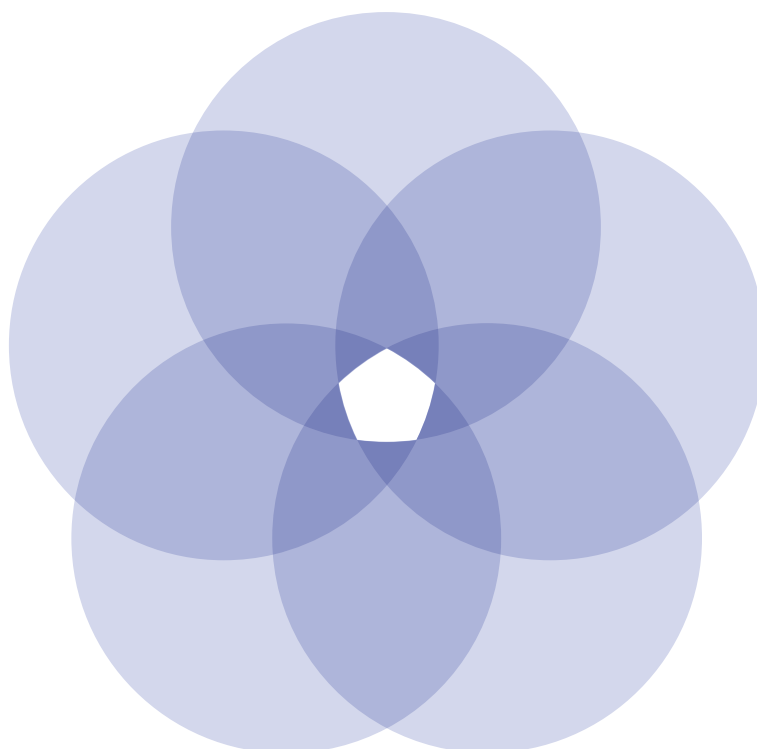# MASTER

Measures for Adults to Support Transition to further Education and Re-skilling opportunities

2019-1-IT02-KA204-063178

GUIDE-LINES

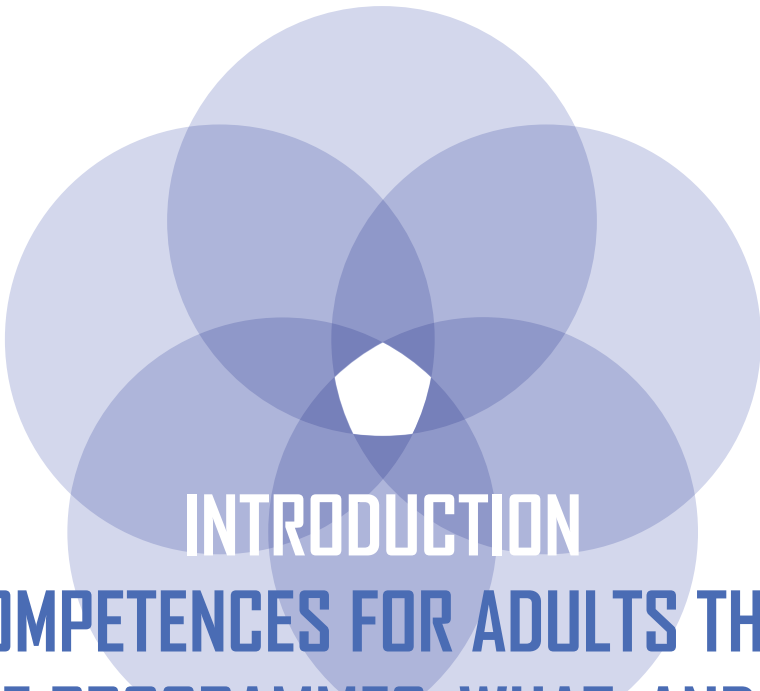# PROJECT INFORMATION

Project acronym	MASTER
Project title	Measures for Adults to Support Transition to further Education and Re-skilling opportunities
Project number	2019-1-IT02- KA204-063178
Sub programme or KA	KA2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices. KA204: Strategic partnerships for adult education
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PSL-COMPETENCES FOR ADULTS THROUGH BRIDGE PROGRAMMES: WHAT, AND WHY?

Personal, social and learning (PSL) competences, are, according to the European Commission's definition of key competences, a wide range of skills that can cut across occupations and sectors[1]. As they promote self-confidence, they are central for learning programmes for low-skilled adults. As experience and evidence from adult learning organisations and providers shows, it can influence all other key competences and is also a motivating factor to improve adults' attitudes towards learning.

LifeComp[2], the European framework for personal, social and learning to learn competences, further explores the role of these skills and competences, aiming to create a common understanding and language for PSL competences and to initiate a set of agreed guidelines for the flexible implementation of PSL curricula. MASTER systematises learning outcomes on the basis of PSL competences and proposes a bridging programme[3] with tailor-made learning activities aimed at low-skilled adults[4] to facilitate and support their participation in non-formal and formal learning pathways (vocational education or further learning and education) and in the labour market.

The MASTER Plan tests showed that PSL competences are the core of those competences that enable adults to continue their learning pathways and step up their career opportunities and thus, for example, also to make the step from non-formal into formal adult learning. Key stakeholders in the field of adult learning and education – at the local, regional, national and European levels, and from policy, public employment services, education providers, private sector and civil society – were involved in consultations by the project partners to discuss the outcomes of the MASTER project and the piloting of the programme. The recommendations presented here are based on the results of these stakeholder consultations.

