

# HANDBOOK

## “METHODS AND TOOLS”

WP6.4. Coordinator:



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## VALIDATION - GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is based on the assessment of the individual's learning outcomes and may result in a certificate or diploma.

Validation can be an exploration without presuppositions, i.e. directed at what one can do so-called divergent validation. It can also be accomplished using set standards, i.e. testing whether a person possesses competence in relation to the set standards, so-called convergent validation.

Clearly defined validation aims and objectives will determine which method is chosen. It is also important to be clear about how the results are to be used. Is validation to lead to a nationally recognised certificate? Or is the aim to gain a picture of the person's competence in order to aid and encourage competence training? The aims and objectives also determine how comprehensive validation needs to be, both in terms of content and time, and thus also the amount of resources which need to be allocated.

This Handbook describes methods and tools intended for convergent validation, i.e. the kind which checks whether an employee satisfies set competence standards.

### **Competence standards**

In order to coordinate and harmonize validation among the countries participating in the ValidAid+ project, the consortium prepared standards for recognition and validation of informal and non-formal competencies in the position "Cashier" for the trade sector; "Chambermaid" for the hospitality sector; "Administrative assistant" for the administration sector.

### **Target groups & Beneficiaries**

The target groups of the project are low-qualified workers; employees with lower or no education; employers; VET centers; career guidance centers, etc.

## 1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVE

When the opportunity arises for employees to validate their competencies, it is important to consider as early as possible the purpose of the validation. One purpose may be to make an exploratory inventory of an individual's competencies. Some of the unidentified competencies that staff has acquired can be an asset for a company. It can provide employees with a chance for personal development and a change in their work duties. Validation can also be a useful instrument for drawing up personnel development plans. This applies only to exploratory, divergent validation.

Another purpose of validation is to evaluate employee competencies in relation to identified competence standards for a particular vocational role, convergent validation. The employee receives proof of his/her competencies and can identify the areas, which need to be developed. It gives employers opportunities to form work groups/units whose competencies complement each other and to develop concrete personnel development plans.

Usually, validation is a mix of an exploration without presuppositions and validation in relation to defined standards.

The validation described in this project takes place in terms of established competence standards within a specific vocational role par. example "Cashier" for the trade sector; "Chambermaid" for the hospitality sector; "Administrative assistant" for the administration sector.

It is important to clarify the scope of the vocational role both with regard to the number of work assignments and how advanced these work assignments are. Are target groups to be found at several different workplaces? These questions largely determine the scope of the validation, how it is organised and the amount of time required.

The objective of the validation also needs to be adjusted for the number of hours an employee can set aside for validation and other validation costs, including costs for advisers and evaluators.

### **Important**

*What is the purpose of the validation:*

- Only exploratory - what competence does the employee have?
- To see if the employee fulfils workplace competence standards.

*What profession:*

- The need for standards and scope of sub-standards.

*Prerequisites:*

- What legitimacy do you want the validation to have?
- What will be done with the results of the validation?
- Who is to be offered validation?
- Who is to make the choice and what are the selection criteria?
- One or several workplaces?
- Estimated number of employees to be validated?
- How much may validation cost?
- How many hours can be set aside for validation?

Objectives and costs must also be related to whether or not it is possible to carry out validation with the required level of quality.

## **2. ORGANISATION**

The various representatives who will later form the Professional Task Group (PTG) should be invited in at an early step to assist in planning. During the initial planning steps, an independent organisation should be involved to assume responsibility for the practical work of implementing the project.

The Professional Task Group may be regarded as the steering group for the validation. The PTG should consist of both national and/or local employer and employee representatives,

and the organisation, which will assume the responsibility for the implementation of the validation. PTG assignments include:

- developing and/or approving of the competence standards;
- providing input on the structure of the validation;
- providing input on documentation;
- possibly signing the certificate;
- guaranteeing the worth of the certificate.

The people responsible for the practical implementation of the validation are the advisers and the evaluators. One or two evaluators will most likely be required. For certain methods/tools, there may be a need for co-assessors at the workplaces.

### **Adviser**

The role of the adviser is separate from that of the evaluator. An adviser's main task is to:

- provide information about project in the recruitment phase;
- carry out the survey and planning interview and, with the participants, establish a plan for the different steps in the process;
- initiate and supervise the portfolio work;
- initiate the self-assessment work;
- arrange contact with the evaluators;
- provide overall support and counselling during the validation process;
- participate in the working group's development/review of the validation tools.

