The European Center for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (Cedefop): More than 20 years Working on Validation

Ernesto Villalba and Jens Bjørnåvold

Cedefop Centre for the Development of Vocational Training[1]

Abstract

This article first outlines a brief history of validation in Europe from the perspective of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (Cedefop), a decentralized agency of the European Commission working in the field for more than 20 years. It discusses the role Cedefop has played in supporting policy exchange and peer learning between EU (European Union) member states. The paper concludes with considerations of the main challenges for the future of validation in Europe. Although the focus is on the European context, many of the themes and issues are likely to have a global resonance.

Introduction

At the European level, Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is usually referred to as validation of non-formal and informal learning. Although there is debate regarding the differences between the different terms used in Europe and elsewhere (VAE, RPL, APL, etc.) (Aggarwal, 2015; Villalba-García, 2021), all expressions share the underlying objective of making learning acquired in different contexts (formal, non-formal and informal) visible and providing that learning with value (currency) that the individual can make use of.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (Cedefop) is a decentralized agency of the European Commission that supports the promotion, development, and implementation of European Union policies in the field of vocational education and training (VET) and skills. In the founding regulations of the agency the following is stated (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2019, p. 3):

> CEDEFOP shall have the following tasks with respect to the policy areas referred to in Article 1(2), while fully respecting the responsibilities of the Member States: [...] (d) analyse and contribute to developments in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

This inclusion of validation in the Founding Regulations reflects that the agency works at the interface of education-training and work, and that validation is seen as an instrument potentially connecting these two sectors.

Validation has been a topic of interest for the agency for more than 20 years. Working in close collaboration with the European Commission and EU member states, Cedefop has contributed to a common understanding of the conditions for taking validation forward. The preparation of the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2009a, 2015, 2023 forthcoming), the European Inventory on validation (Bjørnåvold & Colardyn, 2005; Cedefop, 2010, 2014a, 2016, 2019a; Souto-Otero, Hawley, & Nevala, 2007; Souto-Otero, McCoshan, & Junge, 2005), as well several studies (Bjørnavold, 2000; Cedefop, 1997a, 1997b, 2014b, 2019b; Feutrie, 1998) and a multitude of conferences and workshops have all contributed to necessary conceptual and methodological clarifications in the area.

This article, based on the presentation provided at the [4th VPL Biennale](), briefly presents the historical development of validation in Europe from Cedefop's perspective and concludes by listing some of the main challenges that the field is facing in the coming years. Although focusing on Europe, the topics described are common to many validation systems in different regions and countries and are likely to have a global resonance.

A Brief Historical Overview

The Beginning

In 2000, Cedefop published the monograph, "Making learning visible" (Bjørnavold, 2000). This is a seminal work for validation in the European context. It built on the debates on education and training at the European level initiated with the 1995 Commission white paper on teaching and learning (European Commission, 1995) which is usually signaled as the beginning of the field at the EU level (Bjørnåvold, 2002; Duvekot, Schuur, & Paulusse, 2005). The "2000 monograph" was the first document that explicitly and clearly defined the need for validation. It provided a first overview of European initiatives in the area, establishing a precursor of the European inventory on validation (Bjørnåvold & Colardyn, 2005), and established the foundation for the European guidelines and European cooperation on the field. The document clarified key challenges in validation, some of which are still prevalent in the development of validation. It signaled the need for methodological validity and reliability to make learning that has been acquired outside formal education visible. It also addressed that the credibility of any validation system would require stakeholder involvement and buy-in, something that is still a major challenge.

The emergence of validation as a separate policy field in Europe can be traced to the late 1980s with the emergence of the learning outcomes approach and the gradual shift from teaching input to learning outcomes (Villalba & Bjørnåvold, 2017). While several countries had prior learning assessment possibilities built into their education and training systems earlier than this, systematic developments are mainly linked to the shift to competence and/or learning outcomes-based qualifications. Countries like Finland, France, Norway, and the UK illustrate this in different ways, pointing towards a gradual opening up of qualifications to learning outside formal settings, and underlining

that competences can be acquired in different ways and not exclusively in education institutions. Validation thus emerges as a response to the need for more flexible and open qualifications systems, acknowledging the added value of learning in all settings, formal, non-formal, and informal.

