

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.