







# Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe

A snapshot 2007

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# Foreword

Cedefop has been working on validation of non-formal and informal learning since the early 1990s. At that time validation was a theme addressed by very few countries and considered to be of limited interest. Since then, interest has grown rapidly and validation is now high on the policy agenda in almost all European countries.

This change is closely related to the increasing importance of lifelong learning. The combination of a rapidly changing labour market, an ageing population and intensified global competition makes it necessary to use all available knowledge, skills and competences – irrespective of where and how they have been acquired. The interest in validation can be seen as closely linked to efforts to create more flexible qualifications systems – making it possible for individuals to build learning careers stretching ‘from cradle to grave’.

This report provides a brief introduction to and update of European developments in this important subject. Building on the extensive 2007 update of the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning, the report captures some of the main trends in this field and outlines the main challenges facing us in validating non-formal and informal learning in the coming years.

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Parts of this publication reflect discussion during the Portuguese Presidency conference on 'Valuing learning' in Lisbon, November 2007. Finally, thanks to Christine Nychas from Cedefop, for her technical support in preparing this publication.

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# Executive summary

This publication gives a snapshot – end 2007 – of European developments in validation of non-formal and informal learning. While some countries are making substantial progress others have yet to put in place approaches for individuals to have their non- and informally acquired experiences identified, assessed and/or validated. European developments are therefore described as strongly differentiated. This report identifies factors which promote and prevent developments in this field. The following issues are covered.

## **National motives for pursuing validation of non-formal and informal learning**

Several factors explain why countries give priority to validation. The wish to open up qualifications systems and frameworks to learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions is crucial. It is closely linked to efforts to realise lifelong and lifewide learning. Other factors can, however, be identified, notably economic, social, demographic and technological factors.

## **Validation in the European policy context**

The report outlines how validation has gradually become part of the policy agenda at European level. It is increasingly clear that ongoing development of national qualifications frameworks in many European countries, mostly in response to the European qualifications framework (EQF), encourages developments in and 'mainstreaming' of validation.

## **Characteristics of the validation process and its relation to qualifications systems**

The report illustrates the different stages of the validation process. In particular it points to the distinct but interrelated formative (certification) and summative (support to learning and assessment) functions. The report outlines how individuals can make decisions at different stages of the process, sometimes aiming at certification, other times not. The complex validation process is illustrated by a systematic overview of the stakeholders involved at different levels. Here, the report also looks into the link between standards and validation methods. The portfolio methodology is given particular attention given its important role in many European validation systems.

### **Developments in Europe in validating non-formal and informal learning**

Based on the European inventory on validation 2007 <sup>(1)</sup>, European countries are divided into three main groups. First, those countries where validation has become a practical reality for individual citizens. Second, those countries where validation is emerging as a practical reality and third, those countries where activity is low or non-existent. This overview illustrates the multi-speed character of developments. The emergence of national qualifications frameworks, combined with a shift towards learning outcomes, seems to act as a catalyst for further development of validation, not least in countries where activity has been limited until now.

### **Elements of a validation strategy for 2010 and beyond: key issues influencing further development of methods and systems of validation**

Based on debates at the Portuguese Presidency conference on valuing learning (November 2007), 10 key points relevant to the future development of validation are listed and discussed. Follow up to these points may be seen as the basis for a post 2010 European strategy on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

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(1) <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/eu/pub/cedefop/europeaninventory>

# Introduction

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is increasingly seen as a key to realise lifelong and lifewide learning. A growing number of European countries <sup>(2)</sup> emphasise the importance of making visible and giving appropriate value to learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions, for example at work, in leisure time activities and at home.

Moving from general policy objectives to practical solutions serving individuals is another matter. Some countries have been working on solutions since the late 1980s, achieving important results, others are still at an early stage of discussion and development. Yet others are reluctant to introduce validation and, in some cases, express fear that it may undermine or conflict with other education, training and learning measures.

When discussing the future potential of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe, it is important to try to understand better this strongly differentiated process; which factors explain, lack of progress, reluctance and (even) resistance to validation?

This publication gives a snapshot – end 2007 – of European developments by addressing the following issues:

- national motives for pursuing validation of non-formal and informal learning; validation in the European policy context;
- characteristics of the validation process and its relation to qualifications systems;
- developments in European countries in validating non-formal and informal learning;
- elements of a validation strategy 2010 and beyond: key issues influencing further development of methods and systems for validation.

The extent to which validation has become a practical reality for individual citizens is closely related to the ‘openness’ of the national qualifications system and whether learning outcomes acquired outside schools are accepted as a legitimate basis for a certificate or diploma. The rapid development of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) across Europe in response to the European

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<sup>(2)</sup> See: <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/eu/pub/cedefop/europeaninventory2007.pdf>

qualifications framework (EQF) has (in the period 2005-2007) led to a growing interest in validation and may now be seen as the single most important factor influencing developments in this field.

This report is to a large extent based on data provided by the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning developed by the European Commission and Cedefop since 2002. The European inventory provides detailed information on developments in each of the 32 countries taking part in the Education and Training 2010 process <sup>(3)</sup>, both in the public and the private sector.

European cooperation in the field of validation is partly about agreeing on a common conceptual basis. Annex 1 therefore provides a set of definitions relevant to this activity field. These definitions have been taken from the latest version of the Cedefop 'Terminology of education and training policy – A multilingual glossary' (2008b forthcoming).

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<sup>(3)</sup> The Education and training part of the EU Lisbon process.

## CHAPTER 2

# National motives for pursuing validation of non-formal and informal learning

Progress in terms of policy and practice varies across the 32 countries taking part in the Education and Training 2010 process. However, there has been a significant increase in activity in validation in the last few years <sup>(4)</sup>. Several reasons explain these developments:

- **Education system factors:** *improving access to and efficiency in the formal education system.*

Providing direct ways to gain formal qualifications or ‘door openers’ to education courses and so avoid repetition and inefficiencies in the education system is a key reason for validating informal and non-formal learning (Feutrie, 2005). The 2007 inventory shows that several countries have introduced validation to make mobility easier and provide individuals a ‘second chance’ to reach their full learning potential. In higher education, although progress has generally been slow, several countries have made significant advances, in particular in using validation to facilitate entry to courses. These developments are closely linked to efforts to open up qualifications to a wider range of learning outcomes and learning settings, in many cases leading the development of national qualifications frameworks.

- **Economic factors:** *needs of the knowledge economy also reflected in enterprises.*

Labour markets have had to become more flexible and have innovation more important, with ensuing challenges for human capital development. Validation can be used to address needs in different economic sectors, such as skills shortages or compliance with regulations regarding professional qualifications. Increasingly, private sector stakeholders – social partners as well as individual companies – recognise the benefits of validation (Dyson

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<sup>(4)</sup> This chapter is based on (December 2007) draft summary report of the 2007 European Inventory on non-formal and informal learning, Ecotec, Birmingham.

and Keating, 2005). Today, validation is increasingly used for staff development and to ensure the most effective allocation of resources within the business.

- **Social factors:** *providing opportunities for disadvantaged or excluded people.*

Validation can help socially excluded people to reintegrate into the labour market and society. Validation is recognised in some countries as a tool to support disadvantaged groups, such as refugees, the unemployed and older workers (Kok, 2003; Council of the European Union, 2004b; European Commission, 2007a). In certain countries, priority target groups have been identified and in some cases, (funding for) validation initiatives (has) have been restricted to these groups. Validation can also support promotion of equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups as it helps establish equality in the education and training system and labour market.

