

# Good practice in validating learning results

Ireland

## Qualification "Supply chain management"



*Good practise in validation of learning outcomes. Ireland. Qualification "Supply chain management"*

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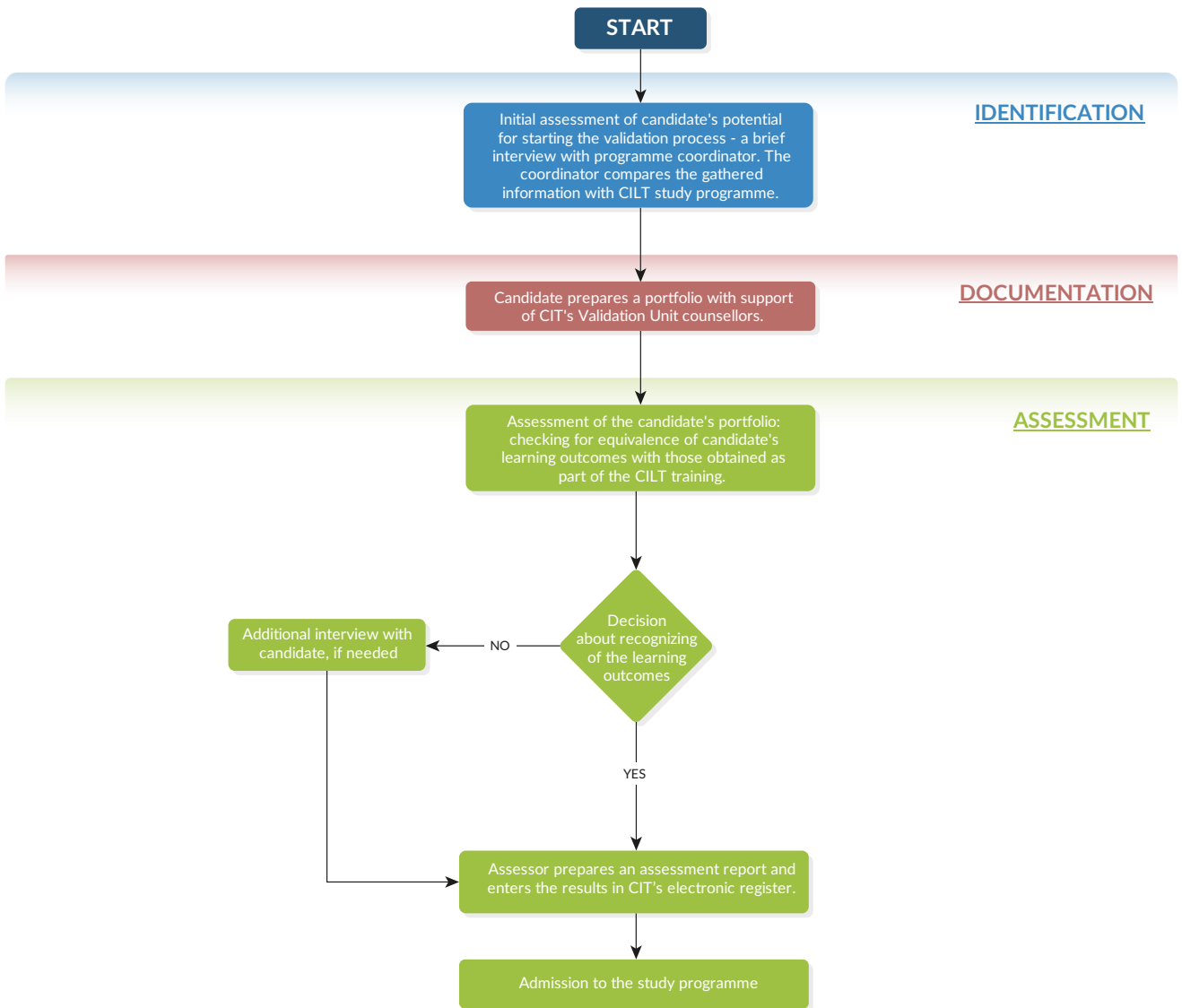
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## 1. Country, institution name