### *Qualification requirements*

- People with educational and occupational guidance competencies are preferable.

Training for the advisers should include attitudes to validation and training for the guidance of the portfolio work. Otherwise, advisers should prepare by participating in the

development/revision of the validation tools.

### **Evaluator/Assessor**

The evaluator (assessor) should have no working relationship with the people to be validated.

#### *Qualification requirements*

The evaluator may be a (senior) trainer outside of the workplace or an expert within a trade association academic organisation etc.

Suitable people include vocational instructors associated with a particular profession; specialists in the field of human resources management.

Important factors when choosing an evaluator are that the person must have:

- credibility and impartiality;
- professional competencies within the area and a knowledge of current standards;
- to know so-called "competency model";
- experience as an evaluator/assessor;
- good communication competence, empathy and a positive attitude to validation.

#### *Training*

It is not always possible to find evaluators who are trained and who have experience.

One way of preparing people who act as evaluators is to have them actively participating in adapting the tools for the validation process/project.

In the framework of ValidAid+ project the Training programme for evaluators in how to implement the validation process was developed.

***Important***

- *Professional Task Group;*
- *Adviser suitable competence - educational and occupational guidance counsellor and training in validation methodology;*
- *Evaluator - educational and occupational guidance counsellor and training in validation methodology.*

### 3. COMPETENCE STANDARDS

When conducting a validation which checks if the employee fulfils certain competence standards, it is necessary to first identify and decide the competence standards for the profession by which employees are to be assessed.

The primary standards offer a comprehensive explanation of the standards. However, it makes it easier for employees to assess themselves in respect of the standards if the primary standards are defined in more detail in a number of sub-standards. These sub-standards can also make evaluation easier.

#### ***Important***

##### *Competence standards:*

- Do they exist?
- If not – produce standards;
- If they do exist - do they need to be reviewed/ adjusted?

##### *Sub-standards in the framework of the necessary knowledge, skills and competences:*

- The need for sub-standards;
- Why?
- Which ones and how detailed?

#### 4. METHODS AND TOOLS

In **section 6**, there is a list of the methods and tools. Some of them always need to be used during validation. The descriptions of each method and the instrument below include how they were used in the project. In order for validation candidates to identify the competencies they have, they need good self-awareness and the ability to communicate about their competencies. The foundations of these abilities are laid down in a well organised portfolio.

***Important***

*Decide which methods and tools can be used;*

*Do the methods need to be adapted to the validation in question?*

#### 5. SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

##### 5.1. Information and establishment of the project

For the success of the whole validation process, it is important to inform people of the forthcoming validation, while carefully selecting the most suitable period for this activity. This includes disseminating information not only among potential direct participants, whose competencies are to be validated, but also among supervisors and people occupying other related positions. Information always needs to be in both verbal and written form. During the preparation of the information materials, it should be considered establishing cooperation with the respective employers' and labour organisations concerned.

Information and information materials should be concise and contain the following:

- background of the project;

- purpose of the validation;
- how the validation will be carried out;
- requirements for participants;
- how the results will be documented.

## 5.2. Recruitment of participants

The purpose and the objectives of the validation determine the specificities of the application and selection process.

Examples of selection criteria:

- an individual has worked for a certain amount of years on the respective position;
- educational background;
- interest.

