Online Validation Event

Updating the European guidelines for validation: Making validation a reality in Europe

All learning, irrespective of where and when it takes place,
is valuable for individuals and society

Concept note

Making skills visible in a changing labour market and society

The necessity of investing in skills development and promoting lifelong learning is more critical than ever. Especially after the COVID-19 crisis, upskilling and reskilling has become ever more important. Member States agreed on a target of 60% of adults participating in learning by 2030 (Action plan for the European pillar of social rights; March 2021). However, given that the need for education, training and learning differs significantly between individuals, efficient strategies for upskilling and reskilling require the support of accessible and trusted arrangements for validation.

Skills development and lifelong learning must make it possible for individuals to build on all prior learning, irrespective of when and where these took place. Validation enables tailoring training provision to the individual needs, while empowering individuals by building on what they already know. In this way, it has become an important tool for job mobility and to ease transitions between unemployment, employment and education and training, especially but not only, for those more disadvantaged. Education and training can become more flexible and effective using individual's prior learning to award qualifications, or provide exemptions, for example through credits. Employers and trade unions can use validation to enhance the career opportunities of employees and better match their skills with their work tasks. The discussion of standards for validation can be an important element for the social dialogue. Civil society and youth organisations might rely on validation processes to identify and document competences developed by participants of their activities.

Validation, thus, can be seen as one of the central building blocks in realising the ambitious goals set by the European Skills Agenda, the European Area of Education, the Osnabrueck VET Declaration and the European Social Pillar Action Plan[1]. In all these initiatives, validation is referred to as a facilitator for up- and reskilling in a lifelong learning perspective that cuts across sectors and institutions. However, despite EU and national policy efforts, opportunities for validation of non-formal and informal learning remain relatively unknown or are not available to potential users. Fragmentation of services persists. There is a need for further coordination between services that support individual learning paths as well as a further development and testing of validation methodologies and tools to

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[1] Skills Agenda: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0274
European Education Area: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area_en
Osnabrueck Declaration: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/osnabrueck_declaration_eu2020.pdf
Social Pillar Action Plan: https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/

assure their quality, reliability and validity. In addition, new forms of certification are changing the qualification landscape in which validation outcomes operate.

To address these issues and ensure that validation forms an integrated part of European up-skilling and reskilling strategies, the European Commission and Cedefop invite key stakeholders at national and European level to take active part in a discussion on how to update the existing [European Guidelines for validation](). The 2012 Council Recommendation on validation established the Guidelines as a tool supporting mutual learning and the practical development of validation arrangements. While providing an opportunity to discuss in depth the revision of the European Guidelines, the validation event will also provide an opportunity to discuss the future of European cooperation in this area, also taking into account the lessons from the COVID-19 crisis and new developments in the area of certification. The event will build on the preparatory work carried out by the EQF Advisory Group in 2020-21 and a flash-survey on validation carried out by the Commission and Cedefop in 2021.

Objectives of the event

The purpose of this event is to update and elaborate the European Guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Guidelines are a key instrument informing the development of robust validation arrangements as well as supporting European cooperation in this area. The event aims at bringing together a wide variety of stakeholders in order to take into account the diversity of validation contexts, uses and approaches in the EU.

The objectives can be further detailed as:

- Obtaining input from participants on the update of the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning and thus contributing to the regular review of the Guidelines as foreseen in the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- Identifying key areas to be further explored with European policies that can contribute to make validation a real and valuable opportunity for all individuals;
- Advancing in the way the Guidelines can contribute to mutual learning and enhanced cooperation on validation in Europe and strengthening of validation arrangements and practises.

When, how and who?

The Validation event 2021 will consist of two half-day webinars: **November 24 and November 30** (morning). The interval of one week between the two webinars will allow for participant's in-depth reflections on the discussions of the first day.

The event seeks to bring together a maximum of 120 stakeholders from different sectors. The participants are expected to take an active role on the discussion and have a good understanding of issues related to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. They will be provided with background notes and reading material to prepare for the meeting in view of contributing to the update of the Guidelines. They will be asked to make concrete suggestions on how to connect the topics under discussion to the European Guidelines and its update.

Each half-day will consist of short plenary sessions (for introduction and wrap up) and parallel participatory workshops. Four workshops (A, B, C, D) will be organised in parallel. For each workshop a note has been elaborated:

A. *Validation in national skills strategies (integrated approach)*
B. *Making validation a reality for individuals*
C. *Developing high quality validation methodologies*
D. *Exploring complementary routes to certification*

Each workshop will consist of three consequently run sessions that look more in depth into a specific issue within each of the themes. For each session a short input from a specific practice will be provided, to stimulate the discussion. This will be followed by an active discussion on the topic based on pre-defined questions, focusing on the implications for the European Guidelines and its update.

