



# Report of Validation of non- formal and informal learning

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**SKILLS WEEK** 2020





# Report

## **Format:**

Interactive online session

## **Speakers:**

**Anusca Ferrari**, Policy Officer, European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (Moderator)

**Ernesto Villalba-Garcia, Expert**, Cedefop

**Anne Tangy**, Freelance consultant on certification systems, France, Board Member EVTA

**Maria João Alves**, Head of Unit, National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training, Division for Qualifica Centres Monitoring, Portugal

**Minna Balint**, Counsellor of Education, National Agency for Education, Finland

**Tina Rapp**, Project Manager, West German Chambers of Crafts and Skilled Trades' Council (WHKT)

## **Number of Participants:**

Registration : 1447 pax

Attendance : 281 pax

## **Main Message:**

- Validation is very relevant process for enhancing employability of individuals. Nevertheless, it is often a long, solitary and demanding procedure.
- Validation opens the door to employability but also to lifelong learning and can motivate adults in developing new competences for work and for citizenship.
- Modularisation of education and training facilitates validation procedures and provides more opportunities for flexible and tailored learning pathways.



- Validation arrangements are often fragmented. It is important to set up features and systems for coordination at national level on validation procedures. Given the variety and fragmentation of the offer, coherence is of paramount importance.
- Validation is not an easy product to sell. It is not easy to implement. Benefits should be clearer for all stakeholders for validation to be taken up in wider ways.
- There are strong links between validation and the need for lifelong guidance delivered by professionals.

### **Detail of the Meeting:**

The validation of learning outcomes from formal, non-formal and informal learning is crucial for employability, personal development and lifelong learning in our fast-changing labour markets. Validating learning can make a valuable contribution to citizens' careers and to the supply of skilled and professional labour to the economic system. The Skills Agenda, adopted in July 2020, underlines how re-skilling and upskilling are crucial to drive the digital and green transitions and ensure recovery from the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2012, the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning set a milestone in the validation of learning outcomes outside of formal education. It called for Member States to implement national arrangements for validating non-formal and informal learning by 2018. The European Inventory on validating of non-formal and informal learning tracks the implementation of the recommendation. Progress has been made in developing validation strategies, but these are typically neither comprehensive in scope, nor fully implemented on the ground. Effort is needed to connect validation to other policies and practices such as guidance, training entitlements, involvement of the private and civil society sectors, with the goal of mainstreaming validation opportunities for further learning and working.

This session aimed at discussing how validation can scale up to be an asset for employability. The focus of the discussion was on validation for lifelong learning and employability.

The session started with a series of interactive questions to participants. One question was focusing on the link between validation and employability. Respondents considered transparency, trust, visibility, quality and recognition to be at the core of validation arrangements that lead to employability.

Following this interactive part, the European Commission and Cedefop gave an overview of policies in the area of Validation at European level, from the European Principles that came out in 2004, up to the new policy cycle foreseen with the Skills Agenda and its focus on cooperation and strategic skills strategies. They also announced the work on the Update of the Guidelines on validation, which will continue until the end of 2021 with the aim of publishing new guidelines early 2022.



The session continued with three country examples: France, Portugal, and Finland.

**Anne Tangy**, from France, provided an account of Validation systems in France, a pioneer country in validation procedures since 2002. Anne Tangy underlined that although successful, validation approaches in France can still be improved. Specifically, validation can be a lengthy (it takes an average of one year) and individuals might have fears of failing. Validation arrangements can sometimes be perceived as being more of a procedure than a process, and a solitary one. Anne Tangy talked about the Compte Personnel de Formation, which is a form of Individual Learning Account that started in France in 2015. Every individual is entitled to 500 Euros per year to be spent on training (and/or for validation procedures). Anne concluded that validation is not promoted enough by HR departments and by employers, and there is in general not enough information nor 'promotion' of validation. Guidance is central for supporting individuals throughout the process.

**Maria João Alves**, from Portugal, provided the example of Qualifica centres, specialised structures that work on validation. She underlined that those centres in Portugal try to solve a specific problem: half of the adult population (aged 25-64) in Portugal have not completed upper secondary education and significantly lack basic skills. This leads to more difficulties in terms of finding and keeping a job, and in terms of participation in lifelong learning. Since 2016, the Qualifica programme has reinvested in education of adults. The programmes provide a combination of validation and further training to cover for the specific problems of adult education population in Portugal and to motivate people to embark on lifelong learning. They think there is a problem of motivation to go further in obtaining certifications. Therefore, the first investment and step within the programme is on lifelong guidance. The Qualifica centres are therefore centres of Validation and of Guidance. One of the strengths of adult education is to increase recognition and the importance of raising the skills level, and of validation of raising the self-esteem of the individual and their motivation for lifelong learning and more facility in improving the employability.

**Minna Balint**, from Finland, spoke about the flexibility of VET systems in Finland and the new reform three years ago on the qualifications structure in VET that has a particular emphasis on learning pathways. Flexibility is at the core of VET systems, and VET caters for the needs of 20+ adults, with 64% of graduates from the VET system that are 20+. Demographics are varied. The approach is competence-based, and the personal learning plan is tailored to the prior learning and objectives of learners. The modular approach to qualifications based on competence points allows for more flexibility and students can combine modules in a number of ways. Access is made easy: there are continuous admissions through the year. The financing system of VET rewards efficiency.

**Tina Rapp**, from Germany, presented the Walikon project (a joint project of Chambers of Skilled Crafts, Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Chambers of Agriculture). The aim is the validation of vocational skills in the dual system. The projects started in 2015 with a pilot and developed now with an enlarged validation offer of 30 chambers covering 32 qualifications. The starting phase is



the information one, where people are informed about the process of validation and supported in choosing the qualification they wish to have their competences validated for. There is a self-assessment phase for applicants to reflect on their competences. This is followed by an assessment carried out by an expert. Their validation is based on the standards of recognised vocational qualifications, as they are well known in the labour market, and is focused on the strengths of the participants. One of the main benefits of their programme is that employer can support their employees and some employers used validation as an instrument for HR development. Validation encourages the participant in engaging in lifelong learning.

**Conclusions:**

There are certainly visible benefits of the validation process. These relate to the employability of individuals but as well to their self-confidence and awareness of their competences. In cases where employers are active and supporting validation procedures of their employees, the procedure has appeared to lead to more positive results. All speakers supported the idea that the benefits of validation, and the opportunities that validation offer, should be more promoted and known. A big majority of participants considered that lack of awareness was one of the main challenges for the take up of validation. A barrier was seen as well in the diversity of providers and fragmentation of validation, which is a problem that might not be overcome but at least mediated through a coherent approach among all the different actors of the validation process. Validation needs to go hand in hand with collaboration. Solutions might be considered on the length of the process, which is also a huge barrier for validation, and makes it harder to understand, sell, and implement. The costs involved in the validation process and the ways of financing validation need to be addressed. From the European perspective, more tools for comparison and support for validation would be welcomed.