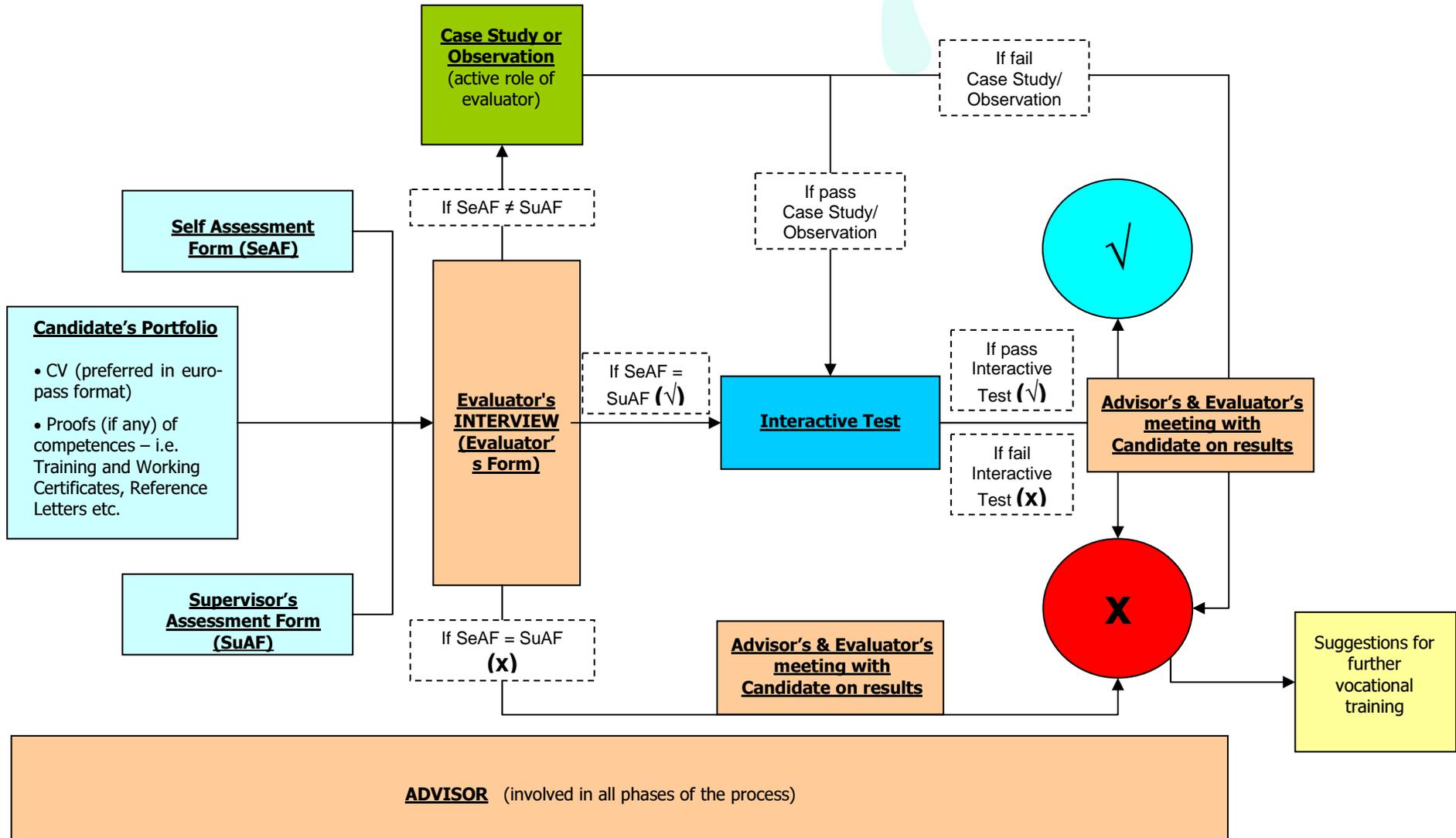
The number of participants for the pilot implementation of the validation kit tool is estimated to be 20 people (“Cashier”, “Chambermaid”, “Administrative assistant”). The number has thus been chosen due to the pilot character of the validation kit tool application.

***Important:***

- *Identify at the planning stage of the validation process the target group and specify the way of conducting the application and selection procedures;*
- *Disseminate information among the target group and other people and organisations concerned with the validation at an early stage and ensure their support.*

## 6. THE VALIDATION PROCESS – IMPLEMENTATION

The following figure presents validation process in the context of the project Validaid+.



### 6.1. Initial exploratory and survey discussions

An initial discussion upon selection of the validation candidates should be carried out. Its purpose is to clarify the individual expectations regarding validation as well as to get the selected candidates acquainted with the processes involved. The discussion will be conducted by the adviser. His role should be to keep things together, providing advice and support to the validation candidates throughout the whole process.

The initial discussion could comprise the following content:

- to determine the educational and vocational background of the validation candidate;
- the validation candidate's attitude to validation and any questions he/she might have;
- the validation candidate's expectations and ambitions;
- a review of the various stages of the validation process;
- information and planning work on the qualification portfolio.

