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ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP FOR THE DIGITAL SOCIETY.  
EXPERTISE, BEST PRACTICES AND TEACHING  
IN THE DIGITAL ERA

*edited by*

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## 2. GUIDELINES, RECOMMENDATIONS AND TOOL FOR NON-FORMAL LEARNING METHODS

by Sirje Hassinen\*

### *Introduction*

Rapid changes in society and technology require adaptation both in working life and education. Lifelong, continuous learning, unlearning, and relearning are more important now than ever before.

Different European policy documents and processes highlight establishing a new lifelong learning culture. These focus on more flexible and permeable vocational education and training systems, the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

CEDEFOP defines lifelong learning as ‘all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills/competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons’<sup>1</sup>. Learning can be imparted anywhere and everywhere, acquired in a formal, non-formal or informal setting.

### *1. Background of lifelong learning and non-formal education*

The concept of lifelong learning (further LLL) has a long historical background. Based on ancient times the concept

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<sup>1</sup> Glossary | CEDEFOP (europa.eu).

developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a humanistic, right based and holistic view of education. Traditionally focusing on adult education, it largely sees a guiding principle for all different characteristics of learning at any age (Markowitsch *et al.*, 2006:1, 5.) LLL, also continuous or constant learning, based on the learner's self-directed, continuous quest to seek formal or informal education for personal enjoyment or to develop career skills and can happen in any number of ways. Education is no longer attached to a specific period in a person's life. From the political perspective, employability is always mentioned at the same time as LLL.

Non-formal education became into action in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Learning can be imparted anywhere and everywhere; it is intentional from the learner's point of view. It can be seen as related strong to the concepts of LLL. Non-formal learning 'is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element'. It typically does not lead to certification<sup>2</sup>.

Development in the early 1990s prepared for a larger interest and political discussion in LLL, both at European and global level (see more in Table 1).

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<sup>2</sup> Glossary | CEDEFOP (europa.eu).

Table 1: The concept of lifelong learning

Concept or program	General topic	Decision maker
Permanent education, 1966	equality of education opportunity to every individual, young and adult	Council of Europe
Learning to be, 1972	the right to education for all	UNESCO
Recurrent education 1973	the alternate education and training to meet labour market needs, continuous training	OECD
he Maastricht treaty 1992	Education as part of the European Union policy	European Union
Growth, competitiveness and employment, Jacques Delors, 1993.	Building a closer link between qualification and employment	European commission
Grundtvig programme 1993	Teaching and study need of adult learners, undertaking learning experiences, alternative education courses, adult education sector	European commission
Leonardo da Vinci programme 1994. Erasmus for education and Leonardo for training 1995	<b>An action programme for the implementation of a European Community vocational/professional training policy</b>	European commission
Learning: The Treasure Within, Jacques Delors, 1996	The four pillars of lifelong learning: learning to know, to do, to live together and to be	UNESCO
The Amsterdam Treaty 1997	wide access to education and through its continuous updating	European Union
The Sorbonne declaration 1998	Promoting a common European architecture of higher education	European Union
The Bologna process 1999	Structuring higher educational system in European countries	European Union
The Lisbon Strategy 2000	Lifelong learning as top priority of the agenda: social cohesion, competitiveness of human resources	European Council
Socrates II programme 2000-2006	promoting a Europe of knowledge by developing the European dimension in education and training and encouraging lifelong learning	European commission
The Copenhagen Process 2002	European Credit transfers in the field of VET	European Parliament

ECVET as a legislation 2009		
Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) 2006	Recognition, validation and accreditation	UNESCO
Lifelong learning Programme 2007-2013	Education and training became part of a larger scheme, four activities (policy development, language learning, ICT and dissemination)	European Union
The Council Recommendation, 22 May 2017	The European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning	European Council
Decision (EU) 2018/646 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 April 2018	a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass)	European Parliament and Council
Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012	European Union launched its Lifelong Learning programme for the period 2007-2013 European Union launched its Lifelong Learning programme for the period 2007-2013 the validation of non-formal and informal learning	European Council
EU 2020, the European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth 2014-2020 Erasmus for all	all general education, vocational education and training, non-formal education and informal learning undertaken throughout life, resulting in an improvement in knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective, including the provision of counselling and guidance services General education, VET, non-formal education and informal learning undertaken throughout life, resulting in an improvement in knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and /or employment-	European commission



	related perspective, including the provision of counselling and guidance services.	
European Skills Agenda 2020	the European Pillar of Social Rights: access to education, training and lifelong learning for everybody, everywhere in the EU	European Commission
Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience 2020	individual learning capacity building, adult education and new opportunities for adults, lifelong learning, more flexible and permeable vocational education and training systems, the validation of non-formal and informal learning	European Council
The Osnabrück Declaration for VET (2020),	establishing a new lifelong learning culture, building flexible lifelong learning pathways	European commission
European Education Area 2022	Removing barriers to learning and improving access to quality education for all. More quality and equality	European Commission
The new Strategy of UNESCO for VET 2022-2029	Development need of lifelong skills. Educational opportunities should take place throughout life and in different cultural and social spaces	UNESCO

The EU framework and political documents focused on learning outcomes to be achieved order to establish a common and user-friendly language for their recognition and validation. First recommendation for the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) published 2009 to improve the recognition, accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes, support mobility and LLL as well as the establishment of an EU credit system in VET. According to the new priorities of Copenhagen Declaration stated a need for a system supporting ‘the transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of

competence and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels’.

