# The Call

# People, validation, and power: democracy in action?

## Introduction and a Call for Contributions About the VPL Biennale

The 5th VPL Biennale will take place in Kilkenny, Ireland from May 6th – 8th, 2024. The Biennale is a dynamic global gathering, showcasing what the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) contributes to effective national solutions for inclusion and lifelong learning in our shared international context of accelerated change and skills formation.

The Biennale is our opportunity to share practices, essential ideas, knowledge, experience, information, and progress updates from the blending worlds of work, learning, human resource and learning management, innovation, credentialling and recognition. 'This VPL bi-annual meet-up of our community provides opportunities for exchanges of effective practices, consideration of approaches, policies, strategies and toolkits for engaging with a diversity of target groups and contexts.

The Biennale builds on the work of the previous four Biennales [https://vplbiennale.org/how-](https://vplbiennale.org/how-it-started/) [it-started/](https://vplbiennale.org/how-it-started/) and is informed by the European Guidelines on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2023) and other recent developments.

# Call for contributions

Under the four thematic pillars, underpinned by the central theme of validation and democracy, you are invited to share your work and experiences, evidence of progress in validation (VPL/RPL), reflections, and/or research, critically reflecting on assumptions, engagement, empowerment and impacts.

We invite a focus that considers future demands and required responses, practitioner skills and competences, and partnerships, including the identification of the potentially unique contribution of validation.

Contexts will typically include education and training policy, practice and provision, workplace development policy and practices, including labour market activation, civil, social and community settings.

Using the questions under each sub-theme/ pillar, you are invited to consider if, or what policy and practice in these diverse settings are evidence of democracy in action. We encourage a focus on future needs and the necessary responses, the skills and abilities of practitioners, and partnerships.

**Submitting a proposal**

We look forward to proposals focused on one of the thematic pillars and their questions described above or related work.

There are two formats for presenting:

1. Concurrent Sessions – These sessions are 30-minutes in length and should be as interactive as possible. Multiple sessions will be occurring at the same time in different rooms.
2. Lightning Talks – These are 5-minute presentations of your work using one slide (electronic poster) based on a template you will be provided. Lightning Talks will be sequential in the same room in front of a larger audience.

[Please use this link to submit your proposal.](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=FjQCGdA99E2Oim-oWNKOMhK52b3EvvFNjFCjj7kYQ_dURDY2T0dTNzhQRFhENjVFMDRNVktKMFE4VS4u)

**Deadline for receipt of your proposal is 12 January 2024.**

You will be notified by 5 February 2024.

**Additional Publication Opportunity:**

Those whose proposals are accepted to the 5th VPL Biennale will also be invited to submit a contribution to the journal, Prior Learning Assessment Inside Out: An International Journal on Theory, Research, and Practice in Prior Learning Assessment ([www.plaio.org](http://www.plaio.org)).

The current “special” issue (co-edited by Ruud Duvekot, Alan Mandell, and Nan Travers) has brought together 15 essays based on presentations from the 4th VPL Biennale that took place in Reykjavik, Iceland in May 2022 around the theme, “Building a Common Ground.”

We look forward to including edited essays from the 5th VPL Biennale in a new issue of PLAIO to be co-edited by Ruud Duvekot, Susan Forseille, Alan Mandell, and Nan Travers. Please expect more details regarding these submissions.

## Validation of Prior Learning

VPL gives visibility and value to all forms of learning and seeks to uncover and unlock latent talent in the workforce and in society.

The 5th VPL Biennale focuses on validation, the individual, and democracy. We explore the question: [is a growth in validation practice evidence of democracy in action](https://vplbiennale.kinsta.cloud/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/5th-VPL-Biennale-concept-paper.pdf)? As a participant you will be able to explore the different contexts in which validation processes, systems and opportunities are framed and reflect on the implicit dynamics, challenges, solutions, and implications of our current global practice.

Validation plays a role in delivering ambitious policies for effective lifelong learning, inclusion, job market agility, skills, individual learning, and career pathways, protecting democracy, and making mobility a reality. Practitioners and champions advocate for implementation, inspired by the transformative impacts they observe for individuals in directing their own learning and career journey. Yet validation can challenge the very systems and dominant practices that are key to its success. Qualifications, academic standards, expert pedagogies, qualification frameworks, and quality assurance practices strive to adapt to accelerated change and ensure the creation of new knowledge, skills and attitudinal approaches, even in unconventional educational settings. Conscious of ‘public good’, attention focuses on opportunities for participation, the sites, methodologies and different contributions in the development and validation of knowledge, and the implicit development of new knowledge itself.

In this Biennale, we focus on empowerment as a key aspect of validation and examine how it affects and involves individuals. We seek to understand the various changes, consequences, and effects that come with empowerment through validation for individuals and society. To do this, we consider different perspectives, such as those of individuals themselves, employers and human resource managers, entrepreneurs, volunteers, researchers, academics, practitioners, education and training institutions, government officials, occupational bodies, settlement and integration organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), recognition authorities, industry councils, as well as policy makers and influencers.

# Thematic pillars of the 5th Biennale

## Validation and the individual: democracy in action?

Lead question: How does validation place the individual at the centre?

