

## VALIDATING SKILLS FROM A DISTANCE



Greek SMEs, of which a high proportion are family-based, struggle to survive due to a lack of less technologically specialised skills and up-to-date knowledge. Not only is the provision of training accessible to just a small group of employees but it is also miles away from what the actual needs are of the labour market.

Moreover, the self-employed do not have the resources nor the time to send their employees out for training and employees find it difficult to take courses in their free time because of the lack of provision of training available close to home. At the same time, people who are threatened with exclusion from the labour market and live in remote areas, have no support systems to get recognition for the skills they possess. Another problem Greece faces in the area of validating skills is that the criteria used are not really connected to labour market demand. Together these obstacles ultimately lead to the disappearance of SMEs, leaving behind unemployed people who are unable to show proof of their professional experience elsewhere.

New labour market policies implemented in the context of the European Employment Strategy are focused on providing the economy with appropriately skilled workers in order to sustain economic growth. Training systems have to become much more flexible and responsive to the real needs of both individuals and the labour market. Labour shortages and skill gaps limit opportunity for growth. It is therefore crucial that the Member States pursue more co-operation between the world of education and the world of work to help develop the skills of workers as well as unemployed people. And more specifically, it has been recognised in the EU policies on vocational training that there is a need to support lifelong learning in SMEs that have less specialised human resources.

## MOTIVATING PEOPLE INTO TRAINING AND VALIDATION

The aim of the “Technomatheia” Development Partnership (DP) is twofold: to address the issue of the accuracy of current validation models in specialised areas such as car air-conditioning and digital photography and to match training courses for adults to job profiles that are needed in the labour market. More importantly, the DP took on board the issue of people living in remote areas by searching for solutions through the innovative use of ICT. *“Why not reach out to people by bringing the solution closer to them and at the same time develop their ICT skills instead of making them go through bureaucratic procedures which will discourage them to take up training in the first place?”*, explains Gerassimos Sourbis, project co-ordinator of this DP. The DP has national coverage and found its roots in the Vocational Training Centre of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (KEK GSEVEE). Numerous key players joined the partnership such as the Hellenic Confederation of Professional Craftsmen and Merchants (GSEVEE), the National Accreditation Centre of Vocational Structures and Accompanying Support Services (E.KE.PIS), the Hellenic Open University (E.A.P.) and the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Technology (I.T.E). The three main outcomes of this DP relate to the development of up-to-date training packages in the form of e-learning, the validation of skills with renewed criteria to fit labour market needs through ICT (e-validation) and the development of accurate job profiles forming the basis of e-learning and e-validation.

## SKILLS VALIDATED THROUGH THE INNOVATIVE USE OF ICT

Traditional validation procedures have already been put into practice for a long time in Greece. But these procedures were not helpful for persons living in remote areas. The innovative use of ICT in the validation procedure, developed by Technomatheia has brought about an important opportunity for a substantial part of the Greek population. Persons without access to centrally located accreditation centres are now able to have their skills validated from a distance through

the use of PCs, internet access, web cameras and videoconferencing. This means in a practical way, that they can make use of the seven recently established accreditation centres around Greece offering all the ICT services needed to pass an exam with the jury in Athens. The exam consists of two parts: a theoretical part examined through the internet and a practical component examined via videoconferencing. The practical component takes place in a created setting, for example a car garage, and everything is directly visible to the jury through videoconferencing. In total 80 persons have benefited from this e-validation procedure so far. *“I have been a car air-conditioning technician for 20 years but I could not prove this on paper. E-validation offered me the opportunity to show that I had the skills needed for car air-conditioning work without me having to go through a lot of travelling and time-consuming training courses in order to obtain some kind of qualification”*, says Manolis, a beneficiary of this DP.

## **BRINGING TRAINING AND VALIDATION CLOSER TO THE REAL NEEDS OF THE LABOUR MARKET**

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An important activity of this DP focused on the development of job profiles which are a better reflection of the current needs of the labour market. Through extensive exchange between national partners as well as contributions made by other transnational partners, the E.KE.PIS was already able to come up with several adequate job profiles. The design of these job profiles comes from extensive cooperation with universities as well as training centres and social partners. Training packages are now being developed for several sectors matching the practical skills needed for a specific job. *“We are actually our first client ourselves,”* says Angeliki Athanassouli, *“because we use these new e-learning packages based on exact job profiles for our own evaluators within the E.KE.PIS. It is very advantageous since they do not have to come to Athens all the time to take courses”*. The next goal is to feed these profiles into the new e-validation system. The DP has also successfully implemented a new method of job rotation in Greece: employees having to leave the company to take a training course (online or in class) have been replaced by unemployed persons. This form of job rotation benefits three target groups at the same time: the employer, who can ensure continuity of activities within the firm, the employed, who get additional training to increase their potential, and the unemployed, who get on-the-job training whilst searching for employment. Nico was unemployed for already 8 months when he got the opportunity through the Greek Manpower Organization (public employment service, which is part of the partnership) to take part in this form of job rotation: *“After my 6 months of traineeship, my boss asked me to stay because he said I did my job very well. It’s a good way of getting in contact again with the working world”*.

## **NEW BRIDGES BUILT BETWEEN KEY PLAYERS – SUCCESSFUL MAINSTREAMING**

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The success of this DP lies for a great part in its partnership that brought together a variety of expertise necessary to develop e-learning and e-validation which corresponds to labour market needs, and make social partners and the ministries of Education and Employment aware of its existence. The KEK GSEVEE as project coordinator already combines extensive training expertise in cooperation with social partners in the specific sectors of professionals, craftsmen and merchants. KEK GSEVEE was therefore well-suited to develop the right packages of training courses adapted to the current needs of a specific industry sector. The E.KE.PIS has been mostly concerned with matching validation criteria to the specific skills needed to perform a job and has put a lot of effort in developing the most accurate job profiles. The ambition of the E.KE.PIS is now to further develop job profiles of all sectors together with matching training courses and validation criteria. Highly technical expertise on converting the training courses and validation procedures into e-accessible tools was brought in by the I.T.E.

*“This is the first time ever that we succeeded in connecting universities and the Ministry of Education on the one hand and social partners, training and validation institutes and the Ministry of Employment on the other”*, says Angeliki Athanassouli from the National Accreditation Centre of Greece. Because of the unique partnership within this DP, it was possible to bring education and training programmes for adults closer to the needs of the labour market. As a result of this successful cooperation, a Green Paper has been agreed on by the social partners and the Ministry of Employment, which states that only training programmes that are based on up-to-date

job profiles can be implemented in the future. This means that a person who follows a training course from now on, greatly increases his or her chances of finding a job afterwards because the course exactly matched what is requested on the labour market.

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**National partners:** Vocational Training Center of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals Craftsmen and Merchants (KEK GSEVEE), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; Athens Chambers of Small and Medium Sized Industries; Foundation for Research and Technology Hellas; Greek Manpower Employment Organization; Halkidiki's Development Corporation; Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health – Safety; Hellenic Open University; National Accreditation Centre of Vocational Training Structures - A.S.S.; Vocational Training Centre-Institute of Labour-General Confederation of Labour

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