ECVET focused on individuals, in a borderless and LLL perspective, needs of the students and working life. ECVET allowed individual learning paths to be created to help enrichment of competencies and peer learning to be evaluated (key competences of LLL). It makes it easier to recognise the learning achievements that student have gained in different contexts as well as initial or continuous training as also formal, non-formal, or informal ways of learning. The main principle is that competences can be acquired wherever, whenever and, however.

## *2. Highlighting the lifelong learning and flexibility*

Different European policy documents of the 2020s impact establishing a new LLL culture. The Council recommendation on VET (European Union, 2020) highlights individual learning capacity building, adult education, and new opportunities for adults, LLL, more flexible and permeable vocational education and training systems, the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The recommendation ensures support at all levels of education, training and learning including through the further development of initial and continuing VET, promoting comprehensive, LLL policies as well as skills and competence development throughout life. New Opportunities for Adults include skills assessment, tailored learning offer and validation and recognition of the skills acquired.

The new Strategy of UNESCO for TVET<sup>3</sup> proposes that educational opportunities should take place throughout life and in

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<sup>3</sup> UNESCO STRATEGY 2022-2029, Transforming TVET for successful and just transitions: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383360>.

different cultural and social spaces. The report highlights the advances in TVET to bridge the divide between theory and practice through new forms of apprenticeships, meaningful courses and effective training are also acknowledged.

According to the Osnabrück Declaration for VET (2020) one of the next objectives is establishing a new LLL culture. This includes developing skills for all individuals to learn, work and live. Thus, building flexible LLL pathways must be supported by skilling, upskilling, and reskilling opportunities those most in need.

The modern teaching method centres the learner's, his or her needs, and involves them entirely into the process of learning. Learning is independent of way how the knowledge, skills and competences have been acquired, not on learning time.

### *3. Finnish experience in flexible study pathway*

Finland started working with ECVET and EQF from 2004. Recognition of prior learning is stipulated by legislation since 2006 and the recognition is based on learning outcomes, not on time. A unit-based (modular) qualification structure is also the key to maintaining study motivation and reducing dropout rates. From the viewpoint of an individual, it is important that they can return later to continue their studies to complete their qualification or update their skills. Each student can complete their studies flexible during formal, non-formal and informal methods by their personal competence development plan (HOS) in different learning environment including more learning at the workplace, but also at the education institution and increasingly also in virtual environments. At least all students must demonstrate their learning outcomes in real working life situation at workplaces.

Study methods must base on student needs and documented in HOS.

A student has the right to demand the validation and recognition of prior learning that corresponds to the vocational skills requirements or the objectives for competence-based learning outcomes stated in the national qualification requirements. Such prior learning outcomes may be recognized as a certain unit of a qualification, either in part or in full.

The validation of prior learning can be done based on the documentation by competent authority or by a skills demonstration. The education providers must consider each student's individual needs and prior learning in the individual competence plans, which is prepared for each learner. Previous acquired competences are recognized and validated. Learners may have obtained relevant skills for example from working life, another school, international study, or work placement periods.

#### 4. *Recognition tools*

One possibility to measure and recognise skills and competences gathered via non-formal learning is using Open Badges. ToVET project<sup>4</sup> aimed to collecting and analysing of key competences of LLL and open badges for recognising and validation of key competences. 16 badges to complement all eight key competences for lifelong learning<sup>5</sup> were created.

Open badges are open and free evidence-based digital badge that is verifiable, portable, and packed with information about skills and achievements. According to the experiences of the ToVET project Open Badges support and motivate the learner's

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<sup>4</sup> Project site: *Together for Future VETskills*. Tovet: <https://www.tovet.eu/>.

<sup>5</sup> Open Badges – Tovet: <https://www.tovet.eu/open-badges5/>.

interest and commitment as well as the learner's self-directedness can be increased by using digital tools and using intrinsic elements as inspiration for knowledge accumulation.

In 2022 the Council of the European Union adopted the recommendation (European Union, 2022) to support the development, implementation, and recognition of micro-credentials across institutions, businesses, sectors, and borders. Micro-credentials, digital credentials and other alternative credential forms are increasingly offered by TVET providers, as well as industry and third sector partners. Also, UNESCO will prepare an international quality framework for micro-credentials.

## *Conclusion*

Many political documents highlighted the right of all citizens to high-quality and inclusive education, training and LLL but recognition of non-formal and informal learning still plays a minor role in many countries. LLL influence and enhances employability and competitiveness as well self-sustainability, social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development.

The RE-EDUCO project addresses to providing a new innovative approaches and training methods based both on formal and on non-formal and informal learning by implementing a new online materials and courses as well a new innovative learning method (student competition)<sup>6</sup>. These materials enable and encourage monitoring the impact of European policies to:

- offer LLL opportunities for both women and men, with individualized and adaptative pedagogies, flexible learning modalities, pathways across types of education and training

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<sup>6</sup> RE-EDUCO - YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWNZR6NJyDiVdN3bMq0i-fQ/featured>.

and across activity sectors, recognition, validation, and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning, career guidance and counselling;

- give possibilities to learn by different methods in different environments;
- provide and support student in individual flexible LLL path;
- train to teacher in use and recognition of non-formal study methods;
- support teachers and instructors in recognition and validation of prior learning;
- support use of EU tools, micro-credentials, and Open Badges.

Achieving better modern and competitive education means student-based learning opportunities, more flexible and permeable VET systems as well the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

All teaching can be combined with a variety of digital applications. Some are inclusive (Canva, Video editors etc.) and some are activity-based (Padlet, different mobile apps etc.). The question is more about how to encourage teachers to seek out and experiment with the raw new and integrate it into teaching, even if their own knowledge of the subject is not perfect. Students learn when given the opportunity. However, digitalisation should not become an end, in which case it may even interfere with the assimilation of the content, but there are great tools to support the activity.

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