Youth Employability Competences

COMPETENCES
VALIDATION GUIDE

YEC – Youth Employability Competences
Competences validation guide
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INTRODUCTION

1. What is the purpose of this guide?

Entering into the labour market can be a very challenging process for a young person. They have to adapt not only to a new reality and implement in practice the skills and knowledge that they gathered in their school years, but they also have to have the means to prove them. While school education and extracurricular courses are easy to demonstrate with certificates or school records, it is much more difficult for a young person to prove that they have other skills that are necessary for the job, but not so easily measured. The same goes for employers. If they want to verify if the candidate is a good welder or an accountant, they can always give them metal bars for welding or ledgers to prepare. But how can the employer check if the newly hired person would be able to work under stress, show empathy to a coworker in a difficult moment or handle an unpleasant conversation with a customer? And most importantly, how can the candidate prove that they are able to face such situations or recognise that they have appropriate competencies to do so?

As it turns out, there are some validation tools and systems that can support this process and this handbook serves to guide you through them. Some of the validation tools presented in here are also designed to help young people to monitor their progress in developing competencies. We are conscious that a major barrier for many young people developing or validating employability skills is the lack of opportunities to showcase these skills in an accredited setting. The aim of this guide is to present different validation and accreditation systems and tools that can be used both by young people and their future employers in order to verify or validate a young person's skills and help them gain recognition on the labour market. The validation of so-called "Key Competencies" that includes, in majority, softs skills, is one of the priorities of the Council of the European Union according to its recommendations on Lifelong Learning released in May 2018. We hope that thanks to this handbook young people will be able to gather or produce certification or accreditation necessary for them while entering the job market.

2. What type of competences do these systems apply to?

In this guide we focus on six different validation systems. The first two: European Qualification System and ECVET are already widely implemented in the EU and help to understand the level of education (including: development of skills) that was achieved by the young person. These systems are accredited by the Member States and are comparable throughout the EU and many other partner countries.

The other two validation systems that we analyse here are Youthpass and Europass. Contrary to the first two, these systems are not based on external accreditation by any state or institution. Instead, they are designed to help young people reflect on the skills they have developed during an educational initiative or project and recognise the progress made. This is especially valuable for young people who are not aware that they have some specific skills (i.e. communication, organisational, leadership-related etc.) and can be used while preparing for a job interview.

The last two systems that we analyse here: Understanding My Journey and Open Badges, are for self-learning. They help a young person map specific skills that they want to develop and guide them through their educational journey. As a system, they propose specific order of learning and help to map progress and achievement. This is especially valuable for these young people who recognise that there are some competencies that they could develop and are looking for a tool to do so.

3. Why do we need validation systems?

Validation systems are needed mainly for recognition of competences gained during different learning activities (including non-formal education approach) by young people entering the labour market. Whereas technical and "hard" skills and knowledge gained mainly within the formal education system are proved by various certificates, diplomas, marks, is it still difficult to measure the development of soft skills. These skills might be developed through various educational activities within formal, non-formal and even informal learning. Many times they are acquired unconsciously through everyday life interactions and events and young people who enter the labour market are not aware of their level of some skills. Often young people are surprised at the job interview with questions aiming at proofing various skills that are not written on their diplomas.

Validation systems help young people to understand their own competences and capabilities, to reflect on the development of various skills, see the progress and make them more aware of their strong and weak points. It enables them to identify and recognise various learning that happens also outside of the formal setting. It can lead to the improvement of their self-confidence and career planning. It also supports preparation for job seeking and the performance during the job interview.

4. YEC project

The project "Youth Employability Competences ("YEC") is an international partnership of 6 European organisations whose mission is to prepare and implement educational tools for youth to develop and recognise soft skills useful in the labor market.

The goals of the project are:
• to increase employment of young people;
• to improve the recognition of young people's competences;
• to encourage involvement of young people and employers in the development of young people's soft skills;
• to increase interest in soft competences among young people and employers.

The project involved close cooperation with the Advisory Boards of Employers and Youth in the partner countries, who were consulting all project outcomes.

