

# Recognising Non-formal and Informal Learning

## Pointers for policy development

### RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IS HIGH ON POLICY AGENDAS

- Non-formal and informal learning – learning that takes place outside formal education institutions – can be a rich source of human capital. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning makes this human capital more visible and more valuable to society at large.
- Recognition can allow people to complete formal education more quickly, efficiently and cheaply by not having to enrol in courses for which they have already mastered the content.
- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning can also help employers and workers to get a good job match and help displaced workers to inform future employers about their skills.

### RECOGNITION DELIVERS A RANGE OF BENEFITS

- Recognition generates four different types of benefits:
  - economic benefits by reducing the direct and opportunity costs of formal learning and allowing human capital to be used more productively
  - educational benefits that can underpin lifelong learning and career development
  - social benefits by improving equity and strengthening access to both further education and the labour market, for disadvantaged groups, disaffected youth and older workers
  - psychological benefits by making individuals aware of their capabilities and validating their worth

### RECOGNITION CAN INVOLVE SEVERAL INCREASINGLY FORMAL STEPS

- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes involves several steps:
  - identifying and documenting what someone knows or can do
  - validating that the person satisfies certain requirements or standards
  - awarding a recognised certification or qualification
- Recognition is only fully accomplished if the certification or qualification is accepted by society as valid and credible. Ultimately, a recognition process could deliver fully equivalent qualifications to those obtained through formal learning.

### RECOGNITION PROCESSES NEED TO BE STRENGTHENED

- Improve communication and information about recognition, including through career guidance and counselling services and other services working with job seekers and other target groups.
- Better integrate recognition processes with lifelong learning policies and encourage a learning outcomes attitude across all learning settings.
- Simplify and strengthen the procedures for recognition by:
  - providing a directory of qualifications that can be obtained through recognition processes
  - enlarging the range of competencies that can be assessed
  - integrating recognition processes within existing qualification standards and frameworks
- Ensure that the assessment process for recognition demonstrably delivers valid, transparent and consistent measures of skills and competences by:
  - putting in place rigorous quality assurance procedures
  - applying appropriate assessment techniques, including testing
  - using competent and well-trained evaluators

## RECOGNITION HAS BENEFITS BUT ALSO HAS COSTS

- Carefully examine costs and benefits when looking at options for extending recognition processes and compare with the benefits and costs of formal education alternatives.
- Focus attention on learning outcomes that are highly valued in the labour market, which generate greater benefits to offset the cost of a more extensive and formalised recognition process
- Ensure that the recognition procedures and practices are high quality and consistent to avoid misleading information about the skills of individuals that could generate additional economic costs.

## FURTHER READING

These general pointers for policy development are drawn from the Thematic Review of Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, which covered recognition policies and practices in 23 countries. The findings of this review are presented in *Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Outcomes, Policies and Practices*, published in March 2010. Background reports prepared by 23 countries, *Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning: Country Practices*, and other documents of the review are also available on the OECD website [www.oecd.org/edu/recognition](http://www.oecd.org/edu/recognition).