



**Recognition**  
RPL LOFT  
RCC

Assessment

Accreditation  
APL  
APCL

**Evaluation**  
Validation of prior learning

**Certification**  
APEL VNFIL





The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) brings together 30 European networks working in education and training. Together, they cover all sectors of education and training including networks for higher education, vocational education and training, adult education and popular education; networks for students, school heads, parents, HRD professionals, teachers and trainers.

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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

## edito

EUCIS-LLL gathers 30 European networks working in the various fields of education and training in order to promote lifelong learning. We consider that the validation of non-formal and informal learning should be a top priority in the modernisation of our education and training systems. It is a concrete tool for lifelong learning. It contributes to offer more flexible learning pathways for European citizens and helps individuals, institutions and employers to identify and take into account individual progression and development in personal and professional pathways. We also see validation has a way to broaden access to education and qualifications, by offering a second chance or a relevant alternative to “non-traditional” learners.

We acknowledge that recent years have seen increased emphasis on the relevance of learning that takes place outside formal systems and on the ways and strategies to recognise and validate it. Validation has an important formative role in motivating and leading to further learning but not all countries have national legislation in place in order to promote and regulate its use. The aim of this LLL-Mag is to give an overview of policy developments at national and European level.

Indeed, the validation and recognition of prior learning has been a priority for our platform but also for many international institutions and particularly the European Union. The European Commission is about to publish a proposal for a Council Recommendation on the promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning to encourage progress in that field. Many reference documents, guidelines, pilot projects and research are already available. However they remain little known by education and training actors in the field. In December 2011, EUCIS-LLL organised a public hearing during which we confronted this political will to national realities. We observed progress in many countries but also huge discrepancies in the path to implementing validation mechanisms. A real political commitment alongside proper resources is needed.

This magazine aims at providing key data on validation, examples of countries' profiles, interviews of experts but also of learners to give an insight about recent developments in Europe linked to the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

I hope you will enjoy the reading!

Audrey Frith,

EUCIS-LLL Director

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### **Before we start...**

For the purposes of this "LLL-Mag", we use the term validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). It encompasses different types of known processes: the recognition of prior learning (RPL), Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL); Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL); Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL); Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); Accreditation of Prior Learning and Achievement (APL&A); Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC); and, more recently Learning Outside Formal Teaching (LOFT). These various definitions already give an idea about the complexity of the processes under scrutiny as well as of the diversity of learning settings in Europe.

APL  
LOFT  
RPL  
APEL  
VNFIL  
APCL

Accreditation  
Evaluation  
Certification  
Assessment  
Recognition

## What's the current situation in Europe?

The validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is a fashionable topic attracting interests of stakeholders from different sectors of education and training. At the EU level, several initiatives have been taken in order to push forward the process of validation and build pathways between non-formal, informal and formal learning. Common European principles and guidelines have been established, peer learning and exchange of good practice have been promoted through a regularly updated inventory of policy and practice across Europe and through the provision of financial support for projects from EU lifelong learning and youth programmes. The Europe 2020 strategy explicitly calls for 'the promotion of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning' under its Youth on the Move flagship initiative. In this sense, by the beginning of 2012 the European Commission should launch a communication on this topic.

VNFIL is recognised as an important tool in the context of the current economic crisis as well as in the pursuit of economic and social goals at European level. However, in Europe VNFIL is organised differently across member states and consequently there are enormous differences within its development and implementation among European countries. In general, we can distinguish three groups of countries:

- The ones that have put in place national systems making validation an integral part of their education and training and employment policies (i.e. France, Portugal); when this is the case it is seen as another nationally endorsed route to recognition of learning outcomes and possibly to certification.

- The ones that have introduced validation partially, putting in place legal and institutional frameworks for future development in sub-sectors of education and training or in the employment sector;
- And a third group of countries where validation remains low on the political agenda and an overall strategy is lacking and there are few concrete initiatives.

This classification has been further extended in the 2010 CEDEFOP inventory to four categories (see table below).

However, it is important to keep in mind that this categorisation provides only an overall assessment, because the situation on validation is multi-faceted, with different degrees of process and development in different sectors. Moreover, each country applies its own strategy. Sometimes we can observe a centralised approach, which leads to the implementation at national level, whereas some countries do not have any national or regional strategies and evidence 'bottom-up' approaches where local educational institutions and workplace initiatives have been developed. There are also different ministries, institutions and bodies responsible for the implementation, control and award of validation. For individuals, outcomes of validation are crucial. In some countries, an applicant can obtain a full diploma whereas in a majority of countries, an applicant can only benefit from access to education or from credit exemptions.

To understand better the process of VNFIL and differences within the European Union, we prepared a short description of validation in four European countries.

### Indicative classification of countries (CEDEFOP)

High	Medium-High	Medium-Low	Low
Finland, <u>France</u> , Netherlands, Norway, <u>Portugal</u>	Denmark, Germany, Romania, Spain, Sweden, UK (England, Wales, Northern <u>Ireland</u> , Scotland)	Austria, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Czech Republic, Estonia, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Liechtenstein, <u>Lithuania</u> , Slovakia, Slovenia	Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Turkey

*Source: 2010 update of the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning - Final Report  
«The focus of this classification is on relative, rather than absolute, levels of performance.»*



## IRELAND

With the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999) steps towards the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) have been taken. The Act provides a framework for a life-wide approach to learning where qualifications are “that which are conferred, granted or given by an awarding body which records that a learner has acquired a standard of knowledge, skill or competence”. The Act itself did not legislate specifically for a detailed RPL system but rather brought into being a range of institutions which through their policies and procedures has ensured that RPL is now a key issue and one which is being addressed by all sectors of the educational system. The Act gave birth to the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) that has a responsibility to develop the use of RPL and to coordinate validation practices between awarding bodies and sectors and to ensure that the developments take place in a coherent manner across different educational sectors and awarding bodies. This agency is to become soon the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland, QQAAI. While RPL for access, and credit/exemptions, is generally practised, the concept of making full awards on the basis of RPL is a relatively new one for Ireland.

