Validation of non-formal and informal learning has relatively long and established roots in Finland and the legislation and policies are well developed and detailed. However, there is no one single law regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning, but laws and regulations for each field of education define validation separately. These fields include general upper secondary education, vocational education and training (including adult VET), and higher education. The core message of the legislation is that validation of non-formal and informal learning is a subjective right of the individual and the competences of an individual should be validated regardless of when and where they have been acquired.

Vocational Adult Education Act (631/1998) (FI) (Laki ammatillisesta aikuiskoulutuksesta) has the most detailed descriptions and Decrees regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning. This law refers to the Competence Based Qualifications (CBQs). The law describes the CBQs as “qualifications independent of the acquisition method of vocational skills or competences”. The Act was strengthened by the Personalisation Regulation in 2007 (FI).

In adult education the competence-based qualifications (CBQ) system offers an opportunity for adults to obtain upper secondary, further and specialist vocational qualifications based on the principle that full and partial competence-based qualifications can be awarded regardless of how and where the competences and knowledge have been acquired. Recognition of prior learning is at the very core of this system and, in principle, candidates can obtain such qualifications without any formal training at all. This means that there are no requirements to complete a certain amount of studies and the requirements are described in terms of learning outcomes. The competence-based qualifications system also offers by law and in practice each and every candidate an individualisation plan at the following three stages: application for competence-based qualifications and for preparatory training, acquisition of the required vocational skills, and completion of qualifications. The plan takes into account the candidates’ personal circumstances, including the relevant learning acquired through informal and non-formal means, such as through work or interests. Training providers are responsible for guiding candidates through this process.

Legislation grants a subjective right for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the different fields of formal education. In general, in upper secondary education, in higher education and in initial vocational education; validation procedures are constantly being developed and they are becoming more widespread and popular. However, the only systematic approach that is nationally used by all education providers is the CBQs system. This is because the CBQ system has been built around the concept of validation and many learners are adults with relevant work experience.
In Finland the most extensive developments in validation over the past few years have taken place in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Prior to 2010, first steps towards establishing validation procedures and raising awareness were taken in HEIs. After 2010, however, the development seemed to gain more momentum through realisation of concrete, more systematic approaches to validation in HEIs. New guidelines to validation in Higher Education (HE) have been developed. Those include prior learning from formal, non-formal and informal contexts.

The University of Applied Sciences Decree (352/2003 §14) (Valtioneuvoston asetus ammattikorkeakouluista) states that a student may - according to the decision of the University of Applied Sciences - accredit or substitute studies linked to the degree in question, also through competences gained in non-formal or informal contexts.

The Universities Act (558/2009 §44)(EN) (Yliopistolaki) states that:

“The student may, as determined by the university, have knowledge and skills attested in some other manner counted towards the degree or substitute studies in the degree syllabus with knowledge and skills attested in some other manner.”

European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014 Country report: Finland [1]

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