



Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Problem statement

Addressed problem: Re-engaging through identification and recognition of skills

Validation has the potential to bring wide benefits to young people who have dropped out of education and training, including those at risk of early leaving. Finding opportunities to enable early leavers to identify and recognise all learning that happens outside of formal education can be significant. It can lead to a huge confidence-boost which is the first stepping stone towards a return to formal learning, finding a pathway to employment, or simply an understanding of their own competences and capabilities.

Beneficiaries

Early leavers from education and training

Young people Vulnerable groups

Validation can target a range of different sub-groups and age ranges of early leavers and low qualified groups. One point to consider in this respect is the specificities of the different target groups and what this means for the type of validation approach they may benefit from and most appropriate tools to be used. For example, many early leavers and low qualified groups will have left education and training with at most a lower secondary qualification and may struggle with basic reading and writing, calculation and using digital tools in everyday life. Some younger early school leavers may have complex needs and may require more psycho-social support to help increase self-esteem and/or self-awareness. There are also individuals who may be changing pathways or wishing to return to education to acquire or complete qualifications.

Practices can include both summative and formative approaches to validation which can be used to help an individual understand and/or acquire recognition of their individual skills and competences. These approaches are summarised in the figure below:

FORMATIVE APPROACHES	SUMMATIVE APPROACHES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily focus on trying to help an individual understand their own competences and increase their self-confidence Serve as a basis to create a personal plan or future learning / career pathway May lead to a tailored learning opportunity Can include portfolios, skills audit (with a focus on identification and documentation) Provide a first stepping stone towards a return to formal learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable the individual to acquire a formal qualification as recognition of their skills and competences Provide opportunities to acquire bite sized learning e.g. credit, units of learning Lead to exemptions and thus shortened study periods Serve as a means to recognising skills acquired outside formal learning Provide a route back into learning or pathway to employment

Addressing the problem

Tips: Making validation work for early leaver

Validation is about making visible the diverse and rich learning of individuals, irrespective of where this learning took place. Validation is a process that can be carried out by different stakeholders within the education and training sector, labour market and third sector. There are four different stages to validation: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. These stages can be mixed and balanced in different ways - e.g. when working towards a formal qualification, the assessment stage is crucial. In voluntary work, the identification and documentation stage may be more relevant.

There are a range of validation initiatives that include early leavers as a key target group, though maybe not their sole target group. Initiatives may be aimed at young people, but not necessarily those who are early leavers. They may cover the low skilled but over a broader age range. Nevertheless practitioners will be able to draw on key elements of existing validation initiatives and their corresponding tools in order to make validation opportunities relevant and specific to the needs of the individual.

Across the different opportunities, there are important considerations to bear in mind. We offer some tips on how to address these considerations:

Tip 1: Recognise skills and competences acquired in a variety of settings

There is an increasing will to recognise all learning that happens in one's life. Although some early leavers may not have acquired a formal education, many have acquired valuable skills at home, in the workplace or through hobbies. For some early leavers who have little or no access to extra-curricular opportunities (including sports or volunteering), practitioners can use formative approaches that concentrate on identifying skills and competences gained in day-to-day activities. This can help to motivate and empower individuals.

Tip 2: Provide guidance to help young people make good choices and increase their chances for success

Guidance can take on the form of a range of different activities and services and plays a vital role in supporting early leavers through a validation process. Career guidance includes career information, career counselling, mentoring and career education. These activities support the development of career management skills that enable early leavers to plan, lead and manage their learning and career choices. Guidance and counselling is especially important for reaching disadvantaged groups and supporting them through the validation process. Young people need access to guidance before, during and upon completion of the validation procedure to realise their inherent potential. Existing guidance methods and tools devised to respond to the needs of different target groups can be used in validation initiatives to assist in defining validation purposes.

Since guidance can originate from a range of services and stakeholders, coordination between sectors and organisations is important to link guidance services with validation. Providing guidance and counselling during the different stages of the validation procedure is important, with particular attention to identification and documentation. Guidance professionals should be aware and up-to-date on the full range of learning opportunities available to an individual upon completion of the validation process. Depending on the individual, guidance activities/services might work better if offered on a one-to-one basis or as part of a group session with a guidance practitioner, career advisor, or mentor.

For more detail on guidance, see the intervention approach: [Guidance: supporting youth to manage their careers](#).

