

# D3.2 Handbook for the certification of digital competences in social care sector

D3.2   
Handbook for   
the certification of digital competences in social care sector

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| Abstract |
| This document is the final report of the Carer+ Work Package 3: Certification Process Development. The objective of the WP3 is to develop a certification process for the digital competences for social carers and link the process with the Carer+ Digital Competence Framework developed in the WP2. |

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| **Generic Minimum Quality Standards** | |
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| Document Summary provided (with adequate synopsis of contents) |  |
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| Quality of text is acceptable (organisation and structure; diagrams; readability) |  |
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| **Deliverable specific quality criteria** | |
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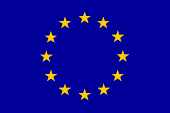
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# Document summary

This paper is the final Deliverable of the Carer+ Work Package 3: Certification Process Development.

In the methodological chapter, an overview is given of the methods used by the Carer+ project to obtain empirical evidence on aspects related to the certification of care workers in the piloting countries in general, and on the views of experts on the possibilities for the certification of digital competences in care work. Opinions and facts collected through validation workshops with stakeholders are summarised therein.

The chapter devoted to methodology also provides the analytical model for a certification process that serves as default, transversal form defined by the Handbook to be mapped on specific national, regional and/or sectoral circumstances.

The analytical model for the certification process defines 3 process elements (Actors, Stages, Relations). Among these there are 4 different Stages recognised (Learning, Application, Assessment, Awarding), and 3 basic types of Actors (Learner, Mentor, Certifying Entity). The relations between the particular elements, and the processual steps involved, are visualised through a process diagramme and defined in process sheets,

Following chapters elaborate in more detail on the specifics of the four Stages: Learning, Application, Assessment, and Awarding. Another chapter is dedicated to the concept of qualification, and deals with different ways how Carer+ can approach qualification as a final objective of certification.

Concluding chapter provides a brief list of lessons learned in WP 3 and recommendation for possible further actions of the Carer+ consortium in this direction.

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# **Introduction: Aims of the Deliverable**

This Deliverable is the final report of the Carer+ Work Package 3: Certification Process Development.

The objective of the WP3 is to develop a certification process for the digital competences for social carers and link the process with the Carer+ Digital Competence Framework developed in the WP2.

“Certification in the strict sense is the acknowledgement of conformity with a norm or that results from a voluntary evaluation process whereby an individual’s knowledge and/or skill in a particular area of interest are validated against a set of predetermined skills requirements, e.g. skills standards, by objective assessment. Accordingly, certifications are part of a larger system issuing credentials for achieved learning objectives and outcomes,” (Cedefop 2006: 23).

The predetermined skills requirements mentioned in the above definition are, in the context of Carer+, found in the Digital Competence Framework that is the fundamental source of the definition of learning outcomes to be gained and demonstrated by a certification applicant, and to be referred to, evaluated and confirmed by a certifying body. The methods, mechanisms and tools that enable and facilitate this process are the first main focus of this Handbook.

The second principal topic of this Handbook is the implementation of a Carer+ certification process into broader national and/or European certification systems. The key question the WP3 raises is how to make the Carer+ certification logic compatible with national qualification systems and certification processes in order for the care workers to have their Carer+ skills and competences recognised, and possibly certified, beyond the project’s frame. Due to the diversity and complexity of different national qualification and certification systems, this Deliverable does not inquire into the particular ways each specific national system would be able to accommodate a Carer+ component, but rather provides a set of guidelines and recommendations for those interested in going in this direction.

The intended users of this Handbook, therefore, are primarily the Carer+ project partners and their cooperating networks of stakeholders who aim to:

a) establish a possibility for care workers to certify their digital competences within the Carer+ framework;

b) take steps towards integrating the Carer+ competence logic and certification process into higher/wider systems of the recognition of competences, e.g. at a sectoral, regional, national or trans-national level.

# **Methodology**

**Collecting evidence on certification stakeholders and processes in three piloting countries**

Four project partners have been involved in Task3.1 of WP3: Identify and involve certification bodies:

* IPERIA (France), IRS (Italy), Iniciadivas Innovadoras (Spain): identification of stakeholders, conducting stakeholder survey, reporting results, organising stakeholder workshops.
* 3s Unternehmensberatung (Austria): coordination of WP3, analysis of survey evidence, support to stakeholder workshops.

