

## ROADMAP

Title of the initiative: **Recommendation on the promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning**

Type of initiative (CWP/Catalogue/Comitology): CWP 2011, Annex II

Lead DG/contact person/details: DG EAC

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### Initial IA screening & planning of further work

#### A. Context and problem definition

(i) What is the political context of the initiative? (ii) How does this initiative relate to past and possible future initiatives, and to other EU policies?

Ensuring that citizens are able to constantly develop, update and make better use of their knowledge, skills and competences over the whole lifespan is crucial to helping the EU become more innovative, prosperous and competitive. The initiative is thus closely aligned to the Europe 2020 goal of speeding Europe's recovery from the economic crisis and building a sustainable future by promoting an economy based on knowledge and innovation and fostering a high-employment economy underpinned by social cohesion.

The Europe 2020 strategy explicitly calls for *'the promotion of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning'* as part of the Youth on the Move flagship initiative with a strong link to the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs flagship initiative which underlines the role of non-formal and informal learning in helping to ensure that citizens acquire the competences they need to engage in further learning and the labour market.

The May 2010 Council Conclusions on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative, call for the *'further development and promotion, in collaboration with all the relevant stakeholders, of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning'* and for the *'development of the Europass framework with a view to recording and highlighting more effectively the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by citizens through their lives in a variety of settings, including by considering the development of a 'personal skills passport'*.

The May 2010 Council Resolution on the active inclusion of young people called for *"Promoting education, training and non-formal learning in order to enhance employability by: (a) improving young people's knowledge, skills and competences, and ensuring that these are tailored to the needs of the changing labour market and the growing new employment sectors, by developing fair, flexible and efficient systems for high-quality education and training, as well as through non-formal learning and youth work, within the framework of a knowledge-based economy; (b) combating the problem of early leavers from education and training, taking full account of socio-economic circumstances; (c) promoting lifelong learning, making use of the added value offered by information and communication technologies"*.

The initiative builds on the Strategic Framework for European co-operation in Education and Training (2009), the Strategy for Youth: 'Investing and Empowering' (2009) and the Adult Learning Action Plan (2007) and the Council Conclusion from May 2008, which highlight the important role of non-formal and informal learning (NF/IL) in making lifelong learning a reality and of validation of NF/IL in boosting personal development, as well as easing transitions to further learning and the labour market, fostering entrepreneurial spirit and creativity, and promoting career progression. It is closely linked to the European tools designed to support citizens' competence development and promote mobility through increased transparency and comparability of learning outcomes whether gained in formal, non-formal or informal settings (notably the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning; the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), Europass and Youthpass).

In connection in particular with the implementation of the EQF Recommendation, Member states are developing comprehensive national qualification frameworks based on learning outcomes, a development that lays the ground for implementing adequate systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This initiative will reinforce efforts of Member States in this latter field, indicating measures through which national developments may build upon and benefit from the above mentioned European instruments.

The initiative provides a follow-up to the 2004 Council conclusions on common European principles for identification and validation and would also build on the momentum created amongst wider stakeholders by the 2002 Social Partners' *'Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications'* which set the recognition and validation of competences as one of its four priorities.

There is a close connection to the planned Communication on the initiative for new European competences and to the 2011 European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship which includes the recognition of skills and competences developed through volunteering in its objectives.

What are the main problems identified?
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It is important to understand what is meant by learning that takes place outside of formal settings. Non-formal (NF) learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. However, it is intentional on the part of the learner and has structured objectives, times and support. Informal learning (IL) results from daily activities related to work, family life or leisure. It is not structured and usually does not lead to certification. In most cases, it is unintentional on the part of the learner.

For most citizens who are not in formal education or training, their learning takes place in non-formal settings (e.g. at work – both paid and voluntary, in the home/community and during leisure activities). For pupils, students and apprentices, knowledge, skills and competences acquired in non-formal settings also play an important role in complementing formal provision. Non-formal learning is important in equipping citizens with key competences, such as autonomy, leadership or a sense of initiative and new skills to adapt to changes in the labour market.

