PATHWAYS
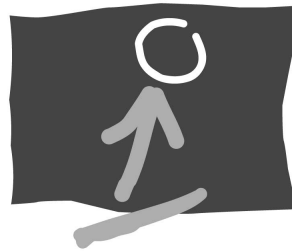# TOWARDS
VALIDATION AND RECOGNITION
OF EDUCATION, TRAINING & LEARNING
IN THE YOUTH FIELD

PARTNERSHIP

COUNCIL OF EUROPE & EUROPEAN COMMISSION

YOUTH RESEARCH

WORKING PAPER

by

the Youth Unit of the
Directorate 'Youth, Civil Society, Communication'
in the Directorate General 'Education and Culture'
of the European Commission

and

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'Youth and Sport' in the Directorate General
'Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport'
of the Council of Europe

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PRELIMINARY REMARK

The European Commission and the Council of Europe constantly adjust their remit of activity and their priorities to the political needs and processes. Their 'work in progress' consists of the new cooperation in youth policy following the publication of the White Paper 'A new impetus for European Youth'[1] and is focused on priorities such as participation, information, voluntary activities, non-formal and human rights education, intercultural learning, research, youth policy development etc.

Three particular agreements are at the disposal of both the Commission and the Council of Europe to develop joint approaches and practices in the youth field:

- a partnership agreement on European level youth leader training[2]
- a partnership agreement on youth research[3]
- a partnership agreement on Euro-Mediterrenean co-operation

Further, there is a close co-operation on third countries, particularly in South East Europe.

The European Commission and the Council of Europe share the same values and have basically the same philosophy on how to work with young people in the areas of education, training and learning. Together they might achieve the recognition of their field of work as a key area for the building of Europe, the development of civil society, the inclusion of all young people into opportunity focussed youth policies and the creation of access to the labour market.

Both, the European Commission and the Council of Europe feel that it's now time to develop a common position and action with regard to education, training and learning in youth activities as part of voluntary and civil society activities, in particular on the validation and recognition of these activities. The main motivation is not to improve employability of young people, but to ensure their social inclusion and to encourage them towards active citizenship, solidarity, personal development and self-fulfillment, voluntary activities and self-confidence.

As will be explained in more detail within the document both, the European Commission and the Council of Europe within their respective youth services have developed very advanced positions on the recognition of non-formal education/learning, have undertaken some work in the development of quality standards and are presently in the process of making concrete suggestions in the area of validation of non-formal education/learning.

Further, as providers and actors within the service based economy sector ('third sector') they look for links and learning relationships within the lifelong learning agenda and this in particular by underlining links to regular formal education, to vocational education and training and to adult education. The focus of the recognition strategy lies in citizenship issues – European and intercultural political education, community based learning, civil society development and active democratic citizenship.

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[1] http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth/whitepaper/index_en.html
[2] http://www.training-youth.net/
[3] http://ue.eu.int/Newsroom/LoadDoc.asp?BID=76&DID=60917&from=&LANG=1%20

POLITICAL INITIATIVES IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH

1. In March 2000 the **European Council of Lisbon**[4] set the ambitious ten-year goal of making the European Union the most dynamic, competitive, sustainable knowledge-based economy in the world. The heads of government treated not only economic and financial aspects but also highlighted that innovation and knowledge, as well as 'education and training for living and working in the knowledge society' are key factors to face current and future challenges and to respond to the needs of people, of citizens and civil society. Knowledge society and civil society are the two sides of one medal and youth policy has to be seen under this umbrella of **knowledge society** and **civil society**.

2. Since Lisbon 2000 diverse **initiatives in the education and training sector** have been launched to meet these challenges, in particular
   - the lifelong learning strategy[5],
   - the concrete work programme on future objectives of education and training systems[6],
   - the Bruges process / Copenhagen declaration on enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training[7] and
   - the White Paper 'A new impetus for European Youth'.

   The White Paper on Youth stresses that "*investing in youth is an investment in the richness of our societies, today and tomorrow. It is therefore one of the keys to achieving the political objective laid down by the Lisbon European Council*".

3. When analysing the **performance of education and training systems** in Europe and the **progress** made since Lisbon 2000, the European Commission comes to the conclusion that the Lisbon objectives can be reached, but it will clearly require substantial political action and sustained commitment. The Communication on "Education and Training 2010"[8] highlights persistent shortcomings and proposes urgent and now indispensable steps. There is still some way to go before one could speak of all countries having a well-developed lifelong learning culture with wide public acceptance and participation.

