European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Country Report: Cyprus

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# Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and informal learning

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1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

In Cyprus frameworks and bodies for validating non-formal and informal learning have not yet been established and there are no procedures or national guidelines for the recognition of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning. However, various efforts are being made in that broad direction, namely towards the development of a National Qualifications Framework.

The main initiatives towards the broad direction of accumulating, accrediting and validating non-formal and informal learning include the following:

- The Cyprus Productivity Centre, CPC (Kentro Paragogikotitas, KEPA), a dedicated centre of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, MLSI (Ypourgeio Ergasias kai Koinonikon Asfaliseon, YEKA) was set as the National Europass Center (NEC) in 2005.
- The HRDA has responsibility for the establishment and operation of a System of Vocational Qualifications.
- Cyprus supported the initiative for establishing a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and a national committee has been set up for the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

In addition, some steps towards the validation of informal and non-formal learning have been taken on the initiative of higher education institutions (see further below for details), while a recent modification of the Law of the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS) allows the Council to recognise, at its discretion, transfer credits based on previous work experience as part of a formal degree title.

The general issue of recognising prior learning arose in the context of the discussions amongst numerous public and private stakeholders about the development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and a proposal for a political decision on the NQF has been prepared.

Developments regarding the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning will influence legislation in Cyprus, relating to the recruitment, employment and promotion of staff, especially in the public sector. Change of legislation will require in-depth dialogue and consent by all stakeholders involved, a process that will be time-consuming. There are no definite plans for introducing a national system of validation, but this may well follow the Education Reform which is currently taking place and which is the government’s main priority in the field of Education and Training.

The non-formal learning sector in Cyprus is growing rapidly, mainly due to the activities of the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA), the organisation responsible for vocational training. Furthermore, adult non-formal education is offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance.

Private sector initiatives have also started to be implemented both at the level of the social partners and of individual companies, mainly in the areas of IT, banking and accounting/auditing.

In conclusion, even though there is not yet a national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Cyprus, there are developments taking place in that direction.

1.2 Relationship with the existing/ developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation

Following discussions amongst government departments in October 2005, Cyprus initiated a debate amongst numerous public and private stakeholders - including the social partners
in the field of lifelong learning. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) initiative was presented, analysed and discussed in early January 2006. Stakeholders were then asked to prepare and submit their proposals, on the basis of which Cyprus developed and submitted its position to the EU, thus contributing to the shaping and introduction of the EQF. The European Parliament formally adopted an EQF in February 2008. At the same time, the stakeholders have started discussing and debating the development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The development of a NQF for promoting the recognition of academic and vocational qualifications that have been acquired in Cyprus is a priority of the government. As a result, the Council of Ministers has set up a high level national committee comprising of the Director Generals of the Ministry of Education and Culture, MoEC (Ypourgeio Paideias kai Politismou, YPP), the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, MLSI (Ypourgeio Ergasias kai Koinonikon Asfaliseon, YEKA) and the Human Resource Development Authority, (Archi Anaptysis Anthropinou Dynamikou, AnAD/HRDA), to formulate the general framework and the policies for the design and implementation of a NQF. For that purpose a working committee has been established.

Cyprus is also developing a system of occupational standards (defining the main jobs that people do, what they need to do, how they will do it and how well they do it).

The System of Vocational Qualifications is based on Standards of Vocational Qualifications, which are developed with the involvement of technical sectoral committees.

The System is designed specifically for the assessment and certification of the knowledge, skills and competences of a person to perform competently in a working environment under normal working or simulated conditions at a predetermined level of occupation.

The development of a Competence-Based System of Vocational Qualifications, which will constitute an integral part of a future NQF, is a high priority objective for Cyprus\(^1\). The System is being established and implemented in two phases. During the first phase in the period 2006-2009, five Standards of Vocational Qualifications at level 2 have been developed in the three economic sectors of Hotel and Restaurants, Construction and Retail trade for the occupations of waiter, cook, receptionist, construction mason and sales person. During this first phase, access to opportunities for validation in relation to the standard is provided to employees only.

One of the strengths\(^2\) of the System of Vocational Qualifications is the sectoral and occupational coverage of qualifications and the fact that during the second phase of the system, opportunities for access are expected to be provided to everyone including employees, the unemployed, economically inactive persons as well as students, apprentices and trainees participating in initial vocational training programmes. Furthermore, there is limited financial burden on employers and employees participating in the System of Vocational Qualifications.

