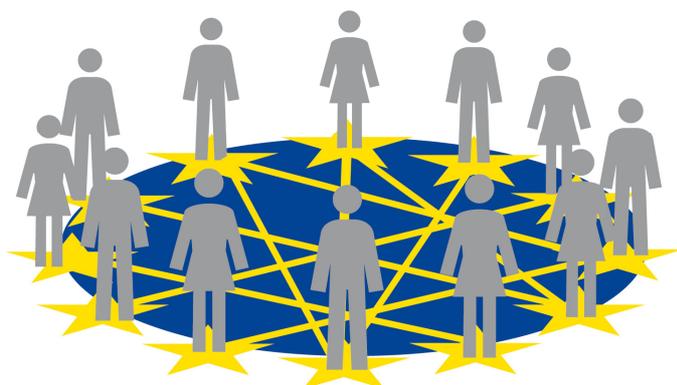


Recognition of informal and non-formal learning

Guidelines and materials for in-company union representatives in the Netherlands

PIN



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

Introduction

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.

In these English version of the guidelines, the Dutch EVC will be referred to as VPL.

Why a guideline for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning?



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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

What's inside?



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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.

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

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



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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.

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

How can individuals prove what they're able to do?



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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.

What's in it for employees?

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.

What's in it for the economy?

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?

Who can benefit from the recognition of informal and non-formal learning?

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)

Who can benefit from this?



- **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".

What sets informal learning apart?

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.

Challenges...

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.

What remains to be done?

The challenges with regard to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning still remain manifold. At the methodological level,



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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

The recognition of Non Formal and Informal Learning in the Netherlands is called the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL), or more literal, Acknowledgment of Acquired Competencies (Erkenning van Verworven Competenties – EVC). The abbreviation EVC is also used for “ErVaringsCertificaat” a certificate describing competences related to the formal qualification system. The system of EVC is a national initiative, with regulated quality standards and a database of admitted providers of EVC. In theory this system is accessible by everybody. The vast majority of procedures is within Vocational Education and Training, organised both by commercial companies as well as regional schools. EVC for higher education still exists, but has a much lesser spread through the country. Financially, EVC is often paid for by employers. For both employers and employees, the costs for formal and recognized EVC procedures can be tax deducted. This might look ideal, but three issues remain at present:

Recognising informal and non-formal learning – the trade unions’ point of view

1. The quality of the certification in the formal EVC system is weak. As the Education Inspectorate of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Science and Culture concluded already twice (2009 and 2012), the quality of the certification is very poor and needs to be improved rapidly. This is of course also an issue for the trade union: if the quality of EVC is not beyond doubts, the value of certificates or even diplomas issued after an EVC procedure might lose their value to employers, so to the employees.
2. According to the statement of Agnes Jongerius, the former chairwoman of the largest Dutch Federation of Trade unions, FNV, some effort is necessary to avoid EVC to become an “exclusive toy” for the working people. “I have worries on the position of the jobless. The more or less are outside of the labour market and do not have an employer who will pay for their EVC-procedure”, Jongerius stated. FNV is working on the process of introducing a procedure targeting at the jobless. In



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the present, FNV feels EVC should be split in two separate procedures: one relating to formal education, organized by or on behalf of schools, relating competencies to further education. And the other one, targeting on career paths, identifying strong points of experience to build further activities of the individual.

3. For employees the situation looks better. In 20% of the collective labour agreements, EVC is a right of the employee, paid for completely by the employers. However, saying that, it is obvious a lot of work has to be done to incorporate the right of EVC in the other 80% of the collective labour agreements! Social partners agreed on this in a covenant, ruling collaboration in the field of recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning until 2020.

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

National level

In the Netherlands, in principle anybody can offer a VPL procedure. However, to use the financial arrangements (tax-deduction, options in collective labour agreements and formal certification) the VPL



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procedure has to be certified and registered. The register of acknowledged VPL providers is maintained by the government, the executive service of the ministry of Education, Science and Culture, DUO (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs). The register is in Dutch only and can be found at <http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/index.php/2011-12-02-11-40-54/register-iframe>.

