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**NEW TRAINING CONTENTS AND JOINT VET QUALIFICATIONS ON ECODESIGN FOR CREATIVE AND  
CULTURAL INDUSTRIES**

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**GUIDELINES TO FOSTER TRANSPARENCY AND  
RECOGNITION ON ECODESIGN FOR SUSTAINABLE  
CREATIVE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DISCLAIMER

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<https://ecodesign4eu.mcast.edu.mt/>



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# GUIDELINES TO FOSTER TRANSPARENCY AND RECOGNITION ON ECODESIGN FOR SUSTAINABLE CREATIVE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

## Purpose of the guidelines

These guidelines explore European methodologies, tools and frameworks of reference for the recognition of prior learning, and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, with recommendations for its application on the recognition of Ecodesign for sustainable CCI defined in the European ECVET Curriculum of reference.

## European Reference Frameworks for Transparency

The Ecodesign4EU curriculum is aligned with a European Frame of Reference and assessment framework to ensure maximum transparency, recognition and transferability. It is designed as a free Open Educational Resource available through the project website: <https://ecodesign4eu.mcast.edu.mt/>

The Ecodesign4EU [ECVET Curriculum of Reference](#) sets out the prerequisites for participation and the course structure and defines the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) at EQF Level 6 for each Unit of the curriculum.

The [Ecodesign4EU Virtual Campus](#) courses each include self-assessment tools through which learners can self-assess their learning. The courses also are linked to an innovative Mobile Self-assessment App through which learners can self-evaluate competences on Ecodesign for sustainable Creative and Cultural Industries.

The Curriculum is designed to align with the following European frames of reference:

[ECVET](#), the European credit system for vocational education and training, offers a framework for making learners more mobile and qualifications more portable, allowing learners to accumulate, transfer and use their learning in units as these units are achieved. ECVET lays down principles and technical specifications, making use of existing national legislation and regulations. It applies to VET qualifications at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework.

[The European Qualifications Framework \(EQF\)](#) is a common European reference framework whose purpose is to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems.

[Europass](#) provides free personal tools for learning and working in Europe

The [European quality assurance reference framework for VET](#) (EQARF) is designed to assure that national approaches to quality assurance in VET are aligned.

The Ecodesign4EU Curriculum also aligns with [GreenComp](#), the European reference framework for sustainability competences, providing a common ground to learners and guidance to educators, advancing a consensual definition of what sustainability as a competence entails.

## Accreditation, Certification and Validation

For transparency and recognition, it is important to have a common understanding of the terms accreditation, certification and validation:

### Accreditation

Accreditation means that the operation of an institution or the delivery of a particular programme is authorised by a body legally empowered to do so. The body might be a government ministry or an accreditation or quality assurance agency dedicated to vetting aspects of higher education provision. Accreditation is an external process. In order to obtain it, institutions and programmes have to satisfy conditions imposed from the outside. Thereby accreditation provides confidence in the value and credibility of the various types of conformity assessment and represents the last level of control of the validity of conformity assessment services in both voluntary and regulated areas. In relation to training providers, accreditation means a process of quality assurance through which an education accredited status is granted to an education or training provider training provider, showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative or professional authorities by having met predetermined standards. In relation to VET courses<sup>4</sup> it means the formal recognition that a vocational course conforms to the national principles and guidelines for accreditation and to a national qualifications framework. This means that:

- ✓ its contents and standards are appropriate to the qualification;
- ✓ it fulfils the purpose for which it was developed; and
- ✓ it is based on national competency standards, where they exist.

### Certification

Certification is a formal procedure by which an accredited or authorized person or agency assesses and verifies (and attests in writing by issuing a certificate) the attributes, characteristics, quality, qualification, or status of individuals or organizations, goods or services, procedures or processes, or events or situations, in accordance with established requirements or standards. The result of the successful certification is the certificate awarded to the organisation by the certification body. Certification in relation to learning outcomes means a process of issuing a certificate, diploma or title of learning outcomes formally attesting that a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, know-how, skills and/or



competences) acquired by an individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard. Certification may validate the outcome of learning acquired in formal, non formal or informal settings.

### **Validation**

Validation means a verification, where the specified requirements are adequate for an intended use. In relation to learning outcomes, validation means the process of confirming that certain assessed learning outcomes achieved by a learner correspond to specific outcomes which may be required for a unit or a qualification.

## **Accreditation of prior learning and non-formal and informal learning**

The key guidance on this subject in relation to Europe is the publication “[European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning](#)” published by CEDEFOP<sup>1</sup> and recently updated in 2023. CEDEFOP also maintains a “[European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning](#)” as a regularly updated review of validation practices across Europe. The guidance that follows summarises some key points. For fuller details and for information on validation in specific European countries, it is recommended to follow the links to the CEDEFOP reports.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is based on two fundamental principles. First, that all learning, irrespective of when or where acquired, is potentially valuable. Second, informal, non-formal and formal learning complement each other.

