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

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1.0 VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN GREECE

By Anna Manoudi (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)

1.1 Introduction

Even though there are few systems in use for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Greece, the profile of validation has been rising on the national policy agenda. The issue has been in discussion for a number of years, especially within the public sector organisations responsible for adult education.

The establishment in 1997 of a new institution for the accreditation of training structures and curricula and a recent framework law (passed at the end of 2003) for the rationalisation between the systems of initial and continuous training are two positive recent developments that are expected to promote the establishment of validation methods in the near future.

1.2 Review of existing initiatives: Public Sector

1.2.1 Institutional, political and legal framework in Greece

A new framework law (Law 3191/2003) with a serious bearing on vocational education, training and job search assistance in Greece, was recently passed in the Greek parliament. The implementation of this new law is expected to rationalize the provision of services such as vocational education and training, accreditation of competences and training outcomes, counselling and vocational guidance and lastly employment-related assistance. The new law is also expected to exploit synergies and promote collaboration among the various ministries and numerous governmental agencies and bodies active in training and employment related activities in Greece. The new law provides for the development of a national system for better co-ordinating vocational education and training with employment (ESSEEKA).

The new framework law aims at addressing a number of drawbacks and inadequacies that are part of the Greek educational and training system. Historically, there has been fragmentation and lack of coordination among the various educational and training streams and levels. General education, vocational education and initial training (all provided by the Ministry of Education), are organized in distinct and mutually isolated pathways. Continuing training, on-the-job training and active labour market programmes are governed by the Ministry of Labour and the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED). In addition, several other ministries and organizations operate their own systems of vocational education and training at the sectoral level. The new law is clearly ambitious as it seeks to activate and coordinate many actors and systems but has prospects for success.

As regards validation of non-formal and informal learning, even though there are scarce initiatives currently taking place in Greece, an institution was set up in 1997 that could potentially take this forward in the future. The National Accreditation Centre of Vocational Training Structures and Accompanying Support Services (EKEPIS) was created through Law

2469/1997. It operates independently, supervised by the Ministry of Labour and is responsible for accreditation of structures offering continuous vocational training.

EKEPIS is responsible for:

- 1) providing accreditation to training **providers** and training **structures**. In Greece, these are the Vocational Training Centres (KEKs) and Accompanying Services Structures (KESYY).
- 2) providing accreditation of training staff (EKEPIS is compiling a Single Register of Instructors).
- 3) providing accreditation of training curricula provided by KEKs. This means that the content of the courses offered has been checked and accredited but the qualifications that individuals gain by attending these courses are not officially recognised yet. Courses offered by KEKs are not connected with the general VET system and do not lead to official accreditation or diploma. This aspect of accreditation is currently under development by the EKEPIS. The intention is that by establishing standards for the contents of courses, and by accrediting the curricula, this will lead to an automatic recognition of the knowledge gained by persons participating in the training. Hence, there are plans for EKEPIS to develop the accreditation of qualifications in the future.

The effort of EKEPIS, that began in 1997, to co-ordinate continuous vocational training provision in Greece has been evolving step by step, starting with the accreditation of training structures, moving on to the accreditation of courses and trainers. The accreditation of competences and qualifications is the final aim of EKEPIS and this is now in the discussion and development stage.

The social partners participate in the EKEPIS administrative body in a consultative role, contributing to the framing and implementation of policies in the field of accreditation of continuing training.

1.2.2 Existing methods and instruments for the validation of non-formal and informal learning

The Ministry of Education recently set up a system of summative assessment, based on examinations to confirm and certify the knowledge of modern languages obtained through non-formal training. The process leads to obtaining the 'State Certificate of Competence in Languages'. The first examinations took place in 2003. The certification can be obtained by Greek native speakers for foreign languages including English, French, German and Italian. Foreign nationals can obtain certification for their knowledge of Modern Greek.

1.2.3 Norms/ standard setting

One of the main norms of the assessment is transparency and for this reason detailed information on the certification method is widely available on the internet and through communication with the Ministry and its agencies. The details of the structure and content of the certification procedure are available for the benefit of the language learners and language teachers that will be involved but also for the employers (who will be the end users of the

language certificates when recruiting). The examination topics are designed with the aim of maintaining between examination cycles:

- stability
- reliability
- construct validity and content validity.

The examinations are designed around the question of ‘what should the user of a language be able to do at each level to be considered adequate in order for his knowledge of the language to be certified’ and consists of 4 phases, as follows, aiming to assess:

- the ability to comprehend written text
- the ability to produce written text and inter-relate between Greek and the foreign language.
- listening comprehension.
- the ability to speak (monologue) and to converse in the foreign language under examination.

