

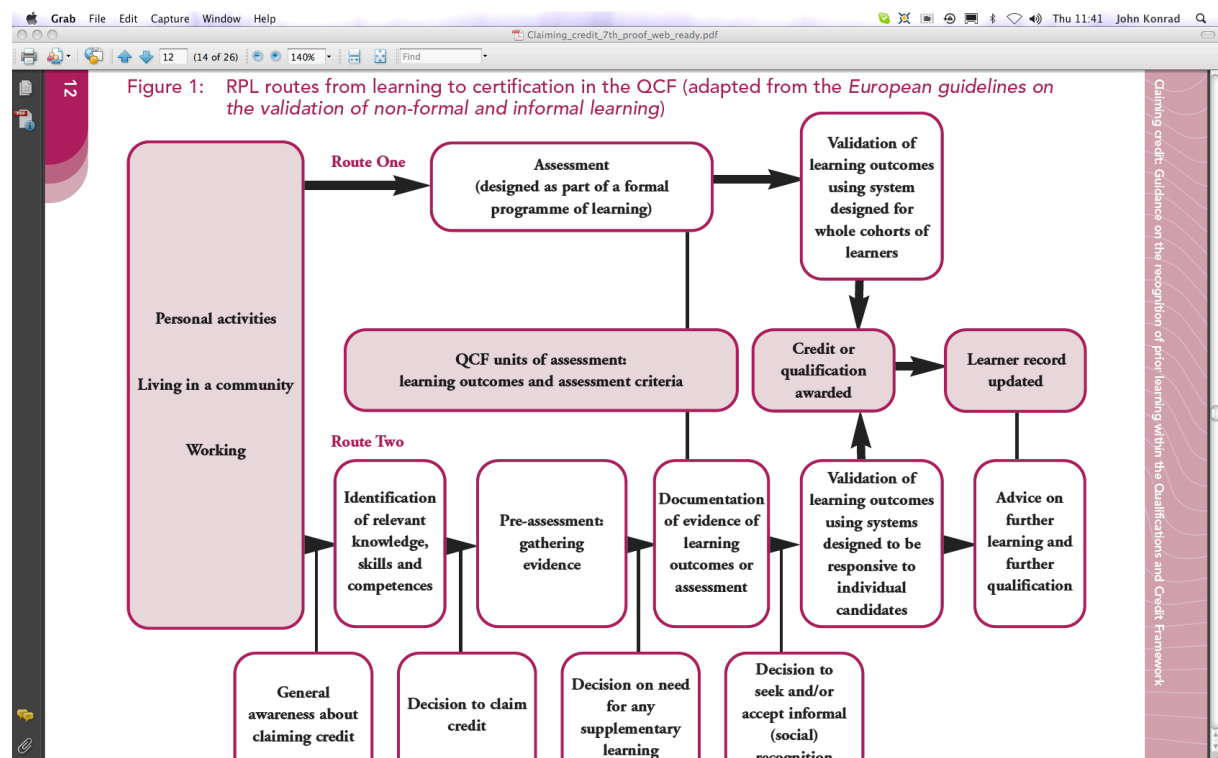
The Structure of Validation Procedures¹

Guideline

The three processes of orientation, assessment and external audit can be used to evaluate existing validation procedures and support the development of new validation procedures.²

Learning that takes place outside formal education and training institutions is not standardised and predictable. The outcomes of these learning processes are – frequently and typically – diverse and multidimensional. The methods and instruments used to identify, assess and attribute recognition must be open to this particular character of non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes. This is very much reflected in the methods developed by countries, for example through an extensive use of portfolio approaches and by using observation and simulation rather than written tests. There is also a changed attitude to assessment – the applicant and the assessor need to engage with the flexible spirit of the validation processes.

In the UK, the important principle involved is that Validation is a route to Certification in the Qualification and Credit Framework that is equal in value to conventional assessment in Formal Learning.



In advance of the basic structural elements presented here there are further general considerations that lead to effective validation procedures.

The validation process

Effective validation processes are underpinned by some general qualities. These qualities support orientation, assessment and quality assurance more generally.

Reliability: would the outcome be the same if the process were repeated under the same conditions?

Validity: is the learning that is being validated the learning that is intended to be validated?

Safety, security and confidentiality: is the candidate protected from abuse during the validation process?

Standards: are the benchmarks of content and level of learning well defined?

Sustainability: will the validation process operate over time within resources of the money and time required?

Visibility/transparency: is the process of validation generally understood and does it lead to wider recognition of the candidate's learning?

Fitness for purpose: does the validation process reflect the circumstances and intentions of the learner?

Cost efficiency: can the process be modified so that the benefits (personal and financial) are optimised in proportion to the cost of the process?

Evaluation Checklists³

Underpinning quality indicators for validation practices

Underpinning ideas	Why they are important
Reliability	The process of validation must lead to trusted results. If the settings for learning and validation vary greatly then the process of validation must allow for these differences but should the process be repeated then the outcome must be the same.
Validity	The evidence documented for an individual must be directly related to the standards being used for validation. The evidence must not be allowed to shift the understanding of the standards.
Safety, security and confidentiality	The initial and ongoing engagement with the validation process from identification through to certification must not be compromised by lack of trust and consequential deterioration in motivation to proceed.
Standards	These are the basis of measuring learning outcomes – they must exist in a clear and unambiguous form that has the confidence of the key stakeholders. The standards are also an “organiser” for the documentation phase.

	Without standards the validation process cannot proceed beyond stage of the identification of learning.
Sustainability	Validation processes can be resource intensive, especially for an individual who presents himself or herself for validation. Trust in validation also depends on the time the process has been operating and the way it is known and understood in communities. Thus sustainability is a key consideration.
Visibility/transparency	The way the assessment and validation process operates must generate trust for the judgements to have meaning. Transparency and visibility of the validation is one of the fundamental features supporting trust. The transparency of the process of using established standards is particularly important.

Underpinning ideas	Why they are important
Fitness for purpose	There are many methods for judging the level and sufficiency of evidence of learning. Not only should any one chosen method be suited to the form of the learning but also methods in combination should create a sensitive and trustworthy toolbox of methods of assessing learning.

¹ European Commission DG Education and Culture and Cedefop (2009), European Guidelines for the validation of non-formal and informal learning Draft 17 February, Section 6.

² For the purpose of the RPLO Project, "Recognition of Prior Learning Outcomes" will replace the concept of Validation.

³ European Commission DG Education and Culture and Cedefop (2009), Op. Cit., Annex 2.