

# PROCEDURE FOR VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL, INFORMAL LEARNING

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First of all we will try to clarify some commonly used words or phrases:

Identification of non-formal and informal learning can be defined as a process which “records and makes visible the individual’s learning outcomes. This does not result in a formal certificate or diploma, but it may provide the basis for such formal recognition.”

About validation of non-formal, informal learning, “is based on the assessment of the individual’s learning outcomes and may result in a certificate or diploma.”

The term validation of learning outcomes is understood as “the confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification.” In this definition validation applies to formal as well as non-formal and informal learning. We will use validation in the context of non-formal and informal settings only, thinking that validation in the formal context is not discussed.

Validation is not the exclusive concern of education and training institutions, it involves also enterprises and other organizations. Validating non-formal and informal learning is increasingly seen as a way to improve lifelong and life wide learning. A growing number of countries emphasize the importance of making visible and valuing learning taking place outside formal education: at work, in the home and during leisure time activities. For that reason, a cluster from European countries was working to support the process of validation by identifying the main challenges and pointing some ways to respond.

A set of common European principles were adopted by the European Council in May 2004:

1. Identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning should be a voluntary matter for individual.
2. Stakeholders should establish systems for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning with quality mechanisms. Stakeholders

should provide guidance, counseling and information about these systems to individuals.

3. The processes, procedures and criteria for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning must be fair and transparent.
4. All systems and approaches for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning should respect the interests and ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders

Since 2004 these principles have been used in countries as a reference for national developments. The European Guidelines are needed to support different development processes in countries, regions and sectors, and respect the different models for validation. In a conference on valuing learning in November 2007, conference delegates agreed that:

1. Individuals are central to the validation process.
2. It is necessary to create systems in which the results of validation are transferable to the formal qualifications system if desired by individuals.
3. Use common standards with the formal recognition system.
4. Validation can be used for both formative and summative purposes (let us develop this point later).
5. Data should be protected, since validation touches personal attitudes.
6. Guidance and training for those who manage and carry out the validation process are essential for the professionalization of practitioners and transparency of the validation process.

Validation is seen as an important element of national policies on education, training and employment. There are different ways in which people have developed their knowledge and skills. Validating non-formal and informal learning makes visible the learning gained outside learning institutions and this represents a vast untapped resource of invisible knowledge and skills. Its visibility could lead to significant economic and social benefits for individuals and countries.

Validation is organized differently across Europe: in some countries it operates in parallel with the formal system, but it can also be a totally separate process. We can also say that not all forms of validation of non-formal, informal learning result in a qualification. The assessment process can have a “formative approach” without the aim for formal certification or a “summative approach”, in which a certification is linked. In Spain we have the summative approach, so validation leads to certification, which means that the process needs to consider

national standards and implies that it must be strongly linked or integrated into national qualifications systems. Anyway, formative approaches are also important as a way of providing feedback to the learning process, indicating strengths and weaknesses, providing a basis for personal improvement and giving guidance and counseling to human resource management in companies.

About the summative approach, it is important to base it on the same standards as the formal learning system, which provides consistency and comparability of outcomes.

The final success of the validation process will depend on different aspects in each country, but we can find some common important factors:

- Sufficient financial resources.
- Sufficient human resources.
- The use of standards and qualification levels.
- The development of proper methodologies based in making outcomes evident.
- Adequate training for responsible staff.
- To share experiences.
- Quality of the whole process.
- To ensure fairness.
- To build confidence in the whole process.
- To make an agile-flexible process.
- Collaboration of stakeholders groups.
- Understand the lengthy and complex procedure for validation.
- To create an adequate, good expectation about the process in candidates, above all if candidates are low-skilled.
- To face employers' fear of higher salary demands.
- To face the distrust of the formal educational system about non-traditional qualifications.
- To build a legal framework for the validation process.

- To achieve validation being accepted as relevant for reaching lifelong learning employability and social inclusion.
- To achieve that validation will be integrated as part of qualifications systems in all levels.
- To have feedback mechanisms for improving the process.
- International, national and regional initiatives must be coordinated.
- To cover all levels and fields in education and training systems.
- To include regular, external evaluation of the process.

If we talk about the expected benefit from the validation procedure, we can point:

- Sustain mobility within education-training and labor market.
- Promote equality of opportunities for people to get recognition of their skills and competences.
- Support disadvantaged groups: unemployed, older workers etc.
- Support lifelong learning.
- Support coherence within European countries.
- To support the response to demographic changes.
- To sort out the qualifications deficits.