Learners' own identification of learning needs and self-assessment of skills are at the heart of MASTER. In a multi-step programme, learners get to assess their skills and competences, and adult learning institutions offering the MASTER programme can use these assessments to design a personalised learning programme for learners. MASTER thus also complies with the recommendations of Upskilling Pathways, in which learners' knowledge and skills are valorised over several levels and further central skills are trained on this basis.

[1] Personal, social and learning to learn competence is the ability to reflect upon oneself, effectively manage time and information, work with others in a constructive way, remain resilient and manage one's own learning and career. It includes the ability to cope with uncertainty and complexity, learn to learn, support one's physical and emotional well-being, to maintain physical and mental health, and to be able to lead a health-conscious, future-oriented life, empathize and manage conflict in an inclusive and supportive context.' https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&rid=7

[2] Sala, A., Punie, Y., Garkov, V. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence, EUR 30246 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, ISBN 978-92-76-19418-7, doi:10.2760/302967, JRC120911. Online: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC120911

[3] The term "bridge programme" or "bridging programme" in adult learning and education is not protected, and is accordingly - depending on the country, especially in Europe - applied differently. In some countries (e.g. Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia), second-chance education programmes in particular are referred to as bridging programmes, in which learners of adult age can catch up on their secondary school leaving certificate and then go on to vocational training or higher education. In some countries and regions, such as Flanders, the term is used for programmes in which graduates from a vocational bachelor's degree can prepare for further ('academic') university studies. In some contexts, the term is also used for basic skills programmes, e.g. for immigrants.

[4] "low-skilled", in this context, means qualifications and skills equivalent to level 3 or 4 in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

METHODOLOGY
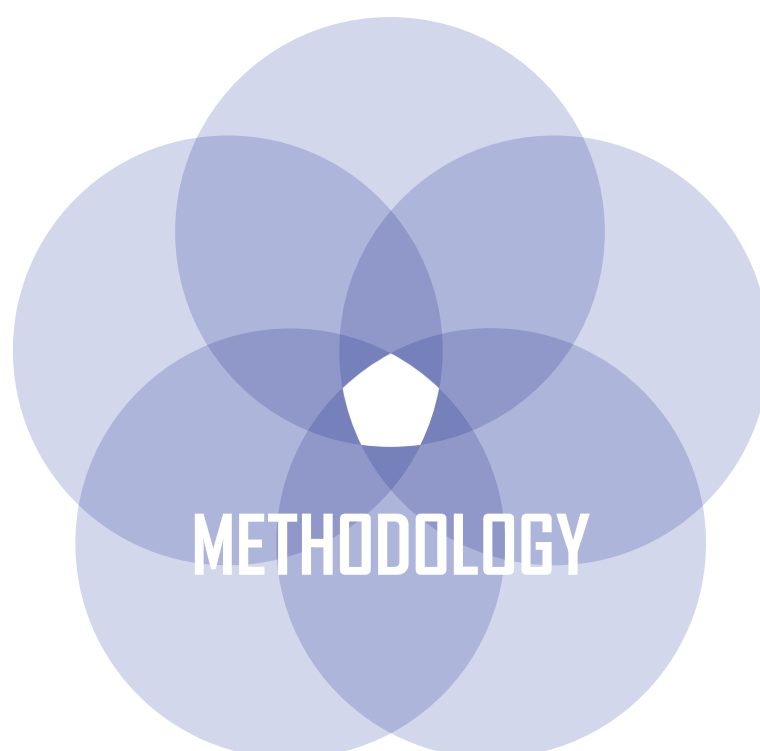
After the development of the MASTER programme, the curriculum was tested in four countries over a period of one and a half years - most of it during Covid-19-related lockdowns: Italy, Portugal, Cyprus, and Scotland (UK). The target groups included long-term unemployed, people with low formal education and low literacy, as well as migrants and refugees; these target groups are mostly referred to as "low-skilled adults" in EU policies and strategies.

The lessons-learnt were collected and analysed by the partners, especially with regard to which tools work well for which target groups, where improvements might be needed, and what requirements there are for adult education professionals. In a first round of stakeholder consultations in the partner countries Italy, Portugal, Cyprus and Scotland (UK), key stakeholders - including non-formal adult learning organisations and providers, VET providers, local and regional policy-makers, public employment services, researchers, civil society organisations - were asked about their priorities for PSL programmes.

The priorities were grouped by the stakeholders and ranked in terms of importance and urgency as follows:

1. Methodologies and tools for promoting/developing PSL competence need to be developed

2. There is a need for more awareness of PSL competences among trainers

3. There is a need for increased financing of bridge programmes targeting low-skilled learners, including non-formal adult learning and education programmes that motivate learners to continue their learning pathways

4. The training of PSL competences should focus on the resilience and stress-management of learners as well as their ability for self-directed learning and flexibility, as these skills form the basis of all learning - Are other skills/attitudes relevant for this?

5. There is a need to monitor PSL competence, by referring to LifeComp learning outcomes and/or adapting the existing monitoring tools

6. Methodologies and tools for promoting/developing PSL competence need to be mainstreamed in education

7. There is a need to raise awareness that PSL competences promote empowerment and motivation, which are very important for reactivating the low-skilled and empowering them to act as full citizens

8. Existing methodologies and tools for "soft skills" training need to be updated according to PSL competence frameworks

9. Bridge programmes in education that aim to promote PSL competences need to be tailored to the needs of low-skilled learners

10. There is a need for more awareness of PSL competences among learners

11. There is a need for more awareness of Adult Education providers of the importance of teaching PSL competence and their key role in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways

12. There is a need for more awareness at the political/policy-making level of PSL competences and their key role in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways

13. There is a need for more trainer's/educator's training on PSL competence and how to integrate them into learning programmes

