Talenti Latenti

PARENT TRAINING: INFORMATION GUIDE

This information guide is largely based on Cedefop's 2023 report European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (1). Cedefop is an agency of the European Union focused on Vocational Education and Training. It supports the EU and Member States in this sector, focusing on policy, research and knowledge sharing. The purpose of this guide is to provide autistic people and people with other disabilities as well as their families with relevant information on the skills validation process, and how it could be useful in order to increase their employment opportunities.

Note: All terms marked with an asterisk * in this guide are explained in the glossary at the end, you can access the definition by clicking on them.

This parent training has been developed by Autism-Europe in the framework of the Erasmus+ Talenti Latenti project.

1. Cedefop (2023). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 124. http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/389827 https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3093

Introduction: What is skills validation?

Skills validation is a process of delivering a certificate to attest skills acquired through education and different forms of learning. Skills validation certificates are delivered by an authorised body (a country's official institution responsible for education, an awarding body*).
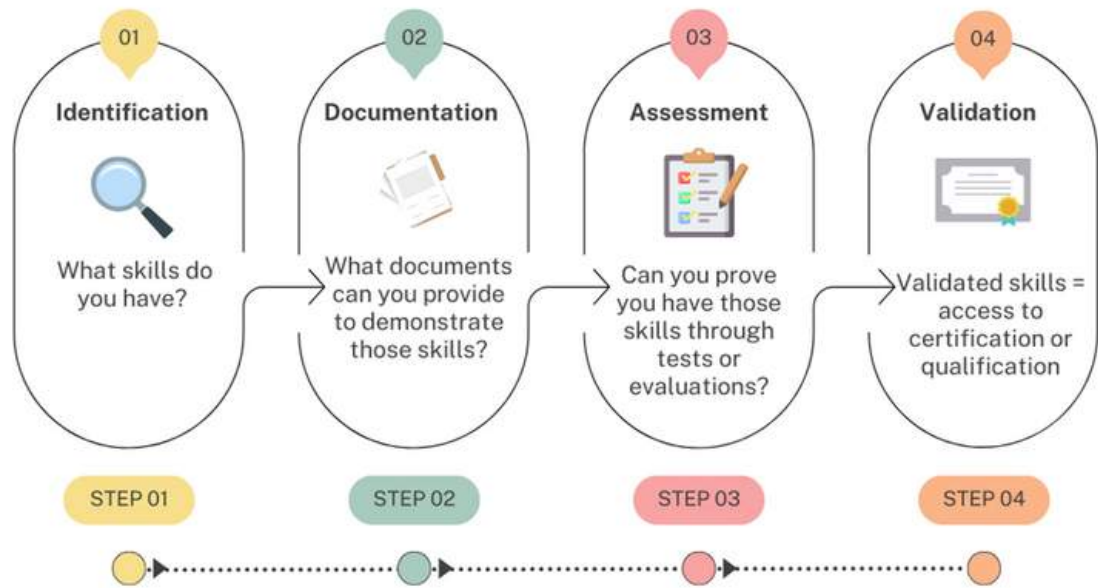
Skills acquired at home, in education, during volunteering activities or in the workplace can be identified, assessed and ultimately certified. In this sense, the skills validation process has the potential to recognise a very diverse range of skills, given that it values all forms of learning, whether they be **formal*, non-formal* or informal*** (including **work-based learning,* learning by doing* and learning by using***). (2)

There is a wide range of skills that can be certified, depending on a person's individual and professional experience. It can cover language and IT skills, sales or interpersonal skills for example.

In order to assess these skills, the authorised body has to measure them against a set of **standards***. Skills validation consists of four different phases:

- **Identification:** at this stage, the person's skills are identified/determined.
- **Documentation:** this is when supporting documents have to prove these skills have been acquired.
- **Assessment:** at this point, these skills are measured against a set of **standards*** to ensure the level of **qualification***/skills. Sometimes, a written or practical test is needed too.
- **Certification:** this is the last stage, during which a certificate or equivalent document is issued when the process has been successful. This is like a diploma that is given in **formal education*** when a particular course has been successfully completed.