An issue during the first phase of the system has been the limited participation in the System. This is connected with the limited access to the system, which will be overcome during the second phase, where opportunities for access will be provided to employees, unemployed and inactive persons and the standards to be developed will cover a broader range of occupations. Additionally, the fact that the second phase is co-financed by the ESF will increase the human and financial resources available.

During the second phase\(^3\), which covers the period 2007 – 2013, the development of 72 new standards in priority occupations at various levels is envisaged and opportunities for access are expected to be provided to employees, unemployed and economically inactive persons. The standards will cover a broader range of occupations in the sectors of Retail

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1 Cedefop ReferNet, VET in Europe Report: Cyprus, 2009
2 Cedefop ReferNet, Cyprus Refernet Report 2008
3 Cedefop ReferNet, VET in Europe Report: Cyprus, 2009
and Wholesale Trade, Repairs of Motor Vehicles, Hotels and Restaurants, Construction, Manufacturing, Systems and Networks of Communication and Computers and Hairdressing as well as the occupation of Trainer of Vocational Training. Furthermore, how the System will incorporate the branches / specialisations of Technical and Vocational Schools and the Apprenticeship System as well as other initial vocational training programmes will be examined. In this way it is expected to bridge the various qualifications acquired via formal, non-formal and informal learning and strengthen the ties between initial and continuing vocational education and training. The second phase of the System of Vocational Qualifications is included in the projects to be co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) during the period 2007-2013.

Regarding the regulated professions, Cyprus is at the final stages of fully implementing the New Directive 2005/36/EC into national law by introducing eight different specific laws, one for the General System of recognition of regulated professions and seven others for the seven sectoral Professions (nurse responsible for general care, dental practitioner, veterinary surgeon, midwife, architect, pharmacist and doctor). To the extent that legislation in relation to regulated professions will outline the qualification requirements for each profession covered by the legislation, this will be one stepping stone towards developing validation initiatives in these professions sometime in the future.

1.3 National institutional framework

HRDA is the national body which has been assigned the responsibility to gradually establish and implement a System of Vocational Qualifications. The HRDA is a semi-governmental organisation governed by a tripartite Board of Directors, including representatives of the government, employers and trade unions. The Authority has been in operation since 1979 and its policies and financial support for almost 30 years stimulated a change in both attitudes towards training and the volume of training. The HRDA places emphasis on continuous assessment of labour market supply and demand; the formulation of strategies to meet the learning needs of individuals in employment and of those seeking employment; and listening to the needs of employers.

In relation to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, a law which became effective on 1 November 1999, broadened HRDA’s powers and placed emphasis on the need to introduce a System of Vocational Qualifications. The System of Vocational Qualifications is designed specifically for the assessment and certification of the knowledge, skills and competences of a person to perform competently in a working environment under normal working or simulated conditions, at a predetermined level of occupation.

More specifically, the law assigned the following responsibilities to the HRDA:

· to define the standards of vocational qualifications
· to provide for the assessment of vocational qualifications and
· to issue the relevant certificates of vocational qualifications.

1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

The lead on the development of new national validation systems is taken by central government, with inputs from other stakeholders, as described above. Since there is no national validation system in Cyprus, it is not possible to provide detailed information in relation to particular responsibilities at the time of implementation. Thus, for instance, higher education institutions undertake validation on an ad-hoc basis –for further information see section 2.1. In current initiatives, providers and the private and voluntary sectors either define and undertake validation procedures, or work within the existing framework related to occupational standards defined at the national level, as described above in section 1.2.
1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

A number of EU-funded projects have enabled Cyprus to become involved in other multi-country pilot actions in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning. For example, ESF funds have been used to co-fund projects with an element of validation. The ESF projects aimed to train and improve the employability of persons from disadvantaged categories and in order to provide an individual pathway to work for each beneficiary, the prior skills, competences and knowledge the beneficiaries held would be informally assessed.

The EUPA project described in the box below has been supported by the EU Leonardo da Vinci Fund. The lead partner organization in this project is from Cyprus.

Validation of Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning: The case study of Personal Assistants (EUPA)4

The EUPA project is funded by the European Commission’s Leonardo da Vinci programme. It brings together partners from Cyprus (lead partner), France, Greece, Slovakia, Sweden and the UK. The project commenced in 2009 and will continue until 2012. The lead partner is the Cyprus’ Management Mediterranean Centre Ltd (MMC) which organises a variety of activities to support the professionalization of personal assistants in Cyprus, such as conferences for personal assistants and secretaries, training programmes etc.

