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## Methodology of defining common standards to assess outcomes of formal, informal and non-formal learning

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**LEONARDO DA VINCI TRANSFER OF INNOVATION PROJECT  
“PROPER CHANCE – IMPLEMENTING ECVET IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE FOR THE PROMOTION  
OF PROFESSIONAL PERMEABILITY AND GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY”  
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For more information on the project “PROPER CHANCE” go to our website  
[www.proper-chance.eu](http://www.proper-chance.eu)

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## 1. Foreword

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This document was written by the institutions participating in the LdV Transfer of Innovation Project “PROPER CHANCE”. It is one of the major objectives of the project to develop common standards for the assessment of learning outcomes for the sector of health and social care in Italy, Belgium and Germany. This will be the basis for future cooperation and mutual understanding to promote professional permeability and mobility for workers in the aforementioned field. The guideline described below is intended to support the project partners but also other institutions to develop common assessment standards for the promotion of learner mobilities and for the assurance of assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes.

It is the objective of this document:

- to provide a guideline for the development of assessment standards in the field of health and social care, and
- to promote mutual understanding for professional permeability and mobility for learners and workers in the aforementioned field.

The assessment standards define frames, quality, criteria, instruments, methodologies and resources required to carry out assessments in the field of health and social care to assess professional competences (knowledge, skills and personal competences).

The assessment standards will be the common norm, the mediator, between the different partners, i.e. training providers, for the implementation of mobility or permeability. They shall as well promote the mutual trust between employees and training centres. They will be based on the descriptions of learning outcomes according to the ECVET standards, instruments and principles.

The *use of terminology* in this document is based on the definitions given in the “RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (ECVET) (2008/C 111/01)”:

- *Assessment* of learning outcomes means methods and processes used to establish the extent to which a learner has in fact attained particular knowledge, skills and competence.
- *Validation* of learning outcomes means the process of confirming that certain assessed learning outcomes achieved by a learner correspond to specific outcomes which may be required for a unit of a qualification.
- *Recognition* of learning outcomes means the process of attesting officially achieved learning outcomes through the awarding of units or qualifications.

The term of assessment is differentiated from the term of evaluation following the definition given in the Cedefop glossary “Quality in education and training”: “*Assessment* generally refers

to appraisal of individuals whereas *evaluation* is more frequently used to describe appraisal of education and training methods or providers.”<sup>1</sup>

This document recommends focusing on *integrated assessment*, meaning the comprehensive assessment on a set of competences, if appropriate. Integrated assessments are for example suitable for the assessment of a complete qualification or for a profession’s key activity which is composed of several professional competences. The integrated assessment is intended to verify that the student has mastered, under the form of a synthesis, all targeted units of learning outcomes. This is to ensure that he/she is able to combine and interlink all together the different components of the training in order to fulfil a professional task.

However, in the context of learner mobilities and the recognition of learning outcomes, assessments will usually refer to smaller units of learning outcomes. Thus, it is to be considered if an integrated assessment is appropriate.

## 2. Quality principles and requirements for assessments and their development

It is the objective of assessments to evaluate professional competences, which represent the ability and willingness of an individual to use knowledge, skills and personal competences in work or learning related environments for the professional and individual development. Accordingly, the knowledge, skills and competences, as described in a given unit of learning outcomes, need to be assessed.

When developing assessment instruments, take into account the following quality aspects:

- The assessment needs to take into account the qualification level the professional competence refers to. Qualification Frameworks are the European Qualification framework and, if applicable, national qualification frameworks (NQF).
- The assessment procedure needs to include the “complete task”. That means that it has to prove the ability of planning, performing and controlling the given task autonomously.
- The assessment is the gateway between educational context and work life. So it needs to anticipate and take into account the actual requirements and conditions of the profession.

The assessment of professional competences is based on the observable performance of typical work situations of a profession. The required performance should be described in the form of learning outcomes, containing a content and a behavioural component, e. g. “to assist clients to form relationships with others” or “to give reasons for work processes and results”.