The results of the project include preparation of the following educational tools:
• Youth & Employer Advisory Boards Methodology handbook - an outline of how to engage young people and relevant stakeholders in projects supporting youth development;
• Employability Competencies Training Modules: a full suite of employability training modules for young people'
• Employability Competencies Train the Trainer Course - a manual for trainers related to YEC competencies;
• This Competency Validation Guide.

The project is co-financed by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2: Strategic Partnerships. The project partners are: Rinova (UK), Ballymun Job Centre (Ireland), CIOFS FP (Italy), STRIM (Poland), Turku (Finland), Met Net (Germany).

5. Employability Competences within YEC

Within YEC partnership eight crucial employability skills for young people were identified and then training modules were prepared:
• Communication
• Motivation
• Autonomy
• Wellness
• Job orientation and searching skills
• Expectation practices
• Addressing workplace discrimination
• Professionalism

All of them are extremely important in the labour market and all of them are difficult to measure and prove the level of development of a particular skill. Presented in this guide validation systems help young people to reflect on their level of these skills and if needed to plan it's further development.

Validation systems

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Name	European Qualifications Framework
Basic information	Designed by: European Commission Present since year: 2008 European-wide learning outcomes framework for all types of qualifications that serves as a translation tool between different national qualification frameworks.
Target group	Young people 13-30 years old, youth workers, youth trainers
General description	The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a eight-level learning outcomes-based framework for all types of qualifications that serves as a translation tool between different national qualification frameworks. The EQF was set up in 2008 and later revised in 2017. Its revision has kept the core objectives of creating transparency and mutual trust in the landscape of qualifications in Europe. **How does it work?** The EQF covers all types and all levels of qualifications and the use of learning outcomes makes it clear what a person knows, understands and is able to do. **How are skills validated?** The eight levels increase according to the level of proficiency, level 1 is the lowest and 8 the highest level. Most importantly the EQF is closely linked to national qualification frameworks, this way it can provide a comprehensive map of all types and levels of qualifications in Europe, which are increasingly accessible through qualification databases. Each country wanting to relate its national qualifications levels to the EQF has to prepare a detailed referencing report that follows the 10 EQF referencing criteria. Once the national frameworks are referenced to the EQF all newly issued qualifications (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements), and/or qualifications databases should in principle contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF and National Qualification Framework (NQF) level. **How long does it take to complete it?** It depends on the system of education in a given country, but usually each step takes a few years. **Why is it useful?** The main purpose of the EQF is to make qualifications more readable and understandable across countries and systems. This is important to support cross-border mobility of learners and workers and lifelong learning across Europe. In the Find and Compare Qualifications Frameworks webpage it is possible to see how national qualifications levels of countries that have already finalised their referencing process have been linked to the EQF
Does this system offer certification?	No
What do you need to do to use it?	Enroll in education programme within EU and EEA countries, validated within the National Qualification Network.
Can you refer to this system in order to validate employability competences, incl. YEC?	With the help of the EQF you can see how National Qualification Frameworks and systems across the EU relate to one another. You can find up to five examples of qualifications for each national qualification type. At EQF Level 1 for example, the requirement is for basic skills needed to carry out simple tasks in a work or study structured context, whilst at Level 2 the requirement is that basic cognitive and practical skills are used to carry out tasks and solve routine problems using simple rules and tools whilst working under supervision with some autonomy.
Best used in:	Formal education settings (i.e. school, under and postgraduate studies.
More information	https://europa.eu/europass/en/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

