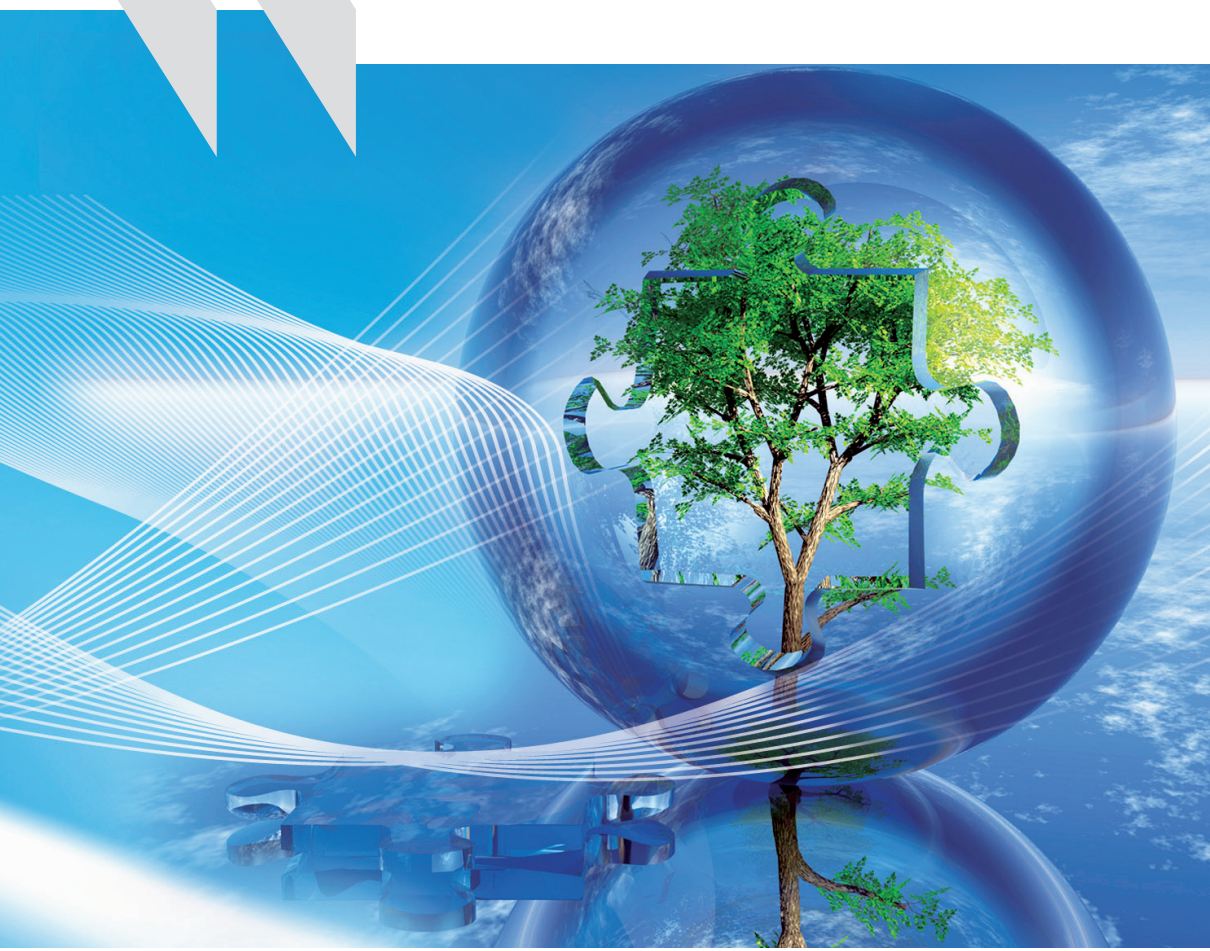
Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning

OUTCOMES, POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Patrick Werquin



OECD

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ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Foreword

Education policies increasingly focus on outcomes and take a lifelong learning perspective. Recognition of competencies that people have acquired through non-formal and informal learning focuses directly on learning outcomes and also provides a stepping stone to further formal education or qualifications that have value in the labour market. Many OECD and other countries have developed approaches to provide recognition of non-formal and informal learning and this report reviews countries' experience with policies and practices for such recognition. It seeks to identify the key steps in a recognition process and analyses the personal, economic and social benefits that recognition can generate. However, country experience has been quite mixed. Recognition processes are often marginal, small-scale and not yet sustainable, and the report points to areas where there is room for improvement. The report also acknowledges that recognition has benefits but also costs. The challenge for policy makers is to find the right balance.

The report is based on the country background reports prepared by individual countries and the country notes prepared by teams of OECD experts following visits to 16 of these countries. The participating countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, South Africa, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

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The country background reports and country notes compiled during the project are available at *www.oecd.org/edu/recognition*, along with a report summarising country practices.

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Executive Summary

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is high on policy agendas

Although learning often takes place within formal settings and learning environments, a great deal of valuable learning also takes place either deliberately or informally in everyday life. Policy makers in OECD countries have become increasingly aware that this represents a rich source of human capital. In many cases, this is fully recognised through the wage premiums paid to those with experience. However, there are some people who are not fully aware of their own stock of human capital or its potential value. There are also some individuals who are unable to put all the learning they have acquired to full use because they are cannot easily prove their capabilities to others. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes does not, in itself, create human capital. But recognition makes the stock of human capital more visible and more valuable to society at large.

Recognition gives non-formal and informal learning outcomes value for further formal learning

Recognition plays an important role in a number of countries by providing validation of competences to facilitate entry to further formal learning. This often involves exemption from certain coursework or parts of a formal study programme. This approach lets people complete formal education more quickly, efficiently and cheaply by not having to enrol in courses for which they have already mastered the content. Allowing people to fast-track through formal education by making the most of their non-formal and informal learning can also create a virtuous circle by making it more attractive for people to engage in self-directed learning.

Recognition gives non-formal and informal learning outcomes value in the labour market

Recognition provides greater visibility and therefore potential value to the learning outcomes and the competences of people in the labour market. This can make it more efficient and cheaper for workers and employers to match skills to jobs. In turn, this may make it more attractive for workers and employers to invest in on-the-job training, knowing that the outcome of that investment can be recorded and built upon. Such recognition of learning outcomes can also facilitate structural adjustment by enabling competences of displaced workers to be recognised and reapplied in other parts of the labour market. Recognition can also play a role in quality assurance systems within companies or in demonstrating compliance with regulatory requirements.

Recognition can involve several steps of increasing formalisation

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes involves a succession of steps. The first step is identification and documentation – identifying what someone knows or can do, and typically recording it. This is a personal stage, possibly with guidance. The second step is establishing what someone knows or can do. This may be a personal stage of self-evaluation (with or without feedback) or, where there is significant formalisation, it could involve reliance on an external evaluator. The third step is validation – establishing that what someone knows or can do satisfies certain requirements, points of reference or standards. In this stage, a level of performance is set and requires the involvement of a third party. The fourth step is certification – stating that what someone knows or can do satisfies certain requirements, and awarding a document testifying to this. This necessitates the involvement of an accredited authority to certify performance and possibly its level. The last step is social recognition – acceptance by society of the signs of what someone knows or can do. Ultimately, it would be possible for a recognition process to deliver fully equivalent qualifications to those obtained through formal learning.

Recognition delivers a range of benefits

Recognition generates four different types of benefits. *First*, it generates economic benefits. Recognition can reduce the direct and opportunity costs that are associated with formal learning, by shortening the time required to

acquire qualifications in formal education. It also allows human capital to be deployed across the economy more productively by giving people access to jobs that better match their true skills. *Second*, it provides educational benefits. Recognition helps to underpin lifelong learning by helping people learn about themselves and develop their career within a lifelong learning framework. *Third*, it provides social benefits. Recognition provides a way to improve equity and strengthen access to further education and to the labour market for disadvantaged minority groups, disaffected youth and older workers who did not have many opportunities for formal learning when they were younger. *Lastly*, recognition can provide a psychological boost to individuals by making them aware of their capabilities as well as offering external validation of their worth.

Recognition can also help to improve equity

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes can also improve equity in three particular ways. *First,* it can make it easier for dropouts to return to formal learning, giving them a second chance. *Second*, it can be attractive to members of disadvantaged groups such as indigenous people and migrants whose competences may be less evident, or who for one reason or another have not been able to acquire qualifications through the formal education system. *Third,* it can help to rebalance equity between generations, since a much smaller cohort of older workers had access to higher education (and the corresponding qualifications) than is the case today.

Recognition processes are often marginal, small-scale and not yet sustainable

This review of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has revealed a wide variety of policies and practices across 22 countries. In many cases, recognition processes remain marginal, small-scale and even precarious, although a number of countries are trying to move towards more integrated systems. The challenges for policy makers are to find ways to raise the profile of recognition, simplify recognition processes, give them greater validity, and find the right balance between benefits and costs. Across all these efforts, a combination of national level policies and more localised initiatives is likely to be most effective.

Better communication about recognition is needed

The profile of recognition could be strengthened through clear communication and information about both the benefits of recognition and the processes involved. This would help to reach those who are unaware that they have acquired competences through non-formal and informal learning channels or that those outcomes have potential value. Career guidance and counselling services can play a role here, as can other services working with job seekers and other target groups. Careful targeting to groups most likely to benefit from recognition processes would help to contain the costs of communication. Effective communication with employers and unions on recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the benefits it offers them could also help to promote the acceptability of qualifications obtained through non-traditional routes.

Recognition processes could also be better integrated into lifelong learning policies

The profile of recognition could also be enhanced by more explicitly embedding it in a broader lifelong learning approach within countries. This would include encouraging a learning outcomes attitude across all learning settings – reinforcing and extending the trend already apparent towards greater emphasis on learning outcomes in the formal education system. In some countries education institutions might need to reorganise their study programmes into smaller modular study units to document what has been learned by those students who do not graduate This can be particularly useful for those who might later take up "second chance" education. Better integration of recognition of non-formal and informal learning into existing qualifications frameworks would also reinforce its place as part of a coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategy.

Recognition procedures and processes could be improved

Another lesson from country experience is the scope to simplify and strengthen the procedures for recognition. A first step could be to provide a directory of qualifications that can be obtained through recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. There is also scope for enlarging the range of competences that can be assessed through recognition processes and for integrating recognition processes within existing qualification

standards. This could also imply greater convergence, and even standardisation, of procedures for awarding qualifications whether the learning has occurred in a formal or non-formal/informal setting. Taken to its logical conclusion, qualifications awarded could omit any reference to where or how the learning took place.

Processes could be reshaped to give greater validity to qualifications obtained through recognition

The validity and the credibility of qualifications obtained through recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes can be strengthened by improving particular aspects of the recognition process. The assessment process itself is pivotal and must demonstrably deliver valid, transparent and consistent results. This may require putting in place quite rigorous quality assurance procedures. It also requires careful application of assessment techniques. Many countries currently rely mainly on portfolios, but the value of these is unclear. Instead, or in addition, countries could draw more extensively on the methods used in formal learning environments, including selective testing. Evaluators also need to be highly competent and specialised training of evaluators may be needed, even for those with experience in the evaluation of learning outcomes in formal education.

Recognition has benefits but also has costs

Although recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes can deliver a range of benefits, recognition processes also involve costs. Outcomes that are highly valued by users and in the labour market generate greater net benefits for a more extensive and formalised recognition process that results in qualifications. In contrast, other outcomes may not justify the additional costs incurred by going all the way to formal qualifications. This suggests that countries need to carefully examine costs and benefits when looking at options for extending recognition processes. A further trade-off to be considered is the balance of benefits and costs of recognition compared with formal learning. Formal education typically has economies of scale, and thus marginal costs fall sharply as more people enrol in a formal education programme. In contrast, recognition processes are likely to have increasing marginal costs if those whose competences are easy to validate are more likely to come forward. In any case, the expected benefits will only accrue if recognition procedures and practices put in place are of the highest

quality and consistency. Otherwise, misleading information about the learning outcomes of individuals could generate additional economic costs.

The challenge for policy makers is to find the right balance

This review has laid out the benefits of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and taken stock of policies and practices in OECD countries. Recognition policies can play a significant role in a coherent lifelong learning framework and there is clearly scope to improve present practices to allow recognition to realise its full potential for making visible the human capital people already have. The challenge for policy makers is to find the right balance by developing recognition processes that generate net benefits to both individuals and to society at large.

Chapter 1

Context and main concepts

This chapter sets the scene for a discussion of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the 22 countries that participated in the study. It examines how recognition is perceived and the problems that can arise. It seeks to clarify vocabulary, proposes definitions, and describes the principal stages of the recognition process.

People learn constantly, everywhere and all the time. There is nothing surprising in this observation as it appears generally understood that individuals are capable of accumulating knowledge, skills and competences throughout their lifetime, well beyond their organised learning in formal settings, such as school, university or structured vocational training. The real issues are the value to be attached to outcomes[1] resulting from learning that is termed "non-formal" and "informal" because it occurs outside a formal context, and the recognition that they legitimately deserve both in society and economic life.

It has become essential to know the circumstances under which it is both possible and desirable to codify and recognise learning outcomes. Recognition of outcomes arising from non-formal and informal learning is therefore high on the policy and social agenda in many countries. It is certainly a major issue in the 22 countries, on five continents, which between 2006 and 2008 took part in the OECD activity on which the present volume is based.

The recent heightened interest in the recognition of learning outcomes reflects significant shifts in the world of education and training, for several reasons:

- Ever since their inception, initial education and training systems have prepared – or helped to prepare – young people for adult life and for work. Formal learning nearly always leads to the award of a qualification which provides its holders with the means to present themselves and a profile which they can use to enter the labour market. It is all the more effective if the form it takes – whether a certified qualification, a title or something else – is widely known (has a reputation) and thus easily recognisable. In contrast, for the recognition of learning outcomes it is experience (particularly labour market experience) and learning outcomes (including the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning) that form an individual's profile and are the basis for recognising his/her knowledge, skills and competences. In the most progressive systems (Ireland, South Africa, Norway and a few others), such recognition even entitles the individual to a qualification which was previously delivered only by the formal system.

- There is a shift from a learning-based to an assessment-based rationale. The central issue is no longer the process of acquiring and accumulating knowledge, skills and competences but, instead, what individuals, as "candidates", know and can do. Placing outcomes at the centre of individuals' developmental paths implies the

appearance of new players, such as evaluators or mentors, whose functions have hitherto been largely performed by teachers alone.

- The temporal and spatial relation between the learning process and the use to which learning is put is severed. There is no longer any relation between the learning process and assessment. This goes well beyond distance education, for example, which already represented a major step forward.

There may be many reasons for this relatively sudden enthusiasm for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Most may be grouped under two main headings. *First*, they may have value in the formal lifelong learning system. If recognised, they may encourage people to return to formal learning. For example, total or partial recognition of learning outcomes might motivate individuals to enrol in courses for a certified qualification because they are no longer required to start anew (*i.e.* exemption from academic prerequisites and/or some parts of the programme or course). More broadly, recognition of these outcomes gives them currency and may thus stimulate individuals to develop their capacity for self-study. This in turn might activate and fuel a virtuous circle in which modern human capital is accumulated and constantly adapted.

Second, non-formal and informal learning outcomes also have potential value on the labour market. If knowledge, skills and competences, irrespective of how they have been acquired, are more visible, market mechanisms may function more effectively. Those offering their professional services would be better placed to gain from their knowledge, know-how and competences if these are endorsed by a quality recognition process in which stakeholders – first and foremost employers – are fully confident. Better informed employers would find their recruitment procedures easier. In firms, recognition processes would also encourage a reorganisation of work to better match staff members' competences and jobs. Better visibility of people's knowledge, skills and competences might also encourage the organisation of formal learning periods as part of employees' continuing training. Training is of course easier to justify and organise if the demand is clear. Finally, access to some professions is regulated and necessarily involves acquiring a qualification. This may be the ultimate aim of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, although many countries are still far from formalising the process to the extent that it results in certification without any compulsory further formal training.

The attention paid to recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes thus has technical, policy and social justifications. The social justice argument for the recognition of these outcomes should also be

emphasised. It seems natural to think that recognition could help those individuals who have never had, or who do not have, the opportunity to access formal learning. They may be strongly attracted to a process, even a difficult one, which gives significance to their non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This is a group with a clear need for recognition – and in particular certified recognition – because few of them hold qualifications with an acknowledged value on the labour market.

All in all, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes might have the advantage of making it possible to deal effectively with problems that are currently poorly handled, although this may well entail considerable financial and human effort in some cases. Whether the problem at issue is motivating adults to learn, the lack of qualifications for certain categories of worker, the lack of certified qualifications in general, or the self-confidence needed to return to formal learning, none of these issues has yet to be satisfactorily addressed. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes could be part of a comprehensive solution based on the implementation of local courses of action.

In any event, this volume seeks to determine whether the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a credible strategy or, rather, under what circumstances it is. The shift of attention from pedagogy to assessment in knowledge transmission has potentially large implications for practice which should be fully considered. The experience of the 22 countries surveyed in this study can be shared to help advance discussion of this issue (*www.oecd.org/edu/recognition*). However, solutions will remain national or even local.

Scope and focus of the study

This publication does not deal with the recognition of formal learning outcomes. In all likelihood, they are already recognised as a result, for example, of specific certification processes. This is almost never the case for certain sectors of lifelong learning, such as adult learning, and learning that occurs in continuing training, for example, is very rarely certified. Neither does this report deal with non-formal and informal learning from the standpoint of learning processes.

