

European Inventory

on validation of informal and
non-formal learning



European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning GREECE

C3342 / December 2007

ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd.

Anna Manoudi

► Priestley House
12-26 Albert Street
Birmingham
B4 7UD
United Kingdom

T +44 (0)121 616 3600

F +44 (0)121 616 3699

www.ecotec.com

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Even though there are few systems in use for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Greece, the profile of validation has been rising on the national policy agenda over the past few years. Prompted to a large extent by the European policy agenda, but also from a need to rationalise the education and training system in Greece, the issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning has been in discussion for a number of years. This is especially so for the public sector institutions responsible for adult education and VET, but an increasing involvement of the social partners and key stakeholders in the debate can be detected. However, there is still no legal framework for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. These facts can be attributed to both the difficulty of evaluating non-formal and informal learning and to the conflicting interests of professional associations who feel that their professional rights might be threatened¹.

On the other hand, the law (passed at the end of 2003 and activated in 2006) for interlinking VET systems is a positive development that is placing the foundations for validation methods in the near future.

¹ Refernet (2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning. CEDEFOP.

2.0 PUBLIC SECTOR

2.1 Institutional framework

Historically, there has been fragmentation and lack of coordination among the various educational and training streams and levels in Greece. General education, technical vocational education, adult education and initial VET are all supervised by the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs. The initial VET system, supervised by the Ministry of Education was set up from 1992 onwards around Institutes of Vocational Education (IEK) and with the Organisation of Vocational Education and Training (OEEK) as the responsible agency. The General Secretariat for Adult Education (Geniki Grammateia Ekpaidefsis Enilikon, GSAE), under the Ministry of Education, is responsible for lifelong learning in Greece and in turn supervises the Institute of Adult Lifelong Education (IDEKE), responsible for implementing actions in the field of lifelong learning in Greece.

Continuing vocational training, on-the-job training and active labour market programmes are governed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and its supervising bodies, the National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training (EKEPIS) and the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED). In addition, several other ministries and organisations operate their own systems of vocational education and training at sectoral level.

The Ministry of Employment and Social Protection is active in the field of continuing vocational training through Vocational Training Centres (KEK) and through the National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training (EKEPIS), the authority and policy maker for the development and implementation of an accreditation system for continuing vocational training. The social partners participate in the EKEPIS processes in a consultative role, contributing to the framing and implementation of policies in the field of accreditation of continuing vocational training. The Ministry of Education and OEEK also remain key players and the Ministry of Education has been appointed as the National Authority for the European LLL Programme (2007-2013).

The effort of EKEPIS, established in 1997, to ensure quality in the provision of continuing vocational training and improve effectiveness of training services in Greece has been evolving step by step through the development of accreditation systems, which were designed upon social dialogue with the active participation of the social partners and key stakeholders and set transparent legislated criteria and procedures.

First, EKEPIS developed the system for the accreditation of Vocational Training Centres (KEK), i.e. ensuring that the accredited training structures have the appropriate infrastructure.

The process moved on to the development of the system for the accreditation of Trainers for Adults and EKEPIS has compiled a Registry of accredited trainers, who have eligibility for employment in EU co-funded programs offered by KEK accredited by EKEPIS. Further, the organisation developed the system for the accreditation of Support Services Professionals, who provide support services tailored to the needs of the social vulnerable groups, and has respectively compiled a Registry of accredited support services professionals, who have eligibility for employment in EU co-funded programs

EKEPIS is also responsible for the accreditation of Occupational Profiles on which continuing vocational training programmes are built. The accreditation of occupational profiles is given in agreement between a representative each from EKEPIS, OEEK, PAEP SA (Employment Observatory Research – Informatics SA), as well as employers' and employees' representatives and a process of accrediting 66 occupational profiles by the end of 2008 is currently being rolled out (see below for further details).

The following step is for EKEPIS to implement the accreditation system for Vocational Training Programs offered by accredited vocational training centres (KEK). Continuing vocational training programmes are accredited on the basis of accredited occupational profiles. EKEPIS aims to accredit 80 training programmes during the first stage of implementation. The accreditation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired by the trainees, who have successfully completed an accredited training program is a next step for EKEPIS.

The Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs which implements the national policy for education has the overall responsibility and supervises formal vocational education and training, through the National Vocational Education and Training System (ESEEK), established by Law 2009/1992. The Organisation for Vocational Education and Training (O.E.E.K.) that was established within the framework of the National Vocational Education and Training System in 1992, has administrative and economic independence and is the responsible body for the Initial VET provision in Greece.