At the turn of the Century, policymakers not only started to observe the need for *lifelong* learning but increasingly underlined the need for *life-wide* learning (learning in and across formal, non-formal, and informal settings). This attributed, by consequence, a crucial role to validation (Villalba-García, 2021). Validation was increasingly seen as a tool underpinning more flexible and permeable education and training systems, allowing progression and transitions to take place according to individual needs and requirements.

The 2001 Memorandum on lifelong learning, for example, signaled that "[...] a comprehensive and coherent lifelong learning strategy for Europe should aim to: [...] significantly improve the ways in which learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated, particularly non-formal and informal learning" (European Commission, 2000, p. 4).

Reflecting these initiatives, European validation started to gradually expand in the period towards 2010 (Villalba & Bjørnåvold, 2017). At the European level, cooperation and peer learning across countries was systematically initiated and supported. Cedefop, in close collaboration with the European Commission, supported processes for the expansion of validation as a distinctive policy field. In 2004, the Council's conclusions on Common European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2004) established a basis for cooperation among Member States. Focusing in particular on the need to protect the interests and rights of individuals in the validation process, these principles were supported by the regular publishing of European inventories on validation (Bjørnåvold & Colardyn, 2005; Souto-Otero et al., 2005; Souto-Otero et al., 2007 and Cedefop, 2010). These inventories, capturing developments in the field, provided the basis for the first edition of the European Guidelines on validation, a reference for policy exchange and development (Cedefop, 2009b). In 2008, the European Qualification Framework (EQF) recommendation gave further impetus to validation. The Recommendation explicitly mentioned validation as an element to modernize education and training systems and as a way to facilitate the interrelationship of education, training, and employment.

Looking back, the implementation of the EQF Recommendation and the development of NQFs would solidify the adoption of learning outcomes approaches and thus facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union & European Parliament, 2008). These European-level developments, paired with a considerable amount of European funding (in particular through the European Social Funds and via the Leonardo da Vinci and Erasmus programs), helped in the expansion of validation in European countries. In countries like Portugal, Spain, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Estonia, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Slovenia (for example) legal initiatives and administrative provisions paved the way for validation, although reaching individual candidates to varying degrees (Villalba & Bjørnåvold, 2017).

2012 Recommendation on Validation: A Common Definition

In 2012, the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2012). The different approaches and initiatives before 2012 resulted in a diverse range of validation approaches. The Recommendation acknowledged that while validation arrangements have to reflect national contexts and needs, systematic development and promotion of validation in Europe requires a shared understanding, conceptually and practically, of the challenges involved. There cannot be a single European approach to validation but only a complex variety of national adaptations of the concept of making skills visible and providing them with value. Building on the European policy learning and exchange over the previous decades, the 2012 Recommendation provided a conceptual framework for future developments, increasing the visibility of the area and establishing a basis for future cooperation. It defined validation as "a process of confirmation by an authorized body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard" (Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 5) and signaled that the validation process can be divided into identification, documentation, assessment and certification of learning outcomes. This broad definition and its four phases allowed the construct of validation to be adaptable to different countries, for different contexts, and different purposes, allowing for a common space to discuss validation. The Recommendation gave further impetus to validation, as the Council asked Member States (Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 3) to:

> have in place, no later than 2018, in accordance with national circumstances and specificities, and as they deem appropriate, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to:
>
> (a) have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated [...];
>
> (b) obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, part qualification, on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences [...].

The Recommendation gave the EQF Advisory Group the overall responsibility for following up on the developments of the Recommendation and establishing a forum to exchange experiences and peer learning. It also established that the European inventory and the European Guidelines should be regularly updated to support peer learning and the exchange of best practices. In addition, it explicitly mentioned Cedefop acknowledging its expertise in the area, built from that first 2000 monograph on making learning visible: "support the implementation of this Recommendation by using the expertise of Union agencies, in particular Cedefop" (Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 4).

