

# The VALLA Tool: an application for the design of Lifelong learning courses

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**Abstract.** *The major aim of the VALLA Project was to develop tools and methods which could describe and evaluate unaccredited sectoral training using the Learning Outcome format. The project partners developed and tested an online tool, the results from which have been very encouraging, earning a high approval rate from course designers. A case study where it was applied is presented.*

**Keywords:** Courses design, Life Long Learning

## 1. Introduction

An important area in need of innovatory ideas leading to the improvement of science education at the vocational level lies in the present need to define units of work/short courses in a format acceptable to awarding bodies/national qualifications frameworks. This task can impose a heavy burden on the staff involved, and the VALLA (Validation of Lifelong Learning in Aquaculture) project has developed a methodology which can provide an excellent solution in this situation.

Some training provided in the vocational training sector falls outside current formal qualification systems, making it difficult to prove that any individual worker has indeed gained the requisite knowledge, skills and competences acquired through specialized training. To remedy this situation, the European Qualification Framework (EQF) was introduced throughout the EU in 2008. The EQF has been described as a translation device\_which will make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning. One knock-on effect is that National

Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) need to be related to the EQF system. But using the EQF system, divided into 8 levels, each described in terms of specific knowledge, skills and competence, requires that the course provider must know, and know how to use, learning outcomes for course descriptions.

How far the inclusion of the EQF system and learning outcomes have reached varies a lot in Europe; though some countries are well on the way, others have not yet begun the process. It looks as if so far the EQF system seems to work quite well in the formal education context. However the European aquaculture sector, an innovative industry which has grown rapidly from a cottage industry in the 1960s into a diverse industrial sector, is reliant for much of its success on a joint practical and theoretical knowledge base. People working in the sector may require specialized vocational training which falls outside current formal qualification systems. To improve this situation was the basis of the VALLA project, (Validation of Lifelong Learning in Aquaculture).

## 2. Valla Project

A major aim of the VALLA project was therefore to develop tools and methods which could describe and evaluate unaccredited sectoral training using the Learning Outcome format.

The VALLA online Tool is able to create descriptions of sectoral training in terms of Learning Outcomes, taking users step by step through a process which generates a template covering the following areas:

- Identification of the Learning Outcomes covered by the subject areas of a specific unit or course

- Information as to how the Learning Outcomes can be acquired
- Information as to how these Learning Outcomes are assessed.

The VALLA initiative has developed a methodological solution and guidance tools at the national, European and sectoral levels, which will implement and further the learning outcomes approach and will develop flexible pathways between general education and VET, possibly even leading to the provision of ECVET credits. For though the online tool was developed for the aquaculture sector, it is already in use by other sectors such as history.

The VALLA project is coordinated by AquaTT, the European network for training and technology transfer in aquaculture. The partnership consists of:

- FEAP - Federation of European Aquaculture Producers
- Ghent University, Belgium
- KEK Diastasi, Greece
- UMB - Norwegian University of Life sciences, Norway
- SQA - Scottish Qualifications Authority, UK

already working in aquaculture or for people who want to be involved and need more competences in that area. The course itself is part of a series designed to run in Portugal. Using the VALLA tool made it quite simple to design the course in such a way as to allow the easy recognition of the course when the proposed course is up and running. This type of course structure also enables people from different countries to understand both the structure of the course and the learning outcomes covered.

### 3. Case Studies

The choice of case studies (mobility placements, short term training, workshops/conferences, on the job training) was made in consultation with industry, educational and awarding body representatives, taking into consideration the range of job roles of differing levels of complexity and are at the heart of the project and its most important justification. They show that it has been possible to establish common reference points across a sector and the generated course descriptions should enable qualifications authorities to use the reference grid of the EQF as intended. The process has been tested through an extremely valuable consultation process with the Greek, Irish, Norwegian and Scottish qualifications bodies which authenticated both the VALLA process and its products.

The case study presented here concerns a blended learning course designed for people