14. There is a need for more awareness about the key role of bridge programmes targeting low-skilled learners that help them to continue their learning pathways (in further education/(C)VET/higher education/other (more formal) types of adult learning and education)

Based on this, recommendations for adult education organisations and policy makers were prepared. These were presented and discussed in a second round of stakeholder consultations and the results were used to refine and specify the recommendations. All stakeholders said that this final version of the recommendations was very suitable for them and that they would implement them in their own areas as far as possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ADULT EDUCATION ORGANISATION AND PROVIDERS

1.1. START FROM THE NEEDS OF THE LEARNERS

As simple as this sounds, it is just as difficult to implement. The needs of learners - especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds - are not limited to learning needs in specific areas. They go far beyond learning and, when working with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, need to be considered at the start of each individual learning pathway:

- Language: Is the language of courses and learning content accessible? Do speakers of other languages and learners with general comprehension difficulties or low literacy skills need special support? Is the content accessible to people with audio-visual impairments?

- Learning history: What is the learner's learning history? Is learning characterised by difficulties and effort (from the learner's perspective)? Have there been any particular incidents in the learning history that have contributed to a negative attitude towards learning? Or does the learner have a positive approach to learning or "intrinsic" motivation?

- Motivation: What is the learner's motivation to participate in a learning programme? Does the learner want to participate on their own initiative to develop their skills? Is participation in the programme necessary to be able to progress professionally? Is participation an obligation imposed by the labour market service or another institution and is participation linked to the payment of social transfer benefits? What makes the learning programme relevant for the learner?

- Managing workloads: How is the learner managing their workload at home/at their work place/in their previous education career? Are learners used to working to a deadline? Can they manage their workload in a self-directed way, or do they need support, e.g. by splitting up tasks into small portions?

- Health and wellbeing: Are learners resilient to stress? How is their general level of well-being and health? Is mental health support available to the learner? Does the learner identify any current or previous need for mental health support?

The most important but most difficult area for learners is knowing the manageability of the workload and what the balance should be. What is healthy in terms of motivation and when are systems pointing to more negative emotions? Recognising previous experience and hearing story examples of the feelings of others is a useful exercise. One instance from the MASTER piloting was related where a previous session's learner spoke to the current learners of the fact that he did not perform well in assessments in his first phase of learning, but he had learnt to seek help for what he did not completely understand and rework his assignment to include the advice he received. The process is difficult for everyone but as time goes on, recognition of what helps becomes apparent.

- Family care work and household: Do learners have caring responsibilities towards other, possibly underage, family members? How can learning times be reconciled with these caring responsibilities? Are there any household obligations that the learner may have to meet and that may (severely) limit the time available for learning?
- Work: Does the learner have one or more jobs and what are their working hours? Does the work require some flexibility in terms of time, which needs to be taken into account when creating learning programmes?
- Financing: Who finances the participation? Is the course fully funded by ministries or other national, regional or local authorities? Do learners have to pay for participation in the programme themselves, or is participation (partly) paid for by a social or labour market institution? Does the employer (partly) pay for participation?

Many of these questions are very sensitive in terms of confidentiality and, if asked directly, learners might feel that their private space is invaded. These are, therefore, rather questions for reflection

of adult learners and practitioners working with target groups from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or low skills. Every learner has a personal life story and a personal learning story. During intake sessions for PSL programmes, biographical narrative interviews can be a useful method to learn more about the learners and their learning history and needs, and learners can choose themselves how much information they want to share.

Dealing with heterogeneity in the "classroom"
Teaching strategies and methods aimed at enhancing adult experiences and promoting the expression of needs and self-expression are particularly appropriate for heterogeneous learning groups. The module of the MASTER plan on "Communication" supports this goal and could serve as a model.

What providers need to take into consideration, is that PSL competences might not always be evident for the learners themselves, and especially the need to train and develop them. Indeed, one of the stakeholders consulted during the MASTER project noted that most adults, including high-skilled and highly educated adults, have never reflected on or are aware of their PSL competences – however they may call them – as they are usually considered as "intrinsic" and "natural". Starting from the individual learners' competences through a sensitive intake process, adult learning providers and organisations can make learners aware of the competences that they already have and how they can use it, but also, where they would need further learning and training.

Learners – and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – may not have experience of reflecting on their own competences and learning needs, and they may find PSL competences self-evident. Self-assessment methods that match the profile of the learners can help them become aware of their competences and learning needs and can raise their motivation for learning. It should be taken into consideration, however, that a raised

awareness of their own "competence gaps" might feel demotivating to some learners. A confidential relationship between the learners and educators or other adult learning staff is key in creating an enabling and positive atmosphere for learning, where the potential of learning is highlighted rather than "competence gaps".

In the MASTER programme, modules are combined and tailored based on the needs of each learner to ensure that the learning programme is interesting and relevant. This tailored approach, combined with an open, inclusive and safe learning environment, ensures the motivation of learners. Experience from the piloting of the MASTER programme in several countries shows, however, that women are, in general, easier to motivate than men. Studies[5] have found that often men are more wary of adult learning and education when not focused directly towards employment or economic opportunities. Men are also less likely to participate in programmes and courses that train "soft skills" because of a perceived "femininity". Where men, however, see the benefits of a learning programme for their career, they are easier to attract to and retain in courses.

The testing of the MASTER programme and feedback from trainers involved also showed that the motivation of adults to participate in lifelong learning processes is mainly related to their desire and need to better manage their professional careers and because they want to acquire skills that will enable them to find a better job in their sector or a job in another sector. Extrinsic motivation from policy makers and education providers, on the other hand, plays an important role in creating awareness among adult learners of the additional benefits adult education offers - broadening one's knowledge and horizons, well-being and health, and better opportunities to participate in society.

