

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation: the key ideas

This note explains some of the key ideas mentioned in the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. Further details can be found in the [Council Recommendation](#).

Skills assessment

People with low levels of literacy, numeracy or digital skills often already possess skills, including professional skills, but may have specific gaps in relation to basic skills or wider set of skills; providing everyone with a standard education or training course that does not take into account their existing skills would be inefficient and counter-productive. So a key feature of effective provision is to tailor the training to individual needs.

The purpose of a skills assessment is to identify the skills that a person has already acquired, and any gaps that need to be filled in order to bring them up to a required level.

This may take the form of a 'skills audit', as proposed in the 2012 Council recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning; this usually results in a statement of skills of the individual which can be the basis for a plan for the next steps in training and the support offered.

A tailored and flexible learning offer

The results of the skills assessment would form the basis for making a tailored offer of education and training to the individual concerned. The key characteristic of the learning offer that would be made to each beneficiary is that it would be designed to fill the specific skills 'gaps' identified through the skills assessment. The offer could therefore relate to training in literacy, numeracy or digital skills, a combination of these or to training that would lead to a qualification.

The offer may be in two stages but should from the outset be open to progression to an EQF level 3 or 4 qualification. Taking into account the upskilling needs identified, the programmes should concentrate first on building up learners' literacy, numeracy and digital skills, providing them with a solid foundation for progression to further learning and, ultimately, a qualification. Programmes could also concentrate immediately on progression to a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4 or equivalent, if the skills assessment results show that this is possible for the individual concerned.

To overcome barriers to participation in upskilling, the education and training offer should be flexible and adapted to the learning habits of adults. Adults whose experience in the past has been poor are motivated by seeing that they are making progress; this can be achieved by structuring the education and training provision into manageable units of learning outcomes which can be documented, assessed and validated individually.

If training for a qualification is offered, it is important that this is relevant to local labour market needs so that the upskilling offer matches the skills gaps at local and regional level.

Validation and recognition

The Recommendation proposes that Member States build on existing validation arrangements to assess and certify skills acquired through the Upskilling Pathways and ensure their recognition with a view to a qualification, in accordance with national qualifications framework and systems.

Validation will allow learners' progress to be recorded at different stages on the pathway so that they can collect credits towards a qualification or part qualification in the national qualifications framework, at a level equivalent to EQF 4. This is easier if national qualifications frameworks accommodate small, transparent steps toward full awards for low-qualified adults and allow learning outcomes to be achieved in different ways.

The delivery of the Upskilling Pathways should be underpinned by the following key principles.

Coordination and partnership

Provision for adult learning is often fragmented; policy may be made by different government bodies with responsibility for different sub-groups; education and training for adults is delivered by a multiplicity of providers; the range of provision may differ from one locality to another. The support available through active labour market policies for low qualified adults does not always focus on longer-term upskilling needs and in most cases targets only unemployed people.

Effective coordination of policy and provision is one of the key factors proven to help ensure that public policy interventions in adult learning achieve their goals. While policy coordination is essential, implementation can only be successful through the active involvement of a wide range of stakeholders and partnerships are essential to make it work.

Partnerships could be encouraged to involve a broad range of actors, social partners, education and training providers, employers, intermediary and sectorial organisations, local and regional economic actors, employment, social and community services, libraries, civil society organisations etc. Local authorities can also play an important role in identifying needs at the local level and facilitating outreach to the target group. These can all play a key role in the delivery of the different steps of the initiative, and in ensuring outreach and guidance throughout the whole process.

Outreach, guidance and support measures

Research shows that many adults are not aware of the benefits of raising their skills levels or of opportunities for upskilling that do not require going back to a formal school setting. Carefully targeted outreach strategies are needed to encourage people to make contact with the relevant services.

The design of such outreach measures needs to be based upon an adequate overview of the many different sub-groups that are included in the low skilled population, each of which may need a slightly different approach. Registered unemployed people, for example, may be more easily reached through bodies helping them to return to the labour market. On the other hand, people in employment can be reached with the active involvement of the employer or trade unions. Specific measures may be needed to reach migrants if they are not familiar with the language of the host country etc.

Outreach should raise adults' awareness of the benefits of upskilling, inform them of available guidance and support measures and learning opportunities, and provide incentives to motivate them to take advantage of these.

Guidance is another pre-requisite in providing advice and information as to what a Skills Guarantee entails, whom to refer to get started

and how to stay on course throughout the process. Such guidance and support should be available to learners throughout all stages of the upskilling pathway.

Adult learning staff has a key role in the education and training of low-skilled adults and in guidance and support. They require adequate initial and continuing professional development.

In addition to outreach and guidance, it may also be useful to consider providing specific support to address barriers to participation.

Follow-up and evaluation

The success of any policy initiative depends on the rigour with which its design and implementation are monitored and regularly evaluated.

The Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) is available to share information amongst all those involved in upskilling low-skilled people. Created to facilitate the exchange of best practice and collaboration among professionals responsible for adult learning, it is a repository for teaching materials, assessment tools and other materials for those implementing this recommendation.