

Effective validation practice: the European perspective

2.1. Making validation processes comparable

From a European perspective, strengthening the comparability of approaches to validation at different levels and in different contexts is important: this is part of developing trust at international level. It has been said that the national and regional methods and systems developed so far can be considered 'islands' of validation.

Lack of system comparability makes it difficult for individuals to combine learning outcomes acquired in different settings, at different levels and in different countries. These guidelines can develop links between these islands and enable policy learning, increased transparency and greater common trust.

Guidelines

Validation practice for informal and non-formal learning should be compatible with the main elements in the 2004 European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the European principles for quality assurance of education and training, and the recommendation for a European quality assurance reference framework for VET.²

European cooperation on validation should be further developed, in particular by regularly updating and improving these guidelines and the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

European level tools and frameworks (European Qualifications framework, Europass, European credit systems) could be used to promote validation and to improve comparability and transparency of the outcomes and so build trust across national boundaries.

¹ This document is taken from Cedefop (2009), European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, Luxembourg. Pages 22-24. Downloadable in English, French and German versions from <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/5059.aspx>

² Downloadable from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0179:FIN:EN:PDF>

2.2. Quality assurance instruments

Quality assurance processes across Europe set benchmarks for validation procedures. The European principles for quality assurance in education and training can increase cross-national trust in these validation processes.

The principles are as follows:

- quality assurance policies and procedures should cover all levels of education and training systems;
- quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions;
- quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions or programmes by external monitoring bodies or agencies;
- external monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review;
- quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes;
- quality assurance systems should include the following elements:
 - (i) clear and measurable objectives and standards;
 - (ii) guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;
 - (iii) appropriate resources;
 - (iv) consistent evaluation methods including self-assessment and external review;
 - (v) feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement;
 - (vi) widely accessible evaluation results;
- international, national and regional quality assurance initiatives should be coordinated to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis;
- quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the community;

- quality assurance guidelines at community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.

These European guidelines seek to show how the above quality assurance principles can establish consistency of application across the many national contexts for validating non-formal and informal learning. Many factors can provide or undermine confidence in either the methods used in validation or the outcome achieved. The success of national and local validation processes depends on the confidence they inspire.

As far as possible, national validation processes should be compliant with the European quality assurance principles and the follow-up to these. The relevance of these principles for future development of validation of non-formal and informal learning requires, however, that more emphasis is given to the quality assurance of certification, and in particular how standards are developed and renewed, how the learning outcomes approach is applied, and how different stakeholders (also outside education and training) are involved in and contribute to certification.