[5] For instance, King, Peadar. O'Driscoll, Sheila. Holden, Stephanie. 2002. Gender and Learning. Commissioned by AONTAS on behalf of the Dept. of Education and Science.

1.2. BE INCLUSIVE

All methods and tools used for learner self-assessment and feedback on learning progress should be as inclusive as possible, i.e. they should take into account possible difficulties learners may have in understanding the process itself.

Low-skilled adults can be victims of numerous discriminations due to their cultural, professional and social backgrounds or be trapped in stereotypes that hinder their self-awareness and empowerment process. For this reason, the MASTER Plan contains specific measures to promote the inclusion of vulnerable target groups and to take into account and actively counteract possible gender discrimination.

- Promote and strengthen training content and didactic resources and scenarios that tackle equality, diversity and inclusion.

- Provision of adequate and appropriate access to on-site learning activities for people with disabilities, as well as a digital environment for people with special educational needs.
- Support for people who do not have sufficient language skills to participate in the courses by providing an additional staff member to assist them.
- Provide intergenerational learning methods/tools to reinforce the inclusion of people of different age groups in the same learnin environment to take advantage of different learning styles and backgrounds, and to facilitate the creation of small communities where individuals can grow and benefit from each other's support and expertise.

Gender

Special attention should be paid to the gender aspects of learning. Learning materials and programmes need to be reviewed for their gender sensitivity and, if necessary, revised to actively promote inclusion. If education providers do not have the internal capacity or knowledge to do this, partnerships with organisations that specifically address this issue are useful.

Gender sensitivity should go in all directions: on the one hand regarding women from disadvantaged backgrounds who experience disadvantages in terms of highest educational attainment or access to education compared to men, but also regarding men who are underrepresented in adult learning programmes - especially those that train "soft skills" - and further to persons who are or have been in transition or define themselves as non-binary and who thus experience discrimination in society in general, but also in education and the labour market[6].

- Make PSL programmes a safe space for learning for everyone, regardless of their sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, and train educators and other adult learning staff adequately.
- When setting the timetable for the MASTER programme, a balance between training and life must be taken into account, especially for women who are generally the main carers in families.

- Encourage collective reflection on how to organise women's participation in training through the sharing of principles and practical arrangements to balance their roles as learners and carers.
- Empower women to value their competences by explaining the gender inequalities that exist and are constantly reproduced in society and especially in the labour market.
- Raise women's awareness of the importance of the competences they have developed, in particular thanks to their role as caregivers in their families, which are often taken for granted and not sufficiently promoted in the world of work.
- Gender differences, stereotypes and prejudices should be taken into account when conducting training and collecting assessment data, especially in relation to access to the world of work.
- In practical exercises, in lessons and in workshops, gender equality should always be taken into account as a central theme in education and on the labour market in order to counteract disadvantages for women or other discriminated groups.
- Encourage men to participate in PSL programmes by raising awareness of their usefulness to the individual learners, but also their potential progress in education and the labour market.

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[6] Devlin, Agatha (2020): Adult Learning and Gender. EAEA Background Paper. Online: https://eaea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ALE-and-Gender-EAEA-background-paper-July-2020_final.pdf

Disabilities and mental health

As in the general population, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds include individuals with disabilities and/or mental health issues. Experiencing continued discrimination in social life, the workplace, etc. – for instance among immigrants or long-term unemployed – can exacerbate mental health issues and reinforce mechanisms of exclusion from education. Even though adult learning programmes targeting learners with low basic skills are generally designed to be easy to access, special attention needs to be given to this, and programmes must actively seek to include learners with disabilities and/or mental health issues. This, however, often requires considerable efforts from adult learning providers and organisations in terms of investment in their infrastructure, but also staff training and development. Project funding and, ideally, structural support can help organisations in implementing their inclusion strategies. Again, partnerships with relevant organisations and services can be very helpful.

1.3. TRAIN ADULT LEARNING PRACTITIONERS AND OTHER STAFF WORKING IN PSL PROGRAMMES

Stakeholders identified the need for awareness raising of PSL competences among educators and adult learning staff as a central priority for the successful implementation of programmes. PSL competences – as a separate field – has been given increasing importance over the past years at the policy level as well as in teacher-training and train-the-trainer programmes. Educators and practitioners may not always have heard of PSL competences – in this or another form – during their initial training, which makes further education for educators and practitioners all the more important. Thus, PSL competences should be included in both initial training and continuous professional development of adult educators.

On School Education Gateway, there is a 10-hour course on practical tools to work on the Lifecomp competence, which can be followed online. It does not provide a certificate of participation but gives interesting insights and ideas into how to promote LifeComp competences in formal and non-formal educational contexts.

Adult learning providers and organisations may offer different kinds of "soft skills" training programmes already, however, without them being integrated into the PSL framework. Awareness raising about the essence of PSL competences, what they include and why they are needed, will help adult educators and practitioners to get a better understanding of the approach and might also help them to systematise what they have been doing in other programmes in an informal manner already.

1.4. ENABLE EXCHANGE BETWEEN PRACTITIONERS AND EDUCATORS TO BUILD CAPACITY

The piloting phase of MASTER showed that the systematic exchange between practitioners and educators on methods and tools for self-assessment and monitoring is very beneficial to build capacity within organisations and providers. Exchange is, generally, easiest at the local and regional levels; however, programmes such as Erasmus+ also offer opportunities for transnational exchange and mutual learning.