Different institutions are involved in validation, and it is possible to find many different arrangements. Generally, education and training bodies have an important position in this procedure which helps comparability of standards. However, it is important that the dominance of the formal system does not inhibit assessment possibilities out of formal learning environments. It is also very important not to abuse the validation tailored to the needs of particular groups as immigrants, unemployed, low-qualified workers and so on, because this approach has a risk: to create first and second classes of qualifications, depending on the way to get it.

Focusing in **Spanish case**, we will start with some details about the last thirty years in democracy in our country: Education has gone through many changes, trying to open our system to Europe and, at the same time, building a new autonomic structure of the State. Education has been devolved to the regional governments, which means it is necessary to coordinate efforts at legislation

and at interregional mechanisms. In the case of vocational training, non formal and informal learning have been mainly a topic of specific trades and industries with their own qualifications and even their own schools. Formal vocational education was offered in specific schools, so students were completely separated of the rest of students in the country.

The gap between formal education and vocational training has been the reason why formal vocational learning was a secondary option for low income classes or for bad students (mainly boys). It was necessary pedagogic and academic links between formal education and formal vocational learning, and it was also necessary to have more options to get qualifications.

The Law 1/1990, LOGSE, was the first step to regulate training processes: vocational levels were related to formal learning, and secondary schools started to offer not only secondary education but also vocational education options. Students could be together for the first time. After LOGSE other Laws contributed to improve VET system in Spain, and some European programs such as Socrates or Leonardo da Vinci granted students to reinforce the European dimension of vocational training, which were regulated by National government with the collaboration of the Autonomous Communities.

There was also a process to create strong links between vocational training and the labor market. Education authorities and labor experts were working together for having a catalogue with national qualifications and with in-company training modules. In Spain there is a Tripartite Foundation for Training in Employment, managed by:

- Representative Business.
- Union Organizations.
- Public Administration (represented by the Ministry of Work).

The Tripartite Agreements describe training plans and complementary training.

About legislation, according to both, The Organic Law 9/1992 on competence transfer to Autonomous Communities, and The Organic Law 5/2002, qualifications within the educational system are established by the government after consultation with the Autonomous Regions. There is a basic, national curriculum, and the education authorities of the Autonomous Regions must complement this basic curriculum for each qualification.

Qualifications are for some years considered an important requirement to access to the labor market in better positions. Even though vocational training has improved a lot in Spain, there is still a social preference for university

studies regardless we have too much young people with university degrees working in jobs with fewer qualifications requirements.

The Organic Law 2002 refers to vocational training in Spain as integrating part of the National System of Qualifications and Vocational Training (SNCFP, in Spanish), aimed to help lifelong learning process. The SNCFP is based in four pillars:

1. The National Catalogue of Qualifications (CNCP, in Spanish), in correspondence with a Modular VET Catalogue.
2. A procedure of recognition, evaluation, accreditation and registration of Vocational Qualifications.
3. Information and guidance about employment and training.
4. The evolution and improvement of the quality of the system.

**The National Catalogue of Qualifications (CNCP)** is based on a modular structure included in The Modular Catalogue of Vocational Training. More than 650 vocational qualifications have been published; they are classified in 26 professional families and 5 levels of qualification and they are accredited through diplomas and vocational certificates.

The National Institute of Qualifications (INCUAL, in Spanish) has the responsibility for defining, preparing and keeping this catalogue updated. In each Autonomous Community we have also a Regional Institute of Qualifications (called ICUAM in the region of Murcia, where we are working).

**A procedure of recognition, evaluation, accreditation and registration of vocational qualifications:** the vocational offer within the CNCP can be credited by:

- Vocational training titles (issued by the Ministry of Education).
- Certificates of professionalism (issued by the Ministry of Work).

Both procedures to get the qualification are developed by the Royal Decree 395/2007: “when evaluation and accreditation of professional competences exclusively takes into account working experience or non formal paths, accreditation will have the CNCP as a referent; if the recognition of professional competences does not complete the qualifications of the training title or certification, an accumulative partial accreditation could be issued”.... “Evaluation Committees may include qualified professionals in an advisory capacity”.

In the procedure of recognition, evaluation, accreditation and registration of vocational qualifications the participation of the Autonomous Communities is also important in our country: they decide which qualifications will be offered in this procedure, according to the needs of qualified people in the sector, and they also are responsible of having qualified staff from the education sector and from social agents to act as advisors and evaluators. Specific requirements to these agents are regulated in a national level, but developed in a regional level.

The main demand for systems for the recognition of learning outcomes comes from the labor market. There is important because of the existence of groups at a disadvantage in terms of education and training. It means there is a demand for strategies and procedures capable of satisfying labor market needs, based on the fact that entry to certain regulated professions depends on possession of a certified qualification.

In Spain, a large proportion of the population is not professionally qualified, as many young people who leave school early. The target group for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is: unemployed, young people, the handicapped, women, persons aged over 45 and those in social exclusion risk.

