

Online Validation Event

24 and 30 November 2021

Brief Summary

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

Introduction

Cedefop and the European Commission organised an online event on 24 and 30 November to gather input for the update of the [European Guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning](#). Validation is one of the central building blocks in realising the ambitious goals set by the European Skills Agenda, the European Education Area, the Osnabrück VET Declaration and the European Social Pillar Action Plan¹. In all these initiatives, validation is referred to as a facilitator for up- and reskilling in a lifelong learning perspective that creates bridges between sectors and institutions.

The 2012 Council Recommendation on validation established the Guidelines as a key instrument in informing the practical development of validation arrangements in Member States as well as supporting European cooperation and mutual learning in this area. The Recommendation calls the Commission, supported by Cedefop, to regularly update them, together with the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Online Validation Event, thus, aimed at bringing together a wide variety of stakeholders in order to consider the diversity of validation contexts, uses and approaches in the EU as input for the update of the Guidelines.

The objectives of the event were:

- 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;

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/>

- 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.

The event was complemented by a survey carried out from April to June 2021 that informed the programme development of the conference. The event gathered 84 participants, representing both experts and professionals working in the field of validation, for two half-day webinars, separated by one week. The interval of one week between the two webinars allowed participant's in-depth reflections on the discussions of the first day. Each half-day was structured in short plenary sessions (for introduction and wrap up) and parallel participatory workshops.

Four workshops were organised in parallel. Each workshop consisted of three consequently run sessions that went in-depth into a specific issue within each of the following themes:

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

For each session a short input from a specific practice was provided as a way of initiating the discussion. The discussion in each session focused on the specific topic and the implications for the European Guidelines and its update. The full programme with the name of the speakers can be found in Annex I.

This note briefly summarises main points raised during the event. All materials and input collected are being used, for the update of the European Guidelines. More information, including the presentations can be found on the web page of the event: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events/updating-european-guidelines-validation-making-validation-reality-europe>

Main issues across the four workshops

The four workshops and each of the sessions had a different focus. The discussions raised several common points that are summarised here. The four themes of the represent four different perspectives on validation:

- a strategic perspective, considering implications for stakeholders;
- an individual perspective, considering how the individual sees and experiences the validation process;
- a methodological perspective that focuses on the reliability and validity of the methods; and
- a certification/outcome-oriented perspective, in which the results of the validation process are examined.

These four perspectives complement each other and need to be aligned in order to build robust and coherent validation arrangements.

Participants acknowledged the importance of the Guidelines as an instrument for policy advocacy and a tool for discussion in local, regional and national contexts. They provide a tool for reflection that can be debated in national forums, exploring possible alternatives and ways of arranging validation.

A first theme that emerged from the four perspectives in the workshops is the complexity of validation. Creating validation arrangements requires considering a large number of diverse, complex interactions that are summarised below:

- a diverse range of stakeholders with different demands, roles and expectations on the arrangements;
- a diverse range of contexts and sectors in which validation is relevant;
- a diverse range of individual needs with rich, diverse and complex learning experiences that need to be codified, made visible and given currency;
- a variety of possible standards and reference points;
- a wide range of possible methodological choices that need to meet the diverse needs of individuals while maintaining the necessary level of reliability and validity to maintain the trust on the results;
- an increasingly diversified range of providers of training and certification, of different nature, lengths, quality and reliability;
- an enormous diversity of learning experiences that result in many possible learning outcomes.

This means that the **European Guidelines should reflect and present this diversity of elements in a coherent and well-structured manner, so that readers can work on embracing and managing this complexity.**

To manage complexity, involvement of the diversity of relevant stakeholders playing a part in validation is crucial. Participants emphasised the importance of tri-partite dialogue and the involvement of third sector and civil society organisations. **The Guidelines need to reflect this increasing need for partnerships and ways for the stakeholders to work together towards common goals.** Partnership and collaboration are facilitated by the existence of laws or regulatory frameworks that govern the relationships between stakeholders and the interaction between services. This can create a framework of collaboration and coordination, that allows for a more coherent provision of validation services, better inter-related with other policies.

Involvement of stakeholders and strategic partnerships requires adequate funding mechanisms that take into account validation. Participants were clear on the importance of funding and considered Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) a potential valuable instrument to help in the take-up of validation. **The new Guidelines will need to present possible funding mechanisms and models.**

Event participants highlighted that the inclusion of end users in validation design and policy debates is a further important topic regarding the involvement of stakeholders. Giving a voice to the individuals, making them real participants of the design, implementation and improvement of existing arrangements is something that tends to be missing in the current work on validation. End users' voices are powerful also because potential users of validation can more easily relate to them. Thus, developing communication strategies in "layman's terms" would help uptake. This can be a way of combating the lack of awareness, identified as one of the main barriers to validation. **The Guidelines will need to better address the involvement of end-users and the strategies for awareness raising.**

Involving individuals and different stakeholders also means that they need to talk to each other. This requires a "language of learning outcomes" that is shared among them. Individual life experiences need to be translated into learning outcomes that are connected with relevant standards. These standards should be agreed by the relevant stakeholders, so that they accept validation results. The standards are the common point of reference for validation process outputs. Participants in the

workshops addressed the importance of the **Guidelines to consider in what way educational standards and/or occupational standards can cover the rich variety of learning experiences. Learning outcomes have the potential to bridge the different standards, but more needs to be done in their definition and writing.** The clarity with which learning outcomes are described was viewed as essential to validation and to being able to accommodate non-formal and informal learning in transparent ways.

National qualifications frameworks can help in building bridges between the different contexts in which validation takes place. There is a need for considering structures and descriptions of qualifications that allow flexibility (e.g. units of learning outcomes), with appropriate incentives to make certification based on learning from non-formal/informal contexts an attractive option (in addition to learning from formal contexts). Micro-credentials are impacting and re-framing engagement with learning opportunities. Validation needs to be integrated across all aspects of all learning and educational opportunities, whether formal, informal or non-formal, in provision, at system level and in infrastructure.

Opening up qualification frameworks might also entail risks regarding the trustworthiness of what is included in them. Thus, it is important to find a balance between control and openness, that permits all stakeholders to trust validation results as well as work on the transparency of the certificates obtained. Adopting the existing transparency measures set out in the EQF Recommendation and Europass, such as the inclusion of the awarding body, the date of issuing, the learning outcomes, the type of assessment are all crucial to ensure trust in the certificates provided through validation.

A final point that came across the workshops, was the importance for the European Guidelines to better highlight the social dimension of validation, as a tool that helps in combating social exclusion. **The Guidelines should recognise the role of validation in bridging social inclusion, education and employment policies.** Validation is an important element of lifelong learning systems and needs to be considered in this way.

The review of the European Guidelines will have to consider a deeper, further exploration of these issues among others to provide value added.