long and life-wide learning from the perspective of the individual

In Flanders, an integrated approach to life-long learning is pursued, based on a dual objective: to increase employability, as well as personal development in a broad social context.

The first path taken in this respect is that of the recognition of acquired competences, the second is that of career guidance. The first path relates to the recognition and transfer of all the learning achieved, of an individual's competences (the summative function). The second path emphasises the methodologies and instruments to support the learning processes of individuals within the framework of their (life) history/career planning (the formative function). The two paths are inextricably linked.

RAC (recognition of acquired competences) was developed as a policy model in Flanders in the Flemish "RAC Working Group". This working group, made up of representatives from cabinets and administrations (employment, education and the economy), the relevant Flemish government institutions (VDAB, the Public Employment Service and VIZO, the Flemish Independent Enterprise Institute), the social partners and the consultative bodies SERV (the Social Economic Council of Flanders) and VLOR (the Flemish Education Council), published a recommendation on RAC in November 2001, which was submitted to the Flemish government in March 2002 (I. Vanhoren et al., 2002). The debate on career guidance for adults takes place within the "Career Guidance Task Force" of the King Baudouin Foundation and, in 2002, resulted in a recommendation on career guidance (L. Sels et al., 2002). Both recommendations are at the stage of trial projects and decree development in 2003.

2.1 The recognition of acquired competences (RAC)

The path of the recognition of acquired competences is a relatively new path. Some clarification of terminology would be appropriate here, before delving into the objectives and added value of RAC.

The competence concept in a model for RAC

The concept of *competences* refers to the real and individual capacity to apply knowledge (theoretical and practical), skills and attitudes in action, as these relate to the specific, everyday and changing work situation and to personal and social activities (I. Vanhoren, 2002).

The competence concept is a multi-dimensional concept. The multi-dimensionality refers to the *types of competence*:

- it refers to both life-wide and labour market-oriented competences (ACOA, 1999):
 - profession-related and methodological competences: this refers to (professional) content aspects;

- administrative/organisational and strategic competences: important for functioning in labour or educational organisations or social organisations;
- socio-communicative and normative-cultural competences: necessary to be able to function in a group;
- learning and environmental competences: geared towards being able to contribute to desired developments in one's own situation. The desired developments are related to profession and company or affect the level of a group or social organisation and bear witness to social responsibility;
- within the category of labour market-oriented competences, this deals with both transversal (trans-sectoral) competences and context-bound (sectoral) competences. In addition to the transversal and context-bound competences, some personal characteristics relate to values and standards, motivations and the concept of self. The personal characteristics are relevant to recruitment and selection by companies and institutions but, to safeguard privacy, are not included in the concept of competence within the context of RAC;
- competences can be both explicit as well as implicit and subconscious.

The above aspects are present in an integrated model of the recognition of acquired competences. This multi-dimensional interpretation of the concept of competence requires particular attention at the methodological/instrumental level.

Moreover, the way in which the competences are acquired is irrelevant. In terms of the *method of acquisition of competences*, foreign and European literature speaks of formal, non-formal and informal learning. However, no consensus exists as to the classification of learning used, nor concerning the content of non-formal learning.

Here, we have chosen to fit in with existing European frameworks, more specifically with the classification used by Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), because this fits most closely with the RAC debate and with the prevailing consensus on the content of formal learning in Flanders (J. Bjørnåvold, 2000).

Starting with the Cedefop classification, in terms of the method of acquisition of competences, we draw a distinction *between formal and non-formal learning (semi-structured and informal learning)*. The analytical distinction between formal and non-formal learning is also important from an institutional point of view for the providers of services.

By formal learning, we mean all forms of learning within a structured learning environment. This refers not only to the formal education system, but also to structured learning in public, intermediary and private training systems.

Non-formal learning encompasses all activities which are not explicitly described as learning but which do contain a substantial learning component:

- Semi-structured learning through planned activities in a (work) environment, where elements with a learning component are deliberately introduced (e.g. counselling, supervision, etc.), (e.g. work environment, voluntary organisations, etc.);
- Informal learning as the (usually implicit and/or subconscious) learning results of the everyday activities of the individual in the personal, family, professional and social context (e.g. workplace, domestic work, socio-cultural work, voluntary work, hobbies, etc.).