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<sup>1</sup> Cedefop (2011): Glossary / Glossar / Glossaire: Quality in education and training / Qualität in der allgemeinen und beruflichen Bildung / La qualité dans l’enseignement et la formation, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

### 3. A guideline for assessment standards development

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Many qualification programmes are regulated by law and / or official curricula. Hence, before you start to develop the assessment standards for a specific qualification, check all relevant legal documents whether they formulate specific requirements for the assessment!

#### a. WHAT will be assessed?

Identify precisely the context and objective of the assessment:

- What is the targeted qualification?
- What is the learner's progress in the qualification programme?
- Which learning outcomes are to be assessed?
- Does the assessment refer to the complete qualification (i.e. final integrated assessment) or to parts of it?

#### b. WHO will assess?

The definition of the roles of the actors in the assessment process is essential for assuring the quality of the assessment. For each assessment (or type of assessment) the following questions have to be answered:

- Who will assess the learning outcomes? Teachers, in-company trainers or external experts?
- What are the criteria for choosing the assessors?
- How many assessors are necessary to do the assessment?
- What are the different roles in a group of assessors?
- How will the assessor group be composed in order to assure the quality of the assessment?

#### c. WHERE and WHEN will be assessed?

- Indicate the place of the assessment (school, workplace ...)!
- When will the assessment take place?
- How much time for preparation will the learners need?

#### d. What will be the assessment TASK?

For defining the assessment task, take into account the following criteria:

- The assessment task should be derived from the key activities of the profession. They are the elements to compose and structure the assessment task.
- The definition, including the use of technical terms, must be clear and understandable for the learner.
- The assessment takes place through the accomplishment of a task, in which the learner can mobilize and combine his skills and knowledge in a specific context and level of responsibility.

- Each assessment task should be structured as follows and should contain information on the given aspects:

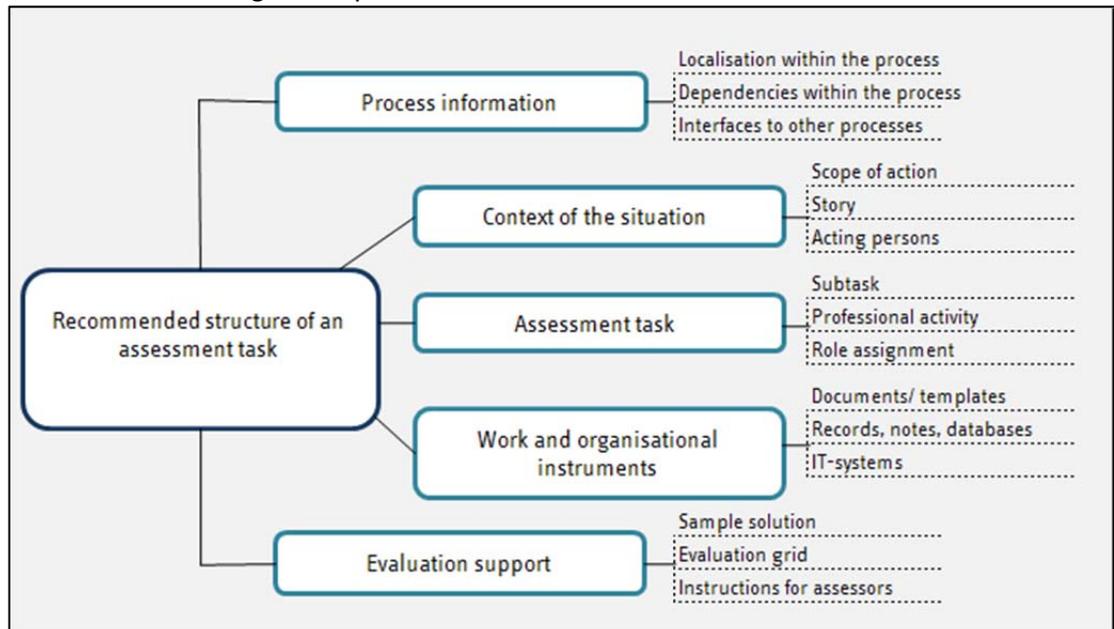


Figure 3: Model of a competence-oriented assessment

- The task(s) to be performed must be complex and global enough to address all the professional competences which are to be assessed. It mustn't combine all skills and knowledge, but address all professional competences.
- In many situations, the profession will not allow one task to encompass all professional competences (since they are situational). In those cases, it is important to integrate the different professional competences, and to assess that the learner is capable of transfer his competences to different situations. So, different tasks on different workstations or work situations, AND some task showing him combining the workstations, will be designed.
- We recommend also using different assessment instruments on the same task. It helps to refine the competences assessment.
- General conditions for the realisation of the task are to be given: duration, material resources (tools, documents etc.), constraints to be respected, etc.

