

Good practice in validation of learning outcomes

Malta

Qualification "Block Laying"



Good practise in validation of learning outcomes. Malta. Qualification "Block Laying"

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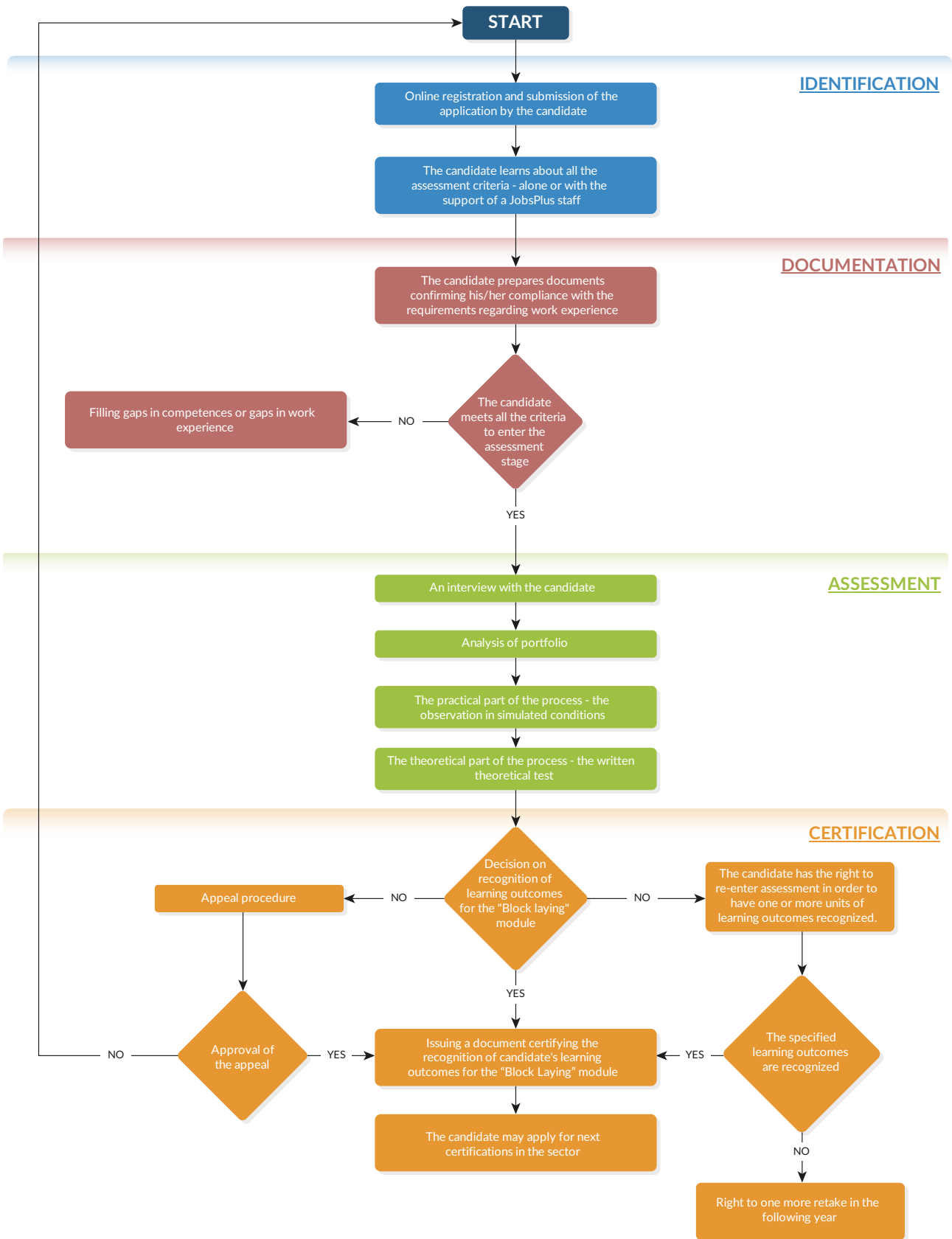
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1. Country, institution name

- Malta
- National Commission for Further and Higher Education, Jobsplus

2. Institution website

<https://www.ncfhe.gov.mt>

3. Qualifications

Award in "Block Laying", part of the building and construction qualifications

Level 3 of the Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (MQF)

Level 3 of the European Qualifications Framework

4. Short description of the validation process

This good practice describes the validation process of the "Block Laying" module, which is performed by Jobsplus, a public organisation addressing the needs of the labour market and its actors: employers, employees and job seekers. Jobsplus cooperates in this area with an awarding body, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), which also oversees the validation performed by Jobsplus.

