

Recognition of Prior Learning and Competencies in Vocational and Technical Training

General and Technical Frameworks

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INTRODUCTION

One of the main structuring orientations of the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* is:

- to acknowledge adults' prior learning and competencies through official recognition¹

Guided by this orientation, the government, in its *Action Plan for Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*, has committed itself to:

- taking aggressive action toward the official recognition of adults' prior learning and competencies
- offering recognition of prior learning and competencies as a regular service in adult education and continuing education and training in Québec²

In accordance with this orientation and the measures associated with it, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) has undertaken to renew the process used to recognize prior learning in vocational and technical training. The approach adopted is said to be harmonized and aims to offer quality services that are open and accessible, harmonized and integrated, and focused on individuals and their needs.

This document describes the main characteristics of the proposed model and its general and technical framework. It is divided into two parts. Part I, entitled *General Framework*, describes the context surrounding the recognition of prior learning in Québec. It provides a brief history of the system over the past few years, defines what is meant by recognition of prior learning and competencies, and outlines its basic principles. It also presents the issues and priorities that the Ministère intends to pursue, in collaboration with its partners, in order to ensure the implementation of an approach that is both harmonized and better suited to upgrading the competencies of the work force and nurturing a culture of continuing education and training in Québec.

Part II of the document, entitled *Technical Framework*, presents the mechanisms put in place by the Ministère in accordance with the priorities and issues of the harmonized approach. It contains a description of the tools used to recognize prior learning, an overview of the revised process adapted to the new parameters of the harmonized approach, and a brief presentation of the recognition of prior learning and competencies Web site.

Many of the actions described in this document have already been implemented or are currently being field-tested. However, much remains to be done as there are many important issues at stake. All of the partners in the education community are therefore invited to participate in this vast undertaking to renew the recognition of prior learning and competencies system.

1. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2002), 6.
2. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Action Plan for Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2002), 25.

GENERAL FRAMEWORK

1

Brief history of the recognition of prior learning and competencies

In Québec, recognition of prior learning is steeped in history and tradition. Current practices and understanding are based on a philosophy that originated in the 1970s and that has led to important experiments in education. Here is a brief description of how prior learning recognition has evolved in Québec.

As early as 1975, in one of its briefs to the Minister of Education,³ the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation indicated that it would be beneficial to develop and apply a process in adult education that would recognize experience acquired "outside of school" in order to help adults gain access to the education system. From the outset, the recognition of prior learning was founded on the principles of accessibility and diversity of learning experiences and places where learning takes place.

In this spirit, in 1982, the Commission d'étude sur la formation des adultes (the Commission Jean) called for the recognition of prior learning as the point of departure and the goal of a decompartmentalized adult education system. In 1984, in its *Énoncé d'orientation* and *Plan d'action en éducation des adultes*, the Québec government went even further and showed its openness by describing prior learning recognition as a service distinct from education and training. This government initiative marked the beginning of a period during which various prior learning recognition services were implemented in education. This implementation was gradual and took many different forms depending on the level of instruction. Up until the early 1990s, many projects were carried out at the secondary, college and university level. Even though the results obtained varied from one level to another, the launching of such services was significant. From portfolios to standardized tests to equivalency tables between academic programs and on-the-job training, the education community experimented with many different approaches.

In 1986, the reform of vocational training at the secondary level, with its competency-based approach,⁴ marked an important turning point as it introduced a model that could be applied to the recognition of prior experiential learning. While the resulting changes were perhaps rather complex and unwieldy in their approach and in the instruments they used, they represented a step forward nonetheless. Available data on prior learning recognition services in vocational training in the 1990s reveal an effort to stabilize and diversify the services offered. Materials, including evaluation instruments specifically designed for prior learning recognition, were developed for approximately 40 programs of study and were used by 600 to 700 individuals per year during that period.

3. Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *Avis au ministre de l'Éducation—Le Collège* (1975).

4. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Élaboration des programmes d'études professionnelles. Cadre général—Cadre technique* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1988, updated in 2002).

At about the same time, in 1985, the Fonds pour l'implantation de la reconnaissance des acquis au collégial (FIRAC) was established and thus initiated the recognition of prior learning at the college level. This resulted in the implementation of several research and training activities as well as the development of ties with other organizations. Not only were instruments developed for various student services, but many documents were written to describe the different components of the process. Based on data obtained between 1985 and 1995, some 40 CEGEPs offered prior learning recognition services. Close to 1000 individuals every year were able to receive recognition for prior experiential learning in about 70 different programs of study.