Common Challenges and Opportunities

A 2015 update of the European guidelines expanded the principles already agreed upon from the 2012 recommendation. The guidelines "seek to clarify the conditions for

implementing validation, pointing to the critical choices to be made by stakeholders when implementing validation arrangements" (Cedefop, 2015, p. 4). Similar to the Recommendation, the guidelines do not advocate for one single approach to validation but acknowledge that any implementation of validation is necessarily linked to specific settings and contexts in which it operates. The guidelines identified common themes and challenges and provided a language to build dialogue at national and European levels. The guideline themes and challenges identified could be used to guide discussions within the EQF Advisory Group established as a forum to advance the field of validation. Over the last few years, since 2015, this dialogue has been reinforced through Cedefop and European Commission involvement in events, such as the [Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) Biennale](#) or the [Validation Festival](#).

The Current Status of Validation in Europe

While the guidelines presented the common challenges and opportunities in Europe through a set of questions, the European inventory was and is meant to show what answers countries have given to those questions. The last edition (2018) shows that most European countries, although to a varying extent, have adopted methods allowing individuals to go through validation. While most countries have put in place legal frameworks or policies for validation (especially aiming at opening up formal qualifications to learning outside classrooms), there is also evidence that countries are increasingly establishing strategies where validation is used across sectors to promote and facilitate lifelong learning. The linkage between validation arrangements and comprehensive NQFs is potentially supporting the transferability of learning achievements across types and levels of education. However, the usage of validation remains relatively low, and people who might benefit most from validation, such as low-qualified or migrants, tend to be under-represented. The actual role played by validation in European countries is, for several reasons, difficult to quantify. In a majority of countries, proper data collection mechanisms have yet to be established. This reflects that validation in many cases forms an integrated part of other arrangements, for example supporting access arrangements and operating as an alternative pathway to qualifications. Frequently this means that the validation component remains invisible and is not registered. The next section briefly outlines four main challenges likely to set the agenda for the development of the validation policy field in the coming years.

Future Challenges

Embracing complexity

Validation is based on the simple idea of making visible and attributing value to prior learning. The implementation of this idea requires, however, the acknowledgment of several elements of complexity that need to be considered, embraced, and managed to deploy validation arrangements that work. A main challenge for the future will be to find ways in which these different elements of complexity can be addressed to create coherent systems that work across contexts and at different life stages.

The first element of complexity in the validation process is the need to be able to differentiate between personal learning experiences. The central element of any validation process is the individual. Individuals start a validation process with complex,

rich, and diverse experiences and needs. As Jón Gnarr, in his address to the 2022 VPL Biennale vividly portrayed when talking about his life experience and the different academic failures he had, validation practitioners see "options and possibilities where I only saw clutter and shame, clutter and shame everywhere" (Gnarr, 2022, 26:23). In this "space of clutter and shame" is where validation practitioners often work. Practitioners need to identify those experiences that for many are seen as clutter, relate them to relevant reference points, organize them, document them, assess them against agreed reference points, and certify them so that they can gain value and be utilized. The backgrounds and experiences of individuals will differ, and individuals will bring different needs to the validation process. Some will be looking for a validation process that identifies their skills and provides information on what their next career step could be; others might be looking for access to formal education or acquiring a formal qualification; others might be migrants who need their prior learning validated, so they can enter the labor market or education. Validation systems are asked to tailor to all those different needs through an individualized, user-centered provision, which creates another layer of complexity associated with the individual.

Another element of complexity is the need for validation to work together with other policies and services; its value as a stand-alone tool is limited. This is exemplified by the necessity —before, during, and after the validation process — to systematically inform and guide the individual candidate. To this end, validation systems need to feed and be connected to guidance and counseling services. As such, coherence and coordination of validation and lifelong guidance need to be maintained through, for example, the development of common frameworks that govern their inter-relationships, flexible free-of-charge services, or adequate training to professionals involved in both services (Cedefop, 2019b). Validation, thus, needs to work in connection with other policy initiatives, such as qualification reforms, migration policies, social protection policies, and active labor market policies to realize its full potential. Validation on its own cannot be sustainable.