The report is therefore concerned solely with non-formal and informal learning which is recognised in the sense that there is some basis for showing that a recognition process is under way or completed. It may be a document produced in the process of gathering a body of evidence or an attestation established by a third party. Its value comes from the fact that it is evidence of knowledge, skills and competences that can be recognised by

some or all of society. It may also be produced and developed personally, almost independently, while compiling this evidence, whence the need to see recognition as going beyond formal certification. Here, the individual's goal is solely to identify and analyse his or her non-formal and informal learning in order to document it, to record or have it recorded, and to make use of it as needed. In this case, a learning portfolio, a competence passport or any other document of predefined format may be produced. Indeed, the more such a known format is adopted, the more the holder's learning outcomes are likely to be easily recognised, because of users' familiarity with it. It may also be issued by an accredited educational institution or an authority with special responsibilities, in which case it usually corresponds to a partial or total qualification, or to credits counting towards one. Where this is so, the evidence produced goes beyond the individual's efforts and calls for the involvement of a third party.

An essential term in this respect is *visibility*. The point of recognising learning outcomes is to make them visible so that non-formal and informal learning is made known, even legitimised, thereby ascribing value to those outcomes and to any corresponding qualifications. This is the starting point adopted in this volume. Its aim is to encourage further thought about the best ways to ensure that learning outcomes which are not obtained in a formal context are as well recognised and as visible as those that are and take the form of a qualification or any other type of document (Bjørnåvold, 2000). More generally, it is desirable to ensure that all learning outcomes become visible, irrespective of the setting in which they were acquired, whether formal, non-formal or informal. Indeed, during a recognition process, individuals may not be able to identify or describe how they obtained the knowledge, skills and competences they refer to and seek to have recognised. The distinction between formal, non-formal and informal learning is often a theoretical one. It is only of interest for purposes of discussion and for preparing strategic options for public policy, as funding for example may vary markedly depending on the learning context. In attempting to offer options for policy making, this volume seeks to pinpoint the essential challenges.

From this angle there is indeed a risk that, although people unconsciously rely on their learning outcomes in daily social and professional activity, they do not consciously see them as tools which they have mastered. Nor are they displayed for others. A recognition process might radically change this by making individuals aware of these "uncultivated" outcomes, particularly if these are situated in relation to clear points of reference and are tangible and visible both to the individual and others. The outcome of the outcomes, as it were, would be growing

awareness of a potential, and of the possibility of mobilising one's non-formal and informal learning outcomes to extend and further develop them.

This study is thus about recognition. Yet, here again, a distinction is required. The research underlying the report is concerned essentially with recognition of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, as opposed to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning *per se*, as a means of acquiring knowledge, skills and competences. The first kind of recognition requires the second to be culturally accepted by the public and the main stakeholders.

The trends observed indicate that national and local practices are tending towards the formalisation of recognition through the award of full or partial qualifications which are recognised in the formal education and training system and/or on the labour market. But not all countries have opted for this approach, and the recognition of outcomes may assume different forms, depending on both the stakeholders and its objectives. This report implicitly considers two approaches to assessing outcomes, self-evaluation (with or without feedback and guidance) and summative assessment. They are often complementary: self-evaluation may constitute the first stage in a qualification process involving summative assessment.

Self-evaluation may involve, for example, the use of a learning portfolio or a competence passport. Here, individuals engage in a process which reveals their knowledge, skills and competences as they relate to their learning or employment objectives, or to their ability to learn. Recent work by the European Union concludes that this approach is one way in which non-formal and informal learning outcomes may be made visible (Cedefop and European Commission, 2008).

Summative assessments may be conducted in numerous ways. The processes, methods and instruments are many and varied. In a summative assessment, the technical process is one of certification, which confers recognition on non-formal and informal learning outcomes through the award of a qualification or title. In this case, the recognition process is formalised. Various aspects of this process are examined below, including the development and value of the reference point used (a standard for example), the nature and modalities of the assessment, and validation of outcomes with a view to the attribution of a certificate.

The difference between self-evaluation and summative assessment broadly corresponds to the distinction made above between a personal process, in which individuals identify and analyse their own learning (and its distance from their objectives), and a more formalised process of validation or certification by an accredited institution. What distinguishes the two approaches is not the presence of assessment but its nature and aims. From

the perspective of the visibility of non-formal and informal learning resulting from the recognition of outcomes, the aim in both cases is to advertise the nature and level of these outcomes and ensure that they are recognised. A learning portfolio, a competence card or a qualification may fulfil this function. Their benefits also depend on the same mechanisms (such as self-esteem, a propensity to learn, motivation, and the visibility of outcomes and therefore of the knowledge, skills and competences deriving from them).

After visibility, a second key term is *documentation*. It is important to document learning or its outcomes (or both) so that it is not necessary, for example, to start anew if the pressures of adult life oblige individuals to postpone any formal learning necessary to complete the recognition process (in-firm training, a return to university), or if the labour market deteriorates and redundancies make professional mobility a necessity. Even if the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes does not lead to a qualification, it must be available in tangible form. If not a document in the narrow sense, there should be at least some basis – material (such as a learning portfolio or profile) or virtual (an electronic portfolio or smart card) – for keeping a record of the work done, and especially of the assessment required prior to recognition (including any self-assessment). A relevant issue here is the safekeeping of this record by the individual concerned and/or a specified institution, so that the recognition process can be traced. The existence and permanence of the record make the concept of recognition meaningful and may also serve as a starting point for a certification process.

Social recognition is the acceptance by society of these outward signs of knowledge, skills and competences derived from learning that is not formal. For such learning outcomes to be permanently useful and usable, they must be available in a format, such as a document, which is not necessarily a certificate but which should retain its currency for subsequent use as appropriate. Social recognition is the ultimate goal of a process of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as it will be the measure by which their value and usefulness are judged. The overriding concern of this study, therefore, is with far more than the technical process of identifying, documenting, recording, assessing, validating or even certifying outcomes. Here, the aim is to analyse the recognition accorded by society to non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The value accorded to the steps taken by individuals to have their non-formal and informal learning outcomes recognised will depend on the value attached by society to the tangible result of the completed process (such as a learning portfolio, competence passport, credits or a certificate) and the use society makes of it.

The discussion of recognition and related issues also has an economic dimension, since the question of practical value is clearly relevant: does the tangible result or document awarded on completion of the recognition process represent, so to speak, "legal tender" or "counterfeit money"? The answer will largely determine how useful it is for an individual to undertake such a process. It will also significantly affect the attitude of policy makers towards offering opportunities to do so. Finally, it will help policy makers avoid establishing systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes simply because they believe it would be useful. In any case, individuals have yet to be firmly convinced of the appropriateness of engaging in a recognition process, which undoubtedly partly accounts for the fact that few do so. If society accords practical value to the tangible record of the recognition process (learning portfolio, certificate or any other document), it becomes meaningful and individuals have something to gain from it. If not, the risk is that time and money will be wasted.

Issues and definitions: making non-formal and informal learning outcomes visible

All data on lifelong learning indicate that the highest qualification held by the great majority of people is obtained in the formal system of education and initial training, which in the case of many adults occurred some time ago. This is confirmed by other sources revealing that almost 90% of adult learning initiatives do not lead to a qualification, even though, depending on the country, 20-60% of individuals who embark on learning do so primarily to obtain one. This is particularly true of those with a low level of education or no qualification at all (OECD, 2007). There is therefore a patent lack of visibility as regards people's real knowledge, skills and competences, since those acquired during their working lives or other activities remain invisible. This lack of visibility is all the more significant for those who left the initial education and training system many years earlier. It is also especially detrimental to those with a low level of qualification, given that a certified qualification provides a form of protection in that it stands for knowledge, skills and competences.

This situation can have adverse effects on the organisation of work in firms, as well as on people's social and professional development and labour market mobility in general. Even if this lack of visibility is only modestly remedied, it should also help to improve the functioning of society as a whole. Such is certainly the view of those who firmly advocate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the countries studied. The same approach would also be an important element in policies to promote equity and "second chance" opportunities.

Growing interest in many countries and regions: from learning to assessment

Earlier work by the OECD concluded that recognition of what people know or can do, regardless of how they acquired their abilities, should be placed at the centre of individual development. For example, two OECD studies (2003, 2005b) stressed lack of motivation or time as factors which often prevent individuals engaging in formal learning again. Because of the pressures of adult life, adult learning probably cannot be regarded as a long-term, full-time activity. Thus, conferring value on what people already know or know how to do through a recognition process should be a way of motivating them to return to formal learning.

More recently, OECD (2007) ranked the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes high on the list of 20 mechanisms identified as potentially capable of motivating learning. At the same time, major international organisations are showing a close interest in the recognition of learning outcomes (Cedefop and European Commission, 2008; Ecotec, 2007; Singh, 2008, 2009). All these studies point in the same direction: formal learning alone cannot account for all of the learning encompassed by the concept of lifelong learning.

There is thus no shortage of studies that argue for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However, these studies have been piecemeal and there is a need to examine the quality of existing data, the validity of the studies, especially in terms of cost, the usefulness of comparative studies, and the accuracy of certain claims and assertions, which seek to justify the introduction of systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Definitions of learning contexts

Three concepts are regularly subject to debate. First is the concept of *learning contexts*, second, there are *learning outcomes* and the final concept is *recognition.*

Formal learning

Formal learning is learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). It is intentional from the learner's point of view and typically leads to validation and certification (Cedefop, 2008). It corresponds to a clear aim: namely, the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences. Whence the idea of associating learning outcomes with knowledge, skills and competences in this volume, even though outcomes

are clearly a far more encompassing concept. However, it is probably neither possible nor desirable to codify or recognise everything, and relevance and cost are important considerations.

Typical examples include learning that occurs within the system of education and initial training, or during training organised by the employer in the workplace. One may also refer to *formal education and/or training* or, more accurately, "education and training in a formal setting". While there has been some hesitancy in the past, particularly when only education and initial training for young people were regarded as formal learning (Werquin, 2007a), the broader definition is now quite widely agreed.

Informal learning

Informal learning is learning that results from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. It is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective (Cedefop, 2008). It is often referred to as "learning by experience" or simply as "experience". The idea is that people, by virtue of their very existence, are constantly exposed to learning situations.

As the opposite of formal learning, the definition of informal learning also meets with fairly broad agreement, notwithstanding a few exceptions (Werquin, 2007). As is already apparent, an initial difficulty in a process of recognising informal learning outcomes is that it is often very hard, if not impossible, to ensure that candidates for recognition fully realise the nature and scope of their own informal learning. A second problem is the fact that this learning may not lead to any recognition if the learning outcomes fall short of the standard fixed by the evaluator or assessment body (regardless of whether certification is envisaged as above).

Non-formal learning

Non-formal learning is learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). It is intentional from the learner's point of view (Cedefop, 2008). Non-formal learning takes a wide variety of approaches, which makes consensus harder to reach. While activities leading to non-formal learning may not necessarily be specifically defined or denoted as learning activities, they may not constitute informal learning either. The advantage of this concept is to meet the potential need for an intermediate concept between formal learning and informal learning, and users have constantly resorted to such a concept.

For example, non-formal learning may occur alongside other activities, which may or may not have other learning objectives. A case in point might be a car mechanics course in the workplace (formal learning), in which the students incidentally learn something about themselves (their punctuality, initiative, etc.), or about teamwork or problem solving (non-formal learning). In this case, non-formal learning is incidental to other activities which do have an educational objective. While participation in the primary activity is intentional, the non-formal learning that stems from it may not be. At any rate, it may not be perceived directly, which is what often makes recognition formalities very difficult for those who are unaware of this non-formal learning by-product or of the related potential outcomes. A further example is provided by Germany where all adult learning is viewed as non-formal. A final example is offered by the many situations in which people deliberately decide to teach themselves with very clear aims in mind (such as proficiency in using new software in the firm or at home), yet without any funding or predetermined time slot.

Constantly changing definitions

From the original pioneering research up to the most recent studies, definitions have changed substantially (see Werquin, 2007, for a summary). Since Coombs *et al.* (1973, 1974), learning contexts consistent with the definition of formal learning have steadily expanded, reflecting a broader conception of formal learning (West, 2007).

Werquin (2007) also points to cases in which the definition of formal learning is fairly similar to that of non-formal learning. Some definitions include additional conditions such as duration (which tends to be short for non-formal learning) or certification (which tends to be lacking in non-formal learning), in order to differentiate between the various forms of learning. Contrasting definitions of formal and informal learning are thus deliberately made mutually exclusive. Some sources note for example that informal learning may be intentional (Eurostat, 2006), and this has led incidentally to the creation of a new category generally known as random learning.

Finally, reference to the duration of learning is not very instructive. There is widespread agreement that what really counts is making sure that knowledge, skills or competences have been acquired and, where appropriate, verifying with respect to particular standards the level at which this has occurred, rather than the time it took to acquire them.

Are single and strict definitions really needed?

The uncertainty of the definitions and the changing nature of the concept of formal learning in particular suggest that it is not very helpful to consider that the three learning concepts either are – or ought to be – rigidly circumscribed. The following aspects may guide future thinking:

- the organisation of learning by bodies funded or regulated by the state, private organisations, or voluntary associations, bearing in mind that formal learning is often, historically at least, the prerogative of states or local governments (provinces, regions, cantons, municipalities), even if their precise remit may vary (denominational schools, private schools);
- the presence of quality assurance mechanisms, which is often a feature of the formal sector but no longer limited to it and often linked to certification of learning other than formal learning;
- the extent to which educational provision is structured in terms of subjects or fields of study, an aspect linked to formal learning as the above definition clearly indicates;
- the extent to which educational provision is structured in terms of curricular organisation (learning at given times, clearly defined relations between learners and teachers).

Non-formal learning is situated somewhere between formal and informal learning and there may be advantages in establishing degrees of formality rather than fixed definitions. In this way, users are free to determine the key aspects locally (see Figure 1.1). The key learning contexts are summarised in Table 1.1. The intentional nature of learning is associated with individual learners, its structuring relates to how it is organised in terms of subjects or fields, and its control (regulation, accreditation of providers and quality assurance) is the concern of the state.

In light of these different aspects and the definitions suggested above are pragmatic. They are meant to enable policy makers, researchers and practitioners to speak the same language in their international activities. There are many national and local variations (see below) and the definitions adopted here allow for taking their specific characteristics into account in the analytical process. They are deliberately contrasted, as a systematic search for compromise is a source of weakness; international definitions are too often reduced to their lowest common denominator and so lose much of the complexity of the concepts involved. These definitions as a whole are consistent with recent attempts to clarify terms at international level (OECD, 2007; Cedefop and European Commission, 2008; Tissot, 2009). They move

in the direction of definitions that are acceptable in international circles in order to simplify communication and the exchange of ideas and good practice.

Figure 1.1. The continuum of learning from formal to informal

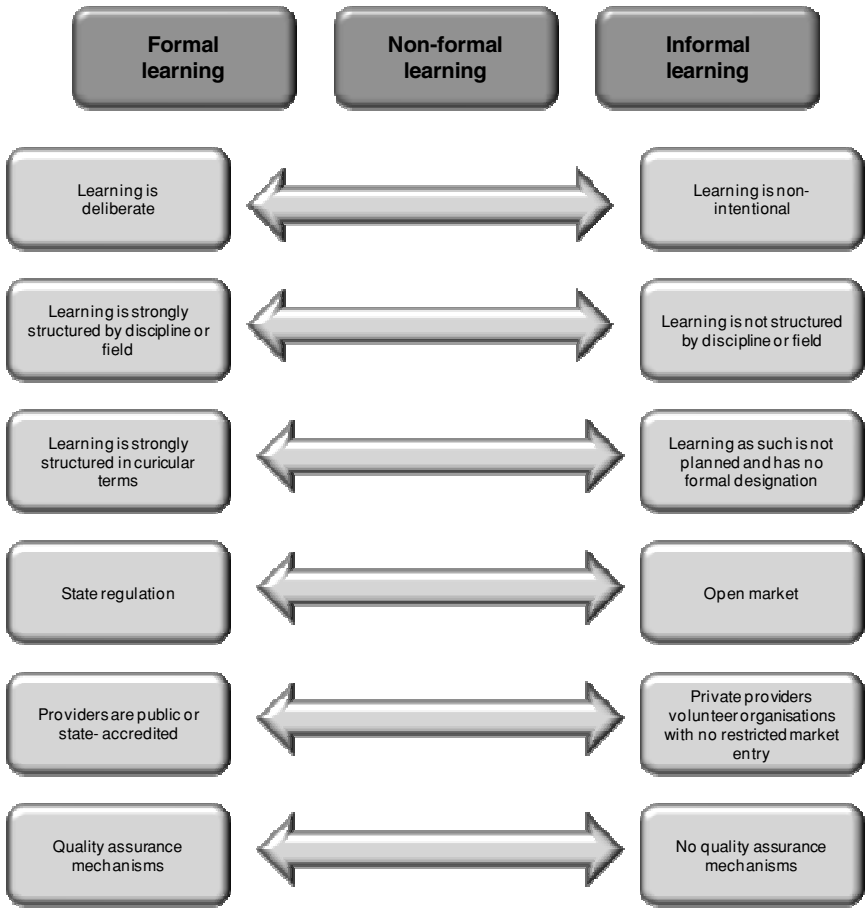


Table 1.1. Learning contexts

Informal learning	Non-formal learning	Formal learning
Non-intentional	Intentional	Intentional
	Structured	Structured
		Controlled

Learning outcomes

In this study, *learning outcomes* are defined as the knowledge, skills and competences that people have acquired as a result of learning and can demonstrate if needed in a recognition process. Here again, the definition is pragmatic so as to be suited to recognition, which is the subject of this study. It is indeed fairly easy to imagine that learning outcomes are broader than the knowledge, skills and competences recorded in a recognition process. However, not all outcomes can necessarily be measured, codified or assessed for recognition purposes.