#### e. Which assessment INSTRUMENTS will be used?

Specify the assessment instruments and methodologies. Choose from the following list. Mostly, a combination of different instruments is advantageous.

- Written tasks
  - e. g. with closed questions, short answer questions or with open answers and written documents (documentations, written plans):
  - represent typical professional tasks with concrete results, such as solutions of specific problems, business letters etc.,
  - will be evaluated according to their right content and the understanding of professional contexts

- Presentations
  - are the demonstration of typical professional issues, professional contexts or the solution of a task
  - will be evaluated according to the professional and communicational competences as well as according to the presentation skills and form.
- Expert discussions
  - are debates about professional problems and professional issues, discussion of problems, solutions and processes of problem solving,
  - can be case-related, task-related or situation-related
- Simulation of a conversation
  - is an oral role play within future professional roles
  - will be evaluated according to professional and communicational competences and customer-orientation.
- Product (of a practical task)
  - Is the creation of a professional product, e. g. a marketing concept
  - will be evaluated according to its work result and the work process, the work process is monitored as well
- Work sample (practical work process)
  - is the performance of a typical professional task, e. g. providing a service
  - will be evaluated according to its procedural methods and work results.

To show the complexity of the different dimensions of professional competence, theory and practice need to be integrated into the assessment. This is to be done by the combination of written, oral and practical assessment instruments. It is recommended to combine the different assessment instruments, but to prefer the instrument which will be the closest to the real professional context.

## f. How to prepare assessment TEMPLATES and GRIDS?

Assessment sheets / templates and observation forms are used as the basis for assessment. These are the practical tools which are used before, during and after the assessment. The coherence of those documents is important, but the practical aspect is also essential, since it will be used by trainers "on the field".

- **The grid for assessment** is a combination of criteria and observable indicators that allows the assessing persons to have an objective basis for the assessment – or the most objective possible.
- **The criteria** are the different looks that we bear on the response of the learner, the qualities expected of a "response" or the different angles from which we can watch the performance of the assessed person. A criterion is the expected quality of the production or delivery of the student. A criterion is the basis for a judgment; it is a point of view that it is up to evaluate, to make a decision. They must be:
  - Relevant: they must correspond to the assessed skills, knowledge, and competences
  - Independent: the failure of a criterion cannot automatically lead to the failure of another criterion. If two indicators are duplicated in two different criteria this means that the criteria are not independent. Instead, the same criterion can be found in various tasks of an assessment.

- Not numerous: if the criteria proposed are too many, integrate or combine some of them.
- **Indicators** are observable and / or measurable signs from which we can verify that the quality of the expressed criterion is encountered. The indicator is an observable indication for a criterion; it allows to "contextualize" the criterion, to clarify what is expected. It answers the question "How will we see that the criterion is satisfied?" or "What will we observe exactly?"

The weight of each competence within the profession is important for the assessment of the different competences. If, for example, a competence is very important regarding the consequences of potential failure (e. g. danger for life) it might be necessary to formulate "K.O. criteria", meaning that a positive assessment for a specific competence has to be achieved by a learner in order to obtain the complete qualification.

Assessment templates and grids should also allocate a number of points for each assessment criterion. On this basis, marks can be given according to the existing and acknowledged evaluation systems.

### g. What will be the assessment RESULT and how will it be DOCUMENTED?

An assessment process results in a statement on whether the envisaged learning outcomes have been achieved and whether the learning process has been completed successfully (according to the assessment template or grid). This is to be certified by written documents.