In spite of such promising beginnings, and the goodwill and strong efforts of all concerned, the recognition of prior learning could not progress beyond the implementation phase. In 1996, in a brief entitled *A Real Access to Continuing Education for Adults*, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation noted that the recognition of prior learning in the Québec school system was at an impasse, caused in part by an overly bureaucratic approach, a lack of flexibility and openness among educational institutions, inadequate financing, etc. Four years later, in June 2000, the Conseil took up the cause once again in a brief entitled *Recognition of Prior Learning, A Political and Social Responsibility*. After drawing a realistic portrait of the situation which, in its opinion, still had not progressed, the Conseil advocated the gradual integration of a system of prior learning recognition whose mechanisms should be coordinated across the province. All of the partners concerned, in education as well as in the labour market, were invited to work together to create conditions that would facilitate the integration of different systems while meeting individuals' right to the formal recognition of their learning. In spite of existing difficulties, certain educational institutions developed great expertise in the field, having put in place structures that made their prior learning recognition services accessible and operational.

Less than two years after this brief was published and following numerous consultations, Québec produced a *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* and its accompanying *Action Plan* in June 2002. This Government Policy centres on four main orientations that are closely related and that define the priorities for action. The third orientation of the policy, **“to acknowledge adults' prior learning and competencies through official recognition,”** underscores the government's desire to make the recognition of prior learning and competencies a cornerstone of its policy on lifelong learning, thereby confirming its intention to take energetic action to ensure that the process of recognition of learning focuses on individuals, and to substantially increase the number of people who benefit from it. In order to improve the situation, the government, in its plan of action, has proposed eight measures to support its overall objective, which is **“to implement a diversified series of organizational methods to ensure access to recognition of prior learning services in every region of Québec.”**

This document on the recognition of prior learning and competencies in vocational and technical training is in keeping with the Ministère's intention to overhaul the system in order to offer quality services that are accessible and open, harmonized and integrated, and focused on individuals and their needs.

2

Definition and principles of the recognition of prior learning and competencies

The recognition of prior learning and competencies is a major lever in the dynamics of continuing education and training. It has implications in terms of social equity and the building of society in that it makes it easier for the greatest number of citizens to participate in culture and in economic development.

The recognition of prior learning and competencies is a process that allows adults to obtain official recognition for competencies in relation to socially established standards, such as those set out in programs of study. Depending on their goals, adults can use this process to identify the competencies they have already acquired and determine the missing components of education or training they need. At the end of the process, recognition is recorded in an official document (e.g. a report card, attestation or diploma) that attests to all the competencies associated with a given title (e.g. program of study) or to part of the components of that title (e.g. credits).

An official process for recognizing prior learning and competencies is based on principles,⁵ which focus on individuals and their rights. These principles are:

- Individuals have a right to social recognition of their knowledge or competencies insofar as they are able to provide evidence that they possess them.
- Individuals should not have to redo in a formal educational setting any learning they may have already acquired in other contexts or other ways. What is important in the recognition of learning is what a person has learned, not where, when or how it was learned.
- Individuals should not be obliged to seek recognition again for competencies or prior learning that have been properly evaluated and certified by an official system.

These principles go hand in hand with three corollaries that appeal to the social responsibility of organizations involved in prior learning recognition. These corollaries are:

- All systems that recognize prior learning or competencies must be transparent.
- Evaluation activities that are carried out for the purpose of recognizing prior learning and competencies must be rigorous, reliable, and adapted to the extracurricular and generally experiential nature⁶ of learning acquired by an individual.
- The legislative and organizational frameworks in various official systems, including education, must create conditions that are conducive to taking into account the basic principles of prior learning recognition.

5. These principles were inspired by the ones in the following documents:

– Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2002), 21.
– Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *La reconnaissance des acquis, une responsabilité politique et sociale* (Sainte-Foy: June 2000), 16-19. (An abridged version of this document exists in English: *Recognition of Prior Learning, A Political and Social Responsibility*.)

6. For a definition of the terms *extracurricular* and *experiential*, please see Appendix 1 of the brief issued by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (CSE) entitled *La reconnaissance des acquis, une responsabilité politique et sociale*, quoted above. For questions regarding the terminology used in prior learning recognition, the CSE refers readers to Francine Landry, *Vocabulaire de la connaissance des acquis*, Montréal, Fédération des cégeps, April 1987. The author specifies that *extracurricular* and *experiential* do not refer to the same thing. *Extracurricular* refers to the place or context in which learning occurred, highlighting the fact that learning was acquired outside the school system. The term *experiential* emphasizes the way in which learning took place, where direct contact played an important role.

