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# MILESTONES FOR FORMAL AND SOCIAL RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL & INFORMAL LEARNING IN YOUTH

Since Lisbon 2000, when the European Council, the Heads of State and Heads of Government decided to “make the European Union the most competitive, knowledge-based region in the world, with more and better jobs, sustainable growth and social cohesion” a number of political processes were initiated in Education, Training and Youth policies, that influenced the debate on validation and recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Looking from the Youth perspective, particularly from a European Commission Youth Policy position these initiatives cover the recognition of youth work from and with young people as well as the recognition of youth workers’ and youth leaders’ training and the social recognition of the youth field in general...

## ► The Education & Training sector

The most relevant policy initiatives in the Education & Training sector since Lisbon 2000 were the Lifelong Learning Strategy, the Concrete work programme for the future objectives of education and training systems and the Bruges/Copenhagen process in the area of Vocational Education and Training (VET). These policy initiatives are now subsumed under the generic term Education & Training 2010. With regard to recognition of non-formal and informal learning, all initiatives stressed the need for a greater transparency of skills and competences and a better validation of all kinds of learning.

More specifically, one of the identified key priorities in the Education & Training 2010 framework “Bringing learning and learners closer together/Making learning more attractive” proposed that **“youth organisations should make visible and publicise regularly the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning that results from their activities”**.

Within the Education and Training strategies a number of working groups have been created in order to support the

political processes, to develop policy recommendations in diverse areas and to exchange information and good practice throughout Member States.

Within the priorities “Validation of non-formal learning” and “Making learning attractive / strengthening links with working life and society” in the E&T 2010 framework, this work resulted in the creation of a number of common principles for the identification and validation of non-formal learning; a European Inventory for the validation of non-formal and informal learning; and the development of a Single European Transparency Framework that led to the adoption of a set of instruments for enhancing transparency of qualifications, skills and competences; the so-called Europass.

The strategy for 2005/06 aimed to adapt the common European principles on validation in the Member States and in various sectors and contexts, including the youth field.

*The Common principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning were adopted by the Council in May 2004. One of the key issues is an individual entitlement to get non-formal and informal learning experiences validated, but*

- asking for validation should be a voluntary matter for individuals;
- stakeholders should be obliged, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competences to establish systems for validation and include quality assurance mechanisms as well as guidance provision.

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Furthermore, validation of non-formal learning should be based on confidence and trust, meaning that the procedures must be fair and transparent and systems for the identification and validation must be credible and legitimate.

On a voluntary basis these principles should be adapted in the relevant areas by each country of the Union as well as be disseminated and promoted by all parties involved. Non-Governmental Organisations engaged in providing lifelong learning opportunities are also encouraged to use and adapt the common European principles as appropriate.

## ► *The European Inventory*

The idea of the European Inventory for the validation of non-formal & informal learning is to collect information on systems for validation in different contexts (public, private, voluntary) in all involved countries and to make it available to the diverse audiences. The inventory provides information on methods and instruments for validation, on norms and standards, on stakeholders and the institutional, political & legal frameworks and last but not least, examples of good practice by country and context.

## ► *Europass*

The Europass is based on a proposal by the European Commission on improved transparency of qualifications and competences, in order to facilitate mobility throughout Europe for Lifelong Learning purposes. It led to a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council in December 2004 and includes 5 existing instruments

- Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV) plus
- Diploma Supplement (Higher Education)
- Certificate Supplement (VET)
- Language Portfolio
- Europass Mobility

National Europass Centres will implement Europass. It will be open to new instruments after an implementation phase of two years, particularly in the field of competences in the field of Information and Communication Technologies and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

## ► *Key competences for lifelong learning*

In November 2005 the European Commission adopted a proposal for a recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning. This recommendation provides, for the first time, a European reference tool on key competences that young people need for adult life, for further learning and for participating actively in society. With the recommendation the Commission aims to encourage and facilitate national debates and reforms of curricula and to develop lifelong learning. The Reference Framework sets out eight key competences:

1. Communication in the mother tongue;
2. Communication in foreign languages;
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
4. Digital competence;
5. Learning to learn;
6. Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence;
7. Entrepreneurship and
8. Cultural expression.

The overall framework for the recognition of all different forms of learning is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Last summer the Commission launched a consultation that ended in December 2005. The objective of the planned EQF is to create a European framework which will enable qualification systems at the national and sectoral levels to relate to each other. This reference structure will be used on a voluntary basis and will facilitate the transfer and recognition of qualifications held by individual citizens.

## ► *The Youth sector*

The White Paper on Youth is the strategic backbone of the policy strategies in the youth field. It proposes to apply the open method of coordination in priority areas of the specific youth field and to take youth more into account in other policies such as Education and Training. One of the key messages is to “expand and recognise areas of experimentation” and to recognise the complementarities of formal, non-formal and informal learning.