### General process

In theory, if an individual wants to get his/her qualifications recognised, he/she can contact a Professional Development Advisor via the competent authorities and complete a written application form to determine his/her suitability for the scheme. If the applicant is eligible, he/she will be registered to join the scheme, and a mentor will be appointed to guide and help her/him. The applicant prepares a Portfolio of Evidence based on the syllabus, which sets out the standards that must be met. The applicant attends an interview/exam/practical skills demonstration in front of a Committee. If the standard is met, the applicant will be awarded a National Certificate. However this process is not fully implemented yet. The list of awarding bodies can be found on the NQAI website (<http://www.nqai.ie/>).



## FRANCE

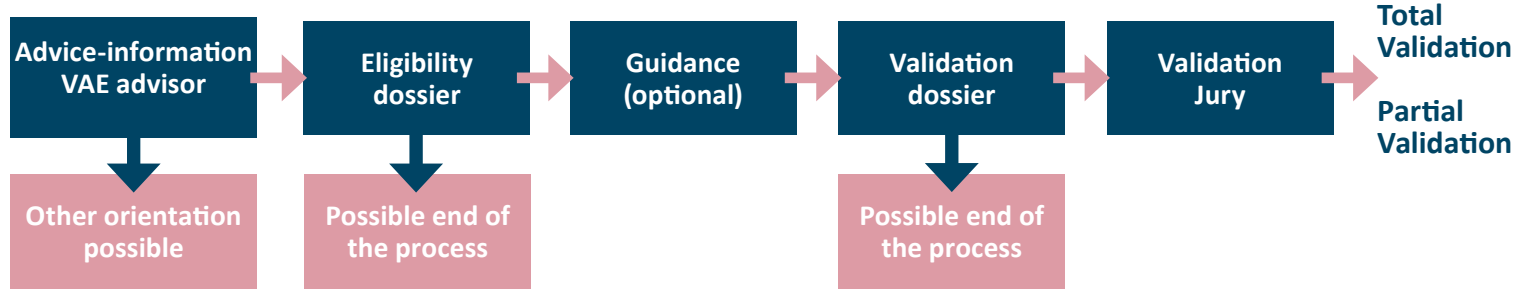
Recognition practices have been fostered in the French educational landscape as a result of a law on validation of professional experience, passed in 1992. Since 2002, the validation system has enabled the validation of prior learning and full or partial acquisition of diplomas and qualifications. French regions have developed information centres, while validation procedures have been drawn up by Ministries and validated by the National Committee for Professional Certification (CNCP). Another tool for validation is the Skills Audit (bilan de compétences), which enables learners to reflect upon their career paths, achievements and available training opportunities. In 2006, the Committee for the Development of Validation of Experience was established to investigate new developments in validation. In higher education, practices have been institutionalised due to the Law of Social Modernisation of 2002, which enables full exemption from coursework through the recognition of three years of professional experience.

### General process

If an individual wants to validate his/her qualifications, he/she can directly contact the institution that awards the qualification or an information centre. Any public or private body can be considered as a legitimate awarding authority if it offers qualifications that are classified in the National Qualifications Directory (RNCP). The next step is to gather material in order to assess the eligibility of the candidate. If eligible, they will be asked to prepare an application to present their experience. If needed, a mentor will be appointed to guide the candidate. Finally, a jury will decide whether or not to award the diploma or qualification. In cases when the applicant does not receive a full validation, he or she can continue to receive individual guidance until full validation can be obtained. The total number of diplomas delivered via VAE (Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience [Accreditation of Prior Learning or APL]) by universities is approximately 4000, and has remained stable since 2007; over half of these (2200) are full diplomas. Information about validation can be found on the government website: <http://www.vae.gouv.fr/>

## The French VAE system

Candidate (3 years experience)

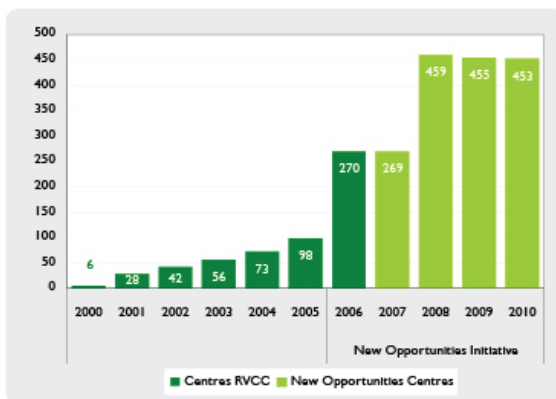




## PORTUGAL

In Portugal, the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) has been taken up as a relevant political issue. The Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) process was implemented in 2001. A main political shift occurred in 2006-2007 with the creation of a National Qualifications System (NQS) and a widened scope of the RVCC process that includes recognition of scholar competencies (basic and secondary level) and vocational education. Within this context, the New Opportunities Centres were created to provide qualifications to the population, through the RVCC processes and through qualified training. One million adults enrolled into one of the 459 bodies across the territory to formalise their qualifications in 2010. The Centers are managed by the National Agency for Qualifications (NAQ) that also coordinates the National Qualifications Catalogue for lower qualifications equivalences. The National ANQ set up in 2007, is the body responsible for the coordination of the national system of validation. Several other bodies are involved into validation practices.

453 New Opportunities Centres all over the country by the year 2010



### General process

Opportunities Centres are the main interlocutors for individuals; they contribute to make the efforts made in terms of recognition visible to the population and became central in the RVCC process. There, an applicant obtains information about his/her possibilities on VNFIL. The next step for the applicant is to make a portfolio under supervision of a mentor. After that, the applicant presents it in front of a team from the centre (in case of basic and secondary education level). The next stage is the validation by a Jury composed of persons from the centre and an external evaluator. The process ends with a full certification (the individuals achieve a qualification level) or a partial certification (some competences are certified but not enough to achieve a qualification level); in this last situation, individuals are enrolled in a training course in order to conclude the qualification pathway. But even when a full certification is awarded in the end of the

RVCC process, the individuals are encouraged to continue their studies. Thousands of low-skilled adults therefore had their qualifications acknowledged thanks to the New Opportunities Centres but it seems that progress needs to be made in the field of higher education where practice remains very difficult, expensive and slow. Learn more on <http://www.anqep.gov.pt/>



## LITHUANIA

No national strategy in Lithuania is dedicated to validation of non-formal and informal learning – the practical implementation has been rather slow and so far based on ad-hoc initiatives. However several laws have been adopted such as the National Education Strategy 2003-2012 (2003) that proposes flexible structures for a holistic approach to education and a focus on learning outcomes via a recognition system for untraditional pathways. A new edition of the Law on Education passed in 2003 set out key elements to formally certify competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning. Several regional, national and European initiatives have also been implemented. Validation practices are managed in a partnership approach. The Ministry of Education is involved in confirming final qualification examinations and determining the equivalence of education levels attained abroad. Public bodies participate in the process and other actors play a decisive role such as vocational schools and training institutions (that give support to applicants), colleges or social partners. Furthermore, several universities have been developing their own validation systems and have used EU funding to experiment these systems during the last few years.