A better exchange between practitioners and educators can also help to develop new tools and methodologies to promote PSL competences. Stakeholders consulted in the MASTER project noted that tools and methodologies can become outdated very quickly with the emergence of new research and technologies, but also new insights into how adult learning works. Updating existing tools and methodologies is, therefore, pivotal. Exchange networks for practitioners and educators enable them to share information and collaborate on the joint development of learning materials.

Peer learning can also help adult education professionals to gain clarity about how programmes are developed and the stakeholders involved. This includes learning about how different stakeholders in other regions and countries work together (including local/regional/national governments and public institutions; adult learning providers; charities; community groups and associations) and how they can support PSL programmes.

1.5. GIVE MONITORING A CENTRAL PLACE IN THE PROGRAMME

Monitoring – both individual and group monitoring – has an essential role in the MASTER programme. This makes it possible to get a clear picture of learning progress, but also where further support is needed. Monitoring should be done together with the learners and not from the outside (or with an additional, but not exclusive, external evaluation). Especially for educationally disadvantaged groups, this joint monitoring can help learners become aware of their own progress and learn to recognise where they may have further learning needs, all in a stress-free and confidential atmosphere with their "personal" trainers and facilitators. Facilitators in learning programmes and adult educators need to keep reminding themselves that the ability to reflect and self-assess does not come naturally and needs to be trained. Learning to self-reflect on the learning process also plays a very important role in validation processes of skills and abilities and is, therefore, a very valuable and transferable skill.

Self-assessment exercises and forms should be discussed with learners step by step to ensure that learners understand what is expected of them. Going through the self-assessment forms together can also help learners who have language problems or otherwise have difficulty understanding written text.

The MASTER Plan could be integrated into the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) process, as there are many similarities. Validation of skills and competences consists in identifying the competences acquired throughout life in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, recognising them according to the school/subject content and validating and certifying this knowledge and these competences with a school-leaving certificate or with a professional certification or with both at the same time. So in this process the goals and methods are similar. Adults (with low formal qualifications) reflect and develop a portfolio in the RVCC, i.e. a written work

about their own life in which they collect documents of a biographical and curricular nature, highlighting the knowledge and skills acquired throughout life. This tool could also be integrated into the MASTER Plan process. Similarly, the PSL self-assessment tool could be embedded in the RVCC process to give more weight to the importance and development of this competence, which is so important and valued in the labour market today.

Monitoring and assessment processes in the MASTER programme follow these steps:

- Discussion of expected learning outcomes during the introduction to the activities, so that the beneficiaries are aware of their learning pathways.
- Before and after the individual implementation of the MASTER Plan, application of PSL competences self-assessment tools[7] to help learners understand the development of their PSL skills and also to assess the actual impact of the learning experience on PSL competence at individual and collective level.
- At the end of each training session, encourage learners to reflect on their learning journey and development by e.g. keeping a learning diary or logbook; recording their most eye-opening revelation or biggest question; sketching a picture representing what they have learnt in class to visualise their understanding and look at their learning from a different perspective.
- Administer feedback questionnaires to assess participants' satisfaction with the organisation of training activities, training, content, didactic methods and resources – or, if needed, organise oral feedback sessions.
- Use of feedback questionnaires to explore users' perceptions of the improvement of their PSL competence and the benefits of the MASTER experience for their future life – or, if needed, organise oral feedback sessions.

Ideally, each learner should have a dedicated facilitator or team of facilitators for the monitoring to ensure continuity of feedback. This builds a relationship of trust between the learners and facilitators, which is, for many learners, a central determinant for their motivation to continue a learning programme.

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[7] For instance, QPCC - Questionario di Percezione delle proprie Competenze e Convinzioni, Competence Cards for Immigration Counselling, Competency assessment cards for low-skilled adults, Vi@ exploration and ProfilPass

1.6. ADAPT THE PROGRAMME AND TOOLS, WHERE NECESSARY, AND REMAIN FLEXIBLE TO ANY UNFORESEEN CHANGES AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Even though adult educators and practitioners can select from a wide range of tools and methods available for training PSL competences and self-assessment, the MASTER piloting phase showed that these tools and methods require adaptation for new target groups. In some instances, and for some target groups, the identified tools and methods might not be suitable altogether, for instance when working with refugees who do not yet have the language skills needed to do self-assessment procedures. Some methods and tools might also be perceived as belittling by learners or either too low or too high in terms of education level required to understand the methods and tools.

Stakeholders consulted during the MASTER project, therefore, said that adapting (and developing) new tools and methods is key for a successful implementation of PSL programmes. A thorough cataloguing of existing tools and methods, as done in the MASTER project, is perceived as very useful; however, it also points out gaps in tools and methods for certain groups of learners. The tools and methods collected and analysed in the framework of the MASTER project can, therefore, guide adult education providers and organisations in the design and implementation of new programmes. However, the catalogue of tools and methods should be adapted and expanded according to the needs of the provider and organisation and their respective target groups.

Where the monitoring of the learning progress of learners shows that a particular programme is not working as it should, the programme needs to be revisited and adapted according to the needs of the learners. External circumstances can also force providers to change learning programmes – a good example is the Covid-19 pandemic where most learning programmes had to be moved online from one day to the other. These changes can mean a great challenge to institutions, educators and other practitioners, especially when working with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds that may also be digitally excluded. Working with alternative means of communication, such as social media, WhatsApp groups and similar tools can help (to a certain degree) to continue learning pathways and to monitor learning progress. However, these methods are generally more suitable for learners from less disadvantaged backgrounds and with good basic skills, including digital skills.