3

Issues and priorities concerning the recognition of prior learning and competencies in schools

Acknowledging adults' prior learning and competencies through official recognition is one of the four main orientations of the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*. Based on the principles mentioned above, the government proposed to identify the issues and establish the orientations that would guarantee individuals' right to such recognition. Insofar as this framework is also guided by these orientations and that its aim is to define the Ministère's contribution to the renewal of prior learning recognition in the school system, the first step is to review the four issues identified in the Government Policy:

- Increasing access to the recognition of prior learning and competencies
- Increasing access to missing components of education or training
- Diversifying approaches to the recognition of learning and competencies
- Harmonization and reciprocity of systems of recognition

All of the partners in adult education and continuing education and training, be it in government or in socioeconomic sectors, have a role to play in these issues. The Ministère is called upon to act at more than one level, since several measures of the Action Plan involve the education system. As a result, the Ministère is revamping the entire system of prior learning recognition in schools. More specifically, it is relaxing or simplifying, where appropriate, the rules, procedures, instruments and conditions for access and funding that apply to each level of instruction. This overhaul of the recognition of prior learning and competencies is necessary in order to make these services more accessible and to establish a culture of continuing education and training in Québec.

To this aim, a **new process of recognizing prior learning and competencies in vocational and technical training** is being implemented. The purpose of this document is to explain the new process by outlining the priority actions on which it is based (general framework) as well as the means and mechanisms used to apply it (technical framework).

The priority actions express the Ministère's desire to follow up on the issues outlined in the recent Government Policy and to institute the measures of the accompanying Action Plan. The approach presented below is based on three main priorities:

Developing a personalized, accessible approach

The approach used focuses above all on the needs of individuals. It is intended to increase access to prior learning recognition services in all teaching establishments. Because individuals have a right to receive recognition for prior learning, they should not have to adapt first to an organization, or its culture or system in order to avail themselves of this service; it should be the other way around. Thus the desired approach in prior learning recognition should be flexible and simple, while continuing to be rigorous and effective. Furthermore, such personalized services should be accessible in all teaching establishments, regardless of where people live, what their level of education is, or whether or not they wish to pursue their studies.

Implementing a harmonized, integrated approach

Both harmonization and integration must occur in several ways and at several levels. The term *harmonized approach* refers to the need to develop a process that, if not identical, is at least similar from one level of instruction to another and uses the same type of instrument throughout. The fact that programs are competency-based at both the secondary and college level makes it easier to harmonize recognition between these levels. However, collaborative mechanisms must also be designed to respond to requests for academic and professional recognition that come from industry and the labour market. In continuing education and training and lifelong learning, this means that a joint school-industry system must be devised to effectively meet needs in terms of prior learning recognition, professional development and access to missing components of education and training for individuals who have similar job functions. In other words, harmonization must take place at several levels: “harmonization among levels of education with respect to terms and conditions, services and recognition granted, and harmonization among the different mechanisms of recognition in order to facilitate reciprocity between the labour market and educational institutions.”⁷

The term *integrated approach* implies that all the aspects of a request for recognition must be taken into account, including the need for acquiring missing components of education or training and opportunities for personal and professional development. In this context, innovative approaches must therefore be found to provide adults who seek prior learning recognition with formats that are suited to their situation, learning style and type of training needed. Distance education, the use of information and communications technologies, self-directed study, part-time training are all formats that should be considered. What is important is to be able to customize a plan for acquiring missing components of education or training to an individual’s situation by applying follow-up measures that are adapted to the extracurricular and experiential nature of learning previously acquired by that person.

Using a comprehensive, seamless approach

The term *comprehensive, seamless approach* describes the process suggested to those who wish to receive recognition for prior learning. This approach must take into consideration all the needs associated with an individual’s request, however diverse these needs may be (e.g. need for recognition of learning associated with several programs at the same level of instruction or at different levels, possibility of recognizing learning partially or fully with respect to one or several competencies of a program or of different programs). The comprehensive approach defined here reflects the schools’ concern for meeting individuals’ need for prior learning recognition above and beyond organizational and administrative constraints and institutional differences. The expression refers also to the fact that schools should not restrict prior learning recognition services to individuals who are interested in pursuing their studies and obtaining a diploma. Here, once again, the focus must be on individuals and their needs, on their personal or career plans. Thus, people should be able to obtain recognition for prior learning simply because they wish to have a record of their competencies with respect to basic education, or because they want to know how they fare with respect to certain job requirements, or because they want an indication of their level of learning or competencies.

These priorities form the basis of the Ministère’s renewed system of prior learning recognition. They can serve as guidelines for all stakeholders in the school network in determining what actions to take at the present time, and what opportunities to pursue in the medium to long term in order to ensure that the prior learning recognition system is coherent. In any event, mechanisms are being put into place to update and renew the approaches used in the school system. Concerted action and cooperation among all partners is required nonetheless, in order to achieve reciprocity among systems and mutual respect for the recognition of learning granted by these systems, as recommended in the recent Government Policy and Action Plan.

7. *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*, 23.

