



## EUCIS-LLL POSITION PAPER

# For a common European approach to the validation of non-formal and informal learning

June 2014

The policy debate over the last 20 years has been about **bringing together all types of learning**, and creating the frameworks able to recognise and validate experience and learning achieved in different ways **to confer qualifications**. Launching the European qualifications framework (EQF) at EU level and the rapid development of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) at national level has put **learning outcomes** firmly on the political agenda. The adoption of the Council Recommendation on Validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2012 is a new political impulse with the goal of having national validation mechanisms in all countries by 2018. The aim is **to link the learning taking place in a variety of settings** i.e. educational institutions, in-company training, on-line learning, courses organised by civil society organisations, learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It follows from this that validation is **not exclusively a tool for education and training institutions and systems** – it is relevant for a much wider range of stakeholders and institutions, including those from the youth area, the voluntary sector and work<sup>1</sup>. There is still a long way to go to acknowledge and coordinate validation practices for non-formal and informal learning, so that all forms of learning are recognised. EUCIS-LLL thus welcomed the 2012 Council Recommendation's political impulse and encourages Member States to **speed up the building of well-functioning validation systems in partnership with stakeholders** so that their commitment for 2018 is respected.

## TOWARDS A COMMON APPROACH IN EUROPE

### RELEVANCE OF VALIDATION: THE NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Validation of non-formal and informal learning **gives opportunities for second chances, improves access to education and enhances motivation to learn**. It also contributes to tackle unemployment and achieve a better match between jobs and skills by acknowledging those acquired outside of the formal education system. It is reported that some **80 million** European Union employees, unemployed persons, particularly the young unemployed will need to update their skills and qualifications to enable them to **improve their employment prospects** and find gainful employment. The target date for a substantial increase in employment of these people is 2020. As important is **creating a sense of self-worth and self-confidence** in all EU citizens and enhancing their position and acceptance in society. Validation contributes to social inclusion, personal development, empowerment and employability. This is why EUCIS-LLL calls on decision-makers to adopt a **comprehensive approach** when developing their validation mechanisms.

### SCOPE OF VALIDATION

The Council Recommendation on validation identifies four main stages involved in the validation of non-formal and/or informal learning (identification, documentation, assessment and certification). This differentiation makes it clear that **acquiring a formal certificate or qualification is one of several possible outcomes of validation**. In some cases an individual may be better served by going through a more limited identification and documentation of prior learning. EUCIS-LLL nevertheless supports the possibility, for those who wish or need, to get access to a full diploma that is equal in value to those delivered in formal educational systems via validation if they have the required learning outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77651.pdf>

## EUCIS-LLL INVITES NATIONAL AUTHORITIES TO CONSIDER 10 KEY PRINCIPLES WHEN DEFINING / REVISING THEIR SYSTEMS:

1. Validation should be an **individual right**: everyone should be able to access validation arrangements.
2. Validation arrangements should be developed in a **comprehensive way** by being possible in all sectors and levels of education and training.
3. Validation should not only aim to get a certificate but when this is the case the **diplomas/certificates should have the same value** as those delivered in the formal system.
4. **Targeted measures** should be financed to reach out to **disadvantaged groups** and be aimed at creating a sense of self-worth and self-confidence in order to give genuine opportunities for second chances and to enhance motivation to learn. Empowering learners is indeed a key to success. Measures shall also be adapted to learners' specific needs in terms of access, duration, etc.
5. It is important to understand and promote the **personal and social benefits of non-formal education** in civil society. There is a need for coherent lifelong learning systems with programmes offering non-formal education to the next levels as these work better for most adult learners (PIAAC report).
6. **Civil society organisations** and other relevant stakeholders should be involved in the development, monitoring and evaluation of validation mechanisms but also in the definition and revision of standards to create a sense of ownership and to inform decision-makers about the implications and possible bottlenecks of the development of such mechanisms for the different sectors.
7. **Educational institutions** should be **prepared and encouraged to implement** validation mechanisms. **Staff** should be properly trained and guided in order to provide quality services to their beneficiaries. The European Social Fund could support such professional development activities. Quality guidance and counselling services should raise awareness about validation opportunities and provide information to learners.
8. Further progress in **data collection** remains crucial in the field of validation and the task force welcomes the European Inventory on VNFIL update. At national level, it is important to collect more evidence, based on a qualitative analysis on validation, to help authorities and institutions to be less overcautious about developing validation mechanisms.
9. **EU programmes** such as Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and the European structural funds should provide opportunities to advance the setting up of national validation systems and favour peer learning. It is also crucial that those projects' outcomes are better disseminated and exploited. There should also be a strong link between validation and youth employment initiatives and we strongly invite Member States to mention validation in their **Youth Guarantee implementation plans**.
10. **At EU level** EUCIS-LLL praises the work done within the **EQF Advisory Group** in which it is a member. It suggested some improvements on the implementation roadmap by dividing countries into three groups with different timelines and speeds according to their situation as regards validation. Peer-learning activities based on the experience of countries would speed up the whole process.

## WHY IS VALIDATION SO IMPORTANT?

European societies are facing **numerous challenges** such as rising unemployment, growing populism and a general mistrust in institutions. Validation offers **another route to qualification** that should be included in a comprehensive strategy aimed to increase access to lifelong learning. The PIAAC report highlighted the fact that 20% of the EU adult population have low literacy and numeracy skills but will also have many skills which have not been formally accredited or recognised.

1. **EUCIS-LLL considers validation is a great tool to make lifelong learning a reality for the largest number of people.** It is important for educational stakeholders and decision-makers to understand how the development of validation mechanisms can contribute to broaden access to further

learning and qualifications especially for disadvantaged groups by giving formal value to personal development and contributing to career development and employability. Participating in learning activities can provide a stable time framework, a community, a chance for re-orientation, a safe place, a new challenge, social recognition and an important tool for empowerment.

2. **Developing validation practices is about valuing a life-long and life-wide approach to learning** by enabling an in-depth modernisation of education and training systems to create open, flexible and individualised learning environments. It does so by **breaking down barriers** between different kinds of education and training and by enhancing the **importance of non-formal and informal learning** with a **paradigm shift towards learning outcomes**.
3. It is crucial to give equal value to knowledge, skills and competences acquired from various learning settings. Validation should recognise **transversal competences** and not only focus on validating occupational competences by using a learning outcomes approach. The definition of standards should for instance take into account the European Key Competences framework.
4. Validation processes should be considered as **an investment**: recognising knowledge, skills and competences of citizens will contribute to upgrade the work force and to put back low-skilled citizens into learning. It is a way to stimulate and **increase motivation** for learning by providing second chance opportunities. It has a high return on investment in terms of social welfare (unemployment, health), participation and well being.

**For all these reasons we call on Member States to modernise their national systems by ensuring a wide access to validation with a specific focus on disadvantaged groups and by providing the necessary financial and human means to educational actors in order to implement validation for the benefits of our societies and economies.**

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## WHO IS EUCIS-LLL?

*The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) is an umbrella association that gathers 33 European organisations active in the field of education and training, coming from all EU Member States and beyond. Currently these networks represent more than 45 000 educational institutions (schools, universities, adult education and youth centres, etc.) or associations (involving students, teachers and trainers, parents, HRD professionals, etc.) covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Their members reach out to several millions of beneficiaries. Download our brochure in [23 languages!](#)  
Contact: [info@eucis-lll.eu](mailto:info@eucis-lll.eu)*

**Validation is a top priority in EUCIS-LLL manifesto for the European elections.**



### EUCIS-LLL MANIFESTO

*Building together the future of learning*

**12** Priorities for lifelong learning



### FLEXIBLE PATHWAYS

Support a wider use of European transparency tools and the setting up by 2018 of national validation mechanisms for non-formal and informal learning to foster flexible learning pathways and facilitate access to the labour market.