Recognition: a single act reflecting several concerns in different phases

Aside from the relative lack of consensus about the definition of various learning contexts, different uses of the word *recognition* also make matters more complex. The idea of recognition as an act makes it possible to bring together the aspects that characterise it as both a process and a procedure:

- The process relates to the sequence formed by the different phases of recognition – identification, formalisation, etc. – and includes its technical and curricular aspects. Processes may vary in nature (for example, direct observation, simulation or portfolio).
- The procedure concerns the authority in charge of recognition and attendant regulations, including for instance the conditions of eligibility and the maximum authorised period.

Depending on its focus, the *act of recognition* may have different objectives. Depending on what these are, different points of reference can and should be used. In each case, the system of evidence and the material record will differ. Finally, at the end of the sequence, the actors involved vary. Relevant criteria for analysing the act of recognition might thus be its focus, objectives, reference points, material record and actors, in that order. For the individuals engaged in a process of recognition, the existence of these many parameters (summarised in Table 1.2) means that the act of recognition, as well as the processes and procedures underlying it, do not always serve the same purpose.

In the case of non-formal and informal learning, the act of recognition may for example lead to a qualification, to recruitment or employment, or to exemption from part of a formal learning programme following an evaluation of the individual's learning outcomes by a teacher or trainer. In all such instances, there is indeed an act of recognition but its focus must be specified. Three are considered here: learning, learning outcomes and certified qualifications. A review of these, of the corresponding reference

points, stakeholders and objectives, is also an opportunity to return to the question of a material record (documentation, learning portfolio, competence passport, certificate or other resource). This study argues for such a record as part of a recognition process to ensure that recognition is an outcome of the assessment process and is a durable record of the process and its findings. As indicated, this will allow individuals to resume where they left off, if they postpone using and benefiting from the recognition process on which they embarked.

Recognition of learning situations

First, there is the *recognition of learning*, and more particularly here, non-formal and informal learning. This learning may be the focus of the act of recognition if the issue is whether it is possible to learn in diverse and not necessarily formal contexts. This is again the issue of legitimacy, and recognition is implicit when it is part of the local culture. However, when it is not – as in many countries – it must be made explicit and becomes a condition of eligibility, in qualifications standards for example, for applying for *recognition of the outcomes* corresponding to what has been learned. While the learning is thus recognised, nothing indicates whether it can lead to a qualification, particularly if it is non-formal or informal. Indeed, while nothing is yet known about the corresponding *outcomes*, this is a necessary first stage as it may provide the cultural shift that will enable non-formal and informal learning outcomes to gain currency in society.

The recognition of learning leads typically to employment or admission to education and training, and the points of reference and stakeholders vary with the objectives (Table 1.2). The existence of a record, such as a document, testifying to the success of the process of recognition of non-formal and informal learning would enable individuals to postpone their use of this recognition. However, these procedures are generally valid for only a limited period (during a specific recruitment process or university semester), or perhaps at just one institution (firm, education and training institution). If individuals become employed or enter formal education and training, it is easy for them to demonstrate at any time that they have complied with the expectations of this recognition process. In other words, once their aims have been achieved, the success of the process is self-evident. This is why a special document is rarely produced. An employment contract or training period is a tangible achievement that may be included in a *curriculum vitae* or competence passport. In the event of recruitment or exemption from prerequisites for entry to training for example, there is occasional reference to *practical recognition* or *informal recognition*,[2] which implies that the process is not really an official one.

Table 1.2. Phases and focus of recognition

A. Recognition of learning situations (nature of learning, with or without validation of outcomes or certification)	
1. Development of competences, and perhaps in-firm retraining	
Points of reference:	Plans or principles specified by the human resources directorate for strategic workforce planning Clearly defined learning methods
Material record[1]:	Report, presentation, appraisal of persons involved in learning Assessment of learning, Interview with the human resources directorate or senior representatives (or even with tutors)
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s)[2]:	Human resources directorate or senior representatives who have agreed on the learning with the prospective learner and, where appropriate, with the responsible stakeholder (not necessarily a teacher/trainer; tutoring or trade guild activity may be involved)
2. Remuneration, classification or promotion	
Points of reference:	Classification criteria based on the level or content of education and training to obtain a job (e.g. a collective agreement in the firm or branch)
Material record:	Curriculum vitae (CV), learning portfolio or any item (payslip, certificate, etc.) for identifying the nature and conditions of a "learning" experience
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	Those responsible for recruitment who have to determine the level of remuneration and the position within a job
3. Access to a contractual training process (such as in-firm continuing training)	
Points of reference:	Regulations setting out the conditions and principles for education and training management, for serving employees, drawn up by the social partners of a branch or firm, or for job applicants, established by the social partners or any sponsor
Material record:	Replies by sponsors to calls for tender. Education and training agreements (nature and length of the education and training contract, terms of remuneration, etc.)
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	A joint committee, human resources directorate, senior representatives or financial sponsors who have decided what will be learnt, and possibly the person responsible for education and training (especially if there is pre-selection)
B. Recognition of learning outcomes of individuals	
1. Securing employment within a firm	
Points of reference:	Implicit: employment standard
Material record:	CV, learning portfolio or any item (payslip, certificate, etc.) for identifying outcomes
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	The human resources directorate responsible for recruitment
2. Access to a certification procedure or to competitive entrance examinations	
Points of reference:	Conditions of eligibility for taking a competitive examination or obtaining a qualification
Material record:	Any document or backup testifying to outcomes indicated in the point of reference (*e.g.* qualifications, education and training certificates, accreditation, certified evidence of a period of professional experience)
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	Authorities responsible for organising the certification procedure, or administrative bodies responsible for competitive examinations
3. Admission to training or exemption from part of the training course	
Points of reference:	Education and training standard
Material record:	Any document or backup testifying to outcomes indicated in the point of reference (*e.g.* qualifications, education and training certificates, accreditation, certified evidence of a period of professional experience)
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	Those responsible for education and training – teachers/trainers

4. Award of a certified qualification, without additional training required	
Points of reference:	Qualifications standard (nature of expected outcomes and assessment methods, and possible preconditions for eligibility)
Material record:	Any document or record testifying to outcomes indicated in the point of reference (assessments organised specifically for certification or accepted as equivalent, such as other qualifications, education and training certificates, accreditation, certified evidence of a period of professional experience)
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	Examiners
5. Guidance, competence appraisal, search for redeployment (devising a process, competence appraisal, search for a professional identity)	
Points of reference:	Counselling methodologies, tests, documentation regarding occupations, education and training, etc.
Material record:	Any document or record testifying to outcomes indicated in the point of reference (qualifications, education and training certificates, accreditation, certified evidence of a period of professional experience)
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	Guidance counsellors, vocational counsellors, etc. (self-assessment process, any form of guidance, coaching)
C. Recognition of qualifications ***Certified qualifications (practical value of "transcript" awarded; entitlements and use in socio-economic and geographical context associated with the representativeness and legitimacy of stakeholders)***	
1. Social value of a certified qualification in a given societal context	
Points of reference:	Public reference point identified generally in accordance with traditional principles and social policies related to a geopolitical context. These regulations generally incorporate the principles governing study activity to the highest level in national education and training systems
Material record:	Regulatory or legislative documents specifying legitimate representative authorities responsible for determining content of a qualification and awarding it
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	Parliamentary, national, inter-departmental or inter-professional representatives, or possibly royal, regional (or local) ones in a few countries
2. Professional value in a given sectoral, inter-sectoral or professional field	
Points of reference:	Public reference point (*e.g.* a collective agreement) containing the definition of a qualification and the indicators of its existence for concluding an employment contract, the licence to practise a profession, or to take up an occupation
Material record:	Compliance of the content of certification with the definition of the qualification or the conditions of practising a profession if regulated (possible inclusion of certification in the point of reference)
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	Employers, institutions or administrative bodies responsible for implementing regulations to recognise a qualification
3. Securing employment within a firm	
Points of reference:	In-firm collective agreement
Material record:	Compliance of the content of certification with the definition of the qualification, or with the conditions for practising a profession if regulated (possible inclusion of the qualification in the point of reference for concluding an employment contract)
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	Employer and possibly a firm's joint committee
D. Special case: mutual recognition	
1. Value in certain circles (initiatory value, fellowship)	
Points of reference:	Qualifications obtained by peers, those already initiated
Material record:	Registers of former pupils
Actor(s) / Stakeholder(s):	Former pupils

1. Evidence, documents to endorse recognition.

2. Actors/stakeholders responsible for the act of recognition.

Recognition of learning outcomes

Second is the *recognition of learning outcomes* irrespective of the kind of learning entailed, even if non-formal and informal learning are the primary concerns here. The aim is to make known the learning outcomes that have taken place. Recognition occurs in the sense that a status is attributed to the non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals. Its purpose is to find a way of drawing widespread attention to their knowledge, skills and competences and choosing the most appropriate method; a certified qualification or learning portfolio are typical examples. The concern here, therefore, is not the same as for the recognition of learning: instead, it is recognised that, as a result of non-formal and informal learning, knowledge, skills and competences have been acquired. These are recognised with reference to standards which, if they are established and accepted by society, will give currency to the qualification awarded through the certification process.

The goals of this form of recognition are generally to secure employment, exemption from some or all of an education and training programme, or a qualification. As later chapters will demonstrate, countries most commonly invoke these goals as their rationale for establishing procedures to recognise non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The reference points and stakeholders vary from case to case (Table 1.2). Once again, recognition should take the form of documents or other resources which can and should be produced where appropriate to testify to the success of the recognition process. Several countries, such as South Africa, Ireland and Norway, are now engaged in work intended to certify outcomes in this way.

Recognition of qualifications

Third, there is the *recognition of qualifications*. The focal point here is the certificate or qualification (called the "transcript"),[3] rather than the learning outcomes. Its purpose is to determine whether the qualifications awarded subsequent to the process of certifying learning outcomes – and non-formal and informal outcomes in particular – have any social value. Recognition here requires those qualifications to have currency and a use. In extreme cases, even a qualification obtained as a result of formal learning may not have currency on the labour market if employers lack faith in it because of its reputation or a negative experience. The formal recognition of learning outcomes of any kind is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for social recognition. Conversely, while a certificate awarded by a firm or a national or international institution may not be classified among a country's official qualifications, it may be valued on the labour market and used

extensively as evidence of knowledge, skills and competences by employers, especially if it has a good reputation and is very transparent about its holders' knowledge or skills.[4]

Assuming this general aim of recognition is achieved, certification may lead to fulfilment of the objectives traditionally associated with it, including employment, better pay, professional or social advancement, the licence to practise a profession, a return to studies, or personal satisfaction. The social recognition of the qualifications awarded inevitably requires considerable work to prepare standards and often an effort to persuade stakeholders of their value. Each certification involves negotiation and a decision about its value in a particular social, economic or sectoral context. In such cases, the recognition process exists at a national or local legal level as a public reference point within a given space and time. Yet there is no guarantee that this recognition will be permanent.

The recognition of outcomes as the focus of this study

The standard used in the act of recognising qualifications implies ensuring a position *vis-à-vis* a society and certain entitlements within it; this is not really the case for the recognition of learning outcomes. The control of standards and qualifications is typically closely linked to the formal system of education and initial training. Identifying who should determine what is of value when assessing, validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is an issue. At present, there is a wide variety of approaches from one country to the next. This diversity must be taken into account if broadly based systems of recognition, which are not confined to a few target groups, are to be established. The standard concerned gives value to the "transcript" as a public reference point and thus indicates how the learning outcomes of its holders should be used (recruitment, remuneration, admission to a course of training or entry to a competitive examination).

The confusion which sometimes arises regarding the use of the term *recognition*, particularly from one country to another, is likely due to the fact that the various aspects listed in Table 1.2 are harder to handle in the case of non-formal and informal learning than for formal learning. Issues arise in relation to pedagogy, organisation and regulation. Recognition arrangements need to be examined with respect to each of these.

In order to reflect national and local concerns, as well as conditions in the field, as closely as possible, this study is particularly concerned with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and with the social recognition of qualifications that may be awarded as the result of a process of recognising those outcomes. This includes special attention to the need for social recognition of the records kept and/or the documents

produced on completion of a process of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, especially when qualifications are involved. These records and documents suffer from a poor image owing to the way they are produced or obtained, as non-formal and informal learning processes (the inputs) are by definition not well known and not subject to quality assurance procedures – only their outcomes are known. Moreover, the participating countries have clearly understood the challenge – and concede the difficulty – surrounding this social recognition of the records established during the recognition process, including the documents awarded on its completion, in the case of non-formal and informal learning. Indeed, they often point out that the key problem is to ensure that these qualifications gain acceptance in society (among employers, in academic circles, etc.). The problem was repeatedly raised during field visits in virtually all countries, even those that have progressed further in recognising outcomes of this kind.

Beyond specialist jargon, these are all key distinctions. First, while most countries have established the *recognition of outcomes*, there is nevertheless the question of the meaning and legitimacy of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning itself. If non-formal and informal learning outcomes are to be socially recognised, this implies an effort to accept kinds of learning other than formal learning. This leads directly to a crucially important question: in what should confidence be placed and to what should value be ascribed – learning or the outcomes of learning? The distinction between learning and learning outcomes concerns the social value of the record made available (*e.g.* a learning portfolio) or awarded (*e.g.* a qualification) following a process of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Behind these apparently technical questions about recognition, and particularly about outcomes, lies the issue of the legitimacy of non-formal and informal learning.

Consequently, it is helpful to clarify terms in order to illustrate the marked disparities. For some, the term "recognition" is only meaningful in the case of a qualification, first because it makes it possible to distinguish what is to be recognised from the objectives of the act of recognition. For example, in terms of confidence it is clearly difficult to dissociate learning outcomes from learning itself. Yet even today, the perceived quality of a qualification on the labour market or for securing admission to a training course is everywhere intrinsically linked to the quality of the formal provision on which it was awarded. Certain strong cultural markers therefore very closely associate the quality of a qualification with the quality/degree of formality of learning. It is difficult to place confidence in, and assign value to, a person's learning outcomes if one lacks confidence in how they were attained, hence the problem of how to judge what is assessed

and is to be recognised. In fact, interest initially centres on the signal provided by the act of recognising learning outcomes and then on the value of these outcomes for potential users. Consequently, the relevant distinction does not concern the act of recognition itself, which is fairly standard. It is concerned with its ultimate use (its value in a sectoral, geographical or temporal context) for a given authority, as well as its focus (the learning process, as opposed to the outcomes achieved).

The term "recognition" is very popular in the literature and among practitioners despite subtle differences in meaning. But overall, the different senses of the term fit together fairly well to give meaning to a process that can lead individuals to capitalise on successful learning experiences regardless of the context, formal or otherwise. Certification – as both the objective of a process to recognise outcomes and the focus of social recognition – clearly illustrates the complexity of ensuring the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. A procedure for recognising these outcomes with a view to qualification makes sense only if the qualification awarded is socially recognised; otherwise the "transcript" awarded would have no currency or use. Moreover, this applies as well to formal learning, as a qualification is of little interest unless it is socially recognised. In this sense, the question of social recognition is not specific to non-formal and informal learning but is harder to address, especially in countries where there is less acceptance that valuable learning can take place outside formal settings.

The idea of recognition thus always relates to the process – more or less long, more or less analytical, for example – and the procedure – more or less restrictive from country to country – but with many different focuses and ultimate objectives, as well as a variety of reference points, actors/stakeholders and time frames which differ from case to case. Qualification may even be alternately both the focus and the objective of recognition. Figure 1.2 sets out a general framework for further thought and discussion.

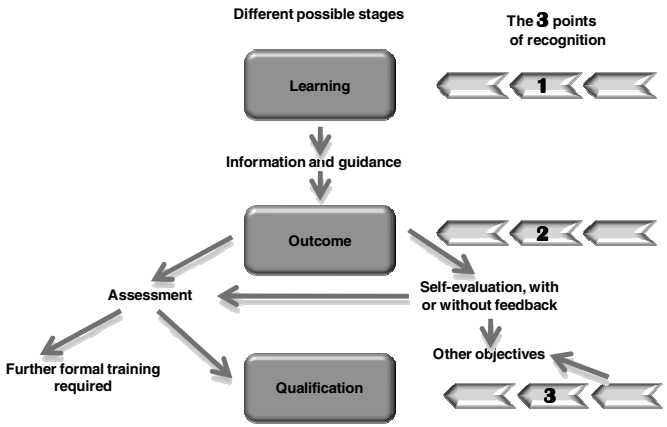
The process of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes

A process for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may contain several stages (see Table 1.3). Assuming that standards have been devised for granting social recognition to the qualification, the process of validating or certifying non-formal and informal learning outcomes may be divided into four stages.

First, there is the *identification* of the non-formal and informal learning outcomes.. The identification is undertaken with a view to assessing those

outcomes. This may involve self-assessment or third-party assessment. Guidance can be an important element in the process of identification.