Name	ECVET
Basic information	Designed by: Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training. Present since year: 2009 Recognised in 27 countries, operates across Europe however takes account the local law.
Target group	Learners interested in developing their technical skills for labour market.
General description	The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is a technical framework which supports the transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes. The aim of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is to: – make it easier for people to get validation and recognition of work-related skills and knowledge acquired in different systems and countries – so that they can count towards vocational qualifications; – make it more attractive to move between different countries and learning environments; – increase the compatibility between the different vocational education and training (VET) systems in place across Europe, and the qualifications they offer; – increase the employability of VET graduates and the confidence of employers that each VET qualification requires specific skills and knowledge. **How does it work?** The ECVET system is based on three elements that are required of training providers to use: 1) competence based study units and their parts, 2) competence points (ECVET points) and transfer of competence points/study credits. **How are skills validated?** The process of confirming that certain assessed learning outcomes achieved by a learner correspond to specific outcomes which may be required for a unit or a qualification. (test/interview, self-evaluation, by a youth worker etc.). A person who validates needs to have special credentials/skills/certification (i.e. at University you need to be a University teacher, college teacher etc). The length of education may vary from country to country. **How long does it take to complete it?** Depending on the duration of the course, from a few days to several months. **Why is it useful?** ECVET is useful because it makes it more attractive to move between different countries and learning environments.
Does this system offer certification?	The ECVET system is a great way to provide qualified VET professionals with a certification that will make their skills marketable.
What do you need to do to use it?	i.e. apply for formal education.
Can you refer to this system in order to validate employability competences, incl. YEC?	The certificate of skills (ECVET) is useful for people to get employed if they transfer to different areas. Therefore all the YEC competences are at least indirectly included.
Best used in:	When a person has already acquired skills so the system is good with not having to duplicate the studies.
More information	(The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)	Education and Training (europa.eu)

Name	Youthpass
Basic information	Designed by: European Commission Present since year: 2007 Europe-wide recognition instrument for non-formal learning in the field of youth
Target group	Young people 13-30 years old, youth workers, youth trainers
General description	Youthpass is both a certificate and a tool that documents and recognises participant's individual learning outcomes achieved during projects within Erasmus+ Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes. Participants are given an opportunity to describe themselves how their competencies were developed during their learning mobility activities (Volunteering projects, Solidarity projects, Youth exchanges, Mobility of youth workers, Youth in policy dialogue, Strategic partnerships in the field of youth, Transnational youth initiatives). Youthpass contributes towards recognition of non-formal learning. **How does it work?** Youthpass is divided into two parts: certificate and self-reflection tool. The first section of the Youthpass is a confirmation of participation in a specific project and gives basic information about this project. It is prepared, authorised and signed by the organisers of a given mobility. This section also includes basic information aims, objectives and the programme of the project. The second section of the certificate is a dedicated space where participants describe what competencies they have developed during the project.. Currently Youthpass gives an opportunity to reflect on the following 8 Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: 1) Multilingual competence 2) Personal, social and learning to learn competence 3) Citizenship competence 4) Entrepreneurship competence 5) Cultural awareness and expression competence 6) Digital competence 7) Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering 8) Literacy competence Participants can explain in their own words how they have developed those competencies, how they used them during the project and how they will use them in their future lives. **How are skills validated?** The skills are validated through self-reflection process often with the support of a practitioner. There are no fixed instructions or marks given. However, a practitioner working with a young person can help them understand how their skills relate to school or work environment and help them come up with examples that can be later used i.e. during a job interview. **How long does it take to complete it?** It depends on the length of the project - from a couple of days (youth exchanges, seminars) to a year (volunteering projects) or even longer (Strategic partnerships). The certificate can be completed either by the end of the project, or throughout the whole duration of it. **Why is it useful?** It is useful to prove participation in an activity. At the same time participants can monitor and direct their own learning and progress. In some countries Youthpass provides ECTS points for students.

Does this system offer certification?	Yes
What do you need to do to use it?	Participate in a project implemented within Erasmus+ Youth or European Solidarity Corps programmes.
Can you refer to this system in order to validate employability competences, incl. YEC?	Yes. Majority of the competences validated by Youthpass are relatable to employability. Using Youthpass can help to monitor development of those competencies and to collect examples of situations in which they have been used. Youthpass is especially useful to validate the following competencies within YEC: Professionalism, Communication, Motivation and Autonomy.
Best used in:	All projects within Erasmus+ Youth or European Solidarity Corps programmes; additional help in any educational activities based on non-formal learning approach.
More information	https://www.youthpass.eu/

