SEA-ABT

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Certification Scheme
for short courses, online courses and webinars

Contents

1 INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning is generally defined as the pursuit of knowledge, either because of personal or professional reasons taking place throughout life on an ongoing basis in a range of situations.

Validation is essentially about enabling an individual to acquire a qualification and to make visible their knowledge, skills and competences, and is particularly important to adult education and training and as a way to support lifelong learning.

This certification procedure for short courses, online courses and webinars is based on the principles outlined in the CEDEFOP Guidelines, the EQF Guidelines and the ISO Standards – aimed at presenting a transparent, visible and accessible validation arrangement that enable individuals to acquire a qualification of knowledge, skills and competences) that have been validated through a trustworthy validation arrangement.

According to the "UNESCO Recommendations for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-Formal and Informal Learning" (2012) and the CEDEFOP Guidelines (2015) - the development and implementation of the validation arrangements needs effective administrative processes for implementing the certification procedure including receiving applications, organising assessment, providing feedback to outcomes and results, awarding qualification and design appeal processes. Furthermore, it is recommended that personnel involved in the certification procedure, possess appropriate qualifications, skills and competences allowing them to manage and conduct the assessments and validation processes.[1]

1.1 CEDEFOP Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning

Building on the first set of "European Guidelines for Validating Non-Formal and Informal Learning" (2009) published by the European **Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (CEDEFOP) and the European Commission, in 2012, the Council published a recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning that seeks to promote a more systematic approach to 'validation', to increase the visibility and value of learning taking place outside formal education and training systems. Consequently, after the publication of the recommendation and after extensive consultation with stakeholders at European, national and regional levels, in 2015, the first update was issued aiming at assisting stakeholders by clarifying the different options and possible steps they face when establishing and operating validation arrangements in Europe. To that end, the guidelines are structured as themes with a set of questions meant as checklist for reflecting on critical issues to be addressed for validation arrangements to be fully functional. [2]

The CEDEFOP Guidelines define validation to be about "attributing value to the learning of individuals, irrespective of the context in which this learning took place", and its purpose it to provide proof of learning,

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[1] UNESCO (2012), UNESCO Recommendations for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000216360

[2] CEDEFOP (2015). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. Luxembourg: Publications Office. CEDEFOP reference series; No 104. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3073

which in exchange requires identification, documentation and assessment of the learning. As such, the CEDEFOP guidelines proposes four phases for validation to include:

1. identification;
2. documentation;
3. assessment; and
4. certification

In the first phase, *Identification* encompasses the identification of knowledge, skills and competence acquired. Although the phase is often made easier through the use of standardised self-assessment ICT tools, as such tools may be cheaper to use, qualitative methods such as interviews may cast light on other skills and competences and are thereby of greater value to the learner. Following from the identification of knowledge, skills and competences, in the *documentation* phase, evidence of the learning outcomes will be provided. Such evidence must provide sufficient proof of the acquired learning outcomes and could be in the form of a Europass - an EU initiative to increase transparency of qualifications and mobility of EU citizens to enable a better understanding of people's skills and qualifications throughout EU - which consists of a CV; Language Passport; Europass Mobility; Certificate Supplement; and Diploma Supplement all assembled in the European Skills Passport. In the *assessment* phase, essentially, the learning outcomes are compared against specific reference points and/or standards, which can imply written documentary evidence but also other forms of evidence. In any case, overall credibility of validation of non-formal and informal learning is essential. Thus, an important aspect is to ensure credibility of the assessment phase by presenting tools, processes and quality assurance arrangements in a transparent way. In the final *certification* phase of validation, all of the previous phases namely the identification, documentation and assessment of the learning is summarised officially "confirming the achievement of learning outcomes against a specified standard". As such, the value of the certificate or qualification is closely related to the credibility, legitimacy and trustworthiness of the issuing authority.[3]

1.2   The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

By April 2018, 35 countries had formally linked their national qualifications frameworks to the EQF: Austria, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales).

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a common European reference framework established to make professional qualifications more readable and understandable across the current 35 European

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[3] CEDEFOP (2015). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. Luxembourg: Publications Office. CEDEFOP reference series; No 104. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3073

countries involved in its implementation[4] to bridge national qualification systems to make qualifications comparable across countries. The legal basis of the EQF is the "Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning" adopted 23 April 2008 and consequently 22 May 2017, a revised recommendation was published to ensure its continuation.

At the core of the EQF are the 8 reference levels (Table 1) defined in terms of the learning outcomes, i.e. knowledge, skills and autonomy-responsibility. Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process: In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual; skills as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments); and responsibility and autonomy is described as the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and responsibly. [5]

Each of the 8 levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications:

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[4] (https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf)

[5] Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (2008), European Parliament and Council (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF)

Table 1: Levels of the European Qualifications Framework (https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page)

Levels	Equivalent to	Knowledge In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual	Skills In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)	Responsibility and autonomy In the context of the EQF responsibility and autonomy is described as the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility
1	-	Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
2	-	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy
3	School leaving qualifications	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
4	First cycle, certificate level	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
5	First cycle, diploma level	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others
6	First cycle, bachelor's degrees	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
7	Second cycle, master's degrees	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
8	Third cycle, doctorate degrees	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

1.3 ESCO Certification Guidelines

With the overall objective of supporting mobility in the EU to foster the development of a more integrated labour market, the **European Skills, Competences and Occupations platform** (**ESCO**) was developed by the European Commission in 2017 by describing, identifying and classifying professional occupations, skills, and qualifications - the three pillars of ESCO - relevant for the EU labour market and education and training sector[6].

