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“Transferring methods for validation of informal learning to VET institutions in the field of sustainable agriculture”

**Template for National
implementation strategy for
converting current non-formal
courses into formal courses and
validating the previous learning.**

FRANCE – english version

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1. Converting non-formal courses

1.1. Aim of course

Organic Agriculture makes part of several alternative agricultures (like agroecology, conservation tillage, biological control, High Environmental Quality...). If some of them gives some ways and good practices for producing, but without any kind of certification, Organic Agriculture has its own charts, adapted to each type of production, with an European recognition. That's why this kind of agriculture is interesting to get a focus in an European project as AGROSKILL.

Organic certification is focused on practices and products, but not on skills. AS well, in France, any certification is existing for trainers or advisers who work with organic farmers, giving a framework about the skills needed for.

The national non-formal training offer for organic trainers/advisers is above all focused on technical or certification fields : technical/economic references in OA by production, steps for converting and maintaining in OA..

But the questions could be :

- *Does organic farming get specificities which need some proper skills ?*
- *In which field trainers and advisers, with already good professional experiences, should improve their skills, to provide a better adapted service to organic farmers ? Should be in technical field, or more in transversal skills ?*

Through the several steps made on AGROSKILL project, and after a Pilot Course focused on these questions, that provided first answers from local trainers / advisers and national experts, the Agricultural Chamber of Ariège is proposing a general course, that could be common to all the professional trainers / advisers that would start to work with organic farmers. This course is focused on transversal skills, and can be followed by specialists courses, according on the main organic productions that would concern the trainees.

The aim of the course is getting the basic skills for supporting farmers in organic Agriculture. These skills are divided in three main topics :

- 1. Advisers must have capacities to adapt their postures, depending of the needs**
- 2. Global approach and transversal capacities to analysis issues and needs, to look for means (and especially "resources bodies")**
- 3. Key knowledge in organic agriculture**

The expected trainees are agricultural advisers/trainers, already in working situation, and who starts to work with organic farmers. They need to feel self-confident even if they are changing of target group, to mobilize the skills and experiences they already have, but also to "think the change" and accept that working in organic agriculture field means also a part of change in their habits.

1.2. Split up the different knowledge parts of the current course into units/elements/learning objects

a) defining of every knowledge - and learning object

8 learning objects are defined, in order to get the basic skills for supporting farmers in organic Agriculture.

To be able to analyse the main issue in a dedicated farm, and supporting the farmer in its strategic decisions :

- diagnosis, global and system approach, identification of the issues and pushing them forward.
- Looking for solutions (which doesn't mean that the adviser has to be expert for everything)
- Providing to the farmer all the information needed to take its own decision by itself (tools supporting decision)

To be able to look for resources : technical information, resources bodies (experts, innovative farmers...)

To be able to organize a meeting with farmers :

- the agenda : it must be related with a issue/ need identified in several farms, and must provide some solutions or at least some ideas that could be tried by the farmers ;
- recruitment of participants,
- logistic organization
- meeting animation, balance and conclusions, proposals of next steps

To be able to organize a training course with farmers :

- analysis of a need which would be most interesting to see in a collective way
- looking for the solutions : internal or external resources, best practices, experimentations made by farmers or researchers, in the local zone or outside...
- creating a pedagogical script which decline the several steps of the course
- Knowledge and awareness about the financial opportunities for funding the course (especially if it needs an external expert),
- recruitment of participants,
- logistic organization

Communication : to be able to write an article for specialist press : adapted to the target, attractive, easy to read and to understand, with a good balance in terms of technical information ?

Participation in team and/or project approach,

- Working with a team spirit, sharing information, participating in internal / external meetings
- Understanding the conditions for project implementation : dead-lines, targets, methodologies...
- Knowledge and awareness about the financial opportunities for funding the actions.
- Knowledge and awareness about the strategic points relatives to this topic

To have all the basic and key knowledge in organic agriculture

- OA organisation, values, main characteristics and principles,

- statistics and key figures about OA in our region,
- marketing channel, valuation opportunities in OA, consumption trends, good practices in the region.