The T3.1 stakeholder survey partly builds on, complements and updates the outcomes of the general stakeholder analysis conducted at an earlier stage of the project, however its focus is more specific. It focuses on the regional context of the piloting countries. It broadens and deepens the initial stakeholder analysis, e.g. in the sense that some stakeholders were identified and included at a later stage of the project as they were contacted during the training provided within the respective Carer+ WPs. T.3.1 survey, therefore, identifies stakeholders that are particularly relevant to participate in the validation workshops on certification. Such stakeholders should meet at least one of the following criteria:

* the organisation is an awarding body accredited for IT certification for carers;
* the organisation is an awarding body accredited for certification of care competences, potentially including digital competences for carers;
* the organisation is an awarding body accredited for IT certification (any kind of IT competences), potentially including those specifically targeted at carers;
* the organisation provides education and training for carers (and thus might be interested in a European certification process of digital competences for carers), including LLL institutions and VET providers;
* the organisation provides education and training in general, including LLL institutions and VET providers, and might be interested to include IT certificates for carers in their portfolio;
* the organisation provides care services (and thus might be interested in a European certification process of digital competences for carers);
* the organisation is an accredited certification body (any kind of certificates) and might be interested to include IT certificates for carers in their portfolio;
* the organisation is an established accreditation body and might be entrusted with accreditation of certification bodies in the future;
* the organisation is a public or governmental body such as ministries, regional or local policy makers in the fields of care, education and VET; social partners, such as chambers of commerce, chambers of labour, trade unions and employers’ associations; who might be interested in a European certification process of digital competences for carers.
* out of the types of organisations listed above, those providing both care services and education and training for carers, will be of particular interest, as they are expected to provide valuable advice from their experience, and at the same time might show great interest in certification of digital competences for carers.

Table 1 below illustrates the results from the survey:

**Table 1: Stakeholder survey**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Type of institution** | | | | | | **Most frequent type of source:** (‘certificate’, ‘course’, ‘VET curriculum’, ‘other’) | **Most frequent type of competence described in the sources identified** (‘IT competences for carers’; ‘care competences’, ‘IT competences’ ‘other’) |
|  | Care provider | Edu&trainprovider | Cert. body | Accred.body | Government | Other |  |  |
| FR |  | 1 | 1 | 0 |  | 1 | certificate | IT competences |
| ES | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 8 | 1 | certificate | care competences |
| IT |  | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 9 | other | care competences |
| EU |  |  | 1 | 0 |  |  | courses | IT competences |

In Spain, the majority of relevant stakeholders identified represent governmental bodies (the certification process in the country is regulated at regional level). In Italy, most of the institutions represent ‘other’ type of institutions including local entities and public utilities for health care provision.

The most frequent type of sources differs across piloting countries In Spain, the most frequent type of source are certificates, whereas in Italy ‘other’ types of sources prevail such as home care service planning, monitoring and provision.

An important finding of the survey is that the specific area of ICT competences for carers has not been identified in any of the piloting countries. In fact, in Spain IT competences for carers are currently being developed for the first time within the Carer+ training mechanism.

**Certified qualifications examples**

Home Care Assistant

There is no professional qualification for home care workers in Italy. In the sysem of regional autonomy, each region has its own qualifications framework. In Emilia-Romagna there was found the qualification “Health Care Assistant” which is a higher profile with respect to the profile of a home care worker in that a health care assistant can provide health care and nursing operations which are prohibited to be performed by home care workers (e.g. injections).

There is an ICT module in the Health Care Assistant course which brings the person to obtain a qualification. Yet it is merely an ICT literacy module, i.e. it does not contain more complex digital competences defined in the Carer+ framework. Such digital competences are reported to be potentially usable for modernising the existing courses, possibly for higher qualification profiles. However, a development along such lines would have to come along with a modernisation of teaching techniques as well as improving the level of technical equipment available to the teachers and learners, the survey respondents conclude.

Home Care Worker

Following the abundance of low-skilled home care workers hired by households, and in response to the lack of any formal qualification for this job, the regional administration in Emilia-Romagna decided that every home care worker needs to undergo a specifically developed training process. Upon absolving the training, the care worker is included in a regional list of accredited care workers managed by the local health authority.

The training provided to home care workers is substantially practical and task-oriented. There is no focus on ICT competences specific for carers. It is designed by the Emilia-Romagna administration. The duration is 120 hours and there is no leaving certificate awarded. The output of the training is a ‘declaration of competences’, which is a non-legal document with little transferability potential.

Only care workers included in the list of trained persons can be considered in the demand-supply match process carried out by the social case workers. The social workers conduct needs analysis of the person who requires an assistant, and on the other hand analyse the profiles of the trained and registered care workers to establish a match.

Specialised training course in ICT competences for care workers

The Spanish example of certification reports on how a certification system for ICT competences related to home care services is being implemented. The evidence draws on current experience from the piloting phase (WP5).

SSI Group as a care service provider works with various institutions towards the development of a certification system for ICT competences in home care services, as well as a specialised training linked to the professional accreditation to be demanded at a regional (Basque country) and national level. It will be based on the DIGCOM framework as well as Carer+. Three institutions are involved at this stage:

- Lanbide (Regional Employment Service) for the design of the specialised training.  
- Competitiveness and Economic Development Department (Basque Government) for the certification of the course. Two other agents are involved together with the regional government: KZ Gune (Telecentre) and Tecnalia. Currently the ICT competences certification is done through Telecentres and Tecnalia who develops the software for certification.  
- SSI Group acts as an expert on home care services.

In Italy, the situation is described as follows:

**1) National certification point.**   
Regional autonomy is in place in Italy since 1978. At the education and training level this means every region has their own qualifications frameworks which may vary greatly between regions. For the region where the survey took place it could be an option to set up a "Regional Certification Point" but not a "National" one.

