

Name or title of the recognition tool/practice:**Attestation et Portfolio de L'Engagement (Engagement Portfolio)****Developed by:**

Luxembourgish National Youth Service

Short description:

The Engagement Portfolio is a tool that aims to provide assistance to youth organisations and youth movements through the development of an official document attesting to a young person's engagement/commitment and competences acquired through non-formal education [activities and projects]. It encompasses two main elements: the 'Portfolio' – a personal folder that allows the young person to keep track of the volunteer work experiences they have done, and the 'Attestation' – an official recognition mechanism of the competences acquired during a young person's engagement as a volunteer. The Portfolio has been designed based on the experience from the project '*certification of skills acquired in the framework of non-formal education*' conducted between 2006 and 2007.

Type of the tool/practice:

Self-assessment tool, Assessment tool, Certificate/Attestation, Portfolio

Recognition dimensions addressed by the tool/practices:

Self-recognition, Social recognition, Political

Level of influence of your tool/practice:

National

Target group(s) for the tool/practice:

Young people taking part in youth work / non-formal education. Youth organisations.

Background and the context of development of the tool/practice:**Development process:**

The development process of the Engagement Portfolio and particularly of the Attestation started in 2004 upon the request of the Luxembourg Federation of Scouts (FNEL). They contacted the National Youth Service with the request to have an 'official' certification for young people engaged in their organisation, to enhance their engagement/commitment and to be able to have a certificate that could represent an added value when looking for a job. The National Youth Service took the request on-board and initiated the development of a validation system for the competences developed by young people through their participation in voluntary work. At first, a steering group composed of representatives of the National Youth Service and the FNEL monitored the overall process.

In 2005, a guidance leaflet was published outlining the pilot Attestation procedure, based on a similar document produced by the Swiss Scout movement.

In its pilot phase (2006-2007), the project was developed for and led by member organisations of the Consultative Commission for the Training of Activity Leaders. Indeed, during that period, the Attestation could only be awarded to young people who were active in a member organisation of that Commission. The

overall process actually began with a consultation phase with employers. The initial proposal was then amended in line with their feedback and a pilot Attestation (or certificate) was launched. The pilot phase was run by an Attestation Commission that was in charge of reviewing all applications submitted and undertook the general management of the pilot project. In addition, a steering group was put together with representatives of the project, of companies/enterprises and of ADEM (the employment development agency). This steering group had the responsibility to monitor the quality of the project.

The external evaluation that accompanied the overall process resulted in adjustments to the initial project. The initiative, the Portfolio and the Attestation, were generally very positively received and welcomed by organisations. The 'reason to be' of the Attestation was the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal learning/education, it was seen by most of the organisations as a 'system rooted in practice'. A number of ideas were put forward with regard to the accuracy of the criteria, the need to simplify the procedure and the promotion of the tool itself. The updated tool was the result of an analysis of these proposals and the willingness to make it open and therefore, to adapt it to other organisations on top of those involved in the pilot phase. As such, the goals remained identical as those formulated in the initial general framework.

Once the pilot phase was completed and evaluated, and all the necessary amendments to the process were made, the Attestation became open to a wider sphere of participant organisations and young people themselves.

Objectives:

For young people engaging in organisations or projects that require the organising of activities, working in teams and or taking responsibilities. This is social learning in action and the acquiring of 'lifelong' competences: *Education, non-formal and informal learning can enable young people to acquire knowledge, skills and additional competences and contribute to their personal development, social inclusion and active citizenship, thereby improving their employment opportunities.*

For the organisations, the tool can be seen as an instrument that on the one hand, enhances the awareness of the values of non-formal learning/education and on the other hand, supports and rewards the work with young volunteers. Moreover, efforts to make visible and disseminate the competences acquired also aim at increasing the visibility of the important work done by youth organisations. The richness of non-formal learning/education with young people is in its diversity, it is happening in youth organisations, youth movements, voluntary service, and many others areas.

Description of the tool:

The Attestation is made up of three principal elements: personal details, information about the organisation the young person is/was involved in, and a description of their voluntary activities. There are three different attestations/certificates that can be obtained depending on the role and responsibilities the young person has held: leadership; training; and project management. With the exception of a project developed and implemented by a group of young people (without the full involvement and responsibility of an organisation) and voluntary service projects, the engagement can take place in a youth organisation, an organisation for youth or a youth service².

² As defined by the Youth Act of July 4, 2008.

The Attestation will be written upon a young person's request, given that the minimum requirements are respected. Even if not used in the immediate future, it is recommended to write the Attestation when the young person plans to permanently leave the youth organisation or when certain responsibilities reach an end. Indeed, to write such an Attestation becomes more and more difficult with time. The organisation of the young person is not the one that develops the Attestation but they have to send the request to the National Youth Service. It is of upmost importance that the choice of what to highlight in the Attestation is made in consultation with the young person.