The occupations pillar lists almost 3000 different occupations each of which comes with an occupational profile. The skills pillar distinguishes between i) skill/competence concepts and ii) knowledge concepts by indicating the skill type. The qualifications pillar is consistent with the EQF.

1.4 ISO 21001:2018

ISO 21001[7] *"Educational Organisations – Management Systems for Educational Organisations – Requirements with Guidance for Use"* presents a common management tool for educational organisations that provide, share and facilitate the construction of knowledge through teaching, training or research, regardless of type, size and the product and service provided.

This standard focuses on the specific interaction among the educational organisations, the learners, customers and other relevant interested parties. It specifies requirements for an **Educational Organization Managements System (EOMS)** when such an organisation:

- needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide, share and facilitate the construction of knowledge to learners conforming with applicable statutory and regulatory requirements
- aims to enhance satisfaction of learners, other customers, and personnel through the effective application of its EOMS, including processes for improvement of the system.

Current educational processes are becoming increasingly focused on co-creation where the traditional customer-supplier relationship is refined into a collaborative partnership. This standard gives guidance on how to deliver quality in this challenging new environment.

All requirements of ISO 21001 are generic and intended to be applicable to all educational organisations that provide, share and facilitate the construction of knowledge to learners through teaching, training or research, regardless of type, size and product and service provided.

The EOMS suggested under this standard provides some benefits for organisations, such as consistent processes and evaluation tools to demonstrate and increase effectiveness and efficiency, increased credibility and stimulation of excellence and innovation.

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[6] ESCO (https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/home)
[7] ISO 21001:2018 (https://www.iso.org/standard/66266.html)

2   CERTIFICATION PROCEDURE

In accordance with the mentioned guidelines and standards, an overview of the certification procedure of SEA-ABT for short courses, online courses and webinars is given in Fig. 1.
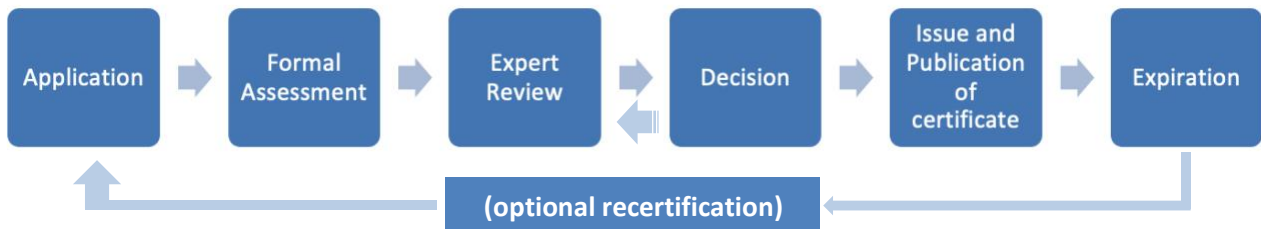

Fig.1: Flow diagram of certification process

2.1   Application to the Certification Committee (CC)

The certification procedure starts with the application of the training provider (applicant) using the **APPLICATION FORM** for short courses/online courses/webinar to be sent to office@sea-abt.net. Short CVs of trainers must be attached.

2.2   Formal Assessment of the Application by the Certification Committee (CC)

Subsequently, the **Certification Committee (CC)** assesses the application and assigns minimum one qualified expert to assess the provided information.

2.3   Expert review

The **experts** asses the provided information and submit an **EVALUATION FORM** for short courses/online courses/webinar to the CC.

2.4   Decision by the Certification Committee (CC)

Then the CC decides on whether the training activity gets certified or requires necessary adaptations.

2.5   Issue of Certificate

If the certification is approved, the CC issues a certificate to the applicant and publish the course on the SEA-ABT website.

2.6   Appeal

A certification decision may be appealed when it is assumed that the assessment process was not performed fairly and properly in accordance with the certification framework. The request of appeal can be made by submitting a response to the decision of the Certification Committee within one (1) month of the decision being communicated to the applicant. The decision of the appeal shall be issued within one (1) month of the submission.

2.7   Expiration of certificate and recertification

The certificate is valid for three (3) years from the date of issue, if there are no changes in the Learning outcomes and no major changes regarding the majority of trainers, the content or the teaching methods. After expiration of the validity or in case of major changes, the application can be resubmitted for additional assessment.

The issued certificate can be used publicly for both the training activity and the training provider organisation. Copyright of the label remains with SEA-ABT and when the training activity ceases to be provided or further certification is unsuccessful, the training provider may no longer use the label in any way.

3   FURTHER APPLICABLE DOCUMENTS

Application Forms	Review Forms
1. Applicationform_Shortcourse_Certification.docx	4. Evaluationform_Shortcourse.docx
2. Applicationform_Onlinecourse_Certification.docx	5. Evaluationform_Onlinecourse_.docx
3. Applicationform_Webinar_Certification.docx	6. Evaluationform_Webinar_.docx