- Ireland
- Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)

## 2. Institution website

<http://www.cit.ie/>

## 3. Qualifications

Qualification "Supply chain management"  
Bachelor of Business in Supply Chain and Transport Management

Level 7 of the Irish National Qualifications Framework (INQF)  
Level 6 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

## 4. Short description of the validation process

The validation process presented here is an example of facilitating entry to an EQF level 6 Ordinary Degree in Supply Chain Management based on prior non-formal and informal learning if the standard academic entry requirements are not met. It is conducted by Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) in Ireland – a higher education institution offering qualifications in business, humanities, engineering, music, art and nautical studies.

A candidate can start the validation process to:

- fulfil the requirements for acceptance at a selected study programme in CIT;
- be promoted to the second (or subsequent) year of studies in a given study programme, provided that the candidate can demonstrate that he/she possesses the learning outcomes corresponding to the those achieved in the first (or subsequent) year of study;
- secure an exemption from selected modules of the teaching programme of a given study programme;
- attain qualifications (up to level 8 of the EQF) after confirming that the candidate has achieved all the learning outcomes required for a given study programme.

The good practice presented here describes the process for the first validation purpose listed above, i.e. fulfilment of the requirements for acceptance to a selected study programme, in this case – supply chain management. This qualification may be attained by persons who have the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) diploma and the Irish Institute of Purchasing & Materials Management (IIPMM) diploma, as well as a diploma in this field at level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework. The ability to conduct the validation process allows persons who have the relevant professional experience but lack the prerequisites listed above to also be accepted to this study programme.

The validation process for the "Supply Chain Management" qualification determines whether a candidate's possessed learning outcomes are equivalent to the knowledge and skills attained from the study programme of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT). The CILT diploma is at EQF level 5, which means that a candidate has to demonstrate that he/she is familiar with the fundamentals of logistics and is also adequately prepared to start studies at EQF level 6.

The presented validation process uses the method of analysis of evidence and statements, which are compiled in a portfolio. It encompasses three validation stages:

- identification of the candidate's learning outcomes based on an interview conducted by the study programme coordinator;
- documentation of the learning outcomes and compiling them in a portfolio with the assistance of a counsellor;

- assessment of the learning outcomes, performed by an assessor, consisting of an analysis of the candidate's portfolio; this stage may additionally include an interview with the candidate.

Supply chain management is a field that has emerged as a result of searching for the best operating methods providing companies with a competitive advantage. It is now a common operating strategy of companies and organisations, in both the private and the public sectors. Thus, specialisations are developing in supply chain management and the industry is demanding higher requirements in terms of the relevant competences of employees. Qualifications in supply chain management and logistics consist of the skills of planning, implementing and controlling the efficient flow and storage of goods, services and information between a point of collection and a point of use, with the aim of fulfilling a customer's requirements and legal requirements, as well as simultaneously ensuring the efficiency, profitability and flexibility of logistics services.

An average of half of the persons accepted to this study programme used the validation process. It is worth emphasising that using this option to be accepted for enrolment is also possible in other study programmes at Cork Institute of Technology, if the person's learning outcomes are determined to be at EQF level 5 as a minimum.

## 5. Detailed description of the validation process

Prior to commencing validation, the candidate can access detailed information about the course of the process (provided on the website and by the Institute). The candidate then contacts the study programme coordinator to discuss the required learning outcomes and to estimate the chances of successfully completing the validation process. After receiving a positive opinion from the study programme coordinator, the candidate goes to a counsellor from the Validation Unit, who assists him/her with registration.

The candidate is not required to have a specific number of years of professional experience, as it is not the length of time spent working in a given position that determines whether a candidate has attained the required level of knowledge, skills and social competence to enter the study programme.

### 5.1 Identification

Candidates who want to start the validation process must first contact the study programme coordinator who initially assesses their potential for starting the validation process. A brief conversation is usually held with the candidate for this purpose (personally or via e-mail), during which the candidate presents his/her formal education and learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning. The coordinator compares this information with the CILT study programme and maps it with respect to the learning outcomes required to enter the Supply Chain Management study programme.