Name	EuroPass
Basic information	Designed by: European Commission Present since year: 2005 Free online tool to compile all skills, qualifications and experiences, using it to self-reflect on career goals, demonstrate achievements and prepare applications for future jobs.It can serve as internationally recognisable curriculum vitae (CV).
Target group	Young learners and workers (most are 21-35)
General description	Europass offers a set of online tools to manage skills and plan users' learning and career in Europe. When creating a Europass profile it allows you to record all work, education and training experiences, language skills, digital skills, projects, volunteering experiences, and any other important achievements. The personal Europass Library allows the user to store diplomas, and certificates, references, and other important documents in one secure online location. One of the most significant Europass tools is the CV and cover letter builders.The CVs can easily be created in 29 different languages using a variety of templates. The Europass profile can be shared with employers, recruiters, education institutions, and guidance counsellors. Based on the users skills and interests, they receive suggestions of jobs that might be of interest. It also allows the user to search for jobs in different countries across the EU. **How does it work?** Europass includes 4 main tools: 1. The Europass profile 2. The Europass Certificate supplement - offering additional information to that included in the official certificate, making it more easily understood. 3. The diploma supplement - issued to graduates of higher education institutions along with their degree or diploma. Not a substitute for the original diploma, but offering additional information to that included in the official degrees 4. Europass mobility - A document to record knowledge and skills acquired in another European country. Completed by two partner organisations involved in the mobility project, the first in the country of origin and the second in the host country. **How are skills validated?** The tool helps guide the user through a journey of self-reflection. By assembling all experiences and achievements, the tool helps frame skills the user may not be aware they possess. It will then support the user to build an overview of the skills, to define future career goals and interests. The supplementary documents further help specify skills and competences beyond those formally recognised in diplomas and certificates. Europass uses ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) to allow its users to choose from a pre-defined list of occupations in their Work Experience section. **How long does it take to complete it?** Europass can be quickly compiled and updated continuously as the user gains more experiences. **Why is it useful?** It provides an easy to complete form for young people to complete and hand out as their CV.
Does this system offer certification?	No.
What do you need to do to use it?	Register online at any time, no costs or subscription required.
Can you refer to this system to validate employability competences, incl. YEC?	Europass is used to compile skills and experiences but does not offer its own validation system. It does offer documents that help elaborate and explain competences in a more accessible way to employers and institutions.
Best used in:	As self-sustained support in job-seeking process; and as a useful tool for guidance practitioner counselling
More information	https://europa.eu/europass/en

Name	Open badges
Basic information	An Open Badge is a digital micro-certificate, in an Open Source format whose definition began in 2012 by Mozilla Foundation. An Open Badge is an image that is assigned by an organization to a person and which, like a photograph, contains metadata that tells about an experience or skill of the person who obtains and exhibits the Badge.
	Although developed firstly for the purpose of validating skills related to programming, the idea of Open Badges developed and now is widely used to validate different sets of skills.
Target group	Wide group of people wishing to validate their competences.
General description	Open Badges help to recognise and verify learning, achievements and skills that are gained from everyday life, hobbies, at work and elsewhere. Using Open Badges is not limited only to the world of informal learning; also educational institutions can showcase the learning that can be gained from their training programs by issuing Open Badges to their students.
	An Open Badge is an image that contains metadata. Open Badges, as open micro-credentials, are indicators of skills, achievements or credits for all types of learning. Badges can be issued by educational institutions, associations, companies as well as private people, community organizations or youth groups.
	The contents of a Badges may vary according to the service objectives that the Issuer has chosen to entrust to them. They can testify to the possession of a competence, they can attest to an observed behaviour, they can reconstruct a learning path (formal, non-formal and informal) aimed at a specific goal (such as spending on a job application), they can be collected and used in variable combinations depending on the intended use.
	How are the skills validated? Open Badges have common standards that the market has recognized in the world, so they can move according to the purpose of use that those who own them intend to practice. Badges are generated and issued in a context of qualified access platforms, they are transferable to social channels, linkable in other web environments, but always resident in the original platform.
	How long does it take to complete it? Depending on the duration of the learning programme.
	Why is it useful? Open Badges are especially useful in order to prove one's development of soft skills.This is due to the fact that in order to recognise soft skills, they generally need to be witnessed in a context within a specific situation (such as reliability, which has a value only if witnessed by an exercise in a certain context and by reliable witnesses). Open Badges serve as a substitute of such "witness", thus proving that someone has a specific set of skills.
	Many companies use Badges to qualify internal training courses, manage careers, identify skills that can be spent in assignments and work groups. Some universities have introduced the use of Badges to certify learning outcomes useful for qualifying formal certifications (Bachelors, Masters, etc.). Sector associations use them to qualify membership, participation in specific qualification paths recognized in the community of members.
Does this system offer certification?	Yes
What do you need to do to use it?	i.e. apply for the formal, non-formal and informal education.
Can you refer to this system in order to validate employability competences, incl. YEC?	Badges could be for "hard skills" such as being able to program in HTML or for "soft skills" like collaboration or "new skills" like writing a blog post or using social media and Web 2.0. Therefore all the YEC competences are at least indirectly included.
Best used in:	Open Badges can be shared with friends, on social media, to show to potential employers within video-CV, to underline daily life competences, and other… The learner chooses what to share and who to share it with.
More information	https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/open-badges-recognising-informal-learning https://www.facebook.com/groups/OpenBadgesEurope/