Figure 1.2. The different stages of the various recognition processes



Second, there is the candidate's *production of evidence* of his or her outcomes on the basis of reference documents. This paves the way for the validation stage. It is at this stage that the predefined standards must be introduced. Otherwise, participants may not have the necessary frame of reference to document their outcomes correctly, or to analyse them so that the process of validation/certification can genuinely be one of building up knowledge, skills and competences through an understanding of those outcomes.

Third, there is the *validation* of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This is an essential stage aimed at verifying that the documents produced or any other form of assessment (simulation, real situation, written tests, etc.) have value in relation to a given standard. It is usually at this stage that the concept of level comes into play since, for a given body of knowledge, skills and competences being validated, the context may lead evaluators to propose higher or lower levels.

Last, there is the very formal and highly formalised stage of *certification*, in which the candidate receives an official document attesting to the veracity, validity and authenticity of these outcomes. If standards have been prepared in accordance with the social context, this document will enable its holder to reap the expected benefits on the labour market, or to return to formal learning when a specific qualification or level is an entry requirement. The benefits will reflect the level obtained, and the document

awarded to the successful candidate should first specify this level, rather than, for example, the nature of the process on the basis of which certification was granted.[5]

Consequently, the entire purpose of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is to ensure the visibility of knowledge, skills and competences. In an ideal world, each person's abilities would be known by all, not just in order to organise work and assign a role to everyone in enterprises and in society in the broad sense, but also to allow employers, government and universities to provide training, for example. For this recognition to be effective, it must be coupled with accepted and recognised standards. And, for the system to work, the certification process must meet the highest standards of quality.

Table 1.3. Definition of a few key terms/stages

Term / stages	Definition (and rudimentary observations)
Identification	Identifying what someone knows or can do, and possibly recording it. (Personal stage, possibly with supervision)
Assessment (Measurement)	Establishing what someone knows or can do. This is a measurement stage. (This may be a personal stage or, where there is significant formalisation, involve reliance on an external evaluator.)
Validation	Establishing that what someone knows or can do satisfies certain requirements (points of reference, standards). (A level of performance is set and requires the involvement of a third party.)
Certification	Stating that what someone knows or can do satisfies certain requirements, and awarding a document testifying to this. (Necessitates the involvement of an accredited authority to certify performance and possibly its level.)
Social recognition	Acceptance by society of the signs of what someone knows or can do.

Table 1.4. Summary of the most commonly used terms in the countries studied

Country	Important accepted terms, and their acronyms where applicable
Austria	*Anerkennung von non-formalem und informellem lernen* (recognition of non-formal and informal learning)
Australia	RPL (recognition of prior learning)
Belgium (Flemish Community)	Recognition of acquired competences or knowledge
Canada	PLAR (prior learning assessment and recognition); formerly PLA (Prior learning assessment)
Chile	Formal recognition of professional competences
Czech Republic	*Ověřování a Uznávání Výsledků Dalšího Vzdělávání* (verification and recognition of further education results)
Denmark	*Realkompetence* (formerly *Reelle Kompetencer*) (genuine competences, or real competences). RPL (Recognition of prior learning) is generally accepted
Germany	Recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired by non-formal and informal means. The term "recognition of non-formal and informal learning" is accepted.
Hungary	*Előzetes Tudás Értékelése* (prior learning assessment). The term RPL (recognition of prior learning) is also used.
Ireland	RPL (recognition of prior learning); also accreditation of prior learning (APL); accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL); accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL); accreditation of prior learning and achievement (APL&A); recognition of current competences (RCC); and learning outside formal teaching (LOFT).
Iceland	*Raunfaernimat* (recognition of real competences)
Italy	No specific term
Korea	Acquisition of academic degrees through self-education
Mexico	For adults: *Acreditación y certificación de competencias y conocimientos previos* (accreditation and certification of previous competences and knowledge). For upper secondary education (*Bachillerato*): *Acreditación y certificación de conocimientos correspondientes a niveles educativos o grados escolares adquiridos en forma autodidacta o a través de la experiencia laboral* (accreditation and certification of knowledge corresponding to an educational level or school grade acquired in a self-taught manner or by way of work experience). For experience gained on the labour market: *Certificación de la competencia laboral conforme a NTCL, independientemente de la forma en que se hayan adquirido los conocimientos, habilidades y destrezas implicados en dichas NTCL* (certification of labour competence according to NTCLs, regardless of the way knowledge, abilities and skills involved in those NTCLs [technical standards of professional competence] have been acquired).
Netherlands	EVC, *Erkennen van verworven competenties* (recognising acquired competences). Various other terms also exist. Formerly *Elders Verworven Competenties* (qualifications acquired elsewhere).
Norway	*Dokumentasjon og Verdsetting av Realkompetanse* (documentation and validation of formal, non-formal and informal competences)

Country	Important accepted terms, and their acronyms where applicable
Slovenia	Assessment of non-formal (*Neformalno*) and informal (*Priložnostno*) learning (*Učenje*)
South Africa	RPL, recognition of prior learning
Spain	*Reconocimiento de aprendizaje no formal e informal* (recognition of non-formal and informal learning). Local variations exist.
German-speaking Switzerland	*Validierung von Bildungsleistungen* (from *Bildung*: formal learning, and *Lernleistungen*: experiential learning)
Francophone Switzerland	*Validation des acquis*
Italian-speaking Switzerland	*Validazione degli apprendimenti acquisiti* (validation of learning acquired) even though Italian-speaking culture would probably suggest C*ompetenze acquisite* (competences acquired)
United Kingdom (England)	APL, accreditation of prior learning (accreditation of all learning with an emphasis on recognition for qualification purposes); APEL, assessment of prior and experiential learning (assessment of past experiential learning, with the emphasis on experience); AP(E)L denotes a combination of APL and APEL; APCL, accreditation of prior certificated learning (accreditation of prior certified learning, in the case of exemption at university); RARPA, recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning (which refers to non-formal learning).
United Kingdom (Scotland)	Recognition of prior informal learning

The definition of standards has the same crucial importance for the recognition of formal learning outcomes and of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. If they are poorly defined or not widely accepted, it is unlikely that the qualification awarded will be useful to its holder, because it is not socially recognised. Standards may also have been defined by interests with no social or technical legitimacy and this would deprive the qualification of any social value. However, in the case of formal learning, the learning context is rarely criticised and the formal system enjoys a good reputation in many countries whereas in the case of non-formal and informal learning the idea that learning is possible outside formal settings seems far from widely accepted.

Definitions used by countries

A survey of the different definitions provided by countries in their country background reports, and often analysed in the country notes reveal the complexity of the situation and the difficulty of achieving standardisation at international level. Given country diversity (Table 1.4), a common vocabulary would not be based on shared concepts. In any case, standardisation of terms may not necessarily be a realistic or desirable goal. Only international exchanges of experience and opinion, or indeed common policies within a political entity, require standardisation. And even then it is

desirable that both the local and international levels of concepts and terminology exist alongside each other to ensure that practice can be shared without sacrificing the quality and variety attributable to local idiosyncrasies.

Concluding remarks

There is a great variety of learning contexts. Their most significant characteristics may include the extent to which learning is intended and the curriculum and teaching are formally organised, as well as the level of supervision involved. Formal and informal learning may be said to indicate the two extremities of a learning continuum, with non-formal learning situated somewhere between, depending on national and local needs.

The last two decades have been noteworthy for the expansion of what policy makers regard as formal learning at the expense of non-formal and informal learning methods. This expansion has been paralleled by the emergence of fresh views about the kinds of learning which are interesting to take into consideration, and the development of the resources needed to recognise these non-traditional forms. These resources reflect a very wide variety of practices and procedures, including the use of learning portfolios and certification.

Two essential considerations are at the heart of this study: non-formal and informal learning *outcomes* and their *recognition* in and by society. What counts is to determine the circumstances under which it is helpful to codify non-formal and informal learning and ensure that its outcomes can be recognised. This volume is concerned with the best way of ensuring that what people know or know how to do becomes fully visible, regardless of how they acquired their knowledge, skills and competences. At issue is an essentially formal process of recognition, a process of recognising learning outcomes likely to have been achieved outside formal settings and often outside a certification process.

Notes

1. Here, the terms "knowledge, skills and competences" and "learning outcomes" will be regarded as synonyms, even though "outcomes" corresponds to a much broader concept than "knowledge, skills and competences" in normal usage.
2. However, the term "informal recognition" may lead to confusion.
3. Depending on the context, the term "certification" or "qualification" refers to a process or to the final document awarded on its completion; the word "transcript" is used when the emphasis is on the latter.
4. See Werquin (2007) for a discussion of the terms "validation" and "value" in this context.
5. Some countries retain the reference "through recognition of non-formal and informal learning" on the qualification itself.

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Chapter 2

Reasons for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes

This chapter gives the arguments for establishing procedures for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, with reference to documents prepared by the experts taking part in the OECD activity underlying this report. As far as possible, it also draws on research and surveys on the recognition of such outcomes.

There is now broad acceptance that RNFIL generates gains. Gains are demonstrated, for example, by the *Meritlærer* in Denmark, or by Canada which found that the economic benefits accruing from PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition) might be as much as CAD 4-6 million annually (Bloom and Grant, 2001). However, countries involved in the study only rarely estimate improvements in earnings. [1] Other surveys that focus on lifelong learning may call attention to gaps in the lifelong learning system that may relate to recognition.

Benefits for individuals

For individuals, the reasons for turning to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning can be classified into four main categories, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Even though they are also relevant to other stakeholders, they are nevertheless set out under the "individual" heading to indicate that the individual is the focus. The four categories are:

- economic benefits
- educational benefits
- social benefits
- other personal benefits.

Some countries, such as Belgium (Flemish Community), distinguish between advantages relating to the formative component of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (self-evaluation) and those associated with the summative component (see Chapter 1). For example, Belgium (Flemish Community) places personal and social benefits in the first category and economic benefits in the second. Educational benefits may clearly belong to both.

In South Africa, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes clearly became part of the national compensation policy after the first free elections in 1994. From this standpoint, the expected benefits were linked together to achieve a comprehensive readjustment in economic, educational and social terms.

Economic benefits for individuals

The most frequent argument – and sometimes the only one – put forward to justify the introduction of a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning is an economic one. For individuals, first of all, the aim is to save time and thus money, which are broadly related – especially in Canada (Aarts *et al.*, 1999) – through the decrease in the direct costs of

formal learning and the opportunity costs arising from the potential loss of resources for individuals during the period in which they are engaged in it. The time argument is such a universal one that it is hard to cite all the countries or regions which invoke it. Almost all countries taking part in the study put forward the time-saving argument to justify the introduction of a process for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Examples of reduced direct costs are given by Australia (Hunter Recognition Centre), while the decrease in costs is very clear in the Canadian PLAR. Canada also emphasises that PLAR provides for the optimisation of institutional resources. In certain cases, it is necessary to propose the PLAR option to obtain public funding.

Another frequently encountered argument concerns the need to make the many different modes of non-formal and informal learning outcomes visible. Scotland has emphasised that visibility is a necessary condition for possible economic gains. Increased visibility has an inherently dual value for individuals. First, it enables them to secure potential benefits on the labour market. Second, it may help them, particularly as adults, to return to the system of lifelong learning, as in Denmark. In Spain, people have to take tests offering access to the lifelong learning system and leading to the award of a *título* or a *certificado de professionalidad*, which generally have immediate currency on the labour market.

Countries which primarily target the upper secondary school leaving certificate to introduce processes for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes are those which often draw greater attention to this dual value. Concrete examples include the province of Saskatchewan in Canada, Mexico, which targets the *bachillerato,* and Norway with its "skills passport". The Netherlands refers to potentially better pay, more interesting work and scope for professional promotion. Ireland and Iceland also emphasise the possibility of returning to the lifelong learning system, as does Norway, especially in the case of frictional unemployment. The idea is that recognition might result in very short and effective training periods so that people experiencing temporary unemployment find a job faster, at least in sectors such as those concerned with health or social issues, which are often recipients of recognition (pilot) projects. Austria argues for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes at the end of upper secondary education, on grounds of equity (*Hauptschule*).

A good example demonstrating that recognition may make hidden knowledge, skills and competences visible comes from the University of New South Wales in Australia. Students who are involved in voluntary activities at the university (known as Yellow Shirts) have become the beneficiaries of an agreement reached with the student unions. Under this agreement, these activities are expressly codified and may be clearly

specified in, for example, a CV. In Belgium, the *Vlaamse Federatie van Jeughuizen* (VFJ, Flemish Federation of Youth Centres) runs a project enabling young people to use competences acquired during casual employment, most notably as holders of a voluntary worker learning portfolio.

In short, non-formal and informal learning outcomes are being made more visible everywhere. The presumed contradiction between being qualified *de facto* but not certified *de jure* is regarded as a foremost concern, either in personal terms for individuals wishing to make themselves heard and take action within their communities, or in relation to their jobs. The 2002 Canadian government report entitled *Knowledge Matters* clearly highlights this aspect of things. Many Canadians may possess interesting competences but they may be underrated and therefore not used effectively, because they have not been assessed. Only formal recognition of these abilities might enable making headway in this area, which (as the above-mentioned report argues) would oblige employers and educational institutions to become more modern and progressive in their outlook.

Australia and Spain (in a FOREM study) draw attention to the opportunities offered by the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in securing a better job and/or becoming more occupationally mobile. Australia also cites, among other things, the case of elderly persons no longer at work who might wish to return to the labour market. Australia has also noted that activities by volunteers such as the Queensland sea rescue group may lead to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences that are potentially in great demand on the labour market.

In Norway, qualification is considered the only indispensable resource for creating and safeguarding jobs. Italy also highlights the importance of transferable competences and labour market mobility, especially for workers in transition, such as those seeking to return to work. In Chile, attention is drawn to improving employability and pay, lowering training costs and optimising the use of time. Over and above employability, countries such as Slovenia speak of inventing new jobs from the knowledge, skills and competences that may become apparent through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Furthermore, the Slovene example shows that the potential advantages of recognition are intrinsically linked to the economic situation. Slovenia has in fact concentrated its entire effort in the field of recognition on qualifications such as the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Those who have recently obtained them are thus certain to be immediately rewarded with economic benefits: success in finding a job or salary increases. Spain emphasises occupational mobility (particularly towards the

tourist sector), pointing out that job creation occurs above all in fields with skilled jobs, such as new technology, which justifies reliance on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, among other things. Canada associates motivation to acquire further competences on the basis of PLAR with occupational mobility.

Some professions have also adopted the philosophy and techniques of recognition when seeking an identity. From 2004 to 2006 in Norway, farmers in the county of Nordland used recognition in this way to assess their competences. Although they are independent workers, the recognition process in general and the Norwegian "skills passport" in particular can help them to identify their potential and position themselves properly on the market for goods and services (in terms of quality, niches, etc.).

Recognition techniques may also enable foreigners to have their knowledge, skills and competences recognised when traditional equivalence procedures are not possible, owing to certain forms of incompatibility[2] from one country to the next. The frequency of such occurrences makes recognition of learning outcomes interesting as a substitute for equivalence procedures. Recognition can be a way of circumventing these problems, since it is the outcomes of prior learning which are assessed in real or simulated situations. This kind of approach is used in the province of Saskatchewan in Canada but it is not necessarily widespread. In contrast, Spain does not seem to be able – or want – to adopt this approach because it could be seen as unfair competition for national diplomas.

Educational benefits for individuals

The main benefit from the standpoint of education and training is facilitating a return to the lifelong learning system. All countries without exception refer to this to some extent. Nearly all consider it to be a factor motivating people to return to learning in a formal context, while fewer identify it as a means of obtaining exemption from academic prerequisites for admission to higher education. There are countless examples and the argument based on educational benefits is ubiquitous.

In Germany, recognition is used to access both higher and vocational education; in Canada it is also believed that use of PLAR for admission purposes minimises subsequent dropout. Belgium (Flemish Community) emphasises that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning results in a positive perception of learning in a formal context. Slovenia maintains that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is particularly well geared to domestic helpers. In securing recognition of their knowledge, skills and competences, they can achieve some professional or social status. To date they have been little more than a statistical category,

although they are essential for the activities of a great many enterprises, and particularly very small family enterprises. In Spain, recognition is a means of compensating for the handicap of not having an upper secondary school leaving certificate.

A well-managed personal scheme for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes can teach individuals about themselves and help them to navigate better both the system of lifelong learning and the labour market. The view that the process of recognising non-formal and informal learning is an excellent learning process in itself is rarely clearly expressed, but it is present in outline in the claims of promoters and other advocates.

The idea that there are educational benefits has been widespread in countries such as Iceland since the 1990s. Australia reports that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is a reliable way of obtaining credits, legitimising personal experience and opening up avenues other than the customary paths to learning and qualifications. Slovenia draws attention to the shorter period needed to qualify. Belgium (Flemish Community) similarly emphasises that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is an alternative route towards qualifications.

Australia takes the argument further in highlighting the usefulness of recognition as a process for helping learners when they plan and develop their career, by identifying weaknesses, special interests or strengths. This point is also made by Italy which views the possibility of translating experience into qualifications as a promising avenue, especially for stimulating learners and helping them devise individual careers. Chile considers personal and professional development together in its support for planning future career paths. In Slovenia, the clarity resulting from the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should facilitate career development. In Canada, the planning of education and the concomitant lowering of its costs is a common feature of arguments for taking account of such outcomes.