To be able to adapt its posture :

OA has some specificities in common with many alternative agriculture that mean change process : lack of referencies, a lot experimentations without huge capitalization,

Farmers as well as advisers and trainers have to adapt their behaviour, to the following benefits continuous improvement, humility...

Advisers must have capacities to adapt their postures, depending of the needs. It's not necessary an expert, but it can also be in some cases just a collective actions animator, or with the capacities to say "I don't know myself but I know who knows".

In this kind of situations, the relationship between farmers and advisers/ trainers is also changing : the "top-down" approach is less using, the main task will not be a transfer of technical or scientific data and some already proven experiences, but more a coordination of several interventions, crossing experimentations in real farming situations, study journeys, experts, in a "bottom up" approach.

b) grouping of learning objects together to several elements

Elements of learning :

1 – Technical skills for individual advising

- To be able to analyse the main issue in a dedicated farm, and supporting the farmer in its strategic decisions
- To be able to look for resources : technical information, resources bodies (experts, innovative farmers...)

2 – technical skills for collective animation and for training

- To be able to organize a training course with farmers
- To be able to organize a meeting with farmers

3 – transversal skills

- Participation in team and/or project approach,
- To have all the basic and key knowledge in organic agriculture
- To be able to adapt its posture
- Communication

c) grouping of several elements together to units

The 3 elements can be regrouped in 2 units :

1. **Technical skills, global approach and transversal capacities** : diagnosis and analysis, group animation, training,
2. **transversal skills** : communication, participation in team and/or project approach, to be able to adapt its posture

1.3. Define the average needed time for achieving knowledge to fulfil the requirements

Elements of learning :

1 – Technical skills for individual advising - 4 HOURS “face-to-face”

- To be able to analyse the main issue in a dedicated farm, and supporting the farmer in its strategic decisions
- To be able to look for resources : technical information, resources bodies (experts, innovative farmers...)

*As the training is dedicated to trainers/advisers already in working situation, these kind of skills are usually learned. Also, the idea of this training is that the most important is not to be an “expert” and to get all the technical information for every production and any situation, but to be able to **find the information**. So, the capacities to identify the difficulties, to analyse them and to search for solutions is here the key skill.*

2 – technical skills for collective animation and for training – 8 HOURS “face-to-face”

- To be able to organize a training course with farmers
- To be able to organize a meeting with farmers

These types of skills need more time to understand :

- *what are the earnings of using collective actions and trainings tools ? what do they provide that individual advice can not provide ?*
- *what are the good practices ? what it can be evaluate ? how to face up to common problems (lack of leadership, difficulties to mobilize farmers, to find a common solutions to individual situations...)?*

3 – transversal skills – 12 HOURS “face-to-face”

- Participation in team and/or project approach,
- To have all the basic and key knowledge in organic agriculture

- To be able to adapt its posture
- Communication

These types of skills need time the most. Learning in this field is more complicate, it needs to be in a self-confident situation (easier within a group with external members, and not colleagues, and that’s already have worked in the others elements of learning).

OVERHALL : 24 HOURS in training “face-to-face” /

These course can be organized with 3 consecutive days.

The trainee have to practice the tools and methodologies they learned during these 3 days,

Several evaluations can be proposed during the course :

- at the beginning : what the level of trainees about basic knowledge in OA ?
- at the end of the “face-to-face” course
- after awhile (like 3 months/6 months / one year) : a phone interview between trainer/trainee, in order to know which tools and methodologies were used after the course, for which results. It can completed by a phone interview trainer / head trainer.