The Ministère plans on proposing a certain number of tools and measures designed to gradually renew the approach used in schools, particularly in vocational training at the secondary level, and in technical training at the college level. The harmonized approach suggested here, derived from testing and experimentation conducted by the Ministère in cooperation with its partners in the school system, consists of:

- **instruments** adapted to the context of prior learning recognition and to the clients who request this service. The materials used in prior learning recognition are not tied to the constraints and conditions specific to evaluation of learning in schools. They meet the criteria for accessibility, flexibility, harmonization and seamlessness.
- a **Web site** on Inforoute FPT (the Ministère's Web site for vocational and technical training) to increase access to prior learning recognition services. This will allow individuals to access prior learning recognition services on-line no matter what region they live in, and allow teaching establishments to process information no matter where it comes from.
- an improved **application process** for prior learning recognition services that takes into account the new parameters of the harmonized approach. This process should simplify an adult's learning path and help highlight his or her needs in terms of prior learning recognition.

These mechanisms represent the first set of initiatives to be implemented gradually in the school system. Together with its partners, the Ministère will continue to field-test these measures in order to enrich and diversify the support mechanisms suggested. The overall objective is to institute measures that will provide and increase access to prior learning recognition services. The Ministère's actions are mainly organizational in nature and consist in:

- making existing instruments available
- developing evaluation tools for certain priority occupations or occupational fields
- raising awareness of and promoting prior learning recognition services among the public, thereby contributing to the development of a culture of continuing education and training and lifelong learning in Québec
- supporting different partners, by helping train personnel and producing information documents and methodological guides
- promoting the consolidation and regional organization of prior learning recognition services and developing diversified, innovative formats that facilitate the acquisition of missing components of education or training.

TECHNICAL FRAMEWORK

4

Instruments used within the harmonized approach

The technical framework contains a description of the different **instruments** used to recognize prior learning and competencies. To be begin with, however, certain remarks are in order.

First, use of these instruments must be consistent with the harmonized approach and the issues and priorities that characterize it. As in any plan of action, the instruments used are the tools that are needed to accomplish a task—in this case, to meet the needs of individuals in terms of recognition of prior learning and competencies. The quality and effectiveness of the services offered, however, depend largely on the way and the spirit in which the tools available are used. Hence the importance, for all future users, to always associate the components of this technical framework with the requirements of the harmonized approach and the basic principles outlined in the general framework.

Because the instruments presented here have been specifically adapted to prior learning recognition, it is important to note that they are not tied to the same constraints and conditions as the instruments used in the evaluation of learning. Although their purpose is to evaluate—the distinctive quality of prior learning recognition—these materials meet the criteria of an accessible, flexible, harmonized, personalized, seamless and integrated approach, which are reflected in the features and purpose of the tools presented below.

The instruments used to recognize prior learning and competencies consist of four essential tools:

- the description form
- the conditions for recognition
- the evaluation form
- the companion guide

4.1 The description form

In prior learning recognition, the description form is a self-evaluation tool that enables individuals to take stock of what they have learned with respect to a given competency. By reading the description forms that correspond to the competencies of one or more programs within a given level of instruction or at different levels, a person may choose which competencies he or she would like to have recognized. This possibility illustrates one of the advantages of a harmonized approach, in that the same type of instrument may be used throughout the entire education network.

Essential features of description forms

Description forms are:

- based on the competencies defined by the Ministère in its programs of study
- made up of statements that represent all of the essential elements of a competency
- written by specialists in recognition of prior learning and competencies or their equivalents, and by content specialists
- validated by representatives in the field and in the education community

Components of the description form

Each description form contains:

- the code, number (if applicable) and statement of the competency as it appears in the program of study
- descriptive statements corresponding to the essential elements of the competency
- spaces where candidates can enter the result of their self-evaluation (e.g. *I can do this, I cannot do this*)
- the conditions for recognition that allow candidates to demonstrate whether they possess the knowledge and skills required by the competency
- basic information regarding the conditions for recognition
- a space where candidates can indicate the condition that best reflects their situation

Purpose of the description form

The description form allows candidates to:

- evaluate themselves with respect to the essential elements of a competency
- obtain information on the aspects that will be evaluated in order to receive recognition for a competency
- determine how they fare in relation to the requirements of a competency, and prepare for the evaluation
- identify the missing components of education or training that are essential to competency acquisition
- prepare for the validation interview

Description forms are also useful to those in charge of prior learning recognition services and to content specialists in the preparation of the validation interviews that are part of the recognition process.

4.2 The conditions for recognition

The conditions for recognition refer to the statements on the description forms and outline the different ways in which candidates can provide evidence of the knowledge and skills they have acquired with respect to a given competency. In other words, as the expression *condition for recognition* indicates, if candidates are able to meet one of the conditions suggested, they may obtain recognition for that competency.

Essential features of conditions for recognition

Because there are many different ways in which an individual can acquire a competency, specialists must propose, for every competency, conditions for recognition that are:

- varied, in order to take into account the diversity of experiences in which individuals acquire learning
- flexible, in order to take into account organizational constraints during evaluation
- reliable, in order to maintain the credibility of diplomas and to respect equity

For this reason, candidates who wish to obtain recognition for a competency will have a choice of at least two conditions for recognition.