**2) Appointment of IRS as "certification point".**   
The Carer+ partner being identified as a "Certification Point" at a regional level will not be possible, for IRS are not a VET institution, nor are they accredited as awarding body. It is, however, possible to create a synergy with other institutions such as VET centres specializing in social care courses and/or certification, and propose to them to become a regional certification point.

In the Emilia-Romagna region, there is no single "Care Worker" qualification. What is available is a "Healthcare Assistant" qualification which entails more complex tasks (e.g. specialised nursing activities) as compared to those required of a care worker. On the other hand, there is a 120-hour course for home care workers which is not mandatory although it is fundamental for the home care workers who wish to be included in a supply/demand matching system managed by the Municipalities (in charge of home care provision). This course does not lead to a qualification confirmed by a certificate; upon finishing this course the learner gains a "Declaration of Competence" which has a non-official character.

Given the outlined settings, the Carer+ partner in Italy would be potentially able to:

- propose to VET centres the adoption of the Carer+ Digital Competence Framework and relevant training through the Carer+ course in a blended version;   
- raise the regional administration's awareness of the topic and encourage possible formal steps towards future certification schemes.

**France**

As regards the French context, during 2015 the French National Ministry of Labour will define a qualification standard for the care work sector and it will certainly include ICT competences. The experts in the Paris validation workshop pointed out that this could be the basis for further development of Carer+ certificate in France, which will be in line of these ICT competences.

More concretely, IPERIA, as an organisation dealing with the creation of specific training modules and qualification and certification standards, can play a key role in the development of a Carer+ certificate in France. In this sense, some modules containing ICT competences are already included in its catalogue, so it can be possible to enlarge and to enrich them thanks to the experience gained with the Carer+ project.

Additional information was provided through the validation workshop organised in France, particularly an overview of relevant qualifications:

* Household Employee
* Life Assistant

Childcare Assistant.

Although the qualifications do not include a specific ICT/digital module at the moment, the related certification process description and conditions were highly relevant for this Handbook in terms of:

* comparing the below described analytical process model with the French example;
* defining in more specific the related sub-processes, conditions and circumstances;
* identifying possible slots in existing qualifications where a Carer+-based module could be inserted.

Based on the French report, it was observed by the experts that one of the strong points of the certification process is the badge system. As regards other possible validation systems, such as exams based on informatics programmes (such as Word or Excel) or scoring, they believed this was not adapted to the profile of care workers, since they have to acquire a wide range of ICT competences, not related to informatics programmes, and scoring is not pertinent, since the important thing is to acquire IT competences and the proficiency level is not relevant for them.

**Analytical process model**

The general notion of certification is understood in Carer+ as a destination on a pathway that begins with an intentional decision to learn, continues via systematic organisation of the learning according to an outcome-oriented framework, and reaches a stage of demonstration of the acquired competences through undergoing an assessment phase based on specific quality criteria and resulting in an institutional recognition of the competences possessed by the learner.

Approaching and analysing such pathway as a process model, the methodology applied by Carer+ distinguishes the following basic (necessary) **types of elements of the process**:

**Table 2: Process Elements**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Type of element | Defined by |
| Actors | Functions |
| Aims |
| Stages | Inputs |
| Change |
| Outputs |
| Relations | Interactions between elements |

Consequently, the general **transversal model of certification** process used in Carer+ presupposes the existence of the following **elements with their defining features**:

**Table 3: Stages**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Stage | Inputs | Change | Outputs | ID |
| **Learning** | - Learner (A1.1) - Mentor (A2.1)  - Learning resources | Learner gains competences. | - Learner (A1.2) | S1 |
| **Application** | - Learner (A1.2)  - Mentor (A2.2) - Certifying Entity (A3.2)  - Application conditions and requirements (Qualification Standard, Assessment Standard) | Learner meets application conditions and requirements. | - Learner (A1.3) | S2 |
| **Assessment** | - Learner (A1.3) - Certifying Entity (A3.3)  - Assessment contents and criteria (Qualification Standard and Assessment Standard) | Learner demonstrates possession of competences. | - Learner (A1.4) | S3 |
| **Awarding** | - Learner (A1.4)  - Certifying Entity (A3.4)  - Awarding process regulations | Learner obtains formal recognition of competences. | - Certified Carer+ | S4 |

