Validation and certification of informal and non-formal learning in Finland

The importance of validating and certifying informal and non-formal learning experiences has been a topic of discussion since approximately 20 years. Certificates, diplomas, recommendations or assessment letters can provide advantages in applications for internships, scholarships and jobs, and they can be considered to increase the general self-esteem of participants.

Validation and certification of informal and non-formal learning in Finland is a process that allows individuals to demonstrate their skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training, such as in work, hobbies, or volunteer activities. Validation can also lead to a partial or full qualification, or recognition of prior learning for further studies or career development.

In Finland, validation of non-formal and informal learning has gone through relatively profound changes since the 2016 Inventory. In 2015, planning of a major VET (Vocational Education and Training) reform commenced and was implemented from 1st January 2018. According to the VET Act[1], VET aims to:

- maintain the population's vocational competences.
- provide opportunity to demonstrate competence regardless of the way it has been acquired.
- develop working life and industry and meet their skills needs.
- improve employment.
- provide entrepreneurship capabilities.
- provide skills to maintain one's working capacity.
- support lifelong learning and professional development.
- support the growth of students into good, balanced and educated individuals and members of society.
- provide students with skills and knowledge needed to ensure capabilities to continue studies, professional development, hobbies and personality development.

A second big development has been the implementation of the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules – FiNQF - in March 2017 based on a Government Proposal to Parliament for an Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules (2016). Finland was one of the last of the EU countries to implement and enforce its NQF.

However, there is no one single law regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning, but laws and regulations for each field of education define validation separately. These fields include basic education, general upper secondary education, vocational education and training and higher education. The core message of the legislation is that validation of non-formal and informal learning is a subjective right of the individual and the competences of an individual should be validated regardless of when and where they have been acquired[2,3]. Validation is based on the principle that full and partial competence-based qualifications can be awarded irrespective of how and where the skills have been acquired[2]. Validation is also supported by a uniform quality assurance system for vocational adult education and training[2].

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[1]https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=86177#:~:text=Act%20on%20Vocational%20Education%20(630%2F1998).,-Country%3A&text=Abstract%2FCitation%3A,or%20to%20become%20self%2Demployed.

[2] https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/finland/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning.

[3] https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/finland/64-validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning.

In Finland, only formal education providers can give a formal certificate or diploma for a qualification through validation in the Finnish system[4]. The third sector organisations (for example adult education centres) provide their own certificates[4], where the acquired competencies may be the same as in the national qualification requirements and formal education providers validate those. Many third sector organisations are active in developing Open Badges in order to validate the competences gained in the world of associations, voluntary work, scouting, etc. For instance, TIEKE Finnish Information Society Development Centre, a non-profit organisation aiming to develop, improve and support the information society and all its digital endeavours,[5] provide *Competitive Skills Open Badges*, a comprehensive model for recognising digital skills. The badge constellation contains five levels to recognise digital skills. The badges are aimed at students, teachers and educators, working life, non-formal adult education personnel and customers or any citizen. The five levels are equivalent to levels of competence in vocational education – from satisfactory to excellent.

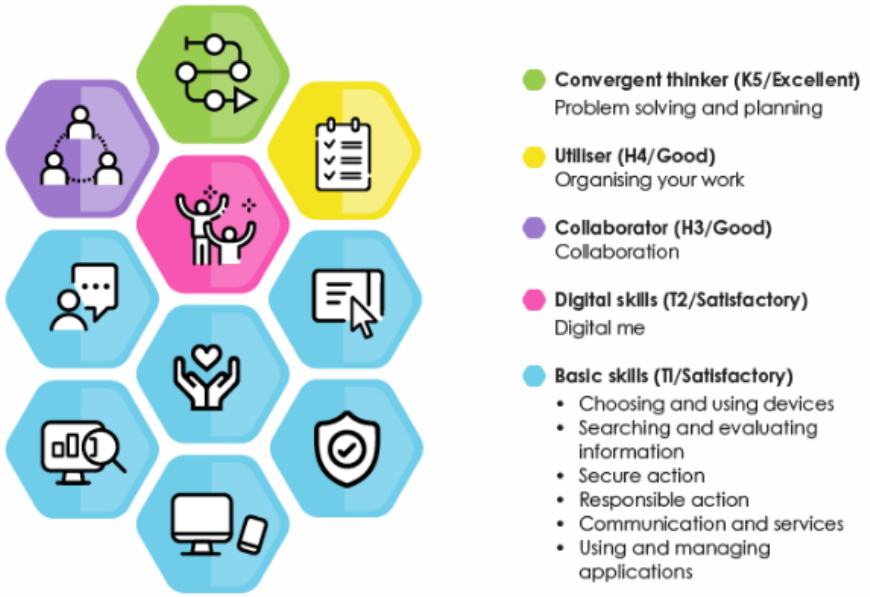

Figure 1. Competitive Skills Open Badges[5].

[4] https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Finland.pdf.
[5] https://tieke.fi/en/services/digital-skills/open-badges-for-digital-skills/