In accordance with Cedefop's guidelines, the validation process in Malta involves 4 stages:

- identification,
- documentation,
- assessment,

The validation process can be undertaken by individuals who have worked for at least three years in the construction industry and can confirm the possession of learning outcomes achieved through informal workplace learning. This three-year work experience is a condition for the validation of those qualifications that have been assigned a level in the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF). However, for those qualifications that do not have an assigned MQF level, the candidate may undertake validation if he/she has a minimum of one year of experience in the field.

Maltese law does not rule out obtaining a full qualification in the field of construction, but this is not practiced. Validation is conducted for individual parts of the qualification, i.e. modules. The "Block Laying" module is one of the building and construction qualifications, which also includes such modules as "Plastering", "Tile Laying", etc. Two institutions from the construction sector are involved in validation:

- NCFHE, which is responsible for developing the assessment criteria for a given qualification and national occupational standards, as well as for issuing certificates, and
- Jobsplus, which performs validation.

Importantly, this is also a system in which the confirmation of competences is clearly separated from acquiring authorisation to perform the work described in the attained qualification by being issued a Construction Industry Skill Card.

5. Detailed description of the validation process

Comment

The validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in Malta is regulated by subsidiary legislation (Subsidiary Legislation No. 327.432, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning Regulations, 2012). These regulations govern the validation of qualifications that are up to level 5 of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF), which has a total of 8 levels. The validation process takes place on the basis of National Occupational Standards developed for NCFHE by sector representatives organised in Sector Skills Units. For higher MQF levels (6–8), validation and the recognition of prior learning is the responsibility of individual continuing and higher education institutions operating on the basis of other regulations and requirements.

If validation is successful, the candidate receives a certificate issued by the NCFHE confirming competences within the “Block Laying” module in the field of construction.

This certification allows the candidate to apply for the Construction Industry Skill Card (CISC) established by the Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) in Malta. After a transitional period, this document becomes a mandatory part of the Construction Industry Skill Card system in Malta. Cardholders are required to update it every 5 years with certain documents: a certificate of current health status, a certificate of updated knowledge and skills in health and safety awareness, and a certificate of completion of a professional improvement course in construction. This is to ensure the highest quality standards and compliance with occupational health and safety regulations in the industry.

5.1. Information and Counselling

Both NCFHE and Jobsplus provide information about the validation process. Information can be found on the Jobsplus website about certificates that can be obtained through validation, commonly known as trade testing. A candidate's proficiency and skill level is assessed in a number of professions. The information from both institutions is similar; the difference is that the NCFHE is the awarding body for the “Block Laying” module.

Counselling services are provided by Jobsplus. It is targeted to job seekers (including employed persons) to assist in further developing their skills through training or employment in accordance with the needs of the individual and the labour market. Counselling includes career planning, competence diagnosis, competence gap identification and mentoring. At Jobsplus, the emphasis is on career guidance and an individualised approach to clients by matching counsellors to clients and developing individual action plans.

To proceed with validation, an on-line application form is completed, which is available in two language versions – English and Maltese. If necessary, Jobsplus employees will assist candidates with both the application and subsequent stages. The institution is based in many towns and villages in Malta and Gozo (the second largest island after Malta in the Maltese archipelago), which ensures broad access to counselling and validation itself. Jobsplus offices provide information on the details of the process, its costs and the requirements for candidates.

In addition, Jobsplus offers introductory sessions during which potential candidates receive detailed information about the validation process.

If needed, Jobsplus staff also support candidates in gathering evidence about the required three years of professional experience.