**Table 4: Actors**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Actor | Function | Aim | ID |
| **Learner** | Starts the process by intentionally entering stage S1. | Gain competences. | A1.1 |
| Initiates stage S2 by applying for certification. | Apply for certification of competences. | A1.2 |
| Enters stage S3 by undergoing testing, evaluation and assessment procedures. | Demonstrate possession of competences. | A1.3 |
| Becomes outcome of stage S4 by receiving certificate. | Benefit from formal recognition of competences. | A1.4 |
| **Mentor** | Enters the process in stage S1 by mentoring Learner. | Support Learner in adopting competences. | A2.1\* |
| Facilitates Learner’s initiation of stage S2. | Support Learner in understanding system and requirements of certification. | A2.2\* |
| Acts as assessor/member of examination board in stage S3. | Assess Learner’s competences. | A2.3\* |
| Acts as assessor/member of examination board in stage S4. | Co-guarantee the certificate awarding decision. | A2.4\* |
| **Certifying Entity** | Provides relevant information and resources to be used by Learner and Mentor in stage S1. | Support Learner and Mentor in Learner’s adopting competences. | A3.1\* |
| Determines all conditions of certification in stage S2. | Receive and accept applications for certification. | A3.2 |
| Realizes stage S3 by organising testing, evaluation and assessment procedures. | Ascertain whether or not Learner possess competences. | A3.3 |
| Realizes stage S4 by awarding certificate. | Formally guarantee, by awarding certificate, that Learner possesses competences. | A3.4 |

\* Items marked with asterisk and lighter font colour are optional, i.e. the process can work even if they are not present.

The above listed elements, their features and relations can be represented in a **developmental diagram** that provides another type of overview of the transversal process model:

**Figure 1: Developmental diagram of the analytical model of certification process**

Learner gains formal recognition of competences

Learner demonstrates competences

Learner meets application requirements

Learner gains competences

S4: Awarding

S3: Assessment

S2: Application

S1: Learning

A1.4 Learner

Get formal recognition

A3.4   
Certifying Entity

Co-guarantee certificate awarding

A2.4 Mentor

A1.3 Learner

follows

follows

Examine Learner’s competences

A3.3   
Certifying Entity

Evaluate Learner’s competences in examination board

A2.3 Mentor

follows

A1.2 Learner

Apply f.certification

A1.1 Learner

Gain competences

complies with

Demonstrate competences

complies with

learns from

A2.2 Mentor

Support learner in meeting requirements

A2.1 Mentor

teaches from

Support learner in adopting competences

follows

explains

A3.2   
Certifying Entity

Accept application f. certification

provides

A3.1   
Certifying Entity

determines  
or follows

determines

Guarantee certificate awarding

Support Learner and Mentor

**Application conditions +  
competence requirements (Qualification Standard, Assessment Standard)**

**Awarding process regulations**

**Assessment content + criteria (Qualificaton Standard, Assessment Standard)**

**Learning resources**

It has been indicated that the above model has transversal character. This means that the model is understood and utilised strictly as an **analytical instrument** **to be mapped on actual processes** found in the pilot testing settings. It represents a minimal default standard for certification process and, at the same time, a tool for identifying common features and gaps when compared with existing certification processes in the area of digital competence of care workers.

By definition, therefore, the model does not reflect certain contextual aspects of certification processes such as accreditation systems and mechanisms and related legislative frameworks. This is because these factors are highly context-specific and fairly variable. Nevertheless, they are considered vital part of certification processes and taken into account at the phase of adapting the Carer+ model on specific sectorial / national circumstances (cf. below the chapter “National and trans-national recognition”).

# **Learning (S1)**

Technically, the “Learning” stage of the Carer+ certification process is one that does not have a formal dimension, nor does necessarily require the involvement of a certifying body. Rather, it is a preparation stage where the potential applicant for certification (Learner) works toward gaining a set of knowledge, skills and competences to be assessed, formally confirmed and recognised over the next stages of the process.

However, this stage is included in the process model because in an ideal case it should be informed and supported by the Carer+ developmental instruments created earlier in the project, especially by the Carer+ Digital Competence Framework and the Toolkit for the Development of Digital Competences.

Using these resources is particularly relevant when there is a Mentor (A2.1) involved along with the Learner (A1.1) in the Learning stage. The Mentor’s role is to support the Learner in two ways:

* establishing a clear and effective learning plan based on a competence-oriented approach and logical structuring of learning outcomes to be achieved;
* finding, understanding and utilising the learning resources that are in line with the learning plan.

A Mentor is any person who:

* is acquainted with the Carer+ project and portfolio of supporting tools and instruments; and/or
* represents a Carer+ partner or an organisation cooperating with the Carer+ project; and/or
* is involved in the provision of social care and possesses level of seniority that allows him/her to perform mentoring tasks; and/or
* is himself/herself certified in digital competence for carers or related fields.

The Carer+ Digital Competence Framework[[1]](#footnote-1) (DCF) is a basic instrument that defines the knowledge, skills and competences of a digitally competent care worker, and organises the elements in a structure based on Domains, Competence Areas, Competences, Examples of Learning Outcomes, and Application Levels. The DCF has been the subject of different Work Packages and Deliverables produced in the project, therefore in this chapter we resort to introducing its elementary structure only briefly through the below given Figure2:

**Figure 2: Carer+ Digital Competence Framework – basic structure**



In the Learning stage, the Learner (possibly with guidance from the Mentor) should consult the Framework in terms of becoming familiar with the different types of competences and their description found in the examples of learning outcomes. The DCF serves in the next two stages (Application, Assessment) as the source of the design of the key instruments of the certification process: the Qualification Standard and the Assessment Standard.

The Carer+ Toolkit for the Development of Digital Competence (WP6) can be used as a blended learning / teaching support instrument in Stage 1.