The different phases of the production of an Attestation are as follows:

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- a) Interview with the person who requests the Attestation in order to know the purpose of it. During this interview it is necessary to provide information about the Attestation and the Portfolio; clarify whether the 'supplementary sheets'³ are to be submitted with the application (for the young people having developed and implemented a project autonomously, these supplements are compulsory).
 - b) Consultation with the young person on the tasks and competences to highlight, and writing the application form (and if relevant, the supplementary sheets);
 - c) Sending the application form completed to the National Youth Service;
 - d) Verification and finalisation of the Attestation by the National Youth Service, based on the documents received;
 - e) Sending the Attestation to the organisation for signature (by the responsible person in charge of the organisation);
 - f) Sending the signed Attestation back to the National Youth Service;
 - g) Signature of the Attestation by the Minister in charge;
 - h) Sending the Attestation to the young person with a copy to the organisation.
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For the young people who have been involved in an autonomous manner and not under the responsibility of an organisation, on top of the supplementary sheets to be completed, the National Youth Service will contact them in order to verify the accuracy of the data and of the information provided. The Attestation encompasses the following information:

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- Name, surname, duration (dates) of the engagement, name of the organisation;
 - Type of engagement/responsibilities/activities;
 - Tasks undertaken: 4 to 6 tasks, preferably in at least 3 different categories: management and animation-facilitation; administrative tasks; team work; organisational tasks; craft; partnership and public relations; and evaluation. The link between the function/role (type of engagement) and the types of tasks must be highlighted (examples are provided in the guidelines);
 - General information about the training courses the young person has attended as well as information about the provider/organiser;
 - Information (general description) of the acquired competences based on a series of already-defined key competences;
 - The signature of the responsible person in the organisation
 - Information about the organisation.
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The Attestation is based on a dialogue with the young person. It is crucial that young people not only understand the contents of the Attestation (they are the ones who will have to, for instance in a job interview, provide additional information about their tasks and experiences or further describe their competences), but also that they are actively involved from the very beginning of the process. In that context, the Attestation becomes a self-assessment instrument enriched thanks to the feedback received

³ There are two types of supplementary sheets, to be submitted together with the application form for the Attestation and to be completed in the context of the Portfolio: 'Project' sheet which is a description of the project with the dates and responsibilities, and the 'Attended Training' sheet that indicates the dates, contents and the name of the organisers of the attended training courses.

during the dialogue. Reflecting on one's acquired competences turns the Attestation into a learning/educational process: what have I learned? What have I done? What can I do? The dialogue should support the valorising of the engagement/commitment of the young person and focus on the competences acquired. Nonetheless it does not mean to avoid a critical analysis: the young person is encouraged to self-reflect and to develop and use the outcomes of this reflection. Taking into account the overall development and the personal experience of the young person, we are here in the very heart of non-formal learning/education.

Some methodological hints are proposed: it must be based on valorising the young person; on the need and on the direct experience of the young person; it should give the young person the opportunity to reflect upon the competences gained; and it must be transparent and based on the initial impetus and interest of the young person. With regard to that last point, the Attestation becomes an opportunity for personal development and a support to define a personal learning plan. If that approach is chosen, the Attestation is not to be seen as a summative evaluation but as a formative one.

The Attestation comes together with a Portfolio, which consists of a personal folder for collecting certificates of participation in ongoing training courses, from large-scale activities and in projects, and to allow the young person to give account of the expertise and competences acquired and keep track of their achievements. As it is an expandable folder, the Portfolio can be a real support for lifelong learning. Working on the Portfolio might require additional support for the young person.

The folder is divided into 5 parts:

1. CV of engagement and self-assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Attestation - A section reserved for the CV of engagement - Fact sheet to perform a self-assessment of the competences
2. Training certificates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Section to collect/list certificates of participation in training courses - Supplementary sheet 'attended training courses' (will be dealt with by the National Youth Service if the additional forms have been completed and submitted).
3. Participation certificates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Section to collect/list other certificates received in the context of non-formal learning/education (e.g. Youthpass), certificates of participation in activities or projects, etc.
4. Documentation.	<p>This part is used to collect, for instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The supplementary 'project' sheet (will be dealt with by the National Youth Service on the condition that additional forms have been completed and submitted) - A general description of projects or documentation of a specific one (e.g. pictures, press articles, etc.).
5. Miscellaneous	<p>This part is available for additional information.</p>

The Engagement Portfolio is not limited to only enhance the concrete engagement of the young person (the tasks), but also to revisit the important observations that this engagement provided the young person with. To explore the opportunity to develop (and respectively demonstrate) knowledge, qualifications and competences.

Based on a dialogue process, the Attestation offers six competence areas or 'core competences' that are considered the most significant. These six core competences are based on the Europass CV. Because of the nature of the volunteer engagement and the importance of the concept of autonomy of the young person,

the concept of 'spirit of initiative/entrepreneurship' has been added. In order to provide as clear and pragmatic guidance as possible, the term 'social competences' has been specified in such a way that the Attestation will indicate, for example, 'social competences/teamwork'.

