

European Inventory

on validation of informal and
non-formal learning



A European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning Spain

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1.0 Introduction

There is an ongoing increase in awareness in Spain of the benefits of recognising and validating informal and non-formal learning. Spain is firmly committed to lifelong learning, and the recognition and validation of informal and non formal learning is seen as fundamental in its development.

Policies have been designed in the different public administrations in line with this aim, which have been further consolidated through legislation. Recognition and validation mainly takes place in relation to the qualifications which are awarded through the formal education system.

Recognising and validating informal and non-formal learning was already implicit in the Spanish legislation in the seventies, in particular with regard to facilitating access to formal education through recognition of competences acquired via non-formal experiences and mechanisms. Subsequently, it was made possible to accredit informal and non-formal learning through partial or complete diplomas and certificates of professionalism.

At present, legislation is being developed explicitly and directly dealing with the recognition and validation of competences acquired through professional and social experiences and in non formal education. The national framework is widening opportunities to accredit non-formal and informal learning.

2.0 Review of existing initiatives: Public Sector

2.1 Legal and Structural framework

The legal Framework related to recognition of non-formal and informal learning is made up of the following Acts:

- The Education Act (Ley Orgánica de Educación 2/2006, de 3 de mayo de 2006) which regulates the educational system, except higher education
- The Higher Education Act (Ley Orgánica 4/2007, de 12 de abril)
- The Employment Act (Ley de Empleo 56/2003) - currently under revision, includes continuous education and occupational training as an active employment policy
- The Qualifications and Vocational Training Act (Ley Orgánica 5/2002 de 19 de junio, de las Cualificaciones y la Formación Profesional)

The **Education Act** (Ley Orgánica de Educación 2/2006, de 3 de mayo de 2006) regulates the educational system, except for higher education. It is based on the principle of lifelong learning, establishing that every person should have the opportunity to be educated throughout his/her life, both within and outside of the education system, and that public administrations should provide flexible learning opportunities.

The Act contains a chapter dedicated to adult education, in which it is established that adults are able to learn through both formal and non-formal methods, such as through work and social experiences. For this reason, the Act states that there should be pathways between the two types of learning and mechanisms for validation of informal and non-formal learning (art. 66.4). Among the different measures included within the act are measures to permit access to formal education for individuals who do not meet the academic requirements, and measures to evaluate and accredit partial or full general, vocational and arts qualifications.

The **Higher Education Act** (Ley Orgánica 4/2007, de 12 de abril) rules that the government will regulate the requirements for academic validation of professional experience. In addition the government will regulate the procedures to provide access to higher education, through accreditation of a determined professional experience, for individuals who do not comply with the academic entry requirements.

The **Employment Act** (Ley de Empleo 56/2003), currently under revision, includes continuous education and occupational training as an active employment policy. This act establishes the certificates of professionalism as an official accreditation of professional competences. These certificates do not have an academic value.

The **Qualifications and Vocational Training Act** (Ley Orgánica 5/2002 de 19 de junio, de las Cualificaciones y la Formación Profesional), adopted in June 2002, aims to create a “National System of Qualifications and Professional Training”. It involves both the programmes of the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education and introduces greater flexibility, which enables vocational education and training to be linked more closely to the labour market and opens up possibilities for lifelong learning and the accreditation of non-formal and informal learning. Among other instruments, a National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications is created. Its principle task is to act as an observatory of the productive sectors, providing a catalogue of the standards of professional competences in the labour market, which serves as a reference in the design of VET qualifications and certificates of professionalism. This technical body provides support to a consultative body. The government has the obligation to establish the procedures and requisites for validation of professional competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning. These procedures and requirements are currently under development and discussion in a working group in the General Council for Vocational Training.

2.2 Principles and objectives of the legislative framework

The legislation develops measures to allow assessment and accreditation of non formal and informal education with a view to:

- Facilitate the return of adults to the education system to continue their education, without having to comply with the academic requirements
- Promote lifelong learning by validating partially or completely a qualification or a certificate of professionalism
- Respond to the need for validation of professional competences acquired through vocational training, professional experience and other non formal education
- Create, in vocational training, a common national standard of professional competences.

2.3 Background

Recognising and validating informal and non-formal learning was already implicit in the Spanish legislation in the seventies, in particular with regard to facilitating access to formal education for adults. Subsequently the possibility of partial or complete accreditation of informal and non-formal learning in diplomas, and certificates of professionalism were incorporated.