.

# **Application (S2)**

**Role of the Learner in Application stage**

In principle, anyone can apply for the certification in digital competence for carers as far as the transversal process model is concerned. The different profiles of the candidates can be, for example:

* independent care worker / caregiver applying out of own initiative for professional development
* organised care giver whose employer (e.g. care service provider) organises professional development of staff
* care work coordinator seeking to become a Mentor of individual care workers
* public officer working in the social care area
* student / apprentice intending to integrate the certification into a broader qualification (if applicable)

The above bullet-point is not complete but indicative. The main idea of the Carer+ certification process is that it allows for the assessment and recognition of competences regardless of their source. In other words, it is based solely on the principle of the recognition of learning outcomes. It is irrelevant for this model whether an individual’s knowledge, skills and competences have been gained through the system of initial education or through work experience or lifelong learning (non-formal or informal).

Hence, the Carer+ certification process does not presuppose any application entry requirements based on formal education, such as specific level or branch of qualification or diploma, or specific number of years spent in prior formal education. Neither does the model require that the candidate have a minimum number of years of relevant work experience or proven employment history in care services. The certification process, to sum up, is based strictly on determining whether a person possesses a defined set of competences. The definition of the competences is the content of a fundamental instrument prepared by the Certifying Entity: the Qualification Standard (see below).

The role of the Learner in the Application stage is fullfiled by:

* meeting basic admission criteria such as legal age and legal capacity;
* meeting technical admission criteria such as registration procedure and fee (where applicable)
* submitting the application in accord with the Certifying Entity’s regulations.

**Role of the Certifying Entity in Application stage**

The Certifying Entity determines the above mentioned basic and technical admission criteria, and possibly furhter application requirements according to specific context and frame of operation.

The key task for the Certifying Entity at the Application stage, however, is to make clear to the applicants what competences will be the subject of the next stage – Assessment – and how they will be examined. In other words, giving complete and publicly available account of the learning outcomes that a candidate should be able to demostrate, and the ways how the examinee is expected to prove his/her possessionof the competences, is a condition of paramount significance for ensuring the quality and transparency of a process that is based solely on the evaluation and recognition of a person’s competences regardless of their origin.

Qualification Standard

In general, a Qualification Standard is a document that specifies the learning outcomes necessary to be found in a candidate for certification. In the context of this certification process model, the notion of qualification is not understood in the narrow sense as an output of a formal programme with a given level in a formal qualification system (i.e. “diploma”), but in a broader sense as a set of abilities that qualify a person to pass an exam that may or may not have a relation to a formal system.

A Qualification Standard defined for the purposes of Carer+ certification is based on the Carer+ Digital Competence Framework. It follows the DCF structure and organising principles, as well as the logic of competence development contained therein.

In most practical instances of a certification process, however, Qualification Standards will not reflect the entire Framework but rather select from it particular areas (or a combination of areas) according to specific certification profiles defined individually.

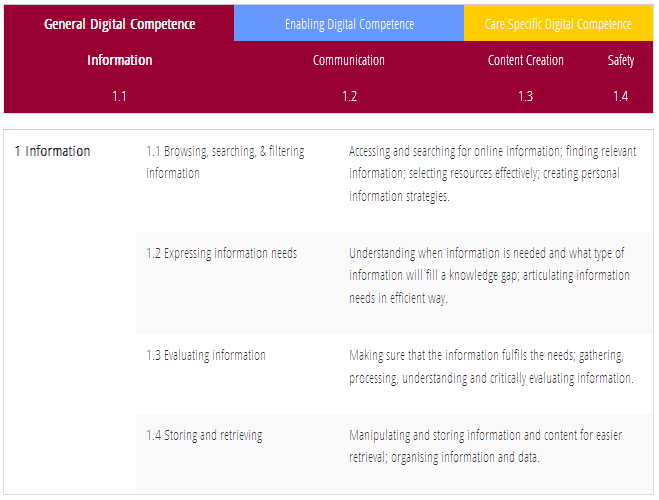
In all cases, however, the Qualification Standard should select from Competence Domains, Competence Areas and Competences, and preserve the inherent logic of this structure. Figure 3 below shows an extract from the DCF that represents:

- Competence Domain 1: General Digital Competence

- Competence Area 1: Information

- Competences 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and their high-level definitions:

**Figure 3: Digital Competence Framework extract – down to the level of Competence description**



This level of information (down to descriptions of Competences) is optimal for the purposes of the Qualification Standard.

Assessment Standard

Whereas a Qualification Standard serves as an overview of the elementary components of a qualification, an Assessment Standard can be considered its expanded version that, in addition:

* specifies in closer detail the competences defined in QS;
* stipulates methods as to how all individual competences are assessed by the examiner / examination board (or reversely, how the Learner is expected to demonstrate his/her possession of the competences).