THE NEED FOR A BETTER VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING

4. All initiatives in education and training underline the **increasing role of lifelong and lifewide learning**. They emphasize that learning must encompass the whole spectrum of **formal, non-formal and informal**

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[4] http://ue.eu.int/Newsroom/LoadDoc.asp?BID=76&DID=60917&from=&LANG=1%20
[5] http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lll/life/index_en.html
[6]

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html **http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/01/st05/05980en1.pdf**
[7] http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/copenhagen/index_en.html
[8] http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/com_2003_685-a1_23013_en.pdf

learning for promoting personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability. As a consequence they plead for a better validation of non-formal and informal learning and they state particularly a need for a better social and formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning:

- the lifelong learning strategy identifies *Valuing learning*, specifically the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning as one of the key priorities and asks for the establishment of an inventory of methodologies, systems and standards, based on a systematic exchange of experience and good practice.

- the concrete work programme for the future objectives of education and training systems indicates as a key objective to *Make learning more attractive* by developing ways for official validation of non-formal learning experiences.

- the Copenhagen Declaration asks to give priority to the development of a set of common principles regarding *validation of non-formal and informal learning* with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between different approaches.

- the White Paper on Youth underlines that "*youth associations, social workers and local authorities in many countries are involved in in-depth work with young people. While continuing to be innovative and non-formal, and as part of the overall package of lifelong learning measures, this work would benefit from a:*

  ➢ *clearer definition of concepts, of skills acquired and of quality standards;*
  ➢ *higher regard for the people who become involved in these activities;*
  ➢ *greater recognition of these activities;*
  ➢ *greater complementarity with formal education and training*".

5. In the final Declaration of the 5th Conference of **Ministers responsible for Youth** within the **Council of Europe** in 1998 the ministers encouraged the Member States to promote equal opportunities by recognising training and skills acquired by young people through non-formal education/learning, and by identifying various ways to certify experiences and qualifications acquired in this framework. Furthermore, the **Parliamentary Assembly** of the Council of Europe, in 2000, encouraged in a Recommendation on non-formal education[9] all those who shape educational policies *"to acknowledge that non-formal education is an essential part of the educational process*…" and "*calling on governments and the appropriate authorities of Member States to recognise non-formal education as a de facto partner in the lifelong learning process and in youth policy*…".

6. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted in 2003 a **Recommendation on the promotion and the recognition of non-formal education/learning** of young people. It recommends that the governments of Member States "*reaffirm that non-formal education/learning constitutes a fundamental dimension of the lifelong learning process, and therefore work*

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[9] http://cm.coe.int/dec/2001/748/71.htm

towards the development of effective standards of recognition of non-formal education/learning…".

7. The **European Youth Forum** in its policy paper on **'Youth organisations as non-formal educators - recognising our role'[10]** of November 2003 stresses that "*one of the most important challenges that education policy makers will have to face in the coming years will be to find ways to increase recognition of the value of non-formal education among young people*". It further states that time has come for youth organisations to actively engage in the process of recognition.

LEARNING IN YOUTH ACTIVITIES

8. The **complementary character of formal, non-formal and informal learning** is more and more undisputed. The necessary skills that people need today to enable them to become informed, active and responsible citizens can be acquired through learning in all settings and contexts. What we learn in formal settings (schools, colleges, training sites) is only one part of needed skills; learning through civil society as well as leisure time activities or in social environments, i.e. in non-formal settings (associations, clubs, youth activities, political and family life etc) is the other complementary side.

9. Especially **young people** take part in a **wide range of activities outside mainstream education and training systems**, in youth work and youth clubs, in sports and neighbourhood associations, in voluntary and civil society activities and in international exchange and mobility programmes. Non-formal learning is often seen by its participants as the most positive, efficient and attractive counterpart to a largely inefficient and unattractive system of formal education and training.

    At European level the YOUTH programme[11] with its diverse actions is a good example of this work and a good practice as such. Hence, the youth sector has over the last years gained experience in providing a large variety of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

10. Having in mind the definition of formal, non-formal and informal learning, agreed on in the lifelong learning strategy, **all kinds of learning** are relevant **in the youth context**, but this is specifically true for non-formal and informal learning:

    -   Formal learning: in specific cases the youth sector / youth work acts as a substitute, alternative education and training provider (e.g. in second chance schools and similar projects), mainly for school drop-outs, early school leavers, disaffected young people or other young people at risk. The learning process is structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time, learning support and it is intentional; the participants get certificates and/or diplomas.