Apart from this, recognition of these outcomes is an essential, simple and acknowledged means of personalising individual learning paths and making access to qualifications more flexible (OECD, 2007). The justification, like the procedure, is simple: recognising people's knowledge, skills and competences enables them to concentrate their efforts on what they have not yet mastered. Each path is thus personalised and nearly always shorter.

This approach is always expressly associated with an offer of formal learning organised in modules. Many countries put forward this argument since recognising that individual learners have different career paths is essential for involving them and creating their motivation to learn.

Switzerland refers to the enhancement of original career paths for women and immigrants. Denmark states that clarifying the competences of individuals stimulates greater personal interest and involvement. In the Czech Republic, the relatively transparent nature of a recognition process is also viewed as motivating and potentially conducive to a return to formal learning.

All policies aimed at recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes help to raise awareness of the value of the lifelong learning concept. For example, the Gateway Project at Athabasca University has shown convincing benefits from PLAR, including admission to formal programmes, the accumulation of academic credits, and improvements in earnings, careers and the quality of life. The strengths of this kind of result are highlighted in the Gateway Project report: employers promote those who have benefited from PLAR, but would otherwise not have done so. The persons concerned were not natural candidates for continuing training, suggesting that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes opens avenues that would not have materialised otherwise.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may also offer people a "second chance" opportunity to experience upper secondary education (leading to a school leaving qualification such as the baccalaureate). For the individual, this may be a springboard to the system of lifelong learning, bearing in mind that research suggests that adults only return to formal learning after reaching at least upper secondary education threshold (OECD, 2003, 2005).

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning provides persons who could not have done so through a conventional route a means of entering higher education and university. This applies perhaps most notably to exemption from academic preconditions, as in Ireland, which cites some regulated professions such as nursing as examples. Some countries are therefore proposing to increase the number of access routes to higher education.[3] In South Africa, UNISA, one of the world's largest distance universities, has a quota of places for non-traditional students, even though those who have completed upper secondary education enrol in sufficient numbers. In South Africa too, the universities of technology have a very large department that works with recognition of prior learning (RPL). They inform learners that they have a choice and can take their decisions on the basis of cost for example. Denmark emphasises the fresh talents and prospects offered by non-traditional students. Generally speaking, many countries (*e.g.* the Netherlands and Austria) highlight the positive impact that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning has on people's awareness of their knowledge, skills and competences. This in return allows learners to control their learning more effectively. The issue of control is

also referred to in Canada, as PLAR enables people to choose the methods best suited to their individual needs, including those for which further formal learning is advocated.

Finally, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is conducive to developing the quality of teachers. While few examples are given by the countries studied, asking teachers to familiarise themselves with recognition concepts and principles may enable them to develop their professional practices, especially through better quality assessment. The college system in Nova Scotia, Ontario and Saskatchewan (Canada) requires all new teachers to take an internal certificate course, one of the components of which familiarises them with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as reflected in PLAR. Moreover, several Canadian provinces and territories report that they have begun a dialogue with teachers regarding their professional development by means of PLAR.

Social benefits for individuals

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning (for example, a general raising of qualification levels) is believed to have potentially positive consequences for social cohesion, one component of which is equal access to qualifications. For example, Slovenia highlights the notion of equity and points out that the social benefits are twofold, and include people who will be cared for by those who have secured recognition of their knowledge, skills and competences in fields such as health or social welfare. Demand for this kind of expertise is increasing, given the impact of population ageing. In some countries, half of the demand for recognition comes from the health and social sectors, including support for persons with limited autonomy.

Equipped with the additional resource that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes represents, institutions can more effectively organise entry into a profession and a possible return to formal learning. This is said to be especially important for social groups at risk of exclusion and the most disadvantaged groups of the population in general (PLA Centre, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada).

Other personal benefits

Over and above the economic benefits, recognising people's learning can help to motivate those who still tend to be reluctant to return to formal learning, especially if they are poorly qualified (OECD, 2003, 2005). The psychological aspect is important here, especially for the least qualified individuals. Switzerland reports that recognition is a more attractive proposition for people than alternatives involving formal training. As a

result, recognition systems are viewed as potentially capable of encouraging a change in mentalities. The process is probably circular, as these systems may also require a change in mentalities in order to exist and function over time.

This psychological aspect can be especially interesting for individuals who have dropped out of the formal system and who might believe of themselves that "I know nothing and can do nothing". In an approach involving the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, the sense that one possesses knowledge and the ability to do things might be (re)affirmed and be stronger than in the formal system, because it mobilises the individual as a central actor. Australia notes that the aims of those who rely on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning might well be different because they are not cast in the customary mould of the formal system. This suggests an opening towards new forms of motivation and thus fresh approaches to attracting people and perhaps also knowledge, skills and competences to be exploited both individually and collectively. Canada emphasises attracting new learners and getting those who had become discouraged to return to learning.

Gaining in self-esteem and confidence is another personal benefit. Indeed, much of the literature on recognition of non-formal and informal learning shows that a recognition process can make individuals aware of the knowledge, skills and competences they possess. This point is referred to in Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Scotland and Slovenia. It is clearly stated in the Netherlands where recognition is regarded as more important in promoting people's image than a possible qualification. It is encapsulated in the slogan of the Norwegian campaign for the "skills passport", namely "you know more than you think". In Denmark, the argument also refers to well-being, improved relations with colleagues and positive attitudes *vis-à-vis* employers' expectations. In Canada, learners who were questioned on the subject in 2003 replied that PLAR gave them confidence in their ability to learn.

Benefits for employers and the world of business

Economic benefits

Given the role of employers and firms in society, the benefits to be derived from the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are mainly economic. The Czech Republic emphasises that individuals may find knowledge, skills and competences derived from the world of work more attractive than purely academic knowledge, because the former are so clearly practical and functional.

Like individuals, employers are interested in the idea of saving on the cost of formal learning when they commit their employees to procedures for recognising non-formal and informal learning, in addition to, or instead of, formal learning. These savings would come from a reduction in the length of training. The Czech Republic refers to this, even though the idea of a gain in time and thus in recognition is not acceptable for professions with relatively strict regulations.

Improving the links between the worlds of work and training

In any event, improving the interface between the labour market and the world of learning through clear recognition of all the knowledge, skills and competences of workers is frequently invoked. Employers are clearly interested in the visibility of knowledge, skills and competences so that they can match their workers better with the jobs or tasks to be performed. Italy emphasises the use of resources involving learning portfolios (*Libretto Formativo del Cittadino*) to help employers and ensure that the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences matches their requirements. Denmark considers the sound documentation and visibility of knowledge, skills and competences to be an important element of business strategy. Austria has established systems of competence appraisal and learning portfolios to encourage this kind of visibility. Spain emphasises the positive aspect of the assessment process inherent in recognition for improving the information employers possess about their employees. This may even help enhance a firm's prestige.

Many Canadian provinces and territories base their justification for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes on worker productivity, which would be improved by better insight into their own knowledge, skills and competences. In Manitoba, the Work Ready Skills Passport prioritises arguments involving productivity on the grounds that this enables people to find appropriate jobs. In Norway, Vox, the adult learning agency, has interviewed employers and employees and concluded that the productivity of workers increases if their competences are identified and codified. Austria also attaches importance to productivity and has established mechanisms involving competence appraisals and learning portfolios.

Even though the strength of the argument depends on the level of exposure to competition, and especially international competition, many employers regard the development of knowledge, skills and competences as a means of overcoming many problems, including a lack of competitiveness. The question is raised at the highest levels in all countries. Denmark has a

well-established official position on the high strategic importance of the subject.

Regulation and quality assurance

Another essential challenge for some employers is to satisfy regulatory requirements. This is the case in sectors such as health in which a proportion of the workforce is expected to have specific certified qualifications (in addition to or instead of a licence to practise). The same applies to other regulated professions in which all employees must hold a certificate for certain technical operations. Finally, a similar condition applies to a whole class of professionals who must have formally qualified staff in their teams in order to tender for certain contracts, most notably in the area of public procurement. A concrete example is provided by the United Food and Commercial Workers Security Officers Training Initiative (Manitoba, Canada).

Employers may also be interested in adopting practices that entail the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of foreign workers whom they would be in a position to recruit if their knowledge, skills and competences were certified. An example is provided by Saskatchewan in Canada. A similar idea that appears to be emerging in a few countries but is not yet widespread would involve recognising the non-formal and informal learning outcomes achieved by migrants returning to their country of origin.

In general, business is always likely to benefit if a firm can advertise the fact that its employees are formally qualified to a particular level. This is above all a condition for securing certification by quality assurance systems that use international standards (*e.g.* ISO), or tendering in the area of public or international procurement and/or for consumer protection, for example. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may make it easier for employers to motivate employees to embark on courses leading to a certified qualification.

Recruitment and work organisation

Techniques involving the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may lead to improved understanding of the quality of applicants for recruitment beyond their knowledge, skills and competences. Denmark argues that firms should orient their strategy on the basis of what they learn from recognition techniques. In Belgium (Flemish Community), recognition is considered to provide scope for improving recruitment processes by means of knowledge testing. Chile views this method of selecting applicants as a way to lower recruitment costs, particularly because

it offers a way of assessing the ability of prospective recruits to adapt in a constantly changing labour market. Canada is pressing for PLAR to be regarded as a resource to support recruitment and used as such; this would provide both a justification for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and a catalyst for its smooth development.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning may also enable employers to organise or reorganise work in accordance with people's knowledge, skills and competences. Recognition can make workers' abilities more visible without involving new formal learning, which might be superfluous and demotivating. Concrete examples include the Competency-based Training Framework (Bristol-Aerospace, Manitoba, Canada) and the Boeing Competency Identification (Manitoba, Canada). In its policy for fighting bottlenecks in knowledge, skills and competences, Australia specifically aims to help employers. Slovenia is also prioritising the need to ensure a better match between workers and their jobs.

Countries with collective bargaining agreements often use arguments linked to length of service as a measure of knowledge, skills and competences that go beyond the qualifications obtained in the formal initial education and training system. Recognition is a natural counterpart to this approach that would distinguish between holding a certified qualification and really possessing the knowledge, skills or competences to which it corresponds.

In the same vein, recognition is a possible approach for fast-changing professions in which knowledge, skills and competences often need to be adjusted. Switzerland is in favour of this approach and of initially making recognition a diagnostic instrument for monitoring trends. Italy also highlights changes in human resources management and the need for analytical instruments during periods of rapid change. Chile refers to the development of quality human resources and the discovery of new competences that would gain a foothold more readily in firms if the scope for recruitment went beyond the formal education and training system. The idea of diagnosis is taken up by Canada in relation to "benchmarking" between provinces and territories which often compete for labour in general and skilled workers in particular.

Norway reported a significant decrease in the rate of absenteeism among qualified workers whose non-formal and informal learning outcomes had been recognised, a factor likely to prove attractive to employers.

Benefits for providers of learning or certification

As clearly suggested above, a major share of the benefits derives from visibility of the knowledge, skills and competences attested through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This occurs when recognition is endorsed by the provision of a tangible record, whether a certificate or some other form of physical or virtual documentation (see Chapter 1). When the record is a certified qualification and based on a standard approved by all stakeholders, its benefits are likely to be even stronger. This accounts for the importance attached here to the providers of certification, even though it is the system of lifelong learning – regardless of whether or not its providers are certifying bodies – which is the backdrop to this study.

Varied national practices

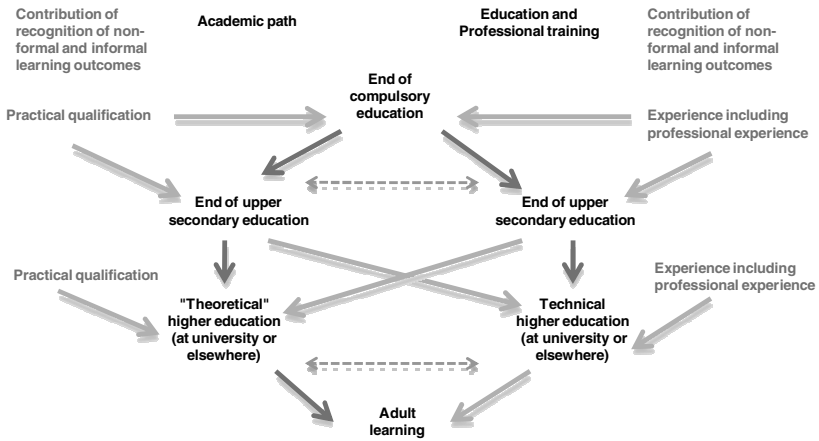
Providers of learning in the formal context and providers of certified qualifications are at the forefront of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. They are either stakeholders in the recognition system or its direct competitors, and sometimes both. Certain traditional providers of qualifications have turned to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a way to increase the number of their prospective clients, as in the Netherlands.

In Australia, it is argued that offering to recognise outcomes enhances the attractiveness of the institution, enabling it to diversify its student intake. Similarly, Australia suggests that recognition brings providers closer to the labour market and makes them more familiar with its expectations and needs. The Netherlands emphasises that recognition can act as an incentive for providers to become more familiar with the wishes of firms, especially at local level.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the access paths to certified qualifications. It shows the most commonly used paths (entrances) and those that are little used. If the flow of people leaving the formal system of education and initial training diminishes, providers of formal learning or of qualifications may pay further attention to paths that provide for entry at all stages of the qualifications system.

The approach used by countries depends to a fairly large extent on the general level of qualification of the population. For example, Spain pays considerable attention to the level at the end of compulsory education, as recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has not yet fully made its mark at that level, while Norway focuses more on the end of upper secondary education.

Figure 2.1. Access paths to certified qualifications and their relative importance



In the Czech Republic, recognition is regarded as a means of giving consistency to the career paths of people with no more than partial qualifications. Italy emphasises this aspect of recognition, which may unify fragmented individual experience. So does Spain in responding to the social need to recognise competences acquired by different means, including experience, to obtain *títulos* and *certificados*. Scotland highlights the possibility of moving from one qualification to another, which might also be in the interests of providers. Australia notes the decrease in costs for providers, mainly because students with credits obtained from RPL remain in the system for less time and vacate their places faster, a point worth bearing in mind if lecture halls are overcrowded.

The university is probably the institution with the most ambiguous position on recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. As the pool of traditional students diminishes, universities in many countries are exploring the possibility of attracting non-traditional students to higher education modules.

In Chile, the argument that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes enables institutions to expand their student intake is also used for technical training institutes. The Czech Republic states that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is essential to diversify provision, particularly for the offer of certified qualifications. Scotland shares this belief, with a view to providing more opportunities for people to have careers that match their expectations – and the remuneration that goes with them – thanks to their qualifications. Austria also uses equity-

based arguments to justify university admission of non-traditional students (*Berufsreifeprüfung*, BRP; *Studienberechtigungsprüfung*, SBP). In South Africa, a number of universities have formed the Free State Higher Education Consortium (FSHEC) and established a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

For the time being, the need to satisfy instructions from national or regional institutions that manage or regulate providers of learning or certified qualifications is a reason given to justify the use of processes for recognising non-formal and informal learning. In Australia, satisfying the regulatory requirements of the ATQF is the argument most often put forward (Bowman *et al.*, 2003).

Recognition for certified qualifications

A key issue for recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is the knowledge, skills and competences that have been accumulated but which are insufficient to obtain a qualification. In this case, recognition of these outcomes can become a natural complement to formal learning (see Annex 2.A1).

Recognised outcomes for access to a qualification do not alter the period needed to obtain it. (This may be because the period needed is specified in the regulations, or that the person concerned establishes a period for achieving the same end.) Alternatively, if the regulations provide for it, the period needed to obtain qualifications may be reduced for people with recognised non-formal and informal learning outcomes. If there are no external restrictions such as a compulsory period of study or training, speed is a personal variable enabling applicants for qualifications to opt for a learning procedure adapted to their own potential and preferences.

In countries such as South Africa and Norway, non-formal and informal learning outcomes may be grounds for the direct award of a full qualification. This is neither systematic nor automatic. It remains uncommon and applicable to just a few diplomas. Even where a certified qualification is the goal, the most widespread solution involves the award of credits for use in a qualification procedure as a supplement to credits obtained or obtainable in the formal system. This is the essence of the Australian system which is devised to aim for and permit certification.

To sum up, the basic justification for taking account of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in a qualification procedure is to enable the participants to start from "higher up". They may thus use these outcomes to progress faster, or to make more of their subsequent formal learning for

qualification purposes in their adult life, depending on the restrictions they face.

Benefits for trade unions and the social partners

Trade unions and other workers' associations view the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as offering their members the possibility to achieve a particular level of qualification and thus to claim the associated benefits. Most collective agreements and other sectoral agreements in many countries and regions in the study base wage scales on the level of qualification.

In Iceland, the social partners, including the trade unions, regard the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a means of offering alternatives. Efforts to reduce school dropout appear to have greatly benefited from co-operation between social partners and schools. The issue also arises in Scotland, where recognition is viewed as a way of identifying the aspirations of early school leavers. In Belgium (Flemish Community), the *Vlaams Instituut voor Vorming en Opleiding in de Social profit* (Flemish Institute for Training and Education for Social Benefit, VIVO vzw) was established in 2000, following an agreement between the government and social partners. It is very involved in the field of social activity and pursues actions in the area of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, especially for the assessment of the knowledge, skills and competences of nurses. In Manitoba, nurses are also the focus of WPLAR (PLAR at work), a pilot initiative to identify the various access paths to a diploma. Saskatchewan has developed a holistic portfolio approach, which contains information of a private nature on the centres of interest of individuals with a view to satisfying future needs in the health sector more effectively.