2. For more information on different types of skills visit: https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/classification/skill_main

The Skills Validation Process

01 Identification	**02** Documentation	**03** Assessment	**04** Validation
What skills do you have?	What documents can you provide to demonstrate those skills?	Can you prove you have those skills through tests or evaluations?	Validated skills = access to certification or qualification
STEP 01	STEP 02	STEP 03	STEP 04

1. Why is it useful for people on the autism spectrum or with other disabilities to go through the skills validation process?

Autistic people and disabled people in general face discrimination and lack of support in the educational system all over Europe, with many facing exclusion in all levels of education – primary, secondary, higher education and **vocational education and training***. As a result, a great number of people with disabilities are under-qualified when accessing the labour market as adults, impacting greatly their opportunities to become employed. Despite surveys showing that a majority of autistic people and people with intellectual disabilities are willing to work, a great number remain unemployed. Addressing the employment gap should notably start with better inclusion and accessibility in education.

However, recognising and valuing the existing skills of disabled jobseekers is a valuable step forward for several reasons:

- **Increased awareness and motivation:** embarking on a skills validation journey enables jobseekers to identify their own strengths and skills. Even if the skills validation process is not completed for whichever reason, this increased awareness of their own skills and strengths may encourage disabled jobseekers to start a new training programme or educational course.

- **Personal fulfilment:** it allows the jobseekers themselves to realise that they have valuable skills, whether these have been acquired at home, during volunteering activities, during **informal* or non-formal*** education or in past work experiences and that these skills are actually useful in the labour market.

- **Increased employability:** skills validation can serve as a form of personal development but the main driving factor behind this process is the increased chance of finding employment with an official **qualification***/recognition of skills. This process may also enable disabled workers who are already in employment to reach for career promotions, developing therefore career progression.

- **Tailored approach:** by its very nature, the skills validation process is tailored to each individual, taking into account their own specific skills, personal experiences, training and education (whether formal or not) background and past work experience. This format can be particularly useful for disabled jobseekers as it takes a strengths-based approach and values all types of experiences. As mentioned above, discrimination and lack of accessibility in mainstream education and employment programmes severely impact disabled people, some can only partially complete formal training, engage in part-time work or participate in volunteering activities for example, all of which are included in the skills validation process.

- **Inclusion:** original research was conducted by the partners of the Talenti Latenti project and focus groups with disabled jobseekers showed that obtaining a **qualification*** would help them to feel more included in society. Indeed, it would be an important first step toward accessing employment and a more independent life.

2. Understanding the skills validation process

- **What skills can be certified**

The types of skills that are certified depend greatly on the person's expectations and experience. The skills validation process takes place in a wide variety of fields and can lead to vastly different **qualifications***, including trade certificates, **vocational education training (VET)*** diplomas or can be integrated in the framework of university degrees, including PhDs. For example, in the framework of **vocational education training,*** existing work skills from previous experiences can be assessed and validated for certain parts of the programme. As for higher education, previous experience can be transformed into credits **(see definition for credit system)***. As mentioned above, other skills, such as transversal soft skills (communication, organisation, listening, teamwork, etc.) acquired during informal learning (during volunteering activities for example) might also be validated through the skills validation process.

- **Who certifies these skills**

Different bodies can certify skills in the context of skills validation. This of course varies depending on the country's national and local legislation. You can contact employment centres, **VET*** schools and education institutions (including universities) from your own country to find out more about the process.

You should also keep in mind that in some countries, only certain sectors/**qualifications*** are open to the skills validation process and that in others, it may not be nationally established or widely available. It is also important to note that in certain countries, you will have to pay a fee for the skills validation process.

You can find more information about the process in the different national reports and materials that the Talenti Latenti partners have drafted, which are available on the project's website (information on France, Spain, Italy, The Netherlands, Iceland, Poland, Sweden and Finland). (3) You can also find more country-specific information on Cedefop's website. (4) Most countries have an official website to provide information about skills validation. Find more information about different countries' skills validation processes through these links:

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3. Visit the project's website https://talentaproject.eu/
4. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/european-database-on-validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning

Austria	https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/european-inventory-validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning-2018-update-austria https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/austria/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning
Belgium	https://www.vlaanderen.be/erkennen-van-verworven-competenties https://promsoc.cfwb.be/raccourcir-ma-formation/valorisation-des-acquis-va/
Bulgaria	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Bulgaria.pdf
Croatia	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Croatia.pdf
Cyprus	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Cyprus.pdf
Czechia	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Czechia.pdf
Denmark	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Denmark.pdf
Estonia	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Estonia.pdf