It is expected that the candidates applying for acceptance to the Supply Chain Management study programme possess the following knowledge, skills and social competence:

- a broad knowledge of the theory, concepts and methods employed within the Transport, Logistics and Supply Chain discipline;
- the ability to seek knowledge of industry best practice through research, critical strategic thinking and to efficiently and effectively co-ordinate tactical matters;
- the ability to specify and use appropriate frameworks, models and tools to contribute to the Supply Chain function, specifically in transport and logistics operations;
- the ability to identify and formulate well-defined abstract problems and solution in warehousing operations, import and export operations, transport operations, purchasing, inventory and capacity, according to best practice philosophies and principles;
- act in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs, identify and apply skill and knowledge to a wide variety of supply chain management contexts;
- exercise substantial personal autonomy and often take responsibility for the work of others and/or for the allocation of resources; form, and function within, multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups;
- take initiative to identify and address learning and training needs and interact effectively in a learning group;

- express an understanding of the wider social, business and environmental and ethical issues within which the supply chain, logistics and transport profession operates. Reflect on self and engagement with others.

## 5.2 Documentation

The identified and mapped learning outcomes are documented by the candidate in a portfolio. CIT's experience to date has shown that starting the documentation stage may be the most challenging for candidates; therefore, they are provided with assistance from CIT's Validation Unit counsellors [1], which can beneficially impact the course of validation. Such support usually consists of individual interviews, but candidates can also attend a workshop for persons starting the validation process.

Candidates receive a portfolio template and samples, giving them a point of reference as they compile their own set of evidence. The completed portfolio is sent via e-mail to the counsellor, who makes sure that the documents are complete and ready to be forwarded to an assessor.

## 5.3 Assessment

At this stage, the assessor evaluates the portfolio and makes sure that the candidate has the prerequisite learning outcomes equivalent to those that can be attained by attending the CILT study programme. If the assessor requires explanations or additional information, an appointment for a supplementary interview is scheduled with the candidate.

After the evaluation, the assessor prepares an assessment report and enters the results in CIT's electronic register. A copy of this report is also sent to the secretariat and to the Validation Unit with a note on whether the candidate's learning outcomes were recognised and whether he/she is eligible to enter the study programme.

[1] The Validation Unit at CIT was established in 1999 in response to industry needs.

# 6. Validation methods

The most important methods used in validation include:

- the unstructured interview (conversation) as a supplementary method at all stages of validation;
- competence mapping at the identification stage;
- analysis of evidence and statements at the documentation and assessment stages.

## 6.1. Unstructured Interview (Conversation)

At the identification stage, the study programme coordinator conducts an interview with the candidate to determine his/her learning outcomes and compares them to the outcomes listed for the CILT study programme. At the documentation stage, the individual interviews between the counsellor and the candidate (performed personally, via e-mail or telephone) are a form of support in compiling the evidence of having acquired the learning outcomes, i.e. development of the portfolio. In this case, the counsellor acts as a mentor. At the assessment stage, the assessor's interview with the candidate may be used as a method supplementing the analysis of evidence and statements compiled in the portfolio.

## 6.2. Learning Outcomes Mapping

At the identification stage, the counsellor maps the candidate's learning outcomes, i.e. catalogues them, orders them and compares them to the knowledge, skills and social competence listed for the CILT study programme. This allows decisions to be made about the candidate's next steps to be taken.

## 6.3. Analysis of Evidence and Statements

The analysis of evidence and statements is used to:

- prepare a portfolio at the documentation stage;
- assess evidence and statements at the assessment stage.

### Preparation of the Portfolio

At the documentation stage, the candidate writes down the learning outcomes and compiles the evidence demonstrating that they have been acquired using the provided portfolio template. Applying a specific template depends on the purpose of validation, as well as the qualifications to which the validation process refers. The template may be modified if needed by the candidate. The template standardises the compilation and presentation of evidence for assessment, which allows candidates to focus on the content of the portfolio, instead of thinking about its form, and significantly facilitates the validation process for the assessors.

