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## Validating informal and non-formal learning outcomes with a focus on labour market perspectives

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In 2004, the European Union defined common principles for the validation of informal and non-formal learning with the aim to facilitate the recognition of those competences acquired through these pathways, on the one hand, and establishing a common framework to make comparability between the different Member States easier, on the other hand.

Following up on this initiative, all member states started developing their national strategies based on these principles. Spain fully entered this work with the publication of Royal Decree 1224/2009, of 17 July, on the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience (RD 1224/2009). This step has been considered a real opportunity for more than 70% of the active population that does not have a recognised accreditation or qualification of their professional experience. Because of this, many groups such as women, immigrants and unemployed people face complex labour transitions and are exposed to a real risk of exclusion.

However, in order to understand in a very specific way the scope of RD 1224/2009, it is important to take into account the Organic Law 5/2002 on Qualifications and Vocational Training which defines the National System of Professional Qualifications and Vocational Training (*Sistema Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales y Formación Profesional - SNCPyFP*) as "the set of instruments and actions necessary to promote and develop the integration of vocational training offers, through the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications, as well as the evaluation and accreditation of the corresponding professional competences, in a way that it favours the professional and social development of people and ensures that the needs of the productive system are covered".

The same organic law identifies, on the one hand, the following basic principles of the SNCPyFP:

- Vocational training will be oriented both to personal development and the exercise of the right to work, as well as to the free choice of profession or

occupation and to the satisfaction of the needs of the productive system, and of employment throughout life.

- The access, on an equal footing for all citizens, to the different forms of vocational training.
- The participation and cooperation of the social partners with the public authorities in the training policies and professional qualification.
- The adequacy of training and qualifications to the European Union criteria, in line with the objectives of the single market and free movement of workers.
- The participation and cooperation of the different Public Administrations according to their respective competences.
- The promotion of economic development and adaptation to the different territorial needs of the productive system.

On the other hand, the Organic Law 5/2002 also identifies the purposes of the SNCPyFP, as detailed in its article 3:

- To qualify for the exercise of professional activities, so that both the individual needs as well as those of the productive and employment systems can be satisfied.
- To promote a quality, updated and adequate training offer to the different recipients, according to the needs of the labour market qualification and the personal expectations of professional promotion.
- To provide stakeholders with adequate information and guidance on vocational training and qualifications for employment.
- To incorporate into the training offer those training actions enabling them to carry out business activities for their own account, as well as for the promotion of entrepreneurial initiatives and entrepreneurship, which will include all forms of incorporation and organisation of companies, whether they are individual or collective, and especially those of the social economy.
- To evaluate and officially accredit professional qualifications whatever the form of their acquisition.
- To encourage public and private investment in the qualification of workers and the optimisation of resources dedicated to vocational training.

Therefore, the evaluation and accreditation of professional competences can only be understood if it is considered within the broader context of the National System of Professional Qualifications and Vocational Training (SNCPyFP), which is supported by 4 basic and complementary pillars:

- The National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications (CNCP).
- The Procedure for Recognition, Evaluation, Accreditation and Registration of professional qualifications (PREAR).
- Information and guidance on vocational training and employment.
- The evaluation and improvement of the SNCPy FP.

It should be noted that RD 1224/2009 makes possible the accreditation by means of the PREAR procedure of the units of competence not yet included in vocational training certificates and professional certificates. This may give rise to a cumulative partial accreditation once the corresponding educational offer is created in future. Therefore, the PREAR leads to these several possible outcomes.

### **1. The Procedure for Recognition, Evaluation, Accreditation and Registration of professional qualifications in Spain (PREAR)**

In Spain, the procedure for the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience is defined as "the set of actions aimed at evaluating and recognising these skills acquired through work experience or non-formal training pathways" (RD 1224/2009, July 17). The following purposes are conferred to this procedure:

- To evaluate the professional competences possessed by people and acquired through work experience, and other non-formal training, through common procedures and methodologies that guarantee the validity, reliability, objectivity and technical rigor of the evaluation.
- To officially accredit the professional competences, favouring their enhancement to facilitate both the insertion and labour integration and free circulation in the labour market, as well as personal and professional progression.
- To facilitate lifelong learning and increase their professional qualifications, by offering opportunities to obtain a cumulative partial accreditation, to complete the training aimed at obtaining the corresponding vocational training qualification or certificate of professionalism.