These connections to different services mean that validation must operate in different contexts. Each education and training sector: higher education, vocational training, adult education, or general education might have a different approach to validation, allowing individuals to acquire or access formal qualifications or awarding credits. Depending on the organization of each sub-sector in education, different legal bases might need to be in place to allow for validation to happen. In addition, as non-formal and informal learning can occur anywhere, validation can be connected to third sector and labor market initiatives. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), youth, or voluntary organizations sometimes provide possibilities for identifying skills and competences acquired while working with them through volunteering or attending their activities. Many of these experiences might constitute important learning opportunities that can be identified, documented, assessed, and certified. In Austria, for example, since 2005 the Ministry of Social Affairs introduced the 'Proof of voluntary activities' ('Nachweis über freiwillige Tätigkeiten'). This document serves as a certification of competences obtained through volunteering, documents the personal development process, and can be used as a supplementary document in job applications (Luomi Messerer, 2019). Similarly, in labor market initiatives, employers carry out skills

identification and skills assessment, notably when recruiting new personnel, appraisals, or internal human resource competence mapping (Cedefop, 2014b). These initiatives — that in many instances might identify, document, assess and certify competences — are not usually identified as validation, and they are rarely connected to formalized reference points or qualification standards.

However, in many instances, the learning outcomes assessed are similar to those in formal qualifications and a connection could be possible. The diverse set of contexts in which the identification, documentation, assessment, and certification occurs confer validation with a complex array of diverse institutional actors that need to work together and trust each other. Finding ways in which outcomes validated in one context can be transferable to other contexts and accepted by other institutions is critical. Often, the actors involved in validation might have competing agendas which might result in not accepting each other outcomes. Stakeholders' involvement in a strategic and systemic development, implementation, and process of validation might facilitate compromised solutions that can work across contexts. Understanding each other and finding consensus on methodologies, common standards, and reference points for validation are important steps in building trust. A key challenge for validation is thus to clarify how validation adds value and to what extent this added value can be exchanged into access and progression in education and employment. This clarification should be used to systematically reduce obstacles and barriers to transitions and transfers and to make visible how progression can best be facilitated. It should also be used to paint a realistic picture of what can be achieved by an individual to avoid waste of time and resources.

Assuring agreed standards

All validation processes need reference points against which learning is assessed. These might be more or less formalized, explicit or implicit, wide or narrow. A prerequisite for validation is the expression of reference points in terms of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes, defined as what an individual knows and can do, are necessary for opening formal educational programs to be awarded through validation. If the outcome of an educational program is strictly based on time spent in an institution or teaching inputs, validation would not be possible. The increasing adoption of a learning outcomes approach to qualifications across European countries has contributed to the development and adoption of validation (ICF & 3s Unternehmensberatung GmbH, 2020; Villalba & Bjørnåvold, 2017). However, several issues need to be considered in the future to advance in the implementation of validation in relation to the standards used for validation.

Certain certificates might be based on educational standards, while others might rely on occupational or economic sector standards. Language in one sector or discipline might be very different than in another, while the underlying competences, knowledge, or skills might be very similar. Chambers of commerce, companies, and employers do not tend to talk about learning outcomes, but more in terms of tasks, functions, or human resources. Connecting these tasks and functions to learning outcomes will facilitate the transferability of learning results from one context to another. In this sense, national qualifications frameworks can be seen as bridges that connect the different contexts of

learning with a common underlying element, that is, the learning outcomes achieved in the different contexts.

The development of national qualification frameworks has contributed to increasing transparency of qualifications (Devaux, Fleury, Howat, & Schaepkens, 2013). Their development tends to initiate a debate among relevant stakeholders on how to understand qualifications and how formal qualifications might relate to other types of certificates that use different reference points or standards. Frameworks are no longer seen as static but as evolving policy instruments that evolve with the qualifications and learning needs. In this sense, qualification frameworks can also be seen as a "lighthouse" that permits one to navigate the ever-changing "ocean of certificates," as it gives the individual and institutions a reference point to understand the different qualifications and certificates.

The process of building and renewing the frameworks can generate new meaning and expand the type of certificates accepted within the frameworks. Stakeholders coming together, building consensus, and agreeing on what are the reference points for validation that can be used in different contexts will build trust in validation outcomes. Consensus on what reference points to use to judge learning achievements could contribute and become part of the social dialogue, bringing together educators, employers, governments, and trade unions (Skjerve, 2020). Agreed standards will be the key for validation outcomes to be transferable and accepted from context to context.

Valid and Reliable Tools: A Balancing Act

A central element to build trust, in addition to bringing together different stakeholders, is to assure the quality and reliability of the tools used to identify, document, assess and certify learning outcomes. Different tools might be used for different purposes. For the identification of skills, a screening with a standardized generic online tool might be sufficient as a first step in a validation process. Certifying the skills of an individual to award a full, formal qualification necessarily requires more robust, reliable, and valid methods with strong quality assurance mechanisms and the involvement of professional assessors. Any tool, thus, needs to be fit for purpose, and tools will differ depending on the objectives of the validation process and the needs of the individual.

Choosing the adequate tool for validation is a balancing act of different elements: validity, reliability, scalability, and cost. Validity and reliability need to work together. As with any measurement tool, validation methods need to measure what they are supposed to measure (be valid) and measure it consistently across time and contexts (be reliable). Traditional assessment might not be able to fully grasp the needs of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The uniqueness of individual experiences, the diversity of knowledge and competences, and the fact that much of the informal and non-formal learning might result in tacit knowledge make constructing tools that are valid and reliable for validation purposes challenging. New methodologies might be required to identify, document, assessed, and certify the learning occurring in different contexts.

Many people who can benefit the most from validation might have had bad experiences with examinations in formal contexts. Their true potential might be hindered by the

method used for assessing that are similar to the ones in formal systems (Looney & Santibañez, 2021). A combination of methodologies and flexibility in the application of these tools and methods might provide fair and valid opportunities for people to show their full potential.

Developing reliable and valid methodologies requires expertise, investment, and trained practitioners to design and properly apply the tools and methods developed. There is, therefore, an important quality and cost component to consider when deciding what methodologies are appropriate. Similarly, the scalability of the method will require some consideration, as it will be important to understand if methods can only be used with designated target groups or in wider groups. All these considerations demand investment in research. Learning from existing experiences and building a robust set of identification, documentation, assessment, and certification methodologies will be a necessary requirement in the future.

Certification and Digitalization

Another major challenge for the future is related to certification. There is an increasing diversity and complexity of certificates. Digitalization and new technologies, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, open up new possibilities never before explored.

Certification might come from a variety of providers or awarding bodies. Private corporations, chambers of commerce, youth and volunteering organizations, NGOs, or semi-private bodies might be offering different forms of training, with various delivery modes and associated quality assurance systems and with possibilities for obtaining certificates through validation. Awarded certificates may differ in duration, nature, quality, and validity. There also may be different forms of delivery: online, hybrid, in-person, in-real-time, or pre-recorded; in small groups or massive online courses. The duration of the courses may be different, with various levels of intensity and forms of assessment. The combination of these elements, which will ultimately be registered in the certification, is almost infinite. Credentialing is, thus, truly an "ocean of certifications" that individuals and institutions, which are the ultimate users of those certificates, need to understand and navigate.

Digitalization is bringing an extra layer to consider, as it affects all stages of validation. It is bringing new ways of organizing processes and methodologies for the identification and documentation of skills and competences and allows for further connection of validation with other services (Mouratoglou & Villalba-Garcia, 2022), but it is maybe on certification that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is most prominent in relation to validation.

Usually associated with increasing possibilities for reliability and transferability, digitalization of certification in validation is still a work in progress, and more needs to be explored to understand its full potential. Digitalization of certificates has increased the number and types of certificates available, contributing to that "ocean of certifications," making it more complicated to differentiate the nature and quality of certificates.

Digital technology also allows for almost an infinite amount of information to be associated with each certificate, so more details can be provided than on a piece of

paper. This, connected with increasing work on interoperability and control vocabularies, may provide new opportunities for transferability and "stackability" of learning achievements. Advances in artificial intelligence, big data, and language processing might also open possibilities for more standardized ways of sharing information through digital certificates. Blockchain technology has the potential of creating more secure digital certificates (Bhaskar, Tiwari, & Joshi, 2021; Mohammad & Vargas, 2022).