At present, regulation is being developed explicitly and directly dealing with the recognition and validation of competences acquired through professional and social experiences and in non formal education.

Changes in legislation aim to address the following challenges:

- Adapting the Spanish education system to the common goals of the EU
- Promoting Lifelong learning
- Boosting the role of education to provide equal opportunities and social inclusion
- Promoting the return to the education system of adults
- Creating a more flexible education system with more pathways
- Labour mobility within Spain and abroad

In particular, labour mobility highlights the importance of validation of qualifications in order to:

- Guarantee recognition of competences by companies and training providers in Spain and in the EU
- Facilitate job searching
- Facilitate mobility in education
- Prevent having a significant number of citizens without official accreditation of their competences

Main Actions

- **Entry tests**, which permit access to an education level without complying with the academic requirements. The tests do not provide accreditation of an education level, but prove sufficiency of maturity and knowledge to study in that education level. There are entry tests to grant access to vocational training at different levels, art studies, sport studies and higher education.
- **Tests to attain qualifications** exist to obtain the certificate of Secondary education, certificate of post-secondary education, VET system qualifications and some university

degrees. In the case of VET, some involve the assessment of professional competences, using interviews, observation on the job, projects, etc.

- **Candidate Initial Assessment** (only for orientation purposes, it does not provide official accreditation) provides an assessment of the experience and knowledge to assist the candidate in choosing the "module" with a view to obtain the certificate of secondary education
- **Assessment and Recognition of occupational competence** is still in development. It will rule out the procedures and requirements to assess professional competences acquired in non formal or informal context and will provide the partial or complete validation of a VET diploma or a professionalism certificate
- **Special awards or occupational licences** which are needed for concrete activities of a certain profession. These are granted outside of the education system. Nevertheless, VET graduates are increasingly, depending on their speciality, obtaining the appropriate occupational licence simultaneously.

2.4 ERA 03 Project

The ERA 03 project is a pilot programme which was undertaken in 2003. It was initially proposed within the General Vocational Training Council¹ and promoted by the Ministry of Education and Science, with involvement from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the social partners (through their representation in the General Vocational Training Council)². In order to ease the follow-up of the project, was concentrated on a limited number of Autonomous Regions (seven in total), each of them implementing the pilot accreditation experience for one or two occupations.

The project was an experimental programme in which for the first time the assessment, recognition and accreditation of professional competences had been tested. It made use of the units of competence of the National Catalogue of vocational qualification which was still under development at that time.

Beneficiaries of this project were workers with professional competences without official qualifications. Documentation of their professional experience was required to undergo the validation procedure.

¹ This is a consultative institution with institutional representation of both the public administration and social actors and embedded within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

² *Theme 8, accumulating, transferring and validating learning*, Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – INEM

Beneficiaries, observers and evaluators who took part in the project received guides with supporting material¹:

- Beneficiary guide: includes supporting material, the application form, the training/professional career record and information about the evaluation's process and framework.
- Observer's guide: includes supporting material for initial orientation, advice and assessment, documentation for the interview with the candidate, proficiency reference points, self-evaluation questionnaires, initial assessment report and proficiencies dossier.
- Evaluator's guide: includes description of their role, evaluation planning, proof of proficiency guides.

In total 302 candidates were evaluated, with an average of 20-25 applicants for each of the 9 chosen professional reference points (related to certain occupations) and Autonomous Communities. Of these, 235 received full accreditation (78%), 35 partial accreditation (12%) and 32 (10%) did not obtain accreditation.

Some measures have been proposed for improvement. The majority of the beneficiaries noted that the evaluation should be closer to the reality of their profession. They considered evaluation on the job and the gathering of direct evidence of performance on the job to be essential. In addition, some beneficiaries were discouraged by the fact that the gap between the proficiencies to be evaluated and their real experience on the job was too large².

2.5 Higher education

Universities have regulations regarding the validation of prior qualifications and degrees, which are applied with a wide degree of autonomy. However, the Act on higher education rules that the government will regulate the specific rules for the validation of prior learning acquired by non-conventional means or by professional experience.

Some higher education institutes are involved in EU (Leonardo and Socrates) and national projects dealing with the issue of recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning. Examples are the Fundación General of the University of Valladolid, Research Centre on Adult Education of the University of Barcelona, Deusto University and Granada University. For example, the Research Centre on the Education of Adults of the University

¹ *Theme 8, accumulating, transferring and validating learning*, Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – INEM

² *Theme 8, accumulating, transferring and validating learning*, Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – INEM

of Barcelona and the Association for the Lifelong Learning of Adults were Spanish partners in the Grundtvig project APEL (Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning) (2000-2002). This project examined how systems to validate non-formal and informal learning work from a student perspective. Through interviews with adult learners, a variety of validation methodologies were evaluated, leading to recommendations for improvement in policy and practice. One of the end results was a handbook for adult learners to assist them in the validation process¹. Another example is the Fundación General of the University of Valladolid that has developed tools for the validation of competencies, in a project financed by the INEM in the context of the accompanying and complementary measures to training.