Not least, while PSL competences were emphasised as the core competences by all stakeholders included in the consultations in the framework of the MASTER project, it needs to be stressed that there should be leeway in the interpretation of these competences. The stakeholders found resilience, stress management and the ability to work in a team particularly important, and all of these can be understood as part of the personal, social and learning-to-learn competences promoted in the MASTER programme. A systemic look at learning – including individual learning needs of the learners – is essential.

1.7. PARTNER UP WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS AND BUILD NEW PARTNERSHIPS

To make the MASTER programme relevant for learners as well as to reach out to the diverse target groups, cooperation with other stakeholders and building new partnerships is key. Their insights into the specific needs of learners is invaluable for designing and carrying out programmes that not only attract learners, but also to retain them and raise their interest in further learning. Moreover, formal adult education providers should also be involved: for example, in Italy, Public Local Adult Education Centres (Centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti) could integrate the PSL competence in their reference curricula.

Concretely, this means, for instance, cooperating with public employment services to reach out to long-term unemployed and to make sure that their newly acquired competences through a PSL programme will be appreciated on the labour market. Partnerships with social services and immigration services can be equally beneficial when working with immigrants and people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Cooperation with local authorities can promote the implementation of PSL programmes, as they are often in a central place to provide funding or do fundraising, for instance through the European Social Fund+. This might, however, require additional capacity-building efforts among and with stakeholders to create new learning cultures within communities.

1.8. ENSURE SMOOTH TRANSITIONS BETWEEN NON-FORMAL ADULT LEARNING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Stakeholders consulted in the MASTER project noted that community education classes do not always allow for progression of learners and are rather promoting a circular form of learning. Joined up learning experiences, for instance in a regional or local cooperation between community learning centres, continuing education and training providers and tertiary education, can ensure a smooth transition between non-formal adult learning and continuing education and training.

PSL competences as the core competences of every learner and understanding learning as a continuous process from early stages to more advanced and in-depth skills and learning can build the foundations of learning programmes and pathways where learners can move up and forward in their own pace. Module-learning and recognition of new milestones, for instance through open badges or micro-credentials, can be a possibility to promote self-directed learning. For specialised bridge programmes that can be implemented transnationally, stakeholders consulted in the project recommended programmes that are effective and efficient in use of time and resources:

1) Specific target group

2) Clear and realistic objectives/reflection on the actual needs of the target groups

3) An educational offer that focuses on PSL competences and is designed with the specific target group in mind (which competences may need more focus, what language to use - should we use "simpler" language, what resources do we need, do we need cultural mediators, etc.):

- Short, planned, learning sessions
- Easily translated into other languages
- Assisting the target group to be learning through self-directed study
- Some elements of digital skills to be included
- Guidance by experienced, well-trained staff
- No necessity for expensive kit or equipment
- Deliverable via mobile phone if possible

4) Accessibility: Consider whether the target group can participate (whether the venue is accessible; whether the event is online - do the participants have sufficient digital skills, what skills do we have?)

5) List of stakeholders and partners who will support the delivery of the programme - ideally involving government agencies (who work with adults and have their contacts).

6) Evaluation programmes: Will and how will the adult learners' process be evaluated? What kind of recognition will they receive?

Bridge programmes, to be effective, must reflect the needs of specific target groups and be designed with this in mind. For example, PSL programmes designed for migrants needs to focus more on intercultural communication, understanding the customs and working environment in a specific country, communicating with locals, etc. This would most likely not be the case if the target group were natives. The same applies to the long-term unemployed - PSL programmes should put more emphasis on the skills that are needed in the labour market today and that the target group may not have.

1.9. ADVOCATE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PSL PROGRAMMES

This is a point that seems self-evident. Yet, implementing PSL competences in adult learning programmes is not a given, especially where providers are dependent on public funding structures and have to follow certain frameworks and programmes to get funding. Adult learning providers and organisations have - also due to partly precarious funding structures - increasingly become advocacy organisations in recent years.

The importance of advocacy at the local, regional and national level cannot be underestimated in order to give adult learning and education space in the political debate and to point out necessary improvements in support and financing structures. These relate primarily to the need for structural financial support – that is, operating grants – to enable adult learning providers and organisations to build the necessary infrastructure and invest in staff training to deliver high quality adult learning and education. This is not possible for most providers and organisations through project and programme funding alone. Especially when working with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, learning programmes should come at no costs for learners.

Depending on political prioritisation, adult learning programmes are typically funded that are assumed to have a benefit - ideally measurable - for the labour market and/or society as a whole. Getting PSL competences and funding for such programmes on the political agenda is likely to require advocacy in some regions and countries to convince decision-makers of their usefulness.

To raise awareness about the importance of PSL competences and the need for structural support, adult learning providers and organisations can

- Raise awareness of how PSL programmes complement existing non-formal learning programmes in a meaningful way and prepare learners for further education and the labour market through infographics, letters, social media campaigns etc.

- Raise awareness about relevant policy strategies and initiatives existing at the European, and potentially also the national, regional and local levels, that support the implementation of PSL programmes

- Reach out to key stakeholders, such as public employment services, social services, local/regional/national authorities, employers and social partners – and, if possible, bring them together to discuss opportunities and requirements of the sector

- Find allies among these key stakeholders who support your message: The awareness of such programmes could be enhanced by closely cooperating with governmental institutions – better cooperation is needed in general between adult education centres (especially if they are not public) and public entities

- Use testimonials, i.e. (former) learners, who can explain why PSL programmes work and which benefits they have brought to them (this could be done through videos, podcasts, blog texts, social media posts, etc.)

Any evidence on how and why PSL programmes work, should ideally be shared through adult learning and education networks so that other providers and organisations can use it for their own advocacy work. Evidence is not limited to scientific research; it also includes feedback from learners that has been analysed and systematised, and it includes, as mentioned above, testimonials from individual learners.