It is important, however, to keep in mind that validation requires a human factor. Sensitivity and professionalism are necessary to build trust and capture the rich variety of learning that informal and non-formal learning entails. While technology will be able to support and enhance the work of professionals, well-trained practitioners, with a clear vision of what validation is and how it operates, are required to make sense of this technology and assist the individual in their validation journey.

A Final Word

Validation has developed considerably in the last 20 years. Almost all European countries have enabled possibilities for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2019a). Cedefop supported this European process on the development of validation and contributed to building, together with the European Commission, member states representatives, and social partners, a common understanding of validation of non-formal and informal learning across Europe through studies, guidelines, forums for discussion, and peer learning. There are new challenges and new opportunities to keep working together in making validation a reality in Europe.

Forums like the VPL Biennale, which bring together different stakeholders and discuss the elements and practices of validation, are crucial for advancing the field and learning from each other. They are necessary for shaping the field and expanding mutual understanding of validation. However, there is also a need for more critical and evaluative approaches to validation. Much of the existing literature — including this article — is mainly advocacy for validation. Articles tend to talk about the importance of validation, its application and benefits. They are in many instances descriptive and do not tend to present empirical evidence or basic research. More is needed in terms of critical and empirical reviews that aim at refuting the very basic principles that laid the foundation of validation, for example, some of the statements presented in this article. Through this evaluation and interaction of policy advocacy, critical research, and community of practice we will be able to build robust and strong validation systems across Europe and globally.

---

[1] The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Cedefop.

References

Aggarwal, A. (2015). Recognition of prior learning: Key success factors and the building blocks of an effective system. ILO.

Bhaskar, P., Tiwari, C. K. & Joshi, A. (2021). Blockchain in education management: present and future applications. Interactive Technology and Smart Education, 18(1), 1-17. doi:10.1108/ITSE-07-2020-0102

Bjørnåvold, J. (2000). Making learning visible: identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. OPOCE.

Bjørnåvold, J. (2002). Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning: European tendencies. Paper presented at the Cedefop. Agora V: identification, evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning, Thessaloniki, 15 and 16 March 1999. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5132_en.pdf

Bjørnåvold, J. & Colardyn, D. (2005). The learning continuity: European inventory on validating non-formal and informal learning. National policies and practices in validating non-formal and informal learning. OPOCE.

Cedefop (1997a). Identification, validation and accreditation of prior and informal learning: United Kingdom report. Scottish Qualifications Authority – SQA. In: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Cedefop (1997b). What do we know? Measuring knowledge, skills and competences in the labour market. European Journal Vocational Training (12). http://www2.trainingvillage.gr/download/journal/bull-12/12-97-en.pdf

Cedefop (2009a). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. Publication Office of the European Union.

Cedefop (2009b). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. OPOCE.

Cedefop (2010). European Inventory on Validation: 2010 Update. https://www.Cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory-2010

Cedefop (2014a). European Inventory on Validation: 2014 Update. European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. www.Cedefop.europa.eu/validation/inventory

Cedefop (2014b). Use of validation by enterprises for human resources and career development purposes. Luxembourg: Publication Office.

Cedefop (2015). European guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Luxembourg: Publication Offfice.

Cedefop (2016). European Inventory on Validation: 2016 Update. https://www.Cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory-2016

Cedefop (2019a). 2018 update: European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. www.Cedefop.europa.eu/inventory

Cedefop (2019b). Coordinating guidance and validation. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the EU.

Cedefop (2023 forthcoming). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (3rd edition ed.). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Council of the European Union (2004). *Draft Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning* (EDUC 118 SOC 253). https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/2095-att1-1-004__Draft_Council_Conclusions_on_validation__18May04_en.pdf

Council of the European Union (2012). Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Official Journal of the European Union, C 398 22.12.2012, 1-5. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:TOC

Council of the European Union & European Parliament (2008). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. Official Journal of the European Union, C 111, 6.5.2008, 1-7. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32008H0506(01)

Devaux, A., Fleury, S., Howat, C. & Schaepkens, L. (2013). Evaluation of the Implementation of the European Qualifications Framework Recommendation - Final report. https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-05/EQF-Studies2008-2012-EN.pdf

Duvekot, R., Schuur, K. & Paulusse, J. (2005). Introduction: VPL it is! Valuation & Validation of prior learning as a new perspective for life-long learning. In R. Duvekot, K. Schuur, & J. Pulusse (Eds.), The unfinished story of VPL: Valuation & Validation of prior learning in Europe's learning cultures (pp. 1-10). Foundation EC=VPL & Kenniscentrum EV.

