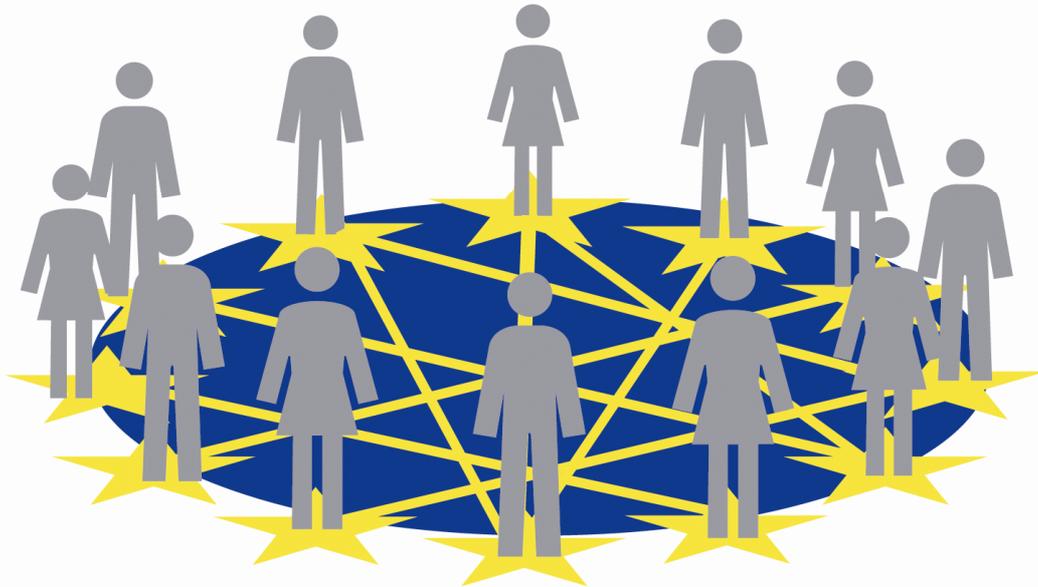


PIN



EQF Praxis and Information Network

Recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Austria

**Guidelines and materials
for in-company union representatives**



Lifelong
Learning
Programme

510698-LLP-1-2010-1-DE-Leonardo-LNW - This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Translation:
Mag. Michael Reiterer, AHA Translation Office,
Lange Gasse 11/15, A-1080 Vienna, Austria

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Foreword

This document is a result of the collaboration of 14 partner institutions within the framework of the project "PIN - EQF practice and Information Network." The Austria-specific parts were provided by the Austrian project partner *öibf*.

Vienna, July 2013

Guidelines for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning for trade union representatives at company level

A good level of education and qualification is the key to participation and good working conditions. However, access to education and qualification is denied to a large number of people. The “rich get richer” phenomenon applies, employees with a high level of education and training have much higher participation rates in further training measures than un- and semi-skilled workers. The recognition of informal learning offers an opportunity to remedy this situation as it can offer employees the chance of getting “proof” of the abilities they have accumulated in their daily work (and also outside of work, for example in personal activities and commitments).

To an extent, it can also be argued that informal learning has been recognised on the labour market. It is undisputed that the vast majority of employers would favour a skilled worker with broad practical experience over a skilled worker who has never seen a company from inside. But the question is how this recognition can be formalised and how employees can get an advantage of their work experience, i.e. competencies acquired in non-formal learning contexts.

Education, vocational or general, is a form of currency. It is in our best interest to help the colleagues, especially the un- and semiskilled, to get their competencies recognised. Despite of the increasing importance of this issue, in effect there are still very few offers in the majority of European countries that enable employees to have their

competencies recognised which they acquired in informal settings. These guidelines are specifically targeted at in-company trade union representatives, works councils and shop stewards, who want to get active in the field. There is a good scope of action for works councils and shop stewards to support colleagues in the recognition process and to also establish models for the recognition of competencies resulting from informal and non-formal learning within the company.

These guidelines contain:

- an explanation terms and context of the issue of recognition informal and non-formal learning;
- an overview of the legal situation surrounding the issue, highlighting the possibilities that exist for recognition of non-formal and informal learning within the formal qualification system and at company level;
- good practice examples;
- the scope of action for in-company union representatives to get active in this field;
- Checklists: A clear overview of what to consider when you get active;
- Toolbox: Tools and materials that may be useful in the process.

Explanation of terms

There is a myriad of definitions to be found on the terminology of lifelong learning – some of them differ widely. We decided to use the CEDEFOP definitions in these guidelines.¹

What is competence?

Competence describes the totality of knowledge and skills that make an individual capable of acting situational and in a self-organised manner.

What is formal learning?

Non-formal and informal learning are typically defined in contradistinction to formal learning. CEDEFOP defines formal learning as provided by “training institutions, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective”.

What is non-formal learning?

“Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically it does not lead to formal certification. However, it is structured, in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view.”