The main aim of the EUPA project is to develop a model based on learning outcomes for the recognition and validation of the qualifications of Personal Assistants (PAs). The role of Personal Assistant (PA) has been chosen to serve as a case study, for a number of reasons but perhaps most importantly because PAs often do not have academic qualifications, which makes the validation of other skills and competences a necessity. Moreover, most inactive women, when entering the labour market, request a position as a secretary or a PA and in many cases they have no formal qualifications. Helping them to evaluate their non formal and informal learning is expected to facilitate their access to the labour market. Last but not least, personal assistants are of vital importance in every company and recognising and validating their qualifications will valorise these positions.

The main objectives of the project are:

1. To develop a qualifications framework for PAs based on learning outcomes
2. To identify Learning Outcomes that may be easier to be developed through non formal and informal learning and to use this information to design methodological tools to be used during formal training for these outcomes.
3. To develop, with the aid of an Assessment Tool, a two-dimensional European certification for secretaries and PAs. The Assessment Tool will use different methodological tools for the assessment of different learning outcomes so that it can be customised and used across sectors.
4. To develop a modular curriculum and training material that will enable PAs to certify and to assign credits to the modules of this curriculum

The objectives will be achieved through an innovative methodology where assessment is performed before and after the training, in different target sectors. EUPA will raise awareness of the issue of qualifications recognition and will develop assessment and methodological tools, materials etc to support the recognition of qualifications.

For beneficiaries, it is expected that participants will become more aware of and have more confidence in their knowledge, skills and competences. They will benefit in terms of their career and / or may be able to find employment as a result of taking part.

4 http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/eve/alfresco/navigate/browse/workspace/SpacesStore/4371c351-6f06-11df-9e36-c1444dabddd4?searchPage=true
1.6 **Link between validation and the existing/ developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications**

ECVET is part of the overall project for developing European cooperation in the field of vocational education and training and constitutes one of its operational tools. In this regard, ECVET complements the EQF. Prior to the adoption of the Recommendation on ECVET (2010), the European Commission prepared a document to serve as a basis for consultation, involving, in particular the policy-makers, the social partners, the stakeholders and experts in qualifications systems and vocational education and training in Europe. The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) in Cyprus, has initiated a process of national consultation with all VET stakeholders and has submitted to the EU the outcome of the national consultation. The relationship between ECVET and EQF is such that the adoption of the EQF would facilitate the establishment of ECVET, and vice versa.

Cyprus does not yet have an NQF. The establishment of the NQF will entail legislative changes and is expected to influence both working and social life in Cyprus. Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is related to ECVET through the process of confirming that certain assessed learning outcomes achieved by a learner correspond to specific outcomes which may be required for a unit or a qualification. Cyprus considers the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning as a subsequent step to be developed following the establishment of ECVET and of a NQF in the country. Thus, the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is not considered to be a main priority for Cyprus at the moment. Nevertheless, Cyprus will continue to follow the developments concerning ECVET both at the European and member state levels.

1.7 **Funding framework**

There is no public national funding framework for validation. In terms of initiatives by the private sector and initiatives pursued by specific companies, such as the initiative described in section 1.5 above, these do not receive any national public funding for validation, except for EU funding.

1.8 **Data on flows of beneficiaries**

There is currently no available data on the take-up of validation in Cyprus. Data on ad-hoc systems, such as validation undertaken in higher education institutions, is not collated centrally. Since fully operating national systems are not yet in place, public sector validation is likely to be more limited than in those EU countries which have greater tradition in the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Concrete data on the volume of validation in the voluntary and private sectors are not available, although there are some indications that participation in validation activities has increased recently, at least in some sectors such as banking and accountancy, as indicated further below in this report.

The only numerical data available in this respect is in relation to the numbers of persons that take the ECDL test. It is estimated that a total of 25,000 have taken ECDL tests in Cyprus, since 1999, the year when the ECDL was introduced in the country.

More specifically, 24 persons have taken part in the examinations to obtain the ECDL Computerised Accounting Competences Certificate during 2010, the first year when this Certificate was introduced, specifically to address needs in the Cyprus labour market.