2.6 Regional public initiatives

Besides the Act on Qualifications and Vocational Training, the National Catalogue of vocational qualifications, etc. many less centralised initiatives are set up in parallel. These initiatives often do not exclusively focus on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, but are set up in a wider perspective.

An example is the "Integrated Employment Service Plan" (SIPES) of the Ministry of Labour which focuses on the establishment of personalised employment programmes for disadvantaged groups among the unemployed. The SIPES plan is run by town halls, amongst other institutions, and is linked with the "trade houses" (Casas de Oficios) and "workshop-schools" (Escuelas-Taller), whose purpose is to share the training of young people - in craft trades and professions - with work on useful public tasks such as restoring historical buildings, repairing parks and gardens and so on. Part of the SIPES plan consists of the development of procedures for competence-based assessment among the unemployed. It offers a combination of interviews and tests to develop the professional and competence profile of an individual. The procedure does not lead to formal accreditation but has the objective to improve the supervision and awareness of an individual's own abilities².

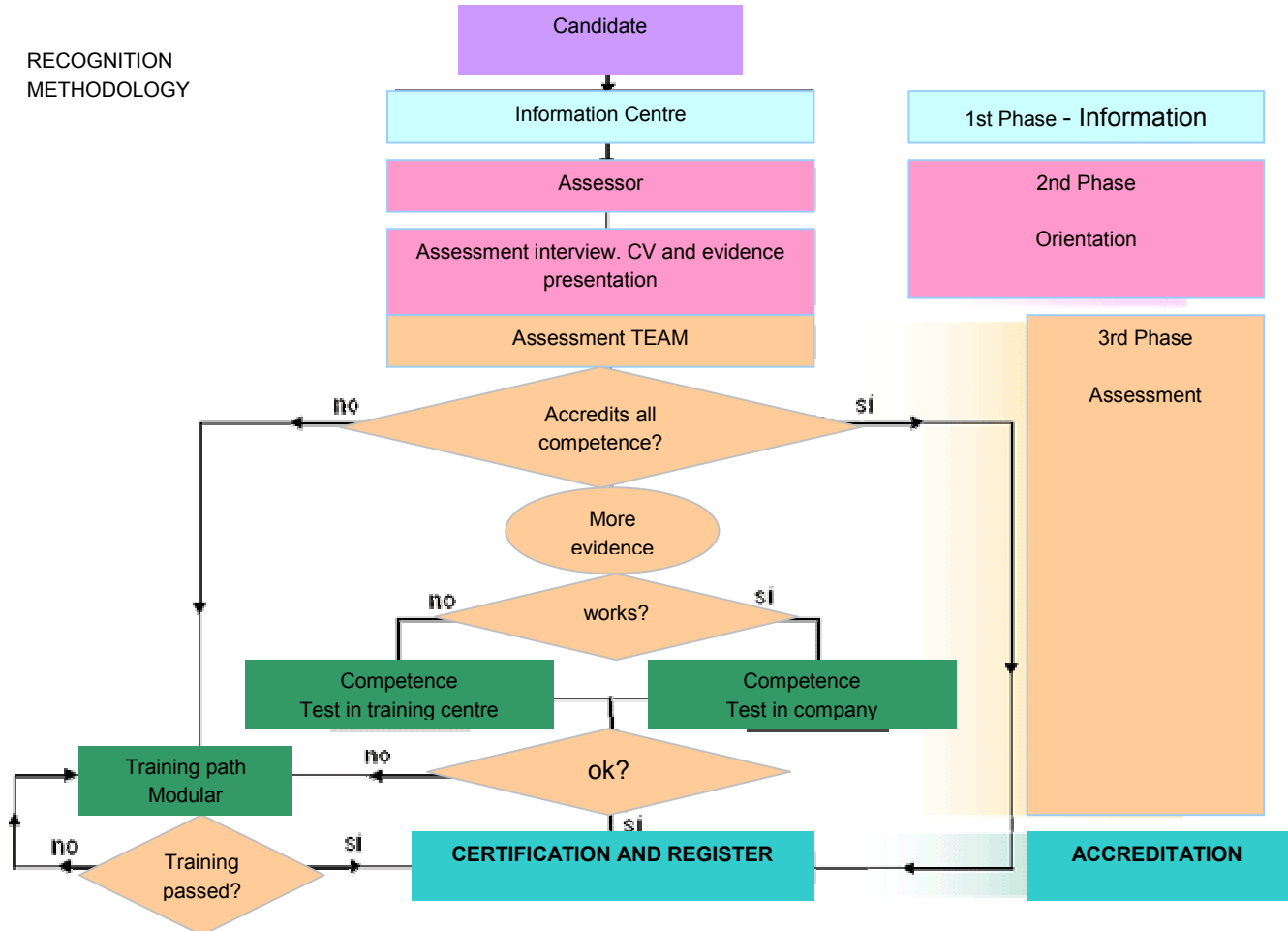
At regional level, the Basque country was the first region to accredit professional training in October 2004. The Basque country has its own Institute of Qualifications (Agencia Vasca

