



AONTAS Submission

**Public Consultation on the
Council Recommendation
on the Validation of Non-formal and
Informal Learning**

30th October 2019

Brief outline of submission:

The DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission created an open public consultation as part of their evaluation of the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning [what we in Ireland refer to as Recognition of Prior Learning, or RPL for short]. This evaluation follows from a [European Council Recommendation from 20 December 2012](#).

The consultation process consisted of an online survey, as well as gave the opportunity to submit additional information that would provide the Commission with information and views on how Member States are putting the Recommendation into practice and whether this is giving people more and better opportunities to validate their skills.

Documented here are the questions asked, and AONTAS' answers as part of the consultation's online survey. In addition we include in our submission as an addendum, a copy of a 2018 submission AONTAS made to the Department of Education and Skills' Upskilling Pathways Steering Group. This submission was completed using data collected by AONTAS in our capacity as National Coordinator in Ireland for the European Agenda for Adult Learning. The submission highlights the positive impact that a formal National Strategy for implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) could have for marginalised populations in Ireland if multiple government and non-government stakeholders worked effectively together.

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Date of online survey submission response: 30 October 2019

Submission sent to: Survey answers sent via online submission form. The document, including the addendum submission to the Upskilling Pathways Steering Group was submitted to EMPL-E2-UNIT@ec.europa.eu and carlo.scatoli@ec.europa.eu per direction in the online submission form.

Introduction to AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation

AONTAS is Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation for adult and community education providers, and adult learners. It promotes the value and benefits of adult learning, and advocates on behalf of the adult and community education sector. Founded in 1969, it is an independent NGO, with 400 members nationwide.

In addition to promoting adult learning in Ireland, AONTAS is the national coordinating body for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL), which is aimed at increasing participation in lifelong learning across the EU, enhancing policies and supports for adult learners, and gathering and disseminating European best practices.

As a membership organisation we provide a space for members to share experience, promote their work and advocate for the value of adult and community education.

Questions and AONTAS Answers to the *Open public consultation supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning*

Below are the questions and answers to the *Open public consultation supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning*.

* Please note that wherever a written response was possible AONTAS provided a response within the character limits permitted by the survey. *

Question 1 asked '**To your knowledge, are there possibilities for people in your country to validate the skills they have acquired outside school or university?**' The following options were given:

- Yes, they are available
- No, they are not available
- No, they are not available
- Don't know

In response, AONTAS stated '**Yes, they are available**'; and followed up by commenting that

Although they are possible and available there is no consistent national system for the validation of skills across institutions within the formal state education system, such as the Further Education and Training sector or Higher Education.

Question 2 In response to the second question, ‘[D]o you think that people who acquired skills in the workplace or outside school should be able to have them validated?’ The response was ‘Yes, in all cases’. Below were the choices provided:

- Yes, in all cases
- Yes, but only in particular cases
- No
- Don't know

In providing further comment on the above AONTAS gave the following information:

A national coherent policy on the validation of skills that meets the mutual needs of individuals, their communities and of society, not only the economy, would encourage and nurture a culture of learning, upskilling and reskilling which would benefit the social, civic and economic development of every EU country. For example, many members of disadvantaged groups don’t have formal qualifications. The validation of skills (also known as Recognition of Prior Learning) is therefore an investment with significant and guaranteed social, civic and economic dividends which would help break the cycle of educational inequity and exclusion.

Question 3 ‘Have you personally participated in a programme to validate skills you acquired (through work, community groups, volunteering etc.) outside an education programme?’ Answering this question was not applicable for AONTAS as an organisation.

Question 4 and Question 5 Below is the response to the **fourth** and **fifth** questions pertaining to the extent to which learners can obtain the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of their skills; as well as the validation services in Ireland:

| 4. To what extent can people in your country obtain: | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | To a high extent | To some extent | To a little extent | Not at all | Don't know |
| 4.a) Identification of their skills, e.g. through skills profiling in a guidance centre or public employment service. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4.b) Documentation of their skills, e.g. supported by guidance counsellors or online skills tools. | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4.c) Assessment of their skills, by a competent body. | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4.d) Certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a qualification (or part of a qualification). | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

| 5. Do you think that validation services in your country: | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | To a high extent | To some extent | To a little extent | Not at all | Don't know |
| 5.a) consistently meet clearly established quality standards? | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5.b) produce reliable and credible results (e.g. to inform employers' recruitment or promotion decisions)? | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

To question 5c) asking for to **'Please briefly explain'** the answers above the response was:

When there are services providing validation there is evidence that these services have positive outcomes and are delivered at a high standard. However without a national policy and implementation there is not enough robust data to give an evaluation.