Non-formal learning can lead to certificates which are not recognised in the formal VET system and / or do not lead to entitlements within the formal system (e.g. access to further training). Non-formal learning includes, among others, language certificates, IT certificates, vendor-based certificates, etc.

What is informal learning?

CEDEFOP defines informal learning as “learning results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time and/or learning support). Typically, it does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases, it is non-intentional (or incidental/random)”.

How does informal learning work?

In many cases, different forms of learning intertwine. This means that often, for example in on-the-job-training courses, dual vocational education, but also in further training courses alongside work, some or all of the different forms of learning take place in parallel.

The major difference between informal and non-formal / formal learning is that it takes place in a non-targeted, normally unaware setting. The learner does not aim at developing competencies, he / she is not even aware of the learning process.

Hence, there are few learning outcomes (skills, knowledge, competencies) which have solely been acquired through one form of learning, on the contrary, professional competence typically develops, depends and widens through a combination of targeted learning as well as experience and repetition which both represent informal learning.

¹ Source: CEDEFOP, European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, 200.

Validation and certification of competencies resulting from informal and non-formal learning

Recognising the importance of learning outside the formal education system, the European Council has adopted common principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2004. These were renewed in 2012 (see Further Reading).

The term validation is used differently in the European Member States which often leads to confusion. For some, the term includes the identification as well as the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. CEDEFOP has compiled an extensive report on the definition, understanding and practice of validation in Europe (see Further Reading: CEDEFOP 2009).

To give just two examples: In France, the system of validation of learning from experience (validation des acquis de l'expérience, VAE) is legally defined and regulated. In this system, experiential learning of knowledge, skills, and competences may lead to the award of a full certificate and can be applied to 'all diplomas, titles and certificates included in the national register of vocational certifications.

In the UK, validation refers to the process of scrutinising a university award in order to ensure it is in keeping with the standards.

Procedures for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning are typically structured into at least four phases:

1. Identification of learning outcomes (existing informally and non-formally acquired learning outcomes are captured and documented)
2. Assessment of learning outcomes (assessment by experts in preparation of validation)

3. Validation of learning outcomes (the existing informally and non-formally acquired learning outcomes are examined and assessed through a validation body - competent body)
4. Certification of learning outcomes (Learning outcomes are certified through a certification body - competent body)

Recognition thus does not solely refer to recognition by means of issuing formal certificates but includes this possibility. Only the certification of such learning outcomes can lead to the assignment in a qualification framework.

Different countries have different procedures for validation and certification. It is important that in-company union representatives are aware of these procedures, including entitlements, costs, access, etc. These are listed in detail for your country in the chapter "National Situation".

Why recognise informal learning? Opportunities and strengths

Most European countries still place a major emphasis on formal learning routes, competencies that are acquired outside the formal system, through non-formal and informal learning and hence are not “proven” by certificates, are not regarded as highly as competencies acquired in formal learning settings. At the very least, it is difficult for individuals to prove such competencies and hence receive some form of remuneration. This applies particularly to un- and semi-skilled workers, those most threatened by precarious living standards, unemployment and low wages. The recognition of competencies resulting from informal and non-formal competencies is thus a very important issue for workers’ representation.

Informal and non-formal learning has always played an important role in vocational education but has seldom received the same level of acceptance as formal learning. Validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning is receiving increasing attention as a way of improving lifelong learning. More and more countries are emphasising the importance of valuing learning that takes place outside of formal systems – specifically at the workplace. What has been accepted for quite a long time by a wide variety of actors, namely that the workplace offers an ideal environment for learning, is now finding acceptance in attempting to treat competencies that were acquired in informal and non-formal settings more equally. The aim of this process is to enable individuals to make their competencies visible and prove them to employers.

Another reason to facilitate the recognition of informal and non-formal competencies is the issue of skills shortages. Making tacit competencies visible can help to locate the required competencies that already exist but have so far been invisible. This specifically applies to the company level.

The recognition of competencies acquired in informal and non-formal settings should promote the acquisition of qualifications of general, vocational and university education.

Target groups

Who can benefit from the recognition of informally / non-formally acquired competencies?

The recognition of competencies acquired through informal / non-formal learning can generally be of benefit to individuals with professional experience. The following groups can benefit from it:

- **un- and semi-skilled workers** (aim: integration in the formal education system, securing employment, raising employability, reducing the risk of unemployment, raising pay, lowering the risk of skills shortages)
- **migrants** (aim: enabling recognition of qualifications, increased mobility, securing employment, raising employability, reducing the risk of unemployment, raising pay, reducing the risk of skills shortages)
- **experienced workers** (securing employment, making experiential learning visible, recognition of lifelong learning)

- **individuals** willing to be mobile within the education system (permeability, better access to higher education, enabling individual career paths, reducing the risk of skills shortages)
- **skilled workers** (aim: transnational mobility, permeability, recognition of lifelong learning, reducing the risk of skills shortages)

Competencies resulting from informal learning are increasingly appreciated. Informal learning is regarded as playing a major role in the development of competencies (e.g. through experience, deepening and widening competencies). Competencies resulting from informal learning are valued highly because they contribute to the ability to react to changing requirements and thus play an important part in lifelong learning. At the same time, they take part in problem-solving, the development of strategies and innovative developments (see Further Reading: Blings, Spöttl 2011). Dreyfus already argued that subject-related knowledge, so knowledge typically acquired in formal or non-formal learning contexts is more important for newcomers and beginners whereas the competent, the experts in their domain fall back on reflected experiences in their work. This brings us to an important issue and a good opportunity for action for in-company representatives, namely the issue of shifting informal learning processes from the unconscious to the conscious. Possibilities for you to facilitate this are listed in the section “Scope for action”.