Learning in the workplace (as a learning environment) is possible, based on this classification, in both formal and non-formal ways (semi-structured and informal ways).

In the literature, RAC usually refers to the concept of “*competences acquired elsewhere*” and sometimes to “*previously acquired competences*” (Thomas E. & Frietman J., 1998; R. Klarus, 1998). The interpretation of the term “elsewhere” is important from a summative point of view (civil effect in recognition of competences). From the formative perspective (support for learning process and the development of competences), it is not the term “elsewhere” that is relevant, but the term “previously”, provided the starting point is the whole range of acquired competences, regardless of the way in which they were acquired.

We have chosen the term “*recognition of acquired competences*”, which includes competences acquired both “previously” and “elsewhere”.

By definition, competences are individual, process-oriented (action-oriented and development-oriented) and contextual. In competence evaluation and the recognition of competences, these individual and real competences are confronted with the (supra-individual) reference frameworks, in order to be able to achieve a civil effect. Various *steps* can be identified in the process of the recognition of acquired competences (R. Duvekot, 2000):

- Recognition or identification of competences: making individual competences visible by naming and describing them;
- Assessment of competences: the evaluation of competences based on (a) reference framework(s) (standards);
- Recognition of competences: the allocation of a civil effect or a public status to individual competences. The formal recognition of competences (delivery of formal proofs of competence, irrespective of the way in which these were acquired) can lead to the certification of competences.

“Recognition” is then seen as the “endpoint” in a RAC procedure, where the first step involves making the competences “visible” to everyone as well as being “demonstrable” by the person in question. The second step is the role which these “visible” and “demonstrable” competences can play in the choice of further training, the search for work or participation in socio-cultural life. The third step is the certification of these “visible” and “demonstrable” competences.

The step towards the recognition of acquired competences can be taken at one’s own initiative depending on whether the learning routes are shortened or flexible or designed to achieve better access to or mobility on the labour market. The launch of a recognition procedure can also be a possible consequence or component of career guidance.

Objectives and added value of a model for RAC

The model for RAC starts with the framework of “life-long and life-wide learning” and is based on the perspective of the individual. The objective of an integrated model of RAC is to increase *personal development and employability* on the labour market and in society.

This involves all citizens, with no target group restriction. The model of RAC is therefore not only for employees and job-seekers, but also for the self-employed, volunteers, unqualified school-leavers, newcomers, returners to the labour market, etc.. Non-discrimination, equal opportunities and social integration are important areas of attention within the RAC concept, both in terms of content and procedure and in terms of methodologies and instruments. We are thinking in this context of certain underprivileged groups, such as older employees, the unqualified, ethnic minorities, women, illiterates and those returning to the labour market.

Moreover, we are dealing not only with professional competences, although the labour market does play a central role in the recognition of individuals’ competences. The development and recognition of non-labour market-oriented competences, such as social skills and competences related to citizenship and learning to learn, also form part of an integrated model of RAC. This broad focus has consequences for the choice of the reference frameworks to be used for the recognition of competences.

For the individual in question, thinking in terms of competences increases his/her personal development and employability on the internal and external labour market.

A RAC system is important not only for the individual in question. More generally, RAC can have *added value* at four different levels (T. Pijls & P. de Roij van Zuijdewijn, 2000):

The first level is that of the individual, in terms of increasing employment chances and career security, increasing self-knowledge and self-confidence;

Secondly, return at the level of the internal and external labour market: a more efficient and effective training policy, in other words, a saving in time and money in a more targeted training policy, lower recruitment and selection costs, improved competence management, increased mobility;

At the level of education and training, the return can be seen in terms of optimising training and broadening competence development channels (flexible learning pathways);

Finally, return at the level of society: directly, the civil effect of the assessment of competences; indirectly, the emancipation of the citizen, improved quality of life.

Four aspects are linked together across the levels: the mobility of competences, the utilisation of competences, communication of competences and competence awareness (W. Bom, 1997).