- **Demographic factors:** *ageing of the population and increasing migration.*

This is linked to disadvantaged groups. Demographic factors are accentuating the number of people at risk of exclusion who can benefit from validation. Validation can help these groups by improving access to and mobility within the labour market, thus helping combat unemployment linked to demographic change.

- **Technological factors:** *development of new technologies accentuates appreciation of technical skills gained through informal and non-formal means.*

There is a need to enable individuals to use new technologies in the workplace and recognise competences in professions where new technologies predominate. In sectors dependent on use of new technologies, formal education / training may not be well suited to keep up with technological changes and emerging needs for skills development. Validation is developed in this context as an alternative option to ensure individuals can gain recognition for their technical competences and identify skills gaps and training needs in the workplace.

- **Increased awareness / acceptance of validation among stakeholders:**

Greater awareness has led to greater use and involvement of stakeholders. The 2007 European inventory identified many validation initiatives across 32 countries. Literature is emerging on how validation of non-formal and

informal learning can improve education systems and policies. It appears that several private and third sector stakeholders have become involved in developing (public) validation initiatives, to ensure their 'voice is heard' and their views and needs are considered. Increased awareness of the importance and value of validation has, to a certain degree, led to greater take-up of concrete validation practices.

The introduction to this publication suggested that the reasons countries pursue validation of informal and non-formal learning can, to a large extent, be integrated into one 'meta-reason', namely the need to facilitate lifelong (and lifewide) learning. This is confirmed by the 2007 European inventory, where validation is often seen as an intrinsic part of national lifelong learning (LLL) strategies.

## CHAPTER 3

# Validation in the European policy context

National motives for pursuing validation are to a large extent reflected in – and stimulated by – European policies. The European Commission communication on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2002b) points to valuing learning (including non-formal and informal) as a key to making lifelong and lifewide learning a practical reality <sup>(5)</sup>. The emphasis on valuing learning was reaffirmed in resolutions by the EU education and employment ministers (in May and June 2002). Involvement of education and employment ministers signals that valuing learning is seen as highly relevant to both areas and, potentially, as a bridge between education, training, learning and work.

Concrete follow-up was adopted in December 2002 when education and training ministers passed a resolution on increased cooperation in vocational education and training (initiating the ‘Copenhagen process’ in vocational education and training) (European Commission, 2002a). This resolution invited Member States to develop

*‘... a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between approaches in different countries and at different levels.’*

Following extensive discussions involving representatives of Member States and European social partners, a set of common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning were adopted by the European Council in May 2004 (Council of the European Union, 2004a). Formulated at a high level of abstraction, these principles identify issues critical to developing and implementing methods and systems for validation. Since 2004, these principles have been used by many countries as a reference for national developments, underlining their usefulness as a checklist for developing high quality, credible validation approaches.

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<sup>(5)</sup> The first time this theme was addressed at European level was in 1995 in the White Paper on ‘Teaching and learning; towards the learning society’ (European Commission, 1995). Apart from limited experimental activity supported by the Leonardo da Vinci and Socrates programmes, the 1995 initiative had limited practical and political impact.



European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning are based on the main agreements shown in Table 1.

Table 1. **Common European principles for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning**

- Validation must be voluntary
- The privacy of individuals should be respected
- Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed
- Stakeholders should establish systems for validation
- Systems should contain mechanism for guidance and counselling of individuals
- Systems should be underpinned by quality assurance
- The process, procedures and criteria for validation must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance
- Systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek a balanced participation
- The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest
- The professional competences of those who carry out assessments must be assured.

While national authorities and stakeholders decide on policies and practices, it is increasingly clear that countries share many challenges. The establishment (in the context of the Education and training 2010 work programme) of the cluster on recognition of learning outcomes made it possible to pursue a systematic exchange of experience and to start the work on a follow up to the European principles. Building on the conclusions of the peer learning activities on effective practices in validation processes (Brussels, January 2007 and Paris, July 2007), a set of European Guidelines for the validation of non-formal and informal learning is now being developed. Draft guidelines were presented at the Portuguese Presidency conference in November 2007 (European Commission – DG Education and Culture and Cedefop, 2007), and a final version is expected spring 2008. These guidelines will provide a reference point and checklist for developing validation methods and systems, making it possible to systematically take into account and build on experience across Europe. Each country and stakeholder will decide whether they want to use the guidelines. Their value and status will be entirely based on their ability to capture existing experience and communicate sound practice. The European principles, European guidelines and European

inventory are interlinked elements in a European strategy to support – through systematic exchange of experience and mutual learning – development of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Member States.

## CHAPTER 4

# The process of validating non-formal and informal learning and its relation to qualifications systems

'Making learning visible' (Cedefop, 2000) distinguishes between three main phases of the validation process <sup>(6)</sup>: identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This distinction reflects that even where validation results in a formal certificate or qualification, the identification and assessment stages preceding the formal recognition are critical to the overall process. The quality of the validation process very much depends on how the initial identification and assessment of the – frequently tacit – learning is handled. Learning taking place outside formal education and training systems can be characterised as non-standardised and is frequently based on complex, individually specific learning experiences and pathways. Ensuring the quality of identification and assessment processes, expressed in terms of validity, reliability and credibility, requires careful consideration of the methods and approaches developed to handle the identification and assessment stages.

Gradual introduction of validation in European countries has been accompanied by a realisation that each of the above stages can be treated as 'self contained'. While in some cases we speak of a complete process leading to a formal certificate or qualification, in others the identification of learning is seen as a goal in itself, not linked to any formal certification process. These elements of validation are referred to in different ways and by a variety of names, for example 'competence measurement', 'competence assessment', 'knowledge diagnosis', 'skills tests', etc. A comprehensive presentation of these approaches, and the links between them, is presented in Erpenbeck and Rosenstiel (2003).

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<sup>(6)</sup> The term validation can be used in a broad sense linked to learning in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. Here we speak of validation in relation to non-formal and informal learning – unless otherwise stated.

#### 4.1. The link between formative and summative approaches

The distinction between identification and assessment and recognition is frequently referred to as that between *formative* and *summative* approaches to validation. The primary purpose of summative assessments is to generate a concluding statement about learning achieved to date and is explicitly about the formalisation and certification of learning outcomes. They are thus linked to and integrated into institutions and bodies authorised to award qualifications. The primary purpose of formative assessment is to enable learners to broaden and deepen their learning. Formative approaches to assessment provide feedback to the learning process or learning career, indicating strengths and weaknesses and providing a basis for personal or organisational improvement. Formative assessments fulfil a very important role and are used in numerous settings ranging from guidance and counselling to human resource management in enterprises. While useful for analytical purposes, it should be noted that the distinction between formative and summative should be treated with some care. In practice, most validation approaches will simultaneously contain both elements. Recent evaluations of the Portuguese National System for Recognising, Validating and Certifying Competencies (RVCC) show, for example, the impact of validation on motivation for further learning.