To get a comparison with others courses and University system, we can give the following equivalence :

3 days training = 3 ECTS

*Usually in Universities the workload of courses is given in **ECTS (European credit transfer system) Points**. Every ECTS usually stands for 25 hours of workload. So the course can be calculated (in university level) for a total of ECTS. Normally a typical course with 14 hours of attendance and 2 ECTS (=50 hours of workload) means that besides the attendance additional 36 hours of workload are expected (in average) by the participants to achieve the learning outcome of this course.*

1.4. Define exam/assignment for each unit/element

1. oral exam

Organisation of a meeting with farmers :

- the agenda : it must be related with a issue/ need identified in several farms, and must provide some solutions or at least some ideas that could be tried by the farmers ;
- recruitment of participants,
- logistic organization
- meeting animation, balance and conclusions, proposals of next steps

2. written exam

Communication :

Writing an article for agricultural newspaper : does it adapted to the target ? does it attractive ? easy to read and to understand ? with a good balance in terms of technical information ?

53 practical exam

Farm diagnosis

Participation in team and/or project approach,

54 supervision at job

Transversal skills

1.5. Calculate the given ECVET points according to country specific standards

This component needs to be strengthened by drawing on concrete cases of validation. He will be treated with the organizations contacted as part of the pilot course to refine the training proposal.

1.6. Prepare a document for participant that show exactly what learning objects/elements/units are fulfilled and what are not fulfilled (e.g. detailed certificate)

This component needs to be strengthened by drawing on concrete cases of validation. He will be treated with the organizations contacted as part of the pilot course to refine the training proposal.

2. Validation of non formal previous learning knowledge

2.1. Searching for proper authority to contact and check for requirements

In France, the national framework for accreditation is the **Accreditation of prior learning and previous experience** (called “Validation des Acquis de l’Expérience, VAE).

The VAE system gives the opportunity for any person with at least three years of experience as employee, self employed or volunteer, to seek a diploma. It is an individual right that provides all or part of a degree from the acquired experience.

The **VAE systems** is lead by Ministry of Employment (see national website for VAE : <http://www.vae.gouv.fr/>).

In agricultural sector, the main target group concerned by the VAE system are the employees in agriculture sector who wish to obtain a higher qualification, in order to get a personal advancement (in the same company/organism or in an other one) and to access to jobs with higher responsibility.

The “national analysis per country about existing structure of formal, non formal and informal learning, and the situation with regard to the accreditation of previous experience” shew that two types of certifications available through VAE may correspond to agricultural activities:

1. Degrees of technical and higher secondary education short agricultural :
 - CAPA: Certificate of Agricultural Vocational Ability,
 - BEPA: Diploma of Agricultural Vocational Study,
 - BPA: Agricultural Vocational Diploma,
 - Bac Pro : Bachelor degree in Agriculture,
 - BTSA: Agricultural Technician Certificate,
 - CS: Certificate of Specialization.

2. diplomas of higher education along agricultural :
 - Professional License,
 - Engineering,
 - Masters,
 - Doctorates.

In our case, the VAE systems could be the proper authority to contact, but it needs to take a diploma as a reference.

VAE only can validate skills corresponding with degrees listed on the National Register of Vocational Certifications (NCPR). Nowadays, as it was already said, any certification or qualification exists in France for trainers/advisers in Organic Agriculture.

However, some formal trainings have specialities in organic agriculture.

Then, 2 diploma were studied to see if they could be useful for an eventual validation of non formal learning :

- **Profesional Licence “Advising and development in Organic Farming “ (called “ABCD” in its French version),**
- **Speciality Certificate “Technician / adviser in organic agriculture”.**

But a second point as to be studied : what are the **stakeholders motivations** today to develop a validation of non-formal learning in Organic agriculture advising ?

The non-formal training that we are presenting above is dedicated to advisers and trainers that are already working. It's not completely sure that a validation of their skills, specifically in organic agriculture, would provide to them new job opportunities. The perception of organic agriculture depends on many points, and it can be seen that this alternative agriculture may have a bad image for some parts of stakeholders (they make links with alternative or marginal ways of life...)