Since the PREAR procedure is an integral part of the SNCPyFP, RD 1224/2009 clearly establishes in its article 5 the relationship of the procedure with the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications (CNCP): "the evaluation consists of the structured process by which it is verified if the professional competence of a person complies with the performance and criteria specified in the units of competence included in the CNCP. Thus, article 7 of Royal Decree 1224/2009 positions the CNCP as the "referent" for the PREAR procedure through the units of competence included in vocational training certificates and / or certificates of professionalism. In this way, and to evaluate a professional competence in a unit of competence, it is necessary to consider the professional achievements, the criteria of the realisation and the professional context that form each one of them, according to the rules fixed in the guides of evidences. In any case, the "unit of competence" is the minimum unit of accreditation.

### **Instruments of dissemination, information and support for the PREAR procedure**

The RD 1224/2009 gives the Public Administrations (education and labour) a fundamental role in all actions of dissemination and information supporting the PREAR. They must guarantee an "open and permanent service of information and support to all those who request information about the procedure and who are interested in participating in the process of evaluation and accreditation of competences".

### **The PREAR procedure is based on Calls: an innovative approach**

The procedure of evaluation and accreditation of competences is carried out in Spain through public calls, made by competent Public Administrations. When a call is published, it must identify the following elements:

- The units of competence that are the object of evaluation and the "vocational training certificates" and / or "certificates of professionalism" in which they are included.
- The general requirements referred to in Article 11 and, when necessary, the specific non-academic requirements agreed between the General State Administration (AGE) and the Regions (Comunidades Autónomas -CC.AA), in accordance with the established framework of the territorial cooperation.
- The places or means where applicants need to formalise their application, as well as the specific points in which the information and guidance referred to in article 8 will be provided.
- The places where the PREAR procedure will be carried out.
- The registration period and deadlines for the different phases of the evaluation and accreditation procedure.
- The procedure and deadlines for submitting appeals to the result of the evaluation.
- If the number of people that can be evaluated is limited, this limit must be established in the call.
- The criteria for admission in case there is a maximum number of people to be evaluated.

The involved Public Administrations must hold a minimum of one annual call in order to enable persons applying to participate in the procedure to have at least a "level 1" professional qualification.

One of the most outstanding characteristics of RD 1224/2009 is the connection between the PREAR procedure and the world of work, its needs and the level of professionalism of workers. The system offers different organisations (trade unions, companies, and others) the possibility of requesting the State General Administration (AGE) or the competent administration in each CC.AA, the execution of specific calls if these can help responding to the needs of companies and the most disadvantaged groups suffering from lack of access to the labour market.

## **2. Phases of the PREAR procedure**

The actual organisation of the procedure consists of three consecutive phases:

1. Advice.
2. Evaluation of professional competence.
3. Accreditation and registration of professional competence.

### **Phase 1: Advice.**

In the Spanish system, the giving of advice to applicants is mandatory and can be carried out individually or collectively, using face-to-face or technology based means. The advisor is the person who supports the applicant through a number of activities that include self-assessment of competencies and preparation of his/her personal, professional and educational history (which we also could call "portfolio").

Based on the documentation provided, the advisor issues a report on the appropriateness of moving forward to the next phase (evaluation of professional competence). In the event that the report is favourable, all documentation submitted by the applicant together with the report drawn up by the advisor is transmitted to the corresponding evaluation committee. If, on the other hand, the report is unfavourable, the applicant is informed about the training that should be undertaken to be able to reapply in future. However, the participant can always decide to continue with the process despite the advisor's negative report.