The core competences or competence areas are:

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1. Spirit of initiative/entrepreneurship;
 2. Social competences [+ specification];
 3. Organisational competences;
 4. Technical competences
 5. ICT/computer competences;
 6. Artistic competences.
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The possibilities for the specification of the type of social competences tackled (social competences + the specification) are: teamwork, communication, conflict management, management and group facilitation, and intercultural competence.

Generally, the reference to a given core competence results from the description of the related-tasks (and not vice-versa). Hence, core competences only serve as a means for classification. The chosen ones should only reflect the engagement and the tasks the young person engaged in and be limited to the competences demonstrated (described). There is no obligation to go for all six core competences. In fact, to ensure the reliability and readability of the Attestation, it is recommended to only refer to a maximum of five core competences.

The overall process can be visualised as follows: performed tasks ➡ description of the competences ➡ link with the core competences or competence areas and, where relevant ➡ specification of the social competences.

The brochure of the Engagement Portfolio provides detailed explanations about what lies behind each competence area/core competences.

Outcomes, results and impact:

External evaluation →

In this context and with regard to the Engagement Portfolio, an external evaluation was conducted in 2007 during the pilot phase of the project. The evaluation was empirical and included two types of analyses. The first one was closed by a mid-term evaluation report on June 30, 2007, which included a number of proposals. Those were examined and discussed during the second observation phase with officials of the organisations involved, in order to test their feasibility in light of opening the procedure of the Attestation to a larger number of organisations or of services addressing young people. The external evaluation also shed light on a series of necessary changes and improvements, such as a series of amendments to the list of competences and tasks, the accuracy of the criteria, the need to simplify the procedure and the promotion of the tool itself.

The use of the Engagement Portfolio by youth organisations →

As already explained, the Portfolio and the Attestation were definitely perceived as very positive by youth organisations, thanks to the fact that the overall development was 'rooted in practice'. For all of them, it was important to have access to an 'official attestation'. Nevertheless, the main problem was – and still is, that very few organisations use the Engagement Portfolio. Moreover, it was foreseen that youth centres

(working with young people with less opportunities or at risk) would use the tool to support young people in their professional [re]integration path and to valorise their engagement as volunteers-animators; those youth centres have very seldom recourse to the tool. One of the main problems is the rather rigorous conditions and requirements to benefit from the Attestation, which are very often too demanding for the young people the youth centres to address (e.g. 400 hours of engagement). One of the reasons behind that firmness is that those criteria are rooted in legal texts and can't be easily changed. The tool is sometimes used by the Scouts – at the origin of the project – by school committees, or by youth leaders groups but mostly in the frame of the 'orientation voluntary service' (hereinafter OVS). OVS is a programme addressing particularly the 'NEETs' and aims at supporting them in stabilising their social and personal situation in order to be able to make informed decisions with regard to their future (education, work, etc.). In 2013, 250 young people took part in an OVS project and they all received their Engagement Portfolio. Generally, the clear and simple format of the Attestation was very much appreciated.

Visibility →

The Attestation is presented in the context of different fairs (e.g. students fairs), in youth organisation events open to a wider public or during training courses for trainers and youth leaders. The Engagement Portfolio is also available online through different websites (National Youth Service www.snj.lu, 'Agence du Bénévolat', etc.) and youth organisations write from time to time an article presenting the tool in their publications. Nonetheless, the Engagement Portfolio is still not very well known in the youth field and particularly in youth organisations.

Recognition →

The Attestation is formally recognised: the tool is integrated in the 'Youth Law' (Loi Sur La Jeunesse). Several Articles directly refer to it as 'the recognition tool' and provide information about the overall process, roles and responsibilities. Such recognition measures of the Attestation have been proposed by Luxembourg in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy. The Attestation can also be used in the process of a 'validation of prior learning' by the Ministry of Education. The Engagement Portfolio is generally welcomed by young people (as demonstrated during a training for facilitators) and tutors involved in voluntary service projects who appreciate the approach of dialogue with the young people.

The tool also represented an important step for the promotion of the concept of NFE and an important outcome is to be found in the pilot phase of the project: participating organisations exchanged on the issues of competences and NFE, which resulted in a much better understanding of the term and the concept of NFE itself. This common terminology facilitates educational and conceptual discussions. NFE has become an important concept in Luxembourg, being used in youth work and in other types of out-of-school activities. A national reference framework on NFE was introduced in 2013.

Once the Attestation has been delivered? →

The management of the Engagement Portfolio is the responsibility of the National Youth Service and particularly of the unit in charge of the voluntary service. Nonetheless, the National Youth Service does not perform, at the moment, a follow-up of the use and relevance/impact of the Attestations that have been delivered.