Figure 4 below shows another extract from the Digital Competence Framework, this time at the level of one single Competence (1.1 Browsing, searching and filtering information) and its more detailed definition through *examples of knowledge, skills and attitudes* that constitute the Competence (for two application levels: User and Guide):

**Figure 4: Digital Competence Framework extract – down to the level of learning outcomes examples**

Whereas the above Figure 3 gives a guideline of how Competences can be described in closer detail in order to make them assessable, it does not contain the principal element of an Assessment Standard – the assessment methods. In general, the following methods are normally used and ascribed to specific learning outcomes:

**Table 5: Basic assessment methods**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Type of learning outcome to be assessed | Common assessment methods |
| Knowledge | Verbal description |
| Written test / Essay |
| Explanation / Definition |
| Giving examples |
| Skill | Observation |
| Task / Practical demonstration |
| Case study solution |
| Giving comments on practical tasks performed |
| Written test |
| Attitude | Observation |
| Free discussion |
| Motivational questions |
| Indirect assessment – overall impression |

By definition, Knowledge and Skill items can be observed and assessed with more empirical accuracy than Attitude items. It is the responsibility of the examiner / examination board to maintain as high a level of fact-based approach as possible even when assessing the candidate in abilities that imply certain level of subjective judgement.

# **Assessment (S3)**

It has been clarified above that the ultimate objective of certification is a formal recognition (i.e. confirmation) that a person possesses certain type and amount of competence at a certain level. To be able to bear the responsibility of formally confirming such a fact, the Certifying Entity must have a means of verifying it. That is the elementary purpose of the third stage in the certification process – Assessment.

Examination approaches

The previous chapter implies that the fundamental instrument for the Assessment stage is the Assessment Standard (AS). The AS defines what is to be looked for in a candidate, and how to look for it. In short: what to verify and how. Nevertheless, there are three different approaches to the actual act of verification:

* direct verification by examination session / interview  
  (an organised, single-purpose event where the candidate is directly interviewed by an examiner or an examination board; work environment / work tasks are simulated; distant examination sessions such as e-learning-based exams belong here)
* direct verification by in situ observation  
  (where the candidate performs his/her regular work activities in his/her real working environment; the examiner / examination board observes and assesses the candidate’s performance in situ)
* indirect verification by assessing evidence of candidate’s competence

(where the examiner / examination board receives and evaluates materials provided by the candidate to demonstrate competences and work results, such as a CV, portfolio, project outcomes and other types of evidence produced by the candidate)

In reality, it is recommendable to combine all three approaches to the verification of a Learner’s competence. It is not advisable to rely on the third (indirect) method only, as in most certification and recognition systems an indirect assessment is not considered sufficient for awarding a formal certificate.

Examiner / Examination board

Depending on the possibilities of the Certifying Entity (and in case of integration of the certification into an existing framework depending on the relevant legal regulations), the verification of the candidate’s competence against the Assessment Standard can be realised by a single examiner or by an examination board.

In either case, the Certifying entity should stipulate a set of transparent rules to determine:

* the minimum number of members of and examination board (odd number recomended in case of voting);
* how the Chair of the board is elected, if applicable, and what are his/her privileges and responsibilities;
* the qualification requirements for the members of the board (e.g. in terms of type and level of fromal qualification obtained, years of professional experience, level of seniority in an organisation, membership in key stakeholder structures, etc.);
* the voting mechanisms;
* the minimum necessary conditions for an exam to take place (in terms of time, location, equipment, etc.);
* other quality assurance mechanisms such as appeal procedures and external supervision.

Following the Assessment Standard

Of greater importance than the technical settings of the examination is the fact that the fundamental instrument used at this stage is the Assessment Standard. It is paramount for the Certifying Entity to make sure that the examiners / examination boards use the AS, and the AS only, to decide whether the Learner passes or fails the exam. Using any other criteria than the AS will jeopardize the transparency and fairness of the process and effectively prevent the possibility of its integration into broader structures and systems of certification and recognition of competences.

# **Awarding (S4)**

The final stage of the model certification process deals with the procedures related to awarding a certificate to a successful Learner that passed an examination in the previous stage (Assessment).

We distinguish two basic types of certificates in terms of regulatory range:

**Certificates issued outside regulatory / accreditation frameworks**

This type of certificate does not establish a claim to a recognition within a qualification system, nor does it enable the holder to enter regulated professions or perform regulated activities. This is a limiting factor. However, such certificates still bear a formal confirmation that the holder’s competence has been institutionally verified, and can thus serve various purposes such as improve job search chances and facilitate professional growth.

It is expected that Carer+ certificates will be of this type at least in the piloting phase of certification, i.e. before integration into regulated sectorial / national systems.

**Certificates issued within regulatory / accreditation frameworks**

This type of certificate is issued in accordance with related legislative regulations and/or within a given system of official accreditation regulated by the law. They normally signify a shift in a given qualifications system or other specific framework. For a certificate to become this type, various systemic conditions need to be fullfiled, and related legal mechanisms established.

We expect that in some of the piloting contexts it will be possible to upscale the Carer+ certificate into this level.

