

The reference tool

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1- Our objective

As part of the project “New transparent certification for young people with no qualifications”, we wanted to develop a list of competences and an appraisal methodology to accompany and support it.

This reference tool constitutes a basis of key competences necessary to embark on any vocational training. It does not concern the competences strictly linked to any particular profession but takes into account the competences that are relevant to all professions: *communicate in the language of the country, have a basic mathematical culture, be able to use a computer, demonstrate learning strategies, and personal and social competences and the capacity to adapt to life in a company, or entrepreneurship*. To facilitate the work of the appraisers, each item is accompanied by an exercise to illustrate the targeted competence.

The reference tool makes it possible to assess the key competences acquired in formal or non-formal education by young people of low educational levels, with a view to validating them.

To ensure the widest possible dissemination in Europe, the product exists in the following languages: German, Bulgarian, French, Portuguese and English.

2- A European framework defining the “key competences for lifelong education and training”

A communication from the Commission of the European Communities in November 2003¹, on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe, noted several considerable defects, and particularly the fact that dropping out was too common and that nearly 20% of young people do not acquire the key competences, whereas “all individuals must acquire a **minimum basis of competences** to be able to learn, work and find personal fulfilment in an economy- and knowledge-based society.”

It is easy therefore to understand the importance of the key competences for social inclusion and employment. The group of experts who worked on the committee discussing key competences were given the objective of identifying and defining the new competences and explaining how they could be best integrated into teaching programmes and maintained throughout life. There should be a particular focus on the least advantaged groups, pupils with special needs (drop outs) and adult learners.

The working group of the European Community Commission thus defined **a framework of eight domains of key competences**:

1. Communication in the mother tongue
2. Communication in a foreign language
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
4. Digital competence
5. Learning to learn
6. Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competences
7. Entrepreneurship
8. Cultural awareness and expression

¹ Commission of the European communities (2003). *Communication from the commission, “Education & training 2010. The success of the Lisbon strategy hinges on urgent reforms.* Brussels, 11/11/2003. [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2003/com2003_0685fr01.pdf]

This working group also reached an agreement on a definition of competences: “**Competence** is defined in this case as a combination of skills, knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes as appropriate to the context.”

It specifies that **the key competences** are those which contribute to the three following objectives:

- “Personal fulfilment and development throughout life (**cultural capital**): key competences must enable people to pursue individual objectives in life, driven by personal interests, aspirations and the desire to continue learning throughout life;
- Active citizenship and inclusion (**social capital**): key competences should allow everybody to participate as an active citizen in society;
- Employability (**human capital**): the capacity of each and every person to obtain a decent job in the labour market.”² (p. 3)

3- The limitations of assessing key competences

It must be noted however that there are limits concerning generic vocational competences and ICT competences. It is at present very difficult to assess directly certain competences, such as entrepreneurship, certain social competences and competences known as learning to learn. A degree of caution is advisable then, when examining results in these domains, especially those of *social competences* and *learning to learn*.

We have nevertheless endeavoured to include these domains in our reference tool. Not with the aim of assessing the young people’s competences of “*learning to learn*” (an objective that the reliability of the tests would not meet successfully in this domain) with a view to a qualification, but with the aim of attracting the attention of teachers and trainers, on the one hand, and the young people following training courses, on the other hand, on the importance and diversity of learning and problem-solving strategies and also on the importance of a reflection on how one’s own intellect functions. This reflection on “how to go about accomplishing a task” often requires teachers to use specific questioning techniques. Knowing how to explain how one goes about solving a problem or accomplishing a task is a very important kind of knowledge to possess when you have to train someone, whether you are a teacher or an in-company tutor. It is also a very important knowledge when you are trying to have your experience and knowledge recognised and validated (VKE or validation of knowledge acquired through experience)³, a process which involves knowing how to describe one’s experiences and analyse the competences they use. Note that the process which aims to

² Working group B “Key competences” (2004). *Key competences for lifelong learning: A European reference framework*, November 2004. European Commission. Directorate-General for Education and Culture [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/basicframe_en.pdf]

³ Aubret, J., & Gilbert, P. (1994). *Reconnaissance et validation des acquis*. Paris: PUF.

recognise one's competences in order to have them recognised in society can also include the constitution of a *portfolio of competences* (Aubret, 1991).⁴

4- Building the reference tool

To construct the reference tool, the different partners in the project selected the competences to be included from the following elements:

- the competence charts taken from the different countries in the partnership, and considered suitable for our public, i.e. corresponding to levels 1 and 2, according to the 8 reference levels of the EQF⁵;
- the results of interviews we conducted with young people, teachers and business managers in the different countries of the partnership to describe the context of the training course, the objectives, the methods and tools used during the teaching activities and the manner in which the assessment is conducted.
- an understanding of these young people whom our partners monitored daily in the field;
- the framework of the 8 key competences defined by the EQF;
- the competence charts taken from 4 tools created by our partners in previous European projects which have the advantage of numerous exercises to illustrate, exemplify and develop these competences.

All these elements of information have encouraged us to adapt the reference tool of the European Commission to a public of young people with no qualifications for whom the urgent need for recognition creates priorities.

⁴ Aubret, J. (1991). Rédiger un portefeuille de compétences: se reconnaître pour se faire reconnaître. *L'Orientation Scolaire et Professionnelle*, 20, 1, 89-97.