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[10] http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports/0618-03FINAL.pdf
[11] http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth/program/index_en.html

- Non-formal learning: learning outside institutional contexts (out-of-school) is the key activity, but also key competence of the youth field. Non-formal learning in youth activities is structured, based on learning objectives, learning time and specific learning support and it is intentional. For that reason one could also speak of *non-formal education*. It typically does not lead to certification, but in an increasing number of cases, certificates are delivered.

- Informal learning: learning in daily life activities, in work, family, leisure is mainly learning by doing; it is typically not structured and not intentional and does not lead to certification. In the youth sector informal learning takes place in youth and leisure initiatives, in peer group and voluntary activities etc. It provides specific learning opportunities, in particular of social, cultural and personal "soft" skills.

11. **Principles in the field of non-formal and informal learning in youth activities** are manifold:

   - the voluntary and often self-organised character of learning, the intrinsic motivation of participants,
   - the close link to young people's aspirations and interests, the participative and learner-centred approach,
   - the open character and structure, the transparency and flexibility of the underlying curricular construction,
   - the evaluation of success and failure in a collective process and without judgement on individual success or failure, the 'right to make mistakes',
   - a supportive learning environment,
   - a preparation and staging of activities with a professional attitude, regardless of whether the activity is run by professional or voluntary youth workers and trainers,
   - the sharing of results with the interested public and a planned follow-up.

12. Generally budgets in the field of non-formal education, youth work, youth exchanges, cultural exchanges and civic education are considered to be a surplus to the formal education system, only affordable if the state budget is affluent and permits this kind of 'luxury'. This is a very short sighted view of things; it overlooks that non-formal education is a production force of its own.

   The **economy of this field** is marked by

   - its belonging to the third sector and thus being a labour market actor[12] of its own,
   - its productivity in the development of labour market relevant and transferable social competencies in young people and
   - its politics by allowing experiences in participation, active citizenship and political responsibility

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[12] The Commission launched in 1997 a pilot action on the Third System and employment, including some research on facts and figures. Following the 'Ciriec'-study, working on the number of jobs in the Third System, almost nine million fulltime gainful jobs were recorded for all third-system organisations and areas of activity in the European Union, accounting for 7.9% of paid civilian employment. Specific figures for the youth sector are not yet available.

- its contribution to formal, non-formal and informal learning in a wide range of activities outside mainstream education systems.

13. In a wider sense such service based economies represent an ever increasing part of the national GNP[13]. Also, the performant knowledge based economy, which is the objective of the Lisbon process represents an objective in education expressed in economic terms. The result will not fall from heaven, it needs investment. Up to now investment in youth work is not seen as part of overall investment in human resources.

Not only public funding with regard to youth work must be considered as an investment; also the investments in time and money of participants themselves and of youth (work) organisations and their often voluntary and honorary working staff need a higher regard. Again, non-formal education/learning as in the youth field is an important contribution to this mixed market of economy and education; it is time to weigh its costs against its achievements.

NEED FOR SOCIAL RECOGNITION OF LEARNING IN THE YOUTH FIELD….

14. The **youth sector** plays a **crucial role** in the political processes related to lifelong learning and education and training. The youth sector also contributes to the implementation of the key priorities and actions in the field. The youth field must however take a **more prominent place** in the strategies for achieving the Lisbon goals, in particular in the field of non-formal and informal learning and its **validation and recognition**.

15. Despite all visibility and undisputed success rates, the **youth work** record in education, training and learning is easily overlooked or simply made a **sub-category within education** by decision-makers and stakeholders in established fields such as education and vocational education and training. But, youth work is more than a sub-category of education and training. It has to be seen for its own sake, but also for civil society purposes. Hence, the youth sector has to constantly reemploy strategies for recognition in tune with social changes and new overall educational objectives such as the preparation of young people for a knowledge based economy, for lifelong learning and for the civil society.

16. **Non-formal learning** as a whole, but particularly in youth activities, is typically **undervalued** as not being 'real' learning. There is a lack of understanding of the benefits of non-formal learning and it is thus necessary to **strengthen the awareness** of key persons and institutions in society, business and politics, of the main players (the social partners, NGO's, education experts, etc.) and of young people themselves in order to promote non-formal education as an integral part of learning and to enhance its social recognition.