Tip 3: Select the right tools

Practitioners should select validation tools that are fit for purpose and provide the opportunity for self-exploration and reflection. In some cases more than one tool, or a combination of tools might be needed to capture the characteristics of the learning outcomes and reflect the needs of the individual. For some early leavers the idea of working towards a formal learning outcome such as a qualification, is simply not an option at first. These young people may just need an opportunity to re-assess their current situation and identify a way forward. First of all it is important to select the most suitable tool to extract evidence. For some learners, conversation methods or observations are more suitable, for others, a test or examination may be more appropriate. Practitioners then need to select the most appropriate tools to document and present the evidence that has been extracted. For some learners a portfolio may be used, for others, third party reports or CVs, or a combination of these tools may be used. A portfolio can be used as a way to help an individual understand the skills and competences they have acquired. It provides the audience with comprehensive insights into the achievements of their learning. Building a portfolio takes time. Some learners will need time for self-reflection and help in identifying undocumented skills and producing a portfolio that shows their skills and competences in a clear and authentic way.

Tip 4: Placing the learner at the centre of the validation process

Validation procedures should refer young people to learning opportunities that are the most appropriate for each individual. Validation is (normally) voluntary and the learner must be supported in a way that enables them to make decisions about going through the different stages of validation. Learners should receive information and guidance to help them understand the process and what the different options for validation entail. For example:

- Some early leavers are more attracted to learning offered in a more informal environment and have their skills validated through non-formal mechanisms (e.g. Europass or Youthpass). This approach can help with increased self-esteem and motivate individuals to take on further learning – perhaps igniting an interest to aim towards achieving an upper secondary qualification in the longer term.
- Other may benefit from enrolling in education and training programmes that will eventually lead to a formal qualification.
- Some learners may not need to enrol in learning activities. They may be able to acquire a formal qualification by directly entering the final examination of a qualification without taking part in formal training. This opportunity is relevant to early leavers who may have left school to take up employment and have acquired skills in the workplace which could be recognised through a formal qualification.

Tip 5: Follow-up after validation

Depending on the needs of the individual, validation can be used as a stepping stone back into education, a pathway to training or work or simply as a way to help them understand their own skills and competences. Therefore it is important that practitioners involved in the process are aware of progression opportunities for the individual. This may be access to, progression within or qualifications or to the labour market.

Systematic data collection and monitoring arrangements (e.g. unique reference numbers, registers) can be used to track the progress and mobility of individuals following completion of a validation procedure e.g. into further education and training or employment. This information can be used to ensure a young person is not lost in their transition into education or the labour market – whereby appropriate follow-up measures should be in place.

Tip 6: Meeting the needs of different learners

Validation activities can be used by different sub-groups and age ranges of early leavers. As such, validation systems should be flexible and adaptable to the needs of the different target groups. Validation practitioners should be trained so that they have a good understanding of the diversity of early leavers, their specific problems and barriers which keep them from participating in formal learning. Validation materials need to be adapted to ensure they are useful to different-subgroups. This includes the use of easy language (especially important for non-native people or those with low-literacy levels), multi-channel visuals such as images, pictograms. Some validation procedures can be created for specific target groups but ideally systems should be responsive to all the different needs.

Tip 7: Ensure the credibility of validation by education providers and employers

The credibility and awareness of any validation process and its outcome is an important issue for early leavers. If the outcome resulting from the validation process is not recognised by education providers / employers or they do not consider it to be of the same value as those acquired through formal learning, then the outcome will have less benefit for the individual in terms of their employability and educational advancement. Awarding a certificate on the basis of non-formal and informal learning requires an agreed reference point – for example, in the form of a qualification standard or occupational standard. Whilst the identification and documentation phase of validation may be carried out without a formalised standard, assessment and certification aiming for a qualification needs to be carried out to an agreed and approved standard based on learning outcomes. The use of standards that are wither the same as, or equivalent to, the standards for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes is important to ensure consistency in the validation system. This is one way to ensure credibility of the outcomes.

Tip 8: Involve relevant stakeholders in validation processes to promote buy-in and raise awareness

Validation processes often require the involvement of many different stakeholders (e.g. national stakeholders, education and training institutions, enterprises, NGOs) with different responsibilities and functions. Their involvement and contribution in the validation process at an early stage can help ensure the quality and coherence of the validation experience for the individual. Coordination between different stakeholders can also raise awareness of validation opportunities and trust in their outcomes.

Tip 9: Train practitioners involved in validation processes

There can be a wide range of professionals involved in validation procedures for early leavers at different stages of the process. These practitioners include those involved in offering information, advice and guidance as well as those carrying out and managing the assessment process. These staff should have access to training, practical guidelines and a range of different validation tools and methods. They should be suitably qualified to work with candidates to appraise the breadth and depth of their learning and ensure appropriate methods are selected at the relevant stages to best suit the individual. They should also be equipped with soft skills such as intercultural capacity to ensure the diverse needs of the early leavers are met.

Expected outcomes

Some validation opportunities are aimed at achieving a qualification (or parts of) and might provide a link to the formal education and training system. Other approaches are more focused on building self-awareness and helping an individual understand the skills and competences in the first instance. Many approaches use portfolios for documenting competences, skills and knowledge acquired in different settings. For some approaches, the focus is not only on identification and documentation but also on assessment and certification. Whilst education providers and employers might use the formal outcome of a validation (e.g. certificate), the different stages of validation (particularly the identification stage) allows a young person to reflect on the competences gained and how they could be used in different ways in the future.