A national qualifications framework is a value element in developing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In Spain we have it, but still the procedure can be described as not fast enough for satisfying the requirements of labor market. In our country, more specifically in Murcia, the procedure for the validation is:

- Each Autonomous Community develops an institution similar to The National Institute of Qualifications (INCUAL, created in 1999) working at a regional level. (In Murcia is called ICUAM and was created in 2007).
- Each regional institution organizes courses to train teachers and professionals to become qualified for being advisors and evaluators in the procedure of recognition and validation of non-formal, informal learning. In Murcia we have a first common course that you need to pass to be able to attend another one to get the “advisor diploma” and another one if you like also to get the “evaluator diploma”. We both (Isabel and Mercedes) got the “advisor diploma” and are involved now in getting the “evaluator diploma” as well. Other two teachers in our department involved in the ICVET project (Asun and Maria Dolores) will soon start the first common course . People who can take part in these courses are teachers from the formal education and professionals working in the sector. First courses in Murcia started only one year ago.

- Each regional institution decides to make calls for accreditation of qualifications considered preferred or more needed to meet labor market demand. In Murcia there was a call for 3 qualifications and the procedure finished after more or less 9 months. We are waiting new qualifications procedures.
- Candidates interested in taking part in this process apply for it.
- The institution can select a maximum number of candidates for each qualification.
- The selected candidates are required to take part in the advisory phase.
- After the advisory phase, the candidates get a report about the convenience or not to continue to the next phase: evaluation. But the candidates can freely decide if they continue or not.
- If the candidates go into the evaluation phase, the Evaluation Commission decides whether it recognizes and accredits the Professional Qualification required by the applicant. If the report is positive, that recognition is recorded nationally.

The regional situation in Spain is really different depending on the Autonomous Community and its labor market needs. We will see now the convened qualifications in some regions:

In **Andalucía**: Childhood education. Geriatric care for dependent people in social institutions. Geriatric care for people at home. Medical transport. Health care to multiple victims and disasters.

In **Aragón**: Geriatric care for people at home. Electricity. Cooking. Pharmacy.

In **Cataluña**: Agriculture and farming. Gardening. Sports and physical activities in nature. Shipping. Ocean-going transport. Administration. Cooking. Restaurant and bar service. Electronics. Computer systems. Cooling and heating facilities. Pharmacy. Manufacture of pharmaceutical products. Nursing assistants. Secretarial. Geriatric care for dependent people in social institutions. Geriatric care for people at home. Management and marketing. Prevention of occupational hazards. Chemical industry. Laboratory and clinical diagnosis. Childhood education. Auditory prosthesis. Computer applications.

In **Extremadura**: Childhood education. Geriatric care for dependent people in social institutions. Geriatric care for people at home.

In **Galicia**: Construction. Geriatric care for people at home. Administration. Energy and water. Textile. Mechanical manufacturing. Touring. Geriatric care

for dependent people in social institutions. Restaurant and bar service. Wood and furniture. Vehicle maintenance. Industrial facilities. Fishing.

In **La Rioja**: Childhood education. Geriatric care for dependent people in social institutions. Geriatric care for people at home. Health transport. Cooking. Restaurant and bar service.

In **Murcia**: Childhood education. Geriatric care for dependent people in social institutions. Geriatric care for people at home.

In **Navarra**: Masonry. Geriatric care for dependent people in social institutions. Geriatric care for people at home. Cooking. Childhood education. Health emergencies. Soldering.

In **Baleares**: Building cleaning. Geriatric care for dependent people in social institutions. Geriatric care for people at home. Childhood education. Restaurant and bar service. Car mechanics. Electricity.

In **Valencia**: Health emergencies. Geriatric care for dependent people in social institutions.

We don't have information about all regions in Spain, but it is possible to see the differences between the regions in the number and fields of qualifications they have called. Obviously Cataluña has the procedure of validation more developed than the rest of regions we have in this report, but we can also add that El País Vasco was one of the first in implementing this procedure and they have a lot of experience about it.

In conclusion we opine that the main problem is that each call lasts long time: the applicant could think that it is easier to attend formal education courses to get the title than to get the qualification through the validation procedure of non-formal, informal learning.

Another drawback is that most regional institutions offer small number of calls and in some specific fields. That means some professions seems not to be interesting and maybe will lasts long time for some workers to have the opportunity to join a validation procedure.

From our point of view, as advisors and future evaluators in the process, it is necessary to make some changes in order to find a method more flexible and faster to allow unqualified people to obtain recognition of their non-formal, informal learning. Otherwise, all the effort and the economic financing invested in recent years may lead to minimal results.

In this regard we are really interested to know the situation in other European countries to exchange those aspects that can improve the whole procedure. Maybe this is a perfect topic for another project...