### General process

Individuals with at least one year's work experience and who are over 18 can apply for the recognition of competences by registering in a licensed vocational school that examines the documents provided by the individual. The student and school agree on a timetable of courses, credit tests and consultations and when the results are positive, the student can take the final qualification exam together with those from formal education, meaning that informal outcomes can only be validated through formal procedures. Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded with the same qualification certificate or qualified worker diploma. Assessment and recognition services are paid by the student or by his/her employer (in some cases by the Labour Exchange for unemployed people). Although the Education Strategy aimed at reaching 15% of the adult population involved in education and training by 2012, the target may not be reached. Weak individual financial capacities and a lack of information have been identified as the main problems.

## EXAMPLES OF EUROPEAN PROJECTS

### *How to get EU funding for your projects?*

The majority of projects are funded by the Leonardo da Vinci Programme within the Lifelong Learning Programme. Specific calls of proposals can be published to support pilot projects. The European Social Fund can also fund projects at the national or transnational level. To find relevant information, visit the European Commission website and/or contact your national agencies.

### *Examples of European projects*

#### IDEAL - Identifier, Evaluer et Valider



IDEAL is an ongoing project, which intends to meet two objectives. Firstly, it is aimed at transferring and sharing the French methodology for the Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience or VAE (Accreditation of Prior Learning or APL), in particular to reduce the noticeable shortage of teachers seen in some European countries, by reducing the training period of adults wishing to take up teaching. Secondly, the project aims at testing and applying this methodology to the field of the continuing education of teachers. Highlighting the

subject-specific knowledge and skills needed to fulfil the role of a teacher will ensure the development of a continuing education programme for in-service teachers. In line with these commitments, partners are expecting to achieve the following results: firstly they planned to issue a "State of the Art" report (2011), which will be followed by the development of guides and tools for the accreditation of prior learning (2012-2013) and, lastly, the developed methodology will be tested by the partners (2012-2013). This project benefited from European Commission funding. Learn more: [www.ideal-project.eu](http://www.ideal-project.eu)

#### OBSERVAL - European Observatory of validation of non-formal and informal learning



OBSERVAL was a three-year project (2007-2010) that aimed to create an online platform and database - the European Observatory. This resource website has been regularly updated, providing easy access to all materials and resources produced on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in European countries. Moreover, OBSERVAL has developed a strong network of experts dealing with the practice of recognising non-

formal and informal learning. The consortium, coordinated by EUCEN, bestowed great care on involving partners outside higher education from all sectors. The consortium consisted of 27 partner institutions, with representatives coming from 21 European Member States and 3 EFTA countries, covering all educational sectors (HE, VET, AE, 3rd sector) with close links to approximately 250 validation experts through the National Working Groups. Learn more: [www.observal.org](http://www.observal.org)

#### Flexi-Path - Flexible professionalisation pathways for adult educator



Flexi-Path is a completed project intended to facilitate the transparency and recognition of adult educator qualifications across Europe making them comparable by having a common reference (EQF) and a common master adult educator profile which promotes the idea of mobility through standardised educational programmes and qualification levels. In addition, Flexi-Path enhanced the recognition and valorisation of adult educator learning that has occurred within non-formal

and informal settings by means of a validation instrument. Flexi-Path was aimed at adult educators who had acquired specific competences outside a formal setting, which simply did not exist sometimes or the job they were doing did not require a formal qualification in adult education as a prerequisite. With the help of this validation instrument, their awareness on the knowledge and skills they have in present can be raised and they will be able to plan their further professional development.

Learn more <http://www.flexi-path.eu/>

### *Koen Nomden, DG Education Culture, European Commission*



*Koen Nomden is a Policy Officer “Skills and Qualifications” at the DG Education and Culture at the European Commission. Previously he was the Head of Sector “Erasmus Mundus” at the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. Before working for the EU, he was a*

*researcher at the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Antwerp.*

#### ***Is there a shared definition on validation in Europe? How does the European Commission understand it?***

There exists a complicated definition of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Its key components are that validation is a process of confirmation by an authorised body of acquired learning outcomes, against a relevant standard, irrespective of the setting where the learning took place. The steps of validation are: identification, documentation, assessment and certification.

#### ***Why is validation a priority of the Commission?***

It is a priority because it can bring important benefits for individuals (educational, personal, and economic), for the economy and employers and for the society at large. For example it allows citizens to achieve a higher qualification, it motivates individuals to learn and it can give a second chance to those who left the formal education and training system. On the labour market it can lead to a better skills matching, based on more complete information on what individuals know, understand and are able to do. Without validation, relevant knowledge, skills and competences remain invisible, undervalued and underused. The idea behind validation is to make non-formally and informally acquired skills visible, so that they can be (better) used. However it remains the choice of the individual to validate his/her skills.

For the Commission, validation is a priority under the EU 2020 Strategy on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It is seen as a lever to improve Europe’s competitiveness in

times of fast changing knowledge, skills and competence requirements for a knowledge economy. It is all the more important since it contributes to the EU Headline targets under the EU 2020 Strategy on early school leaving (< 10 %), tertiary education attainment (>40 %), employment rate (> 75 %), poverty reduction (< 20 %).

#### ***What are the main recommendations of the Commission to Member States to make progress?***

Under the Recommendation under preparation, Member States will be recommended to take practical measures that will mainstream validation of non-formal and informal learning. The proposed measures are complementary to the European Qualification Framework which promotes validation, but which does not provide indications on how to validate. An important aspect of the recommendation is that Member States should allow that qualifications cannot only be obtained on the basis of formal learning, but also on the basis of validation of non-formal and informal learning. It is important however that for both ways to obtain qualifications, the same standards in terms of learning outcomes are applied. In relation to this Member States should ensure that guidance is available and that procedures and standards are quality assured. Member States will further be recommended to create entitlements for individuals, e.g. if there is a prospect of unemployment. There is also a focus on disadvantaged groups for which usually specific measures in terms of awareness raising and guidance will be necessary. A very important part of the draft recommendation will be the involvement of social partners and all other relevant stakeholders. Finally it is foreseen that Member States promote the use of credit systems (ECTS, ECVET) of Europass and of Youthpass.