### **Phase 2: Evaluation of professional competence.**

The next stage of the PREAR process consists of evaluating each "unit of competence" in which the applicant has registered. At this stage, it is checked whether "the professional competence required in the professional realisations, the levels established in the criteria of realisation and in a real or simulated work situation, established from the professional context, is demonstrated".

The advisor's report is taken into account together with the documentation sent by the participant and when it is considered necessary, new evidences can be requested. The evaluator selects the appropriate methods (job observation, simulations, tests, professional interview ...) and the final result of the evaluation, for a given competence and in a specific "competency unit", will be deemed as: "Demonstrated" or "Not demonstrated".

### **Phase 3: Accreditation and registration of professional competence.**

The final phase of the procedure is to issue accreditation for any applicant who has successfully passed the evaluation. The accreditation will be for each of the "units of competence" where the professional competence is demonstrated.

If the evaluated professional competence does not completely fulfil the qualifications contained in a VET "qualification" (certificate) or "certificate of

professionalism”, the worker receives a “cumulative partial accreditation” that will allow him to complete his training in order to obtain the corresponding qualification (certificate).

An important aspect of the PREAR procedure is issuing the accreditation of “units of competence”. This action is undertaken through the organisational structure of the procedure. This is a joint structure in which the General State Administration (AGE), the Ministry of Labour and Immigration, the Ministry of Education and the Regions (CC.AA), are all represented. The results are remitted to a state registry showing the “units of competence” accredited during the procedure.

On the other hand, the State Public Employment Service is responsible for the file of this registry, which can be accessed by both the Ministry of Education and both the education and labour administrations of the Regions.

#### **Effect of the accreditation obtained**

The direct effect of obtaining the accreditation is that the education authorities recognise the “units of competence” accredited to validate the corresponding professional modules of each “qualification”, on the one hand, and the Labour Administration recognises the accredited “units of competence”, for giving exemptions on the training modules associated with the “units of competence” included in the “Professional Certificates”, on the other hand.

#### **The training plan**

At the end of the PREAR procedure, the competent administrations inform all the participants about the open training paths available so that the “units of competence” for which they have applied for accreditation can be accredited in future calls. They are also informed that they can complete the relevant training leading to the obtaining of a “vocational training certificate” or, if applicable, a “certificate of professionalism”.

### **3. Procedure and data in 2010-2013**

In 2012, the National Institute of Qualifications (INCUAL) was in charge of preparing the first evaluation and monitoring report on the calls carried out by the different regions in their respective PREAR procedures. The established report contains indicative information on several aspects of the calls made by the regions during the period 2010-2013. In the following, we will present the most relevant of these aspects.

#### **62 PREAR calls and more than 64.000 places convened**

The first observation that we can make from the evaluation and monitoring report is that all Regions have performed at least one PREAR call in different professional

families, qualifications and “units of competence”, between 2010 and 2013. In total, 62 calls were realised during this period:

- The AGE, through the Ministry of Education, made 1 call for the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

- The Regions (CC.AA), on the other hand, made 61 calls through their different competent administrations:

- Education administrations: 32 calls
- Labour administrations: 6 calls
- Agreement between the educational and labour administrations: 18 calls
- Educational and labour administrations in the same department: 5 calls

The following table lists the different calls made during the indicated period. The data collected for each CA.AA are presented, including the number of calls made by each of them and the number of respective places associated with the calls:

Regions	Calls	2010	Calls	2011	Calls	2012	Calls	2013	Total calls	Total Places
Andalusia			1	12.000			1	7.100	2	19.100
Aragon	1	R	6	225	1	1.540	9*	1.025	17	2.790
Asturias			1	352					1	352
Balearics	1	150	2	760	1	165	1	190	5	1.265
Valencia			1	600	2	1.195	2	2.009	5	1.728
Canary Islands	1	500	2	1.200			1	300	4	2.000
Cantabria					1	250			1	250
Castilla Leon			1	2.655					1	2.655
Castilla la Mancha			1	3.626					1	3.626
Catalonia			1	8.118			1	1.712	2	9.830
Ceuta and Melilla			1	1.000					1	1.000
Extremadura			1	1.105			1	300	2	1.405
Galicia			3	3.800	3	5.236	1	1.340	7	10.376
The Rioja			1	100	1	345	1	276	3	721
Murcia	1	450			1	845	1**	50	3	1.345
Navarre	1	240	1	810	1	420	1	250	4	1.720
Basque Country			2	2.920					2	2.920
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.340</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>39.271</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8.920</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14.552</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>63.083</b>

Source: [Personal adaptation] *Datos sobre el procedimiento de reconocimiento de competencias adquiridas por la experiencia laboral*. Consejo General de Formación profesional, August 2013.

- \* Call of the SSC professional family with no limit of places.
- \*\* Call for the SSC professional family including 50 places offered in 2013. For 2014 and 2015 the places to be offered will be determined through the lists of admitted applicants to the procedure.

### 7.500 Advisers, evaluators and counsellors

Article 25 of RD 1224/2009 establishes the requirements in terms of teaching and/or professional experience and of specific training which advisers, evaluators and counsellors must fulfil in order to obtain the necessary "qualification" to act as advisor and/or evaluator. These "qualifications" are valid for the calls carried out both by the General Administration of the State and by the Regions, in the "professional qualifications" or "units of competence" enabled. During the analysed period, a total of 7.500 advisers, evaluators and counsellors have been trained.

### 64.083 places created

According to the data available in the report, it can be observed that 64.083 places have been created from 20 professional families. It can be noticed that there is a strong concentration around two professional families, since 72% of the places were for the professional family "Sociocultural Services and to the Community (SSC)" and 10% for the professional family "Health (SAN)".

The high demand for these professional qualifications can be explained by the entry into force of the Spanish Law on the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care for dependents and the requirements included in the agreement derived from the Law on the System for Autonomy and dependent people caring (SAAD), which required the accreditation of all its workers by 2015.

The next table summarises the distribution of the places convened during the considered years, distributed per Professional family:

Professional families	Total Places	2010	2011	2012	2013
Administration & Management - ADG	100			40	60
Physical activities & Sports -AFD	1.447		500	400	547
Agriculture --AGA	50				50
Arts & handcrafts --ART	290				290
Electricity & Electronics -ELE	1.035		100	395	540
Energy & Water --ENA	515		300	150	65
Building & Civil works -EOC	445		95	50	300
Mechanical manufacturing -FME	845	30	290	200	325
Catering & Tourism -HOT	3.105	30	905	895	1.275