Figure 5 below gives a default example of the model structure of a Carer+ Certificate. The distinguishing quality of the certificate is the fact that it contains, on the second page, a list of competences verified in the candidate and related to a complex system of competence development that is the Carer+ Digital Competence Framework. (Note that the model certificate contains items that are only applicable if the certificate is related to broader systems such as a national qualifications system or the European Qualifications Framework.)

**Figure 5: Model structure of a Carer+ Certificate in Digital Competence for Care Workers**

Authorised body: .....................................................................................................................

Address: ........................................................

.......................................................

Authorising body: ......................................................................................................................

Address: .......................................................

........................................................

**CERTIFICATE**

in

**Carer+ DIGITAL COMPETENCE**

**Ms JANE DOE**

**.................................................................................................**(name of the holder, address, date of birth)

This is to certify that the holder of this document has successfully ***passed* / *passed with honours***

the exam in

***Digital Competence for Care Workers.***

Title and code of qualification:......................................................................................................

Level of qualification in National Qualifications Framework:........................................................

Level of qualification in European Qualifications Framework:.....................................................

Legal basis: ..................................................................................................................................

Date (valid as of): ...........................................................

Place: ...........................................................

The holder of this certificate demonstrated the adoption of the following competences:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Title of competence** | **Level of proficiency (if applicable)** | **Reference to the Carer+ Digital Competence Framework** | **Reference to the NQF / EQF**  **(if applicable)** |
| **1** |  |  |  |
| **2** |  |  |  |
| **3** |  |  |  |
| **4** |  |  |  |
| **5** |  |  |  |
| **6** |  |  |  |
| **7** |  |  |  |
| **8** |  |  |  |
| **9** |  |  |  |
| **10** |  |  |  |
| **11** |  |  |  |
| **12** |  |  |  |

Description of examination settings, form and criteria:

.................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

.............................................................................................................

Chair of the Examination Board:  
(name and signature)

# **National and trans-national recognition**

Qualification

It has been implied above that any model for a process of certification is eventually related to the notion of (formal) qualification. In the context of this Handbook, three different ways of relating the Carer+ deliverables to qualification principles are recognised:

1. Full qualification

A full qualification is understood as a formal outcome of a training and certification process where:

- there is national/regional systemic recognition and accreditation;

- obtaining the qualification constitutes a shift in formal level of education in a national/regional qualification system.

Given the nature of the Carer+ competence system, learning tools and certification process, this option is not found suitable. The main reason is the specificity and, to a certain level, partiality of the outcomes when related to standard full qualification profiles found in European education systems.

1. Partial qualification

A partial qualification is a relatively new instrument that, however, has been implemented in numerous European qualifications frameworks. It is defined as a type of qualification that does not constitute a new level of education (e.g. shift in EQF or particular NQF) but rather recognises a specific area of competence, predominantly of vocational character. Partial qualifications (sometimes also called “vocational” or even “professional” qualifications) are often used as tools for the recognition of the outcomes of the outcomes of lifelong learnign, be they non-formal or informal. In many European countries, partial qualifications have the character of exams that may or may not be preceded by a period of training. The decisive factor in the concept of partial qualification is the assessment of whether or not a person possesses the competences required by a Qualification Standard and possibly specified through Assessement Standard.

The option of driving the Carer+ certification process in this direction appears more realistic than an attempt for full qualification. In a longer run, this Handbook finds it possible for the Carer+ portfolio of outcomes to become a basis for a single partial qualification. Nevertheless, the procedure for introducing a new partial qualification into a national/regional system differs across Europe. Normally, it should involve at least the following aspects:

- a functioning National Qualifications Framework;

- related legislation to stipulate rules for the recognition of the outcomes of lifelong learning;

- established stakeholder networks based on the principles of social partnership that formulate the skill needs and shortages upon which the relevance of proposed partial qualifications is evaluated;

- formal mechanisms for designing, approval, accreditation and realisation of partial qualifications;

- lobbying mechanisms through which interest groups promote their proposals for partial qualifications.

Should the Carer+ network consider this option, all the above listed aspects will have to be taken into consideration and further examined at national/regional levels.

1. Carer+ as a module within an established qualification

It has been concluded in the final validation workshop for this Handbook that this third option is to be considered the most realistic for Carer+ in terms of its objectives, possibilities, and target group needs.

The third option is based on the principle of including a Carer+-based module into an already existing (or currently designed) qualification, be it a formal full qualification or a partial one. In this sense, the Carer+ outcomes (primarily the DCF and the learning tools) would serve as a means of broadening and deepening of a qualification rather then a vehicle to bear a single qualification by itself.

The advantages of such an approach can be seen in the following:

- A clear need for including a digital aspect into care workers’ competence portfolio has been identified, as has a general lack of means to do so.

- In terms of legislative and accreditation circumstances, including Carer+ as a model into already established qualifications represents the most effective way of achieving a certification in digital competence without the need to struggle with lengthy (and sometimes political) negotiations.

- A digital competence module possesses by definition a transversal aspect that can allow it to become part of various kinds of qualifications without the need to restrict it to a single one.