Regarding the Commission itself it is foreseen to regularly update the European Guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning as well as the European Inventory on validation. Furthermore the European Social Fund as well as the future Erasmus for All programme should provide funds for validation projects.

#### ***Is the need to move this agenda forward shared by all the member states? Do you think all EU citizen will benefit from validation by 2020?***

The European Inventory on validation (2010 update)



shows that in all Member States validation is now progressing. Furthermore in the Bruges Communiqué the Member States agreed to develop and promote, no later than 2015, the use of procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning supported by EQF/NQFs. If the Recommendation is adopted by the Council and is followed up by Member States in practice, there is a good chance that EU citizens who wish to do so will benefit from validation of their non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes. However, validation of non-formal and informal learning should not be seen as a substitute for formal education and training paths.

### ***Can the development of national qualifications frameworks support validation processes?***

The European Qualifications Framework (2008) has created a new dynamic in the European Lifelong Learning area. Under the EQF a European reference framework for all types and levels of qualifications, described in learning outcomes, was set up. The Member States are currently referencing their national qualification levels to the eight European qualification levels. All have chosen to do this by first setting up a National Qualifications Framework. Under the EQF process validation of non-formal and informal learning should be promoted. To this effect in their National Qualifications frameworks Member States are supposed to indicate in which way qualifications can be obtained on the basis of non-formal and informal learning experiences as well. The EQF process, including national qualifications frameworks, is very important for the validation process. A key element is its focus on learning outcomes instead of learning inputs such as the duration of studies, because this makes it possible to treat qualifications obtained on the basis of formal learning and on the basis of non-formal and informal learning in the same way.

### ***What are the available tools of the Commission to support educational actors working in this field?***

Funding for validation is currently available through the ESF and through the Lifelong Learning programme. This should also be the case under the future ESF and the future Erasmus for All programme. Furthermore the existing credit systems for higher education (ECTS) and for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), provide support for validation. Finally one has to mention Europass, which is a tool for the documentation of learning experiences, including those resulting from non-formal and informal learning. Under the current Youth in Action programme Youthpass contributes as well by providing documentation of learning experiences acquired under the programme.



### **European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning**

The European inventory is a tool that provides an updated overview over good practices in the area of validation and is addressing the needs of both policy makers and practitioners working in the field. The European Inventory is closely connected to the European Guidelines on validation and exemplifies in a concrete way the principles outlined in these.

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/>

### **European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning**

The Guidelines provide expert advice to be used voluntarily by stakeholders at national and local levels. The aim is to contribute to developing diverse and high quality, cost efficient validation approaches in Europe, thus supporting lifelong and life-wide learning.

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/>

### **European Qualifications' Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)**

The EQF acts as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning. Because the approach is based on learning outcomes, it provides the scope to develop an integrated approach to the promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning. In particular with the implementation of the EQF Recommendation, most Member states are developing comprehensive national qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes, a development that lays the ground for the implementation of validation systems at national level.

<http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/>

### **European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)**

ECTS is the credit system for higher education used in the European Higher Education Area, involving the 46 countries engaged in the Bologna Process. It aims at the establishment of a system of credits as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. ECTS credits are a key element of the Bologna Framework for Qualifications, compatible with the EQF. ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes that describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. They relate to level descriptors in national and European qualifications frameworks. Each learning outcome is expressed in

## IS VALIDATION PROGRESSING IN EUROPE?

### Jo Hawley, GHK Consulting



Ms. Hawley is a Senior Consultant at GHK Consulting. She has been involved in updating the 2008 and 2010 versions of the CEDEFOP Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. She previously worked as project manager at ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd.

#### ***You have been monitoring developments in validation the last three years in Europe; do you see an evolution?***

Our work on the latest update of the European Inventory on Validation showed that in many countries, a lot of progress has been made since the previous version of 2006/07. However, the rate of progress varies across the different sectors of education and training, as well as across the countries of Europe, with some making much more progress than others.

Two developments that have helped to support the further evolution of validation processes are the introduction and adoption of a learning outcomes approach to describing qualifications and the introduction in some countries of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). By describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes, learners can be assessed on the basis of what they can do (their skills and competences), rather than what they have done (for example, whether they have participated in a certain number of hours of learning). This makes the process of validation much easier.

However, while progress has been particularly strong in terms of the adoption of the necessary policy frameworks for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the application of validation measures on the ground still faces important institutional, attitudinal and resource-related barriers, except in a minority of countries.

**EUROPEAN INVENTORY**  
ON VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL & INFORMAL LEARNING

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory.aspx>

#### ***What is the added value of validation for individuals, companies and society?***

Validation has a wide range of potential benefits to individuals, companies and society as a whole. The costs and benefits of validation are explored in detail in a thematic report produced for the 2010 Update of the European Inventory. It's not possible to go into great detail here but I would say that for the individual, the key benefits are of course the chance to either acquire a qualification, or take forward a professional or learning pathway, perhaps within a shorter timeframe or at a lower cost than through a traditional learning route. Validation also increases awareness of one's skills and competences and enables individuals to present those to other parties. For companies, there are many potential benefits in terms of staff development, staff recruitment, and change management. For society as a whole, validation presents an opportunity to recognise 'untapped' knowledge, skills and competences among the population and to ensure that people are given cost-effective opportunities to gain recognition for their skills, which can for example help to tackle issues such as unemployment and skills mismatches.

#### ***Validation is a priority of the European Commission but its implementation is unequal in Europe. What are the main challenges / barriers in the countries?***

There are a number of challenges, which of course will depend on the individual context within the country in question. One issue is the lack of dedicated funding allocated to the development or implementation of validation in some countries. The 2010 Inventory showed that only a few countries have an earmarked, or ring-fenced budget for validation. Another issue is the need for a 'cultural shift' to increase the trust among different stakeholders in the value of non-formal and informal learning, as well as the process and outcomes of validation itself. The need to move from pilot and short-term projects to mainstream measures is another issue and there seems to be in some countries a certain variation in the way and extent to which a national policy / strategy is applied at local or provider level. It is also necessary to introduce better systems of collecting data and evaluating existing validation initiatives and practices, to create an evidence base for future developments in this area.