OEEK Provides initial or supplementary vocational training, establishes and operates the Vocational Training Institutes, determines the curricula of public and private Vocational Training Institutes, recognises and qualifies the professions which correspond to vocational education and training, determines vocational rights of all vocational education and training levels, as illustrated in Law 2009/92, in co-operation with competent Ministries

and social partners and finally is the only authority responsible for the certification of initial VET.

A national consultation process has been launched by the Ministry of Education for the development of a National Qualifications Framework and its links with the European Qualifications' Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Policy makers, social partners, national experts and VET stakeholders are all participating in this discussion.

A National LLL Committee has been created, which is chaired by the Secretary General of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (YPEPTH). The Committee is made up of representatives, policy makers and experts from all Ministries and organisations that are directly involved in both the strategic planning and the implementation of LLL policies, along with representatives of various stakeholders, trade unions and members from the HEIs. In addition, Lifelong Learning Institutes have been established in HEIs and in Social Partners Structures.¹

2.2 The developing legal framework

Up until 1999-2000, there were few channels of communication or coordination between the systems of initial and continuing vocational training but, at that time and under the pressure of the social partners, it was decided to find avenues for closer cooperation and more efficient coordination. This led to the passing of Law 3191/2003 on developing a 'National System for Linking Vocational Education and Training with Employment' (ESSEEKA). ESSEEKA has been developed to exploit synergies and promote collaboration among the various ministries and numerous governmental agencies and bodies active in the fields of VET and employment in Greece. This was a significant step, at national level, in the direction of interlinking systems and actions in the policy areas of VET and employment: i.e. diagnosis of labour market needs; secondary level vocational education; initial vocational education and training; continuous vocational training; accreditation of vocational training and occupational qualifications regardless of the way acquired; vocational guidance and counselling and linking with the labour market. For each of these sub-systems, roles, responsibilities and coordination arrangements have been explicitly defined. The legal framework provides that the system will be composed of a core National Council, which is to be aided by one steering committee and six coordination committees (one for each sub-system), as well as by a technical support unit.

Even though the ESSEEKA law was passed in 2003, it had remained inactive since then. A first step towards implementation was taken in 2006 by setting up the High Level

¹ Hellas National Report 2007, Education and Training 2010

Committee for ESSEEKA, which will function as the core group that will implement all the other provisions of the Law. The High Level Committee held its meetings during the second half of 2006 and 2007 focusing on operational issues that have necessitated an amendment to the Law, as well as analysis of the six systems, as envisaged in the Law (i.e. recording labour market needs and vocational guidance and counselling).

Another significant step was taken in 2005, when the Ministry of Employment and the Ministry of Education together promoted the new law on 'Systematisation of Lifelong Learning' (Law 3369/2005).¹ This Law constitutes the first integrated strategy on lifelong learning at national level, in contrast to the frequently fragmented policies of the past. The Law sets out the roles and responsibilities of each type of organisation involved in VET and lifelong learning. It also sets the framework for the establishment and function of the "National Committee for Life Long Learning" (see above), whose role is intended to be the better identification of needs in lifelong education and training, the improved cooperation between actors in lifelong education and training and its link with ESSEEKA. The Chairman of the High Level Committee sits in the Life Long Learning Committee. In particular, the Law sets the legal framework for:

- the accreditation of occupational profiles to be carried out by EKEPIS in cooperation with the social partners (described in detail further in the box below);
- the accreditation of VET Programs to be carried out by OEEK for initial VET and by EKEPIS for continuing vocational training and the respective certificates.

The May 2005 Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection and the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs led to a number of actions being implemented:

- Studies to describe and record trends in the labour market
- Initiation of vocational profiles' conversion into training programmes and elaboration of pilot mechanisms for validation of prior learning
- EKEPIS has completed the accreditation of Ongoing Vocational Training structures in the existing statutory framework
- Training courses have started for more than 10,000 instructors on the EKEPIS register, who will receive certification upon completion of the courses.

