

VITA



VITA Manual

Validation System for Social, Personal and Organisational Competences for the Service Economy

Chapter 1: Introduction

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1 Introduction

European societies are more and more based on the service economy.

Hence professional lives are increasingly determined by the need for continuous learning to adapt to rapidly changing demands and concepts like external (customer) orientation, team work/ cooperation, etc. Especially social competences are necessary for effective management in the service sector and are becoming competitive factors at the job level and as such aspired competences both for employment and societal reasons.

These rather cross-cutting competences are often learnt in informal contexts, be it in extracurricular activities connected with school education, societal learning (active citizenship) or organisational learning in higher education beyond formalised curricula. Thus the mentioned competences are being developed in a sphere that overlaps all educational sectors: schools, higher education, VET and adult education.

As far as the validation of these competences is concerned an "off the shelf"-assessment against standardised systems (e.g. entirely developed on basis of EQF, ECVET and ECTS) is barely conceivable because in most of the cases they are not suitable to display non-cognitive learning outcomes that determine service orientation, such as interaction, tolerance, commitment, motivation etc.

VITA intends to link formal validation approaches based on EQF with evidence of social and personal competence development which are essential in the service sector.

1.1 EU-Policy Background

The European "Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning" is recognised as an important tool in the pursuit of economic and social goals at European level.¹ Its importance is underlined by the fact that a number of European stakeholders have been contributing to or further promoting development of validation. The following results illustrate the ongoing activities:

- Common European Principles for the Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (2004)
- Europass (2005) and Youthpass (2007) – sets of documents recognised across Europe that enable validation
- EQF (2008) – based on learning outcomes
- Action Plan on Adult Learning (2007-2010) – Priority Action 4
- European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning (2009) (2nd edition in preparation)
- ECVET – European Credit System for VET (2009)
- EQAVET– European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (2009) – covers validation
- E&T 2020 (2009) – need for increased 'recognition of learning outcomes'
- European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (2010)
- Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (2011), priority 1: "[p]utting in place fully functional systems for validating non-formal and informal learning and promoting their use by adults"
- Council Recommendation on Validation (expected soon).

¹ CEDEFOP. "2010 Update of the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning - Final Report", 2010.

1.2 Validating Personal and Social Competence Development

Service oriented learning outcomes cannot be “taught” along fixed curricula as other subject matters in formal education. Often they are an agglomeration of sub-competences and their relevance is predominantly dependent on context and purpose (cf. chapters 3 and 5 (expert interviews)).

The European Commission suggests to speed up the process of assessment of personal and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes².

Competences should be understood as a complex combination of knowledge, skills and abilities/attitudes needed to carry out a specific activity, leading to results³.

Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after a completion of a process of learning (ECTS - EU, 2004).

Cognitive outcomes refer to knowledge and to the development of intellectual abilities and skills (Posner, 1992).

Non-cognitive development is mainly seen as „a way of complementing the formal learning and refers to changes in beliefs, values or attitudes (Ewell, 2005).

However as far as the development of competences of professionals in VET and adult learners is concerned the non-cognitive, affective competences and competence developments are also of major importance for the professionals in the field.

A few attempts have been made to set up a taxonomy of non-cognitive learning outcomes and most of them focus on the psychosocial development, which includes self-development, relational development, interpersonal and intercultural skills, autonomy and maturity.

However, for educators and educational staff, those non-cognitive learning outcomes, that are mainly acquired in informal learning settings and also at the workplace and their validation are becoming more and more important both for the educational organisations and the individual learners.

1.3 Validating Competences for the Service Economy

When regarding learning outcomes that are relevant for service rendering one has to consider that a substantial amount of them are non-cognitive outcomes. However the non-cognitive outcomes are much more difficult and complicated to be assessed than the cognitive ones. Hence most assessments focus on cognitive learning outcomes, since they can be easily quantified and measured.