Currently, much of the learning gained in this way in the EU remains hidden representing a significant untapped resource at a time when it is crucial for Europe to empower its citizens to develop their full potential and to further their social inclusion. Promoting non-formal learning, better identifying and making this learning visible is as important for the learners as for employers, civil society and providers of education and training. Giving value to this learning – by identifying, documenting and/or certifying it - is important for individual motivation for lifelong learning, for transfer and mobility in education and training as well as in the labour market and in society at large.

Although many developments on the promotion and validation of NF/IL have already taken place at European level and increasing numbers of Member States are introducing validation into their legal and institutional frameworks, there is a need to go further. The main problems are:

- the undervaluing of learning outcomes acquired in NF/IF settings and the lack of awareness of their contribution to overall learning in society;
- the diversity of approaches taken at national, regional, local and sectoral level coupled with the lack of integration in mainstream education, training and learning systems. These factors can make the identification and validation approaches appear fragmented and uncoordinated and contribute to their not being widely known or sufficiently trusted for individuals to use them extensively;
- the need to find cost-efficient methods to provide identification and validation systems that are sufficiently large-scale to offer broad coverage and easy accessibility (in places, at times and in ways that suit user needs) to all citizens who wish to benefit from them. In most countries initiatives are still of a small size and experimental in nature;
- the lack of information, support and guidance; even in countries where more systematic procedures have been established, take-up by individuals often remains low, partly due to ignorance and difficulties in using and understanding the procedures;

- the inherent complexity of the identification and validation of NF/IL since it concerns individual learning experiences and outcomes rather than standardized results of institutions and involves a wide range of stakeholders with different interests (individual learner/employee; enterprises; education and training institutions; qualifications authorities, NGOs). Capturing NF/IL in the workplace is a particular challenge;
- the lack of professional development and recognition of those involved in facilitating NF/IF and in identifying, recording and assessing related learning outcomes and the lack of adapted tools and methods to support their work.

Who is affected?

- Citizens of all ages wishing to make visible the knowledge, skills and competences they have acquired in non-formal and informal settings. It is especially relevant for those having dropped out of school early, migrants and ethnic minorities, unemployed people and low-skilled adults who can use it for their personal development, to open up flexible routes to qualifications and/or to access further education and training and/or to facilitate (re)integration into the labour market. It also has an important role to play in supporting career progression, job and occupational mobility for employees in general.
- Companies and Public Employment Services. Adequate identification and validation schemes would provide them with a tool for identifying and making better use of human resources.
- All those involved in facilitating NF/IF and/or in identifying, recording and assessing related learning outcomes including guidance services, enterprises, adult learning organisations, youth organisations, community organisations and NGOs, Public and Private Employment Services.
- Qualifications authorities and formal education and training institutions involved in certifying learning outcomes.
- Formal education and training systems which benefit from an intake enriched with non-traditional learners, more flexible learning pathways and increased permeability between different sectors and levels of education and training.

(i) Is EU action justified on grounds of subsidiarity? (ii) Why can the objectives of the proposed action not be achieved sufficiently by Member States (necessity test)? (iii) As a result of this, can objectives be better achieved by action by the Community (test of EU Value Added)?

Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty respectively foresee that the Union will contribute to the development of quality education and implement a vocational training policy by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, where necessary supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and vocational training. Particular fields of Union action mentioned under these articles include: encouraging the mobility of students, developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States, facilitating adaptation to industrial changes, facilitating access to vocational training and stimulating co-operation between educational or training establishments and firms.

Action by the Member States alone would be insufficient since the initiative aims at consolidating, further developing and better exploiting existing European instruments. These instruments include in particular the EQF, ECVET, Europass and Youthpass and the European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. Such initiatives provide added-value by supporting Member States in reforming their national systems and enabling them to situate themselves in the European context. They play a key role in building a European labour market and a European lifelong learning area; promoting the transparency of knowledge, skills and competences and the comparability of learning outcomes across Europe. They contribute to social inclusion and facilitate the geographical and occupational mobility of learners, volunteers and workers.

## **B. Objectives of EU initiative**

What are the main policy objectives?

The broad policy objectives are to:

- contribute to the development of smart and inclusive growth and thereby support the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy;

- assist Member State efforts to modernise their education and training provision and thereby support the implementation of the Education and Training 2020 strategic framework and the Strategy for Youth: 'Investing and Empowering';
- give concrete support to Member States in implementing their lifelong learning strategies.

The main specific objectives are to:

- strengthen and promote learning outside formal education and training including the acquisition of transversal key competences, especially for specific target groups such as young people, citizens with disadvantages or adults that need to adapt their skills to pursue their careers;
- improve the value, visibility & transferability of learning outcomes gained through NF/IL in line with the implementation of the EQF and ECVET;
- help citizens take advantage of the opportunities offered by Europass and Youthpass to record and present their skills;
- reinforce effectiveness and quality including through: i) greater support and training for staff involved in facilitating NF/IL and/or in identifying, recording and certifying related learning outcomes; ii) strengthening independent information, advice and guidance for learners;
- deepen partnership & co-ordination amongst all stakeholders - public and private - to support the relevance, coherence and sustainability of NF/IL and validation systems.

Do the objectives imply developing EU policy in new areas or in areas of strategic importance?

In accordance with Europe 2020: Agenda for new skills for jobs and Youth on the Move, education and training are considered as areas of strategic importance. This initiative consolidates and further develops existing initiatives in this field.

### **C. Options**

(i) What are the policy options? (ii) What legislative or 'soft law' instruments could be considered? (iii) Would any legislative initiatives go beyond routine up-date of existing legislation?

**First option** (a baseline scenario): continue with the implementation of the existing tools without further political or legislative action.

**Second option:** give new impetus to the debate on promotion and validation of NF/IL and highlight the progress made at European and national level since the 2004 Council conclusions on common European principles for validation and the remaining challenges. This could be done through non-legislative action with a Commission Communication.

**Third option:** propose concrete measures to be undertaken in support of the objectives identified above including the further development of some of the existing European instruments and related networks. This would require updating existing soft-law, particularly the EQF, through a Recommendation of the Council.

**Fourth option:** propose to establish and co-finance a new European network specifically addressing the promotion, identification and validation of NF/IL. This would require new soft-law through a Decision of the European Parliament and Council.

The second option would be limited to consolidation of existing initiatives at European level. The third option would enable the deepening and extension of existing initiatives by Member States supported by the Commission, whilst the fourth option would make it possible to go beyond existing provisions and develop new ones.

Does the action proposed in the options cut across several policy areas or impact on action taken/planned by other Commission departments?

The action proposed should complement Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, which is monitored by DG MARKT. The action should contribute positively to Employment and Social Inclusion policies, the free movement of workers and mobility more generally, as well as to Enterprise policy, DG Home Affairs policy to assist migrants, Research policy and to the 2011 European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship co-ordinated by DG Communication.

Explain how the options respect the proportionality principle

The benefits to be gained from strengthened NF/IL and more effective validation are substantial and wide-ranging, touching not only individual citizens, but also enterprises, education and training providers and Member State education, training and labour market policies. However, the situation is complex and realising these benefits will be a challenge in all Member States and can only be done with the full commitment and concerted action from all the stakeholders involved. The Commission seeks to facilitate appropriate responses and to support the Member States and the different stakeholders in the most effective and efficient way. Each of the options proposed leaves implementation of the measures to the discretion of the Member States. Overall more systematic co-operation would increase the value and 'currency' of validation, not possible through isolated and fragmented approaches. Sharing experiences in the development of methodologies would promote higher quality and wider acceptance and linking validation to the implementation of ongoing initiatives (EQF, ECVET, Europass, Youthpass) would strengthen synergies and improve the efficiency of existing instruments.