A Joint Ministerial Decision on the creation of Occupational [Vocational] Profiles (566/2006) was issued in 2006. Further, the Ministerial Decision No 110998/2006

¹ The Law was ratified in July 2005

regarding a common methodology for the creation of job profiles is considered to be a central and innovative development for VET in Greece.¹

Developing 66 occupational profiles

The process of designing 66 occupational profiles was initiated by EKEPIS in early 2007, with close involvement of the social partners. The occupational profiles cover a multitude of emerging occupations and economic sectors including commerce, tourism, industry and banking. The social partners are actively involved in defining these occupational profiles, the relevant knowledge, skills and competence for each occupation and the learning pathways and training programs that need to be followed in each case. The national level social partners have taken the initiative to coordinate their input for the design of each occupational profile to ensure consistent quality throughout the 66 occupations.

Each profile can extend to the whole range of knowledge, skills and competence gained through education and training required for the specific job profile and in line with existing labour market needs. Priorities for the development of job profiles are justified by existing (and persisting) fast changing job requirements as proposed by employers and employees, as well as national priorities set by the government.²

These profiles will subsequently be accredited and training institutions will then be expected to adapt their curricula in accordance with these occupational profiles. This is a significant initiative for Greece illustrating the involvement of the social partners and experts in validation of non-formal and informal learning and in improving the link between training and the requirements of the labour market.

In line with the legislation, training programmes will be accredited on the condition that they are based on the respective accredited job profile. To date, the following programmes have been accredited under priority conditions:

- Training Programme for Trainers for Trainers for Adults.
- Training Programme for Trainers for Adults.
- Training Programme for Trainers for Support Services Professionals.
- Training Programme for Support Services Professionals.

The accreditation system for knowledge, skills and competence will enter the implementation stage after the implementation of the system for the accreditation of training programs. Acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence will be evaluated and certified upon successful completion of the accredited training program.³

Finally, as already mentioned, a national consultation process is underway between policy makers, social partners, national experts and VET stakeholders more widely, in order to

¹ 2007 Greek national report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport_en.html

² Ibid

³ Ibid

develop a National Qualifications Framework in Greece that will fit within the framework of the EQF and ECVET. The formal educational system, including higher education, has already been classified according to the 8 levels of the European Qualifications Framework.¹

2.3 Existing methods and instruments for the validation of non-formal and informal learning

Currently, upon successful completion of a continuing vocational training program, participants are provided with a certificate of attendance by the accredited Vocational Training Centres (KEK). Such programs are not integrated in the formal VET system and such certificates do not have official state recognition but may have a kind of recognition in the labour market.

The Education Departments of various Ministries and major public corporations also plan vocational in-service training programmes for their own staff. These courses lead to certificates which are taken into account for career development within each Ministry or company.

Informal learning is provided by: the Second Chance Schools for adults who have not completed compulsory education; the Adult Education Centres (KEE); the Parents' Schools (Scholes Goneon); the Centre for Distance Lifelong Education and Training of Adults (KEEENAP). Lifelong learning programmes lead to the acquisition of either a 'Certificate of Training' (this is awarded for programmes that last for up to 75 hours) or a 'Certificate of Lifelong Learning' (awarded for programmes that last for up to 250 hours).

In terms of specific methods for validation, in 2003, the Ministry of Education set up a system of summative assessment, based on examinations to confirm and certify the knowledge of modern languages obtained through non-formal training. The process leads to obtaining the 'National Language Certificate' which is not linked to the formal education system, it mainly targets adults and is recognized as a work qualification. This Certificate has adopted the scale of six levels of language competence proposed by the European Council. It can be obtained by Greek native speakers for foreign languages including English, French, German and Italian, while foreign nationals can obtain certification for their knowledge of Modern Greek.

One of the main norms of the assessment is transparency and for this reason detailed information on the certification method is widely available on the internet and through

¹ 2007 Greek national report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport_en.html

communication with the Ministry and its agencies. The details of the structure and content of the certification procedure are available for the benefit of the language learners, language teachers and employers.

A more recent development is that the System for the Accreditation of Greek Language Competence for Immigrants was established in 2006. The General Secretariat for Adult Education (GSAE) has developed this system which provides for the accreditation and recognition of Greek language competence for immigrants at four levels of competence. Those who successfully complete the final (4th level) of the GSAE's educational programme on Greek language and culture can participate in twice-yearly examinations to obtain a Certificate of Greek Language Competence. This Certificate is a pre-requisite for obtaining a long-stay permit in Greece.