Looking on the three levels of the EQF concept the cognitive levels are split into a knowledge and skill component. The third dimension “competence” is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy which is still a rather behaviouristic approach leaving apart the emotional strand of learning expressed in motivation, attitudes, empathy or self-control.

In this respect the LEVEL5 system is rather unique since it includes these affective components in the assessment and evidencing of learning outcomes.

² European Commission (2006a) Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe — 2006 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission on progress under the Education & Training 2010 work programme (Brussels, European Commission).

³ Research for Beleid (2010): Key competences for adult learning professionals

As the ECOTEC 3rd sector study (2007) on validation of informal learning concludes, “there is a strong need for procedural and methodological approaches and frameworks in the field of validation.”

In the 2010 subsequent CEDEFOP study LEVEL5 has already been mentioned as unique system to assess evidence and visualise competence developments in informal learning settings (ref.: <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77651.pdf>, pp 15/16).

Mostly the evaluation of competences focuses on performances of an individual without regarding the learning PROCESS, whereas the LEVEL5 concept focuses on the observation of the learners' developments (PROCEDURAL validation of learning outcomes).

This procedural view is essential when looking at personal and social competence developments because in these domains the “potential” of a learner is key for the employer (e.g. in regard to the competence “client orientation”).

What does all that mean in practice?

As pointed out in the VITA needs analysis, on certification level the EU has been planning and promoting a transferable system based on the EUROPASS certificate system including standardised learning outputs based on

- The European Qualification Framework (EQF)
- ECVET (European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training)
- ECTS (European Credit Transfer System (Higher Education Sector))

These systems are rather focusing on formally acquired, cognitive learning outcomes and do not provide substantial evidence on “personal and social skills and competences”.

However, especially those transversal competences - among others for instance “customer orientation”, “learning to learn”, “intercultural understanding”, “teamwork” - are of increasing importance in a mobile society.

EQF based systems are having systematic obstacles in regard to the validation of these competences since they are somehow “hidden” in the third axis (competence expresses as level of autonomy and responsibility). Apart from that, they do not fit to the eight levels since they are not linked to professional development stages.

Hence it can be concluded that EQF based systems as well as the EUROPASS certification need additional input (in terms of approaches and instruments) when it comes to service related competences.

1.4 Findings from the VITA stocktaking phase

Previous to the setting up of the VITA manual a thorough stocktaking was carried out including an online survey (sent to 3.000 European educational stakeholders with 165 respondents) and interviews with 20 experts from School, Adult and Higher education and VET .

Generally there is a high appreciation and relevance seen for SPOC (social, personal and organisational competences) in regard to delivering good services, also the need for assessment and evidencing is clearly seen by most respondents.

In contrast to this the availability of suitable methods seems to be limited and scattered. Also the availability or often lack of time plays a very important role when people deal with the issue of assessing and evidencing SPOC,

The main findings of the VITA online survey at a glance:

- Social and personal competences are considered being important for the service economy by an overwhelming majority of respondents

- Communication was ranked being the most important competence followed already by a personal competence (flexibility). However all proposed competences received high scores.
- There are two main purposes of assessing and evidencing:
 - Improving the teaching/training performance
 - Improving the chances of the learners by evidencing their SPOC
- The respondents clearly voted for a formative approach since self-assessment, partly in combination with external/staff assessment was predominantly selected as assessment approach.

The interviews underpinned the findings. The major messages given by the experts from the four educational domains are as follows:

- Validation should work along a holistic approach:

SPOC are acquired and developed in outside formal learning environments (learning input). However, their impact (learning outcomes) become apparent and relevant both in professional and non-professional life. Interviews and online survey highlighted this double function very clearly – as a matter of fact the formal educational sectors (school, HE) emphasised the career and job related outcomes while stakeholders from Adult Education also stressed the civic life context in which the competences are being performed.

Hence validation of those competences is related to both input (acquisition) and output (performance) side.

Insofar, a reasonable validation of SPOC could even have a bridging function between formal and informal learning under the precondition that it would not be embedded in the formal sector
- Validation of SPOC should not be coupled with formal (standardised) validation systems:

For the respondents it seems rather difficult and maybe not even desirable to include SPOC as cross-cutting competences into the formal validation systems. The EQF outlined “responsibility” and “autonomy” as competence traits as third dimension. This might be insufficient to describe a competence like “customer orientation” in a satisfying way, however, the purpose of the EQF is to outline qualification stages in regard to a specific professional field.

Insofar, and this was emphasised by most experts in different educational domains, one should be very sceptical to validate SPOC with formal instruments.

This refers especially to the question of “standardisation” which is also tackled in a rather theoretical approach in chapter 6.2

This is why LEVEL5 should NOT be systematically integrated in EQF or ECVET but should be placed as a stand-alone instrument beside the formal systems.

From there it can be linked

 - to the EUROPASS in order to collect evidences of SPOC
 - to specific EQF related levels, e.g. if the scope of a specific level too large and a further differentiation is needed⁴
 - as an instrument to differentiate the “competence dimension” in the EQF⁵

⁴ E.g. if a B.Sc (EQF-Level6) or a M.Sc. (Level7) wants to highlight his/her intercultural communication skills)

⁵ This can be imagined if, e.g. in a formal EQF based VET system (EQF Levels 1-5) the LEVEL5 cubes for autonomy and responsibility could be used to describe the learning outcomes in regard to knowledge, skills and attitudes.

■ Strengthening the recognition of SPOC

They can be promoted and fostered by educational means, however not in the sense of instructional design but rather as supported practical and self learning activity. To talk with COMENIUS or the reform pedagogues from the 70s what matters in informal learning surroundings is rather the art of learning (“Mathetics”) than the art of teaching (“Didactics”).

VITA will promote holistic learning approaches that strengthen the self-learning competences of learners in different educational domains over their lifelong learning pathway.

■ Formative or summative assessment?

The interviewees clearly stated that a formal validation along external standards should be avoided (e.g. GR, DK and DE respondents from HE, VET and schools). However some standardisation is necessary for the sake of credibility (respondent from AE from IR).

Hence a formative assessment that gives evidence of the development of learners’ SPOC along a high quality standardised procedure should be the approach of choice.

1.5 Interfaces to EUROPASS

EUROPASS is the standardised CV for Europeans including different links to European certification and validation systems.

As shown in the systematic graph below EUROPASS links to the formalised validation systems ECTS for Higher Education and ECVET for the vocational training and education sector.

If it comes to evidencing SPOC (in the meaning of showing what a person has learnt, which competences he/she has developed) there are some blanks in the EUROPASS system in regard to these competences.

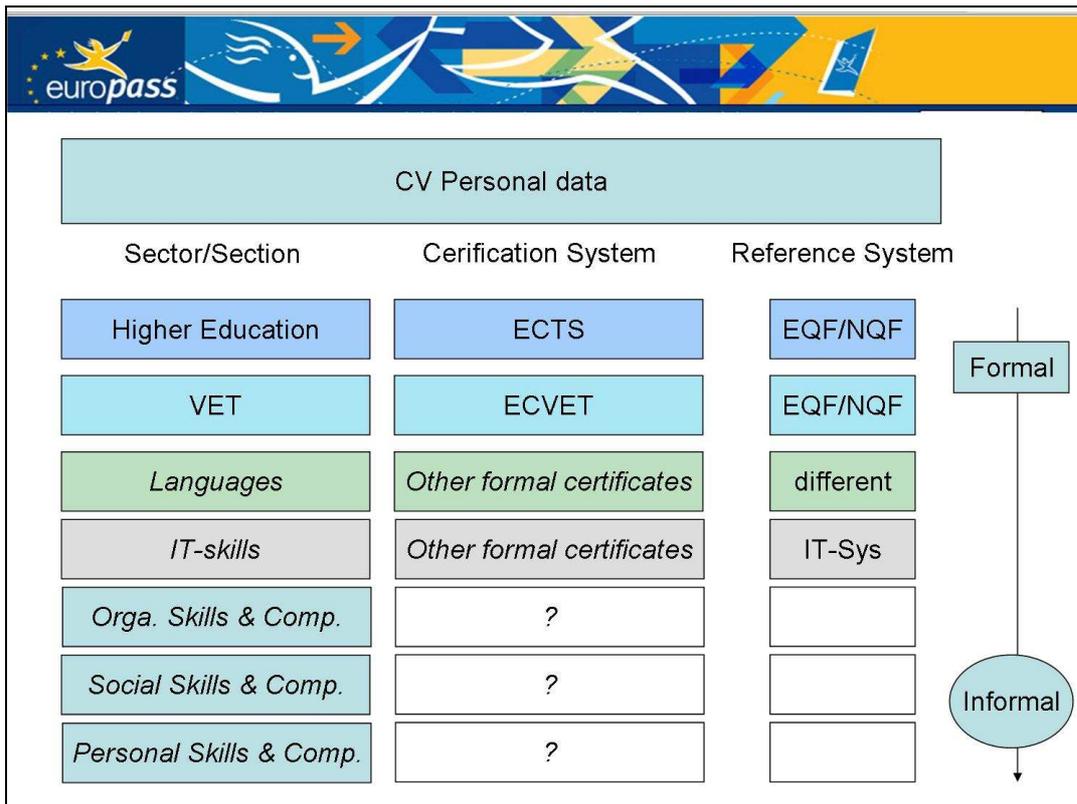


Fig.1: EUROPASS levels in regard to decreasing formality

In regard to language skills still curricula and marks for pre-defined standards exists, as well as in the IT sector (e.g IT drivers licence and proprietary systems linked to the products of software companies).

On these plateaus we are still on a level of formalisation based on standardised reference systems that facilitate the classified rating of individuals independent from the learning context. A language or IT course on Malta may be certified along the same reference systems and instruments as another course in Slovenia or in Finland.

Below this level informality is high. In regard to organisational, social and personal skills and competences there is an increasing lack of uniformity in regard to learning contexts, objectives resources etc. Hence systems basing on common (external) standards will not be able to highlight competences acquired in these in-formalised learning contexts like mobility learning.

At this point the LEVEL5 system can be linked with a high level of process standardisation and a low level of content standardisation.

The first delivers credibility due to the quality criteria developed in the LEVEL5 consortium and the large experience in different learning contexts and sectors.

The latter delivers a high flexibility and avoids formalisms and standardisation of learning contents that are also regarded sceptically and considered to be negative from most of the interviewed experts. In order to simplify the clustering and in regard to the usability the developing team in VITA decided to stick to the EUROPASS order and to differentiate social, personal and organisational skills (chapter 3).

On this basis the aforementioned service related competences are grouped in order to set up an inventory of topics/competences. It shall become the basis for reference systems that

facilitate the assessment and evidencing of competences and competence developments with the LEVEL5-system.

1.6 Integrating the SPOC in the personal EUROPASS CV

A competence is not a static concept, it is the ability of a person to perform. Hence it is a dynamic construct, it is developing in life and competences are acquired over the lifelong learning pathway, be it in professional life or in leisure time, sports, community life etc..

As stated above also competence levels are not "somehow existing". They are developing with a personal development and they are highly dependent on the context and highly *independent* from formal education.

Hence if it comes to client orientation the certificate from school or a HE diploma does not tell anything about this competence of a person.

It may be doubted that an EQF pattern will be established to integrate this competence in formalised qualification.

Therefore the evidences established with the LEVEL5 evaluation system can be collected in a personal e-portfolio (that shall be established in the second year of the project under the domain www.my-vita.eu). In the e-portfolio those evidences can be linked to the EUROPASS. In case of a job application the LEVEL5 evidences (certificates) in regard to a specific social competence like client orientation or entrepreneurship can be compiled and presented to potential employers.

This way a new quality of evidence is achieved for those competences that are regarded being extremely important but nevertheless somehow neglected when it comes to their evidencing.

3 How to use the VITA Manual and

The LEVEL5 system is more than a validation tool. It can be used as central instrument of an holistic competence based learning approach. Insofar it serves both as a planning tool for learning arrangements outside formal institutions (e.g. in mobility, volunteering, civic education but also in learning at the workplace, internships and practice phases in apprenticeships).

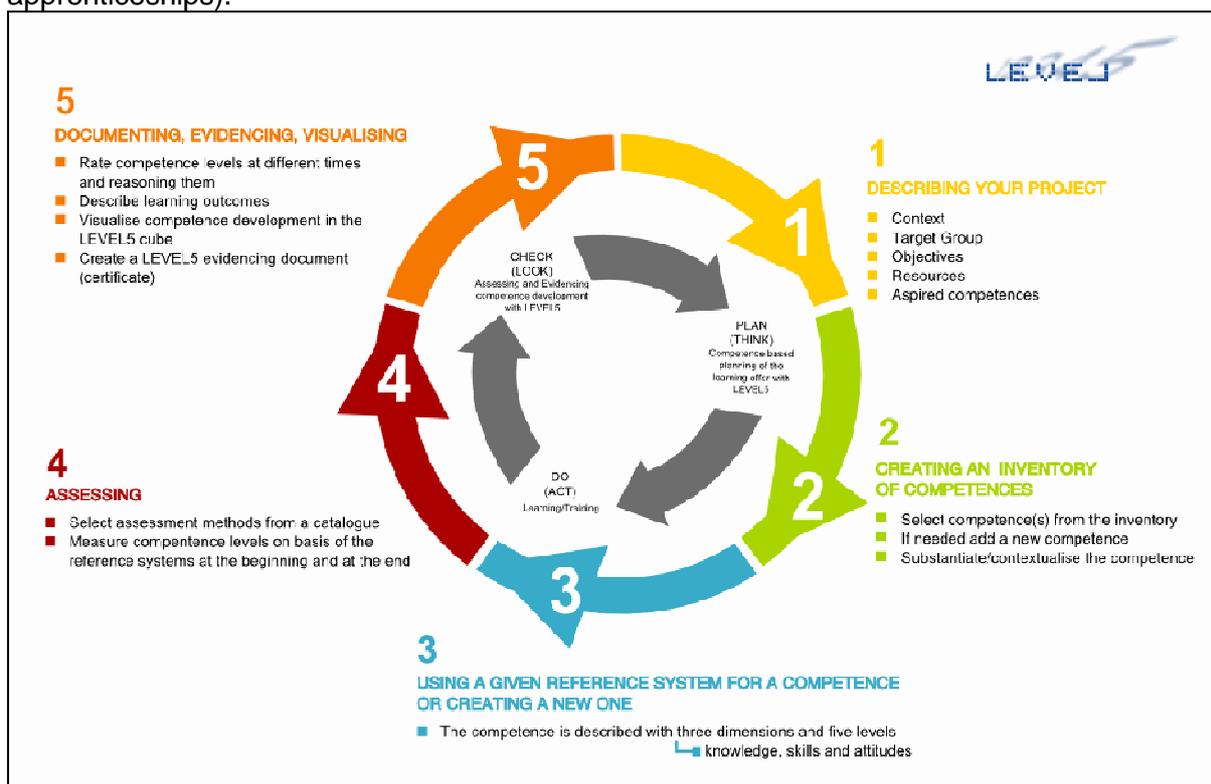


Fig. 4: Interlinking Informal Learning Design with validation of personal and social competences

While LEVEL5 as validating tool is described in chapter 2 (outer circle), chapter 3 will deal with the integration in a learning process (inner and outer circle).

Chapter 4 is an inventory of competences and related reference systems as central validation and planning devices..