Once a candidate has registered, he/she is given access to an electronic version of the qualification's manual. It contains information on the required documents and validation rules. There is also a shortened version of the National Occupational Standards in English and Maltese, which also serve as the criteria for assessing learning outcomes.

This information is provided in a simplified version to facilitate understanding by those with a low level of literacy skills. It should be noted, however, that these skills are essential in the validation process itself. The methods used in the process, such as a written test, require the candidate to be able to read and write at

least at an elementary level. Depending on the qualification, action may be taken to adapt the validation to the needs of those with reading and writing difficulties.

5.2. Identification of Learning Outcomes

As a rule, candidates identify their learning outcomes on their own, comparing their experience with the assessment criteria presented in the manual.

5.3. Documentacion of Learning Outcomes

The statutory requirement of three years of professional experience means that an official employment history must be prepared and presented. This applies to the professional experience gained both in Malta and abroad – there are no restrictions with respect to where the experience was acquired.

Documentation of professional experience is sent to Jobsplus before entering the assessment stage. Examples of documents that can be presented include:

- evidence of work activity,
- references, statements from colleagues, witness testimony,
- documents – reports, activity summaries, occupational health and safety procedures, employee instructions,
- photographic documentation,
- evidence based on work experience that was not observed by the assessor at the candidate's workplace.

The inclusion of a document confirming the assessment of competences in safety and health awareness is required.

After completing and sending Jobsplus the documents indicated above, the candidate waits for information on whether or not he/she qualified for the assessment stage and its organisational details. The applications sent to Jobsplus are registered by the validation coordinator, known as the Trade Testing Coordinator, who, together with the validation committee, known as the Trade Testing Board, reviews the portfolio provided by the candidate and starts planning the process, taking into account the experience and needs of the applicant.

5.4. Assessment of Learning Outcomes

The assessment, known as trade testing, is conducted when a sufficient number of candidates apply for the process and send documents or, if this does not happen, after a maximum of 6 months after an application is submitted by a candidate. In this case, the Trade Testing Coordinator (TTC):

- sets a date for the candidate to meet with the Trade Testing Board (TTB),
- reserves the venues where validation will take place,
- sends a letter to the validation candidate(s), informing about the date and venue of the assessment, no later than 15 days before the validation is to take place.

To assess the learning outcomes, assessors use such methods as: the interview, observation in simulated or real-life conditions and theory test. They also analyse the portfolio with the documents collected by the candidate.

Assessment consists of three parts, each of which is conducted using a different method.

First, the TTB conducts an interview with the candidate, which takes place in the Jobsplus office. During the interview, the assessors confirm the candidate's knowledge and discuss issues relating to the documents collected in the portfolio that was previously prepared and sent.

The second part of the process is the practical assessment, in which the observation in simulated conditions method is used, which reproduces the working environment. It is also possible to organise an observation in

real-life conditions, i.e. in the candidate's workplace. This part takes place a week after the interview. During the observation, a candidate must perform the tasks specified by the assessors.

The third and final element of the process is the written assessment (written theory test), during which the candidates' knowledge of the construction industry is confirmed.

In order to confirm possession of the learning outcomes comprising the "Block Laying" module, a candidate must show that he/she possesses **all the learning outcomes** (knowledge, skills and social competences) listed in the National Occupational Standard. The TTB uses an already prepared matrix for this purpose, which is developed in order to reliably assess all candidates.

5.5. Certification

As a result of the assessment, the candidate receives information from Jobsplus about the validation outcome. If all the assessment criteria have been confirmed, the candidate also receives a certificate issued by NCFHE confirming the sets of learning outcomes for the "Block Laying" module. Jobsplus also informs him/her about the possibility of forwarding the documents (positive validation decision together with the certificate) directly to the Building Industry Consultative Council in case the candidate wants to apply for the Construction Industry Skill Card.

6. Validation methods

[Comment](#)

The following methods are used in the validation process:

- interview (oral theory test and interview with the Trade Testing Board),
- analysis of documents gathered in the portfolio,
- observation in simulated conditions or possibly observation in real-life conditions at the workplace,
- written theory test.