Candidates may look for specific qualifications (kwalificaties), professions (beroepen) or providers (aanbieders). When looking for procedures, all relevant information delivered by the provider is shown, as regional limitations, whether guidance can be offered at work, costs etcetera. The cost of an EVC procedure will vary from € 850,00 to € 1.250,00. Most procedures are linked to the formal Dutch qualification system. The vast majority to VET-qualifications at EQF level 2 – 4, but some on higher level (bachelor).

Due to the fact that most financial provisions (especially as organised through the Dutch tax offices) demand linkage between EVC and formal standards, almost no procedures without linkage to standards exist. Although branch specific standards can be an option, in most cases EVC is directly linked to the formal Dutch qualification system, thus leading to certificates and diplomas from the regular educational system.

In some cases, candidates can obtain a complete diploma or (some) official certificate(s) based on the qualification system. In many cases however, there is some gap between the proven competencies and the demands of the standard. Mostly an Ervaringscertificaat is issued then, describing proven competences in the language of the qualification system, linking the candidate to the qualification system as well. In effect, two systems are used until now (see below for latest developments!):

- 'Ervaringscertificaat'. As described, this is a formal procedure in which a candidate can get accreditation of his/her learning outcomes. It is a summative approach; the portfolio is referred to a specific standard and the accreditation consists of a number of credits that can be cashed in at a qualifying institute or school. The portfolio therefore is only a dossierportfolio or showcase of the relevant learning outcomes to be referred to the specific standard.
- 'Ervaringsprofiel'. This is a set-up for a generic, personal portfolio. It is formative oriented and aims at validation of the generic competences of a candidate. It advises on the possible opportunities for accreditation or development steps. It also



points out what to do when a specific qualification or diploma is at stake.

Although this system looks rather solid, three main problems are identified:

- Effectiveness: in some cases the results of procedures (Ervaringscertificaat) are not acknowledged by other institutions or even employers.
- Quality: the Inspectorate for Education judged that most of the procedures lack quality. So an intensive program to improve the system of EVC started in 2013;
- Quantity: the number of procedures is decreasing. Also the number of EVC providers is decreasing, even regional schools are stopping, or freezing activities. Given this fact –see table below- more problems are apparently present.

Estimation of completed EVC procedures in the Netherlands

2008	2009	2010	2011
12.500	15.700	22.000	17.700

In the coming years, it is likely that EVC will develop into two different procedures:

- Path 1, targeting entry in the educational system. Instead of EVC ‘before the gates’, it will most likely develop to an in depth system for exemptions. Advantage can be that by becoming a part of the educational institutes, it will also be financed by / within the educational system;
- Path 2, targeting the labour market, enabling employability. Combined with the formal educational standards (crebo and croho¹), or standards of branches.

For trade unions this is an important development, where the focus will be on:

- Quality: to ensure quality of the systems, direct involvement of the government is needed;
- Linkage: the two systems must be linked together, so the results of one path can be used in the other path. This might also indicate the necessity of governmental involvement.

Company level

The first step is to realize whether or not EVC is a formal right agreed upon in the collective labour agreement (CAO). In 20% of the CAO’s

¹ The Dutch qualification system uses two registers: crobo for VET and croho for higher professional education. All official education is leading towards a qualification in either one of the registers



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What are the possibilities and entitlements of works councils?

this is already the case, and more are to follow until 2020. Social partners agreed that money for education –paid by social partners within a sector- can be used for EVC.

To start with the procedure, either a guidance company can be contacted, concrete procedures can be introduced to the colleagues (based on the sector for example). Shop stewards can implement a guidance system to aid candidates in choosing the right procedure (in effect, choosing the right educational standard) for their procedure. Also a procedure leading to an Ervaringsprofiel should be present.

In most cases, company management shall be willing to assist in the process. If EVC is in the CAO, they will simply have to. If not, EVC can be organized outside of the company, using the tax facilities open to every Dutch employee. Depending on the situation (fear of jobs loss or the wish for further development) either the social security system (UWV) can help or an educational institute (either connected to the sector (branche school of opleidingschool or to the regular educational system (ROC)).