Why keep a critical eye? Challenges, risks and weaknesses

Some argue that the trend to placing greater emphasis on the recognition of competencies resulting from informal learning contexts might endanger deeply engrained formal learning and training traditions and their worth.

To this date, the vast majority of European member states lack sufficient procedures for the recognition of informal competencies. As long as the recognition process does not lead to formally accepted certificates, and as long as proves of non-formal learning are not considered in such processes, solutions offered for this issue will remain largely window-dressing.

The challenges with regard to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning still remain manifold. At the methodological level, research still remains to be undertaken as to sound assessment methods. At political-institutional level, there remains a lot of work to be done towards better and fairer recognition. There are still a number of open questions in this area. They include issues such as whether and what difference between competencies / learning outcomes resulting from different learning settings, this has to date not been answered satisfactorily.

Our demands

From the perspective of the employee representatives, the NQF does not constitute an instrument to solve existing problems of the education system, but can help reveal problematic situations and weaknesses, thus producing a "pressure to act". The assignment of certain education programmes of different providers which cover the same contents but are offered at different prices, for example, has a market-regulating effect.

It is even more important not to lose sight of the NQF's fundamental objectives: The goal of the NQF is to assign provable qualifications, assignment is not conducted at the level of individuals or competences. In addition, international translation (translation tool) and comparability are in the foreground.

Respective considerations about validation are not necessarily connected with the NQF per se. It can indeed be the outcome of the evaluation of experiences that no assignment in the NQF is possible. Nevertheless an individual can derive benefit from this because his/her qualifications and competences have been made visible.

Therefore the Austrian representations of interest on the employee side recommend the following in the international context:

- to understand the EQF and NQF as food for thought helping to identify areas needing improvement;
 - to focus the activities of the representations of interest increasingly on the cooperation and steering of NQF processes;
 - to strengthen information activities for members only when there is specific benefit (established recognition procedures, the question of recognition bodies clarified);
 - to bear in mind different mentalities (trust in descriptive procedures versus the necessity of formal certificates).
-
- to bear in mind and acknowledge the heterogeneity of the education and labour markets;
 - to give much weight to the aspect of quality assurance;

Legal situation – possibilities for recognition

The situation in Europe

The situation in Europe with regard to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning remains differentiated. Many countries still lack good systems of recognition and strongly focus on the formal sector whereas others have good approaches in place.

Different methods of recognition in Europe can act as good practice examples but they are not necessarily transferable from country to country, as recognition approaches are embedded in the national VET systems which differ from country to country. This is the reason why we focus on the national situation at hand in this guide (see next chapter) but still want to give a few good practice examples from various European countries in order to give an idea of what different methods exist out there.

National situation

In the beginning it is important to note that there is no comprehensive system of recognising non-formally or informally acquired qualifications in Austria (such as in France and Switzerland) and that this country has some need to catch up in explicating, developing and disseminating procedures for the recognition and proof of learning outcomes acquired outside the formal education system. Nevertheless, many years ago a large number of activities were already launched in Austria via European initiatives (EQF, NQF, ECVET and NQF consultation process).

If the goal is now to make non-formally and informally acquired qualifications more visible, it is necessary to take into account both largely differing and evolved institutional competences and responsibilities and also learning

arrangements and competence identification procedures which vary significantly between provinces, regions, economic sectors or companies.

One finding during preparatory work for integrating learning outcomes into the National Qualifications Framework is that there are starting points and links for how to deal with non-formal and informal learning in all education sectors and the institutions represented there. Therefore, a broad basis for discussions about this strategy is needed. This can be found in the basic objectives of the partial strategy to integrate non-formal learning into the future National Qualifications Framework. Relevant focuses are mainly learning outcome orientation, evidence orientation, participation orientation, purpose orientation and the general lifelong learning orientation.

According to the Austrian 2020 LLL strategy (LLL:2020 2011, 46), which was signed by the four most important ministries, a validation strategy on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning will be implemented in Austria by 2015. Accordingly, since the autumn 2012, a structural concept and process model have been developed to integrate qualifications of C2, with a pilot phase for the relevant processes.

Even if the (technical) procedure of a validation of learning outcomes in line with a national strategy is planned to be clarified by 2015, the corresponding practical implementation still requires a great amount of awareness-raising and preparations among the relevant target groups (such as employees, representations of interest, human resource managers, educational providers) outside the NQF expert groups.