Finland	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Finland.pdf
France	https://vae.gouv.fr/ https://avril.pole-emploi.fr/ https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_France.pdf
Germany	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Germany.pdf
Greece	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Greece.pdf
Hungary	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Hungary.pdf
Ireland	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Ireland.pdf

Italy	https://www.inapp.gov.it/
	https://www.competenzelavoro.org/
	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Italy.pdf
Latvia	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Latvia.pdf
Lithuania	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Lithuania.pdf
Luxembourg	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Luxembourg.pdf
Malta	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Malta.pdf
The Netherlands	https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/netherlands/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning
Poland	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Poland.pdf

Portugal	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Portugal.pdf
Romania	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Romania.pdf
Slovakia	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Slovakia.pdf
Slovenia	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Slovenia.pdf
Spain	https://www.todofp.es/acreditacion-de-competencias.html https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Spain.pdf
Sweden	https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Sweden.pdf
Europe	https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en https://europa.eu/europass/en/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning https://IIIplatform.eu/

Different stages of the validation process

1. Identification: What skills do you have?

First, identifying one's skills is essential for the correct development of the skills validation process. You can start working towards this phase at home prior to officially starting the validation process with your local or national educational body or responsible institution.

When helping your relative identify their skills, it is important to consider all skills, whether they may be technical or linguistic skills learnt during **informal or non-formal*** learning (e.g. IT skills, gardening, beautician work, cleaning or knowledge of a second language), cognitive or non-cognitive (soft skills) acquired during volunteering activities or professional experiences (such as communication skills, teamwork, organisation, etc.)

This phase is crucial as it can give your neurodivergent/disabled relative confidence that they possess valuable skills that are useful in the labour market, even if they may not have been able to continue formal education*

TIPS: Together with your relative, you can start by listing the different skills the person has as well as their areas of interest. You can consult the European Commission's ESCO website to gather ideas and examples of different skills https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/classification/skill_main

You can also contact your national/local body responsible for education or employment centre to know if there are counselling or skills validation services available in your area that can support you in the process. In many countries, self-assessment questionnaires are available.

It is important to note that the type of skills to be identified may need to be narrowed down depending on the professional path that the person on the autism spectrum (or with another disability) may be seeking. Depending on the sector they wish to work in (ex: IT, care, administration), a certain set of skills will have to be identified. Depending on the service and context, the candidate might be required to fill in a self-assessment questionnaire to identify the skills they have.

2. Documentation: What documents can you provide to show that you have those skills?

Different types of proof will be needed for the documentation phase and in most cases, you will need to establish a portfolio, including a CV and different supporting documents – such as writing samples or other documents that showcase your skills. The difference with the identification stage is that enough proof of these skills has to be presented. It demonstrates that the person in question has the stated skills. The documentation phase will vary depending on the skills in question and career path that the person wants to take. For this stage, the accredited reviewer/responsible body will provide information on the type of documentation that you have to present.

TIPS: In order to support your relative, you could support them in drafting their CV. You can access the free Europass website (provided by the EU) to create a CV with a standardised format and pre-existing categories, skills and certifications to choose from when creating you CV. https://europa.eu/europass/en.

You can also use the website above to test digital skills and obtain more information about training and jobseeking in Europe.

3. Assessment: Can you prove you have those skills through tests or evaluations?

For the **assessment** stage, a reviewer or assessor will compare the person's skills and learning outcomes to a specific set of standards*. In order to verify that the person indeed possesses these skills in specific areas, different types of tests might be required, such as written tests, practical demonstrations of a particular technical skill or other forms of evaluations. For this part of the process, you can contact the assessor beforehand and inform them of any accommodation or accessibility needs that the applicant may have.

TIPS: In order to support your relative, you could establish with them a timeline of tasks with the activities that will take place during each phase. Autistic people or people with intellectual disabilities usually greatly benefit from having a schedule in order to be able to predict the different activities that are going to take place. Together, you can gather all the necessary information such as what type of test might be needed, where it is going to take place, who will be the evaluator (if this information is known), how long will each stage take, etc. and draft a timeline or schedule.