At this point, the various stages of the process should be scheduled, times and places specified as precisely as possible, and a list of all the other people involved who will provide support throughout the validation process should be prepared. The schedule should be revised continuously.

***Important:***

- *Include any education and work experience, which might be of significance for validation.*
- *Provide clear information and listen carefully to questions.*

## 6.2. Qualification portfolio

In order that validation candidates identify the competencies they have, they need good self-awareness and the ability to communicate about their competencies. The foundations of these abilities are laid down in a well organised portfolio.

The adviser has an important role to provide guidance to the participant during the performance of this task. Occasionally, existing documents, e.g. diplomas, certificates and testimonials only provide summarised information about the educational and vocational background of the participant. These should therefore be supplemented by detailed descriptions of their educational achievements and work experience. Besides the existing portfolio, the process of performing one's duties is just as important. Supervision or guidance may be organised in groups but should mostly be provided by the adviser on an individual basis. Among other things, this process helps individuals increase awareness about their own competencies and improve their ability to communicate about them.

### ***Important***

- *Documents concerning education and work as part of the qualification portfolio, often need to be supplemented by participants' own detailed descriptions.*
- *Considerable time and effort should be put in the process.*
- *As a result of the process participants will become aware of their competencies and therefore be able to better identify and communicate about them.*
- *Guidance is important;*
- *The ensuring of confidentiality of the personal information is also important.*

## 6.3. Self-assessment and supervisor's assessment, where applicable

Self-assessment always relates to the established competence standards including sub-standards. The validation candidate must be very familiar with the standards in question. Self-assessment may be organised in different ways. Validation candidates may specify the competencies they believe can be validated on a self-assessment form, including a list of the

established standards. It is also possible that candidates determine which competencies can be validated following a dialogue with their supervisors.

Evaluators will have a better basis for identifying participants' competencies if self-assessments are supplemented by a supervisor's assessment. In some cases, the latter may be used as confirmation of participants' competencies.

#### ***Important***

- *It is important that the validation candidate fully understands the validation standards.*
- *An evaluator should be available to provide explanations and guide participants throughout the process of self-assessments.*
- *It is valuable if self-assessment is supplemented by a supervisor's assessment.*

#### **6.4. Individual discussions – revised planning**

The next step in the validation process is conducting evaluator's interviews with the validation candidates. The interviews should be based on each individual's self-assessment and qualification portfolio. The purpose is to reach an agreement between the validation candidate and the evaluator upon which competencies should be assessed and how they should be assessed. The way the individual has described the performance of his/her duties may be of great significance to how the validation candidate presents his/her competencies and thus affect choice of validation methods.

The choice of assessment tools (case-studies and/or analysis of work tasks that have been carried out, observations and/or role-play, knowledge tests and any additional discussions) is individual. The schedule describing the process (produced during the first interview/discussion with the participant) should be revised with up-to-date times, places and people to be involved.

**Important**

- *Set aside a sufficient amount of time for the discussions.*
- *Plan all the stages of the assessment process.*

**6.5. Case-studies and/or analysis of work tasks carried out**

The validation process should ensure that competencies are validated in environment resembling the working conditions where they have been acquired. Case-study is an illustration of this method where the process can be organised based on this concept. Starting from a given situation, the validation candidate describes how to proceed solving a particular problem, either verbally, or in written form, or both. As a rule, there is not a single correct way of handling the situation and here the validation candidate has the opportunity to describe and argue for the way that he/she has chosen to solve the problem.

As a first step, it would be suitable to analyse the processes and products, which the validation candidate has presented as a part of his/her ordinary work assignments. These may include, for example, keeping records, writing reports etc., which together with verbal comments and explanations can form a basis for the assessment.

**Important**

- *Try first to analyse the materials the validation candidate has produced during his/her ordinary work assignments.*
- *Case studies should resemble the working conditions where the competence has been developed.*
- *It is suitable to make separate check-list with the correct answers of the case-study and to fulfil the level of knowledge, skills and competences (a grid analysis).*

**6.6. Observations and/or role-play**

This method is suitable for assessing competencies, which cannot be identified using case-studies or traditional knowledge tests. These may concern attitudes towards customers and

colleagues, service-mindedness, general awareness and ability to listen etc. It is advantageous if observations are made in a real working environment.