One of the conditions for recognition applies to all competencies, i.e. the presentation of an official document attesting to the successful completion of relevant training. In certain cases, the official document presented may need to be accompanied by a description of the course content. This procedure is a direct application of the third principle guiding the recognition of prior learning and competencies, which states that “individuals should not be obliged to seek recognition again for competencies or prior learning that have been properly evaluated and certified by an official system.”

Candidates may have the choice of one or several other conditions for recognition, such as:

- presentation of samples of work, followed by a demonstration in the presence of a content specialist
- participation in an interview with an expert in the occupation, trade or field concerned
- performance of a task in the presence of a content specialist in the workplace or in a training centre
- presentation of a certificate of qualification or certification issued by a recognized organization or ministry
- observation in the workplace
- preparation of a video
- presentation of an official letter followed by an interview with a content specialist

4.3 The evaluation form

The evaluation form, designed specifically for content specialists, is used to evaluate the essential elements of a competency. All of the elements that appear on the description form must be evaluated. In addition, each evaluation form must be adapted to the different conditions for recognition suggested for a given competency: in other words, each condition for recognition is accompanied by an evaluation form.

Essential features of evaluation forms

The essential features of the evaluation form reflect its dual purpose, which is:

- to decide whether to grant full or partial recognition for a competency
- if a competency is partially recognized, to identify the missing components of training that must be acquired in order to attain the level of mastery required by the competency

The evaluation form must comply with the requirements specific to evaluation for the purpose of prior learning recognition, namely:

- The level of mastery of a competency must correspond to that expected at entry-level on the job market, as established in the Ministère's reference framework (program of study).
- All of the essential elements of a competency must be evaluated and deemed to have been mastered in order for a competency to be recognized.
- Evaluation for the purpose of prior learning recognition never leads to failure: a competency is either fully or partially recognized. When a competency is partially recognized, various forms of additional training may be suggested.
- The elements of the competency that were not mastered are used to identify the missing components of training that the candidate needs to acquire.

Purpose of the evaluation form

An evaluation form is used to:

- obtain information on how to prepare and conduct the evaluation
- obtain information on which elements to verify
- clarify the criteria used to evaluate the elements to be verified
- record the results of the evaluation and the decision concerning recognition

4.4 The companion guide

The companion guide contains all of the necessary information regarding the management of prior learning recognition in teaching establishments. It is usually divided into three parts. Part I contains general information on the approach used and the methodological principles on which the materials are based. Part II describes the reference framework used and presents a synoptic table of competencies. Part III contains information on the evaluation procedure and the validation interview.

Purpose of the companion guide

The main purpose of the companion guide is to present the competencies described in the reference framework (program of study) and show how they fit into the evaluation process. The guide briefly explains the reasoning behind the methodological choices that were made in designing the various tools suggested. It also shows the links that exist between the essential elements of each competency, as well as the way in which certain competencies can be integrated into others.

The guide also includes practical advice on how to group together certain competencies during the evaluation in order to shorten the duration of the evaluation, for example, on how to interpret certain conditions for recognition, or on how to use certain checklists or instruments to record relevant data. Additional materials may also be included to ensure that the task to be performed is fully understood, or to better inform candidates on the type of follow-up to expect in the process.

The process of recognizing prior learning and competencies consists of the following steps:

- reception (obtaining information on-line or in person)
- file preparation (self-evaluation of competencies, using documents obtained at a recognized establishment or on-line)
- file analysis
- validation interview
- evaluation of prior learning and competencies
- results of the process and, if applicable, plan for acquiring the missing components of education or training

Reception

Reception is the first step in the process. It allows individuals who are interested in the process to find out how they can obtain recognition for prior learning and establish contact with a resource person who can help them prepare their file. This step can take place in a recognized establishment or on-line using the Web site designed for prior learning recognition.

Individuals must be given all the information they need concerning the steps to follow, documents to provide, services offered, etc. This information must enable potential candidates to decide whether or not they wish to undertake the process, based on the requirements and their chances of obtaining recognition.

File preparation

Candidates who decide to undergo the process must prepare a file. This consists in:

- specifying their goals (e.g. to obtain a degree, to obtain qualifications for a job)
- taking stock of what they have done in school, at work and in their personal lives
- completing the description forms that correspond to the competencies which they would like to have recognized
- submitting their file to the establishment of their choice

File analysis

A counsellor in prior learning recognition then checks the file presented, analyzes how relevant it is to the request and, if applicable, establishes equivalences, based on the documentation submitted. In order to perform this task accurately, competently and with adequate knowledge of the field concerned, counsellors may ask content specialists to assist them in assessing the application and each of the supporting documents.

