

**“Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning in OECD Countries  
with a Specific Focus on Higher Education”**

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We are constantly learning, all of us, everywhere and all the time! While there is nothing new about this observation, the idea of exploiting learning that takes place outside the formal system of initial education and training seems to have emerged on a large scale only recently. Taking advantage of such learning requires it to be visible and therefore recognised.

The production of skills, knowledge and/or competences concerns all human activities, not only, nor obviously, in the context of formal learning situations. Learning that occurs on a daily basis could also represent skills, knowledge and/or competences that are more interesting and longer lasting because they take place in a practical setting, at work or in daily life. Whatever the case, skills, knowledge and/or competences representing non-formal and informal learning outcomes are likely to be very valuable, to judge by the interest shown by public authorities aiming to catch the train of economic growth, global competitiveness and human development.

The main aim of the presentation is to give an overview of the key issues involved in recognising non-formal and informal learning, ranging from the legitimacy of the learning activities in terms of the outcomes to be recognised (often an issue in the higher education sector), through the cost of the necessary assessment, and essential elements such as quality assurance, the standards used, the potential benefits and the real obstacles. The findings summarised here are based on a report that describes and analyses practices in the 22 countries that participated actively in an OECD study (2009), with participating countries from the five continents.

In many countries, recognition of non-formal and informal learning is seen as a possible solution to make skills, knowledge and/or competences visible as well as to deliver partial or full qualifications directly to individuals that meet the expected and agreed standards; without additional formal learning. Recognition must be understood here as social recognition; whether what is delivered to successful applicant to a recognition process has value and is used in the society they live in; in particular in the labour market and in the lifelong learning system. In the most advanced countries indeed, recognition of non-formal and informal learning has a double currency: it may give people access to the labour market as well as it allows them to re-enter the formal education and training system (especially access to the higher education sector).

The presentation will try to address in 30 to 40 minutes: the context, the definitions of non-formal and informal learning and of recognition, the rationale for organising recognition of non-formal and informal learning, some country practice, the potential barriers, the issue of cost and benefits. It will give an overview of what countries are doing, will suggest some ways forward.

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