To learn more about the interview process and the steps you can take to support your autistic relative in the process, you can check Employment Autism's website, where they share useful information when preparing for interviews or other assessments: https://employmentautism.org.uk/i-am-autistic/understanding-the-selection-process/

Your educational body may also provide specific information on how to prepare for interviews in the framework of skills validation, so make sure to check out their available website and materials!

4. Validation: Validated skills = access to certification or qualification

The final stage, validation, is when the skills that have been evaluated are positively assessed and are given a certification. This certification depends on the skills and sector in question, and the qualification* that is awarded can be total (full formal qualification) or partial depending on the skills that have been assessed and the requirements of the specific certification that the candidate is aiming for.

As Cedefop points out, for certain qualifications, a professional licence, which would authorise the candidate to perform specific tasks, may also be provided at the certification stage depending on the skills and qualification in question. (5)

5. Cedefop (2023). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, p. 17.

Glossary

All of the definitions below are from the following publication: Cedefop, Terminology of European education and training policy, Second Edition: a selection of 130 key terms, Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union, 2014.

Definitions in plain English have been provided for certain complex terms.

Awarding body: a body issuing qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognising the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment procedure.

Definition in plain English: A place that gives you a paper that shows you have learned something or can do a job well. They check your skills and knowledge and say you are good enough. They use a certain way to test you.

Credit system: a credit system can be designed by describing: an education or training programme and attaching points (credits) to its components (modules, courses, placements, dissertation work, etc.); or a qualification using units of learning outcomes and attaching credit points to every unit.

Definition in plain English:
A credit system is a way to measure how much you learn or do in a program or a qualification. You can make a credit system by describing what you need to know or do to get a qualification using smaller pieces of learning (units) and giving each piece a number of points (credits).

Education or training provider: any organisation or individual providing education/training or training provider services.

Formal learning: learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (such as in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification. (Example: school diploma, university course, etc.)

Glossary

Definition in plain English: Formal learning is when you learn something in a place that is made for learning (like a school, a college, a training centre or a workplace) and they tell you what you will learn and how long it will take. You want to learn something when you do formal learning. You usually get a paper that shows what you have learned. (Example: school diploma, university course, etc.)

Informal learning: learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. (Example: reading books, watching videos, participating in discussions, etc.)

Definition in plain English: Informal learning is when you learn something from your everyday activities that are related to your work, your family or your hobbies. You do not have a plan or a goal for what you will learn or how long it will take. You do not realise that you are learning something when you do informal learning. (Example: reading books, watching videos, participating in discussions, etc.)

Learning by doing: learning acquired by repeated practice of a task, with or without prior instruction. Or learning acquired by transforming one's mental assets through confrontation with reality, resulting in new knowledge and skills. (Example: learning how to draw by practicing)

Definition in plain English: Learning by doing is when you learn something by doing it over and over again, with or without someone teaching you. Or when you learn something by using what you already know and changing it when you face new situations, resulting in new things that you can do or understand. (Example: learning how to draw by practicing)

Learning by using: learning acquired by repeated use of tools or facilities, with or without prior instruction.

Glossary

Non-formal learning: learning embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. (Example: going to recreational swimming lessons, attending a gardening workshop or an in-company training/seminar on a specific topic).

Definition in plain English: Non-formal learning is when you learn something by doing activities that are not made for learning, but you still want to learn something from them. (Example: going to swimming classes for fun, going to a workshop to learn gardening or going to a training at work to learn something new).

Qualification: Qualification covers different aspects. Formal qualification: the formal outcome (certificate, diploma or title) of an assessment process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work. A qualification confers official recognition of the value of learning outcomes in the labour market and in education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practise a trade [as well as] knowledge, aptitudes and skills required to perform specific tasks attached to a particular work position.

Definition in plain English: A qualification is a paper that shows you have learned something or can do a job well. You get a qualification when someone who knows a lot checks your skills and knowledge and says you are good enough. A qualification can help you get a better job or continue your education. Sometimes, you need a qualification to do a certain job by law. A qualification also tells you what you can do and what you know about a certain topic.

Glossary

Standard: In the context of skills validation, a set of standards is defined as a set of learning, training or working objectives or tasks with specific achievements and milestones that have to be reached for a person to be assessed or certified.