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[13] 16% in the Netherlands, according to Lester Solomon. An example on the importance of the third sector for the labour market may be given for Germany. Caritas provides nearly 500.000 working places in 2003 (more than DaimlerChrysler and Siemens together !!), with a tendency of expansion (plus of 70.000 since 1996). This makes a projection of nearly 2.000.000 people employed in the *private* social welfare sector in Germany. The youth sector is part of it. Additionally to this number of employed people Caritas counts 500.000 volunteers, supporting the work of the 500.000 professionals. Surveys show that 37% of young people are volunteering in Germany, including those active in diverse forms of voluntary services.

… AND PATHWAYS TOWARDS VALIDATION AND FORMAL RECOGNITION

17. To cut a long story short, it is becoming more and more important to develop **effective and flexible ways of validating and recognising** skills acquired outside formal education and training systems. Validation of competences, however acquired, should highlight the full range of knowledge and skills held by an individual. This latter task is closely linked to the debate on lifelong learning, on the future objectives of the education and training systems, the Bruges/Copenhagen process, the White Paper on Youth and the European Year of Citizenship through Education, declared by the Council of Europe for 2005.

18. Within the framework of education and training policies and in the light of the Lisbon conclusions the Commission recently established a **comprehensive strategy** and invited an expert working group to foster validation of non-formal learning, taking into account the different purposes for validation. These purposes are related to the following three main settings: formal education and training, labour market (enterprises and sectors) and voluntary and civil society activities[14], including the youth field. The work of the expert group will lead to **common European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning[15]**.

    A main challenge in drafting these common principles will be to address the different purposes of validation methodologies and approaches in different contexts and to avoid the risk of standardisation. This is an imperative for the youth field, where one can never say 'one size fits all'. However, specific approaches respecting difference and cultural particularities, can produce results which can integrate with the intentions to establish European principles.

19. A main **motivation** for defining **common principles** is to improve **comparability of methods and approaches** and to contribute to the **development of high quality** without narrowing down solutions and options. There is a consensus among experts in the framework of lifelong learning that common principles should allow individuals to combine learning outcomes from different settings of life and society, irrespective of the formal status of the learning context in question. The concrete aim is to strengthen quality of methods and systems for validation and - where not existing - to encourage their implementation.

20. Thus, **validation of learning outcomes**, be these acquired in a formal, non-formal or informal setting, aim at **making visible the full range of knowledge**, **competences and experiences** held by an individual; it can serve **formative** (support an ongoing learning process not leading to formal recognition) as well as **summative purposes** (leading to a formal

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[14] Voluntary and civil society activities encompass various social actions and participation, such as formal voluntary work, informal community networks, neighbourliness, informal political action, awareness-raising, altruistic acts, caring work at home and the community.
[15] http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/non-formal-and-informal-learning_en.pdf; See also the virtual community on validation of non-formal learning: http://cedefop.communityzero.com/nfl

recognition). The individual should be entitled to get this range of competences validated, but he/her should also enjoy the right not to participate in validation. However, in most countries an institutional framework as well as a legal and practical basis enabling individuals to have their learning validated is still missing.

PRINCIPLES FOR VALIDATION IN THE YOUTH FIELD

21. These **common principles**, developed by the expert group in the framework of the Education and Training 2010 strategy, cover also the demands and standards of the Youth sector as part of voluntary and civil society activities. This is particularly true for the following basic aspects: the validation process must give **confidence** about the transparency of procedures, standards, assessment criteria and availability of information. It must be **impartial** and include the relevant stakeholders in order to guarantee **credibility and legitimacy**. The Council of Europe and the European Commission propose to adapt these principles to the concrete needs of the youth field.

22. The Council of Europe and the European Commission, within their **partnership agreement** on European **youth worker / youth leader training**, have already done some pioneer work in this respect. This is true both for the Advanced Training for Trainers course, and for the pilot courses on European Citizenship. It is also true for the training strategy of the YOUTH programme as such, which helps those involved in youth work and non-formal education to acquire advanced skills and knowledge relevant to their activities. In all cases learning has been documented in terms of the course development and the curricular objectives, group achievements and individual learning histories without establishing records of failure and success. Experiences have shown that this can be done perfectly well and professionally. Now the next task will be to simplify methods of documenting learning histories through tested instruments (e.g. portfolios) and to do this in such a way, that they contribute to the CV and employment prospects of participants just as much as they contribute to their active participation in public affairs.

23. The Commission and the Council of Europe build on the **diversity of existing systems** and do not seek to standardise and over-formalise non-formal learning. It is a sensitive task to find the right balance in a set of tools which guarantee appropriate and satisfying solutions for validation, certification and recognition of non-formal learning, in accordance with the development of quality standards, open access, (self) evaluation and assessment procedures for non-formal learning. Non-formal learning in the youth sector must keep its unconventional, innovative and attractive character.