## ***Are stakeholders' involved in the definition of validation processes in the countries?***

The answer to this question varies from country to country and also within a country from sector to sector. It is of course important to involve a range of stakeholders from both the public and private sectors in the development of a system of validation in order to ensure that it is valid and reliable, and buy-in from all parties – including potential users of the system – is important to ensure trust in the system, its processes and outcomes.

## ***Do you think validation is a tool that supports lifelong learning in Europe? How?***

Absolutely. Validation puts the different forms of lifelong learning on a par with formal learning and makes all forms of learning visible. It presents an opportunity for people to return to learning, or to acquire a taste for learning, by giving them a way of understanding and in some cases gaining recognition for their existing skillset. It helps individuals to resume formal learning at their actual level of competence and not simply according to the qualifications they have, which avoids wasteful repetition. Formative validation can therefore help people to plan a learning pathway for the future, while summative validation gives them a chance to acquire a (partial) certificate, which may act as an incentive to take up more learning opportunities in the future. By recognising the skills and competences people have acquired, regardless of the context in which those competences have been obtained, validation can therefore be seen as a tool to support lifelong learning.

## ***With the current economic crisis, what are the good arguments advocating for validation?***

In response to increasing unemployment resulting from the crisis, validation of non-formal and informal learning can offer a basis for jobseekers, or workers at risk of losing their jobs, to make future educational/professional choices and to undertake personal development, by providing to each jobseeker a clearer picture of their strengths and weaknesses. Because validation focuses on the competences acquired, rather than the context in which they have been acquired, it facilitates transitions between economic sectors, which is particularly important in times of economic crisis and restructuring. Validation can thus help people to improve their employability and in some cases present an opportunity to acquire a qualification. Validation can also help employers to make more efficient recruitment decisions. Furthermore, in some instances it is possible that validation is more cost-effective than the provision of a (full) training course and in the context of tight public sector budgets, this may be a considerable advantage.



terms of credits, with a full-time student workload ranging from 1500 to 1800 hours for one academic year, and one credit generally corresponds to 25-30 hours of work.

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ects\\_fr.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ects_fr.htm)

## **European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)**

ECVET is a system for the accumulation and transfer of units of learning outcomes in vocational education and training in Europe. It provides a common methodological framework that can be used to describe qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points. It is not intended to replace national qualification systems, but to achieve better comparability and compatibility among them. ECVET applies to all outcomes obtained by an individual from various education and training pathways that are then transferred, recognised and accumulated in view of achieving a qualification. This initiative makes it easier for European citizens to gain recognition of their training, skills and knowledge in another Member State. It aims to promote transnational mobility and access to lifelong learning.

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ecvet\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ecvet_en.htm)

## **EUROPASS portfolio and future Skills Passport**

Europass is an online Curriculum Vitae service, helping individuals to make their professional experience and skills clearly and easily understood. Europass draws attention to people's skills and abilities, including those acquired outside formal education and training. The structure of the Europass serves to encourage identification and recognition of learning, and therefore competence and qualifications levels, which consists in an important step towards full recognition, validation and certification. However, so far these tools have only been able to capture non-formal or informal learning taking place in the home country to a limited degree. The Commission considers that to cover these unmet needs it is necessary to develop an integrated Europass Skills Passport capable of recording the full range of formal, non-formal and informal learning whether acquired abroad or domestically.

<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/home>

## **YOUTHPASS**

Youthpass is a tool for participants of projects funded by the Youth in Action Programme to describe what they have done and learnt. It is part of the European Commission's strategy to foster the recognition of non-

### *Michel Feutrie, EUCEN and Secretary General of EUCIS-LLL*



*Michel Feutrie was Professor in Sociology of Education at the Université des Sciences et Technologies of Lille. He is the former President of EUCEN, the European Association for University Lifelong Learning. He is currently Secretary General of EUCIS-LLL. From 1987 to 2007, he was Vice President of USTL in charge of continuing education and Director of the Continuing*

*Service from 1986 to 2006. He has been appointed from 2002 to 2006 Rapporteur Général of the French Agency in charge of the French National Qualification Framework and of the national “Répertoire” (RNCP) registering all French qualifications.*

#### ***Is validation of non-formal and informal learning considered to be important for lifelong learning strategies? Which role does it play?***

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been linked to lifelong learning (LLL) strategies in European Commission policy documents since the publication of the Memorandum on LLL and the Communication that followed in 2001. The Commission decided then to initiate an exchange of experience and good practice in the field of identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. It established an inventory of methodologies, systems and standards and encouraged Member States to provide legal frameworks and educational institutions to systematically implement measures. This orientation led to concrete initiatives: adoption of Common principles in 2004, publication of European guidelines in 2009, of 3 inventories (2005, 2007 and 2010), key element of the Adult Education plan adopted in 2007 and of the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework in 2009.

But more generally, as we are living now in a world offering more and more opportunities for valuable learning not only in educational institutions but in a variety of settings, it is evident that the question of recognition of informal

and non-formal learning becomes essential in a life-long and life-wide learning perspective. For individuals it contributes to the development of positive personal and professional pathways, and helps them to progress vertically and horizontally within education and training systems.

#### ***How can non-formal and informal outcomes be valued in the formal educational system and in the labour market?***

What we learn informally and non-formally (as well as what we learn formally) has to be described in terms of “learning outcomes”. By this way we create a sort of common currency to make possible their description against official standards and then their recognition in the formal system or the labour market. Therefore, it is necessary to be able to present what we have learnt non-formally or informally in a readable and understandable way for assessors or recruiters. This obliges individuals to identify what they have learnt, to organise their learning outcomes in a way that suits the standards of the relevant qualifications and to present them in a way which meets the requirements of assessors. This in itself is a learning process, and must follow the rhythm of each individual. It is a new and so far unusual practise, and it must be guided by advisors able to adopt a new kind of attitude.

#### ***How can we assess someone’s learning outcomes? Which methods would you suggest?***

The experience of an individual is comprehensive and cannot be seen through the prism of disciplines or traditional programmes. Learning outcomes from professional and personal activities are not immediately available for assessment. In addition, experience is contextualised, and contexts do not provide equal opportunities, which is particularly difficult for assessors or academic juries. Two main approaches are currently orienting the assessors’ work: one is based on what we could call a “weighing principle”, whereby the individual’s experience is weighed up against standards and references of the qualification; whilst the other is based on a “developmental principle” that takes into account experience as a whole. The first focuses on formal results (“prior learning”) and is more or less related to programmes while the second tries to



formal learning, visualising and to validating learning outcomes gained in “Youth in Action” projects. Youthpass Certificates are available for European Voluntary Service, Youth Exchanges, Training Courses and for Youth Initiatives.

<https://www.youthpass.eu/>

## EU Skills Panorama

The European Union “Agenda for New Skills and Jobs” includes producing, as of 2012, an EU Skills Panorama to improve transparency for jobseekers, workers, companies and/or public institutions. The Panorama will be available online and will contain updated forecasting of skills supply and labour market needs up to 2020.

## European Framework for Key Competences

The Key Competences for lifelong learning are a combination of knowledge, skills and competences that are essential for the personal fulfillment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and employment of European citizens. This framework defines eight key competences and describes the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to each of those. Many Member States have already used it to reform their programmes and school curricula. The key competences are: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness.

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/key\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/key_en.htm)

## European Taxonomy of Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO)

ESCO aims to be a multilingual European standard terminology and classification of skills, competences, qualifications and occupations. ESCO will build on and link with relevant international classifications and standards, such as the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) and will complement existing national and sectorial occupational and educational classifications and enable exchange of information between them. A partial classification is already in use in the European job mobility portal EURES.

<http://ec.europa.eu/eures/>

make candidates aware of what they have learnt and the milestones they have passed, to situate them on a route, and to develop a holistic approach (“experiential learning”). The European guidelines for validation published in 2009 identify: dossier, portfolio, observation, simulation, interviews, exams, etc. All these assessment methods are not equivalent, are not giving the same chances to candidates, are not likely to make possible a relevant expression of what people have really learnt, are not producing the same results.

## ***How to ensure quality assurance in strengthening the trust to validation?***

Validation is a process implying the whole life of an individual. The assessors are not evaluating the result of an exam, but the results of an individual experience with positive and not so positive effects. This can be seen as a judgment. While encouraging Member States to install validation procedures, the European Commission invited governments to adopt Common Principles aiming at the protection of the individual in 2004.

## ***What are the main remaining challenges ahead on validation?***

The results of the consultation of Stakeholders published by the European Commission at the beginning of 2011 show:

- a clear consensus on the importance of making the skills gained through life and work experience visible;
- more weight should be given to less formal forms of validation;
- a need for an overall approach to validation;
- for more quality in validation processes;
- to better integrate validation into enterprises human resources management practices.

More generally it is evident that it is still necessary to convince educational institutions, but also governments, even employers that access to knowledge and qualifications is not linked to specific time and space. It is a continuous process made of periods dedicated to formal, non-formal and informal learning. This implies new roles for teachers and trainers, needs for professionals for guidance and counselling, needs for new administrative and financial organisations taking into account the lifelong learning perspective.

## IS VALIDATION PROGRESSING IN EUROPE?

### *Niamh O'Reilly, Irish National Adult Learning Organisation*



*Niamh O'Reilly is the Head of Membership Services at AONTAS, the Irish National Adult Learning Organisation. She has overall responsibility for the co-ordination of the AONTAS membership development programme. She has 10 years experience in adult education and 6 years experience in advocacy work in AONTAS.*

#### ***Do you consider European developments in validation as important for adult education?***

In my opinion European developments in validation are vital for keeping adult education on national agendas by providing the rationale for resourcing, supporting and developing the sector. In the current economic crisis, with rising unemployment rates, there is an increased pressure to upskill the population in order to develop new skills for new jobs, and thus the focus on adult education to address such challenges has come to the fore. European developments in validation support the opening up of the whole education system to the potential for offering the currency to move between different types of education provision and into employment. However, the adult education sector is not merely focusing on vocational skills and competences, the liberal view of education through the development of the whole person is central to the understanding of adult education. Therefore, adult education providers and national policy must balance between education for the economy and development of the individual and community.

#### ***How can validation strengthen the adult and third sectors?***

The strength of the adult education sector is dependent on its ability to provide the most effective, responsive, learner-centred education experience. Therefore if learners want validated learning, the capacity of adult education providers in offering this strengthens their ability to respond to learners' needs and thus strengthens the sector as a whole.

In the Irish context, community education provides non-formal adult education programmes to learners on areas that respond to their aspirations e.g. personal development and information technology. Those most likely to participate in community education are individuals who left school early therefore it is important that the education they engage in is considered equal to formal education so that they are not further disadvantaged. The AONTAS research report '*Community education: More than Just a Course*' found that 50% of learners surveyed stated that all courses should be validated each time and that the opportunity to undertake validated learning acts as a source of motivation. However, only 10% of non-formal adult education practitioners stated that courses should be accredited every time. Therefore a disconnect exists between what the learners wanted and what practitioners thought was important.

And especially in the current economic climate validated learning, through accreditation, is the currency which is vital for gaining employment and access to further and higher education. Therefore in order to address the wishes of learners - to ensure they are benefiting from education that is viewed on a par with other sectors and provides equality in terms of further opportunities - validated learning has an important role to play.

#### ***Is it relevant for non-formal sector providers to be compatible with the formal education system? Do you see a risk of standardization of your sector?***

The national qualifications framework sets out the learning outcomes based on 3 themes: knowledge, skills and competences, required at each level, it is not based on the kinds of education provision or learning inputs. Therefore, in theory, validation of non-formal learning with the framework does not mean education provision is the same as the formal education system. Validation indicates the learning outcomes achieved by a learner at a standard agreed level. The national framework of qualifications is the mechanism to compare learning from across the education system, schooling, adult education, further and higher education. Therefore, it means the outcomes from the learning processes in the non-formal and formal education system are comparable but the learning process is not necessarily the same as validation does not need to be tied to one area of the education

# Glossary



system.