These opportunities for jointly shaping policy arise between the conflicting priorities of business management action logic (workplace and company-specific qualification), technical and interdisciplinary competence development as well as individual interests and perspectives. An additional difficulty is provided by the fact that training matters are just one among numerous other tasks requiring attention in the representation of workplace interests.

Accordingly, these, depending on the economic situation of the company or the current challenges works councils are dealing with, are competing to gain attention and priority as they represent only a partial task for workplace co-determination (...). The first thing to be done in such cases is to clarify the concerns or also to seek clarification with regard to the role expected of staff representatives, but also as regards whether such a role can and should be occupied in a realistic fashion. In this regard, forms of roles with real differences can be identified, such as being an initial contact person, disseminator, promoter and - even if more rarely - actually an adviser. Each of these roles is, however, then linked to different requirements and ways of working. These different tasks require - in turn derived from the challenge that this does not represent the core activity - being certain that the level of information is adequate to ensure the dissemination of correct details, competent further referrals or also the application of already existing instruments to provide the person seeking advice with guidance in a rapid and focused way. It is here that initiatives and services which are already actually offered by trade unions come into effect in order to provide support for stakeholders at a local level: internet portals, instruments for identifying skills, advice services which can be accessed and much else besides.

Good practice examples

Schneeberger/Schlögl/Neubauer (2009)² distinguish between three ideal types of validations, which are substantiated in the separate document "Austrian examples of good practice". In their selection, the authors took into consideration that there was a sufficient quantity available in Austria and that they "will, with high probability, require an assignment (or a related decision) to the future NQF sooner or later".

Acquisition of certificates/qualifications of the formal education system (formal): The formal recognition procedures (...) all have a legal basis and result in certificates and qualifications of the formal education system or in certificates and qualifications which are equivalent to formal proofs of qualifications. Therefore the assignment of the recognition results of type 1 would be connected with the same challenges as the referencing of formal proofs of qualifications in the NQF.

Typical relevant examples are the "exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship exam" and the "acquisition of lower secondary school qualifications by adults". Regarding the recognition of qualifications which have been obtained as part of volunteer work but are subject to legal regulations, the Health Ministry is currently examining the recognition of training programmes for paramedics which are conducted by volunteer organisations but the content of which is based on the Paramedics Training Regulation (Sanitätsausbildungsverordnung) and the assignment of this qualification to the NQF in C1.

Acquisition of certificates without any equivalents in the formal education system (summative): The summative approaches of competence identification (...) relate (...) to the current state of competences (...). The competences identified in this way are (...) less cross-functional and transversal than in the first mentioned type, therefore some (...) are even slightly better defined

²The description of the three types is a shortened presentation of Schneeberger/Schlögl/Neubauer (2009, 113ff)

and have stronger predictive power regarding the acquisition of the certified competences. In the course of the development of an NQF it will fundamentally have to be clarified whether – and on what conditions – an assignment of partial and/or additional qualifications will be possible.

This category includes the title HTL-IngenieurIn, access conditions to regulated professions and the certification of individuals, for example.

Procedures to identify and validate informal learning (formative): Formative procedures of competence identification are more strongly oriented towards input factors and geared towards the procedures and standards inherent in the education system. (...) Due to their focus on individual development processes, these formative approaches can in practice more likely be found in the education sector, especially in adult education and guidance concepts. Most questions regarding integration into a future NQF (...) still need to be answered in connection with these procedures to identify and validate informal learning, as the logic of proofs of qualifications with different levels does not directly apply here.

By way of an example, reference frameworks for linguistic competence and ICT competences as well as competence identification by applying portfolio methods can be mentioned. As part of the youth strategy of the Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ), much attention is paid to the recognition of non-formal and informal education. As part of this initiative, various proofs of informally acquired qualifications, such as the "badge of achievement for honorary work" of the rural youth organisation Landjugend Österreich or

the Youthpass certificate, which can be acquired as part of the EU's Youth in Action programme for non-formal education, have been presented and discussed.

Similar to all typical ideal presentations, a number of special cases are also coming to light here, which are identified and focused on precisely during the pilot phase. This is illustrated by the example of the Academy of Continuing Education or wba (cf. Schneeberger/Schlögl/ Neubauer 2009, 124): Here competences for individuals are certified by a publicly accredited body, where already existing competences are identified and recognised in a "certification workshop". wba certifies and issues diplomas to adult educators by specifying standards in the form of a curriculum (including ECTS points). People who work in adult education can submit the competences and practical periods they have acquired in manifold ways. This evidence is assessed and recognised based on the curriculum. The competences which are still outstanding can be furnished by attending courses or providing other evidence. Graduates are awarded a recognised certificate or diploma.

For assignment to the three above types this means there are several assignment options, even though the focus can be seen in type 2: The preceding identification of the status corresponds to the third type, the certification overall corresponds to type 2, with an assignment to type 1 also seeming to be justified due to ECTS credits for master's programmes at higher education establishments.