Legal basis

There are no specific laws regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Netherlands. Validation is more embedded in existing laws in the education-sector. There is however an informal right for citizens without a formal starting-qualification (equivalent of EQF-level 2) to obtain this level of qualification. He/she can enter any VETschool and start a learning programme for this goal, with or without a formal VPL-procedure.

Concerning the Vocational Education and Training-sector, the Law on Adult & Vocational Education (WEB, 1996) was the basis for developing a national standard for the recognition and certification of acquired skills in the VET-sector. In the classification scheme for developing the standards in the qualification structure of Dutch VET it was explicitly stated on the purpose of the qualification: "to facilitate recognition from elsewhere or previously acquired skills" (informal or non-formal learning).

This qualification structure as a basis for assessing prior learning is therefore so important because it allows certificates to be provided from which social rights can be derived. It also prevents that a distinction can be made in quality of skills acquired on the basis of a formal learning and skills acquired on the basis of a learning pathway independent assessment (informal or non-formal learning). Both the results of formal and informal/non-formal prior learning are assessed through a system of independent assessment of learning pathways.



Of course in larger companies (> 50 employees) the obliged working council can initiate an EVC process. In any company with more than 10 employees (and less than 50 of course) staff representation may be organized. The employer has to comply by law if a majority of the employees demand so. Union representatives will be helped by their union, or check (in Dutch only) the possibilities and rules at <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/ondernemingsraad/regels-ondernemingsraad>.

Good practice examples

The ROCKWOOL Group is the world's leading supplier of innovative products and systems based on stone wool, improving the environment and the quality of life. In a European project, a case study is about the plant in Roermond, the Netherlands where about 1.200 people work (400 office and 800 production).

Best practice

Since the 1990s the role of learning is a key element in the human resource management-policy of Rockwool. In the plant in Roermond this HRM-policy can be regarded as an on-going process of linking learning and working for each individual employee by means of competence-steered assessment methods and work-based development-programs:

- Assessment is considered as a summative and a formative method for enhancing performance of not only the employees for the company but also of the company for the employees.
- Learning goals are oriented towards employability and qualification on the one hand for strengthening the working processes, and on the other hand for creating empowerment and opening up internal/external career opportunities for the employees.
- Development is focused on facilitating learning trajectories that are beneficial for employability, personal development and internal/external career steps of the employees.
- VPL is the method for linking the potential of employees with the need for competences in the function groups. It is utilized as a multi-targeted and single-targeted method for sustainable HRM.

VPL came into practice in 2001 when the company wanted to broaden the classical approach of HRM - with a primary role for learning in the form of formal learning outcomes, i.e. qualifications and certificates - towards more staff-steered HRM – with co-makship of the



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employees in the decisionmaking on learning goals. The ever-changing technological developments, the shortage of qualified staff, the internal demand for more flexibility and employability, convinced Rockwool to incorporate VPL in the existing training and development policy of the company.

In the period of 2003-2013, 77 employees in a multiple VPL-procedure and 9 in a single VPL procedure were involved. In the same period 450 employees filled-in traditional learning programs at VET-schools. So, about 16% of all staff involved in training in the last 10 years has been trained by means of VPL. Indirectly, 55 staff-members were in the same period involved in VPL: assessors, guiders, managers and HRM-staff.

The 'Rockwool Career model' offers to all employees the opportunity to grow. But where previously the focus was on training, the employees can now also invest in themselves in any way possible (workbased learning, self-study, distance learning, coached-on-the-job, external traineeships, etc.) as long as they meet the conditions in terms of skills and competences needed for a desired function. VPL is the cornerstone in this HRM-policy of Rockwool with a focus on the self-steered character of learning for the sake of both the company as well as the employee him/herself.

See more at: <http://www.observal-net.eu/content/netherlands-case-study-2013-vniil%E2%80%90steered-career-management-personal-development#sthash.nL9LrLWz.dpuf>

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

Why get active?

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. If VPL is in the collective labour agreement, use it! If not, be aware of the tax advantages your workers can use.



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2. To establish models of recognition of competencies resulting from informal and non-formal learning. Introduce at least one way of the 'Ervaringsprofiel' individuals can use to find their way through the educational system. Be aware of the help provided by organizations for your specific industry or sector.