In Norway, a study carried out in a single county from 2001 to 2003 revealed that recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is very useful in wage negotiations. This ranks higher than the usefulness of recognition in job search (in second place) and the scope it provides for occupational mobility (third). In Norway, the social partners completed nine pilot projects in various sectors from 1999 to 2002. This led to the development of instruments that could be used by employees to assess their tasks. In Austria too, the competence recognition centre (KOMPAZ) established in Linz in 2004 offers the development of a competence portfolio on the basis of a self-assessment exercise covering four half-days and an assessment provided by KOMPAZ evaluators on an optional basis.

Student unions are often interested in approaches involving the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as student life offers a great many opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and competences which are not necessarily taken into account in degree courses (a situation exemplified by the *Yellow Shirts* in Australia).

Workers' organisations in Chile view the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as an opportunity to become involved in defining new employment profiles.

Benefits for governments

A more competitive economy

Most governments, for example those in the European Union or NAFTA, have objectives in common with other countries or individual objectives defined in terms of the knowledge society or knowledge, competitiveness and economic growth. This always involves the development of human capital and thus an effective system of lifelong learning. The characteristics of such a system include recognition of what individuals already know and can do (European Commission, 2006; Belgium [Flemish Community]; Denmark). For Ireland, the main benefits of a system for recognising outcomes are to support upskilling and meeting workplace needs. Australia's Life Experience Counts project seeks to help women, economically inactive persons and young school dropouts to return to work. Italy is also seeking to reduce the school dropout rate. Denmark cites the Bologna Process and the Copenhagen Declaration.

Democracy and citizenship

Some countries (*e.g.* Iceland and the Netherlands) refer to democracy and access to enlightened citizenship as conventional aims of recognition. In Norway, the argument is clearly that a well-educated population is the main resource for ensuring the quality of life and fighting discrimination. Austria draws attention to the importance of social participation.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is used by governments to increase people's opportunities to access the system of lifelong learning. The wide variety of paths available is highlighted and only recognition appears capable of acknowledging and making the most of this diversity.

More effective systems

Recognition may also help to further the permeability of systems and galvanise institutions (Spain). The argument is used in Switzerland and the Czech Republic, where reference is made to improving co-ordination of education and initial training, on the one hand, and continuing training, on the other. This argument appears vitally important in Scotland which wishes to establish bridges between continuing training and higher education. It is heard in Norway in relation to mobility between vocational education and higher education. Austria reports strong institutional segmentation in post-secondary education, and wishes to use recognition as a means of providing bridges between institutions for post-secondary education and vocational training institutions.

Some governments also talk about making the knowledge, skills and competences of individuals, workers and citizens more consistent and compatible with demand. Italy is developing this line of reasoning from the angle of the public employment service. The goal is to increas efficiency by reducing the time taken to reply to job seekers. Italy also wishes to promote policies for intervention in labour market segments that are weak, for example because they have few human resources or skills at their disposal. Chile too highlights recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes for the public employment service, which is regarded as better placed to appreciate labour market needs in a country where such recognition is very employment-oriented. Nova Scotia in Canada also has plans to develop a learning portfolio for 650 people within the public employment service over a three-year period. The scheme targets in particular those at risk of social exclusion.

Other governments seek to exploit to the maximum the potential of each individual's knowledge, skills and competences. The importance of using all talents is highlighted in the Netherlands and Ireland. In Iceland, the idea is to mobilise the entire population and above all older citizens who might be persuaded to return to the labour market. Spain also notes the potential benefits for the elderly of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Slovenia supports the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a means of helping to transform the traditional system of learning, making it more flexible and personalising the learning paths involved. This would lead to more effective integration of disadvantaged groups and to improvements in the qualifications structure, and should ease social tensions.

In Spain, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is viewed as a way to hasten the use of common competence standards, an idea which was instrumental in developing the National Vocational Qualifications Catalogue (CNCP). The Netherlands suggests that recognition makes it possible to spread learning more evenly over a lifetime, as it tends to be overly concentrated on young people.

In occupations with a shortage of workers, there is a need to adjust as effectively as possible and to maintain the level of knowledge, skills and competences of an ageing population (Australia). British Columbia has created a website listing occupations that will suffer workforce shortages in the next five years. PLAR is regarded as a possible way of responding to this challenge.

Many countries refer to macroeconomic benefits, such as a lowering of the costs usually associated with formal learning. For example, the Netherlands emphasises that there are fewer dropouts during training when access depends on the recognition of learning outcomes. The Netherlands also believes that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may stimulate formal educational institutions to innovate and possibly change their practices, and discover for example new paths to qualifications that are better suited to workers.

All these arguments invoked to a greater or lesser extent by governments involve increasing the number of opportunities open to individuals to secure recognition of their learning outcomes or obtain a qualification – whether a new one or an additional one that would be more effective or better suited to recent developments in the labour market. By providing for the award of qualifications, the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes enables countries or regions to improve the spread of qualifications among the population.

Recognition thus offers a second chance to obtain a qualification and not necessarily – or at least, not routinely – a second chance to experience education and training in a formal context. The difference should be noted, since it is essential and indicative of a probable change in the paradigm now emerging. This second chance to qualify represents an opportunity for those without any qualifications, or whose qualifications are not widely recognised. These include the unemployed (and especially the young unemployed), disabled persons, older workers, immigrants and second generation immigrants. Spain points out that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes could prove attractive for immigrants, as it might motivate them to seek social improvement or appropriate vocational training. Alberta uses PLAR to promote internal and external migration in Canada and attract workers, and the province has thus launched a wide

variety of actions. Recognising the competences of immigrants is generally a priority in all Canadian provinces and territories.

Australia and Canada have indigenous populations. Brandon University, in Manitoba, is involved in a project with the First Nations to develop the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. As research conducted in Saskatchewan confirms, this approach is all the more promising as Aboriginal people value most experiential lifelong learning, which includes spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual learning. By comparison, the Western formal learning approach tends to focus primarily on intellectual learning.

The Czech Republic refers to equity, as do Austria and Hungary, which also add social cohesion to the list of justifications for recognition. Ireland is concerned about improving the labour market situation of those with a low level of education. In Norway, documenting and imparting formal status to the knowledge, skills and competences of those over 50 years of age who are likely to be more vulnerable is viewed as a very constructive strategy. Austria has established a scheme under the European EQUAL programme which offers a learning portfolio to immigrants wishing to become proficient in German. The Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan also note that proficiency in English and in literature may fuel the use of PLAR. In Austria, the WIFIs (Institutes for Economic Promotion of Economics Chambers) highlight the significance of second chance opportunities, as well as information and guidance.

In South Africa, the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) is developing recognition for workers with low-level qualifications, including those who have been victims of apartheid or who are illiterate.

Public action mechanisms

Governments have limited ability to change things on a very large scale. Their main opportunities for action lie in:

- drawing up goal-oriented public policies;
- implementing them, directly or indirectly;
- investing wisely in systems for recognition, or any of their components, in order to establish formal incentives for achieving the aims of those policies.

A reduction in bottlenecks can be included among the economic aims that a government may wish to pursue. By revealing the knowledge, skills and competences of successful learners (see the discussion of visibility above), recognition of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes can

ensure that they obtain jobs in accordance with their real abilities. Switzerland is proposing to use recognition to identify potential cases of mobility, while Australia is using it to boost mobility. The Netherlands has drawn attention to the shortage of highly skilled workers in certain economic sectors. Scotland sees a general lack of knowledge, skills and competences, with a problem of adjustment between supply and demand that the recognition of outcomes may be capable of overcoming. The concern here is to offer opportunities for redirecting people, for example to job vacancies on the labour market. In Norway, bottlenecks affect the nursing, engineering and teaching professions.

Notes

1. Country background reports and country notes are available at *www.oecd.org/recognition*.
2. This can occur where professions have different regulations from one country to another, diplomas or training specialisations not listed in the host country, problems in translating documents provided by applicants for equivalent diplomas, effects of reputation, etc.
3. While Norway provides for admission to higher education on the basis of exemption from preconditions, there appears to be some risk that these students may be stigmatised, as they are in many countries. However, in Austria, although qualifications obtained in formal learning contexts are in greater demand, others do not appear to be stigmatised.

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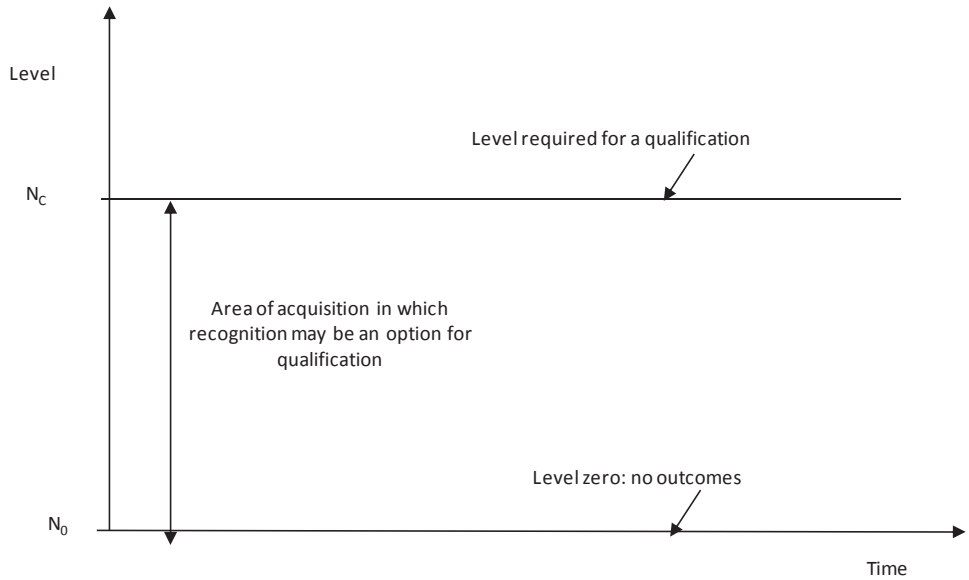
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Annex 2.A1

Recognition for certified qualifications

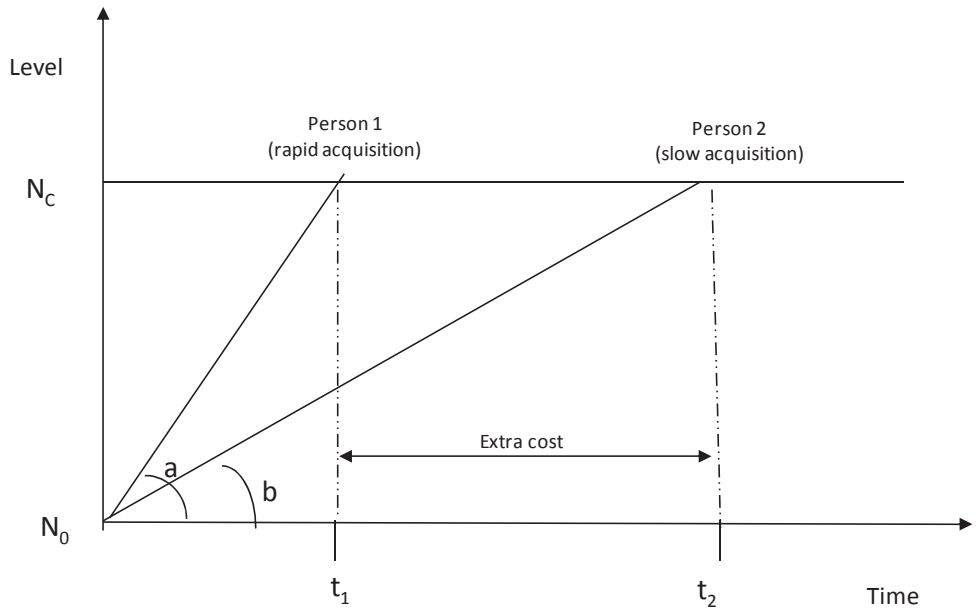
The possible advantage of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is often expressed in terms of the time and budget available. This set of figures illustrates how recognition of these outcomes can work as a natural complement to formal learning.

Figure 2.A1.1. General framework: qualifications in the formal context



In Figure 2.A1.1, a candidate seeking a certified qualification should reach a certain level given by N_c, in order to obtain it following an assessment. Figure 2.A1.2 shows the relation between the duration of learning and costs, though still in a formal context with formal learning. As well as the additional direct cost for someone who reaches the qualification level more slowly, the opportunity costs may also be higher. However, this depends on whether learning is full-time or part-time. In any case, the potential benefits associated with the qualification will accrue for a shorter period if the qualification is obtained at a later time.

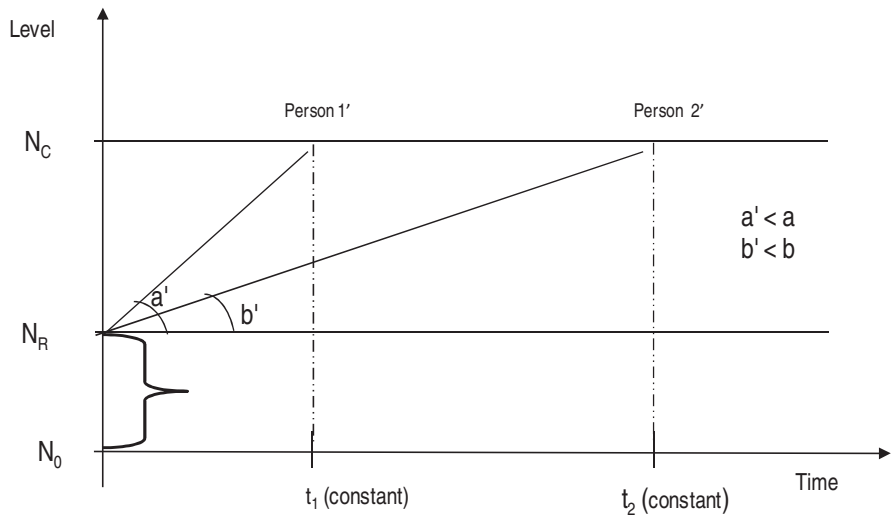
Figure 2.A1.2. Duration of learning and potential extra costs in the formal context



Note: Person 1 reaches the requisite level for a given qualification more quickly than person 2.

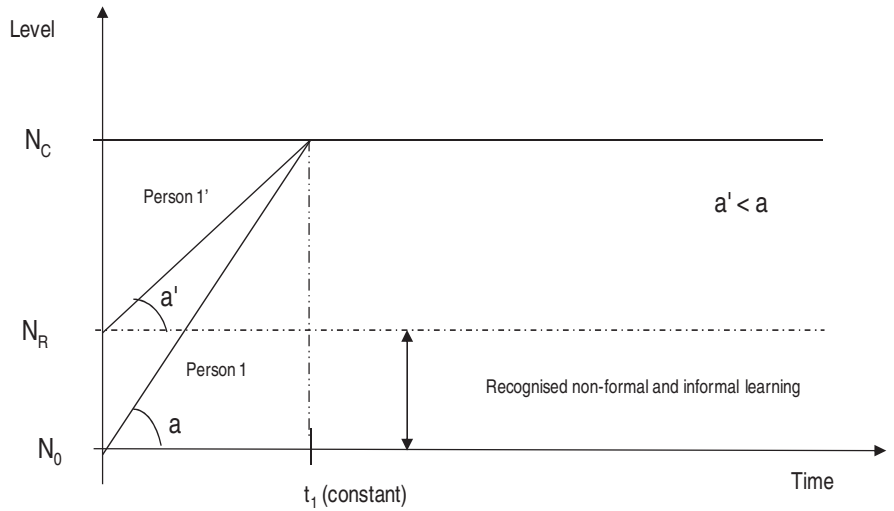
In Figure 2.A1.3 the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes do not alter the period needed to obtain it. However, as shown in Figure 2.A1.4, less daily effort is invested required to reach the qualification level by a certain date by a person because non-formal and informal learning outcomes have been taken into account.

Figure 2.A1.3. The position of non-formal and informal learning in qualification procedures



Note: The possession of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is recognised at level NR. Slope a' is not as steep as slope a. Person 1' starts from higher up because he/she has secured recognised outcomes.