Aubret, J. (2001). *Portefeuille de compétences. Le portefeuille des acquis de formation et d'expérience*. Fédération Nationale des CIBC/INETOP. Paris: Editions « Qui plus est ».

⁵ European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

5- The 6 domains of “key competences”

The reference tool is divided into 6 domains of key competences. Each domain has a relevant chart of competences with recommendations for use. Most of the competences are illustrated by an activity or an exercise. This activity will enable the appraiser to visualise the competence concerned and/or ask the candidate to do the exercise.

1- Communication in the mother tongue

“Communication in the mother tongue is the ability to express and interpret concepts thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts, in education and training, work, home and leisure.” (Recommendation, 2006, p. L 394/14)

Our public, however, includes many young people whose “mother tongue” is not the language used in the country where they live and are seeking inclusion. We therefore prefer to use the term “language of the country”. Our reference tool will allow an assessment of the aptitude to communicate orally and in writing.

2- Mathematical competence

« Mathematical competence is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations. Building on a sound mastery of numeracy, the emphasis is on process and activity, as well as knowledge. Mathematical competence involves, to different degrees, the ability and willingness to use mathematical modes of thought (logical and spatial thinking) and presentation (formulas, models, constructs, graphs, charts). » (Recommendation, 2006, p. L 394/15)

Our reference tool will allow a very concrete assessment of basic mathematical competences.

3- Digital competence

“Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet.” (Recommendation, 2006, p. L 394/15)

Our reference tool will allow an assessment of this competence by placing the young person in a situation that allows him/her to show their ability to use a computer.

4- Learning to learn

“Learning to learn is the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organise one’s own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. This competence includes awareness of one’s learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities, and the ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully. This competence means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills, as well as seeking and making use of guidance. Learning to learn engages learners to build on prior learning and life experiences in order to use and apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts: at home, at work, in education and training. Motivation and confidence are crucial to an individual’s competence.”
(Recommendation, 2006, p. L 394/16)

Our reference tool makes it possible to assess the young person’s logical thinking and different cognitive strategies (memorising, comparing, classifying, ordering, deducing, etc.) through simple exercises. The young person will be asked to explain his/her strategies.

5- Social and civic competences

“These include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation.”
(Recommendation, 2006, p. L 394/16)

Our reference tool provides appraisers with an observation chart which will enable them to appraise the young person’s autonomy, self-assertion and communication ability.

6- Adapting to life in a company, or entrepreneurship

This assessment requires the young person to have done work experience in a company. Our reference tool will provide his facilitators (trainers, tutor, supervisor, etc.) with appraisal indicators in the following domains: understanding the company, integrating and accomplishing satisfying tasks.

6- Activities to illustrate the competences

In order to help the assessors, most of the criteria defining a competence are accompanied by an activity to illustrate it. These are assessment indicators in the form of exercises or role-play situations.

These activities are taken from **different tools created in previous European projects by the partners of this project:**

- The Leonardo de Vinci project “*900 exercises in vocational Communication*” enabled us to elaborate and illustrate the competences in the domain “Communicate in the language of the country”.
- The Comenius project “*A new approach to social and cognitive skills*” provides activities illustrating the domains “Social and civic competences”, “Learning to learn” and “Adapting to life in a company”.
- The Leonardo de Vinci project “*A teaching model for a Second Chance School*”⁶ has provided us with a questionnaire which served as a model when creating the assessment chart for the domain of “Digital competences”.

7- A reference tool for assessments that can be used by the teacher in conjunction with teaching aids on Internet

The reference tool of the project “New transparent certification for young people with no qualifications” can be used **as a diagnostic tool:** the appraiser and the young person work together to find the acquired competences and those which should be developed. These competences can then be practised using the exercises proposed in the tools listed in point 6.

All these tools are available on line. They exist in French, German, Bulgarian and English. They provide **teaching programmes**, individualised if necessary, based on many varied exercises taken from everyday life. They can be used directly as part of a teaching course with disaffected pupils with learning and inclusion problems.

⁶ Blanchard, S., & Sontag, J.-C. (2006). *Accompagner les jeunes en difficulté dans leur insertion professionnelle. Rapport de synthèse du projet européen Leonardo da Vinci: « Un modèle pédagogique pour une école de la deuxième chance.* Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 29, rue Aldringen, L-2926 Luxembourg and Institut National du Travail et d’Orientation professionnelle (INETOP/CNAM), 41, rue Gay-Lussac, F-75005 Paris.



Where to find the teaching tools listed in the reference tool?

“900 exercises in vocational Communication”

On the website: <http://compro.ltjb.lu/>

Available in FR, DE, EN, BG*

Also available on DVD from Euro Cordiale asbl, erny.plein@education.lu

“A new approach to social and cognitive skills”

On the website: <http://outils-cognitifs.ltjb.lu/>

Available in FR, DE, EN, BG*

Other tools created by our partners:

“Restaurant Venezia”

Available in FR, DE, EN, PT, LU*

Also available on DVD from Euro Cordiale asbl, erny.plein@education.lu

“Bienvenue à Graphoville” and “Welcome to Graphoville”

Available in FR, EN*

On the website: under construction

Available on DVD from Euro Cordiale asbl, erny.plein@education.lu

* According to the European code:

FR: French

DE: German

EN: English

PT: Portuguese

BG: Bulgarian