

equal class

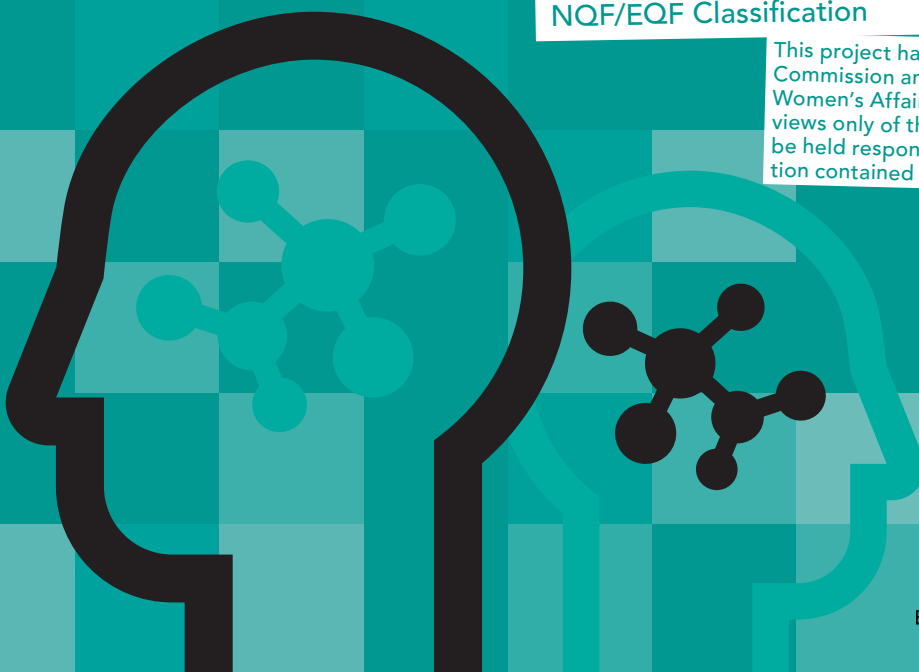
Taking relevant professional experience into account

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in the EQUAL-CLASS countries

Summary Report

Engineers Qualified in Higher Non-University VET Institutions – Providing Arguments and Evidence for NQF/EQF Classification

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (BMBWF). The content of this publication reflects the views only of the author, and neither the Commission nor BMBWF can be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Project Information:

Project title: Engineers Qualified in Higher Non-University VET
Institutions – Providing Arguments and Evidence for
NQF/EQF Classification

Project acronym: EQUAL-CLASS

Programme: Lifelong Learning Programme, Leonardo da Vinci

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1. Introduction

EQUAL-CLASS is a European Commission-funded project which aims to analyse and compare qualifications in the field of **mechatronics, electronics/electrical engineering** across different countries, with particular focus on their **classification within National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs)** and the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**.

One facet of the work of the EQUAL-CLASS project was to explore the context of the **validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL)** in five countries: Austria, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, and Switzerland. Learning that takes place outside formal education and training systems and institutions – i.e. outside traditional school-based education – has been attributed greater significance in recent times. The aim of validation of non-formal and informal learning is to make this learning visible and usable for individuals, for their professional career or personal life. One of the central considerations is how learning outcomes acquired outside formal education can be taken into account when allocating qualifications to National Qualifications Frameworks.

This report summarises the results of the research carried out by EQUAL-CLASS project partners to explore the context of validation of non-formal and informal learning in their respective countries, with particular focus on the link to National Qualifications Frameworks.

This is a condensed summary of work carried out in the EUQAL-CLASS project.

For more comprehensive documentation, visit the project website: www.equal-class-eqf.eu

Non-formal and informal learning refers to learning that takes place outside formal education and training institutions, for example at work, during leisure activities, and at home. **Validation** of non-formal and informal learning is based on an assessment of the individual's learning outcomes and may result in the issue of a certificate or diploma.

Based on: Cedefop (2009). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, Luxembourg

2. Methodology

The results described in this report are based on research work conducted by the EQUAL-CLASS project partners. This work was carried out in two stages. The first consisted of **desk research** undertaken by the project partners. Using on a common template, researchers were asked to provide an overview of the national context for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the role and impact of validation at national level, and to identify examples of good practice of validation arrangements that could be of interest to (non-academic) engineers.

In the second stage, in early 2014 project partners conducted **expert interviews** to obtain additional information on possible examples of good practice and the link between validation and National Qualifications Frameworks.

3. Policy background and country developments

Although a topic of discussion for some time, the issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning has in recent years been elevated up the political agenda – both at European and national level – and has formed a crucial component of several European policy initiatives, such as the respective Council Recommendation of 2012.

The Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2012:

This document calls for Member States to, by 2018, establish arrangements at national level to enable individuals to validate the knowledge, skills and competences they have acquired through non-formal and informal learning. These arrangements should also allow individuals to obtain a full or partial qualification on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences.

The link between validation and the NQF

In many countries, the discussion on validation arrangements has been closely linked to NQF development. However, the actual links between validation and the National Qualifications Framework remain weak in the five countries surveyed. An examination of developments across Europe reveals a very similar picture, highlighting that the link between validation arrangements and NQFs is either tenuous or does not exist at all in many countries. France, where only those qualifications that are open to validation are eligible for inclusion in the national register of qualifications, is the exception to this general trend.

Country developments towards comprehensive national validation strategies

None of the surveyed countries currently has a comprehensive validation strategy in place but, as research shows, significant developments have been reported in all five countries. The results of this study indicate an increasing trend towards the development of national validation strategies, both in the five countries studied and generally across Europe. The results also, however, suggest that the opportunities available to (non-academic) engineers to have their non-formally and informally acquired knowledge, skills and competences validated, are limited. Indeed, very few relevant practical examples could be identified throughout the research.