Table 13.1 Certification procedure are available for the benefit of the language learners in Greece

<i>Written exam</i>	Assessment of:	No. of questions	% of the grade	Duration	Length of text (in words)
Phase I	✓ Written comprehension	75	25%	90’	1.500-2.000
Phase II	✓ writing ability ✓ inter-relation between Greek and the foreign language	2-3	30%	90’	230-300
Phase III	✓ Listening Comprehension	25	25%	15’-20’	500-800
<i>Oral exam:</i> Phase IV	✓ Speaking ability ✓ Conversation	5-10	20%	15’- 20’	Not applicable

Standards also exist for the type of questions to be put under each phase, including multiple choice, short answers, ranking and role play among others.

No evaluation of this validation methodology has yet taken place, it is considered too early to evaluate the programme since the first examinations took place in 2003.

1.2.4 Public-Private-Third sector partnership initiatives

Three EU projects involve Public-Private-Third sector initiatives: 2 Equal projects (ESPARTAKOS and PROOPTIKI) and one Leonardo project. All 3 projects are pilots for validation. All projects end in 2005.

The idea of the ESPARTAKOS Equal project, co-ordinated by the Hellenic Management Association, is to work with a portfolio of skills in order to provide training and finally to validate non-formal and informal learning in the sectors of informatics, logistics and hostelling. The process involves the following steps. Firstly, employees have to fill in a check list of their skills. A paper from the employer, for instance, stating that the employee has developed certain skills in their work or has followed a certain training course is sufficient. Depending on the skills employees already have, they receive different parts of the training programme. If the beneficiary does not have previous practical experience, it is compulsory for him to work for around 3 months. This is done through internships in companies with which agreements have been signed, as the Development Partnership of this project has very solid social partners (Chambers of Commerce, Unions).

The PROOPTIKI (PERSPECTIVE) Equal project, coordinated by European Profiles¹, is focussed on people who come from the former Soviet Union and seeks to find a way to validate non formal and informal learning and work experience, in particular for lower skilled workers. The validation is done through a flexible portfolio of documents which is followed by a validation procedure.

The Leonardo project EPO “European Postmen”, co-ordinated by the Hellenic Post Office and involving Greece Continuing Training Centres as well as the Organisation for Vocational Education and Training², aims at developing a common competence profile for European postmen involving 15 units and for two different skills levels. The project started in 2004, a course has been designed and the first set of postmen is due to follow the course and validate their skills.

1.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private sector

Research as part of this study has brought to light little information on sector or company-specific methods for identifying, assessing and recognizing competences acquired through informal or non-formal learning in the private sector. Indicatively, it can be mentioned that the following validate learning acquired through training courses provided outside the formal education system:

- certification is offered by Private Educational Institutes for courses offered by them but these are not officially recognised by the State,
- Certain major private companies, examples of which are encountered in particular in the banking and IT sector offer certification for the in-house training courses their employees participate in.

¹ European profiles is a company involved in any European projects specially in Eastern Europe.

² This is an independent organisation that belongs to the Ministry of Education.

1.4 Review of existing initiatives: The Third Sector

In this section, a self-standing validation system of summative assessment used by a major non-profit Greek organisation, the Hellenic Business Administration Corporation (E.E.D.E.) is presented as a good practice example. This certification is not part of any formal validation system, but the certificates in question enjoy recognition by employers. Hence, the validation system offers 'social recognition' of the training received. This is because EEDE is widely known for offering quality non-formal training.

EEDE offers a number of 'Post-Graduate Programmes'. The Programmes recognise prior learning, since they are open to individuals who have either a University degree or possess 8 years of work experience.

About 2000 individuals have participated in the EEDE 'Post-Graduate Programme on Business Administration' since 1989. The Programme lasts for one year and there are 4 thematic cycles. A round of examinations is held after the end of each thematic cycle and there is a requirement to submit a dissertation at the end of the course. If the results of the 4 examination rounds and the dissertation are satisfactory, a certificate is issued to the participant which certifies the knowledge gained and recognises the holder as 'possessing extraordinary management knowledge and ability'. This certification is not part of any formal system, is self-standing and is recognised in the labour market by employers.

1.5 Conclusions

As outlined above, to date, an overall framework for validation has not been developed in Greece but the foundations for creating this have been set, in the form of the establishment of a new institution for the accreditation of training structures which has been very active in the past few years. A recent framework law which aims to better co-ordinate the systems of initial and continuous training and which establishes a number of Committees for the development of adult learning is also expected to help in this direction.

It is too early to judge the efficiency and effectiveness of the national validation system of language competence which has been in place since 2003. It should be noted however, that European (e.g. European Computer Driving Licence) and International (e.g. Microsoft, Cambridge) systems for validating computer competences, are being used very successfully in Greece and have been enthusiastically received both by adult learners and employers. For cultural reasons, educational attainment is very important for younger generations of Greeks. Greek society would be very receptive to any initiatives aiming to validate informal and non-formal learning and that would help to clarify the complex environment of adult learning in Greece.