This is also the stage during which content specialists, together with the counsellors in charge, prepare the validation interview and plan the strategy that seems most appropriate, given the results of the file analysis. Several factors, such as the possibility of integrating competencies, the sequence of steps and the blocks of time required for evaluation, must be taken into account in order to keep the amount of time, costs and travel at a minimum, and to plan where the evaluation will take place (e.g. workplace, training centre or other).

Validation interview

A jury of content specialists interviews the candidate in order to decide whether there is sufficient evidence to presume that a competency has been acquired or mastered. If it is not, the jury may recommend that the candidate enroll directly in a training course. If only certain elements of a competency are missing, the jury may suggest additional training as a prerequisite to evaluation. For this reason, recognition of prior learning and competencies does not lead to failure, but rather to partial or full recognition of the competency evaluated.

If the presumption of mastery or acquisition of a competency is justified (i.e. if there is sufficient evidence to presume that the candidate has mastered or acquired a competency), the jury then determines which condition to use to recognize each of the competencies concerned, taking into account the conditions selected by the candidate on the description forms, and his or her situation. The candidate is also told what supporting documents to provide (e.g. written assignment, reference letter) and what the next steps in the process will entail, such as planning the evaluation schedule.

Evaluation of prior learning and competencies

Referring to the candidate's file and using the required instruments (supplied by the counsellor), the content specialist evaluates the candidate, in a teaching establishment or in the workplace, with respect to each of the competencies retained following the validation interview.

If a candidate demonstrates mastery of a given competency, the results of the official recognition will be expressed as a mark, a percentage grade, a pass mark or in any other form, in accordance with the rules governing the evaluation and certification of learning stipulated in the basic school regulations in effect.

Because of their diagnostic function, description forms are used to make an initial assessment as to missing components of education or training. The conditions for recognition and evaluation forms serve to document whether a candidate masters a competency fully or partially, and to accurately determine, in the case of partial mastery, the elements of the competency that need to be acquired.

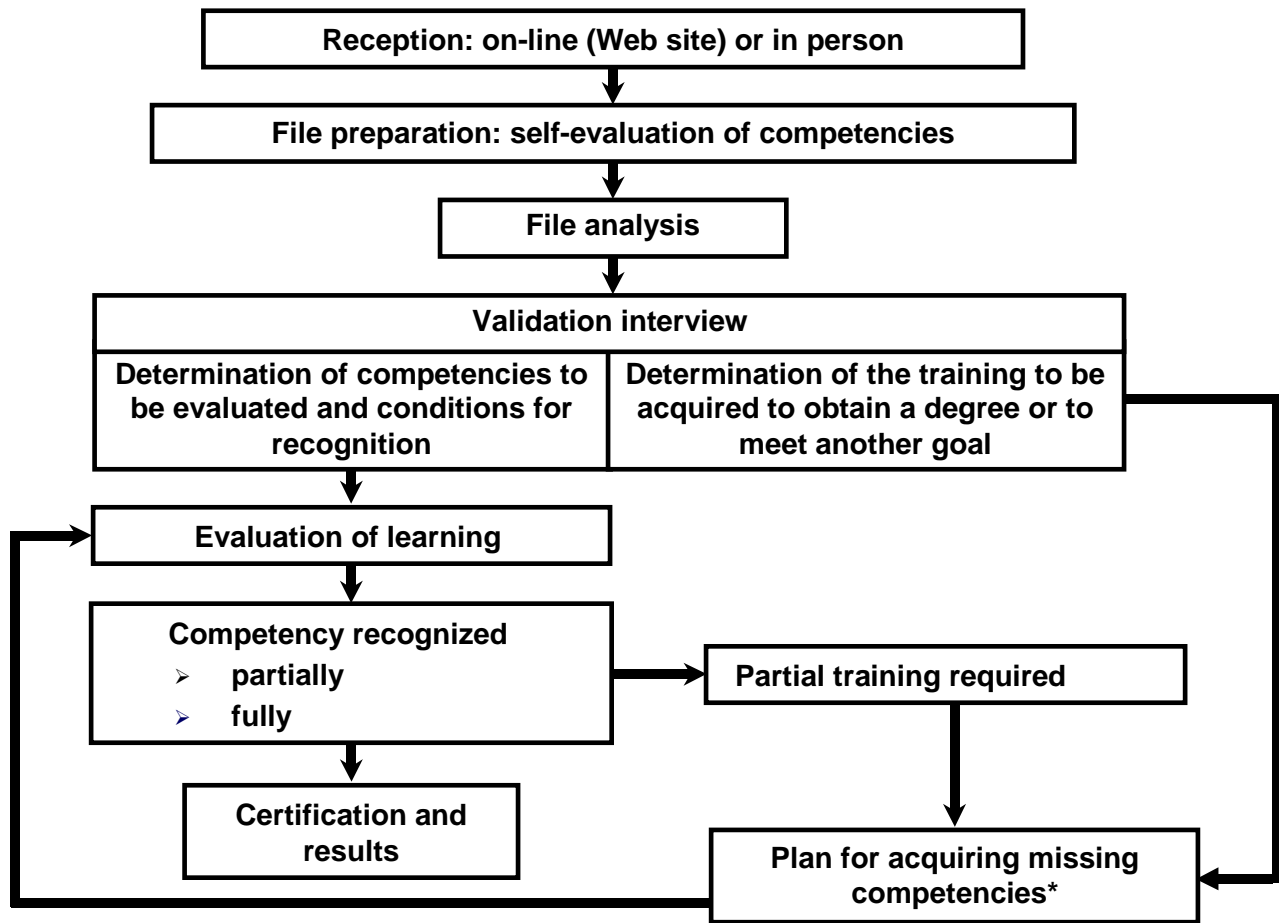
Results of the process and follow-up plan for acquiring the missing components of education or training⁸