Name	Understanding my Journey
Basic information	Designed by: Ballymun Job Centre, REY Europe, ANESPO, IFOA, Action Synergy, OAZA, STRIM Present since year: 2018 Recognised in 7 countries
Target group	Young People (involved in volunteering projects, work experience or employability training)
General description	Understanding my Journey toolkit was created to foster soft skills development in young people. The "Understanding My Journey" toolkit guides young people to reflect on distance travelled and assess their achievements in terms of soft skills development. The toolkit supports users to recognise and articulate their progress, using tangible examples of where they have demonstrated strength. The tool supports users to undertake a self-audit of their soft skills before taking part in an activity and puts realistic and self-led personal development plans in place to build on these skills and acquire new skills during the activity. Upon completion of the activity, the tool will guide young people to reflect on distance travelled during the activity. They will be supported to think of specific examples of situations where they have demonstrated strength/improvement of their soft skills. **How are the skills validated?** The Toolkit uses the metaphor of a journey to engage and gamify the process for young people and encourages them to think of each soft skill as a mountain adventure – a steep climb but rewarding once they reach the summit and see the distance they've traveled. It has been developed in both a traditional paper-based format and in an interactive web-based app format and focuses on the following eight soft skills: 1. Positive Attitude 2. 2.Communication 3. Adaptability 4. Time and Energy Management 5. Work Ethic 6. Problem Solving and Analytical Thinking 7. Teamwork 8. Leadership The structure of the toolkits contains the following sections: • Introduction • Learning Outcomes • Before The Journey- Skills Check • Continuing the Journey- Development Activities • Action Planning • Reflecting and Evaluating • After the Journey- Skills Check • Moving on **How long does it take to complete it?** The structure allows for the individual to work through individual skills or pick multiple skills. This increases the reach and flexibility of the tool allowing as many young people to benefit as possible. There are three stages of skill development that have been created in the toolkits: Emerging = the young person's skills are starting to develop. Consolidating = the young person is practicing and developing their skills, but you're not quite there yet. Established = the young person's skills are well developed and have become part of how you naturally do things. This mapping allows the young person, along with the practitioner who will be working with them to gauge their progression in a strengths based model. Usually completing the skills takes from 3 to 6 weeks. **How is it useful?** The tool supports young people to consider how to sustain and continue to build on these skills, and how they might self promote their acquisition of skills to a range of audiences – this could be their peers, prospective employers, family, teachers etc.