- The different parts of the Carer+ Digital Competence Framework can be used independently according to specific profiles of different qualifications. In this way, Carer+ outcomes’ advantage is seen in their flexibility while keeping the learning-outcome-based approach that makes them compatible with conteporary qualification and competence frameworks and paradigms.

# **Conclusion**

In a way of conclusion, this Handbook’s principle recommendations as regards the certification process are formulated thus:

- National and regional certification structures are to be regarded as such, i.e. with a priori acknowledgment of their specifics, individual procedures, and requirements.

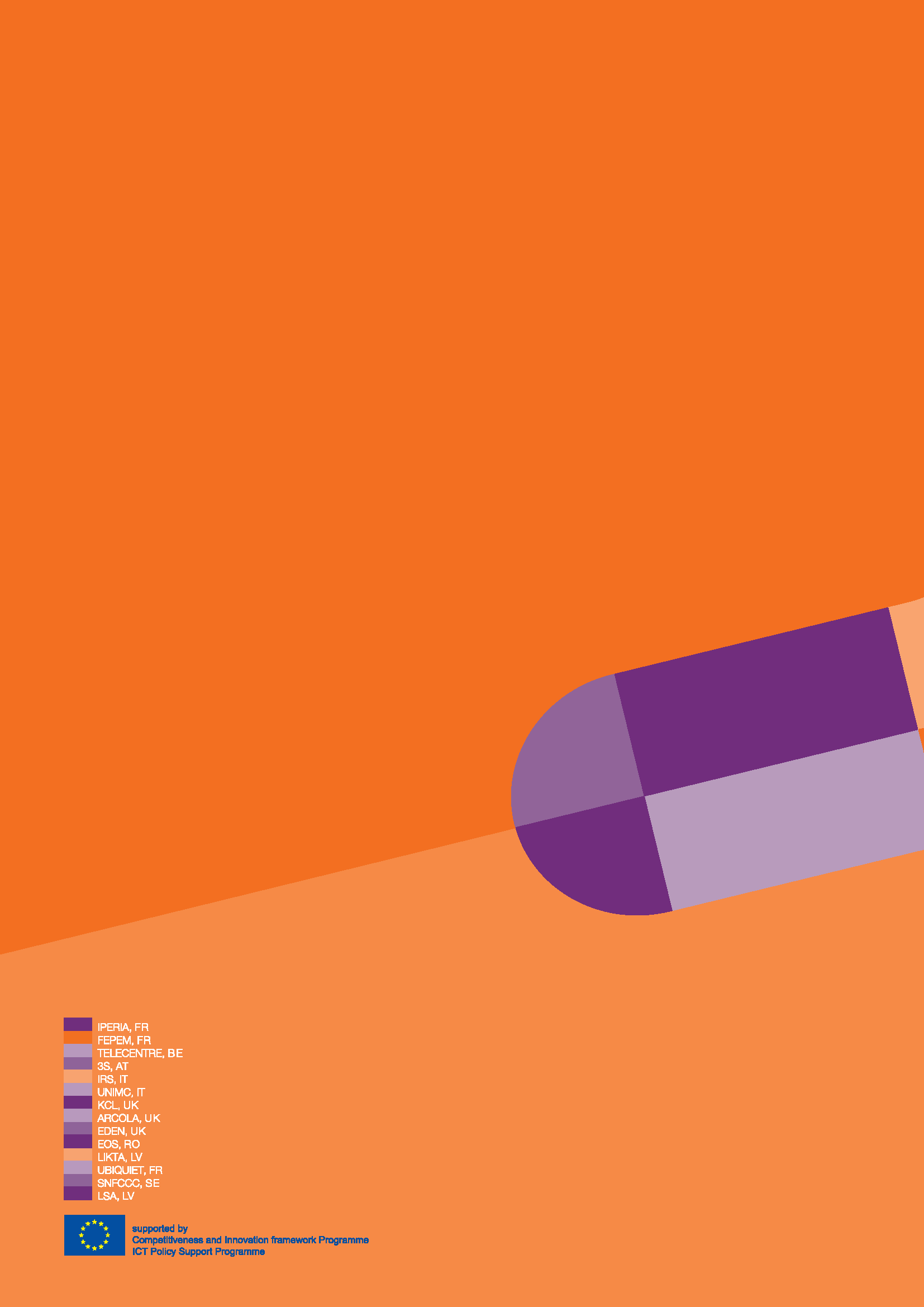
- On the other hand, the fundamental integrity of the Carer+ competence logic should be maintained (if possibly adapted e.g. by selection), and so should be the learning-outcome-based approach.

- Any certification process should be organised upon a clear understanding of the actors involved, their aims and functions.

- Equally important is to define a certification process in terms of stages, where inputs, changes and outputs should be defined in relation to the actors.

- The optimal way of realising the certification potential of the Carer+ outcomes at the current phase of their development is found in including them into already existing qualifications.

- The topic of certification has been found to bear clear potential for further investigation and, in the end, practical implementation. The analysis, however, also suggests that such ambition reaches beyond the present Carer+ project framework.



1. <http://carerplus.eu/developing-training/wiki/digital-competence-framework> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)