Scope of action - Recognition of informal competencies as a field of action for workers' representatives

There are major advantages for individuals and for companies! As employees' representatives, we should first focus on some of the advantages for the individuals: good appraisal processes offer formative assessment that enables individuals to uncover competencies which they were hitherto unaware of the workplace is a great environment for learning.

There are basically two fields of action for works councils and shop stewards:

1. To inform, encourage and support colleagues to get their competencies recognised within the formal system
2. To establish models of recognition of competencies resulting from informal and non-formal learning

In the following chapters, we have described the scope of action in this field. It is important to remember that the ultimate aim should always be recognition within the formal system, as it results in the greatest advantages for the individual but it should also be borne in mind that establishing models of documenting and assessing competencies resulting from informal and non-formal learning within your company can also lead to important advantages for the colleagues in question. Depending on the situation in your company, this could lead to promotion, better pay, better identification of training needs and opportunities and / or better career opportunities (within and outside the company) for the colleagues in question.

For this purpose, we have describe a 3-step-model for how to get active in this field, starting with information, documentation of competencies and assessment of competencies.

Getting started – how to approach this issue at company level

As described above, there are not only advantages for employees but also for companies. Here are some examples that can be used to persuade company management of the advantages of beginning to recognise informal and non-formal learning at company level:

- using validation procedures can help identify and better allocate competencies in the business process;
- assessing existing and required competencies can uncover opportunities for improvement of processes and innovation;
- validating comepetencies resulting from informal and non-formal learning can help identify skills gaps and tailor in-company training around those.

A model process for validation in companies:

Build commitment	The works council becomes aware of the opportunities and understands what could be done and how. The commitment to a skills and competence documentation level is shared across decision-making levels.
Assessment of required competencies	All (expected) functions and workplaces in the company are described, competencies required to complete these functions are defined.
Information of candidates	The involvement of candidates requires information about the process, the objectives, the opportunities as well as the difficulties, critical situations they might face.
Portfolio completion	The candidates complete the portfolio, reporting all educational, training and work experience and inserting evidences of documented or non-documented competencies acquired. This can be done by using self-assessment.
Assessment	An assessment group (ideally consisting of representatives of HR and employees' representatives) can start to evaluate the profile. It is also possible to involve external assessors.
Personal development plan (PDP)	Results of assessment are discussed with the candidates and become the basis of a personal development plan that takes into account the candidate's competencies and the needs of the candidate and the company.
Vocational training	Tailor-made training is defined based on the PDP.
Validation of competencies	The competencies are validated by the company, for example in the form of a personal certificate. The validation finds consideration in the planning of the workplace, future training and development and pay.

Based on CEDEFOP, 2009

Information: Informing individuals of possibilities – the first step towards recognition

Before an individual makes the decision to seek recognition of informal and non-formal learning, he / she needs to know what the added value will be, what to expect of the process, what costs are to be encountered, etc. Informing colleagues who are interested in the issue of getting their competencies validated is the first step. Only through thorough and accurate information can we enable access to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Enabling access:

- Informing about possibilities
- this includes information about timelines and possible costs (and in how far those can be reimbursed)
- this includes clear information about the requirements of the validation process

- this includes information about possibilities to participate in training before the validation process.

Even before making the decision to seek validation of their competencies, individuals should know what is the added value, what could be the implications for them, what they expect, what possibilities there are, etc. In order to support employees in your company, providing them with information on possibilities, what they entail, their advantages and disadvantages should be the first step.

Two-step information and guidance:

1. Initial information provided by the works council / employees representation
2. Referral to counselling and guidance bodies

Initial information can be conducted by employees' representation if you feel you know enough about

the issue. However, if more information is needed, it is good for you to be able to refer your colleagues to counselling and guidance bodies. Here's a list of organisations that may provide the services you are looking for.

In the Checklist section you will also find a checklist for what information should be available to your colleagues.

Documentation of competencies

The documentation of competencies resulting from informal and non-formal learning is the second step towards recognition. As described above, this is also an important part of many procedures for the recognition of competencies within formal systems. However, it can also be a useful approach when you want to establish company-internal procedures for recognising informal and non-formal learning.

There are different ways of documenting non-formal and informal learning processes, more often than not, a portfolio approach is used. This approach can also be used for assessment purposes (see next chapter).