Does this system offer certification?	The Toolkit is based on Non-Formal Education methods (NFE). In NFE, the trainer or facilitator works together with the participants on the topic, rather than having specific knowledge that the trainer needs to pass on. As a result, there is no formal certification, however based on self-assessment the tool can measure the progress of the young person in terms of the development of the specific soft skills that are the focus of the tool.
What do you need to do to use it?	The toolkit can be used independently with the option to opt in or opt out of sections as you deem relevant to you. Some young people may require assistance and thus a teacher or youth worker can provide guidance. It is recommended to spend at least 3-6 weeks developing each skill and more than one skill can be developed simultaneously.
	The toolkit assesses the individual and records the initial level of the soft skill. It then gives tips to develop the skill and the individual decides a set of actions that allow these skills to be practiced. After a few weeks a period of reflection occurs and the individual notes the changes in their skill development.
	The soft skills are measured using three levels (1) Emerging- skills are starting to develop (2) Consolidating-practicing the skills (3) Established- your skills. In order to assess the individual's level 10 questions must be answered and are then scored on a 5 point scale.
	The results of the assessment are represented visually using a spider web graph. Each spoke represents one of the ten aspects with points 1 to 5 radiating out from the centre. The participant must mark the score that you recorded for the aspect against the relevant numbered spoke. The spider web graph allows participants to see aspects which are not fully developed and assist in deciding the next steps in using the Toolkit.
	While each individual or group will be different, we recommend that practitioners commit to at least 3-6 weeks to work on developing each soft skill with a young person. If the Toolkit is being used within a group setting this timeline will most likely be even longer, with a minimum of 6 weeks advised. The young person doesn't need to work on one skill at a time; they can work on several skills all at once. However, it's probably too much to work on all the skills at the same time, all in one go.
	As outlined earlier it is a self-assessment but it is recommended that a youth worker/coach/mentor be consulted for a second opinion as it's important to understand how others view us.
	No specific credentials are required to carry out this assessment thus this tool caters to a wide demographic of people. The tool allows young people to develop, foster and incorporate invaluable soft skills into their daily routine.
Can you refer to this system in order to validate employability competences, incl. YEC?	The UMJ toolkit, both paper based and app, is used to measure eight soft skills that are important in the workplace. The specific soft skills measured by the tool were identified as important employability skills through research undertaken as part of the development of the toolkit. The toolkit is designed to measure the progress of the skills in the young person and can demonstrate to the young person the progress they are making in using the soft skills. While the UMJ tool relies on a self-assessment process it validates the change in the young person's soft skills through interaction, discussion and clarification between the young person and the youth worker/employment officer/tutor. Thus, the system can validate employability competences as the soft skills measured by the tool are important employability skills required for the workplace. The method used by the UMJ toolkit can be used to measure the YEC employability competences but would require adaptation.

Best used in:	The UMJ Toolkit has been designed to be worked through independently in self-guided sessions alongside whatever 'real life' activities young people are taking part in. However, some young people may need the support of a practitioner (such as a youth worker, teacher, lecturer, trainer or advisor) to use the Toolkit. A practitioner may also decide to use the Toolkit within a pre-existing group as complementary material.
	One to one use of the tool is best with young people who have a well-established relationship with their practitioner or youth worker. The one to one method also benefits young people who feel uncomfortable discussing their skills in a group setting or who have high support needs. The tool can be used as a mechanism to raise the young person's confidence and then gradually transition them to a group setting where they will have an opportunity to apply their newly acquired or improved skillsets. The one-to-one delivery method can also be used effectively with young people who feel confident and motivated to use the Toolkit in self-guided sessions.
	The group delivery method would be useful for a group who can be facilitated to carry out joint activities to increase their chosen skill level. In a group session the young people can work on the same soft skill, they will be able to provide each other with peer support. Participants could choose one skill as a group by voting or consensus. The group delivery method gives the facilitator the opportunity to guide the group through a skill together with peer support and then transition the individual group members to carrying out a skill by themselves at home. The group delivery method allows for more exploration of the topic, specific contextualisation of the skills within the group activities, and support from their peers.
More information	For more information and to download the UMJ project outputs please visit: www.understandingmyjourney.eu

Best used:	EQN	ECVET	Youthpass	Europass	UMJ	Open Badges
Enrolling in educational programmes	x	x				
Evidence of hard skills	x	x				x
Evidence of soft skills		x	x	x	x	x
With external evaluator	x	x				
With practitioner		x	x	x	x	x
Alone				x	x	
Job seeking	x	x	x	x	x	x
Job interview			x	x	x	x
Recognisable in EU	x	x	x	x	x	x
Recognisable outside of EU					x	x
Under 30 years old	x	x	x	x	x	x
Over 30 years old	x	x		x		x
Formal education	x	x				x
Non-formal education		x	x		x	x
Informal education				x		x