Finding relevant validation opportunities for early leavers offers huge potential to support further educational, employment achievement and the wider well-being of the individual. Institutional and system benefits can also be identified as illustrated in the table below.

		
INDIVIDUAL	INSTITUTIONAL	SYSTEM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased self-esteem / self-awareness • Empowerment • Tailor made learning opportunities • Stimulus to engage in further learning • Access to higher level of study • Gain evidence to apply for employment /promotion • Improved employability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce drop-out rates • Learning opportunities better meet the needs of individual learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better matching skills and labour demand • Promoting transferability of skills between companies and sectors • Supporting mobility across the labour market • Contribute to fighting social exclusion

Related resources

Good practices

GOOD PRACTICE

Certification Per Unit (CPU)

In the French-speaking community of Belgium, Certification Per Unit (CPU) allows students to validate their skills gradually. This gives value to the young person's learning outcomes and can help to avoid year repetition.

 Belgium-FR

GOOD PRACTICE

Second chance schools - France

Écoles de la deuxième chance

French second chance schools (E2Cs) offer training programmes which incorporate individualised learning paths tailored to the needs of each participant.

 France



Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

Students following the Irish Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) accumulate credits by three different routes (satisfactory completion of modules; the student tasks; and the final examinations) over two years. They are certified on the basis of the total number of credits accumulated.



Certificate of practice (Praksisbrev)

The Norwegian 'Certificate of Practice' is a two-year programme with emphasis on practical training. After obtaining a 'Certificate of Practice', the learner can continue training towards a trade or journeyman's certificate.



Contact Points for people who gained professional qualifications abroad (AST)

Counselling on recognition and further educational topics for migrants, people entitled to asylum status and to subsidiary protection. Multilingual consultations are offered in the following languages: German, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, Turkish, English, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, French, Romanian, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Farsi, Arabic, Dioula, and Bobo. Through lobbying and networking with decision-makers and opinion leaders AST gathers information, analyses and responds to policy initiatives and social developments with the aim to represent the interests of migrants.



Tools



Digital video platform "Film your job"

"Film your job" aims to promote apprenticeships by introducing young people to apprenticeship and trades through short videos shared on a dedicated platform as well as on social media.



My Key

MyKey aims to validate skills, knowledge and competences acquired through non-formal and also informal learning related to the key competences and transversal skills.



Portfolio for Volunteering Experience based on the ProfilPASS

The ProfilPASS is a portfolio of self-evaluation tools to support young volunteers to evaluate and reflect on their abilities, competences and skills developed while volunteering as possible pathways towards employment.



Youthpass

Youthpass is a recognition tool for non-formal & informal learning in projects funded by Erasmus+ Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps. It is a certificate accompanied by a process that supports reflection and documentation of learning.





TOOLS

Check.work - my work experience matters!

Check.work supports the recognition of professional experience and potential of migrants through work placements and counselling.



Germany



TOOLS

New Challenges - New Answers (NCNA)

NCNA offers a straightforward method to assess informally acquired competences of refugees and asylum-seekers in 30 professions in the sectors of metal, wood, construction, and tourism. It also offers a database-driven comprehensive personal labour market integration plan.



Austria



Croatia



Finland



Germany



Italy



United Kingdom



Slovenia

Publications



PUBLICATIONS

Degrees of success: The transition between vocational education and training and higher education

This study looks at transitions between vocational education and training and higher education and the learning experiences of young people.

Read the report [here](#).



United Kingdom



PUBLICATIONS

Validation and early school leavers

Validation of non-formal and informal learning practices can enable individuals to have their skills recognised, or can simply be a way of helping them to formulate a learning / career pathway for the future.

Read the Cedefop report [here](#).



Europe



PUBLICATIONS

Immigrant background and expected early school leaving in Europe: evidence from PISA

This technical brief analyses the relationship between immigrant status and educational expectations in PISA. Migration flows from outside and within the EU have increased in recent years, and this has raised the attention of policy makers and the general public, with special interests on the implications that those flows can have on, among other, the education system and the labour markets.



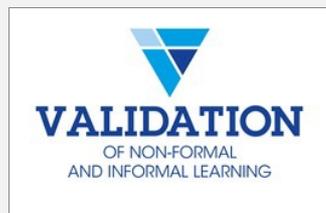
Europe



PUBLICATIONS

European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

Thematic report: validation and early school leavers



The European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning is a regularly updated overview of validation practises and arrangements across Europe. It is compiled in cooperation with the European Commission. The Inventory was endorsed by the [Council Recommendation of 2012 on validation](#) and works together with the [European guidelines](#) as a tool to support countries to develop and implement validation arrangements.



Europe