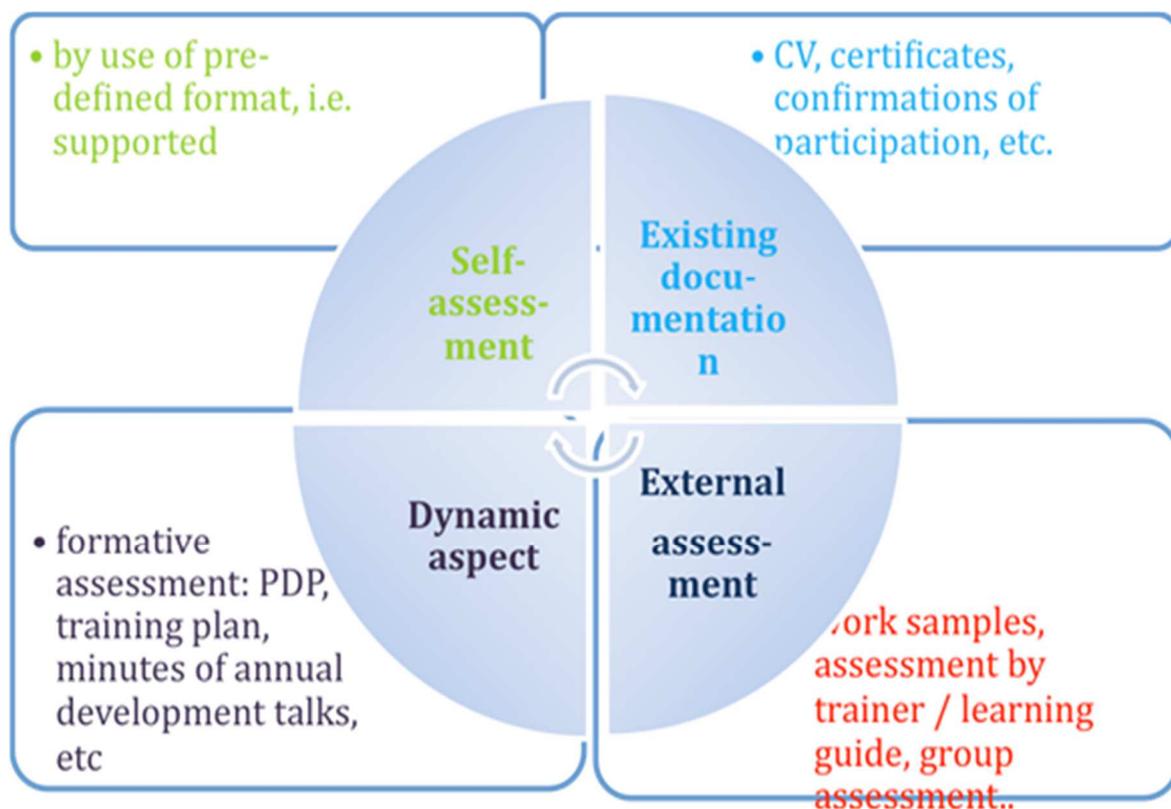
The portfolio approach is a multi-faceted process. It combines a variety of means of documentation of learning processes. It typically includes some form of self-assessment where the learner assesses his learning process and outcomes himself by use of different forms of documentation aid (e.g. CV-based or job profile-oriented procedures). The self-assessment is complemented by other means of documentation of learning processes. Proofs of non-formal learning (certificates, confirmation of participation, etc.) can also be included in the portfolio. If the portfolio is also used for formative purposes (i.e. ongoing learning processes), it can include documentation materials such as diary

sheets, personal development plans, etc. These can also be used for the purpose of assessment.

The process of documenting learning outcomes, particularly if done by means of a portfolio development, can be very helpful for learners. The process of collecting proofs of competence and conducting self-assessment enables a reflection of learning processes which is particularly important for informal learning processes as the learner is typically not aware of the fact that he / she is learning. The process of documenting learning processes and outcomes thus becomes part of the learning process itself.

For this purpose alone, it can be helpful to introduce a company-internal model for documenting competencies of employees. The documentation can then be used to identify further training needs, as a basis for recognition within the formal system (if applicable in your country), as part of personnel development, also in the framework of promotions, company-internal career development, pay raises or for the purpose of proving learning outcomes to potential new employers.

Here is a model example of how documentation of competencies could look like in your company:



There are different approaches to and different kinds of portfolio, but they typically involve the following elements:

- A clear reflection of learning outcomes to be documented for purposes of recognition.
- They focus upon the learner's learning processes and outcomes.
- They contain samples of work that stretch over an entire marking period, rather than single points in time.
- They contain works that represent a variety of different assessment tools.
- They contain a variety of work samples and evaluations of that work by the student, peers, and teachers, possible even parents' reactions.

Some tools for documenting competencies are included in the toolbox.

Assessment of competencies

Identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning should be a voluntary measure for each individual. However, in order to ensure that the validation and recognition of informal learning is accessible and fair to all, some principles need to be ensured. There should be a sufficient level of information for all individuals to understand the benefits and challenges of validation and recognition, to understand potential costs and efforts involved in the process thereof.

Furthermore, individuals need support in assessing their own competencies and the competencies required to achieve a certain qualification through recognition of informal learning.

Assessment of informal and non-formal learning is often based on a portfolio approach (see documentation of competencies) which often involve some form of self-assessment. Self-assessment is a good starting point for this. It enables individuals to reflect upon their learning processes and outcomes, their abilities and potential gaps in their competencies which can be filled by further training measures. Self-assessment can (and should!) be a guided process. In this, the guide helps the individual uncover their competence. Informal learning is characterised by the unconsciousness of learning processes, hence, individuals are typically unaware of the competencies that result from these processes.