24. To better position this particular area of education and learning it is indispensable to **introduce specific quality criteria**. Such criteria apply to organisers, youth workers and trainers and their performance, locations chosen, dissemination of the learning offer made and criteria for access, preparation of participants, cost efficiency, coherence, evaluation and the links to other possible experiences in education and learning with regard to personal development, social inclusion, public and civic life or the labour market.

25. **Quality** is also about **relevance** – with regard to life skills, cognitive learning and understanding, living in groups and communities. At European level this includes intercultural competences such as communicating in foreign languages, respecting difference, discovering universal values, living and sometimes suffering diversity and thus developing tolerance of ambiguity. How to understand an enlarging European space and reflect it appropriately in programmes of non-formal learning at European level will become of key category for quality assessment in the future when looking for relevance.

26. Quality is indeed about ensuring **reliability and validity** and this leads to the controversial item of validating non-formal education/learning in the youth field. Some refuse this altogether considering, that this is the opening for formal education to take over. In fact, non-formal learning in youth activities should not lose its open character and become a formal structure by imitating the formal education system. But, it should be undisputed that an individual has an easy **access to validation** of non-formal and informal learning and non-formally acquired skills if desired and appropriate. In certain cases and countries there might even exist an individual right for validation.

27. Regarding the risk of formalisation of learning in youth activities, the question is, however, **how the validation process** is **organised and how transparent procedures are.** The above mentioned controversy might have a lot to do with a one-dimensional, youth work focused approach to non-formal education/learning. The proposal is, to understand validation as **'confirmation'**. What have I learnt, how did I learn, what does it mean for me, what can I make of it, what does it mean for the communities I live in and refer to? Raising these questions from the learners' end shows already, how the confirmation/validation process should happen – through a guided and transparent process of self-evaluation, leading to self-recognition.

CONTRIBUTION TO RUNNING ACTIVITIES IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

28. What the European Commission and the Council of Europe **propose** to do, is not to initiate a separate, youth specific process in parallel to initiatives already launched in education and training. Instead we propose to contribute from the youth side, within the framework of the existing partnership agreements, to the ongoing activities such as the establishment of a **European Inventory** of systems and methodologies for the validation of non-formal learning, to the setting up and the introduction of a set of **European common principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning and education**, to the **"Education and Training 2010"** strategy and to the **Copenhagen/Bruges** process by participating in the respective **Working Groups.** This joint paper should also be presented to and discussed by the CEDEFOP virtual communities 'Non-formal learning' and 'Young Researchers'.

Needless to say that the youth field must keep and bring in its specificity and identity as part of voluntary and civil society activities in this process and in particular in the common principles.

SPECIFIC ACTION UNDERTAKEN BY THE YOUTH FIELD

29. In addition to these supporting activities to the policy strategies in the education and training sector, the youth sector will implement further actions in the specific youth field. The Commission Communication on lifelong learning proposes under the key priority "Bringing together learners and learning opportunities" that youth organisations should **regularly make visible and publicise the outcomes** of non-formal and informal education that result from their activities. All players in the youth field, at all levels and at any time are responsible for implementing this action.

30. In order to foster communication and to debate the youth sector's self-image, the Commission and the Council of Europe propose to foresee and plan in 2004 some **further activities**, amongst two main events:

   - A **seminar** with researchers, practitioners and policy makers on 'Non-formal education/learning, quality standards, validation and recognition' end of April in Strasbourg and

   - A larger **meeting** of representatives and partners **of the youth field** of the type « Bridges for training[16] » on recognition, validation, quality standards in autumn in Netherlands.

   The joint paper should also be presented to and discussed by the main **representatives and stakeholders** in the youth field: the General Directors for Youth and their working group 'Engagement', the expert group on youth autonomy, the Council of Europe working group on 'Quality', the National Agencies for YOUTH and the SALTO resource centers, the European Youth Forum and any other relevant institution in the field.

   Feedback to this working paper can be given to:

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   DG Education and Culture   **Directorate of Youth and Sports**
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[16] The "Bridges for Training" European training event took place in September 2001 in Bruges, Belgium with the main purpose to link partners in non-formal education in the youth field. It was a joint co-operation of the YOUTH programme of the European Commission and the Partnership in Training and Youth between the Council of Europe and the Commission.