- In **Austria**, a comprehensive national strategy for validation of non-formal and informal learning is currently under development. This new strategy will be linked to both the ongoing process of the development of the NQF and the evolution of the Austrian Strategy for Lifelong Learning.
- In **Germany**, current validation arrangements can be described as a smorgasbord of local, regional, and national approaches, mostly below the legislative level. Significant process has been made in the last few years towards developing a national framework or system for validation.
- In **Lithuania**, several changes have been made to the legal framework in recent years in order to pave the way for the development of a national validation system.

- In **Switzerland**, the development of systematic validation arrangements has progressed slowly but steadily in recent years. Currently, only in the VET system are validation procedures organised in a structured manner, particularly at upper-secondary level.
- **Portugal** is one of the few countries that has an established, mature (but not comprehensive) national validation system with a significant number of participants in validation arrangements.

In several countries across Europe – including Germany and Austria for example – it has been observed that validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning are a smorgasbord of different processes and initiatives that are frequently project-based, and which often lack coherence between one another.

Some countries reported that one of the key challenges is to raise people's awareness of the validation procedures available. This is particularly problematic in Lithuania, but is also an issue in Germany.

Taking relevant professional experience into account

One of the specific aims of this research was to take stock of existing validation arrangements (in particular those for engineers) through which relevant professional experience can be taken into account to obtain a new qualification, possibly at a higher NQF/EQF level. One example is the professional engineering title 'Ingenieur' in Austria:

Current reform of the professional engineering title 'Ingenieur' (Austria)

After they have obtained at least three years of relevant professional experience, graduates of engineering VET colleges have the opportunity to apply for the 'Ingenieur' title. This procedure is not based on any defined standards, and the 'Ingenieur' title cannot be considered a qualification in the context of the National Qualifications Framework.

This process is currently being reformed. Learning outcomes (standards) are being defined and the procedure for the issue of the 'Ingenieur' title is being revised. The aim is to transform the 'Ingenieur' title into a qualification that is eligible for inclusion in the National Qualifications Framework. No information is currently available on the possible NQF level of such a qualification.

This specific research task has proven to be more difficult than anticipated for several reasons. Firstly, NQFs in Europe are at less advanced stage of development than was expected at the inception of this project. In Austria and Switzerland, for example, qualifications have yet have to be classified in the national frameworks and therefore no information is currently available as to which NQF level they will be assigned to. In addition, as stated above, the link between validation arrangements and National Qualifications Frameworks is weak in many countries.

Secondly, it is difficult to take stock of all relevant validation arrangements in one country. In several nations validation arrangements take the form of a collection of different initiatives, projects, and measures – some bottom-up, some top-down – and

even validation experts are not always aware of every single recognition opportunity available in a country.

Thirdly, it appears that, based on the desk research and interviews undertaken, there are few examples of validation procedures available which relate to the target group of this project - skilled professionals in the field of engineering. In many cases, validation initiatives primarily target the lesser-qualified and unemployed, as these individuals are those considered most in need of possibilities for validation.

3 About the EQUAL-CLASS project

The EQUAL-CLASS project studies qualifications in the field of **mechatronics** and **electrical engineering/electronics** that can be obtained in higher non-university VET¹ institutions or comparable institutions in Austria, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, and Switzerland.

The qualifications are examined from three different perspectives – learning outcomes, learners, and graduates – with particular focus on their **NQF/EQF classification**, e.g. through

- the implementation of “Remote Laboratories”, i.e. online laboratories used to remotely conduct real experiments in order to learn more about learners’ knowledge, skills and competence;
- an online survey among graduates to learn more about their occupations and positions in the labour market.

4 Further information

This summary report summarises the research carried out by the EQUAL-CLASS project on validation of non-formal and informal learning in a condensed form. Further documentation is available from the project website.

For more information about the EQUAL-CLASS project, visit <http://www.equal-class-eqf.eu/>.

Project reports and other results are available in the ‘Results’ section of the website: <http://www.equal-class-eqf.eu/results/>

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Comparing qualifications in mechatronics & electrical engineering/electronics

European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels 5-6
in Austria, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal and Switzerland

3 perspectives

LEARNING OUTCOMES (THEORETICAL – DESCRIPTIVE)

Structured description and comparison of qualifications based on learning outcomes

- Using adapted methodology from the 'ZOOM' project
- Comparing qualification profiles
- Comparing the assessment of knowledge, skills and competence

LEARNERS (PRACTICAL – PERFORMANCE TESTING)

'Remote Laboratories'

- Online laboratories to remotely conduct real experiments
- Testing learners' PLC* knowledge, skills and competence
- Learners in the participating countries have to solve the same programming exercises online.

* PLC = Programmable Logic Controller

GRADUATES (LABOUR MARKET)

Alumni survey

- Comparing graduates' occupations and positions in the labour market
- Web-based questionnaire in four different languages
 - Job level and status
 - Degree of responsibility
 - Career prospects
 - Type of tasks executed

How can learning outcomes acquired in the workplace be taken into account?

- Desk research & interviews
- Validation and recognition of non-formal/informal learning
 - Higher NQF/EQF level?

Can the results provide additional evidence for the classification of qualifications in the National/European Qualifications Framework?

Aims: Providing and testing a set of methodological tools

- for transnational comparison
- for the creation of transparency and
- for raising the understanding of a qualification

Further information: www.equal-class-eqf.eu

Duration of the project: 10/2012 – 09/2014

Partners from: Austria, Germany, Lithuania, The Netherlands,
Norway, Portugal and Switzerland

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