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5 Cedefop ReferNet, VET in Europe Report: Cyprus, 2009
6 Idem
2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

At present, there are no procedures or national guidelines for the recognition of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning. However, individual higher education institutions may allocate at their own discretion a number of credits for prior learning when evaluating entry or transfer requirements.

A recent modification of the Law of the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS) allows the Council to recognise, at its discretion, transfer credits based on previous work experience as part of a formal degree title.

For example, the Continuing Education Centre, operating within the University of Cyprus, (Panepistimio Kyprou, UCY) has assigned learning outcomes and credits to the modules of some of its lifelong learning programmes.

2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

Existing information, advice and guidance networks are not well established. Advice and guidance is either given at the provider level (e.g. individual higher education institutions will inform prospective students about their validation procedures) or at project level. An example of this is the Leonardo da Vinci project “Diaplus”, in which Cyprus participated, and which aimed to produce a European tool for life-long career management, to enable individuals to monitor their career. The Information and Communications Technology sector was selected for the pilot implementation of the project and partners from six countries worked on producing a tool giving individuals the opportunity to review their qualifications, personal and occupational profile, so as to set new goals and plan their development accordingly.

2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors

Tripartite cooperation is well developed in Cyprus and the social partners have been involved in the debate on developing a System of Vocational Qualifications, especially since the social partners are members of the Board of Directors of the HRDA and fully support the development of the System.

In addition, the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) is operating a scheme certifying competences in computer-related subjects such as word-processing, databases, spreadsheets etc, based on examinations organised in cooperation with the organisation ICT Europe, which is based in Greece. International Computer Technology (ICT) is the worldwide recognised Programme of Certification of Competences in the use of computers and information technology at introductory, basic and specialised level. The certificates awarded enjoy recognition by the enterprises who are members of the Chamber, but also from other private companies and public organisations. The majority of participants are young people (15-18 years old) but the scheme is also targeted to people already in employment.

Apart from this scheme, other European methods such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), is also available and widely used in Cyprus. The ECDL Certification Programmes are categorised in levels depending on their target audience and degree of difficulty. Currently, there are four (4) levels: Introductory, Core, Expert/Advanced and Specialised. ECDL Cyprus has also developed three additional certificates in response to local labour market needs. These are entitled “3rd Lyceum Exam in ICT”, “Visual Basic Programming” and “Certification of Computerised Accounting Competences” (see further below for details on this). ECDL is the certificate chosen by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus to certify the IT Skills of the teachers of secondary education and is

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also preferred by the banking sector and more generally, by the private sector of Cyprus.

The Cyprus ECDL “Certification of Computerised Accounting Competences”

The ECDL ‘Certification of Computerised Accounting Competences’, has been developed specifically in Cyprus in order to address the following labour market needs:

a) education in accountancy is theoretical, using traditional educational methods and tools (such as exercise books, notes, calculator etc and

b) individuals with qualifications in accountancy that have been employed by companies, are unable to perform efficiently when they are asked to use a computerised accountancy system inside the enterprise.

The examination of Computerised Accounting Competences aims to address these gaps and meet the accountancy needs in the enterprises of Cyprus. At the same time the examination creates a supply of executives for organisations both in the public and private sector using computerised accountancy systems. The examination targets: personnel and executives of accounts departments that wish to certify their competences in the use of computerised accountancy systems, but also individuals with some knowledge of accountancy that seeks employment in accounts departments of companies, as well as students and (candidate) students that wish to enrich their portfolio of qualifications. Those interested in taking the examination follow a training programme lasting 30 - 40 hours, depending on the profile, the knowledge and the experience of each candidate. Candidates are also required to hold basic knowledge of accountancy or qualifications equivalent to a GCE O Level in Accounting. Even though a GCE A Level in Accounting is not a requirement, holders of these qualifications have increased chances of success in the examination. Candidates also need to have knowledge and skills in computers (of at least ECDL level) in the units ‘Using the Computer’, ‘Managing Files’ and ‘Word processing’. The same software used during the training is also used during the examination for this certificate.

There are also other examples in the banking and accounting/auditing sector in Cyprus, whereby foreign certifications are recognised as described below. This has led to an impressive increase of participants in these qualifications schemes, among the employees of banking and accounting/auditing firms in Cyprus:

- The Cyprus Association of Commercial Banks recognises the qualifications awarded by the Chartered Institute of Bankers of England and Wales; the American Institute of Bankers and the Documentary Credits Certificate awarded by the International Chamber of Commerce.