The portfolio is divided into three parts. The first part is an extended curriculum vitae (CV), where the candidate presents his/her experiences and describes his/her level of responsibilities. In the second part, the candidate describes his/her competences in relation to the CILT study programme, referring to the CV presented in the first part, so that it is clear when and where the declared learning outcomes were acquired. The third part contains evidence for the information described in the first two parts.

It must be stressed that each candidate's experiences are unique, so therefore there is no fixed list of evidence that must be included in the portfolio. Evidence may include, e.g.:

- publications, reports;
- photographs, audio and video recordings;
- references, recommendations;
- copies of certificates and diplomas;
- certificates of training completed at the work place;
- employment certificates;
- voluntary work certificates;
- completed project work;
- employee evaluation reports.

One piece of evidence may be used to confirm several learning outcomes. Therefore, a separate piece of evidence for each learning outcome does not necessarily have to be provided. If the counsellor believes that the portfolio is complete, the candidate can proceed to the third validation stage.

The portfolio is prepared as a Word document and after its completion, it is saved as a PDF file and subsequently submitted for assessment.

### Evaluation of Evidence

The assessor analyses the submitted portfolio to determine whether the candidate has achieved the learning equivalent to the prerequisites for entering the Supply Chain Management study programme. If the assessor needs additional explanations or information, an appointment for a supplementary interview may be scheduled with the candidate.

## 7. Validation results

Despite the fact that the result of validation is confirmation that the candidate possesses learning outcomes at EQF level 5, the process does not end with the issuance of a formal document in the form of a diploma or the awarding of ECTS credits. The result of the validation process is entry to an EQF 6 Bachelor of Science programme in Supply Chain Management at stage 3, which is the final stage of the programme. Once persons successfully complete this stage, they are conferred with a BSc in Supply Chain and Transport Management Ordinary Degree.



Should the candidate fail to confirm his/her learning outcomes, they can be acquired, i.e. by completing a formal programme of study operated by professional bodies at EQF level 5.

## 8. Human resources

Study programme coordinators, counsellors and assessors are involved in performing the validation process at CIT.

### 8.1. Study Programme Coordinators

The staff who assess validation applications are those who coordinate, manage or deliver the modules and study programmes to all learners. They are familiar with what is expected of a learner on completion of a module or programme, and so are best suited to evaluate learning which has occurred outside of formal education. They issue an initial opinion on a candidate's readiness to start the validation process. The system has been designed so that only candidates who have a chance to achieve a positive validation result are admitted to the process. In case the study programme coordinator believes that the candidate lacks the required learning outcomes, alternatives are discussed with the candidate, as well as the possibilities of supplementing them, e.g. through training or professional work.

### 8.2. Counsellors

There are currently two staff responsible for the mentoring and development of processes for validation at CIT, both of whom have Honors Degrees in discipline-specific related areas and Master Degree qualifications in the validation of prior learning and in Teaching and Learning (level 6 EQF). However, education in the area of validation is not required to work in the Unit as a counsellor. As a result of the growing interest of candidates in using validation, the unit has started offering training in this field to other staff involved in the validation process.

The currently employed counsellors have a wealth of experience in academic didactics and academic work, which includes preparation of the procedures, policies and individual teaching programmes, as well as publications, conference presentations, and reports pertaining to validation.

One counsellor is primarily responsible for working with students and assessors in preparing and evaluating portfolios, whereas the other works on developing the procedural and substantive aspects of the validation process.

### 8.3. Assessors

The assessors are study programme coordinators or lecturers working at CIT who are familiar with the assessment criteria and learning outcomes which the candidate has to achieve. During internal training on validation methods and processes, staff persons are prepared for working as assessors.

## 9. Organizational and material conditions

### 9.1. Timeframe

The organisational framework requires that candidates should apply for validation starting from June. Student registration for study programmes must be completed in September, before the start of the academic year.

### 9.2. Material Conditions

The validation methods used and the support offered to candidates do not require any special material conditions. Basic needs consist of appropriate premises for holding conversations with candidates, equipment to contact them via e-mail and telephone, and equipment to work with candidates on preparing their portfolios.