6.1. Interview

This is one of the basic methods used in validation. The Trade Testing Board confirms that the candidate has met the conditions to qualify for the process and has sufficient professional experience to participate in validation. This is usually done by assessing the portfolio prepared by the candidate. It is worth noting that the Trade Testing Board is free to contact the institutions indicated in the documents to confirm the described experience or the candidate's participation in training.

After confirming that the candidate has the required experience, the TTB focuses on assessing the candidate's competences: it assesses the candidate's knowledge, skills and social competence for the "Block Laying" module. During the interview, the following are checked, among others:

- interpersonal skills,
- communication skills,
- technical knowledge,
- the ability to describe and discuss one's expertise.

Each assessor completes his/her own assessment sheet. After the interview, the result is calculated based on the average of the marks awarded by each assessor.

6.2. Analysis of Documents in the Portfolio

As previously indicated, the TTB analyses and discusses with the candidate the previously prepared documents in the portfolio during the interview. The portfolio contains documents, which are to confirm that a person has achieved the necessary learning outcomes through non-formal education and informal learning.

Each portfolio is unique and can be designed to reflect a candidate's personality and preferences. By developing their portfolios, candidates can prove not only their competences confirmed by the collected evidence, but also their creativity, accuracy or organisational skills. The portfolio is also an excellent tool that can be used by candidates for self-reflection, including an assessment of their own skills.

6.3. Observation in Simulated Conditions or Real-Life Conditions

The candidate's performance of tasks that meet the assessment criteria is the subject of the observation. As a rule, the observation occurs in simulated conditions, which reflect the work environment in the closest possible way. However, it can be conducted in real-life conditions, i.e. in the actual workplace of the candidate.

The documentation needed to conduct this part (task descriptions, detailed instructions, diagrams or evaluation criteria) is prepared by the Trade Testing Board. The documentation should describe at a sufficiently detailed level the requirements to be met, including information on materials and equipment. The materials are intended to facilitate the course of the process, control of the process, as well as the assessment of the candidates' results, therefore the TTB sends them to the candidates before the process is started.

The TTB also selects and prepares the venue where the observation will be conducted. It ensures that the venue has the necessary health and safety conditions. Where products are produced as part of the validation, Jobsplus is obliged to keep them for three months, among other things, in case the candidate questions their assessment.

6.4. Theory test

A theory test is used to check the candidate's level of masonry knowledge. It consists of:

- multiple choice questions,
- short open questions,
- case studies,
- short essays.

As a general rule, the test is given in English, but on request, it can be provided in the Maltese language. Candidates can also answer in Maltese on the English language version of the test. In exceptional cases, a theory test can be conducted orally.

As with other methods, the questions and the answer keys for the theory test are prepared by the Trade Testing Board. Its members have to make sure that the tools designed are capable of checking all the assessment criteria that are checked through the theory test and that they have been prepared in a way ensuring their reliability in checking the candidate's knowledge, skills and social competences for the learning outcomes confirmed by this method.

The theory test is conducted by 1–2 assessors, depending on the number of people participating in the validation. The assessors monitor the test. They make sure that the candidates work independently and also prepare the test in such a way that the candidates have no difficulties in understanding its content.

7. Validation results

Persons who have successfully completed validation receive a certificate confirming their learning outcomes for the “Block Laying” module at level 3 of the MQF. The other modules of qualifications in construction are assigned to levels 1–5 of the MQF.

Individuals who fail to confirm that they have the learning outcomes for the module can undergo validation again and then only those learning outcomes or assessment criteria that the candidate failed to confirm the

first time are checked. The date and venue of the second validation is provided by Jobsplus to the candidates interested in undergoing this process.

All candidates who did not received a positive validation decision are encouraged to address their competence gaps in the areas of the unconfirmed learning outcomes. Candidates can take advantage of further training courses organised by Jobsplus or other organisations or through workplace practice. In addition, after receiving a validation decision, candidates have the right to receive additional information on the outcome as well as guidance on the areas needing improvement that may be helpful prior to attempting a re-assessment.