More funding would also be welcome, not only from European funds but also from local resources. However, to achieve this, awareness of the importance of PSL competences and their key role in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways on the political agenda or in policy-making at national level needs to be raised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. POLICY-MAKERS

2.1. MAINSTREAM, AND RAISE AWARENESS ON, THE DEVELOPMENT OF PSL COMPETENCES

Policy makers at all levels of governance should mainstream and promote the use of the MASTER model to assess, develop and recognise the Personal, Social and Learning to learn (PSL) competences in European, national, regional and local strategies, policies and programmes on adult education, in particular in Upskilling Pathways for learners with a lower level of education attainment. It is, therefore, crucial that the MASTER model for PSL competences is embedded in national and local adult education and learning systems.

Moreover, the assessment and development of PSL competences should also be included in national and local strategies for social inclusion, recognising the enabling function of these skills to empower adults to reach their full potential and become active members of the society and their communities.

One of the stakeholders consulted in the framework of the MASTER project – a policy maker – said that "adults from the target groups, in addition to not being aware of their skills, most of the time also do not know the possibilities and training opportunities they have to meet their goals." Guidance, therefore, plays a key role, to help adult learners navigate existing learning opportunities. PSL competences are at the essence of successful guidance.

Finally, policy makers should promote awareness and understanding of PSL competences and their importance, related testing and learning opportunities with dedicated communication campaigns. In this context, the dissemination and promotion of tools for the self-assessment of PSL competences to all relevant stakeholders is key.

Stakeholders in the national consultations agreed that many educators already teach PSL competences but do not call them PSL competences because they are not very popular or mainstream. Therefore, trainers/educators need training to better understand PSL competences (what is it, why teach it, case studies of organisations teaching PSL competences and the impact on learners, etc.) and how to update their existing educational programmes according to PSL competences.

At the European level, the completion of the MASTER model across borders takes the cross-border exchange of best practices further, and it should be valued and recognised accordingly. In line with the emerging EU policies on micro-credentials, policymakers should create a framework for skills recognition and their mutual recognition. Lastly, regional and local policy makers should engage regularly with their communities and with community leaders.

2.2. PROVIDE ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR PSL PROGRAMMES

To guarantee the sustainability, accessibility and quality of PSL programmes, policy makers should allocate targeted long-term and structural funding for projects and initiatives implementing the MASTER programme for PSL competences, also by investing in high-quality and accessible infrastructures for non-formal learning activities. Additional funding should be provided at the European level for cross-border bridging programs, empowering learners to complete their PSL competences programme partly or fully in physical and/or virtual mobility.

Sustainability of funding is key to promote PSL competences and learning experiences that bridge non-formal adult learning and further education. Stakeholders consulted during the MASTER project said that the target population needs finance as there will always be a need for upskilling pathways. Much of the funding available is a casualty of 'short-termism', in one-to-three-year blocks which does not lend itself to embedding in the minds of adult learning practitioners, never mind the target groups themselves. All awareness-raising activities for adult education professionals and adult learners are useless if funding is not sustainable and learning programmes need to be adapted according to changing policy priorities and budgets.

Stakeholders consulted in the MASTER project said that current expenditure levels for adult learning would not be sufficient to allow for the implementation of the MASTER programme in its entirety. While the self-assessment of initial PSL competences at the beginning of the programme can be integrated into existing programmes relatively easily, the implementation of the training modules proposed in the MASTER plan would require additional funding. In order to unleash the potential of this initiative, policy makers should provide resources for:

- Scientific research on the MASTER model and its impact, especially in the framework of longitudinal studies that study the long term consequences of the development of PSL competences on employment outcomes, health and well-being, social inclusion;
- Adequate technological infrastructure for adult learning providers;
- Equal access to digital learning technology for adult learners;
- Promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in the implementation of projects, initiatives and research activities, including for the development of specific trainings for trainers and resources;
- Projects and studies on the implementation of the MASTER model for other key competences;
- Training of adult learning practitioners on PSL competences and the MASTER model.

2.3. FACILITATE PARTNERSHIPS, NETWORKS AND EXCHANGES FOR PSL PROGRAMMES

The MASTER project has demonstrated the effectiveness of a coordinated, diverse and complementary network of actors for the advancement of PSL programmes. Building on these positive results, policy makers should strive to create strategic alliances and partnerships at all levels of governance, while empowering adult learners to share their input and provide feedback. European actors should facilitate the cross-border exchange of best practices on the implementation of the MASTER model. In addition, national, regional and local policy makers have a central role to play in bringing together public institutions, non-formal ALE providers, civil society, social partners, adult learners community leaders and other stakeholders. These processes prevent the development of a silo mentality, guaranteeing permeability and exchange between different strands of adult learning, that is, from non-formal to formal adult learning, such as from community learning, to vocational education and training, to give learners the possibility to build on their competences and to strengthen motivation for further learning by providing perspectives along the learning pathway.

Online hubs can host such exchanges: policy makers should sustain the creation of free online learning environments for, among others, the virtual self-assessment of PSL competences, bringing programs, exchange of views, data sharing and feedback, prioritizing accessibility in the design of these features.

In order to involve academic and research institutions, policy makers should make the data that they possess open and public, facilitating longitudinal studies and providing administrative data (e.g. from tax, labour and social authorities, educational institutions, national health systems) to assess the impact of the initiative, while implementing the adequate guarantees for the protection of personal data, including the consent of the learners, anonymization and pseudonymization practices, etc. Especially at the regional and local level, policy makers should gather and exchange qualitative and quantitative feedback from learners, trainers, ALE institutions and relevant stakeholders.