Organic Agriculture is presently growing in France (and especially in some mountains zones like Ariège), which means that more and more advisers are needed to support farmers recently converted in OA. In this context, it doesn't appear clearly that a certification for advisers/trainers could be a priority for main agricultural organisms or for State.

For an employe, advising or training specifically in organic agriculture is not necessary an individual choice, but it may be also a mission provided by its hierarchy.

It means that a proposal for validation of non formal previous learning knowledge has to be presented **not like something that should be mandatory, but as a quality measure, taken willingly by advisers and their employers**, with the idea to put itself in a **position of questioning its practices and of improvement continuous process**.

For the AGROSKILL partnership , the interest also lies in the fact to compare national situations, highlighting the fact that examples of mandatory certification exist in other European countries. These examples show that this possibility can not be totally aside and is relevant to anticipate and consider how agricultural development organismes could respond, and how validation systems would provide access to this certification for the largest number of advisers/trainers. However, in the current French context, it is a quality approach that seems to be the most likely option.

To promote this kind of quality measure, and propose to agricultural organisms networks to discuss about it, **RESOLIA** could be a proper contact, in order to develop the non-formal course described above here, to make it know and recognize by agricultural organisms which are supporting organic farmers.

RESOLIA is a Vocational Education and Training Center, created by the Agricultural Chambers network (88 district chambers, 21 regional chambers, one national head). It proposes a large offer of trainings to all agriculture chambers staff, adapted to each staff category and kind of missions.

Nowadays, the RESOLIA trainings with an Organic Agriculture specificity are focused on specific productions, and answer to some needs in improving technical skills. During the AGROSKILL pilot course made by the Chamber of Ariege, a workshop with national experts discussed about the question : *does it need an additional training on the RESOLIA offer, with a transversal focus ?* For the experts, it appeared clearly that it would be interesting (unfortunately, any expert from RESOLIA could participate in this workshop).

2.2. Steps of Validation/Accreditation

One first step is to describe the **improvement individual project** : which skills have to be improved in priority ? for which kinds of activities ? This document has to be discussed between the employer and the employe, so each ones can give its point of view.

2.2.1. Counselling (help of advisors to collect documentations)

- Collect documentation (evidences)

Description of achieved learning objects (when, how, by whom,..)

It needs to collect all the non-formal trainings in which the adviser has participated in its vocational experience, to describe the learnings received, what the adviser had selected and the tools currently used in the framework of its missions.

Evidences of applied work :

- advisers interviews : what are my strengths ? my weaknesses ?
- for those who participate in non-formal learning : with an evaluation 6 months or one year after training.

2.2.2. Evaluation (help of committee)

These points of the procedure have to be discussed with several organisms, in order to find the best organization for the following points :

- Viewing in documentation
- Decision about proper method of evaluation (interviews, exam, evidences, check for competency at workplace,...)
- Run proper activities

2.2.3. Accreditation/Certification

In a position of questioning its practices and of improvement continuous process, the accreditation/validation would allow to make a balance for employees and employers about the mastered skills, the ones which needs informal improvement, and the ones that need non-formal learnings.

3. Validation of informal previous learning knowledge

3.1. Searching for proper authority to contact and check for requirements

Same procedure as for non-formal previous learning knowledge, see 2.1.

3.2. Steps of Validation/Accreditation

3.2.1. Counselling (help of advisors to collect documentations) :

It needs to collect all the mastered skills by the adviser / trainer. These skills come from all its vocational experience, and have to be distinguished from the learnings received on formal trainings and non-formal trainings.

See also of the procedure for non-formal previous learning knowledge, see 2.2.1.

3.2.2. Evaluation (help of committee)

Same procedure as for non-formal previous learning knowledge, see 2.2.2.

3.2.3. Accreditation/Certification

Same procedure as for non-formal previous learning knowledge, see 2.2.3.