The term certification refers – according to the definition given in the Cedefop glossary "Quality in education and training" – to the "process of issuing a certificate, diploma or title formally attesting that a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard."<sup>2</sup>

If an integrated assessment for obtaining a complete qualification has been passed, the competent institution is to issue a certificate on this degree. It is recommended to supplement this certificate by a personal transcript of records (including the description of the achieved learning outcomes).

This personal transcript should – similar to the europass mobility – contain the following information:

- Details about the learner
- Details about the issuing institution including contact person and contact data
- Training history

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<sup>2</sup> Cedefop (2011): Glossary / Glossar / Glossaire: Quality in education and training / Qualität in der allgemeinen und beruflichen Bildung / La qualité dans l'enseignement et la formation, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

- Description of Skills and competences acquired during learning mobility experience
  - o Activities or tasks performed, if applicable
  - o Professional competences, skills and knowledge acquired
  - o Language skills and competences acquired
  - o ICT skills acquired
  - o Other skills (social, organisational, etc.) acquired

For the obtainment of partial qualifications, for example in international mobilities, the institutions competent to issue certificates will do this according to their standard procedures, if a practical training has been completed abroad, the internship company is to issue a certificate. Both document types should be supplemented by the “europass mobility”<sup>3</sup> and / or the personal transcript.

A personal transcript for a learner mobility should contain:

- Details about the learner
- Details about the issuing institution including contact person and contact data
- Data on the sending and hosting institutions and
- Description of the learning mobility experience
- Description of Skills and competences acquired during learning mobility experience
  - o Activities or tasks performed, if applicable
  - o Professional competences, skills and knowledge acquired
  - o Language skills and competences acquired
  - o ICT skills acquired
  - o Other skills (social, organisational, etc.) acquired

#### 4. Recommendation for the assessment of informal and non-formal learning

The assessment of informal and non-formal learning has received a lot of attention across Europe in recent years. It is essential to facilitate mobility of learners and permeability of education and labour markets.

In its recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning from the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2012, the European council defines non-formal learning as

*“learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training [...], and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> cf. <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/home>

<sup>4</sup> COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, p. C 398/5, available under: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF> (saved on 22.02.2013)

Informal learning is defined as

*“learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner’s perspective”<sup>5</sup>*

Basically, the assessment of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning should follow the same guidelines as the assessment of formally acquired learning outcomes. However, a few additional criteria should be respected, which take account of the widely differing learning contexts of non-formal and informal learning.

### **a. Counselling and Orientation Phase**

Before the actual assessment can take place, it is essential to offer counselling and orientation to the learner. The learning outcomes, which are to be assessed, have to be identified, usually by the learner himself with the help of a counsellor, tutor or assessor. The learner has to know the organisational framework of the assessment and has to understand which requirements and standards are to be met in the assessment.<sup>6</sup>

### **b. Choice and adaptation of assessment instruments**

As specified above, the combination of different assessment instruments is often advantageous for the assessment of complex professional competences. For the assessment of outcomes of informal and non-formal learning, consider that different instruments capture different aspects of learning outcomes and that it might be necessary to adapt them according to the context in which they have been acquired.<sup>7</sup>

For the assessment of practical skills, it might for example be beneficial to combine work samples with the theoretical reflection on the work process.

For further reading on the assessment of informal and non-formal learning, the Cedefop publication “European guidelines for validating non formal and informal learning” is highly recommended.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, a number of European projects have dealt with the topic of validation of informal and non-formal learning. Recommended projects are for example:

- **KODE-NQF** - Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal competencies in the context of National Qualification Frameworks (<http://www.kode-project.eu/>)
- **Innovative tools and procedures for non- formal and informal learning validation** (<http://www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=3263&page=1#.USdycUJ70YQ>)
- **Valid-Info: The promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning in the fields of labor integration of disadvantaged people and intercultural mediation** (<http://www.valid-info.eu/>)

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> cf. Cedefop (2009): European guidelines for validating non formal and informal learning, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, p. 57. Available under: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/5059.aspx> (22.02.2013)

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 58

<sup>8</sup> Available for download under: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/5059.aspx> (22.02.2013)