Definition in plain English: Standard: A group of things that people who care about them decide what they should be like. When you want to show that you have certain skills, you need to follow a set of standards. A set of standards is a list of things that you need to learn or do, and how well you need to do them. Then, someone can check or give you a paper that shows your skills.

Vocational education & training: education and training which aims to equip people with knowledge and training, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market.

Definition in plain English:
Vocational education & training is when you learn and train to do a specific job or work in a certain field. You learn the knowledge and skills that you need for that job or work. You also learn how to do things well and solve problems in your work. Vocational education & training can help you find a good job or improve your career.

Work-based learning: acquisition of knowledge and skills through carrying out – and reflecting on – tasks in a vocational context, either at the workplace or in a VET institution.

Definition in plain English: Work-based learning is when you learn by doing and thinking about your work. You can do this at your workplace or at a place where they teach you how to work. You learn the knowledge and skills that are useful for your work. Work-based learning can help you improve your work performance and career opportunities.
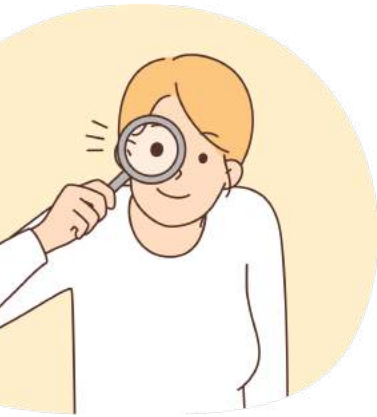
Practical case: what does a skills validation process look like? (6)

This fictional example has been written to show what a skills validation process could potentially look like. (7) This is not an account of a skills validation process that has happened in real life. Some of the tests mentioned below were used only as an example and might not reflect what a skills validation centre will require for this diploma. It is based on information from the official French skills validation website (8) and official French website for validation of competences. (9) However, the diploma mentioned below, the different institutions and centres exist and are available for this type of diploma (Vocational Qualification for Baking, 'CAP Boulangerie'). (10)

Laura is a 25-year-old autistic woman from France. Laura's passion is baking. Laura was not able to finish her education because her school did not give her the adaptations she needed to learn in the classroom. Now, years later, Laura wants to have her baking skills validated so that she can officially work as a baker. For several years, Laura has been volunteering at a local bakery and at a charity where she made bread, biscuits and cakes. With a diploma for baking, Laura will be able to work at a bakery and have enough money to live independently. Laura's mother, Marie, is supporting her with this task. How can Laura start the skills validation process?

The first step is identification. Laura has a passion for baking, she has identified the different baking skills that she has acquired over the years and wants to access employment in this sector. Laura has to find where she can validate her baking skills and what diploma she wants. Laura and her mother Marie searched on the official French skills validation website https://vae.gouv.fr/ if there were any diplomas about baking that Laura could access without having formal training. They found the CAP baking diploma (CAP is a Vocational Qualification in France). Laura decided that she wants this diploma. On the official French skills validation website, Laura and Marie find that they have to contact a skills validation centre in order to carry out the process. In France, these centres are called DAVA (Dispositifs Académiques de Validation des Acquis).

The second step is documentation. The local skills validation centre asks Laura to check if she has the different skills that the CAP baking diploma requires. Some of these include stocking ingredients appropriately, organising the workstation, preparing different types of food and selling products. Laura has had to fill in different questionnaires. To access this diploma, Laura has to prove that she has 1-year experience at a bakery or doing baking activities. Laura can prove this with her volunteer experience in the bakery and charity. The skills validation centre has asked Laura to write a CV and provide documents that prove that she volunteered at the bakery and charity. Marie helps Laura to write her CV. Laura also gave letters from the managers at the bakery and charity showing that she worked there. The local skills validation centre has helped Laura through the process, and has given her information on what documents she has to give.

The third step is assessment. Laura has spoken with an interviewer to explain in detail her experience and passion for baking. To prepare for this interview, Marie and Laura role-played different questions and answers.

The fourth and final stage is validation. Laura spoke about what she wants to do with this diploma, explaining that she wants to work at a bakery. After checking all the documents, the skills validation centre grants Laura the CAP baking diploma.

This process took Laura several months. Thanks to this diploma, Laura can now work at a bakery in her town and earn her own salary and Laura role-played different questions and answers.