- The Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Cyprus and the accounting and auditing companies that are members of the Institute, recognise the qualifications awarded by the Chartered and Certified Accountants of the UK and the US CPA qualification.

2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

No third sector validation initiatives have been identified as a result of this review.

2.5 Costs to organisations

There is no information available on the costs of validation initiatives to organisations. In some cases, such as the validation practices that take place in higher education institutions, costs refer largely to staff time to undertake validation. The time spent is not considered to be high, as procedures can be rather informal.
3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment
Awareness raising and recruitment into validation initiatives are not centrally quantified. However, anecdotal evidence gathered during this review suggests that take up is limited. As already mentioned, this is aggravated by low levels of information, advice and guidance.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support
As already mentioned, existing information, advice and guidance networks are not well established. Advice and guidance is either given at the provider level (e.g. individual higher education institutions will inform prospective students about their validation procedures) or at project level.

3.3 Costs to individuals
There is little available information in relation to costs to individuals. In relation to validation in higher education institutions, this does not entail a fee payment by the individual.

In relation to certificates such as the ECDL, the cost to individuals is mainly composed of the testing fees for each ECDL test. As an example, the cost for the ECDL Core certificate costs a total of EUR 65, covering the cost of a Log Book and the cost for the Testing Fees ECDL Core.

As another example, the cost of participating in the examination for the ECDL Certificate of Computerised Accounting Competences is EUR 76.

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups
ESF projects with a validation component tend, as mentioned, to focus on disadvantaged groups. In the private sector, specific target groups are defined sectorally, as outlined above in this report. The government has not defined specific priority target groups for public sector initiatives.

3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals
It is expected that validation initiatives help to increase the possibilities of access to higher education, and the reduction of time to achieve a higher education qualification. Within sectors, validation is undertaken to better match individuals with job tasks. However, given the low profile of validation in the country, no studies have systematically evidenced the benefits of validation to individuals.

4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework
There is no national quality assurance framework for validation initiatives. Organisations involved in validation practices are therefore free to establish the quality assurance procedures they decide.

4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures
The quality assurance procedures employed in Cyprus are likely to vary by validating organisation, as little national guidance is provided on this topic and the extent to which European tools have been adopted by organisations is unknown. Moreover, there is currently no comparative overview of the level and nature of such practices.
4.3 Evaluation framework

There is no national evaluation framework for validation initiatives. There is also a lack of tradition in evaluation of validation practices at the organisational level (the concept itself is relatively new) in Cyprus, which suggests that little is being done currently in this area.

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

5.1 Methods used

There is no national validation system in Cyprus. However, in relation to private sector initiatives, such as the ECDL general and sectoral certificates, the assessment methods used are based on both general examinations (for the Core ECDL certificates) and locally developed exams (for the ECDL computerised accountancy certificate), which follow participation in a brief training programme.

5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the methods used

The advantages of using examinations as an assessment method for validating informal and non-formal learning relate to the consistency of the approach, the fact that such exams are convenient to use and they can be adopted and implemented quickly. Using locally developed exams has the advantage that the exams can be tailored to match programme and institutional objectives.

The disadvantage of using examinations as an assessment method relate mainly to the fact that examinations measure relatively superficial knowledge or learning. Some competences acquired through informal and non-formal learning, may not be picked up and validated through such examinations.

6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

The validation practitioners involved in the ICT-related certification are ICT professionals who offer training to candidates and who are subsequently involved in assessing the examination results.

6.2 Provision of training and support to practitioners

The only available information in relation to validation practitioners relates to the private sector validation initiatives described above, such as ECDL and ECDL for Computerised Accountancy Competences. It is considered that the success of this later certification is to a great extent due to the quality of training offered to candidates for the certificate. For this reason, free training lasting 9 – 12 hours is offered to the practitioners who offer training to candidates before they take the exam. This training of 9-12 hours aims to help the practitioners familiarise themselves with the software being used by candidates for the duration of their training and during the certification examination itself.

6.3 Qualifications requirements of the practitioners

Since there is no national validation system in Cyprus, there is no national regulation regarding qualification requirements of practitioners. Each organisation thus selects people that are considered qualified to undertake validation procedures. This is often judged by their level of professional experience as well as qualifications.
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Stakeholders consulted:
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Mediterranean Management Centre (MMC) Ltd
Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI)