

VALIDATION METHODOLOGY

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A) INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH

The development of a methodology for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Russian higher education has been inspired by the European dimension of the validation of non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP, 2009, European Council, 2012).

The understanding of the term methodology has been specified to (a) *procedures of validation* of non-formal and informal learning and (b) *methods for validating* non-formal and informal learning within a validation procedure.

Different procedures of validation have been analyzed and elaborated to one procedure of validation that can be used as basis for the further development and implementation of validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning at Russian universities.

This procedure has been tested at the VALERU workshop at DUW in December 2014 in Berlin. Critical issues have been discussed there, possible disciplines and fields of validation defined and the potential target group for the validation of non-formal and informal learning specified. (VALERU, 2014) Within the upcoming trainings of experts at Russian partner universities the procedure can be filled with life, more concrete functions and specified procedures and methods for the different purposes.

B) VALIDATION PROCEDURES IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Validation procedures in Europe and worldwide differ due to different political, economic, legal circumstances and to different national and regional strategies (UNESCO, 2013; European Commission/CEDEFOP/ICFI, 2014). Nevertheless, in the development of validation procedures common features can be seen: The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) has monitored the development of validation procedures of non-formal and informal learning in Europe for more than 15 years. CEDEFOP (2009) develops guidelines and recommendations for validation based on an intensified exchange of experiences of 22 countries in Europe.

These European guidelines are relevant for the basic structure of validation. They stipulate an equal right for access to validation for everyone. In addition, it is important to always keep in mind that in the course of a validation procedure the privacy and the rights of the individual must be respected and any information collected for a validation procedure must not be used for other purposes without the individual's consent. According to the guidelines, the institutions and procedures must be clear and individual tasks must be assigned for a successful implementation of validation procedures. Three distinct stages of validation procedures are identified (CEDEFOP, 2009, 55ff.):

- 1) Orienting the individual
- 2) Assessing the individual
- 3) Auditing the process

Ad 1) The first stage focuses on the orientation of the individual, including production and distribution of knowledge, interaction between the individual and advisors or counsellors, and other important actors. CEDEFOP (2009, p. 56) states: "Orientation is never complete but it always reaches a significant point when the activity begins to focus on assessing the individual's actual learning."

Ad 2) The second stage focuses on the assessment of the individual covering all aspects of the process of assessment, from requirements and standards, to the identification of learning, the search for evidence until organizing it for assessment. The monitoring of the effects of the validation on the individual is emphasized for this stage.

Ad 3) The third stage focuses on the quality of the validation process with regard to orientation (stage 1) and assessment (stage 2) and its efficiency and effectiveness, involving an external and independent review of these two stages and has nothing to do with the learning of the candidate.

Concerning procedures of validation in the European context, the European Council (2012) promotes in its recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning a more differentiated Four-Phases-Model for the validation, but neglects the phase of information. The four phases are:

"(a) IDENTIFICATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
(b) DOCUMENTATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
(c) ASSESSMENT of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
(d) CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate;" (European Council, 2012, C 398/3).

C) FIVE-PHASES-MODEL

Besides the educational and occupational standards that need to be taken into consideration for the process of validation process-based standards are essential. They include (CEDEFOP, 2009, 34):

- ▶ "assessment or evaluation standards (such as criteria defining types of qualifications, syllabi for qualifications, assessor qualifications);
- ▶ validation standards (such as rules for methodologies, jury practice, availability of information, advice and guidance);
- ▶ certification standards (such as criteria for awarding a certificate, (legal) definition of who can make awards, regulation practice)."

These standards need to be agreed upon by the relevant stakeholders, they need to be visible, reviewed and further developed on a regular basis. Hence, they form the foundation for quality and trust within the validation methodology.

According to the guidelines of CEDEFOP, the council’s recommendations for validation, and appropriate practical implementation (CEDEFOP, 2009; BBT, 2010; European Council 2012), as a validation methodology five phases can be established that will lead to the identification and evaluation of informally and non-formally acquired competences. The core of the four phases (European Council, 2012) is completed by a preceding *Information phase*, including counseling and mentoring.

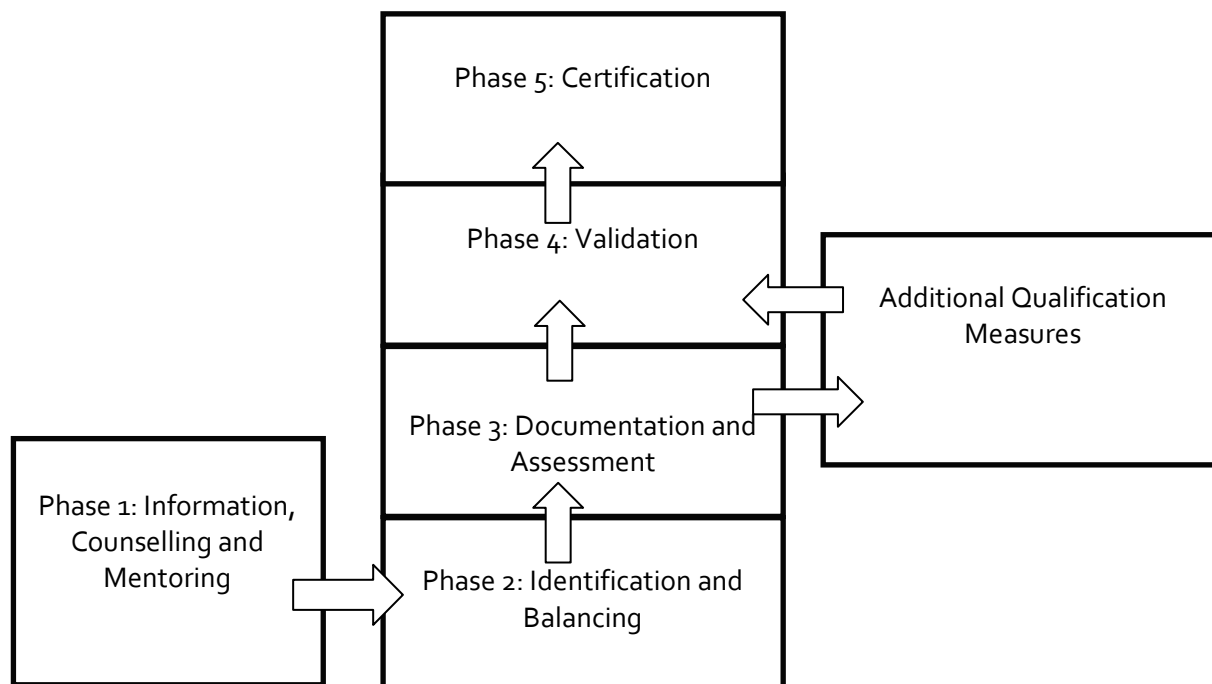


Figure 1: Five phases of validation

Phase 1: Information, Counselling and Mentoring

The goal of this phase is to enable interested individuals to get information about the possibilities to have their professional competences and their learning outcomes validated. Furthermore, they receive the necessary information for the course of the procedure and they can profit from counselling for the whole process. Information needs to be provided on the whole procedure of validation – on timelines, costs, forms and presentation of evidence of learning outcomes, quality and standards, assessment, support available and last but not least also the appeal procedure. Very important for this phase is the issue of how to “market” the validation procedure in the sense of how to reach the possible candidates.

Phase 2: Identification and Balancing

Identification and balancing form the basis of the process of validating non-formal and informal learning. In this phase the individual’s competencies and learning outcomes are recorded and made visible. (CEDEFOP, 2009, 18) Candidates identify and analyze their individual and professional competences and their educational background. These are being documented e.g. in a portfolio that includes data, facts and proof pertaining to a certain

professional qualification profile. Included here are formal education and non-formal education as well as informal learning.

Phase 3: Documentation and Assessment

Documentation is of course part of the whole process of validation. Nevertheless, a structured documentation is the outcome of the phase of identification and balancing and the basis for the assessment. Experts appraise the documentation, e.g. as portfolio, interview the candidate and provide an assessment at the end. On the one hand, they check if the submitted proofs are relevant, reliable and significant and on the other hand, they determine if and how the scope and the level of the professional competence and the educational background fulfil the requirements for the profession or degree programme. The assessment is being made from a holistic point of view and is suitable for adults.

Additional Qualification Measures

Between Phase 3 "Documentation and Assessment" and Phase 4 "Validation" is a possible side step that can be very important. Depending on the relevance and the significance of individual's documentation there can be made recommendations for additional qualification measures an individual needs to follow (see e.g. French Procedure Mamoune/Ribaud, 2014).

Phase 4: Validation

The institution responsible for validation decides, based on the assessment of the experts, which professional competences exist and which requirements are fulfilled and then issues a certificate of learning achievement. Furthermore, the institution decides which additional performances in the area of education must be delivered in order for the candidate to obtain the desired degree or certificate.

Phase 5: Certification

The certification is being issued pertaining to the requirements and standards of the profession or degree programme. The chambers or other certifying institutions issue a report or certify the requirements for the profession or degree programme.

D) METHODS FOR VALIDATION

The developed Five-Phase-Model needs also to be filled with respective methods used for the process of validation. It is essential that the used methods help to achieve "greater validity, reliability, fairness and fitness for purpose of results." (CEDEFOP, 2009, 60) Several methods have already been addressed within the validation procedure. Here they shall be briefly characterized and valued with regard to the phases (2) Identification and Balancing) and (3) documentation and assessment.

From existing European practices in validation procedures for identification, documentation and validation of non-formal and informal learning eight methods of assessment can be extracted (CEDEFOP, 2009, 60-63):

Debate

In debates, candidates can show their capacity to sustain a considered argument and demonstrate depth of adequate knowledge of a subject. In a debate they can also demonstrate their communication and social skills.

Declarative methods

In writing candidates make an evidence-based statement about their learning against preset criteria designed to help them be evaluative. Central here is the ability to use critical reflection. Declarative methods are used in conjunction with other methods that have more independent evaluation built in.

Interview

Interviews may be applied in areas where judgement and values are important. They are often accompanied by other methods for a more complete assessment of a candidate, allowing commentary and clarification.

Observation

Candidate's behavior is observed and assessed by a third party in a particular setting, e.g. in his or her professional practice. The Assessment criteria are set in advance.

Portfolio method

A portfolio is an organized and structured collection of materials that presents and verifies skills and knowledge acquired through experience. The collection of evidence is provided by the candidate. A portfolio might include documents such as résumés, performance appraisals, references, photographs, drawings. In digital portfolios text, audio, graphic and video-based presentation of information can be combined. Portfolios need some counseling and mediation by a tutor.

Presentation

With a presentation candidates show their ability to structure and reduce complex information and to perform in front of experts or assessors. Communicative and social skills are relevant here too.

Simulation and evidence extracted from work

In the center of this method is the performance of the candidate in a structured situation modelled on real life, e.g. as a role play. The method allows for testing complex interacting skill sets. Clear assessment criteria are required.

Tests and examinations

The candidate responds to preset questions orally or in writing. A test provides direct assessment of specific knowledge and skills. An advantage of tests is that they are easier to prepare, and they are often understood as more objective. A disadvantage is that the content that can be tested is limited.

Frequency and Acceptance of Methods

With regard to the core-phases in the validation process (2) *Identification and Balancing* and (3) *Documentation and Assessment*, European practices show that methods have different acceptance. Furthermore, consideration needs to be put on how the method suits the identification, documentation or the assessment of a specific type of knowledge, skill or competence. (European Commission/CEDEFOP/ICFI, 2014)

Looking at the procedure of validation of non-formal and informal learning as whole, the portfolio method is most often used, followed by interviews, tests and examinations. (European Commission/CEDEFOP/ICFI, 2014)

With regard to the phase of *Identification and Balancing* of non-formal and informal learning interviews, portfolios and declarative methods are the most frequently accepted methods. For *Documentation* the portfolio method is most accepted, followed by declarative methods, and simulations and evidence extracted from work. For *Assessment*, tests and examinations become the most frequently accepted methods, followed by simulations and evidence extracted from work, observations and interviews.

E) CHALLENGES AND STEPS TO TAKE

Until now, the Russian higher education system has been scarcely involved in the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Ponomareva et al., 2014). Therefore, the presented methodology needs to be further developed and geared to the needs at the involved Russian partner universities while taking into account the circumstances on national and on institutional level. In accordance with the necessity of acquired experience outside higher education the focus regarding the target group has been drawn on students who are working and studying with focus on MA or transition from BA to MA. (VALERU, 2014)

Within the universities the question will arise how to adapt existing validation procedures for formal learning to meet the needs of students who want their non-formal and informal learning validated. Challenges that probably need to be dealt with:

- ▶ “how to avoid validation of non-formal and informal learning being seen as undermining existing formal education and training, for example by reducing the number of full-time pupils and students;
- ▶ how to create incentives (economic and otherwise) that stimulate formal education to adopt validation methodologies;
- ▶ how existing education objectives can be converted into competence objectives in each individual area of education;
- ▶ how work on methods that are relevant and reliable for an assessment of prior learning can be organised, simultaneously guaranteeing education quality;
- ▶ how to ensure coherent practices, based on consistent national standards;

- ▶ how pedagogical methods can be adapted to incorporate greater roles for guidance and counselling;
- ▶ what the administrative requirements are for guidance/counselling, documentation, assessment and validation?" (CEDEFOP, 2009, 38)

On the other hand there will be benefits from the engagement with validation of non-formal and informal learning, as it can:

- ▶ "address the needs of mature learners and part-time students, by recognizing alternative forms of entry requirement and shortening the period of study through earning exemptions;
- ▶ engage people who are developing knowledge, skills and competences in third or voluntary sectors, work-based learning, trade union learning and community learning;
- ▶ improve support strategies for retention, guidance and learner support by identifying the needs of learners before entry;
- ▶ contribute to curriculum development on the nature of learning, knowledge and assessment. It is integral to the development and operation of work-based learning programmes;
- ▶ improve transparency of decisions regarding entry and credit, by developing a consistent, and recorded, approach to validation for entry to or exemption within a programme;
- ▶ lead to the development of learning partnerships between colleges, universities, employers, professional bodies, and community learning and voluntary sector learning providers, using formative and summative assessment which may require collaboration between learning providers across different education and training sectors to ensure the needs of the learner are most effectively met." (CEDEFOP, 2009, 39)

At the workshop in Berlin the Russian partners spotted the following challenges on national level (VALERU, 2014, 14-20):

- ▶ current legislation in Russia
- ▶ Qualifications Framework
- ▶ educational standards
- ▶ weakness of professional standards system
- ▶ terminology

Within the universities the following challenges were detected:

- ▶ lack of experience in VNIL validation
- ▶ mismatch between curriculum and educational program
- ▶ Issue of credits vs. grading system

- ▶ no standardised procedure in place
- ▶ lack of clarity for responsibility within the university
- ▶ little awareness and reluctance to reach such students
- ▶ vagueness of experts competences

Taking the methodology both the procedure and the presented methods as basis, roles and function within the process need to be defined. The aim should be to meet the needs, try to focus more clearly on the disciplines and professional fields. The following steps help with the implementation of a validation procedure:

- ▶ Focus on to concrete target group and the outcome of validation.
- ▶ Find relevant and interested actors at your university to involve.
- ▶ Define role and functions for the validation procedure.
- ▶ Attach the procedure to existing structures – try to use synergies.
- ▶ Make the process clear and simple for all actors involved – especially for possible candidates!

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