The 2015 European Guidelines and the four themes of the event

As the event is about updating the guidelines, it is important to get acquainted with the current guidelines and its purpose. The ambition and purpose of the 2015 guidelines is to clarify the conditions for designing, implementing and carrying out validation, highlighting critical choices to be made by stakeholders at different stages of the process. Following the 2012 Recommendation, the Guidelines identified a few critical issues, both political and practical, which have to be addressed for validation to become a reality. These issues should not be read in isolation but as building blocks which, when combined, can provide the basis for a coherent approach to validating non-formal and informal learning. The current guidelines illustrate on page 52 the steps/areas that are required to develop and implement validation arrangements and how these different areas need to interconnect so that the learning can be made visible and provided with value. The different workshop themes and the associated notes highlight and deepen several of these aspects:

i)   *Clarify the purpose of validation*: This is a key aspect that cuts across all workshops, but workshop A on integrated approaches in particular will bring additional insights.

ii) *Identify how initiatives respond to individual interests and needs*: This is the focus of workshop B that expands on chapter 2 of the current guidelines.

iii) *Ensure guidance and counselling is coordinated and targeted*: Workshop B focuses on this aspect but will also address other issues such as wider support system, awareness raising or financing.

iv) *Coordinate relevant stakeholders and avoid fragmentation, assuring a coherent approach*: This is addressed in Workshop A and builds on section 3.2 of the current guidelines.

v)   *Ensure the visibility and sustainability by linking arrangements to national qualifications frameworks:* This area is addressed both in workshops A and D and needs to go beyond the narrow focus of NQFs.

vi) *Strengthen the value and currency of validation outcomes by referring to the same or equivalent standards as those used for formal education*: This relates to workshop C, while workshop D and A also provide additional aspects to consider.

vii) *Strengthen the trust in and credibility of validation by linking to quality assurance arrangements*: This aspect cuts across all the workshops, in particular workshop C will provide specific insights.

viii) *Professional competences in validation*: This is an area that cuts across all the workshops, but is not the focus of this particular event.

ix) *Systematically reflect on the role of validation in different sectors*: Workshop A addresses this issue that builds on chapter 4 of the current guidelines but the workshop will also explore how this issue further connects to national strategies, qualifications and credential systems and transferability.

x)   *Clarify methods and tools*: This is addressed in workshop C, building on chapter 5 of the current guidelines.

The event, through the discussion and input from participants, will address and provide additional insights into these areas, highlighting new aspects to be addressed as well as issues that remain relevant and should be kept in the Guidelines. The outcomes of the workshops will provide the basis for an in-depth and adequate review of the guidelines that can better serve cooperation among stakeholders across Europe.

Programme

All times in Central European Time

Day 1: NOVEMBER 24			
9:00 – 9:30	Entering the platform/technical checks		
9:30- 9:55	***PLENARY SESSION***		
	Introductions: DG EMPL and Cedefop Working methodology and expectations on the event		
9:55 – 10:00	Transition buffer		
10:00 – 12:45	***PARALLEL SESSIONS***		
	A. Validation in national skills strategies (integrated approach)	***B. Making validation a reality for individuals***	***C. Developing high quality validation methodologies***	***D. Exploring complementary routes to certification***
10:00 – 11:15	WS.A1: Employer and trade union's involvement	WS.B1: Awareness raising	WS.C1 on transversal skills	WS.D1 on Opening qualifications
11:15 – 11:30	BREAK		
11:30 – 12:45	WS.A2: Role of Civil Society Organisations	WS.B2: reducing complexity and creating validation opportunities	WS.C2 Tailoring validation tools to the individual	WS.D2 on Learning outcomes
12:45 – 13:00	BREAK		
13:00– 13:30	***PLENARY SESSION***		
	Reporting back from the parallel sessions and preparation for next half-day		

Day 2: NOVEMBER 30			
9:00 – 9:30	Entering the platform/technical checks		
9:30- 9:55	***PLENARY SESSION***		
	Recap from first day - Key observations		
9:55 – 10:00	*Transition/Buffer*		
10:00 – 11:15	***PARALLEL SESSIONS***		
	Validation in national skills strategies (integrated approach)	***Making validation a reality for individuals***	***Developing high quality validation methodologies***	***Exploring complementary routes to certification***
10:00 – 11:15	WSA.3: Connecting to education and training	WS.B3: Financial support – connection to ILA	WS.C3 on scalability and cost	WS.D3 on Technical format – digitalisation of certificates
11:15 – 11:30	BREAK		
11:30 – 13:00	***PLENARY SESSION***		

	Translating parallel sessions outputs into Guidelines requirements
	      Reporting from the 4 workshops
	      Plenary discussion
	      Lessons learnt and next steps		