8. Human resources

The persons involved in validation include:

- a Trade Testing Coordinator,
- members of a Trade Testing Board – the assessors.

Assessors check whether the applicants for a document confirming possession of specific learning outcomes meet all the assessment criteria. Assessors recommend to the Sector Skills Units, through their assessment, whether individual candidates should receive this certification or a part of qualification.

The Trade Testing Board consists of three assessors, including a chairperson and two technical members. These individuals usually are from the academic community and the labour market, to ensure that the assessment includes both theoretical and practical elements.

The function of an assessor can be performed by individuals who are trained in validation and have knowledge of:

- the sector in which the validation is being conducted,
- the validation process,
- the validation methods used in this process.

Assessors cannot have a personal interest in the validation results.

Assessors – the members of the Trade Testing Board – are nominated by Jobsplus and appointed by the minister responsible for Jobsplus. In some cases, the appointment is made after consultation with representatives of employers and vocational education and training institutions. The assessors are appointed by the Sector Skills Units with the approval of the Sector Skills Committee.

9. Organizational and material conditions

The validation process generally takes 3 weeks, with one week for each component. The interview and written theory test take place in Jobsplus offices. The practical test can take place in the Jobsplus office or in one of the workshops prepared for validation by vocational training institutions in Malta, namely the Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology and the Institute of Tourism Studies.

Validation is divided into three parts, corresponding to the methods used. Interviews usually last from 20 to 45 minutes. Observation under simulated or real-life conditions takes about 4 hours. The duration of the written theory test is determined by the Board and should be adjusted to the number and difficulty of the tasks, but should not last less than 1 hour and more than 3 hours. The Trade Testing Coordinator ensures that the test starts and ends on time.

Any materials or tools needed to perform validation tasks, depending on the candidate's preference, may be brought by the candidates themselves or provided by Jobsplus.

10. Quality assurance

Sector Skills Units play an important role in the quality assurance of validation through their development of the National Occupational Standards for key sectors. This is one of the most important activities in the context of the functioning and quality assurance of validation, as well as for the system as a whole. These Units bring together experts representing different stakeholders in each sector. The process of developing occupational standards begins by identifying the areas in the sectors concerned that need to be included and by identifying external experts to develop these descriptions and standards in an appropriate, reliable and sector-specific manner. The prepared documents are reviewed by the Sector Skills Units, who study them and propose changes. Before the standards are published, the development process may involve several similar rounds. The aim is to create quality materials that respond to the needs of the market and sector.

Sector Skills Units also play an important role in designing validation and selecting the entity that will be authorised to conduct it.

In addition to the regulations governing validation, NCFHE and Jobsplus also have developed internal materials. Handbooks and manuals explain the process to candidates interested in undertaking validation and provide guidance to validation practitioners.

In addition, NCFHE has developed a handbook for external experts on developing descriptions of occupational standards and informational brochures for candidates. Jobsplus, in turn, has developed a manual for assessors who confirm learning outcomes, as well as a template for reporting on the internal quality assurance system for the validation process.

10.1. Appeal Procedure

A person who has not validated all of the learning outcomes for the “Block Laying” module receives a negative validation decision. However, he/she can appeal the result by submitting an appeal to Jobsplus within 10 working days of receiving the validation decision.

If the appeal results in a change in the validation decision to a positive one, a document confirming all learning outcomes is issued. If the appeal is rejected and the candidate continues to be interested in confirming his/her learning outcomes for the “Block Laying” module, guidance can be obtained from the Trade Testing Board on the areas that need to be improved before they are re-assessed.

11. Financing

Validation is financed in Malta by public funds, including national funds, as well as candidates’ own resources.

Public funding covers:

- the costs of developing National Occupational Standards by the Sector Skills Units at NCFHE,
- the remuneration of NCFHE employees who coordinate the work of Sector Skills Units,
- and the partial funding of organising validation, including compensation for Jobsplus employees.

Public funds for the organisation of the validation process are transferred to NCFHE and Jobsplus as part of the annual budget allocation for each entity.