► ***Since the launch of the White Paper recognition has played a prominent role in a number of activities, both with regard to policy development and in practical terms.***

In order to facilitate the implementation of the White Paper priorities, the General Directors for Youth convened three working groups on “participation”, on “information” and on “engagement / commitment”. This third group also deals with recognition with the purpose to valorise commitment of young people and ensure a better recognition of their engagement. For this reason the groups awarded prizes for good practice and organised an exchange of good practice and information on validation systems.

In the follow-up of the White Paper the European Commission invited an expert group on Youth Autonomy that discussed how education, including non-formal learning, contributes to autonomy. It is no surprise that a main finding was that education, in particular non-formal learning enables young people to live autonomously. Consequently the group of experts proposed to integrate the issue of youth autonomy into ongoing activities in Education and Training strategies and to better define and recognise the skills and competences needed for developing autonomy.

The political debates in the European Union coordinated by the Commission led to the drafting of a Council Resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field that it is hoped will be adopted under the Austrian Presidency in the first semester of 2006.

► ***Joint activities of the European Commission and the Council of Europe***

Some joint activities of the European Commission and the Council of Europe are of particular relevance here. The working paper of both institutions, ‘Pathways towards validation and recognition of Education, Training and Learning in the Youth field’ summarizes the state of the art and asks for further action. As key messages it highlights a strong need

for social and formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning in youth work activities and proposes a definition of youth work that is more than a sub-category of education and training since it is contributing to the preparation of young people for the knowledge society and civil society. The paper also stresses the need to strengthen awareness of key persons, institutions and of young people themselves on the value of youth work and asks for the development of effective and flexible ways of validation and recognition.

A research seminar on non-formal learning was organised in April 2004 within the Partnership Programme between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the youth field. The purpose of the seminar was to initiate a cross-sector dialogue between researchers, policy-makers and trainers and to discuss the joint “Pathways...” working paper. One of the main results was a more precise picture of the impact of youth work and of the skills and competences of those active in the youth field. It also confirmed the need for the development of a professional profile and clear educational pathways for youth workers and youth leaders.

► ***Bridges***

The Bridges for Recognition conference in January 2005 in Leuven was a follow-up to the Bridges for Training event in 2001. The conference aimed at increasing the visibility of the value of youth work and discussed ways to formal and social recognition, thus laying the foundations for further action.

As a follow-up activity of the interim evaluation procedure 2000-2006 of the YOUTH Programme, the European Commission invited various working groups to look for ways of effective implementation of the 52 recommendations that resulted from the interim evaluation. Number 11 focused on ‘Recognition & validation of non-formal learning’ by saying: ***“It is recommended that a certificate be issued to young people and youth workers who have participated in a project, as is the case for EVS, recognising skills acquired during participation in a project”.*** As a result the Commission decided to foster ongoing activities for the development of a Youth-specific validation instrument.



### ► **Youthpass**

This is particularly expressed through the mandate given to the SALTO Resource Centre Germany that is entitled to develop a specific “Youthpass”. The Youthpass aims at developing a European level validation instrument and, as a start, implementing it into the YOUTH Programme. [See Rita Bergstein’s article on the Youthpass for further information]. The broader approach is to extend the recognition tool to other forms of non-formal learning within international and national youth work and integrating it into Europass. As main activities, the initiative will assess existing models of validation and develop and design a new model that should be tested and adjusted to the concrete needs in the field.

### ► **Youth workers and leaders**

With regard to the specific recognition of competences of youth workers and youth leaders, the decision of the Council of Europe’s European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) of 2003, to develop a portfolio on non-formal education of youth workers and youth leaders was a real milestone. Based on this decision the Council of Europe invited an expert group to produce an instrument to describe experiences and competences in the youth field as well as to enable users to assess and monitor learning progresses. The European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders is based on a functional analysis of what youth workers and leaders should be and do; from this is drawn a framework of competences which individuals are invited to use as a self-assessment tool and then to gain feedback from their peers and colleagues. A test phase involving a control group of 250 youth workers and leaders from across Europe (plus those who are interested and download the portfolio from the internet) will lead to a finalised version to be published and distributed from the beginning of 2007.  
See: [www.coe.int/youthportfolio](http://www.coe.int/youthportfolio)

### ► **The European Youth Pact**

The European Youth Pact confirms and supplements the strategies for a better recognition of non-formal learning and of youth work in the follow-up of the White Paper on Youth.

The Pact identifies employment and social inclusion as key concerns and as major priorities on which to concentrate in order to enable young people to play an active role in society. Non-formal and informal learning contribute essentially to the personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability of young people. The European Youth Pact must be seen as an important tool within the Lisbon Strategy for reaching the major goal of including all young people in society. The Pact with its focus on the meaning of non-formal learning in the youth field still needs to be effectively implemented by Member States. It is crucial that young people and their organisations should be seen as key partners together with other stakeholders in the follow-up process and should be closely involved in implementing the European Youth Pact and its impact on recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the youth field.

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