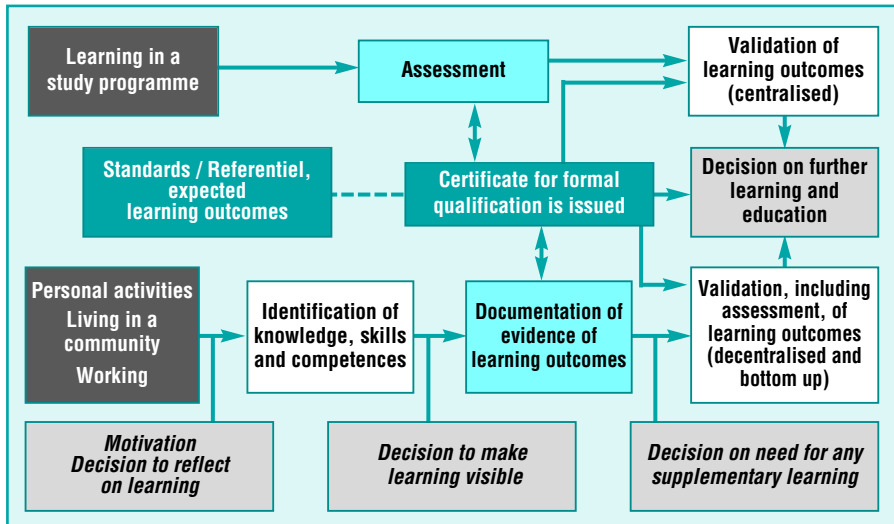
In recent years, the balance between formative and summative approaches has developed differently in different European countries. In some – Sweden is a good example – no centralised, national validation system has (so far) been set up. Developments were based on local, regional and sectoral initiatives addressing particular target groups and needs. A general opening up of the national qualifications system to non- and informally acquired learning outcomes has still to be agreed. Elements of the same approach are found in the Netherlands. The emphasis was very much on a bottom-up approach to validation addressing specific local and sectoral needs, focussing less on a general opening up of the qualifications system via validation. Sweden and the Netherlands belong to the group of countries most active in validation, illustrating that the link between validation and qualifications systems may be treated in different ways. This mix of formative and summative approaches is also illustrated by Norway where formative approaches were developed in parallel to summative, certification-oriented approaches. This was done through public support to experimental projects and programmes at local and regional level, in enterprises, branch organisations and voluntary organisations. France also exemplifies this double

strategy. The *bilan de compétence* has existed in France since 1985, giving individuals the opportunity to identify their competences. A parallel approach has also been established in Switzerland.

#### 4.2. Validation and opening up qualifications systems

While the formative approach is important, national policies on validation have in most cases been linked to and motivated by the wish to open up qualifications and qualifications systems to learning outcomes acquired outside the formal systems (7). To understand fully validation it is necessary to see how it is linked and aligned to the formal system. Figure 1 shows, in broad terms, different stages of validation and how formal and informal systems align with each other. In both systems individuals have choices about learning and how to make it visible. Generally, validation processes outside the formal system present many more choices because they are more complex and as may also be learning careers. In the formal system the learning and validation environment is likely to be simple.

Figure 1. Different processes and stages of valuing learning outcomes



Source: created by Jens Bjørnåvold and Mike Coles.

(7) This section reflects the draft European guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning, presented to and discussed in the 13-14 December 2007 meeting of the (Education and Training 2010) cluster on recognition of learning outcomes.

question of how integrated these approaches are with qualifications systems and to what extent they refer to established performance standards and norms. In Figure 1 these standards are seen as common to both the formal and informal system.

### 4.3. The validation process and the individual

The first European principle for validation of non formal and informal learning puts the individual at the centre of the validation process. It insists that the process of making visible the full range of an individual's knowledge, skills and experiences is voluntary and that the validation results remain the individual's property. A right of appeal against decisions is included and later the individual is protected against conflicts of interest amongst those carrying out the validation.

Figure 1 illustrated the different stages involved in validation and how choices have to be made at each single crossroad. Table 1 offers a more detailed overview of the choices individuals face.

Table 2. **Choices faced by individual learners in validation**

Stage of validation	Choice to be made	Notes
<b>Pre-initiation</b>	Whether or not to begin the process of thinking seriously about prior learning.	The motivation to begin the process is important here. Personal reasons can be based on boosting self-esteem, or economic reasons such as getting a new job or through the recruitment process for a formal learning programme. Sometimes employers can initiate this thinking about validation through changes to work practices and presenting new opportunities that require proof of competences.
<b>Initiation</b>	To identify in outline the knowledge and skills that were learned.	The standards that are expected for formal qualification, or a job represent a starting point for identification.

Stage of validation	Choice to be made	Notes
<b>Pre- documentation</b>	How to find out the requirements of the documentation process. Whether to proceed to documentation.	Accurate, timely and accessible information, advice and guidance are critical to the decision to proceed with the documentation process. It is also critical to the decision to undertake any supplementary learning.
<b>Documentation</b>	How best to carry out evidence gathering and mapping. What is sufficient in terms of evidence? What to do about areas of insufficient evidence.  Whether to submit for validation.	From the perspective of the individual this is the substantial part of the validation exercise. Issues arising during the process need to be discussed with expert counsellors (on subject content and documentation process). Decisions on sufficiency of evidence will be based on these discussions.  The need for additional learning will become clear during documentation. Here too advice will be required.
<b>Submission for validation</b>	Does the evidence meet the standards for validation?  How best to prepare for interview questions.	Independent advice on sufficiency and how best to orally support the evidence base is needed.
<b>Validation</b>	How best to facilitate a positive outcome.	Credit, partial qualification or full qualification are the outcomes.
<b>Certification</b>	Whether to seek certification.	Advice on the added value of certification is needed
<b>Further qualification</b>	Decision to make the next step.	It is well known that learning and qualification is likely to lead to the desire for more learning and more qualification.

Source: European Commission – DG Education and Culture and Cedefop, 2007.

#### 4.4. Stakeholders in validation

The number of stakeholders and agencies involved in validation can make it difficult to see the whole picture from any one perspective. The overview of the validation process (Figure 1 and Table 1) maps out and extends current boundaries of thinking regarding how, where and why validation occurs. To develop an integrated concept of validation of non-formal and informal learning five distinctive but interrelated levels, all engaged in validation are described

Table 3. **An integrated view of validation**

	<b>WHO is involved?</b>	<b>WHAT are the results?</b>
<b>European level</b>	EU Commission and Council, EU Agencies (Cedefop, ETF), Social partners organisations, Ministers of Education and Training Employment Ministers.	EQF, Europass, Common European Principles for Validation, Draft European guidelines for validation.
<b>National level</b>	Ministries; Qualification Authorities; Social partners; NGOs.	Qualifications.
<b>Education and training sector</b>	Local government; Assessment centres; Vocational Schools; Universities; Specialist recognition centres.	National curricula; National standards; Certificates recognising participation; Diplomas.
<b>Business sector</b>	Business managers; Human resource managers; Trade union representatives.	Competence profile or work standard; Work description.
<b>Voluntary sector</b>	Communities; NGOs; Projects.	Skills profile.
<b>Individual</b>	Candidate; Employee.	Motivation to learn; Self esteem; Proof of knowledge and skills.

Source: European Commission – DG Education and Culture and Cedefop, 2007.



– individual learners, organisations (business and voluntary), educational sector, national policymakers on lifelong learning and European policymakers.

Each ‘level’ has its own traditions, needs and aspirations. While the individual level has been elaborated in some detail above, Table 2 presents an overview and integrated view to broaden understanding about the practical challenges of validation when developing and implementing validation systems on all levels.

WHY are they doing it?	HOW is this done?
Comparability and transparency; Increased mobility; Competitiveness; Life Long Learning.	Open communication.
Knowledge society; Mobility; Innovation; Skills supply.	Projects; Networks; Financing; Legalisation.
Education for all; Tailored training; Shortened study period; Increased admission.	Defining assessment and validation methods.
Competitive advantage; Resourcing; Career planning; Training; Summative and formative assessment.	Mapping; Counselling; Assessment validation.
Social and personal reasons; Employability.	Mapping; Youthpass; Europass CV.
Employability; Mobility; Career advancement; Entrance to education; Internal training.	Supplementary learning; Making a portfolio.

## CHAPTER 5

# Validation standards and methods

There is a clear interrelation between the methods and instruments used for validation and the standards and references underpinning qualifications systems. The current chapter addresses this interrelation.

### 5.1. Standards

Opening up qualifications to a broader set of learning processes and contexts requires a common reference point. Validation of non-formal and informal learning depends on how this reference point – standard – is defined and interpreted. A too narrow standard may clash with the non-standardised but in many cases highly relevant learning taking place outside schools. Much attention has been paid to the methodologies for validation, relatively less has been given to standards and how they influence the final results of the process. In general, qualifications – and validation of non-formal and informal learning – relate to two <sup>(8)</sup> main categories of standards; occupational and education-training standards. These two categories can be described as employment and teaching/learning specifications respectively and operate according to different logics, reflecting different sets of priorities, motives and purposes.

- Occupational standards are classifications and definitions of the main jobs that people do. Following the logic of employment, these standards focus on what people need to do, how they will do it, and how well they do it. Occupational standards thus have to be written as competences and formulated in terms of outcomes <sup>(9)</sup>. They exist in all European countries, but each nation has its own style of derivation and presentation of the standards. Occupational standards form a bridge between the labour market

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<sup>(8)</sup> In some countries, for example the UK, assessment standards are developed as a third, separate category of standards.

<sup>(9)</sup> For a detailed study of the issues related to learning outcomes, see Cedefop (2008a, forthcoming): 'The shift to learning outcomes in European education and training policies and practices'.

and education because educational standards (syllabuses and pedagogies) can be developed from them.

- Education-training standards, following the logic of education and training, focus on what people need to learn, how they will learn it, and how the quality and content of learning will be assessed. The main interest is thus formulated in terms of input (subject, syllabus, teaching methods, process and assessment). Educational standards are normally written as teaching specifications and qualification specifications. For example to be a skilled plumber you need to study these subjects at this type of institution for this many years and use this text book or manual. Occupational standards, written as competences are forcing a change in the way educational standards are to be written – as learning outcomes which are statements of what a person knows and can do in the work situation.

If validation is to become integral to qualifications systems (and frameworks) they need to operate according to the same standards as the formal system. This creates a problem as most approaches to validation of non-formal and informal learning relate to the second category of standards, those designed specifically for the education and training system. The critical question is whether these standards are defined through specifying teaching input or outcomes, reflecting a competence-orientation. While the competence-based approach to a large extent seems to be used for vocational education and training (as the fact that the link to occupational standards normally will be stronger), existing standards used for general and higher education are not always well suited for validation of non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes. A successful introduction of validation across Europe very much depends on how standards develop and to which extent they are defined and described through learning outcomes or competences.

## 5.2. Methods

The 2005 European inventory gave an overview of the different methods and approaches to identification, documentation and assessment across the countries studied and defined a typology of methods (see also Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2004; Cedefop, Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2005) <sup>(10)</sup>. The typology of approaches given in the 2005 inventory is:

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<sup>(10)</sup> This section is based on (December 2007) draft summary report of the 2007 European inventory on non-formal and informal learning, ECOTEC, Birmingham.

- **Tests and examinations:** identification and validation of informal and non-formal learning through or with the help of examinations in the formal system.
- **Declarative methods:** based on individuals' own identification and recording of their competences, normally signed by a third party, in order to verify the self-assessment.
- **Observation:** extracting evidence of competence from an individual while performing everyday tasks at work.
- **Simulation and evidence extracted from work:** simulation is where an individual is placed in a situation that fulfils all the criteria of the real-life scenario to have their competences assessed. To extract evidence from work, a candidate collects physical or intellectual evidence of learning outcomes. This may relate to work situations, voluntary activities, family or other settings. This evidence forms the basis of a validation of competences by a third party.
- **Portfolio method:** using a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents or work samples showing an individual's skills and competences in different ways.

These categories have to be seen in the context of the validation process outlined in Figure 1 and the different tools and methods used at different stages of the process. The boundaries between different approaches are not always clear. Thus, some validation initiatives may make use of more than one of these approaches, for example, combining them to achieve, for instance, greater validity or reliability of results. It is also important to highlight that these categories are relatively broad and further distinctions can be drawn within some of them. Such is the case, in particular, of portfolio methods (see Zeichner and Wray, 2000) <sup>(11)</sup>.

The portfolio is particularly relevant to validation of non-formal and informal learning. It allows the individual candidate to contribute actively to collecting evidence and offers a mix of approaches strengthening the overall validity of the approach. This is confirmed by many countries introducing the portfolio as a central element in their validation systems. There is much evidence in the portfolio literature that the selection process included in portfolio building promotes self-assessment and focuses students' attention on quality criteria

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<sup>(11)</sup> The three compendia which form part of this 2007 Inventory document the use of these methods in the public, private and third sectors, which makes it possible to now identify some patterns across the sectors, as well as to illustrate how the strengths of the methods can be exploited and their weaknesses overcome.

(Dysthe and Engelsen, 2004; European inventory, 2007). In general, a good portfolio for validation, in the eyes of assessors, characterised by being easy to assess focuses on specific matched learning outcomes (Peters, 2005). Preparations for a portfolio frequently start at the 'documentation' stage, preceding the assessment stage. Even at this stage, however, evidence is gathered and organised according to agreed standards. Consequently, the portfolio is a very important instrument for making learning visible, for formative as well as summative purposes. The most important risk in preparing portfolios identified by the European inventory 2007 is when applicants prepare these alone or with little mediation from a tutor. One practice to counter such possible limitations is to gather groups of claimants together specifically to share experience and learning to enable all participants to proceed with greater assurance to prepare their own portfolio for validation (Cedefop, 2007). Such sessions can then be complemented with individual tutorials.

One recent trend used more in the public sector is the use of digital portfolios. Whilst interesting and essentially building on the tradition of paper-based portfolios (Davies and Willis, 2001), such portfolios still have the risk that the technological novelty can overshadow their purpose. Learning to use the technology may subsume the learning opportunities of portfolio construction offsetting, to some extent, the advantages such portfolios can offer (Piper, 2000; Barrett, 2000). These include, such as the possibility to combine text, audio, graphic and video-based representation of information and a greater capacity to accumulate data (Woodward and Nanlohy, 2004) which can provide the audience with greater insights into the achievements and successes of the learner (Kimeldorf, 1997) and increased learner motivation. As argued by Harnell-Young and Morris (1999), technology should support, rather than drive, portfolio development.

## CHAPTER 6

# Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe – situation 2007

Development of validation in Europe is a multi-speed process. Countries are at different stages of practical implementation and overall acceptance. In summary, at the end of 2007, countries had reached three main levels of development <sup>(12)</sup>, distinguished as countries where validation:

- has become or is close to becoming a practical reality for individuals;
- is emerging as a practical reality;
- is at an initial stage of development.

It is important to note that the situation is changing continuously and, in particular, development of NQFs has led to increased attention to validation. It is possible, given current trends, that the situation will be different in one or two years.

### 6.1. High degree of implementation – countries where validation is a practical reality for individuals

Countries in this group at December 2007 have validation policies and practices enabling individuals to have their learning outcomes identified, validated, or both on a systematic basis. Validation has moved from the level of general policy statements to tangible practices. Countries like Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Romania, Spain and the UK belong in this category.

In these countries there is a high degree of acceptance of validation as an instrument supporting lifelong learning. Most countries have legal structures

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<sup>(12)</sup> In the summary report written for the European inventory 2007 by Ecotec, countries are divided into four groups, countries at high, medium, low and initial levels of development. In this analysis we have chosen to retain the somewhat simpler categorisation introduced in the 2005 inventory, using three main categories.

supporting validation methods, together with a strong policy framework. All sectors – public, private and the third sector – have developed and applied methods to validate competences acquired outside the formal education system. The high degree of acceptance of validation methods is also illustrated by high levels of take-up. Practical examples of countries in this category and a brief description of the validation initiatives in place in them can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. **Countries with a high degree of development**

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
Denmark	<p>The Danish 2004 policy <i>Recognition of prior learning in the education system</i>, which follows up the 2002 <i>Better education action plan</i>, gives validation a high priority and very specific focus. The policy paper proposes recognition of informal and non-formal learning be taken into account throughout the entire education system, and that initiatives be taken in adult education and continuing training to improve opportunities for assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning (OECD, 2007).</p> <p>Systems for validation of informal and non-formal learning stretch from general upper secondary to vocational, adult education and tertiary education. Validation is most prominent in adult vocational education and training. A legislative amendment in 2007 gave each individual the right to have their prior learning experiences validated in relation to adult education and continuing training. The new policy centres individual's needs and aims to make the process as accessible and flexible as possible.</p> <p>In 2004, 54 445 Individual competence clarifications (ICA) were recorded. This figure fell to 49 995 in 2005 and rose again to 51 411 in 2006 (ibid.).</p> <p>The private sector has been a long tradition of validation, with examples of usage dating back to the 1990s. Much of this experience was related to recognising work experience, but recently this has extended and unions now support individuals in applying to have their prior learning recognised.</p> <p>Many interesting initiatives in validation of non-formal and informal learning are found in Denmark's third sector. Among the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) initiating development projects are: NetOp (<i>Netværk for Oplysning</i>) in cooperation with LOF (<i>Liberalt Oplysnings Forbund</i>), both adult education associations, and DUF (<i>Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd</i>), which is the Danish Youth Council. In Denmark, activities in liberal adult education organisations enable individuals to develop competences, although they are not formally recognised as education. This makes liberal adult education well prepared to take on the task of developing a wide range of competences.</p>

Country	Overview of validation initiatives in place
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<b>France</b>	<p>France was the first Member State to introduce legislation with respect to validation, in 1934 a law was passed to enable individuals to obtain an engineering diploma on the basis of professional experience.</p> <p>Today, the concept of <i>validation des acquis de l'expérience</i> (VAE), which was introduced in the 2002 Social Modernisation Act, is the main system in France for validation of informal and non-formal learning. All citizens with at least three years of paid or voluntary experience have a right to pursue a VAE (validation) procedure of their skills and competences.</p> <p>Non-formal and informal learning can be considered as a basis for the award of all types of nationally recognised qualification. VAE can be used as a basis to award full qualifications, or alternatively units ('parts') of a full diploma. Over 50 000 qualifications were awarded through VAE between 2002 and 2005, most immediately after the new law was enacted. The drop can be explained by a presumed accumulation of demand for validation, later adjusted to a state of normality <sup>(13)</sup>.</p> <p>Social partners play an important role in implementing the new VAE framework established by the 2002 Law on social modernisation and at company level. Many firms have facilitated employees' access to validation of experience-based skills, either through an individual initiative or on a collective basis (UNICE, CEEP, UEAPME, 2006).</p> <p>Examples of good practice in assessing voluntary experience in France, include the notebook to record voluntary skills, which has been supported by the National Union for University Clubs (UNCU) since 1998.</p>
<b>Finland</b>	<p>Finland has had a comprehensive structure to validate informal and non-formal learning for adult education and training since the mid-1990s, when a competence-based qualification system for initial, further and specialist VET was first established. Competence-based qualifications can be awarded regardless of how and where the skills and knowledge were acquired. Recognition of prior learning is at the core of this procedure.</p> <p>In addition to the competence-based qualification system, several laws were passed in the 1990s, to enable individuals to access formal studies at different levels on the basis of their prior experience even if they do not meet the formal entry criteria.</p>

<sup>(13)</sup> Cf. [http://pdf.mutual-learning-employment.net/pdf/FR07/discussion\\_paper\\_FR07.pdf](http://pdf.mutual-learning-employment.net/pdf/FR07/discussion_paper_FR07.pdf)



**Country**      **Overview of validation initiatives in place**

	<p>A legal framework is in place for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in higher education institutions.</p> <p>The number of individuals accessing competence-based qualifications is growing and between 1997 and 2006, reached just under 365 000 individuals. Of this total, some 199 000 obtained a full qualification and nearly 82 000 were partly qualified.</p> <p>Social partners and individual companies play an integral role in the competence-based qualification scheme. Involvement of the private sector in the validation of informal and non-formal learning is very strong and stretches from national to local level.</p> <p>The third sector has also been relatively active validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland. A particularly successful initiative is the Recreational Activity Study Book, developed by the Youth Academy in 1996. Over 80 000 study books have been distributed so far <sup>(14)</sup>.</p>
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Source: European inventory 2007.

## 6.2. Medium level of development – countries where validation is emerging

Countries in this group (December 2007) have still to put in place practices making it possible for individual citizens to have their learning outcomes identified and/or validated on a systematic basis. Most are establishing approaches to make this possible. The level of activity varies considerably in this group. Countries like Austria, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Italy, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland and Sweden can be said to belong in this category.

This group of countries have either recently set up a legal or policy framework for validation. They are currently starting to implement it or have had experience of piloting a variety of different methodologies on the basis of which they are developing a national approach. The degree of acceptance may also vary from sector to sector but overall the take-up of validation methods remain lower than in the previous group of countries. In many of these countries it could be expected that validation of informal and non-formal learning will play a greater role in the coming years. Tables 5 and 6 below

<sup>(14)</sup> See: Nuorten Akatemia ([www.nuortenakatemia.fi](http://www.nuortenakatemia.fi)).

outlines the situation of several countries and describes briefly the validation initiatives in place.

Table 5. **Sweden: An emerging national policy for validation**

Country	Overview of validation initiatives
Sweden	<p>Validation of informal and non-formal learning is considered a key issue in Sweden in its overall lifelong learning strategy. However, no national regulation currently exists on validation of non-formal and informal learning.</p> <p>In the 2003 Bill on Validation (<i>Validering m.m. – fortsatt utveckling av vuxnas lärande</i>) the government stated that it was too early to regulate validation. It felt more time should be given to pilot projects to gather more experience and further discussion before deciding on regulations and passing legislation. Thus, responsibility for validation is currently heavily decentralised to local and regional level. Due to the decentralised nature of validation, and different validation providers and their methods and models, it is difficult for individuals to identify the level of quality, legitimacy and equivalence of operations carried out by individual providers. As a result, the National Swedish Commission on Validation was set up for 2004-2007 to enhance regional cooperation and describe and propose suitable methods to develop and implement quality-assured validation (Swedish National Commission on Validation, 2006).</p> <p>In 2000, approximately 2 300 people had their competence, knowledge and skills validated. In 2005 this number increased to approximately 8 000 people within municipal adult education (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2006b).</p>

Source: European inventory, 2007.

- Countries described as having emerging systems of validation have either:
- recently adopted a legal framework or strategy for validation;
  - recently taken significant, practical steps to create a framework capable of recognising informal and non-formal learning;
  - limited it to specific educational sectors (adult or vocational training only) or target groups such as unemployed people.

The following examples illustrate this:

Table 6. **Czech Republic and Luxembourg; validation as an emerging reality**

Country	Overview of validation initiatives
Czech Republic	<p>Since 2005, legislation has been put in place step by step to create a framework to recognise non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic.</p> <p>The New School Act, which took effect on 1 January 2005 enables individuals (above 15 years of age) to acquire a partial qualification by passing a single examination as a part of the respective final examination, regardless of how they acquired the relevant knowledge and skills.</p> <p>The new Act on Recognition of Further Education Results, which came into force in August 2007, foresees a possibility for adults to acquire partial vocational qualifications, through an examination to compare their prior learning achievements (knowledge, skills and competences, regardless of how they were attained) with qualification and assessment standards of respective partial vocational qualifications.</p> <p>It is not possible to gain full qualifications through these procedures of validation. A comprehensive national system for validation of competences gained through informal and non-formal learning does not yet exist in the Czech Republic.</p> <p>The lack – until recently – of a generally valid legal regulation fostering recognition of non-formal education has resulted in development of several specific sub-regulations within decrees issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other ministries (agriculture, industry and trade, health, the interior, and defence) which govern various specific types of CVET or qualification testing. These partial regulations concern, for example, recognition of professional competences of individuals working in electrical engineering, crews of ships, railways and railway transport operators, healthcare workers, etc. (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2006a).</p> <p>In the private sector, various specific sectors have developed elaborate systems of assessment, training and certification of qualifications. These sectors mostly concern those with professions covered by specific laws and regulations and sectors where international qualifications and certificates play an important role.</p> <p>Activities in the third sector to recognise non-formal and informal learning have been very scarce to date.</p>
Luxembourg	<p>The national action plan for employment adopted in 1998 saw creation of a <i>bilan de compétences</i> or individual skills audit, a tool to help people evaluate their own skills and competences and hence match them to appropriate jobs or</p>

## Country Overview of validation initiatives

training programmes. The national action plan for employment, 2002, created a similar tool to assess vocational skills, the *bilan d'insertion professionnelle* (BIP), specifically for job-seekers <sup>(15)</sup>.

The *bilan de compétences* and the *bilan d'insertion professionnelle* are only available for unemployed people.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is gradually being introduced as a way of accessing formal learning. Legislation creating the University of Luxembourg in 2003 includes an article allowing a prospective student to request a *validation des acquis de l'expérience*, which is effectively a validation of non-formal and informal learning of the candidate, as a substitute to certification or other proof of having undertaken the formal education required for entry to the university <sup>(16)</sup>.

The *Règlement grand-ducal* (17 June 2000, revised 18 May 2007) on organisation of adult learning allows, in certain cases, admission to courses for candidates who do not meet the regular requirements, providing they have relevant previous professional experience, which can be validated <sup>(17)</sup>.

A major bill has been submitted to the Luxembourg parliament, proposing reforms of the formal state professional training system. When approved (expected in 2008), the legislation will build on existing provision to create a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning similar to the French model.

In the private sector, the *Chambre des employés privés* has set in place provision to validate skills and competences for candidates to its adult education evening courses in continuing professional training.

Some third sector organisations have also developed their own initiative to validate skills and experiences gained through voluntary activities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth. This initiative, which is known as the *attestation de compétences* was piloted between 2006-07.

Source: European inventory, 2007.

<sup>(15)</sup> See: European Commission. *National action plan for employment 2002*. Available on Intranet: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/employment\\_strategy/02\\_national\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/02_national_en.htm) [cited 7.2.2008].

<sup>(16)</sup> See: *Loi du 12 août 2003 portant création de l'Université du Luxembourg*. Available from Internet: <http://www.uni.lu/content/download/8848/140107/file/loi.pdf> [cited 7.2.2008].

<sup>(17)</sup> See: *Règlement grand-ducal du 17 juin 2000 portant organisation de l'apprentissage pour adultes*. [Luxembourg] Available from Internet: <http://www.legilux.public.lu/leg/a/archives/2000/0551107/0551107.pdf> [cited 7.2.2008].

### 6.3. Low level of activity – countries at initial development stages

Countries in this group according to the European inventory 2007, frequently describe validation as a new theme and something yet to influence the overall education, training and employment agenda. In some countries validation is a controversial theme, sometimes triggering resistance from national stakeholders, including in education and training. This group includes countries like Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Lichtenstein, the Slovak republic and Turkey.

In these countries the benefits of a scheme to identify, assess and recognise learning gained outside formal education may be recognised by stakeholders, but, as yet, there is little in terms of policy or practice to facilitate its validation. To the extent that initiatives can be observed, these are driven either by the European agenda, EU-funded projects, private or third sectors. Work on national qualifications frameworks in response to the EQF has changed the situation. Many of these countries are considering validation as an integrated part of future NQFs.

The table below gives examples of countries in this category.

Table 7. **Countries at initial development stages**

Country	Overview of validation initiatives
Croatia	<p>Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Croatia is beginning to surface with some developments in recent years, mostly driven by European integration and initiatives from the private and third sectors.</p> <p>A major institution envisaged to be responsible for monitoring, analysis and evaluation of non-formal education – the Agency for Adult Education – was established recently.</p> <p>The Agency for Vocational Education and Training has begun a process of developing new qualifications which is taking account of non-formal and informal learning. Work has also started on defining the Croatian qualifications framework, seen in Croatia as an important prerequisite for validation of non-formal and informal learning.</p> <p>Currently, learners can store evidence of prior learning in an individual record of achievement of qualifications and work experience, kept in a booklet called <i>radna knjižica</i>. Every employee with a labour contract (not those on short-term contracts) in Croatia has one. However, while there is no formal requirement that</p>

Country	Overview of validation initiatives
	<p>only accredited programmes can be entered into the <i>radna knjižica</i>, in practice the local government offices which enter items into the <i>knjižica</i> normally accept only certified education programmes.</p> <p>The newly adopted Act on Volunteering creates a good starting point for developing validation initiatives related to volunteer experience. It obliges the volunteer employer to issue written confirmation of volunteer work experience. This follows initiatives by the third sector, especially the network of volunteer centres in Croatia which exist in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek.</p>
Latvia	<p>There is no legislative base or national concept of informal and non-formal education and learning in Latvia.</p> <p>However, by the end of the 1990s, within lifelong learning, more attention was being paid to informal and non-formal learning. Concerning validation ('validation' or its equivalents have not been used until recently) Latvia remains at the stage of experimentation and uncertainty.</p> <p>Several specific validation initiatives have been implemented, such as development of a teachers' qualification and a certification of knowledge of the state language. These are mainly based on, or have a very strong integral part of, assessment and validation of knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning.</p> <p>In the private sector there is awareness of the importance of enabling employees to develop skills and competences, but it remains to be seen how the sector will respond to this by developing initiatives for validation of informal and non-formal learning.</p> <p>There is currently little evidence of initiatives to promote validation of informal and non-formal learning in the third sector in Latvia.</p> <p>The operational strategy of the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science for 2007-2009 was issued in July 2007. A sub-priority of this strategy deals with the supply, accessibility and quality of lifelong learning in the country. It also stresses the importance of validation of non-formal and informal qualifications.</p> <p>Inclusion of Latvia in the common European area could promote understanding of the wide range of problems connected with validation, and prompt possible solutions.</p>

Source: European inventory 2007.

## CHAPTER 7

# Beyond 2010 – elements of a strategy on validation

This snapshot of European validation policies and practices, at the end of 2007, shows significant progress in recent years. Increasingly countries are putting in place methods and systems making it possible for individuals to have their non- and informally acquired competences identified and/or validated. The debate in the European Parliament in October 2007 on adoption of the European qualifications framework underlined that validation is seen, more than ever, as an integrate part of the European strategy on lifelong learning. However, our snapshot also illustrates that validation is a multi-speed process in which countries have reached very different stages of development and progress can not be taken for granted. The Portuguese EU Presidency conference on ‘Valuing learning – European experiences in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning’ in Lisbon November 2007 <sup>(18)</sup> addressed the current situation and tried to identify the main elements of a European strategy for validation, looking beyond 2010. The following 10 key challenges were emphasised.

### **The individual at the centre**

When designing and implementing validation, individual learners must be at the centre of the process. Validation can not be based on an imbalanced teacher-pupil relation, but must actively involve candidates in the different stages of the identification and assessment process. The frequently tacit character of non-and informally acquired learning outcomes makes it necessary and possible to involve candidates in an active process combining dialogue, self assessment, systematic reflection and portfolio approaches to capture the experience in question. Methods and systems must be set up and designed to take into account the complex and non-standardised character of non-formal and informal learning. The 2004 European principles on validation underline that validation results should (normally) be the individual’s property.

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<sup>(18)</sup> See: [http://www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Reunioes\\_Eventos/Outros/aprendizagem.htm](http://www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Reunioes_Eventos/Outros/aprendizagem.htm)

### **A shift to learning outcomes is crucial for validation**

The shift to learning outcomes is critical for validation of non-formal and informal learning to become an integral and normal part of qualifications systems and frameworks. The link between qualifications and formal education and training courses must be weakened/removed to 'mainstream' and normalise validation. This is exemplified by the French case where opening up qualifications to a broader range of learning experiences, including non-formal and informal learning at work, has dramatically increased the number of individuals in validation. The focus must be on what an individual knows, understands or is able to do at the end of a learning process, not on the inputs to or duration of the teaching process. Validation will be extremely difficult if it has to relate to input based standards; while the outcomes of formal, non-formal and informal learning may be equivalent, the processes leading to these outcomes will necessarily be different.

### **Standards are critical to validation**

Validation will always involve reference to a standard. The character of these standards is crucial and will largely decide whether the results of validation are trusted or not. If a standard is too local, it may have a negative impact on transferability (see also point 5). If a standard is too general and inflexible, it may prevent the validation from capturing the essence of the individual learning experience.

To encourage validation, standards must first and foremost be (re) defined and described as learning outcomes or competences. While this, to a certain extent, is already happening, substantial work remains to be done, not least in general and higher education. It can sometimes be observed that validation approaches are met with scepticism, reflecting a fear that the overall quality of qualifications may be reduced by opening up to non-formal and informal learning. The only way to meet this concern is to be very clear that qualifications awarded on the basis of non-formal and informal learning have to meet the same rigid quality criteria as learning in the formal system. Agreement on clear standards applicable to all forms of learning is a critical element in such strategy.

### **Validation must balance formative and summative functions**

Analysis of the validation process (see Figure 1) illustrates the important combination of formative and summative functions. While the summative ('certifying') function is important, all experiences show that the formative ('promotion of learning') aspects need serious consideration. First, formative



aspects of validation can be treated as a separate part; identification of learning experiences is important in itself, reflecting the need to make learning outcomes visible to the individual and other stakeholders. Second, summative and formative aspects of validation are interlinked; entering a formal certification process is frequently accompanied by strong motivation and a wish to continue learning. Developments of validation need to consider both functions and clarify how they can be separated and combined.

### **Transferability is a ‘must’**

Validation must facilitate transfer of learning outcomes from one setting to another. If approaches are too local and restricted, they may not accomplish this. While local solutions may be valuable for formative purposes, for example to identify competences acquired in an enterprise, their wider relevance will be restricted. If validation is to respond to the challenges of increased change and mobility, approaches must pay attention to transferability and base themselves on a broad involvement and commitment of relevant stakeholders. To be transferable, validation results must be credible and trustworthy.

### **Methodological convergence is necessary**

An important objective of validation is to enable transfer of learning outcomes from one setting to another. This requires strengthening the overall quality – validity and reliability – of the validation process. As validation is gradually turning into a practical reality in European countries, more methodological experience is being accumulated. This applies, in particular, to experience related to the portfolio methodology, self-assessment and dialogue-based approaches. These experiences need to be systematically shared and exploited to make transfer and acceptance of validation results easier and strengthen credibility. Methodological convergence in Europe reflects the character of non-formal and informal learning; identification and assessment of non-formal and informal learning requires candidates to participate actively in the process and encourages them to demonstrate their acquired competences.

### **Validation has to take into account ethical issues**

Following increased use of validation, ethical issues related to these practices are coming to the forefront. While partly addressed by the common European principles in 2004, it is clear that validation, in some cases, may conflict with protection of privacy. Sometimes validation touches upon domains of personal life where it can cause harm. This is illustrated by efforts, for example in some

service sector occupations, to identify and assess personal attitudes and convictions. Here it is important to address the boundaries of validation and the individual's right to control the process and the use of the validation results.

### **Cost-benefit issues**

Challenges related to capturing the complexity of non-formal and informal learning may give rise to highly sophisticated methods and approaches for identification and assessment. This can be defended from the perspective of validity and reliability, but the costs of these approaches in terms of time and money may conflict with the returns for candidates and other stakeholders. It is necessary to look carefully and systematically into various experience and the balance between costs and benefits. This requires looking into concepts of costs and benefit, as the meaning may differ for different stakeholders and can not exclusively be expressed in monetary terms.

### **Sustainability of validation approaches and systems**

A significant part of activity related to validation has been taken forward through projects and limited duration programmes. While this provides a good opportunity for testing and experimentation, it causes problems for introducing permanent systems and approaches. Too strong a reliance on limited duration projects or programmes will reduce the overall transparency of validation; individuals can not rely on these services being taken forward on a permanent basis. They also have to question whether the results of these approaches will be of value on a longer term basis. It is important to discuss how validation can be 'mainstreamed' and given a permanent and predictable role.

### **National qualifications frameworks and validation**

The changing character of national qualifications systems, in particular through the setting up of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), is highly relevant to developing approaches to validation of non-formal and informal learning. Emerging NQFs may be said to operate according to four main aims shown in Table 8:

**Table 8. Functions of national qualifications frameworks**

- Facilitate establishment of national standards for learning outcomes (competences);
- Relate qualifications to each other;
- Promote access to learning, transfer of learning and progression in learning;
- Promote the quality of education and training provision.

Source: Bjørnåvold and Coles (forthcoming).

Each of these aims may be directly related to further development of methods and systems for validation. Frequently national qualifications levels will be closely related to education and learning standards, which are in many cases defined by input (subject, syllabus, teaching methods, character and duration of teaching process). Since educational standards are normally written as teaching specifications, they are not open to non-standardised and individually specific learning outside formal education and training. Recent comparative research (Cedefop, 2008a forthcoming) shows a significant shift towards learning outcomes in education and training across Europe. Introduction of NQFs could contribute to this process and open up development of coherent, learning outcomes-based standards for qualifications. This could facilitate opening up to a broader set of outcomes, including those acquired through learning in non-formal and informal settings. An objective shared by most NQFs is to reduce barriers between education, training and learning institutions and systems and to promote access, transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes.

Many NQFs currently being developed may be described as working towards integration <sup>(19)</sup> of different education and training sub-systems in their countries (integrating frameworks). Methods and systems for validation can complement and contribute directly to this objective aiming at permeable education, training and learning systems. If introduced on a systematic basis, as a part of the overall qualifications system, validation will open up qualifications to a broader set of users, for example by certifying work experience and voluntary work. Validation can also be seen as an important tool for opening up qualifications systems to immigrants and making it possible for individuals with low formal qualifications to enter an education and training

<sup>(19)</sup> See, for example, summary report from Peer Learning Activity on National Qualifications frameworks, Budapest, October 2007, Education and Training 2010, Cluster on Recognition of learning outcomes, European Commission, DG EAC, Unit A1 (European Commission, 2007b).

career. The key to success, however, is mainstreaming of validation and the broad acceptance of non-formal and informal learning as a normal route to qualifications. Development of validation and NQFs thus refers to the same objectives, both trying to make it possible for individuals to progress in their learning careers on the basis of their actual learning outcomes and competences, not on the basis of the duration and location of a particular learning process. Development of validation should therefore be directly linked and seen as complementary to NQF development. By establishing a stronger link to the outside world, in particular to enterprises and organisations, validation of non-formal and informal learning may complement traditional, provider oriented quality assurance. In this sense a systematic approach to validation may be seen as providing feedback to the formal system, making it possible to compare the strengths and weaknesses of different routes to the same qualification.