When applying for validation, candidates must pay a fee, which in 2019 was €34.95. These funds are intended to partially cover the costs of organising the validation process, including the remuneration of Jobsplus staff involved in validation counselling and assessing learning outcomes. Persons registered as unemployed are exempt from validation fees.

12. Context of good practice

The NCFHE was established on September 14, 2012 as a result of amendments to the Education Act, which came into force on August 1, 2012. The NCFHE is an advisory body to the Ministry of Education and its main functions include:

- accrediting programmes and institutions in the field of lifelong learning and higher education,
- ensuring the quality of the services provided,
- recognising qualifications,
- validating non-formal education and informal learning,
- commissioning research on the directions of the activities being undertaken.

Following the enactment of the law governing validation, NCFHE signed agreements with Jobsplus and BICC, under which validation was entrusted to Jobsplus. Since then, on the basis of the validation decisions provided to candidates by Jobsplus, NCFHE has issued about 500 certificates (with assigned MQF levels) confirming the possession of learning outcomes required for different qualifications in various professions. In 2018, NCFHE signed a similar agreement with the Institute of Tourism Studies, authorising it to be the validation institution for qualifications in the hospitality and tourism sector.

NCFHE is a member of ENQA (The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), an association working on quality assurance in higher education. It also acts as the National Contact Point for the European Qualifications Framework.

In recent years, NCFHE has also undertaken many activities to promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning at the national and EU levels. It has organised a number of events and conferences to increase access to information about the processes, strengthen their transparency, and contribute to the development of local practitioners and their competences.

Another activity is the continuous improvement of the system by the Sector Skills Units, which regularly meet to review processes and introduce eventual activities for their improvement. NCFHE also cooperates with the labour market and takes into account the feedback received from its representatives.

A National Skills Council (NSC) has also been established to analyse the skills needs of Maltese workers. Based on the results of a diagnosis, the National Skills Council will be able to guide the work of the Sector Skills Units so that the actions taken are in line with labour market needs.

13. Comments

Validation solutions in Malta are constantly being developed and integrated in new industries. However, the funds allocated for this purpose are still limited. NCFHE coordinates the Sector Skills Units that develop and publish National Occupational Standards. Given that salaries for members of these teams are low, it is difficult to attract local experts to engage in this process. More funding would also help disseminate information about the concept and mechanisms of the validation of non-formal education and informal learning in local communities.

Another observed need is the continuous development of employees involved in validation: NCFHE and Jobsplus employees, members of the Sector Skills Units, as well as guidance and counselling professionals. Building and maintaining a local expert base would provide a stable foundation for a high quality validation process.

An important challenge is also to create opportunities to apply validated modules and sets of learning outcomes in employment or further training. Solutions should be designed to make it easier for those undergoing validation to accumulate and transfer credits. Following the introduction of such solutions as linking validation to the MQF and using the language of learning outcomes, further development of the qualifications system in Malta should focus on this objective.

At the same time, quality assurance mechanisms need to be established and further developed, as well as training for education providers and employers, which would certainly raise awareness of the qualifications system and open up new opportunities for those who are successful in the validation process.

Comments

the validation of non-formal and informal learning

The validation of non-formal and informal learning

In Poland, we refer to the validation process as “validation of learning outcomes”, as it may encompass all knowledge, skills and social competences (including those attained in formal education).

assessment consists of three parts

Assessment consists of three parts

Malta has one exception to the rule of the three parts of the assessment stage – oral, practical and written. This is in the case of the pre-school management qualification (a qualification at level 5 of the Malta Qualifications Framework). There is no practical assessment for this qualification and more attention is given to the interview, i.e. the oral assessment, where candidates are assessed in managerial, leadership and finance-related competences (e.g. budget planning).

the questions and the answer keys for the theory test are prepared by the Trade Testing Board

the questions and the answer keys for the theory test are prepared by the Trade Testing Board

There is an exception to this rule when the Trade Testing Board considers an already existing validation tool from another source as sufficient, e.g. a test form, a model of another written form. In this case, it is possible to use such a tool provided that it applies to all candidates.