The counsellor, taking into account the recommendations made by the content specialist, establishes and updates the candidate's record of competencies, and, if applicable, draws up a plan for acquiring the missing competencies or elements of the competency. This plan provides candidates with precise information concerning the gap between what they have acquired and what they need to acquire in order to achieve their goals. It offers them the possibility of choosing the option or path that best suits their needs and learning style, such as a training program, workplace apprenticeship, mentoring or a personal professional development plan.⁹ By providing a record of an individual's needs and path, the companion plan ensures follow-up until individuals attain their desired goal or qualification. It must therefore be kept updated by the person in charge of following up a candidate's development path.

8. For more on the expression *missing education*, please refer to the comments and suggestions of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation in the *Rapport annuel sur l'état et les besoins de l'éducation 2003-2004* (Sainte-Foy: 2004), 109-112. (An abridged version of this document exists in English: *Career Training: promoting the value of all paths* in the Annual report on the state and needs of education 2003-2004.)

9. *Ibid.*, 110.

Recognition of Prior Learning and Competencies Process



* If a teaching establishment provides all of the training for a given competency, it will be responsible for the evaluation and will use examinations for scholastic learning for this purpose.

6

Recognition of prior learning and competencies Web site

The purpose of the third measure presented in this framework is to increase accessibility to services and to contribute, among other things, to the diversification of approaches. This site will provide on-line access to the recognition of prior learning services, no matter where a person lives. It will also enable colleges and school boards to process information no matter where it may have originated.

Student section of the Web site (<http://reconnaissancedesacquis.ca/>)

This section enables individuals to obtain general information on the recognition of prior learning process, to specify their goals, to choose the competencies they wish to have recognized, to complete the description forms corresponding to the chosen competencies, to write their résumé and to send their file to the establishment of their choice. It also contains references that can help potential candidates find some of the supporting documents required, if necessary (e.g. school reports, birth certificate, documents issued by the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles). In addition, candidates can receive help at any time, on-line or by telephone, to navigate through the site or to obtain information about the description forms.

File management section of the Web site

This section is designed exclusively for recognition of prior learning counsellors to help them manage candidates' files. It allows them, among other things, to view the status of the files for all the candidates who wish to obtain recognition, to group them, and to record information in personal files. It is also used to help different staff members with file analysis, the results of the validation interview, the evaluation procedure, the recording of results, etc.

Record of learning and plan for acquiring the missing components of education or training

This section of the Web site is used by the candidate to view the result of the process and to obtain information concerning the training to be acquired, content of training courses, formats suggested, training acquired and recognition granted; this information is updated by the person in charge of following up candidates' files. It also provides information on training offered in order to promote access to training through the development of diverse, innovative means.

Database

This section, whose access is restricted to counsellors, contains all of the tools available for the recognition of prior learning and competencies, i.e. description forms, evaluation forms, companion guides and any additional materials.

CONCLUSION

This document, which contains the general and technical framework for the recognition of prior learning and competencies in vocational and technical training, is not an exhaustive list of all the measures and actions the Ministère is implementing with its partners in order to revamp the system.