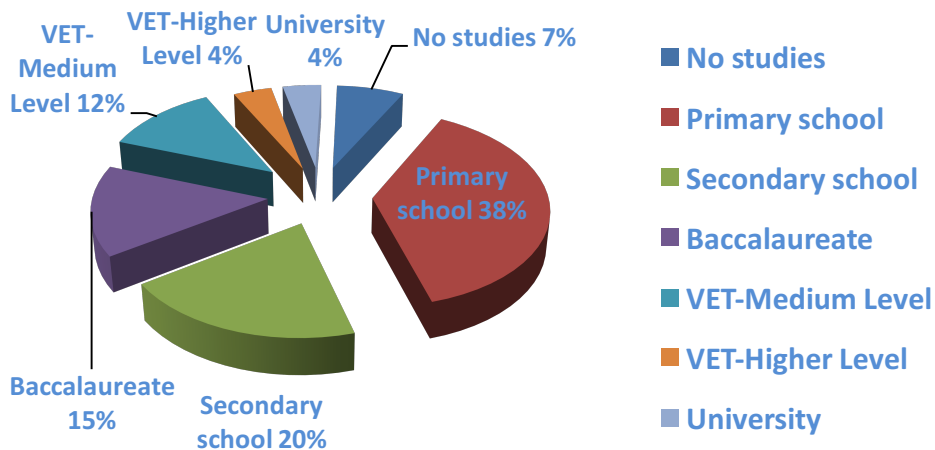


Installation & Maintenance -IMA	705			46	659
Personal image -IMP	50				50
Food industries -INA	450			450	
Wood & furniture -MAM	243			113	130
Maritime fishing -MAP	580		330	200	50
Chemistry -QUI	250			40	210
Health --SAN	6.536	380	3.500	980	1.676
Security & environment -SEA	550		100	200	250
Socio-cultural and community services --SSC	45.967	900	32.706	4.421	7.940
Textile, clothing and leather --TCP	40			40	
Transport & Vehicle maintenance --TMV	880		445	300	135
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>64.083</b>	<b>1.340</b>	<b>39.271</b>	<b>8.920</b>	<b>14.552</b>

Source: [Personal adaptation] *Datos sobre el procedimiento de reconocimiento de competencias adquiridas por la experiencia laboral*. Consejo General de Formación profesional, August 2013.

#### 45% of applicants had a low level of education

According to the compiled data, the level of education of applicants was quite disparate and all levels of education were represented. The figure demonstrates the level of education of applicants.



Source: [Personal adaptation] *Datos sobre el procedimiento de reconocimiento de competencias adquiridas por la experiencia laboral*. Consejo General de Formación profesional. August 2013.

Starting from the lowest levels, it can be observed that applicants without any kind of studies (7%) and those who only completed their primary school (38%) together represent around 45% of the total number of applicants. It is a figure that indicates that this segment of applicants has a real interest in evaluating and accrediting their professional competences acquired by means of non-formal and informal learning.

Secondly, applicants who have completed secondary education (20%) and Baccalaureate (15%) account for 35% of the applicants.

Thirdly, 16% of the applicants had a vocational qualification (FP): At Medium Level (FPGM) in 12% of cases and at Higher Level (FPGS) in 4% of cases.

Finally, only 4% of the applicants possessed accredited university studies.

#### **4. The PREAR calls in practice**

Since the PREAR procedure is a structured process undertaken in three phases, it is observed through the evaluation and monitoring report that the results and the tools used to carry out the procedures were varied.

##### **The Advice phase**

According to the available data, the most popular way of interacting with the applicants in this phase was “face-to-face”. All applied tools at individual and group level were applied “face-to-face” in 90% of cases, as follows:

- Initial face-to-face group meeting (41%)
- Individual interviews (46%)
- Review of documentation and remote support (10%)
- Final meeting in small group (3%)

For the future, there is an important margin to increase the efficiency of the procedures, by reducing the costs generated and the time spent. This could be achieved by using more distance/electronic means.

As for the tools used, the data collected indicate a widespread use and a high level of satisfaction of the following ones:

- The guide for the applicant.
- The evidence guide of the “units of competence”.
- The adviser's guide.
- The self-assessment questionnaires.

##### **Data collected from the advice phase**

Firstly, it is observed that a total of 48.436 applicants went through this phase and have been served by 1.888 advisors, in all Regions. The Applicant/Advisor ratio was therefore 22:1.

Secondly, 84% (40.548) of the applicants have received a positive report from the advisor and therefore could go ahead to the second phase of the PREAR procedure.

Thirdly, we think that the average time spent on each applicant during the advice phase is a very valuable data as it has a direct impact on the average cost per applicant. The average time dedication to each application was around 7 hours per applicant, during the first phase. The calculated average cost was estimated at € 110 per applicant.