¹ ISOC, Socrates project database, retrieved 2007: <http://www.isoc.siu.no/isocii.nsf/projectlist/88271>

² Duvkot, R, Schuur, K., Paulusse, J. (editors), 2005, The unfinished story of VPL, valuation and validation of prior learning in Europe's learning cultures, Kenniscentrum EVC, Netherlands; Eiro online, active employment policies in Spain, an overview. Retrieved September 2007: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/1997/07/feature/es9707214f.html>

para la Garantía de la Calidad) which has implemented since October 2004 the assessment and recognition process presented in the diagram below¹.

Figure 2.1 Assessment and recognition process introduced in the Basque country



¹ Leonardo da Vinci programme, professional competences and credit units in craft firms and SMEs, national system and best practices in Spain about identification, assessment and certification of competences, retrieved September 2007: http://www.ecipar.it/iffpmi/materiale/Documenti/Report_Spain.doc

3.0 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector

3.1 Social partners (sectoral)

Some social partners support the development of a national approach to validation of informal and non-formal learning, while others promote some sectoral recognition (the construction sector, etc.)¹. For example, the employer's organisations CEOE (Confederation of Spanish employers) and CEPYME (Confederation of Spanish SMEs) believe that the methods to recognise and validate non-formal and informal learning should be based on objective criteria, set by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The trade unions, Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.) and the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), believe that methods for recognition and validation should be based on more qualitative criteria within concrete jobs, since that is the only place where social partners have the opportunity to participate in accreditation².

Several initiatives are financed by FORCEM (Foundation for Continuing Training - Fundación para la Formación Continua); a joint national organisation empowered to put into practice the national continuing training agreements which have been agreed among the most representative employers' organisations and trade unions. These initiatives mostly focus on developing within industrial sectors (particularly those with difficulties finding accredited workers) a credible procedure of recognition and certification of professional competences acquired through professional experience.

When other sectoral initiatives have been initiated, they mostly have been developed within the framework of the Complementary Actions and Accompanying Measures in Relation to Training or through the Leonardo da Vinci II 2000/2006 Community vocational training programmes. Most of these initiatives examine to what extent recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning are included in policy and how continuing training can be improved, rather than focusing on the creation of methods for the validation of informal and non-formal learning³. Examples of social partners involved are the Spanish Association for welding and union technologies; the National Federation of Food, Beverage and Tobacco; the Spanish Confederation of Young entrepreneurs; the Unión General de Trabajadores; and employer organisation of Cataluña (SEFES).

¹ *Framework of actions for the lifelong learning development of competences and qualifications, evaluation report, 2006*, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP

² Duvekot, R, Schuur, K., Paulusse, J. (editors), 2005, *The unfinished story of VPL, valuation and validation of prior learning in Europe's learning cultures*, Kenniscentrum EVC, Netherlands

³ Theme 8, accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – INEM

An example of a project is the 2003 Toolbridge project (Tools for assessment and recognition of skills in the building sector), funded by the Leonardo programme, that analyses existing tools and mechanisms to recognize informal and non-formal learning towards skills accreditation and proposes new or revised tools/methodologies for use, particularly in the construction sector. The coordinator is the Spanish Instituto de formacion y estudios sociales (IFES) which is a non-profit foundation created by the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT-General Workers' Trade Unions, one of the two most representative Trade Unions in Spain)¹. This organisation has also been involved in a Socrates project Che-mi-tec (System of evaluation, recognition and validation of proficiencies sensitive to technological changes in the chemical sector) (2004-2006). This project analysed trends in the chemical sector to identify associated proficiencies in processes of change in order to create adequate reference points; evaluation instruments to assess available proficiencies and an instrument for the validation of proficiencies².