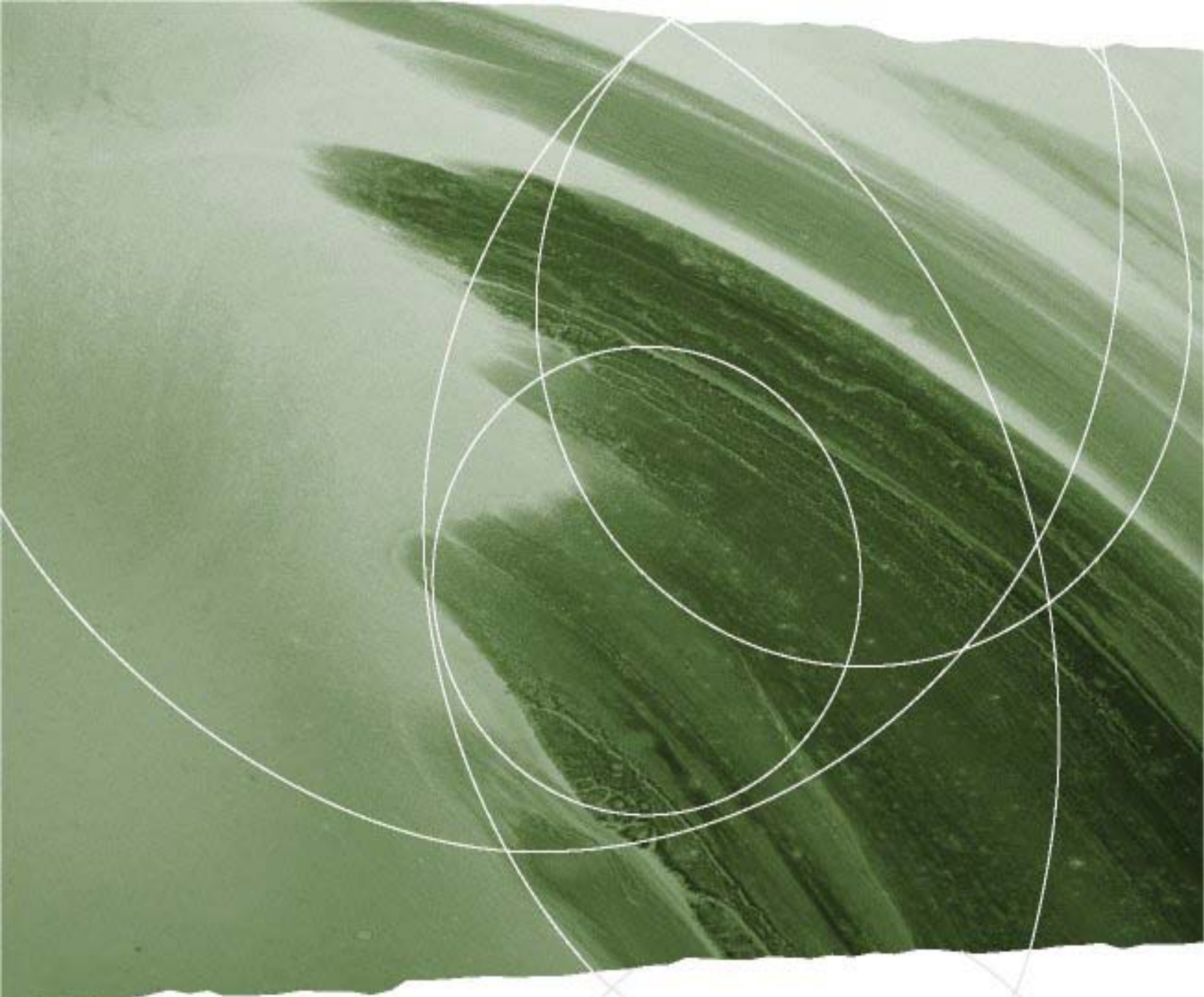
Work is currently under way to ensure **access to recognition of prior learning services in every region of Québec**. The Ministère thus lends its support to the various partners involved in offering prior learning recognition services by promoting the grouping of these services at a regional level. We must encourage the implementation of organizational modes that help create **synergy** and maintain coherent, effective action in recognizing learning that individuals have acquired **in different places and ways**.

Broadening **access to missing components of education and training** through diversified, innovative means is a key issue which must remain a priority if we wish to design and offer an appropriate, adapted and personalized response to requests for recognition of prior learning. Some testing and experimentation is currently being done and progress in this area must be sustained through research and innovation.

The need for **qualified staff** including a certain number of specialists and professionals trained to work in the field of prior learning recognition is another important avenue to examine. Work is currently under way to design and implement a human resources development plan for the recognition of prior learning and competencies.

The desire to be involved and to participate actively in an **international movement promoting the recognition and validation of prior learning** as a major lever in the dynamics of continuing education and training is a cornerstone of the revitalization process. Québec must be ready to meet this challenge so that a genuine culture of lifelong learning can become entrenched in our society in a spirit of openness to the world, in conformity with international standards and in accordance with our specific identity and traditions. The education community, in partnership with other ministries and organizations concerned, must continue to work in this area by intensifying its efforts and presence on the international scene.

In short, many opportunities for action and development are being explored. This general and technical framework for the recognition of prior learning and competencies in vocational and technical training is an important step in reforming the system. It is hoped that all the individuals and organizations who work in this area will find it a useful reference that will help them renew, or even transform, their view and practices in the recognition of prior learning and competencies.



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