Figure 2.A1.4. Recognition in adapting formal learning for qualification purposes

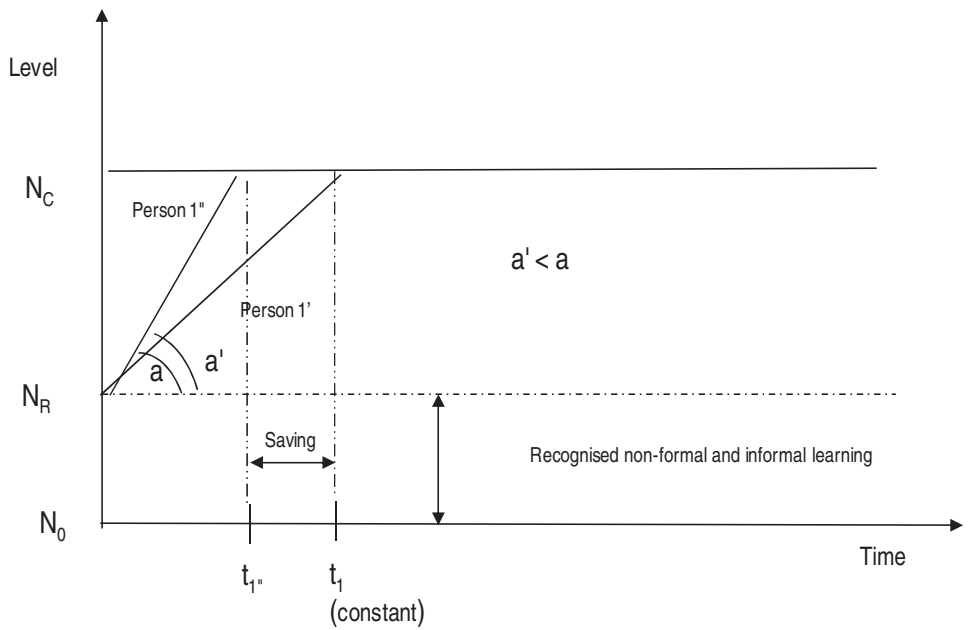


Note: Less daily effort is invested by person *1* in the qualification procedure. The opportunity costs for person *1'* are smaller than those experienced by person *1* because non-formal and informal learning outcomes have been taken into account. This lesser effort is represented by slope *a'* which is less steep than slope *a*.

In addition, Figure 2.A1.4 shows that taking account of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, at level N_R, is always advantageous for accessing qualifications obtained through additional formal learning. Whatever the period selected by an individual or laid down in the regulations, the qualification procedures in formal learning can be personalised more effectively by taking account of those outcomes.

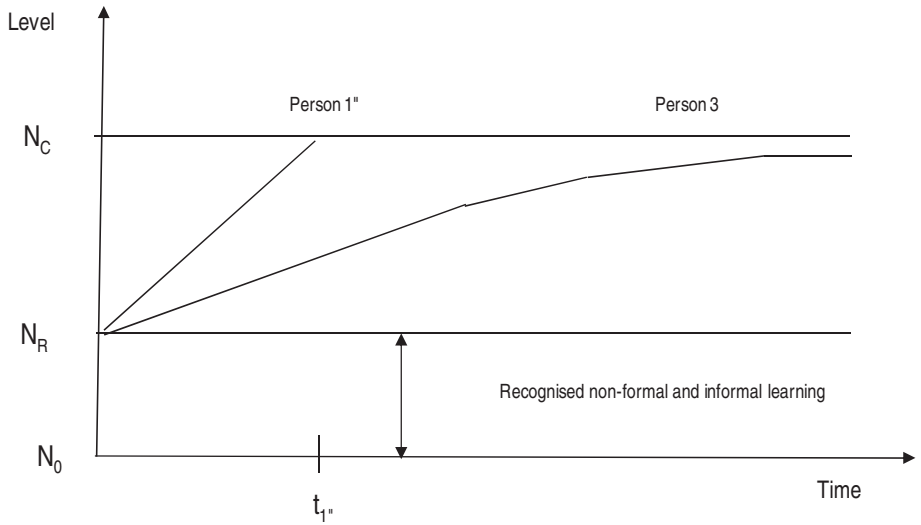
In Figure 2.A1.5, if there are no external restrictions such as a compulsory period of study or training, then speed is a personal variable enabling applicants for qualifications to opt for a learning procedure adapted to their own potential and preferences. However, Figure 2.1.A6 shows that some candidates may never reach the level necessary to obtain the qualification, while Figure 2.A1.7 illustrates the case where the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is sufficient to obtain the certification, without additional formal learning.

Figure 2.A1.5. Recognition as a means of shortening formal learning for qualification purposes



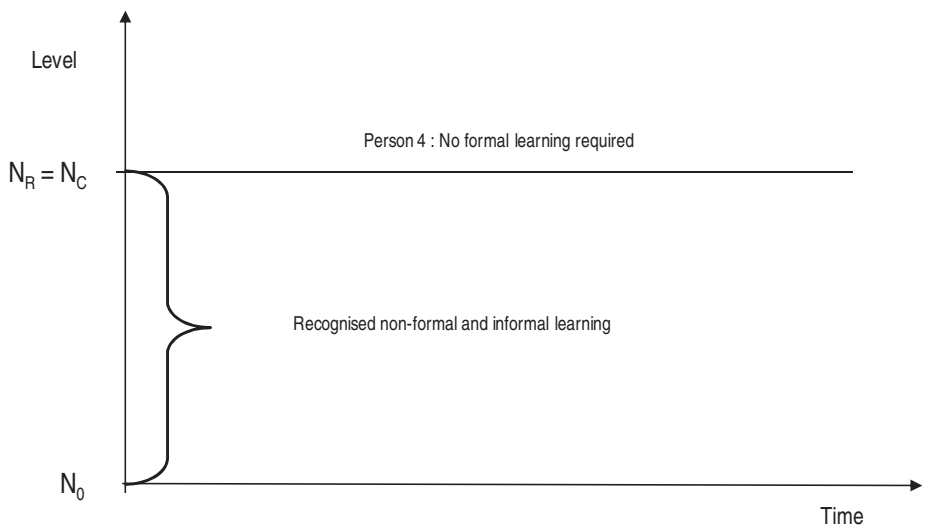
Note: Where the initial level is N_R, the result is a period of access to qualification, $t_{1"}$ which is shorter than t_1, and thus a saving in time. It may be noted that the slope indicates the speed at which learning outcomes are accumulated.

Figure 2.A1.6. Recognition does not always lead to a certified qualification



Note: Person *3* does not satisfy the conditions for the award of a qualification.

Figure 2.A1.7. Full qualification through recognition



Chapter 3

Public policy options

This chapter identifies a number of issues to bear in mind if the introduction of a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, or the strengthening of an existing system, is on the short- or medium-term agenda. A number of policy options, not necessarily mutually exclusive, are also proposed.

The preceding chapters have described and analysed the current situation as regards the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The present chapter sets out to study the conditions under which the functioning of recognition systems may be encouraged and indeed initiated. Rather than offering recommendations, the chapter identifies issues that should definitely be borne in mind if the introduction of a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, or the strengthening of an existent system, is on the short- or medium-term agenda. Moreover, the policy options reviewed here are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

National or local government authorities take the lead in guiding recognition systems. They face a range of options *vis-à-vis* the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (West, 2007). These include:

- removal of any obvious barriers to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes;
- promoting recognition practices among institutions;
- encouraging processes for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes;
- publicising the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes;
- promoting – and perhaps demanding – common quality assurance procedures;
- standardising the content of qualifications (learning outcomes) so that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is accepted as fully comparable with formal education and training;
- securing an integrated system.

The trends observed across all countries in the study suggest that countries are moving from "simple" steps to make it easier to recognise non-formal and informal learning outcomes towards the introduction of a truly integrated system. Few countries have reached the final stages, even though many of them have a clear view of what these final stages might be. The rest of this chapter sets out the policy issues that are involved and provides some pointers for policy makers, practitioners and researchers when considering reforms.

Organising communication and promoting transparency

Choosing suitable terms and using them in communication

A common language to describe clearly identified subject matter is necessary. Standardisation of terms is a *sine qua non* for communication with prospective candidates for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. It is also the essential preliminary stage in any constructive work. The approach and the words selected will have to be in phase with the local culture.

The ability to communicate clearly about what the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes really means is one of the great challenges that lie ahead, both for policy experts and to ensure that potential candidates will not be deterred. In the case of end users, this can be achieved by reliance on simple language, as in Australia where some centres for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are sited in shopping centres and capture the attention of passers-by with the words: "If you have skills, come and tell us about them!".

Communicating – and communicating astutely – with due regard for vocabulary and concepts is a way of bringing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes out of its current isolation to become part of commonly accepted practice.

Organising and strengthening information, counselling and guidance

People who know that a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes exists (the initiated) do not necessarily always know where to obtain information or whom to contact. Moreover, the vast majority of individuals are not even aware of this possibility of having their non-formal and informal learning outcomes recognised (the non-initiated).

One proposal therefore would be to encourage information and guidance in the initial phase of recognising non-formal and informal learning. For those who know that recognition is possible, personal support of this kind may enable them to shorten the period between their first exploratory contacts, including perhaps registration itself, and completion of the recognition procedure with (for example) a certified qualification. It would also make others aware that recognition is possible.

In concrete terms, this may mean drafting accessible, clear and self-explanatory information. It may also involve recruiting employees who are specialists in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Above all, it will mean training staff who engage with people in general,

whether in public employment agencies, municipalities or at any of the levels to which the public and end users, including enterprises, may turn.

Information may be more effective if it reaches into people's lives in everyday locations – for example, sports stadiums, shopping centres, cultural centres and the premises of immigrant worker associations. As already noted, this is the case in both Australia and Portugal.

A disadvantage is that an effective information and guidance network has a cost. It is relatively high and varies most notably in accordance with geographical factors and the level of qualification of the population. It can be very high in large countries with a scattered population. Simplifying the system and procedures for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes also makes it easier to communicate information effectively.

Making recognition central to a more comprehensive personal career path

Groups of people who have not accumulated sufficient knowledge, skills or competences through non-formal and informal learning probably cannot expect very highly formalised recognition of their learning outcomes, such as the award of a certified qualification. People also learn about themselves and acquire awareness of their potential and their abilities. This is a frequently described phenomenon among participants in recognition procedures (for example, in the preparatory seminar for building up a learning portfolio in Saskatchewan).

The highly formalised recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is thus not necessarily the right approach for people with a low level of knowledge, skills and competences. On the other hand, it is likely that many people have acquired non-formal and informal learning outcomes that are neither recognised nor turned to good account. There may be scope to develop methods for identifying the knowledge, skills and competences they might possess.

There may be a particular case for recognition efforts more systematically directed towards the unemployed or non-working population which can be a financial burden on social welfare systems (unemployment benefits, early retirement) when a qualification might lead these individuals back into employment. However, it will also be important not to waste time and effort recognising learning outcomes that have become obsolete.

Working together and involving all the stakeholders

Just as formal learning systems involve various stakeholders, including many ministries, so the recognition of non-formal and informal learning

outcomes is also a concern for many players. From a practical standpoint, decisions may be more acceptable if all stakeholders are involved from the outset. The disadvantage – noted in particular by South Africa – is that this can result in extremely lengthy procedures. An approach worth considering if the national context is appropriate is to set up an inter-ministerial delegation on a temporary basis yet long enough to organise (for example) a few pilot schemes.

Establishing a qualifications framework as a catalyst

Many countries consider that the existence of a qualifications framework may help to promote systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, especially in the case of recognition procedures formalised to the extent of awarding qualifications. In general, the incorporation of all qualifications available through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes into a framework that is known and accepted by all is a means of providing a central reference point and simplifying the work involved in devising and awarding qualifications obtained through recognition of this kind.

A written record of qualifications available through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes would confer a status and a form of legitimacy by associating them more closely with qualifications obtained via formal channels. This would ultimately provide for greater mobility for the holders of any of the degrees, diplomas or certificates specified in the qualifications framework. It would be wise to refer to a qualifications framework as providing a catalyst – it is neither necessary nor sufficient for developing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Communicating with employers

Employers may find it helpful to use recognition to become more familiar with the stock of knowledge, skills and competences available in their enterprise. This may also allow firms to upgrade skills more rapidly and cost-effectively by capitalising on existing competences.

It may also be more motivating for workers to embark on a procedure for recognising their non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as this potentially enhances their profile. Yet caution is warranted – some people with a job may fear such a procedure since failure could call into question their suitability for their present post.

Establishing a consistent official policy position

Few countries have an official policy position, although the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is clearly on their policy agenda. All countries, apparently without exception, have a consistent and sometimes highly detailed and unifying position on lifelong learning. On the other hand, recognition is the subject of government statements in few of them.

However, it is likely that local action and small-scale experiments would achieve success more often if carried out in a supportive context. The aim therefore should not be to promote only central measures. Instead, it should be to make clear that local initiatives and a decentralised approach are probably more effective if they occur in a context in which everyone understands the precise nature of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and its potential benefits.

Making recognition one of the mechanisms for lifelong learning

Co-ordinating education and initial training and adult learning by means of the concept of recognition

The link between initial education and training and adult learning still hinges on obtaining the upper secondary school leaving diploma. This qualification is a sort of threshold that people should have crossed if they are to return naturally to formal learning in adult life. Yet in some countries a significant share of young people leave the system of education and initial training without it or without even reaching the corresponding level. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes offers an interesting opportunity to link the two systems by creating a culture in which learning outcomes are documented from education and initial training onwards.

From the practical standpoint, this approach means creating a culture in which learning outcomes are identified, documented and recognised in the education system. This means teaching children and young people to analyse learning outcomes and grasp the learning portfolio concept at a relatively early stage. Documenting all kinds of knowledge, skills or competences could be useful even for those who leave school before the end of upper secondary education. It is the practice in Norway. One possibility might even be to introduce a certificate or formal documentation of recognised learning outcomes for those who leave school early.

But some difficulties would arise. *First*, if it is too easy for young people to leave the system of education and initial training, many of them

may be encouraged to do so, whereas the primary aim should be first to bring them at least as far as the upper secondary school leaving diploma. *Second*, returns on investment in education and training are much better, and more attractive, if investment occurs at an early age. Nonetheless, recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes could support "second chance" opportunities. In this area, further research appears necessary.

Recognising partial outcomes in tertiary education

A considerable number of students in tertiary education prematurely abandon their studies or do not complete the courses they began. Formal learning is potentially lost whenever they drop out or change their courses of study, if their institution does not provide credits for units of study completed. Providing for recognition of the learning outcomes accumulated could be a way of rationalising post-secondary education and making it less expensive. While equivalence arrangements exist for students who change courses, they take account of diplomas already held or partial qualifications and not the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes.

The fact remains that many countries or regions use the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes to grant course exemptions for people returning to tertiary education. One might thus envisage extending these arrangements on a general basis even for students who change their course prior to its completion. If assessment techniques involve professionals, either in the design of recognition processes and procedures or in the assessment phase itself, it is reasonable to suppose that the recognition of learning outcomes may also have some currency on the labour market. In any event, the idea of subjecting learning outcomes to analysis at all stages of tertiary studies, as already suggested above for schools, seems worth exploring further.

Getting universities interested in recognition

Often universities appear to become interested in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes only when student enrolments are falling and when enrolments by the upper secondary school leavers who constitute their fresh intake is declining (Saskatchewan, Canada).

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may be a way of offsetting the decrease in enrolments among traditional students arriving from upper secondary education. Indeed, by recognising learning outcomes and offering further courses in tertiary education institutions to supplement the recognition procedure up to the stage of qualification where appropriate, it might be possible to enlarge the potential intake of

universities. These non-traditional students would broaden the group of potential entrants. Even if they remained enrolled for shorter periods and paid lower registration fees, they would be a means of diversifying the income of universities and other tertiary education institutions.

In addition, this recognition-based approach may be a way of restoring a certain measure of equity in countries that have experienced the "massification" of tertiary education (Korea, the Netherlands and Norway) for the many adults who were unable to enrol when they were young. The aim should therefore be to offer access or course exemptions to people for whom some of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes could be recognised.

Recognition for minorities and migrants

Arrangements for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes may make particular sense for some groups in the population. For example, it would appear that Aboriginal people in Canada are much more open to the principle of recognised learning outcomes, given the role that experiential lifelong learning plays in their social hierarchy.

Immigrants might also gain from this kind of access to recognition, in cases where established equivalence arrangements, such as the UNESCO Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications[1] or the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, cannot be applied.

However, one difficulty of adopting such an approach is that it may generate some negative reactions from those already holding formal qualifications. This strengthens the argument for quality evaluation procedures. However, if carried out effectively, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes becomes a real mechanism for social and professional integration, especially if the recognition procedure can be completed in a relatively short space of time.

Improving recognition procedures and processes

Integrating recognition in existing qualification standards

Incorporating the qualifications available through recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes in an existing and accepted standard seems to be a necessary rather than a sufficient condition for social recognition, yet an inevitable stage in securing it. Ideally, this standard would be accepted by all stakeholders and in particular by the various ministries that award qualifications, such as the ministries of education or

labour. For this to occur, work on preparing the standard should involve all such parties.

Ensuring quality assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes

The seriousness and quality of the assessment process should ensure user confidence in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes – an assessment process that must above all be valid, transparent and reliable:

- Valid, in the sense that people whose learning outcomes are recognised deserve this. The implication is that they do indeed possess the knowledge, skills and competences for which they have secured recognition and can thus carry out the corresponding tasks proficiently and perform the professional activities corresponding to the knowledge, skills or competences they possess.
- Transparent, in the sense that it must be possible to examine the procedure at any point in time so that neither the assessment, nor the truth and sincerity of the learning outcomes recognised, nor yet again any qualification that may be awarded are tainted by any kind of doubt or suspicion.
- Reliable, in the sense that several assessment processes administered several times under the same conditions (*i.e.* the same candidates with the same learning outcomes) must yield the same results. Ensuring fairness may be costly, since it calls for the standardisation of quality assurance procedures.