The CEDEFOP guidelines identify four phases of validation: identification, documentation, assessment and certification.

**Identification:** Validation starts with the identification of learning acquired and is where the individual becomes increasingly aware of prior achievements. This stage is crucial as learning outcomes differ from person to person and will have been acquired in various contexts: at home, in education, during work or through volunteering activities. Methods and approaches to identification must be open to the unexpected and not be designed in ways which narrow down the range of learning outcomes to be considered. For this reason, in person dialogue and interviews are preferable to ICT-based approaches.

**Documentation:** The documentation stage complements the identification stage by adding evidence and proof of acquired learning, eg: building a portfolio with CV and career-overview supported by evidence – documents/work samples/demonstrations of practice. This evidence must allow (future) external readers and users to judge and eventually trust the learning outcomes acquired by the individual: simply listing job-titles or positions is not enough.

**Assessment:** Assessment is normally referred to as the stage in which an individual’s learning outcomes are compared against specific reference points and/or standards. It needs to be designed

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<sup>1</sup> Cedefop (2023). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 124. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/389827>

to capture and assess the learning specific to each individual, so various tools need to be considered: written tests may be sufficient; in other cases demonstrations, practical tests and evaluation of other forms of evidence will be required. The assessment stage is crucial to the overall credibility of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Tools and processes must be presented in as transparent a way as possible and must be linked to clear standards and robust quality assurance arrangements, ensuring that all phases of validation, including assessment, are open to critical scrutiny. Involvement of relevant stakeholders will also help in building trust.

**Certification:** The final phase of validation is about the certification – and the final valuing – of the learning which has been identified, documented, and assessed. Usually this involves the award of a formal qualification (or a partial-qualification or a smaller stand-alone part of a qualification), or in some sectors, issuing a licence allowing the individual to carry out specific tasks. In recent years alternative credentials have emerged, eg: digital labels, badges, microcredentials, vendor certificates and international qualifications.

The CEDEFOP guidance also identifies key questions in each of these areas:

#### **Key questions on Identification:**

- Are there templates and systematic ways of identifying learning outcomes?
- Is the identification phase limited to predefined areas of prior learning? What is the starting point for the identification of skills?
- How are standardised (for example ICT-based) and open (for example dialogue-based) identification methods mixed and balanced?
- How is guidance and counselling supporting and interconnected with the identification phase?
- How is the identification process supported by professionals?

#### **Key questions on Documentation:**

- Is there agreement on which evidence to accept for validation?
- Have end-users, notably individuals, been made aware of what is accepted as evidence?
- Are the formats used for documenting non-formal and informal learning generally known and/or accepted?
- To what extent do existing documentation formats support the transfer and portability of evidence gathered in the context of validation?

#### **Key questions on Assessment:**

- Are assessment tools adapted to the individual's needs and characteristics?
- Are validity, reliability, accessibility and fairness assured?
- Can assessment results be contested?
- Have the conditions for assessment been clearly defined and communicated in terms of procedure, tools and evaluation/assessment standards: - to candidates? - to employers and education institutions?
- Is feedback regularly collected and analysed?



### Key questions on Certification:

- Is the awarding body known?
- Is the process leading to the award transparent?
- To what extent can the outcomes of validation (qualifications, certificates, credentials, etc.) be exchanged into further education, job opportunities?
- Are certifications obtained through validation linked to NQFs?

### Key recommendations:

The use of **Learning Outcomes** to define and describe education, training and learning targets, against which the learner's knowledge, skills and competences can be assessed and validated

**Reference points and standards** are important to individual learners in the identification and documentation phases in deciding what is attributed value in the validation process. In the third and fourth phase, the role of the reference point (the qualification standard, the curricula or programme description) is direct and of crucial importance and therefore it needs to be suited to capturing the diverse and sometimes unexpected learning taking place in non-formal and informal settings.

**Occupational standards**, which focus on what people need to do, how they do it, and how well they do it are more relevant in VET and in creative design processes than educational standards which focus on what people are expected to learn, how they learn it, and how the quality and content of learning are assessed.

**Microcredentials and technology-related certificates** may be suited to capturing flexible, learner-centred forms of education and training, but consideration should be given to how they could "stack" into a larger credential that can fit into a wider learning career.

**Validation of prior learning** can reduce the time spent in education and training and programmes should be adapted and tailored to the individual to fill gaps. This can contribute to reducing social inequality as access to education and training becomes wider, allowing access for people with no formal credentials.

Validation arrangements need to be **learner-centred**: transparent about their purpose, tailored to the needs of the individual and flexible so the learner can choose the form best suited to their needs.

The **values and benefits** of validation of non-formal and informal learning need to be clearly communicated to learners

In the context of Ecodesign it is important that the validation of individual learning maps against new and evolving quality standards in **environmental sustainability**