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

How to approach this at company level

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.
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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.

Supporting colleagues to get their competencies recognised

Enabling access:



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1. 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

Information on possibilities of recognition is the first step!

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.

Making
competencies
visible

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.

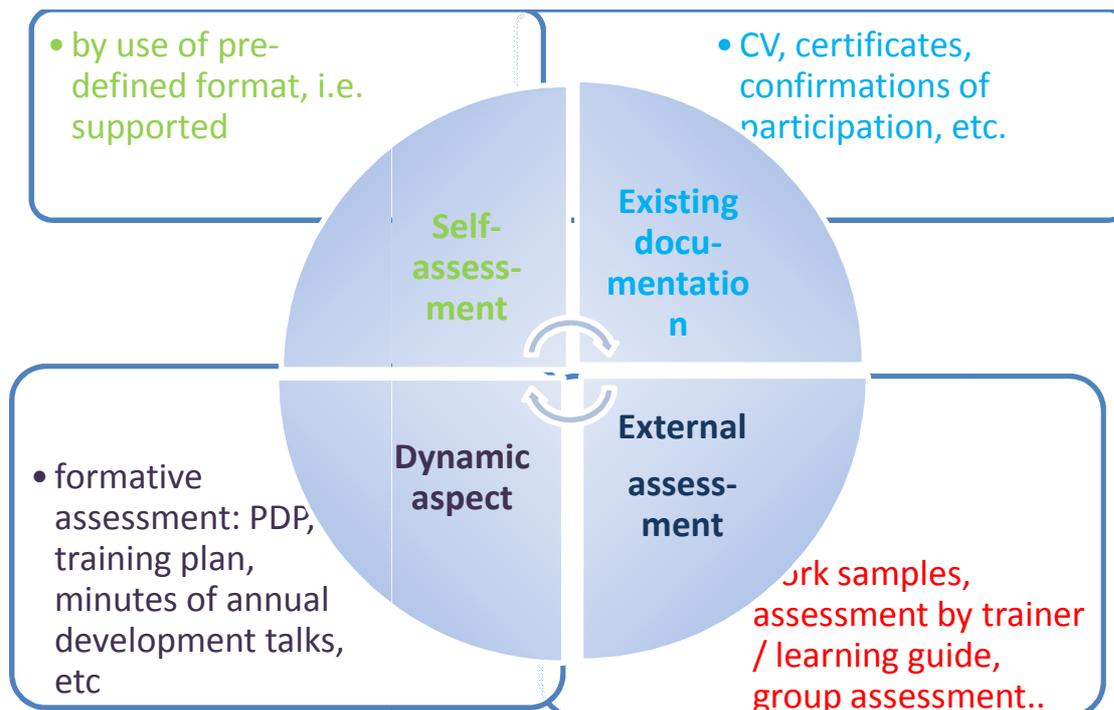
Here is a model example of how documentation of competencies could look like in your company:



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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



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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.

The benefits of self-assessment

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.

One of the fine examples from the early years of EVC in the Netherlands was based on a method of formalized peer review. The work non-qualified personnel was doing, was analysed by an regional VET school. This was translated into a (very small) part of the qualification system. Then some staff (2 or 3) where trained to judge the quality of work of colleagues by using this part of the qualification system. In equal discussions, they then 'assessed on the job'. With the authorization of the regional VET school ,this procedure led to formal certificates based on the national qualification system².

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

² Based on a case at Bakkerij Wiltink, a bakery, in Doetinchem, documented in an English documentary 'How full is my backpack'.



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

Cofora (2010) *Eindrapportage betreffende de kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve resultaten van het deelproject 'Empowerment van vrouwen door EVC' binnen het project Duizend en Eén Kracht*. Arnhem: Cofora.BV

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Duvekot, R.C. & R. van Raai (2007) *It takes three to run VAE! Statements and comments from the Dutch experience*. Arnhem: Empowerment Centre.