All the above 10 points are directly or indirectly linked to the challenge of continuously improving the quality of validation. This is a challenge faced by all the stakeholders involved (see for example Table 2), and at all levels.

## CHAPTER 8

# Conclusion

Whatever stage countries have reached in developing and implementing validation, the overall picture presented by this report, and the 2007 version of the European inventory, is that countries increasingly take lifelong learning seriously. Hardly any country argues against the importance and necessity of valuing as broad a scope of learning outcomes as possible.

In most cases, validation is linked to opening up national qualifications systems and frameworks to learning outside the formal education and training institutions. In this sense validation is seen as a bridge between different forms of learning outcomes and setting, a tool to strengthen the permeability of qualifications systems and coherent individual learning pathways. What differs between the various countries is their practical response to these challenges and the speed at which they are carrying out reforms. It is worth noting that very few – if any – countries explicitly argue against the relevance of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A successful lifelong learning strategy implies that individuals have increased access to learning, be able to transfer and combine the outcomes of learning and to progress vertically as well as horizontally within systems. It is for these (individual) purposes validation of non-formal and informal learning is important.

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## ANNEX 1

# Conceptual basis

In this field, many terms are used – recognition, validation, certification, accreditation, valuation of non-formal, informal, prior, experiential and real learning – to name a few.

The rapid introduction of legal frameworks and technical and institutional arrangements have made it increasingly important to agree a set of basic concepts and definition. The pressure to clarify concepts has also been accentuated by extensive international cooperation in this area and the role of international organisations in this endeavour seems quite significant.

Several authors have offered proposals on how to deal with this complexity (Weil and McGill, 1989; Cedefop, Bjornavold, 2000; Duvekot et al., 2005; Straka, 2003; Cedefop, Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2005; Andersson and Harris, 2006; van Kleef, 2006). International organisations have also, frequently based on the above input, contributed by comparing the use of concepts in different countries and proposing possible common solutions (Eurostat, 2006; OECD, 2007).

In EU policies, the 2004 agreement on a set of common principles for 'identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning' was important in promoting conceptual coherence. This agreement, while not pretending to offer any final or absolute answer to remaining conceptual problems, has *de facto* provided a common conceptual reference point for pragmatic cooperation between countries. It is with reference to this agreement that this publication uses validation as the overarching term.

The following definitions, selected from the updated version of the Cedefop glossary (2008b, forthcoming) on vocational education and training terms, reflect increasing cooperation in this field and efforts to develop a common language. It should be noted that the terms can be divided into two main groups:

- The first set of concepts is related to the processes involved when trying to capture the learning outcomes of an individual. These are concepts of identification, assessment, accreditation, valuation, recognition, validation and certification. The list of terms illustrates that we speak of very different purposes, ranging from the support of learning processes (formative) to formal certification (summative).

- The second set of concepts is related to the context and outcomes of learning. The terms formal, non-formal and informal learning are most frequently used, together or separately. Terms like prior and experiential learning are also common, along with skills and competences because they are not always and necessarily recognised in a qualification.

The ongoing shift to a learning outcomes perspective in national and European education and training policies and practices directly influences communication in this field. There is a tendency to speak of processes to 'validate learning outcomes acquired in non-formal or informal settings'. This draws attention to the fact that the learning outcomes in question are not necessarily different from those acquired in formal settings. The problem is rather that they are invisible and less valued because they are acquired outside the formal systems.

#### assessment of learning outcomes

The process of appraising knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences of an individual against predefined criteria (learning expectations, measurement of learning outcomes). Assessment is typically followed by validation and certification.

#### certification of learning outcomes

The process of issuing a certificate, diploma or title formally attesting that a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard.

#### formal learning

Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (in an education or training institution or on-the-job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to validation and certification.

#### informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. 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.

Comments:

- informal learning outcomes do not usually lead to certification but may be validated and certified in the framework of recognition of prior learning schemes;
- informal learning is also referred to as experiential or incidental/random learning.

<b>learning</b>	<p>A process by which an individual assimilates information, ideas and values and thus acquires knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences.</p> <p>Comment: learning occurs through personal reflection, reconstruction and social interaction. Learning may take place in formal, non-formal or informal settings.</p>
<b>learning outcomes / learning attainments</b>	<p>The set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process.</p> <p>Comment: learning outcomes can arise from any form of learning setting (either formal, non-formal or informal).</p>
<b>lifelong learning</b>	<p>All learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.</p>
<b>lifewide learning</b>	<p>Learning, either formal, non-formal or informal, that takes place across the full range of life activities (personal, social or professional) and at any stage.</p> <p>Comment: lifewide learning is a dimension of lifelong learning.</p>
<b>non-formal learning</b>	<p>Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view.</p> <p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• non-formal learning outcomes may be validated and lead to certification;</li> <li>• non-formal learning is sometimes described as semi-structured learning.</li> </ul>
<b>qualification</b>	<p>The term qualification covers different aspects:</p> <p>(a) formal qualification: the formal outcome (certificate, diploma or title) of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work. A qualification confers official recognition of the value of learning outcomes in the labour market and in education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practise a trade;</p> <p>(b) job requirements: the knowledge, aptitudes and skills required to perform the specific tasks attached to a particular work position (ILO).</p>

<b>recognition of learning outcomes</b>	<p>(a) Formal recognition: the process of granting official status to skills and competences either through the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• award of qualifications (certificates, diploma or titles);</li> <li>• grant of equivalence, credit units or waivers, validation of gained skills and/or competences;</li> </ul> <p>and/or</p> <p>(b) social recognition: the acknowledgement of the value of skills and/or competences by economic and social stakeholders.</p>
<b>recognition of prior learning</b>	see recognition of learning outcomes; certification of learning outcomes; validation of learning outcomes.
<b>skills audit/Bilan de competence</b>	Analysis of knowledge, skills and competences of an individual, including his or her aptitudes and motives to define a career project and/or plan professional reorientation or training project.
<b>standard</b>	<p>Expectation, obligation, requirement or norm expected.</p> <p>Comment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One can distinguish between several types of standards:</li> <li>• educational standard refers to the statements of learning objectives, content of curricula, entry requirements as well as resources required to meet the learning objectives;</li> <li>• occupational standard refers to the statements of the activities and tasks related to – or to the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for – a specific job;</li> <li>• assessment standard refers to the statements of the learning outcomes to be assessed, the level of performance to be achieved by the individual assessed and the methodology used;</li> <li>• validation standard refers to the statements of the learning outcomes to be assessed, the assessment methodology used, as well as the level of performance to be reached;</li> <li>• certification standard refers to the statements of the rules applicable for obtaining a certificate or diploma as well as the rights conferred.</li> </ul> <p>According to the system, these standards can be defined separately or be part of one document.</p>
<b>transferability of learning outcomes</b>	The degree to which knowledge, skills and competences can be used in a new occupational or educational environment, and/or to be validated and certified.
<b>transparency of qualifications</b>	The degree of visibility and legibility of qualifications, of their content and value on the (sectoral, regional, national or international) labour market and in the education and training systems.

<b>validation of learning outcomes</b>	Confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification.
<b>valuing learning</b>	The process of promoting participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning, in order to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning.

Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)

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