Although self-assessment is often part of the validation of informal and non-formal learning processes, different kinds of external assessment methods play a greater role in the process. There is a multitude of tools to assess the outcomes of learning (irrespective of the nature of the learning process). The assessment tools or methods should match the nature of the learning outcomes to be

assessed. Theoretical learning outcomes can best be captured by use of different methods than practical skills, for example.

Some assessment methods are more appropriate than others, and, especially in the case of assessment of competencies resulting from informal and non-formal learning, it is important to be able to understand the principles, the advantages and the disadvantages of assessment methods. In order to be able to judge and select good assessment methods, you should know the principles of different methods, their advantages and disadvantages. In the Checklists, you will find an overview.

Further Reading

More info about the PIN project:

www.eqf-pin.eu

Principles of validation of non-formal and informal learning:

European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, CEDEFOP, 2009

Different approaches in Europe:

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe – A snapshot, CEDEFOP, 2007

Practical approaches to lifting informal learning to the non-formal level in companies through learning guidance:

Manual for SOLOS Learning Guides, Dr. Karin Bockelmann, 2011

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Appendix 1: Checklists for in-company recognition of informal and non-formal learning

These checklists aims at helping you ask the relevant questions when it comes to implementing procedures for the recognition of informal and non-formal competencies in your company.

Principles for good validation

- Validation must be voluntary
- The privacy of individuals should be respected, this includes issues of data protection
- Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed
- All stakeholders should be involved in the process (in-company: management, HR, employees' representation, employee) – there should be balanced participation
- There should be information (guidance and counselling)
- There should be good quality assurance mechanisms (see checklist quality assurance)
- Ethical principles are respected and data is protected
- The process, procedure and criteria should be fair and transparent
- The process of validation should be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest
- Is there a good cost-benefit ratio?
- Are the assessors / advisors well qualified?
- Are the results of the validation transferable to the formal system? Is this desired by the learner?

There is a clear link between the desired learning outcomes of a given qualification and the assessment methods

Are the assessors / advisors well qualified?

Informing interested colleagues

- Timelines for validation
- What are the costs? Are there funds to cover costs?
- What is the procedure? How does the validation work?
- If applicable, which forms of proof / documentation of competencies are accepted? By whom are they prepared?
- What is to be expected during assessment? What are the standards to be assessed? Detailed information of competencies to be validated.
- What assessment methods will be used?
- Are there training possibilities to fill in gaps in competencies?
- What are the costs, timelines of such training offers? Are the (company-internal) funds to cover the costs?
- Is there an appeals procedure if the assessment is not passed?
- What are the benefits of recognition? What can the colleague expect to achieve through it? Promotion? Higher pay?
- Are there possibilities to train further after recognition? Which paths could be interesting for the colleague?

Principles of good assessment

Validity: The assessment method must assess what is intended to be assessed.

Reliability: The extent to which the assessment method results in the same outcomes if the examinee is assessed under the same conditions.

Fairness: The assessment must be free from bias.

Cognitive range: The form of assessment enables the assessor to judge the depth and breadth of the examinees learning.

Assessment methods	Advantages / Disadvantages
Debate (offers the individuals an opportunity to demonstrate depth of knowledge and communicative skills)	Advantages: Good to assess knowledge; discursive, open, ability to demonstrate communicative and social competence Disadvantages: Not appropriate for assessing skills
Declarative method (based on an individual's own identification and recording of their competencies, normally signed by a third party)	Advantages: Helps individuals to reflect upon their competence, enables critical reflection, can include work samples Disadvantages: On its own, this form of assessment does not provide a neutral and independent statement about competencies, this is the reason it is often combined with other methods
Interview (with examiners, often following some other form of assessment)	Advantages: Interviews are particularly helpful in areas where judgment is important. They are a good tool to complement impressions from other forms of assessment. Disadvantages: An interview on its own cannot well establish the quality of work (especially skills). Some criticise that this method can produce a high level of stress in the examinee.
Observation (observation of an individual in the process of work, assessment of a particular setting)	Advantages: There is an opportunity to observe real practice. Especially for "informal learners", this form of assessment produces very little stress as it occurs in an everyday setting. Disadvantages: Depending on the context, it can be complicated, time-consuming and expensive.
Portfolio method (portfolios use a mix of methods in consecutive stages which are documented)	Advantages: Portfolios allow for a comprehensive impression of an individual's competencies. They allow the individual to actively take part in the assessment and are very flexible in terms of what form of assessment is used. Disadvantages: Disadvantages can occur when individuals aren't supported in the preparation of the portfolio. The process should be mediated by a tutor.
Presentation (The examinee gives a presentation in front of an examination board.)	Advantages: Good to assess analytical and communicative competencies. Like interviews, they are a good tool to complement impressions from other forms of assessment, especially real work orders and projects. Disadvantages: Similar to interviews, this form of assessment is said to produce a high level of stress in individuals.
Real work orders /projects (The examinee typically prepares the order / completes the project in his work time and presentation is used in front of the examination board).	Advantages: High level of relevance as real work situations are the object of assessment. The examinee has the opportunity to invest time and effort in the order / project and document the processes to present them to the examination board. Disadvantages: Depends very much on the cooperation of the company.
Simulation (The examinee performs in a simulation of a typical work situation)	Advantages: Close to real life. Allows for assessing complex interacting skills. Disadvantages: Complicated and costly to arrange.
Tests and examinations (Candidate responds orally or in writing to set questions)	Advantages: Good possibility to assess theoretical knowledge. This form of assessment is often used to assess formal learning as it is cheap and allows for many examinees to be tested at once. Disadvantages: Is not appropriate to assess skills and professional competence. It can favour examinees with strong written skills. It causes stress in a lot of examinees.