#### *Observation during work with customers*

The evaluator observes the work with customers for a particular period of time. Some of the customers could be 'secret client' who have been prepared to act in a certain manner and possibly ask predetermined questions. This is to ensure that relevant questions are included. The observer should have a checklist with him to make notes concerning abilities and factual knowledge.

An example of what could be evaluated is how the customer is met, how well the validation candidate listens to the customer, the attitude of the candidate to the customer, the way in which information is provided, how the customer is seen off. Feedback should be given on a later occasion.

#### *Observations during internal meetings*

An observer sits in at one of the internal meetings, which are held regularly. He again should have a checklist so that he can take notes concerning abilities and factual knowledge. All the participants at the meeting should be aware as to who the observer is and the purpose of the observation.

#### *The observer*

The observer may be the candidate's immediate superior (supervisor) or an experienced colleague with no close relationship. It is important that observers act impartially.

#### *Role-play*

If it is not suitable to conduct observations at the workplace, role-play can be arranged whereby the participants are asked to act and react based on given instructions. Depending on the complexity of the task, one or two observers should be appointed.

**Important**

- *Observations during work with customers – it is important that the validation candidate is aware of the structure and purpose of the observations.*

- *Observations during internal meetings – all participants at the meeting must be made aware as to who the observer is and the purpose of the observation.*

**6.7. Knowledge testing**

Knowledge testing is a traditional method, which has been practised for a long time within formal education. The method measures actual knowledge and may be carried out with different types of tests such as written questionnaires, multiple-choice, interviews and the like.

The usefulness of the method is limited, as it does not measure abilities and attitudes. Since the focus here is recognising the participants' ability to manage their work tasks and the competence standards have also been formulated based on this approach, knowledge testing has a limited usage as a complement to other tools (see Methodology for using knowledge testing as a “competence” validation tool).

**6.8. Supplementary individual interviews**

If the evaluator considers that he/she does not have sufficient information to make an assessment, or the evaluator needs to check work assignments that have already been presented, it may be necessary to conduct further individual interviews with the validation candidate.

**Important**

*Keep the participant regularly informed about how assessment is progressing.*

## 6.9. Assessment

Assessment takes place continuously during the process. As a final stage in the process, the evaluator analyses what has been verified during the process. If there is a correspondence between the results of the self-assessment and the verification process (incl. case studies and observations) then it is easy to conclude that the individual has the competencies as described.

If such a correspondence lacks, the evaluator must determine the degree of non-conformity and depending on that, decide which of the following alternative courses of action to take:

1. Come up with a decision that the individual does not have the competence in question.
2. Allow the individual to carry out additional assignments.

## 7. CERTIFICATE

The way of documenting the results is of key importance to the validation process. The decision about the form of documents certifying a given competence should be taken as early as possible since the development of standards and the choice of methods used depend on the form of documentation chosen.

A number of issues are important with respect to the documents issued:

### *Legitimacy*

Is the documentation to be accepted:

- locally?
- nationally?
- in EU countries?

*What qualification should be documented:*

- factual knowledge?
- abilities?
- general competence?

*What work assignments/tasks should be included:*

- only the results of the validation?
- details concerning education and work experience – a selection?

*Level-graded evaluations*

- how many levels?
- what standards apply for each level?

*Format*

- what should the certificate look like?
- preparation of template/layout?
- who should sign/stamp?

*Design/content*

The competence standards focus on ability to carry out work tasks – this should therefore be reflected in the documentation. The aim is thus to provide certification, which presents a picture of an individual's personal profile.

When documentation of this type is issued, it is important that the certificate is informative so that the reader receives a clear picture of an individual's competence within his/her vocational area. The results should be described as objectively as possible. To give the certification more authority, it should include a description of how assessment was carried

out and who issued it. There is also value in having certificates issued with the same layout, thus making them recognisable and adding a certain quality to them.

If there is a need for national acceptability, it is necessary for assessment to be made in relation to nationally accepted competence standards, found within the formal education system for most occupations. Even the various trade associations could contribute by producing up-to-date competence requirements. This would allow the use of existing documentation such as testimonials, certificates of vocational competence, etc.

***Important***

- *As early as possible, decide what form of documentation is to be issued*
  - What type of legitimacy?
  - Content?
- *A certificate of competence must be informative to have any value.*
- *Who is to sign/stamp it?*