The risk of standardisation of the non-formal education sector runs against the concept of validation using the national qualifications framework. There is a shift in thinking, from input to learning outcomes, which allows validation of learning in all forms: informal, non-formal and formal. The main benefit of this is that the most appropriate mode of education provision can be decided by the learner and thus is not standardised as there is diversity of provision and choice. This enables the learner to choose the most appropriate and effective learning opportunity for their requirements, thus becoming truly learner centred (this is dependent on the diversity of opportunities available).

However, one must also consider how policy is put into practice. In the context of non-formal education the risk of standardisation could mean the loss of the inherent attributes and value of such a learning process because of the requirements and demands of the Awarding Body for achieving validated learning. If the only process recognised for achieving learning outcomes is through a formal education process then there is a risk. The potential for standardisation is dependent on how the validation process is developed by the Awarding Body, therefore if a flexible process for achieving the learning outcomes of NQF standardisation across the education system can be avoided.

In addition, the potential standardisation in the understanding of valued learning, i.e. only learning that is validated is valued, is a risk for learners. Non-validated and non-accredited learning facilitates the individual to make the initial steps back to learning without the pressure of the real, or perceived, demands of validation. The value of non-validated learning must be held and supported through funding and development otherwise we run the risk of a standardised view of valued learning which is to the detriment of learner choice: not all learners want validated learning.

## ***What are the main barriers according to you to recognise competences gained through volunteering in the non-formal sector?***

Recognising the competences of volunteers is dependent on how this approach is carried out. There are not necessarily barriers rather there is a need to understand what competences are being developed by the volunteer and how this can be validated most appropriately. I believe that volunteers themselves can contribute to both of these understandings through a process of reflective practice. Organisations must then listen to the volunteers and respond by facilitating the necessary process for validating competences.

**Assessment:** the sum of methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, know-how and/or competences) of an individual, and typically leading to certification.

**Certification:** the process of formally validating knowledge, know-how and/or competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure. Certificates or diplomas are issued by accredited awarding bodies.

**Validation:** the process of assessing and recognising a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences which people develop throughout their lives in different contexts, for example through education, work and leisure activities.

**Recognition:** formal recognition: the process of granting official status to competences, either through the award of certificates or through the grant of equivalence, credit units, validation of gained competences; and/or social recognition: through acknowledgment of the value of competences by economic and social stakeholders.

**Learning outcome(s):** the set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process.

**Competence:** ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in a habitual and/or changing work situation.

**Prior learning:** the knowledge, know-how and/or competences acquired through previously unrecognised training or experience.

**Formal learning:** learning that occurs in an organised and structured context (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning in terms of objectives, time or learning support. It is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification.

**Non-formal learning:** learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support, but which contains an important learning element. It is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification.

**Informal learning:** learning resulting from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

*Source: CEDEFOP Validation Inventory*

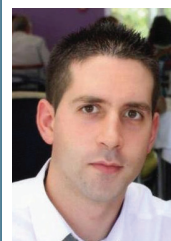
## HOW VALIDATION CHANGED THEIR LIVES...

### 5 learners share their story...



Audrey is Irish. She left school early and focused on her family life. A few years later, she decided to enter the labour market and applied to a

Community Employment Scheme. She also went through a validation process in non-formal education at the Warrenmount Community Education and Development Centre in Dublin, Ireland. Thanks to this experience, she now works at the Warrenmount CED as an administrator.



Tiago is 29 years old, he is Portuguese. He left school early and occupied different jobs. He worked as a miner when he started a Recognition,

Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) pathway in the New Opportunities Centre "NERGA" in Guarda, Portugal. Thanks to his previous experience and to the RVCC pathway, he became a qualified firefighter in Belmonte.



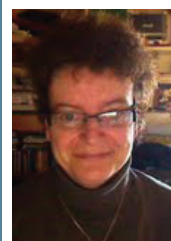
Belmiro is 40 years old, he is Portuguese. He dropped out of school and started working early for family reasons. After completing a

secondary education level through the RVCC pathway in NERGA, he applied for a Technological Specialisation Course and is now in 2<sup>nd</sup> year at the Polytechnic Institute studying to become a computer engineer. He works in the same company but was given more responsibilities and became a manager.



Karenn is French. She used to work as a laboratory technician at the French Research Institute for the Exploration of the Sea (IFREMER). Her level of

responsibility increased, so she decided to apply for a Master's degree. She applied for a specialised Master's and received partial validation at the Université de Bretagne Occidentale (UBO). After completing her studies, she was granted the full diploma and now works as an engineer at IFREMER.



Marie-Dominique is French. She left school early without her high-school certificate (Baccalauréat). She decided to follow a

"second chance pathway" scheme, aiming for a diploma (DAEU) that would allow her to enter higher education. The DAEU is open to adults over 20 who have been out of the education system for at least two years. She obtained her diploma and is currently self-employed offering administrative and computing assistance.

### Why did you go through a validation process?

**Audrey** "I left school after my final examination, the Leaving Certificate, however I did not continue as I decided to start a family and stay at home. When my daughter started school, I felt I needed to do something just for myself. I wanted to get back to work but felt that having been out of education for so long, I hadn't the skills or the confidence to go for this. In May 2008 I started a Community Employment scheme, it involved

doing administrative work in the non-formal adult education organisation, Warrenmount CED. As part of this scheme I was able to access some non-formal adult education courses free of charge. I wanted to get the skills so I could get an administrative job when the Community Employment scheme was finished. I realised that I needed validated learning as this would help my employment options."

**Tiago** "I wanted to improve my education. I also had some hopes professionally, as I didn't feel all that fulfilled by my activities until then. I had to leave school

early. Although I enrolled in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (basic education certificate), I began to feel less and less motivated to study. All I thought about was to get a job and be independent. I





////////// **Marie Dominique** "Entering higher education was a dream for me. Before, University was something that was inaccessible; it was for the "smart brains", the highbrows as we say. I could not make up my mind whether to enrol or not. The teachers were very nice and told me not to give up. It's hard for an adult to go back to studying. We

have our own way of thinking; we're used to doing certain things our own way, so it's not easy. However, the idea of finally succeeding in the end is very motivating. We know that we'll make it; that finding a job will be easier, and that too is motivating. I even obtained my diploma with honours."