After being informed about the positive results of validation, candidates gain access to the enrolment system for CIT students. All information about validation is contained in brochures for students published by the Institute and at the CIT website: [www.cit.ie/rpl](http://www.cit.ie/rpl)

Tab	Review of information contained in a given tab
Recognition of prior learning home	Introductory information about validation and the role of the process at CIT. Includes an electronic version of the guidebook facilitating the preparation of a portfolio.
How does the recognition of prior learning work?	Information on possible validation outcomes, including the possibility of fulfilling the requirements for study enrolment.
Where do i start?	Description of validation at CIT.
Attend a workshop	Information about workshops intended for persons starting validation, organised during the first six weeks of every semester, on Mondays and Wednesdays, twice a day.
Book an appointment	Information about the possibility of arranging an individual meeting with the counsellor
Application format	Description of individual steps to be taken depending on the purpose of validation
Upload instructions	Information about documents that the candidate must submit to the institution and the mode of submission
Useful forms	Forms and templates useful in the validation process
FAQ	Responses to FAQs

Testimonials	The experiences of persons who have completed the validation process
Valuing learning	Information about lifelong learning

**Table 1. Information from the CIT website: [www.cit.ie/rpl](http://www.cit.ie/rpl)**

## 10. Quality assurance

### 11.1. Internal Quality Assurance

At Cork Institute of Technology, validation is subject to the same quality assurance system as is the process of education and examination, which encompasses: student registration, monitoring student data and reporting procedures. Information on persons starting the validation process, including their validation results, are registered in the Institute's database. This is done to examine the number of persons who wish to take part in the process and to track the demand and basis of applications in the different disciplines and programmes. It also facilitates the comparability and reliability of the validation outcomes.

Persons who start the validation process at CIT have the right to appeal the results, just as students can appeal the results of standard examinations. The appeals procedure is specified in student regulations.

The methods for performing validation and the solutions relating to this process are improved on an ongoing basis with the support of a working group, comprised of representatives of the entire Institute. If the current system requires a change, the group prepares a report, which is submitted to the CIT Academic Council.

### 11.2. Professional Development of Specialists Performing Validation

Validation has become an area of expertise and persons involved in its performance should be familiar with it. To this aim, the CIT Validation Unit organises yearly training for counsellors and assessors to ensure that they have up-to-date knowledge and skills in the methods and procedures of validation.

### 11.3. External Quality Assurance

Given the fact that the presented validation process does not result in the issuance of a formal document (e.g. diploma) or the awarding of ECTS credits, there is no need to ensure additional, external monitoring of the quality of validation results. On the other hand, when validation ends with the awarding of a full qualification (receipt of a diploma), an additional evaluation of the candidate by external assessors is foreseen.

## 11. Financing

Candidates starting the validation process at CIT do not incur any costs. If the validation result is positive, the candidate is charged a fee for enrolling in the studies programme. The fee for supply chain management studies is 2,950 EUR. Some employers cover the education costs of their employees; however, there are no public sources of financing for working persons or persons pursuing part-time studies. Full-time students can apply for financial support at their alma mater universities.

## 12. Context of good practice

### 12.1. National Level

There are 14 Institutes of Technology in Ireland offering bachelor and master degree studies. These institutes have become very successful as a result of their innovative curricula, where students' needs and labour market demands play a central role. The institutes promote equal access to education and the ability to transfer and recognise credits. The extensive cooperation of technology institutes with employers, business and industry has contributed to the increased involvement of the latter in the education sector, including the education and vocational reorientation of adults on the level of the entire country. The Institutes of Technology also promote a research ethos, driving innovation and entrepreneurship.

## **12.2. Local Level**

Cork Institute of Technology is located in the south of Ireland. It is a higher education provider with delegated authority to issue awards up to EQF level 7. CIT operates across four main campuses and offers programmes in business, humanities, engineering, music, art and nautical studies. It has the largest engineering offering in Ireland. The Institute cooperates with numerous professional organisations, which recognise the qualifications awarded by CIT to graduates.