The following table summarises the data obtained by each CA.AA during the advice phase:

Regions	Candidates convened	Assessors	Candidates convened /assessor	Candidates with positive report	Advising phase - hours / candidate	Cost € / Candidate
Andalusia	12.000	333	22	11.311	6	99
Aragon	3.566	217	10	3.498	4	185,50
Asturias	342	18	19	–	3	76,71
Balearics	934	139	7	808	4	75,42
Canary Islands	1.797	26	25	1.677	9	98,53
Cantabria	250	15	13	–	–	–
Castilla la Mancha	3.626	95	38	2.846	–	135,63
Castilla Leon	2.667	105	25	2.623	8	77
Catalonia	11.939	300	26	7.179	6	–
Ceuta	160	8	20	70	7	80
Extremadura	1.087	31	35	963	5	62,32
Galicia	3.054	204	15	3.054	4	109,83
The Rioja	414	27	15	410	8	127,80
Melilla	371	17	22	–	–	–
Murcia	450	30	18	400	8	167,55
Navarre	995	66	15	995	6	113,50
Basque Country	4.054	121	33	4.054	7	74
Valencia	730	59	13	730	–	118
<b>Total</b>	<b>48.436</b>	<b>1.888</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>40.548</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>110</b>

Source: Personal adaptación from the survey “Datos sobre el procedimiento de reconocimiento de competencias adquiridas por la experiencia laboral”. Consejo General de Formación profesional, August 2013

### **The evaluation phase**

In the evaluation phase, the following tools have been used to evaluate the professional competences of the applicants:

- Structured professional interview.
- Standardised tests through case study.
- Simulations of professional activities based on the reference of the Professional Evaluation Situation, indicated in the evidence guide.
- Methods of direct observation in the workplace.

As for the instruments of support in this phase, the following have been used:

- The guides of evidences of the competence Units (GEC).
- The evaluator's guide.

### **Data collected from the evaluation phase**

Given the nature of the PREAR procedure according to which the advisor's report is not considered to be binding, it is interesting to note that several applicants who have received a negative report by the advisor have decided to avail themselves of their right to continue in the process and move further to the second phase. In fact, there were 981 applicants who submitted to the evaluation phase. However, this range of applicants represented only 2,28 % of the total 42.940 applicants evaluated.

It should be noted that 2.248 evaluators have participated in the evaluation phase. This represents an average of 1 evaluator for every 16 applicants evaluated. The average time spent and the average cost generated by each applicant were respectively 7,5 hours and 172 € per applicant. For a better appreciation of the disparity of data between the Regions, it is important to note that the time spent on each applicant depends to a large extent on the tests selected by the Evaluation Committee as well as on the nature of the "units of competence" and their respective levels.

From the point of view of the final results obtained by the applicants who participated in the evaluation phase, it is estimated that 91,5% of them have "demonstrated" their professional competence. It is worth noting that:

- 82% of these applicants have demonstrated their professional competence in a complete "qualification".
- 9.5% of these applicants have demonstrated their competence in one or more "units of competence", without completing all the professional qualification.

### **The accreditation phase**

The last phase of the PREAR procedure consists of registering and accrediting the competences that have been evaluated. For this purpose and in accordance with RD 1224/2009 in its article 18, the issuing of the accreditation of the "competence units" corresponds to the General State Administration and that "the competent

administration transfers the results to a register, state, nominal and by accredited units of competence".

According to this provision, and in relation to the period under review, it is noted that until the date of the INCUAL's evaluation and monitoring report, the registered professional competences were still being registered in the Regions.

It is observed, on the one hand, that the number of accredited applicants reached 35.087 for a complete qualification and 4.093 for one or some "units of competence". It should also be noted that 353 applicants from Ceuta and Melilla have accredited a complete qualification or one/some "unit (s) of competence". On the other hand, the average time needed by the Regions to register the accreditations issued was 81 days. The detail of the data shows that this period of registration has oscillated between 10 days and 12 months.

#### **Accreditation and post-PREAR training**

There is no doubt that the procedure for the accreditation of full competences or "units of competences" is an asset of great value for the applicants. However, it is not an end in itself. It opens a path to excellence through training or the "Certificates of Professionalism" available, or the vocational training system. Available data from some Regions show that of all accredited persons, 21.841 have requested complete "professional certificates" and 1.386 have applied for the validation of professional modules of professional qualifications.

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