2.4. NSURE FULL ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION OF PSL PROGRAMMES

The design of PSL strategies and programmes should actively promote full accessibility, equality, diversity and inclusion. To this end, policy makers should implement well-funded initiatives and studies, developing resources and specific trainings for educators. Several measures could support the meaningful inclusion of learners from all backgrounds in PSL programmes, including the following:

- If labour law and regulations envisage the right to (paid) educational leaves or other benefits for adult learners in employment, policy makers should ensure that workers can enjoy these rights when participating in the assessment and development of PSL competences, in cooperation with social partners and adult learners. If these rights are not guaranteed already, government and local and regional authorities should introduce subsidies that enable workers to access these learning opportunities, with special consideration to learners in precarious working conditions, in cooperation with social partners and adult learners.
- Access to relevant services for learners with caregiving and parenting responsibilities. If these services are unavailable, policymakers should support learners with alternative benefits, e.g. vouchers for baby sitting and care professional services.
- Funding and human and learning resources for adult learners with disabilities and special educational needs, ensuring that both in-person and online environments are accessible for learners with a disability.

- Design, disseminate and promote the exchange of educational resources for self-assessment and bridging programmes in the national language(s), and – according to the needs of learners – in minority and regional languages, including in the idioms spoken by learners with migrant backgrounds that do not master the local language, ensuring that the language is accessible for learners with basic or limited literacy skills.
- Offer the MASTER programme to job seekers in collaboration with national employment agencies, with due consideration to the needs of the learners and the additional responsibilities carried by them (e.g. caregiving, job applications).
- Access to digital technology, e.g. internet connection and IT equipment, and support to prevent digital poverty from becoming a barrier to learners.

Regional and local policy makers, in particular, should ensure that ALE providers are positioned to offer the MASTER model to learners living in underserved neighbourhoods or rural and remote areas, working together with local institutions, including libraries and schools, to give adult learners free access to internet and IT facilities. Finally, local actors should facilitate intergenerational learning and community building, by enabling partnerships and the involvement of a diverse range of associations, institutions and groups in the design, promotion, implementation and evaluation of MASTER programs in the local context.

2.5. INTEGRATE PSL COMPETENCES IN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL GUIDANCE STRATEGIES

Whereas a few years ago guidance was seen primarily as a labour market tool to guide job seekers into sectors with a high demand for labour, the concept has now been greatly expanded to include more and more the education and lifelong learning sectors. National and regional guidance strategies play a central role in helping learners find the learning opportunities that suit them, as well as opportunities for validation and recognition of their skills and knowledge.

The promotion and integration of PSL competences in guidance strategies are central. They are the "meta"-skills (or transversal skills) that everyone - whether low or highly educated - needs to be able to develop personally and socially, and to be able to acquire new competences in a targeted way. This requires a greater awareness of these competences among political decision-makers and those leading (public) employment services. At the same time, this also requires training of guidance staff in educational as well as job market-oriented settings.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership has launched an initiative called "My Skills, My Future". It is a suite of resources aimed at supporting individuals in identifying the skills they have gained from non-formal and informal learning. Advisers from a wide range of organisations can use these resources with individuals over one or more sessions to identify their transferable skills through a series of practical and engaging activities. These skills are then bench-marked against the SCQF to help individuals understand the level of their informal learning.

The resource also helps them to develop a set of competency based statements that can be used in a CV, to access further training or to use in job applications. Individuals can then work with advisers to agree on a future plan of action based on their strengths.

(https://scqf.org.uk/support/support-for-educators-and-advisers/using-the-my-skills-my-future-resource-with-learners/)

2.6. LEVERAGE THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PSL COMPETENCES

The MASTER project has highlighted the untapped potential of universities in the development of PSL competences. Higher education institutions can make a fundamental contribution to the dissemination and practices of lifelong learning. Universities should develop actions that promote the widening of access and training throughout the life span, as a new overall training strategy[8]. This strategy should also include collaboration with all training agencies operating in the field of adult education in the formal and non-formal contexts, as well as with those actors - including companies and third sector entities - in which people mature competences that can be recognized and validated according to the recommendations of the European Union on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the consequent Guidelines published by Cedefop.[9]

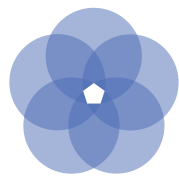In particular, the commitment of universities to lifelong learning as part of their third mission should also include the activation of collaborative networks for the promotion and development of key competences among adults. Encouraging the development of basic skills among adults, including non-cognitive ones and learning-to-learn, would in fact offer a great benefit to the community. Studies show that competences empower people, that higher levels of competences foster social inclusion and promote economic and social mobility, generate economic productivity and create social well-being, and that non-cognitive competences appear malleable even at an older age[10].

The training practices implemented within territorial collaboration networks could greatly benefit from the contribution of universities, in order to ensure a robust scientific foundation, constant evaluation of the learning experience based on critical reflection, constant updating in the light of studies conducted in the academic context, and the availability of adequately trained trainers.

[8] Di Rienzo, P. (2018). Università e terza missione: una nuova prospettiva di sviluppo possibile. In P. Federighi (Eds.), Educazione in età adulta: ricerche, politiche, luoghi e professioni. Firenze: University Press.

[9] European Union. Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning; Cedefop (2015). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 104. http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/008370.

[10] Kautz, T., Heckmann, J.J., Diris, R., ter Weel, B. & Borghans, L. (2014). Fostering and Measuring Skills: Improving Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills to Promote Lifetime Success. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 110. Paris: OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/5jxsr7vr78f7-en.

MASTER

**Measures for Adults to Support
Transition to further Education
and Re-skilling opportunities**