**What impact did it have on your personal and professional lives? //**

////////// **Audrey** "Although it involved a lot of effort, I found it very enjoyable, it gave me confidence and I got the reward: a nationally recognised validated course

that would be helpful in getting a job. I now work in Warrenmount CED as an Administrator thanks to the validated non-formal education which I received there."

////////// **Tiago** "It did a lot of good to my job expectations and to my personal life. I was a miner when I began to work on my RVCC pathway, but that was a very demanding job not only physically but also psychologically. I realised that I felt that I had the ability to move forward. And in good time! I became a qualified firefighter in Belmonte Fire Department. It gave me some financial stability.

At the same time, I decided to start a business with a friend, and we opened a restaurant. In fact, this path to a qualification made me think seriously about my life, and about what I wanted to do. Besides, I gained new and better competences, so now I feel comfortable and energetic to seek new opportunities in order to succeed."

////////// **Belmiro** "For the first time in my life I felt that my experience and my competences were acknowledged. As I am self-taught in many aspects, it was very important to feel that my investment in learning throughout the years had paid off. There was this greater sense of accomplishment and the motivation to pursue my academic studies. The professionals and trainers had always been very helpful and supportive and the Personal

Development Plan encouraged me to move forward. And this is what I did. After completing the secondary education level through the RVCC pathway, I applied for a Technological Specialisation Course and I am now in my 2<sup>nd</sup> year at the Polytechnic Institute to become a computer engineer. There has been a consistent impact on my profession, as many technical and scientific skills I have now have sprung from the seeds of the RVCC process."

////////// **Karen** "I obtained half of my Master by validation and the other half by following courses and taking exams. I was well integrated. It was rather funny to see the image students had of the labour market and what I could tell them about it. Equally, they could tell me about student

life, something that I had almost forgotten. In January 2011, I became an engineer. My company recognised me as such with a salary raise and a change in staff category. I was promoted from technician to manager."

**Would you recommend this process to a friend? Why? //**

////////// **Tiago** "I most certainly would, because it can improve their life. This path acknowledges your life and work experiences, and it also improves your self-confidence and encourages you to move forward and

face new challenges. I will move forward myself, and try to complete the secondary education level as soon as my work will permit it, for I know that is the way to improve my competences."

////////// **Belmiro** "I most surely would, especially to those who had a hard life and didn't have the opportunity to study at the proper age. My only advice is to choose a good New Opportunities Centre. Once there, you'll be able to acquire knowledge, and the motivation to go further. If there is a will, there is a way; and step by step you can achieve what you really want. Don't think it will be easy,

though; you'll need to be dedicated to your work and study hard. Nowadays, requalification is necessary and it must be a constant process of acquiring professional skills. In my opinion, training and qualification are essential; besides, this effort can contribute to a better, more educated, more competent, and more responsible society."

////////// **Marie Dominique** "Don't hesitate, because you can get help. I asked my region for financial support to enter training and it was not a problem. Now I am self-

employed in administrative and computing assistance. I do not regret anything. If I had to do it again, I would do it tomorrow, that's for sure."

## WHAT ARE OUR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS?

### ***Concerning the upcoming Council Recommendation...***

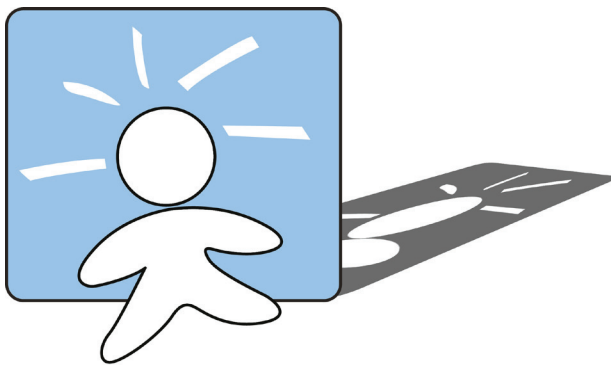
***EUCIS-LLL would like to outline some important elements that should be taken into account if we really want to make progress in that field. We need to:***

- Acknowledge that validation / recognition are learning processes as well and can play an important role in empowering learners and motivating them into further learning and in the further development of their career.
- A specific mention to disadvantaged groups should be made in the Recommendation. We cannot ignore the benefits of learning for these target groups: 80 million Europeans with disabilities, more than 20 million migrants, almost 80 million low-skilled workers and almost 25 million people out of work in the European Union.
- Validation processes should be considered as an investment: recognising knowledge, skills and competences of citizens will contribute to upgrade the work force and to put back low-skilled citizens into learning. Even if validation mechanisms require additional and sustainable funding for educational institutions notably in terms of human resources (i.e. enabling the staff to be able to support non-traditional learners) the social and economic returns are greater. Research shows that investments in education pay off in many ways.
- Funding is a key element but we also need to encourage a cultural shift in the way learning is valued in our societies especially when it comes to learning outcomes. It is crucial to give equal value to knowledge, skills and competences acquired from various learning settings: formal, non-formal and informal (concept of recognition). Experiential learning is a key path to develop competences. Validation should also recognise key and transversal competences for lifelong learning and not only focus on validating occupational skills.
- Finally, validation should be seen as a concrete tool to recognise and validate learning outcomes in the volunteering field.

***We have to move from policy to practice:***

- Today we observe a lack of monitoring and guidance on validation of non-formal and informal learning in most countries. At national level, it is important to collect more evidence, based on a qualitative analysis on validation, to help authorities and institutions to be less timid or overcautious about developing validation mechanisms.
- We also need to develop peer learning among Member States on the development of a specific legislation and its implementation as well as among educational organisations in order to ensure a standardisation of validation processes and quality assurance.
- Supporting EU pilot projects led by educational institutions to develop the use of validation while at the same time ensuring that the results of these projects are better shared and known. A European conference could be organised to gather all the leaders of the EU granted projects that dealt with validation. Policy recommendations could be drawn from their results.
- We Invite the European Commission and CEDEFOP to further disseminate the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning and the Inventory that remain insufficiently used and known by practitioners and policy-makers around Europe.
- Seminars could be organised at the national and local levels in order to raise awareness on these opportunities and ensure capacity building. The results of EU projects could be presented.

***Thanks for reading us!***



**EUCIS-LLL**

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