Question 6 asked **'[T]o what extent do people have easy access to information and guidance on validation in your country? (for example, on the existence of validation procedures, their processes or outcomes)'**; with the following multiple choice options:

- To a high extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

And question 6a) asked **'[T]o what extent do you see any progress in this regard since 2012?'**. The response to both question 6 and 6a) was 'To a little extent'.

Question 7 asked **'[T]o what extent are guidance and counselling available during the validation process in your country?'**; the choices given were:

- To a high extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Question 7a) followed on by asking **'[T]o what extent do you see any progress in this regard since the adoption of the Council Recommendation in 2012?'**; and gave a range of options outlined below:

- To a high extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- No progress at all
- Don't know

The response to question 7 was '[T]o a little extent' and the response to question 7a) was '[D]on't know'

Question 8 was **'[T]o what extent do validation arrangements in your country target disadvantaged groups (long-term unemployed, migrants, disabled persons) in your country?'**. The response chosen was '[T]o some extent'.

Question 8a) followed on by asking ‘**[T]o what extent do you see any progress in this regard since the adoption of the Council Recommendation in 2012?**’ to which the response was also ‘**[T]o some extent**’.

Question 9 was ‘**[O]verall, to what extent do you consider that the cost of implementing the Council Recommendation are proportionate to the benefits to individuals, the economy and society?**’ to which the response would have been ‘**[T]o a high extent**’ if the Recommendation were implemented in Ireland. However with not enough relevant data the answer given was ‘**[D]on't know**’.

Question 10 Asked ‘**[T]o what extent do you think the Council Recommendation appropriately addresses the needs of your organisation**’ to which the response was ‘**[D]on't know**’ given that the Recommendation has yet to be implemented.

‘**To a high extent**’ was the answer given in response to Question 11 ‘**[T]o what extent do you think the development of validation policies and initiatives in your country involve all interested parties (namely: labour market stakeholders, education and training institutions, civil society)?**’

Below is the response to question 12:

12. To what extent do you think that the Council Recommendation has contributed to:

| | To a high extent | To some extent | To a little extent | Not at all | Don't know |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 12.a) enabling individuals to progress in their educational or professional development? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 12.b) generating national action towards more and better validation opportunities? | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

12a) asked for a brief explanation for making the above choices. The response was as follows:

While there is potential to contribute to the above, without implementation there is not enough evidence to assess if the Recommendation has made a positive impact on the lives of individuals or national action on improving validation opportunities.

For the final question, Question 13: **‘In general, to what extent do you think the Council Recommendation has contributed to make validation more available to people?’** The answer was ‘[D]on't know’ because there is not enough available data to evidence the extent to which there has or has not been a contribution to the area of recognition of prior learning.

Addendum

Included as an addendum to this survey AONTAS is providing a copy of the 2018 *AONTAS Submission for the Implementation of Upskilling Pathways: Data collected as National Coordinator for European Agenda for Adult Learning*. The document highlights the important role that Recognition of Prior Learning could play if effectively implemented systematically across Ireland.

We hope that by including this submission with our response to the consultation put out by the DG Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion, that we are providing insights into the grassroots perception and implementation of RPL across Ireland.



August 2018

AONTAS Submission for the Implementation of Upskilling Pathways: Data collected as National Coordinator for European Agenda for Adult Learning

Context:

AONTAS is supported by a Project Advisory Group (PAG) for the current project; 'Increasing Pathways, Increasing Participation' (2017 – 2019) as part of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL). On July 12th 2018, in the Ashling Hotel Dublin, members of the group came together and shared their perspectives, experiences and recommendations for the implementation of Upskilling Pathways.