#### **D. Initial assessment of impacts**

What are the significant impacts likely to result from each policy option (cf. list of impacts in the Impact Assessment Guidelines pages 32-37), even if these impacts would materialise only after subsequent Commission initiatives?

**First option:** The problems set out in section A of this roadmap would persist and these impact negatively on citizens' social inclusion and labour market prospects and the competitiveness of enterprises. There would also be an increase in stakeholder frustration at the apparent failure to respond to the political demand for action set out in Europe 2020, in the May 2010 Council conclusions on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative and in the May 2010 Council Resolution on the active inclusion of young people.

**Second option:** The non-legislative approach of a Communication would enable the Commission to strengthen debate on NF/IL amongst all the stakeholders, identify key challenges and point to possible responses through examples of good practice and suggestions to improve articulation of the existing European tools and strengthen their implementation. This would enable a partial response to the political call for action but no real change in the problems and the related negative social and economic impacts could be expected without targeted concrete action. To pursue more systematic cooperation on identification and validation, a stronger basis is needed than the 2004 Council conclusions. Failure to boost action and strengthen co-operation may culminate in some countries abandoning efforts due to lack of adequate take-up by citizens.

**Third option:** The approach of updating soft law through a Recommendation of the Council would strengthen the political basis for cooperation at national and European level and enable the implementation of concrete measures addressing the problems which should, in the long-term, contribute to positive social and economic impacts (increased social inclusion, employability, more competitive enterprises). It is particularly timely and proportionate to come forward with concrete measures in view of the implementation of NQFs related to the EQF Recommendation which lay the groundwork for implementing adequate systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The ongoing work on ECVET also provides a strong basis to build on as do developments of the Europass initiative (in particular the Skills Passport called for by the May Council conclusions). The stakeholder networks related to the implementation of the EQF, ECVET, Europass, Youthpass and guidance networks (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, Euroguidance) could be mobilised to explore opportunities for co-operation and to promote the mainstreaming of identification and validation approaches. This option balances the need for new action and complementary tools with the need for connection, consolidation and deepening of existing initiatives and is likely to be seen by stakeholders as an appropriate response to the political demand for action. However, since promoting and validating NF/IL is by no means the exclusive domain of governmental bodies, care would need to be taken to ensure a strong focus on partnership and the involvement of all public and private stakeholders, particularly the Social Partners and NGOs.

**Fourth option:** Setting up a new, co-financed European network on the promotion, identification and validation of NF/IL could be seen as the strongest and most visible response to the political call for action. However, the impact of such a step is difficult to predict. It is likely that, in the short-term the situation would remain stagnant and possibly even worsen slightly simply through

the upheaval caused by change and the time needed to develop and implement the new network. (It should be noted that the EQF and ECVET were adopted very recently, respectively in 2008 and 2009, and networks involved in their implementation are therefore still at a very early stage). Setting up a new, separate European network could run counter to the aim of mainstreaming identification and validation approaches and exacerbate the problems of isolation. This would limit the scope for increasing the value of NF/IL and the wide use of identification and validation systems which would mean that, in the long-term, the positive social and economic impacts are likely to be lower than with option three. Given the diversity of stakeholders involved in NF/IL, there could also be practical difficulties attached to agreeing the composition of the network at European level and the bodies to take it forward at national level. For these reasons, and also because of the budgetary implications, stakeholders are likely to view this option as a step too far at this stage.

None of the options are likely to result in any significant environmental impact.

In conclusion, it is the third option, which offers a combination of consolidation and development of existing instruments with new concrete actions, which seems, at this stage, the most effective and appropriate. The impact assessment will include analysis of the content of this option – e.g. the level of ambitions, priorities and concrete measures.