3.2 Individual companies

A number of larger companies have shown good practices in developing policies of ongoing assessment of all their human resources. This has helped not only to identify gaps and define competence development activities, but to make the most of human capital and to increase efficiency. SMEs are slightly lagging behind in this respect³.

We can outline that there are some common aspects in these projects: mainly there are three key efforts:

- An effort towards the recognition or analysis of the new skills or new training needs that are needed in some sectors of the economy;
- An effort towards a validation, at regional, national and/or European level, of certain trainings or certain skills as valid to undertake certain professions
- An effort to draw up guides or methodologies for recognising and validating informal learning within a sector of the economy.

¹ ETV. Retrieved September 2007:

http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Projects_Networks/SocialP/project_details.asp?id=1146

² Theme 8, accumulating, transferring and validating learning, Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal – INEM t; SREP lifelong learning, *details on European projects*. Retrieved September 2007:

http://www.srep.ro/english/detalii_proiecte.html

³ Framework of actions for the lifelong learning development of competences and qualifications, evaluation report, 2006, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP

Examples of companies/institutes focusing on developing initiatives towards the validation of informal and non-formal skills are the Institute of Theatre of Barcelona (Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona) and the Technological Institute of Castilla y León.

Most of the initiatives are undertaken through EU programmes such as the Leonardo and Socrates programmes.

An example of such a project is “Inflow – informal learning opportunities in the workplace” which is a Leonardo project focusing on developing a model for the identification and recognition of informal learning taking place within SMEs. The idea is to develop methodologies for accreditation of these informal learning achievements across the EU, among others in the hotel and hospitality sector in Spain (Balearic Islands). The Spanish partner - BDF (Balear de desarrollo y formación) - is an SME active in both the research and training fields, with close links with regional actors and social partners in the hotel, catering, travel and tourism sectors¹.

Another example is the CAST (Competencies and skills in tourism) project, a Leonardo project with two Spanish partners: BDF (Balear de desarrollo y formación) and Asociación Hotelera de la Playa de Palma (2003-2006). The aims of this project were to analyse what ICT professional competences are required in the tourist sector in Spain and other countries; what training in ICT is performed; and what training is necessary. The end results of the projects were a methodology for the recognition, validation and accreditation of competences in the work place in the tourist sector and a handbook for the harmonisation of professional competences in the tourist sector. The accreditation methodology made use of a web tool (CREDICAST) and an ePortfolio. The accreditation process involved the participation of an evaluation organisation, in this case the business itself as well as a certifying organisation.²

¹ Inflow website. Retrieved September 2007: <http://www.inflow.eu.com/index.asp?s=pubpartners>

² Contribution of BDF and information retrieved from the web. Retrieved September 2007: <http://www.castsite.net/descripcion.asp?idioma=2&conexion=>

4.0 Review of existing initiatives: The Third Sector

There is little information available on activities undertaken in the third sector regarding the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. INJUVE (Youth Institute) – which has been appointed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to undertake initiatives in the youth sector - and the Consejo de la Juventud (Youth Council) do not consider the issue of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in any of their programmes. However, INJUVE does authorise some organisations to issue a non-formal certificate to trainers which allows them to work with children. As INJUVE is aware that these certificates are not enough, they have contacted the INCUAL (Instituto Nacional de las Cualificaciones) to ask for a clear definition of necessary qualifications so that they can be validated under the Act on Qualifications and Vocational Training.

5.0 Conclusions

In Spain, several initiatives with respect to the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning are being and have been set up, and concern the complete education system.

In 2003, the ERA 03 project was undertaken to test for the first time the assessment, recognition and accreditation of professional competences, making use of the National Catalogue of vocational qualifications. On the basis of the project several new measures have been proposed for the future and several Spanish Autonomous Regions are taking further action.

In higher education, attention to recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is given in the recently approved Act on Higher Education (ley Orgánica 4/2007, de 12 de abril), which clearly rules out that the government has to regulate the requirement for academic validation of professional experience. In addition, several universities are involved in pilot projects, mostly funded through EU programmes.

Social partners and individual companies – particularly the larger ones - seem to be involved in many different small-scale initiatives, either funded through the EU or through national or regional funding. In the third sector, very little activity is taking place and publicity of existing initiatives seems to be low.