European Commission (1995). White paper: teaching and learning: Towards the learning society. OPOCE.

European Commission (2000). A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. Commission Staff Working Document, SEC(2000) 1832. https://uil.unesco.org/i/doc/lifelong-learning/policies/european-communities-a-memorandum-on-lifelong-learning.pdf

European Parliament & Council of the European Union (2019). Regulation (EU) 2019/128 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 January 2019 establishing a European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) Official Journal of the European Union, No 337/75, L30/90-105. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019R0128&from=EN

Feutrie, M. (1998). Identification, validation et accréditation de l'apprentissage antérieur et informel: France. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Gnarr, J. [VPL Biennale]. (2022). A users voice [Youtube].
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69a7bTS3e2I&feature=youtu.be

ICF & 3s Unternehmensberatung GmbH (2020). Study supporting the evaluation of the
Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal
and informal learning Final report. Publication Office of the European Union.

Looney, J. & Santibañez, B. (2021). Validation of non-formal and informal learning to
support disadvantaged learners: Alternative assessments. European Journal of
Education, 56(3), 439-453. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12469

Luomi Messerer, K. (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and
informal learning 2018 update: Austria.
http://libserver.Cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_
2018_Austria.pdf

Mohammad, A. & Vargas, S. (2022). Challenges of Using Blockchain in the Education
Sector: A Literature Review. Applied Sciences, 12(13), 6380.
https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3417/12/13/6380

Mouratoglou, N. and Villalba-Garcia, E. (2022). Bridging lifelong guidance and validation
of non-formal and informal learning through ICT operationalization. Publications
Office. Cedefop working paper; No 8. http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/692674

Skjerve, T. (2020). A Balancing Act: Describing skills acquired in the workplace - how and
why. https://www.virke.no/globalassets/rapporter/a-balancing-act

Souto-Otero, M., Hawley, J. & Nevala, A.-M. (Eds.). (2007). European Inventory on
Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning. 2007 Update. ECOTEC.

Souto-Otero, M. McCoshan, A., & Junge, K. (Eds.). (2005). European Inventory on
Validation of non-formal and informal learning. ECOTEC.
https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/etv/Information_resources/EuropeanInvent
ory/publications/inventory/european_inventory_2005_final_report.pdf

Villalba-García, E. (2021). Validation of non-formal and informal learning: The hero with
a thousand faces? European Journal of Education, 56(3), 351-364.
doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12468

Villalba, E. & Bjørnåvold, J. (2017). Validation of non-formal and informal learning: A
reality in Europe? In Cedefop, ETF, & UNESCO (Eds.), Global Inventory on NQFs,
volume 1: Thematic chapters (pp. 72-82). The European Centre fore the
Development of Vocational Training. https://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-
learning/qualification-frameworks/global-inventory-regional-and-national-
qualifications-0

About the Authors

Ernesto Villalba is an expert at the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (Cedefop) since 2011. He is responsible for the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning, where he works, together with the Commission and in consultation with social partners, in the development and update of the European Inventory and the European Guidelines on validation. He has served in different committees and working groups of the OECD, UNESCO and the European Commission.

Jens Bjørnåvold has been working with European and international education, training and employment issues since 1996 and has held posts at the European center for development of vocational training (Cedefop) and in the European Commission. Following his retirement from his position as senior expert in Cedefop's Brussels office end 2022, Bjornavold is now working as researcher and consultant in several research and development projects.

Bjornavold has coordinated and carried out numerous research and development projects, notably on the changing role of qualifications, the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks, the conception and use of learning outcomes and the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Bjornavold was actively involved in the development and implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) from the start in 2004. Between 2015 and 2022, Bjornavold coordinated Cedefop's research on the 'Future of vocational education and training in Europe'.