Could the options have impacts on the EU-Budget (above 5 Mio €) and/or should the IA also serve as the ex-ante evaluation, required by the Financial Regulation?

None of the options would imply a contribution from the EU budget of over 5 Mio €

Could the options have significant impacts on (i) simplification, (ii) administrative burden or on (iii) relations with third countries?

Option 3 could contribute to simplification in as much as it would promote better synergies and efficiencies within existing instruments. The creation of a new network implied by option 4 could lead to some additional administrative work for the Commission and the Member States but not to any significant degree.

## **E. Planning of further impact assessment work**

When will the impact assessment work start?

Reflection on the impact assessment began in May 2010.

(i) What information and data are already available? (ii) Will this impact assessment build on already existing impact assessment work or evaluations carried out? (iii) What further information needs to be gathered? (iv) How will this be done (e.g. internally or by an external contractor) and by when? (v) What type and level of analysis will be carried out (cf. principle of proportionate analysis)?

There is a wide body of data to draw on, including the results of many studies and peer learning activities. A key source will be the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning which has been mapping practice across Europe since 2004. The 2007 issue describes hundreds of experiences in more than 800 pages. An update is in progress and is due for completion by end 2010. It will contain: 32 country reports; four thematic reports (the use of validation by and for disadvantaged target groups, developing high quality, reliable and valid assessment methods; understanding the costs and benefits of validation; using validation in Higher Education); ten in-depth case studies and an overview report analysing progress across the 32 countries.

Cedefop has launched a study on the use of validation by enterprises for human resource and career development purposes. Other studies by Cedefop on relevant issues will also provide valuable information. The European Training Foundation promotes the relevant tools and studies in accession countries.

Since 2006 the Cluster on the recognition of learning outcomes (currently called the Learning Outcomes Group) has held several peer learning activities on validation of non formal and

informal learning. This work was at the basis of the European guidelines on validation of non formal and informal learning, a technical tool for practitioners published by DG EAC and Cedefop in 2009. The 2010 update of the inventory will be closely linked to a further development of the Guidelines, ensuring that these two instruments support each other and can be used in an integrated way.

Work on the initiative will also build on the findings of the 2008 Joint report of the Council and of the Commission: "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation" and accompanying SWD), the impact assessment prepared in 2006 for the creation of the EQF, the recent findings of the expert group on New Skills for New Jobs, and experiences made in the implementation of existing instruments (EQF, ECVET, Europass, Youthpass).

Speeding up the process of assessing and recognising the non-formal and informal learning of disadvantaged groups, in particular the low skilled (80 million people according to EU 2020) is a priority of the Action Plan on Adult Learning, 2008-2010. Full use will be made of the related reports including the 2009 study: 'Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications 'one step up'.

The results of numerous European co-operation projects focussing on validation supported by the Lifelong learning programme (LdV, Grundtvig, Socrates) will be taken into account.

Account will be taken of the results of: the peer-learning on participation of young people with fewer opportunities in 2008; the online public consultation in the youth field in 2009; DG RTD EU Youth Research report on "Supporting young people to participate fully in society" (2009) and the EU Youth Report, DG EAC, European Commission (2009).

Which stakeholders & experts have been/will be consulted, how and at what stage?
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Informal consultation of key stakeholders is expected to begin in September 2010 via existing mechanisms. For example: the EQF advisory group (which involves representatives of the Social Partners as well as education/training and qualifications authorities); Europass centres, the Member States Expert Group on the development of non-formal learning elements of Europass in the youth field, the Youthpass Advisory Board , adult learning working group the Youth Forum and other NGOs and bodies involved in the Youth Structured Dialogue, the Alliance of NGOs for the European Year of Voluntary Promoting Active Citizenship and the Member States Expert Group on mobility of young volunteers. A broader public consultation is planned to be launched in October 2010. The expertise of the Learning Outcomes Group will continue to be drawn on. Cedefop will actively support the work.