2.2 Career guidance

Seen from the context of life-long learning and competence thinking, the path of career guidance can be regarded as the guidance of competence development in career routes. Moreover, the path of career guidance can be linked to the concept of the transitional labour market (G. Schmid, 1998).

The concept of the transitional labour market

The concept of the *transitional labour market* is based on the premise that, as a result of the process of individualisation and flexibilisation, the ageing and greying of the population, the ideal of “full employment” in its traditional meaning can no longer be maintained (R. J. Muffels, 2001). Moreover, the process involving the aforementioned factors also has consequences for the vision of labour and the quality of life: the traditional living pattern, involving study, work and inactivity in that order, is not only regarded as unfeasible, it is also being questioned as an idea.

An important element in the concept is the *lifecycle perspective*, in terms of changes and combinations of positions on the labour market throughout the lifecycle of individuals. These transitions are regarded as movements between and combinations of different “segments” on the labour market. The division into segments, based on Schmid’s concept, varies depending on the angle of analysis (R. J. Muffels, 2001; T. Vandenbrande, 2001). In order to be able to contextualise the path of career guidance, we distinguish between the following segments: education, unemployment, paid work, care work, leisure time and inactivity.

Career guidance paths

The model of the transitional labour market refers not only to the consequences of a changed vision of work and life in the lifecycle, but also to the problems associated with this for the individuals in question. Irregular career patterns often bring uncertainty at key moments and combination problems between various segments. Many types of career guidance are organised in order to absorb these “side effects” of the transitional labour market for individuals.

Career guidance is aimed at individuals with career questions, usually based on the work situation and its relationship with other areas of life. The guidance is given in career and information centres which deal not only with the question of “what is the next step in my career?”, but also questions about the relationship between life and work in the broader sense, based on which a change of direction is possible towards studying, not working, therapy, travelling, writing a book, etc.. In practice, career guidance usually deals with one segment of the labour market (education, unemployment or paid work) or comes at a transition time (e.g. education to paid work, unemployment to paid work). The combination of segments in the career forms an additional dimension of career guidance and usually relates to the relationship with care work and leisure time.

In the existing systems of career guidance, work is currently underway on various *tracks*. The first track is that of study career guidance for children of compulsory school age and young adults. The second track is that of route counselling for underprivileged groups; job career guidance is the third track. The distinction between the three tracks is linked to the finality of the career guidance: education and qualification; employment placement or access to the labour market; mobility on the labour market. Starting with the model of the transitional labour market, the three tracks inevitably cross one another. We illustrate this from the perspective of the path of route counselling for job-seekers (I. Vanhoren, 2002).

Route counselling for the underprivileged has always been highly labour market-oriented: its finality is that of placement on the labour market with placement routes that are as short as possible and as long as necessary. In a placement route, various phases or modules can be identified: channelling, intake and diagnosis, training and work experience, placement, after-care or counselling in the workplace after placement. In a placement route, training is a possible but not a necessary component. Moreover, in the route approach, the emphasis is heavily placed on learning through work experience, rather than learning in a formal learning environment.

From the point of view of life-long learning and the model of the transitional labour market, education and training can be expected to recover their importance in the labour market-oriented route approach. The transitional labour market does after all mean that people more often find themselves in periods of transition and therefore also at key points in their career: a competence-oriented approach in career guidance is appropriate in this case. The final outcome is then not only direct employability (based on an activation policy), but also sustainability of the job position of the individual in question, based on competence development. The route approach is thus broadened from route counselling for job-seekers to career guidance for adults. A second shift in route counselling is that of the labour market-oriented route approach, which starts from a deficit approach or a problem approach to the individual (“distance from the labour market and from the information society”) to a career-oriented approach which starts with the approach of competence development and valuation. This is where the link is established with the path of the recognition of acquired competences.

3. The two tracks as one: challenges to an integrated service from the perspective of the individual

The above section demonstrates that the discussion of “life-long learning” is expanding into “life-wide learning” and “counselling learning, working and living”. Life-wide learning stands for the multi-dimensional concept of competence and the wide range of competence acquisition channels. Competences, wherever and however acquired, can then ideally be given value through certificates. Counselling for learning, working and living refers to counselling study, work and careers within the labyrinth of the learning supply and at key points in the careers of individuals on the transitional labour market.