Last but not least, 'Second Chance Schools' was introduced in 1997 with great success, to offer adults who had not completed compulsory education, a second chance to do so. Graduates of the second chance school are awarded a Certificate which is equivalent to the Junior High School Certificate. This Certificate is recognised for employment in the Public Sector and allows holders to proceed to higher secondary general education or to vocational training programmes in IEKs, KEKs, and other structures offering adult training.

Individuals who have skills in using computers can obtain certificates from examination centres. These examinations lead to the acquisition of various licenses, such as the European Computer Driving License (ECDL), which is recognized as a formal qualification in both the private and public sectors. OEEK is responsible for the certification of providers of such training and the issuing of the State Certificate.

There are a number of other Leonardo da Vinci pilot projects in which Greek organisations have been partners. For example, Greece was involved in the work on the direction of Learning Outcomes approach, which may help to lay the foundations for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the future (e.g. Leonardo da Vinci pilots EPO – EuroPostman and COMINTER-International Commerce).

3.0 PRIVATE SECTOR

In relation to the private sector, the Federation of Greek Industries / SEV, the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Foundation for Economic and Industrial Research (IOVE), the Greek Business Management Association (EEDE), et. al., contribute in various ways to the consolidation of a coherent LLL platform (PRAXIS Network, ALBA graduate degrees, etc.). The Social partners are encouraged to be involved in various stages of education and VET, such as the development and implementation of the relevant legal framework, via their participation in the National Council of Education.¹

There is no specific vocational qualifications certification system for assessing and recognising competences acquired through informal or non-formal learning in the private sector. For employers, the absence of a qualifications certification system leads to non-acknowledgement of skills which have been acquired through informal learning.

The following validation of learning acquired through training courses provided outside the formal education system, however, takes place.

- Certification is offered by Private Educational Institutes for courses offered by them but these are not officially recognised by the State. However, certificates of attendance at such courses are an element that is sometimes taken into account by employers to the advantage of candidates who possess such certificates.
- Certain major private companies, including in particular companies in the banking and IT sector, offer certification for the in-house training courses they offer to their own employees.
- There is also some opportunity for acknowledgement of skills via the acquisition of certificates or a licence to exercise certain professions which are issued by a number of agencies.
- The European Computer Driving License (ECDL) etc. is well sought after in Greece and recognised both by public and private sector employers. The number of registered persons in the programme has reached 2.5% of the total population of Greece (this is nearly double the EU average)² indicating a high degree of interest in ECDL etc. in Greece. Similar certificates are also provided by private sector companies for various information technology applications in collaboration with IT multinationals (Microsoft,

¹ 2007 Greek national report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport_en.html

² Source: <http://www.ecdl.gr/ecdlacceptance.aspx>

Oracle etc.) Acquisition of IT basic knowledge and skills is recognized by the Supreme Council for Personnel Selection (ASEP) of the Greek State on the condition that the respective certificates (except those acquired through the formal educational system) are awarded by the following certification bodies accredited by OEEK:

- a) ECDL Hellas S.A. (1.2.2006)
- b) Vellum Global Educational Services (22.2.2006)
- c) Infotest (22.2.2006)
- d) ICT Hellas A.E. (22.2.2006)
- e) KEY-CERT (5.4.2006)
- f) ACTA A.E. (17.5.2006)

The learning modules are a) word processing, b) spreadsheets and c) internet services.

The certificates awarded are valid for three (3) years from the day of issue.

3.1 Examples of individual companies

The social partners from Greece have also recommended a number of individual companies that have been engaged in recognising and certifying non-formal and informal learning. As an example, Aluminium de Grèce SA¹ has established a 'Continuing Progress System' where employees record their own existing knowledge, skills and competences through team discussions and through the personal assessment processes. In this way, each employee is closely involved in determining their own and their teams' future skills needs, helping to set out the necessary training which then takes place either in-house or outside the company.

Branches of private companies offering professional certification linked to international sets of standards have also recently started to operate in Greece. As an example, the Staregister company started operating in Greece in 2006 and has since developed an accreditation scheme for professions such as ISO19011Management Systems' Inspectors and for Consultants on ISO19011Management Systems.

¹ Based on information from the 'Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications', Fourth Follow up report, 2006, ETUC, UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP and on brief telephone discussion with the company's Education Dept

3.2 Sectoral projects developed with EU funding

A number of pilot projects within the EQUAL and LEONARDO programmes include elements relevant to the development of methods and tools for the validation of skills and competences in different sectors.