Improving the assessment process

It is clear that much hinges on the assessment process, which must be of high quality. It should also encourage consideration of what the evaluator needs to observe in undertaking a sound quality assessment. In the formal learning system, the factors that constitute the learning process – inputs such as the number of course hours or the content of the programme – are subject to quality assurance procedures (inspection, accreditation of institutions and other learning or qualifications providers). In short, the formal learning system may gain from twofold quality assurance: monitoring the learning process and assessing the learning outcomes on completion. In contrast, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes can do little other than assess outcomes – by definition, no control over the learning process is possible.

While many institutions in virtually all countries rely on learning portfolios, the value of these portfolios is not always clear, especially when they rely only on self-evaluation, such as those that ask learners to list their skills, rather than provide evidence of competences. It would therefore appear possible and indeed necessary to improve portfolios so that they can be used both to certify activity reliably and to support introspective and retrospective analysis of the learning carried out. Portfolios could also make a more limited contribution in the event of final assessment by examination, simulation or observation. Here indeed, their value would lie more in guiding candidates and encouraging them to think, since the real assessment of learning outcomes would occur on the day of the final assessment.

The methods of assessment could draw on the methods used in the formal system and an effort to promote the principle of assessment by selective testing is relevant even where such learning outcomes are recognised.

Developing evaluators

Many countries appear to have taken the decision to retrain former teachers as evaluators. In the best instances, the teachers receive appropriate training but this certainly does not occur routinely. Being a teacher and assessing pupils in relation to one's own course or programme does not necessarily involve the same competences as assessing non-formal and informal learning outcomes, which have been acquired over a much longer and more complex period.

Assessment panels could still include teachers of the subject assessed alongside professionals from the occupation corresponding to the knowledge, skills or competences that are the focus of assessment. On the other hand, one may also envisage developing the professional occupation of evaluator of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Standardising procedures for recognition and the provision of formal learning

Many systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes aim, either in law or in practice, to secure exemptions for people keen to return to formal learning in secondary education, tertiary education or vocational training at the workplace. This has benefits of lower costs and more strongly motivated learners/candidates. Measures of this kind are effective only if the formal provision concerned only offers what candidates for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes actually need. Structuring provision into modules for example, so that the formal learning undertaken corresponds just to the learner's gaps as identified in the

recognition procedure would be a priority for systems designed to use recognition to shorten the period of formal learning. More generally, work on the development of flexible paths through education and training which are clearly co-ordinated with procedures for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes appears worthwhile.

Equity and equality in access to recognition

It has been argued that the assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should not be treated differently from the assessment of formal learning outcomes, which is performed almost entirely by selective testing. Accepting that the assessment methods in the procedures for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes should be neither more nor less demanding is a first step towards equity.

Where qualifications are awarded, urgent consideration should be given to the option of avoiding any specific indication on the document submitted to their holders that they were obtained through recognition of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In the formal system, qualifications have never stated whether they were awarded on the basis of continuous assessment or a final examination, or the relative importance attached to personal coursework compared to the final exam. Nor do diplomas or other qualifications reveal the weighted coefficient allocated, for example, to an in-firm placement. And out of concern for non-discrimination and equity, many countries have removed any such indication from the written certificate or transcript.

It would not be a breach of this principle to continue to collect information for purposes of research or analysis on the use of procedures for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes to obtain a qualification. However, such information should not be made public, even if the *curriculum vitae* of learners may enable recovering it.

Promoting the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes

Many of the policy options discussed in this chapter will naturally contribute to promoting the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Other innovations may also do so.

Providing a directory of qualifications

Where recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes can lead to the award of a qualification, these qualifications could be included in the national qualifications directory if there is one. Providing such a

directory could be especially helpful in countries in which some qualifications are only obtainable in this way, such as Belgium (Flemish Community).

In countries in which the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes can lead only to qualifications already listed in the national qualifications directory, the directory could be amended to state that a particular qualification can be obtained through formal provision or recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Establishing partnerships

Setting up partnerships is a way of securing access to virtually unlimited resources by promoting exchanges and mutual comprehension of the issues and concerns related to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. For example, partnerships between enterprises and/or a professional sector and government may be a means of qualifying workers more effectively whenever this is essential, as in the case of the regulated professions or high-risk occupations requiring the mastery of rigorously codified techniques.

Partnerships between formal learning providers and centres for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes seem useful in helping each institution to understand the difficulties and aims of others and encouraging a common search for solutions.

Action as well as words

The existence of an official policy position on the value of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in which there is a place for local or decentralised initiatives, is essential for creating awareness of the potentially constructive role of such recognition. However, in order to be credible, this policy line must be coupled with consistent actions and clear signals geared to promoting recognition. This could involve targeted funding, not necessarily by unlocking fresh sources of financial support but by reallocating a share of existing funding. Similarly, the civil service can point the way forward by recruiting staff who have obtained recognised non-formal and informal learning outcomes to demonstrate the faith governments have in recognition of this kind.

Attentiveness to labour market needs

In certain sectors of the labour market, the demand for workers with the requisite knowledge, skills and competences is growing faster than the supply, often because the formal system of education and training is not

sufficiently responsive. In this case, a vertical approach based on needs identified in the labour market is potentially very valuable. Belgium (Flemish Community) has adopted such an approach. It is a way of organising provision for this kind of recognition, and the qualifications to which it can lead, as effectively as possible in accordance with labour market requirements. It would, at the very least, raise its profile by providing immediate support in sectors suffering from major shortages of knowledge, skills and competences.

Indeed, the approach might be developed with the support of partnerships between the certifying body and the final recruiter (*e.g.* an employer or university), which would jointly determine the process for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, with a view to reaching real recruitment agreements on its completion.

The full significance of this is apparent at the local level (in terms of geography or enterprises). A local-level approach provides for greater familiarity with labour market requirements and a better knowledge of the potential areas of employment in which qualifications or upgraded qualifications might be useful. However, employers need to be persuaded that they should consider qualifications on an equal footing regardless of how they have been obtained.

Recognising a broader range of competences

One of the most striking differences revealed by a comparison of the approaches adopted in different countries concerns whether or not they take account of general experience in addition to professional experience. Some countries only consider non-formal and informal learning outcomes acquired in a professional context (Slovenia), while others also recognise all forms of experience (Mexico, Norway, Spain). Nevertheless, broadening the range of non-formal and informal learning outcomes could be a way of persuading greater numbers of people to formalise and eventually to use their knowledge, skills and competences.

Making recognition systems more sustainable

Most systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes are not yet fully viable and thus not sustainable. Nearly all presuppose that candidates will be few in number, and, with the notable exception of Norway, they would probably be unable to handle sudden strong growth in demand for recognition. The sustainability of the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes may involve striving to reach a critical mass of candidates, qualifications awarded and/or competent personnel and evaluators. This would allow economies of scale

and ensure a minimum return on investment in technology and equipment, given that establishing a recognition system is expensive. This approach has apparently been followed in Belgium (Flemish Community) and Canada.

It is possible that some, or all, of the system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes might cease to function. Several countries reported that certain pilot programmes delivered results that fell below expectations and were discontinued. Careful analysis of disappointing results might shed light on the obstacles and help pinpoint measures that would improve sustainability.

Developing data collection and research activity

The lack of any purposely collected specific data and appropriate research activity is probably the most obvious shortcoming for understanding and analysing systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes in all countries in the study. Iceland appears to be an exception, since it has established a national register in which candidates may record information relevant to the recognition procedures in which they may be involved. By so doing, the country has also initiated a knowledge base for research purposes and a place for recording the results of recognition for the benefit of users themselves. More generally, the sustainability of these systems inevitably involves demonstrating conclusively that they are useful and less expensive than alternatives. Research based on data gathered from and about users is therefore necessary.

Testing systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the field, but also in pilot projects, may be a way of understanding what is vital for their future survival. Such pilot activities may be used to test the appropriateness of prospective legislation (Spain). They provide information on real costs, the sustainability of a system, its attractiveness for potential users (candidates, employers, recruiters), the performances of its individual users and its utility for employers.

Any pilot programme should be devised with an eye to evaluation. For the evaluation to result in possible amendments to the programme in real time, it must occur while the latter is under way. An evaluation may also be organised subsequently to give a more dispassionate appraisal of all aspects of system performance. However, the criteria for evaluating the system should be determined beforehand and it is vital to identify objectives to be achieved. At present, most observers and policy-makers are unable to state on what grounds they decide whether the ongoing system is a success or a failure.

Collecting more and better data (over time) for impact studies

The lack of quantitative data is confirmed in all countries. While there are certainly examples of local databases – in assessment centres, reception facilities and enterprises – cases in which representative data are gathered on an extensive scale are almost non-existent. A satisfactory detailed investigation might be conducted by developing a database which describes people involved in a procedure for recognising non-formal and informal learning, observing those who have failed, those who have succeeded and those who have not wished to take part or not thought about it, provided that measurements are also recorded over time.

In concrete terms, surveys of users may be a way of getting to know their needs and moving away from an approach driven solely by the provision for recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, which is apparent in many countries. In practice, this also means carrying out research to identify groups of people who are potentially interested in such recognition – groups whose members possess few *de jure* qualifications but who are qualified *de facto* and prepared for recognition because they have developed excellent routines for documenting their learning activities or periods of employment. In short, the aim should be to identify existing human capital reserves that are not visible because they have not yet been recognised.

With this kind of data available, the eligibility criteria for embarking on a procedure for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes might be greatly refined and improved. The current criteria leave much to be desired because they are nearly always based on a number of years spent in a given sector of activity, whereas the concept of learning outcomes seeks to surpass the learning process to focus on what individuals know and can do.

Data gathering may also provide an opportunity for standardising international data collection, as well as national data collection (as opposed to local or sub-local information gathering) in federal states or countries with strongly decentralised forms of government. Furthermore, by placing emphasis on research, it will be possible to bring the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes out of its relatively isolated position *vis-à-vis* practices in formal education and training, and employment and the use of human resources. However, research programmes will require standardisation of the vocabulary and the underlying concepts – quantitative information can be only collected if the subject matter is clearly defined.

Identifying costs and benefits of recognition

Although there are clear benefits to the introduction of systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, there are also economic costs. Two normative models have been developed (West, 2007; Werquin, 2007). They only seek to determine set the scales of interest – and the links between them where applicable – for deciding whether to introduce arrangements for recognition and to offer them to candidates. The first model analyses the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in terms of costs and benefits. The second analyses the comparative costs of recognition and of education or training, which are the most obvious natural alternatives in the human capital field.

In both models, the underlying assumption is that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is always desirable. Both examine the extent to which the formalisation of the procedure is the means of achieving recognition by society. The variable of interest is the cost of recognition, which will depend on the extent to which the procedure is formalised. It is assumed that the more it is formalised, the greater the cost.

The core hypothesis here is that formalising the recognition procedure increases the benefits derived from learning. In the event of qualification for example, a recognised seal or stamp is affixed on the document awarded to the holder. Quality assurance measures are also generally associated with a highly formal recognition procedure. The formalisation enables external users who set a value on learning to have confidence in the recognition process since the seal or stamp on the certificate is a guarantee of its quality. Employers can thus organise recruitment more economically, as there is no need to assess all candidates for the knowledge, skills or competences corresponding to these recognised learning outcomes.

The more learning outcomes are valued by external users, the greater the benefits of formalising the process. But this incurs costs which supplement the costs of learning. They may stem for example from assessment, quality assurance and possibly from certifying qualifications (production of documents).

For learning outcomes with a high exchange value, benefits rise faster than costs. It is probable that the regulated professions require learning outcomes with a strong exchange value, and compulsory certified qualifications. For learning outcomes with a low exchange value, formalising the recognition procedure may result in costs that exceed benefits. It does not necessarily make much sense to offer a formalised procedure to individuals interested in learning with a low exchange value, which they might undertake because they lack information or because it

corresponds to a hobby. Between these two cases, learning outcomes only provide net benefits if the recognition procedure is not formalised.

The exchange value of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is pivotal. If this value is high, such outcomes probably procure benefits, and particularly if the recognition procedure is formalised to the point of certification. If the value is not high, non-formal and informal learning outcomes also offer benefits but the recognition process gains nothing from being formalised; certified qualifications would probably not make much difference on the labour market.

Any decision to promote or develop arrangements for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes should not hinge exclusively on a cost-benefit analysis. The benefits of a formalised recognition procedure (certification) may not all be measured in monetary terms – there are many potential non-monetary benefits. Not all costs are necessarily financial either, as in the case of opportunity costs and psychological barriers to commitment. Nonetheless, this approach may contribute to identification of those groups in the population that could be targeted as a priority. A potential lesson from this exercise is clearly that the difficulty lies in the extent to which the recognition process should be formalised. This will probably vary in accordance with the aims of the particular candidate, which should thus be correctly identified and interpreted.

The second model considers the alternatives of education or training and formal learning *versus* recognition. The key variable is the extra cost – or marginal cost[2] – of each new candidate for recognition, or each newly taught or trained candidate. The marginal cost of education or training decreases with the number of persons who embark on it: adding one person to existing provision becomes progressively less expensive given the programme's fixed costs. Well-established, smoothly running provision becomes less and less expensive, all other things being equal.[3]

By contrast, the marginal cost of recognition tends to increase overall – the first people who apply for recognition of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes are generally less expensive to deal with, except the very first few. There are several possible reasons. For example, the first candidates may be better informed, more motivated and more aware of their learning outcomes. When critical mass is reached and/or the system is operationally tried and tested, the marginal cost starts to decrease – at least until it becomes increasingly hard to find candidates who have enough outcomes or require considerable mentoring, which is time-consuming and thus costly, for example in terms of staff.[4]

The typical country practice of applying eligibility criteria to candidates at the point of entry to a recognition procedure is an indication that costs are

likely to be higher for some candidates than others. Indeed, if the main justification for eligibility criteria is to keep costs to a minimum, this provides a benchmark for assessing the appropriateness of the criteria currently in use. Using information about relative costs for individuals with different characteristics might also make it easier to target those individuals for whom recognition would offer the greatest net benefit.

All countries in the study without exception assume that, for a given individual, the cost of recognition is lower than the cost of teaching or training. However, this assumption only remains valid if individuals are relatively easy to deal with in a recognition-based approach. If it becomes too difficult to obtain usable information from candidates about the nature of their learning outcomes at a reasonable cost – because they cannot express or prove it – then teaching or training becomes a more credible alternative. Moreover, the candidates who are easier to handle are likely to come forward faster than those who are more difficult, inevitably more hesitant and less certain about the quality of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The real costs should include the costs for the institution and not just those for the candidate. For example, they should take account of the time spent with candidates to help them to understand what an approach involving the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes really means or to build up a learning portfolio. Besides time, which represents a cost, a proper comparison would cover all costs, including those covered by subsidies (in cash or in-kind, such as the use of facilities).

The nature of recognition costs

The costs of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes involve three interlinked elements. *First*, there is the cost of the recognition process for a particular person from the point at which (s)he embarks on it and up to its completion. *Second*, there are the sponsors, namely those who bear all or part of the cost of recognition. *Third*, registration fees represent the share of the cost borne by the individual – entirely, if the person is not sponsored, or temporarily if an employer, or the public employment services for example, repay these fees. Some countries require the payment of registration fees, while others consider that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should be free of charge.

The cost of the recognition process itself consists of a mix of one-off, fixed and variable elements in proportions that depend on the country context. These costs include (in no particular order):

- research and development, and monitoring;

- training of professionals (evaluators);
- implementing the system;
- information and guidance (documentation);
- administration of the system (infrastructure);
- management of the system (quality assurance);
- assessment of candidates;
- formalising recognition (with a certified qualification the most developed case of formalisation);
- control and evaluation (statistics, data);
- incentives for participants and users (paid training leave, grants, loans, allowances, further training);
- cost of further training where needed.

At the same time, countries also need to consider the risks associated with establishing a recognition system at all if they cannot guarantee that the recognition practices will be of the highest quality and consistency. In these circumstances, poor-quality recognition systems could raise false expectations and provide misleading information both to individuals seeking recognition and to potential employers and potentially lead to significant economic costs for all parties and fail to generate the expected benefits. Ultimately, it is the chosen context and the extent to which the procedure for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is formalised that determines the overall cost.

Notes

1. UNESCO conventions on the recognition of qualifications are legal agreements between countries agreeing to recognise academic qualifications issued by other countries that have ratified the agreement. There are currently seven conventions (see *www.unesco.org*).

2. The average cost is also an interesting variable but, in so far as systems for recognition and for teaching or training are already in place, the extra cost of each new arrival is a more critical variable in deciding whether to direct him or her towards a recognition procedure or the provision of education or training.

3. There are, of course, points at which the number of applicants for teaching or training involves forming a new class, recruiting a new trainer or buying teaching materials.

4. This is confirmed in many countries: practitioners of recognition all describe their difficulty in getting candidates to accept that they possess knowledge, skills or competences which have currency, especially if they are only modestly qualified or have long been absent from traditional learning channels.

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Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning

OUTCOMES, POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Although learning often takes place within formal settings and designated environments, a great deal of valuable learning also occurs either deliberately or informally in everyday life. Policy makers in OECD countries have become increasingly aware that non-formal and informal learning represents a rich source of human capital.

Policies which recognise this can play a significant role in a coherent lifelong learning framework, and present practices can be improved to make the knowledge and competencies people acquire outside of formal schooling more visible. The challenge for policy makers is to develop processes for recognising such learning, processes that will generate net benefits both to individuals and to society at large.

This report, based on an OECD review in 22 countries, explores the advantages of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes, takes stock of existing policies and practices, and recommends how to organise recognition of these learning systems.

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