Duvekot, R.C., G. Scanlon, A. Charraud, K. Schuur, D. Coughlan, T. Nilsen-Mohn, J. Paulusse & R. Klarus (eds.) (2007). *Managing European diversity in lifelong learning. The many perspectives of the Valuation of Prior Learning in the European workplace*. Nijmegen/Vught/Amsterdam, HAN/EC-VPL/HvA.

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Feenstra, P.B., R. van Raai & R.C. Duvekot (2003) *EVC at a glance. EVC-development in the Netherlands*. Houten: Kenniscentrum EVC.

IvO (2010) *Competent erkend?* Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs.

Kans, K., M. Stuivenberg & J. Lubberman (2010) *EVC gemeten. Een onderzoek naar het aantal gerealiseerde EVC in de periode 2005-2009*. Rotterdam; Ecorys.

PLW (2008) *Carrying on with Learning and Working. Plan of approach 2008-2011*. Den Haag: ministerie van SZW.

PLW (2009) Brief van de Staatsecretaris van OCW aan de voorzitter Tweede kamer over *De kwaliteit van het ervaringscertificaat*. PLW/2009/26304.

Raai, R. Van (2010) *Het levenlangleren-offensief op de 'Hollandse' arbeidsmarkt*. Arnhem: Cofora BV

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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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
	<u>Validity:</u> The assessment method must assess what is intended to be assessed.
	<u>Reliability:</u> The extent to which the assessment method results in the same outcomes if the examinee is assessed under the same conditions.
	<u>Fairness:</u> The assessment must be free from bias
	<u>Cognitive range:</u> The form of assessment enables the assessor to judge the depth and breadth of the examinees learning

	Assessment methods
1. Debate (offers the individuals an opportunity to demonstrate depth of knowledge and communicative skills)	<u>Advantages:</u> Good to assess knowledge; discursive, open, ability to demonstrate communicative and social competence <u>Disadvantages:</u> Not appropriate for assessing skills,
2. Declarative method (based on an individual's own identification and recording of their competencies, normally signed by a third party)	<u>Advantages:</u> Helps individuals to reflect upon their competence, enables critical reflection, can include work samples



	<p><u>Disadvantages:</u> 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</p>
<p>3. Interview (with examiners, often following some other form of assessment)</p>	<p><u>Advantages:</u> Interviews are particularly helpful in areas where judgment is important. They are a good tool to complement impressions from other forms of assessment.</p> <p><u>Disadvantages:</u> 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.</p>
<p>4. Observation (observation of an individual in the process of work, assessment of a particular setting)</p>	<p><u>Advantages:</u> 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.</p> <p><u>Disadvantages:</u> Depending on the context, it can be complicated, time-consuming and expensive.</p>
<p>5. Portfolio method (portfolios use a mix of methods in consecutive stages which are documented)</p>	<p><u>Advantages:</u> 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.</p> <p><u>Disadvantages:</u> Disadvantages can occur when individuals aren’t supported in the preparation of the portfolio. The process should be mediated by a tutor.</p>
<p>6. Presentation (The examinee gives a presentation in front of an examination board.</p>	<p><u>Advantages:</u> Good to assess analytical and communicative competencies. Like interviews, they are a good tool to complement impressions from other</p>



	forms of assessment, especially real work orders and projects. <u>Disadvantages:</u> Similar to interviews, this form of assessment is said to produce a high level of stress in individuals.
7. Real work orders / projects (This form of assessment is based on a real work order / project. The examinee typically prepares the order / completes the project in his work time and presentation is used in front of the examination board)	<u>Advantages:</u> 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. <u>Disadvantages:</u> Depends very much on the cooperation of the company.
8. Simulation (The examinee performs in a simulation of a typical work situation)	<u>Advantages:</u> Close to real life. Allows for assessing complex interacting skills. <u>Disadvantages:</u> Complicated and costly to arrange.
9. Tests and examinations (Candidate responds orally or in writing to set questions)	<u>Advantages:</u> 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. <u>Disadvantages:</u> 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.

TOOLBOX

Please add good materials you may know to the 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 to 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.



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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



EOF Praxis and Information Network

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Professional biography

Name:

Date and place of birth:

School leaving certificate:

Qualification:

Further training:

Current job title:

Currently employed as:

Employed since: full-time / part-time

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.



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Personal development plan

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