In the Greek context, projects for the ICT and environment sectors have been particularly popular. Within the framework of the European Community Initiative EQUAL (1st cycle), four Equal projects (“Technomatheia” promoting the distance accreditation of skills in SMEs, “ENVI-E” for the accreditation of professional qualifications in the environmental sector, ‘Spartakos’ for the support of unemployed through the accreditation of their qualifications and ‘Ifestos’ for the use of accredited technical skills as a tool to fight racism) took place from 2001-2005. Further, all of the main VET bodies had an active involvement in the development of the National Thematic Network (NTN) titled “Accreditation of Vocational Qualifications and Skills”. The NTN actually addressed the need for developing an accreditation system for occupational qualifications (knowledge, skills and competencies), which would be based on job profiles, in response to the needs of the labour market (small & medium sized enterprises). The outcome was policy recommendations emanating from the pilot application in certain professions. These highlighted the need for a comprehensive and integrated accreditation system, which would be competence-based according to national occupational profiles and standards and certain were incorporated into the Greek accreditation framework. This can be considered a case of positive impact on policy-making.

Within the framework of EQUAL (2nd cycle: 2005-2008), a project is being carried out on the accreditation of educational packages and the recognition of knowledge acquired through work in IT applications and in technical occupations.

The Leonardo project EPO “European Postmen”, which started in 2004 is co-ordinated by the Hellenic Post Office and involving Greece Continuing Training Centres as well as the Vocational Education and Training Organisation¹, aims at developing a common competence profile for European postmen involving 15 units and for two different skills levels.

¹ This is an independent organisation that belongs to the Ministry of Education.

4.0 THE THIRD SECTOR

An example of a self-standing validation system of summative assessment is that of a major non-profit association, the Hellenic Business Administration Corporation (E.E.D.E.)¹. This certification is not part of any formal validation system, but the certificates in question enjoy the recognition of employers. Hence, the validation system offers 'social recognition' of the training received. This is because EEDE is widely known for offering quality non-formal training. EEDE offers a number of 'Post-Graduate Programmes'. The Programmes recognise prior learning, since they are open to individuals who have either a University degree or possess 8 years of work experience.

Over 2,000 individuals have participated in the EEDE 'Post-Graduate Programme on Business Administration' since 1989. The Programme lasts for one year and there are 4 thematic cycles. A round of examinations is held after the end of each thematic cycle and there is a requirement to submit a dissertation at the end of the course. If the results of the 4 examination rounds and the dissertation are satisfactory, a certificate is issued to the participant, certifying the knowledge gained and recognises the holder as 'possessing extraordinary management knowledge and ability'. This certification is not part of any formal system, is self-standing and is recognised in the labour market by employers.

¹ The Hellenic Business Administration Corporation (E.E.D.E) is a non-profit association but fees are charged for the postgraduate programmes it delivers.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

For cultural reasons, educational attainment is very important for younger generations of Greeks. The Greek society would be very receptive to any initiatives aiming to validate informal and non-formal learning and that would help clarify the complex environment of adult learning in Greece. A national qualifications' certification system has not yet been developed in Greece but the issue is being widely discussed and significant developments have been taking place in recent years. In the Greek legalistic society, it is important that the foundation of relevant legislative provisions have been set in order to allow the creation of systems for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning.

EKEPIS, established in 1997, has set in train a number of developments for the validation of non-formal and informal learning including developing the occupational profiles on which the continuing training programmes are built. Early 2007 saw the start of a process to design 66 occupational profiles in close cooperation with the social partners. Other bodies have also been active in the sphere of validation, such as OEEK, which is the responsible authority for the certification of qualifications.

Another positive recent development is that the provisions of the ESSEEKA framework law started to be implemented in 2006. This law had been passed in 2003 but had remained inactive since then. This law sets out a framework for better co-ordinating initial and continuing vocational training and linking both systems with the labour market and is expected to help in the direction of developing a national system for occupational qualifications.

The national validation and certification system of Foreign Language competence and proficiency which has been in place since 2003 has been operating successfully. A system for accrediting the Greek Language Competence of Immigrants was also put in place in 2006. European funding, through the Equal and Leonardo da Vinci programmes, has supported a number of pilot projects with relation to the development of validation. European (e.g. European Computer Driving Licence) and private sector (e.g. Microsoft, Oracle etc) systems for validating computer competences are now being used successfully in Greece and have been enthusiastically received both by adult learners and employers.