Starting with the *perspective of an opportunity approach* in an integrated service for individuals, the link between the two tracks is very important. A route approach in career advice, competence development and certification is appropriate for anyone with career questions but, in the first instance, for underprivileged groups, in other words for those facing barriers to their participation in life-long learning and social functioning.

The recognition of acquired competences is the ideal instrument for underprivileged groups: the promotion and recognition of learning in a non-formal setting is beneficial to intrinsic learning motivation and, moreover, offers possibilities for shorter and flexible learning paths and a lowering of the barrier to the labour market. However, the risk exists that precisely these groups will not make use of RAC

procedures. The accessibility of services regarding career guidance and advice and regarding RAC procedures, including for underprivileged groups, is an important area of attention (I. Vanhoren, 2002).

The accessibility of these provisions is facilitated by the transparency or visibility of the possibilities and RAC procedures, the low threshold or accessibility of the counselling services and by the cost price or affordability (lack of cost?) for the individual.

Special areas of attention in terms of accessibility are the aspects of equal treatment and non-discrimination. In terms of scope and channelling specific target groups towards the services, the midfield is an important link.

The link between the summative and the formative track is important, not purely from an opportunity approach perspective. This link is also necessary from the *lifecycle perspective*.

In the debate concerning life-long learning, we observe that employability thinking dominates. This implies that the emphasis is placed on labour market-oriented competences and on the recognition of immediately employable competences. It is clear that this implies a serious narrowing of the broad competence concept, put forward in the policy discussion (J.G.L. Thijsen & E.S.K. Lankhuijzen, 2000; J. Kessels, 2000).

A route-related approach is, by definition, an approach with a lifecycle perspective. This means that, in addition to immediately employable competences, attention is also devoted to the development of learning competences and career competences. The recognition of competences is then a possible component or instrument of career guidance.

Moreover, the starting point in a route approach is the individual, with all the dimensions of his/her aspirations, competences and needs. Labour market-oriented competences therefore form only part of the rich tapestry of the competences of individuals. The labour market-oriented, trade specific competences pose the fewest problems at methodological level when it comes to the recognition and certification of competences. On the other hand, transversal and life-wide competences not only present methodological problems in terms of evaluation and recognition. The recognition of these competences also poses an ethical problem. Transversal and life-wide competences do after all affect the private domain of personal characteristics which relate to values and standards, motivation and the concept of self.

Conclusion

In Flanders, a policy of life-long learning, with competence thinking as its central tenet, is a fairly recent phenomenon. In this article, we have approached the competence discussion from the point of view of the individual, with a summary of measures, concepts and models for the development and valuation of competences. A crucial aspect of the article is its starting point of an opportunity approach for individuals. We are aware that we are thus presenting a partial picture of what is going on in terms of life-long learning and competence thinking. For instance, in an economic approach, much more attention is focused on aspects such as competence management in companies, the development of the knowledge economy, etc..

Two tracks for an integrated approach to life-long learning are outlined in this article: the track of the recognition of acquired competences (RAC) and the track of career guidance. In essence, RAC deals with the recognition and transfer of acquired competences, irrespective of the way in which these have been acquired. RAC can lead to flexible and shorter learning paths, to improved access to and mobility on the labour market.

Career guidance is targeted at counselling people in transition periods and at key points in their careers. The aim of the guidance is to smooth out insecurities and problems arising in this context, but is at the same time development-oriented depending on study, work and (life) career prospects.

The added value for underprivileged groups is found in the combination of the two tracks. A route approach to career advice, competence development and certification is appropriate for those facing barriers to their participation in life-long learning and social functioning. In this route approach, RAC is an instrument for promoting intrinsic learning motivation and, moreover, it offers possibilities for short and flexible learning paths and a lowering of the threshold to the labour market. In this way, RAC can be an important lever for the emancipation of the citizen and the democratisation of society.

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