

European Inventory

on validation of informal and
non-formal learning



European inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning CYPRUS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Even though a framework and systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning in Cyprus have not yet been set up, there are many efforts being made in that direction and the framework for a System of Vocational Qualifications has been set.

The EU developments in the field of validation are also being followed closely by national policy makers and Cyprus supports the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework. In this context, the Cyprus Productivity Centre (CPC) was established as the National Europass Centre in 2005.

The non-formal learning sector in Cyprus is growing rapidly, mainly due to the activities of Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA), the organization responsible for vocational training. Furthermore, adult non-formal education is offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance.

2.0 Public Sector

2.1 Legislative Framework

Cyprus is committed before the European Commission to the development of a Competence –based System of Vocational Qualifications. This is a high priority objective which is included in the National Programme for the Lisbon Strategy and in the Lifelong Learning Strategy of Cyprus.

HRDA is the national body which has been assigned the responsibility to gradually establish and implement a System of Vocational Qualifications. The HRDA is a semi-governmental organisation governed by a tripartite Board of Directors, including representatives of the government, employers and trade unions. The Authority has been in operation since 1979 and its policies and financial support for almost 30 years stimulated a change in both attitudes towards training and the volume of training. The HRDA places emphasis on continuous assessment of labour market supply and demand; the formulation of strategies to meet the learning needs of individuals in employment and of those seeking employment; and listening to the needs of employers.

In relation to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, a law, which became effective on 1 November 1999, broadened HRDA' s powers and placed emphasis on the need to introduce a System of Vocational Qualifications. More specifically, the law assigned the following responsibilities to the HRDA:

- to define the standards of vocational qualifications
- to provide for the assessment of vocational qualifications and
- to issue the relevant certificates of vocational qualifications.

The System of Vocational Qualifications is based on Standards of Vocational Qualifications, which are developed with the involvement of technical sectoral committees. The System is designed specifically for the assessment and certification of the knowledge, skills and competences of a person to perform competently in a working environment under normal working or simulated conditions at a predetermined level of occupation.

At the 1st phase (2006-2008), five Standards of Vocational Qualifications at level 2, for the occupations of waiter, cook, receptionist, construction mason and sales person (retail trade) have been developed and utilised. Opportunities for access were provided to employees.

During the 2nd phase (2007-2013), the development of standards of vocational qualifications for additional occupations at various levels is envisaged. Specifically, it is

envisaged to cover approximately 60 occupations in the economic sectors of Manufacturing, Hotel/Catering, Construction, Retail and Wholesale Trade, Repairs of Motor Vehicles, Communication Networks and Computers as well as Hairdressing and the profession of Trainer of Vocational Training. During this phase, opportunities for access will be provided to employees, unemployed and economically inactive persons.

Following the decision of the Cyprus Council of Ministers of the 27th April 2005, the CPC was set as the National Europass Center. Europass records skills and competences in a clear and easy to understand way, to help individuals to find a job, gain experience abroad or enrol in an education or training program.

The CPC as the National Europass Centre:

- is responsible for the coordination, management and promotion of all the activities related to Europass and its documents.
- provides information to individuals, education and training providers, guidance operators, employers and anybody requiring information and guidance on Europass and any of its documents.
- assures cooperation with other related organisations that operate in the same field of mobility and qualification transparency and also background information relating to the Europass initiative.

Following discussions amongst government departments in October 2005, a debate has been initiated in Cyprus amongst numerous public and private stakeholders in the field of learning, including the social partners, for contributing towards the development of Cyprus position on the EQF initiative. The EQF initiative was presented, analysed and discussed in early January 2006 and the participants were then asked to prepare and submit their proposals. At the same time the same stakeholders have started discussing and debating the need for the development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). On the basis of these proposals and further consultations and discussions, Cyprus has developed and submitted its view to the European Union, thus contributing to the shaping of the EQF. (Ministry responsible: Ministry of Education and Culture).

3.0 Private Sector

Tripartite cooperation is well developed in Cyprus and the social partners have been involved in the debate on developing a System of Vocational Qualifications, especially since the social partners are members of the Board of Directors of the HRDA and fully support the development of the System.

In addition, the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) is operating a scheme certifying competences in computer-related subjects such as word-processing, databases, spreadsheets etc, based on the Chamber's own examinations. The certificates awarded enjoy recognition by the enterprises who are members of the Chamber, but also from other private companies and public organisations. The majority of participants are young people (15-18 years old) but the scheme is also targeted to people already in employment. Apart from this scheme, other European methods such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), is also available and widely used in Cyprus.

There are also examples in the banking and accounting/auditing sector in Cyprus, whereby foreign certifications are recognised as described below. This has led to an impressive increase of participants in these qualifications schemes, among the employees of banking and accounting/auditing firms in Cyprus:

- The Cyprus Association of Commercial Banks recognises the qualifications awarded by the Chartered Institute of Bankers of England and Wales; the American Institute of Bankers and the Documentary Credits Certificate awarded by the International Chamber of Commerce.
- The Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Cyprus and the accounting and auditing companies that are members of the Institute, recognise the qualifications awarded by the Chartered and Certified Accountants of the UK and the US CPA qualification.

4.0 Other initiatives

Apart from the above, a number of EU-funded projects have enabled Cyprus to become involved in other multi-country pilot actions in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning. For example, Cyprus participated in the Leonardo project “Diaplus”, which aimed to produce a European tool for life-long career management, to enable individuals to monitor their career. The Information and Communications Technology sector was selected for the pilot implementation of the project and partners from six countries worked on producing a tool giving individuals the opportunity to review their qualifications, personal and occupational profile, so as to set new goals and plan their development accordingly.

ESF funds were also used to co-fund projects with an element of validation. The ESF projects aimed to train and improve the employability of persons from disadvantaged categories and in order to provide an individual pathway to work for each beneficiary, the prior skills, competences and knowledge the beneficiaries held would be informally assessed.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, even though there is not yet a national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Cyprus, there are developments in that direction.

During 2006, the HRDA established and began to implement a System of Vocational Qualifications. In the first phase (2006-2008), five Standards of Vocational Qualifications have been developed and utilised. During the second phase (2007-2013) it is envisaged to develop Standards for around 60 occupations at various levels. A consultation process is under way between public stakeholders and the social partners to discuss how the standards will actually be implemented.

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Private sector initiatives have also started to be implemented both at the level of the social partners and of individual companies, mainly in the areas of IT, banking and accounting/auditing.