* Validation practice prizes the individual and their learning as the central concern. From your experience, practice and/or research, what changes are necessary in approach to curriculum and pedagogy, standards/learning outcomes, assessment practices, quality assurance, qualifications, and qualification frameworks?
* What should we learn about putting the individual at the centre of what we do and what conditions and supports, including lifelong guidance systems, make this effective?
* Who decides what is valid knowledge?
* Who empowers the individual and how? When might empowerment for one group or individual mean disempowerment for another group or individual?
* In keeping with effective lifelong learning, validation seeks to support democratic citizenship and empower individuals to identify the opportunities that build on their learning. In what ways do systems need to be structured and scaffolded to give an individual ownership of their own pathways?
* What kind of coordination mechanisms are used to ensure that individuals are served where they live, study and work? Are possibilities, costs and benefits of validation becoming clearer and the outcomes more portable?
* Has your experience of validation shifted a balance of power in your personal practice and context?
* How compelling is the evidence base that validation strengthens the resilience of an individual?

You are invited to share initiatives and approaches that have prized the individual driving validation, to elaborate what you have learned, your conclusions on changes and implications required of the engagement and on the added value.

## Validation and skills: democracy in action?

Lead Question: How can validation be quickly harnessed to prepare the individual, workplace and workforce for the future while truly respecting and valuing the process of skills acquisition?

* How does our understanding of skills and embodied knowledge impact our validation processes?
* Validation of what we know and can do is seen as a key feature of resilient employment sectors and strategies, enabling continued and flexible participation in the labour market, and supporting competitive economies. What characteristics make the validation of skills an inclusive lifelong and life- wide practice?
* How can the validation of skills and knowledge gained in diverse contexts contribute to new knowledge and to the personal, professional, and economic success of individuals?
* What evidence have we that validation increases academic, cultural and/or economic excellence?
* Who determines what is important to be validated and how does this affect individuals and communities of practice?
* How does validation drive or enhance engagement between individuals, educators and employers?
* The diversity of stakeholders- HR and training management, innovation leads, employee representative groups and education stakeholders may each have distinct ways of knowing and valuing an individual's skills and knowledge; do expectations compete, are roles and purposes clarified and prioritised in validation?
* In the context of global megatrends like digitalisation and climate change, can validation enhance the resilience of individual, communities, and employers? If so, how?
* In your experience, how do the diversity of outcomes of recognition and contexts align, and are the benefits equitable?
* How compelling is the evidence base that validation strengthens skills recognition?

You are invited to share specific initiatives and approaches that focus on validation and skills, to elaborate what you have learned, your conclusions on changes and implications required of the engagement and on the added value, for whom.

## Validation and inclusion: democracy in action?

Lead Question: How can validation be an enabler to empowering local whilst thinking global?

* What is the real contribution of validation – at system, policy and implementation level, in opening up the power of diverse people and groups?
* Does validation increase and extend engagement and opportunity? How? For whom? To what? What impacts have you experienced working with diverse individuals, groups/cohorts and sectors?
* What impacts were experienced by individuals who had experiential learning validated, culturally, socially, and practically?
* Whose learning is valued within validation and how is this determined? Who decides what learning is valued within validation?
* What supports and challenges are necessary to inclusively honour everyone's engagement?
* How equitably are individuals enabled to engage in validation?
* What is the value of validation and inclusion in balancing individual, societal and economic interests?
* What is the evidence base of validation for social cohesion and economic engagement?
* We lose out on the unique cultural, social, and professional contribution of those who don’t participate in common democratic structures. How can validation be more effectively used to include all individuals? How compelling is the evidence base that validation strengthens inclusion?

You are invited to share specific initiatives that cross and connect boundaries. Please explain what you have learned from these experiences, the conclusions you have drawn regarding the changes and implications required by engagement in validation and on the added value that comes with it.

## Validation and mobility: democracy in action?

Lead question: Does validation support mobility while respecting cultural and sub-cultural difference?

* Validation is increasingly acknowledged as essential to supporting effective mobility for people. This can include physical mobility across jurisdictions and sectors for economic and personal opportunity, professional development and for survival, including arising from the distress of war, climate change and disaster. It also includes the subsequent integration in a new context.
* How can we strengthen our approaches so that we value and respect diverse cultural knowledge and ways of understanding?
* Are our recognition frameworks and constructs sufficient for fair recognition? In preparing for the implementation of the Global Recognition Convention what one thing would you do to improve your capacity to respond to validation needs in support of mobility?
* How can we best appreciate, be sensitive to and preserve unique cultural knowledge within recognition frameworks in a globalized world?
* Are we capable of being responsive to individual needs, what challenges you most in your context?
* Are systems and processes operating as gatekeepers to opportunities for individuals?
* What does validation practice look like when applied in emergency contexts?
* What is your experience of toolkits specifically developed for migrants and refugees and how do they differ from those developed for other target audiences?
* Does mobility challenge standards and reference points for validation, in your experience, in capturing skills, for individuals and for inclusion?
* Where someone moves from one jurisdiction to another how can recognition and partial recognition be best supported?
* What does validation for national, regional, and global mobility require of systems, processes and the creation of opportunity?
* What kind of processes and supports for individuals can be implemented to further include people on the move?
* How compelling is the evidence base that validation positively strengthens mobility?

You are invited to share specific initiatives that focus on validation and mobility across and within jurisdictions. Please discuss what you have learned from these experiences, your conclusions regarding the necessary changes and implications for engagement. Finally, what is the added value for whom in validation and mobility contexts.