Appendix 2: TOOLBOX

Examples for portfolio assessment

Portfolio assessment is a multi-faceted process characterised by the following qualities:

- It is continuous and ongoing, providing both formative (i.e., ongoing) and summative (i.e., culminating) opportunities for monitoring and documenting a learner's progress toward achieving essential outcomes.
- It is multidimensional, i.e., it reflects a variety of proofs and processes of learning
- It enables assessment by different actors, including self-assessment, external or group assessment and thereby allows for learning in the process of documenting learning outcomes.

There are different approaches to and different kinds of portfolio, but they typically involve the following elements:

- A clear reflection of learning outcomes to be documented for purposes of recognition
- They focus upon students' performance-based learning experiences as well as their acquisition of key knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
- They contain samples of work that stretch over an entire marking period, rather than single points in time.
- They contain works that represent a variety of different assessment tools.
- They contain a variety of work samples and evaluations of that work by the student, peers, and teachers, possible even parents' reactions.

Guideline for self-assessment

We have included two models of guidelines for self-assessment. One is a generic CV-based tool which can be used in all sectors and for all work places. The benefit of this model is that it can be applied in all working environments and also includes competencies which do not directly relate to the workplace.

The other model is based on concrete learning outcomes. It can be based on either job profiles (in-company profiles which summarise the competence requirements for a specific workplace) or occupational profiles (official documents that summarise the competence requirements for either an entire qualification or an additional profile (e.g. further training profiles, specialised profiles, etc.). The benefit of using this model is that concrete competencies can be assessed which directly relate to a workplace or a qualification. It is thus possible to also use this as a basis for identifying training requirements in order to achieve a qualification through the means of recognising informal learning.

It can be useful to use both models, beginning with the CV-based self-assessment and completing the assessment with profile-based one.

1 - Professional biography

Name:

Date and place of birth:

School leaving certificate:

Qualification:

Further training:

Current job title:

Currently employed as:

Employed since:

full-time O / part-time O

Main areas of responsibility:

Description of tasks:

Previous employment:

Worked as (specific job title) at (company) from (Month/Year) till (Month/Year)

Tasks and responsibilities in this job (possibly core tasks):

Main features of the work process:

Workplace-related factual knowledge:

Workplace-related IT knowledge:

Workplace-related business knowledge:

Knowledge of safety regulations at the workplace:

Knowledge of environmental / sustainability-

related aspects at the workplace:

Native language:

Other languages:

Beyond this I know / I'm able to

My strengths are

I want to develop in the area of

2 - Profile-based self-assessment

Step 1

Take your Job profile or the relevant occupational profile. Copy out a list of competences / abilities (i.e. learning outcomes) it contains. If the profile does not contain competences / abilities you can create a list of the tasks and responsibilities listed.

Step 2

- Look at each learning outcome / task and responsibility and think about how well

this relates to your role. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I doing this now?
- Could I be doing this?
- Is this important in my daily work?
- Do I really understand what this means and involves?

Step 3

For each learning outcome / task, indicate the level that best describes your abilities in this area. See table below. The ratings are as follows:

1. Not applicable – This learning outcome / task does not apply in my job
2. Not competent – I am not competent in any element of this learning outcome / task and require training in this field.
3. Competent under supervision – I am competent in the majority of elements of this learning outcome / task but require some assistance or supervision.
4. Competent – I am competent in all the elements of the learning outcome / task and can apply / complete them independently.
5. Competent to supervise others – I am able to supervise others applying this learning outcome or performing this task.
6. Competent to train others – I am able to train others in developing this learning outcome or in performing this task.

Step 4

Reflect this with someone else at work (trainer, supervisor, manager). Develop a personal development plan, if possible together with them. Find out about training opportunities to fill your gaps. Find out how you can obtain proof of your competencies. Discuss options of training / development within the own company.

Personal development plan

My personal development plan				
Name:				
Aims -> what do I want to achieve	Activities -> what I will do in order to achieve my development aims	Obstacles -> what could hinder me achieving my goals	Solutions -> how I can overcome the obstacles	Duration and deadlines -> my detailed timeline
1.				
2.				
3.				