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

Examples of Good Practice - Education  
& Training Service Centre, Iceland

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**CONTENTS**

**1.0 EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE - EDUCATION AND TRAINING SERVICE CENTRE, ICELAND ..... 1**

By Papiya Chatterjee (ECOTEC Research and Consulting) ..... 1

1.1 Introduction ..... 1

1.2 Description of the initiative..... 1

1.3 Outcomes and take-up ..... 2

## **1.0 EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE - EDUCATION AND TRAINING SERVICE CENTRE, ICELAND**

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### **1.1 Introduction**

The Education and Training Services Centre became involved in the validation initiatives as the Ministry of Education designated it as a leading body to develop validation tools in Iceland. Funding of the validation initiatives takes place through the Ministry of Education.

### **1.2 Description of the initiative**

The organisation works on several validation initiatives, but the best example of these initiatives is the Telecoms Project - Joint development project between Iceland Telecom, Efling Trade Union, Starfsafl (fund for the educational support of untrained workers in the greater Reykjavik area), Reykjavik Technical School and the Education and Training Service Centre. The project aims to develop methods of assessing and validating the competence of unskilled employees at Iceland Telecom for them to shorten the formal telecommunication technician study path at the Reykjavik Technical School. As a part of this project, special focus is placed on developing methods for the employer to verify the workers' job related skills.

This project focuses on work-related competencies (practical) acquired in the workplace; namely – measurement, technical, planning, material use and connections (technical). The methods of validation that are used in the project include self-evaluation, formal tests, simulation, and observation. A committee of internal assessors (in-house teachers), external assessors (careers counsellor + external teachers) and supervisors assess the non-formal learning which is validated in the project. The workers have a say in the identification of competences to be validated and the methods for validation as it is important that they are happy about what they are being assessed on and how they are being assessed, so it is very much a two-way process based on consultation with the employees about the validation methods that suit them. This method of self-evaluation followed by interviewing with the committee proved to be very successful as it has both enabled the employer to verify the employees' work related skills and abilities; and enabled the employees to achieve greater success in the formal education part of their learning as well. The next step for the committee is to formulate a plan of what to assess and how to assess it so that this guide can be used in the future with other employees.

The competence levels which can be validated within the organisations are at two levels – basic and higher. These competence levels are related to the secondary school curriculum (101 and 102). The validation does not lead to a certificate directly but the outputs of the validation process are that the individual can shorten their education by skipping formal courses, and therefore gain their formal qualification more quickly. In other words, the beneficiaries can skip parts of the formal education because their non-formal learning (on-the-

job skills) can be used as credits towards their formal qualification (which leads to a certificate).

The barriers to recognising learning gained outside formal education are perceived as:

- difficulty in measurement i.e. areas of non-formal learning are more difficult to measure as they are not necessarily assessed through formal examination
- difficulty in comparison between formal learning and non-formal learning because of the measurement problems so formal learning is often perceived as being superior to non-formal learning
- attitudinal barriers which stem from the above two points and it will take time to recognise that individuals can learn outside a school/academic and in a more practical environment.

### ***1.3 Outcomes and take-up***

This project has worked particularly well because all the partners are committed to the idea of validation of non-formal learning, and realise that it is a process which takes time to achieve success (partly due to the aforementioned barriers). The organisation does feel it could do more in this area, but will have to approach it incrementally, as changes in deep-seated attitudes take time. This is also a political issue and in order to do more about promoting non-formal learning initiatives, it needs funding and therefore needs to get buy-in from all stakeholders. The specific support that the organisation needs to get involved in validation initiatives more effectively is mainly to learn from practical examples from other countries (it has already done this partly through attending EU-level conferences). Also workers who have been through the validation process should share their success stories in order to convince funding bodies that there is a need there. Exact needs should be identified through a skills mapping process between company needs and individual skill needs to establish exactly what needs funding. The organisation needs support from businesses at a sectoral level, which again requires a more positive attitude towards non-formal learning to begin with.

There has been about 50% take-up of the validation initiatives in this project. This means that of all the employees who were offered validation methods within the framework of this project (including self-evaluation, formal tests, simulation, and observation), about half chose to take them up. The benefits that the beneficiaries have gained as a result of the validation initiatives include:

- increased motivation at work as they are happier at work through having their skills recognised
- increased job security as a result of gaining qualifications
- increased confidence
- increased motivation to study as they are part of a group and not on their own
- fairer career progression as the employees are on a more level playing field with those who have formal qualifications gained through school

The benefits for the telecoms company are:

- increased staff motivation means that they are more likely to stay with the company because they realise that the company values their contributions
- the skill needs of the organisation and the employees are more closely aligned
- the employees project a more positive image of the company to customers as a result of their more positive attitude towards working for the company.