The Project Advisory Group includes:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| An Cosán VCC | National Adult Literacy Agency |
| AONTAS | National Centre for Guidance Education |
| Department of Education and Skills | Northern Ireland Impact Forum (EAAL) |
| Dublin City University | Open University |
| Education and Training Boards Ireland | Learning Tech Labs / Rehab Group |
| Kilkenny and Carlow ETB | Maynooth University |
| Léargas | Quality Qualifications Ireland |
| Skills for Work | SOLAS |
| Learning Tech Labs / Rehab Group | Teachers Union of Ireland |
| Maynooth University | University of Limerick |



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Main Findings:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is recommended as a key method for the implementation of Upskilling Pathways in Ireland.

Discussion of Findings:

Target groups identified by the Upskilling Pathways Steering Group include marginalised and traditionally hard to reach people in Irish society. Due to the complex needs of these individuals, a flexible and person centred approach is suggested. RPL, if implemented successfully has the potential to act as a method focussing on a 'distance travelled' approach, building personal understanding of ones skills and strengths, and moving people both upwards on the National Framework of Qualifications and/or across the economic sector.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2011) states that 'RPL has significant potential benefits for individuals, enterprises, education and training providers and governments. These benefits include better matching of employees to tasks, improved transparency in terms of competencies of workers, meeting regulatory requirements for qualifications, reduced time needed to attain qualifications, better labour market mobility, increased capacity and flexibility for education and training providers, and contributing to lifelong learning policy.

There is also evidence of significant potential returns on investment from RPL for the individual, in terms of better graduation rates and savings in tuition fees, and for employers in terms of lower training costs and reduced need for absences from the work place.' (p.4)

PAG members suggest potential investment in implementing RPL may reduce social issues, increase educational attainment, support social cohesion, be inclusive of the qualification needs of new-Irish, and facilitate the fluid nature of the current workforce in Ireland.

Themes emerging from the discussion have been categorised into the following recommendations:

Recommendations:

Accessibility:

- Targetted campaigns in plain English. Materials developed from a strength based approach encouraging potential learners to build upon current skills and knowledge.
- An easily navigated engagement process with steps broken down to clearly outline what is expected, needed and involved in each stage of the process for learners and educators.

Policies and Partnerships:

- A National RPL Strategy guided by Upskilling Pathways with multiple Government Departments, Agencies, NGO's and institutions working in partnership for effective and successful implementation.
- Clear and transperant Guidance Policy within broader strategy. Guidance agencies working in partnership at each stage of the proecess as core support structure.
- Implementation Guidelines for all front-line educators, educational management, ETB's and other partners with training and resources provided to ensure understanding and effective implementation.
- Employer engagement with targetted campaigns highlighting benefits of workplace learning and potential impact on employee retention and business output

Best Practice and Training:

- Mapping of existing stuctures, systems and best practices in Ireland and Europe.
- Priority training and resources given to educators working with learners on lower levels of NFQ/EFQ

Employee Engagement:

- Engage low qualified employees through programmes such as Skills for Work and/or create flexible funded major award programmes targetted at employees within ETB's and community education centres.
- Recognise high risk and financial barriers in leaving employment for employees in accessing full-time education programmes

Conclusion:

Engaging marginalised groups is complex and requires more than traditional methods due to the barriers faced by and the diverse lived experiences of these individuals. AONTAS (2011) highlights the value of social recognition [and one's value to the community] and personal development in education, an approach fostered in Community Education resulting in higher self-esteem, social inclusion and increased educational attainment.

In this paper, RPL is recommended as a key method under the implementation of Upskilling Pathways in Ireland. There are multiple potential benefits for society, marginalised groups, and the education sector (EGFSN, 2011). RPL is on the policy agenda as seen in the European Council Recommendation 2012 and the Quality Amendment Bill 2018. Members of the Project Advisory Group promote its ability to recognise that a person having no qualifications is not a matter of them having no skills or knowledge. It provides an opportunity for capacity building, self recognition, needs based learning and bringing someone through an individualised education journey resulting in validation and qualification.

Next Steps:

As part of the 'Increasing Pathways, Increasing Participation' EAAL project, future papers will be developed to support national dialogue on the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation in Ireland.

References:

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2011). Developing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). [online] Available at: http://www.skillsireland.ie/media/egfsn110411-developing_recognition_of_prior_learning.pdf

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