



111, Chaussée de Charleroi
1060 Brussels
Tel: 02/234.39.40 Fax: 02/234.39.94
Website: www.fse.be

Methodological Guide For The Self-Assessment And Validation Of Equal Products

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Thematic Organisation Management – Guy De Smedt, Agency Director

INTRODUCTION

Within the context of its Equal animation tasks, the ESF Agency has asked Ramboll Management to set up a validation system for Equal products and to test it on the main first round Equal products, with the active help of the Development Partnerships (DP).

This guide is one of the results of this work. It presents the set up method and is highly inspired by the Portuguese experience on the topic.

The ESF Agency first would like to thank Mrs VALE and Mrs DO CARMO for the information they provided about what was done in Portugal, which allowed us to work faster.

We also would like to thank Ramboll Management and everyone who answered the survey and took an active part in the meetings that allowed the testing and the finalizing of the method.

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This guide is a strategic tool for the persons or entities involved in the implementation¹, validation², distribution³, mutualisation⁴, capitalisation⁵ and transfer⁶ of an Equal product. The Equal product is a sufficiently materialised, identified and visible output of the project that serves to accompany the implementation of the “flagship” product. The “flagship” product is any *output* intended for beneficiaries. It is recommended that the key players in the product’s implementation process should use this guide. These players are:

- All the members of the DP in which the product has been implemented, or those who are involved in the implementation process. This validation process will enable the co-ordinators to express their points of view and to analyse their product and its development process for themselves.
- The “Peers”⁷,
- The “Experts”⁸

This methodological guide is composed of four parts, which will be presented successively:

- The Context
- The Presentation of the Validation and Capitalisation Concept
- The Self-Assessment and Validation Process
- The Capitalisation Process

1. **The Context**

The EQUAL Initiative constitutes a “laboratory of ideas in the service of the European strategy for employment and the process of [social inclusion](#). Its mission is to promote a more inclusive professional life, by fighting discrimination and exclusion based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, handicap, age or sexual orientation”⁹. This concept of a laboratory of ideas should not be underestimated because it is one of the governing ideas of product validation.

The Equal CIP (Community Initiative Programme) is composed of a series of key principles¹⁰:

¹ Implementation is that which is financed and accomplished with the Equal programme.

² Validation seeks to determine whether a product is coherent, relevant and innovative compared to the solutions traditionally used in the sector in which it is implemented, and then transferable.

³ Distribution is the process that seeks to ensure product communication both inside and outside its DP.

⁴ Mutualisation seeks to bring together the partners of your DP or other external people/institutions, in order to share know-how and knowledge with the objective of improving efficiency or reducing costs.

⁵ Capitalisation is the DP partners getting together for the purpose of accumulating the experience / know-how acquired at the time of the implementation of the activities.

⁶ Transfer is the fact of transmitting the product to another person, or another organisation according to the necessary terms and conditions.

⁷ The peer is a similar person in terms of the function but one who has not taken part, directly or indirectly, in the design or implementation of this product. For example, for a co-ordinator coming from a training organisation, the peer will be another training organisation that has not taken part, directly or indirectly, in the design or implementation of this product.

⁸ The expert is a person with exhaustive knowledge and know-how in a particular field.

⁹ http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/index_fr.cfm

¹⁰ http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/about/index_fr.cfm

- A partnership that seeks, on a geographical or sectoral basis, to bring key players together (local and regional authorities, training organisations, public employment services, non-governmental organisations, companies and trade unions) within development partnerships (DP) around strategic activities in the fight against discrimination and inequality.
- A thematic approach that concentrates the actions on a basic theme in the context of the European strategy for employment.
- Innovation, which seeks to explore and test innovative approaches, in the employment and training policies, in terms of the objectives pursued, the methods used and/or the implementation systems.
- *Empowerment* (active participation), which seeks to reinforce the capacity of action of all the players concerned, including the beneficiaries, by involving them.
- Dissemination and incorporation into policies that seek to generate and validate new solutions in order to incorporate the best practices into the employment and social inclusion policies.

2. Self-Assessment and Validation Presentation

Before defining and presenting the self-assessment process, one needs to establish the context, i.e. to define the principal terms, the objectives of the validation and self-assessment process and to present the tools that have been developed.

2.1 Definition

Before defining and presenting the self-assessment and validation objectives, it is essential for the principal terms to be defined so that the organisational context can be established. These terms are: self-assessment, validation, capitalisation, “flagship” product, “support” product and product “family”.

The self-assessment will be continuous during the implementation of the product and will be carried out by the DP team in accordance with the indications contained in this guide. Self-assessment consists of an assessment of the product by the DP (the co-ordinator and the partners) that was directly involved in its implementation.

The objective of the self-assessment is to establish a rigour and a dynamic during product implementation in order to obtain a product that is relevant, coherent in relation to the objectives (Equal...), innovative and transferable. Thus, each self-assessment will make it possible:

- To check the state of progress of the work and to readjust, if necessary, the implementation timetable.
- To ascertain that the products are properly enshrined within the Equal logic.
- To make the partners accountable by allowing each one to define his or her personal commitment in order to endorse the results of his or her product.

Self-assessment applies to a “product family”, i.e. to the “flagship” product and to the “support” products.

After the self-assessment, the product will be validated. Validation seeks to determine whether a product is coherent, relevant, innovative in relation to the solutions traditionally used in the sector where it is implemented, and transferable. The term “transferable” means the transmission of the product to another person, or to another organisation. This validation will be made by a group of peers, experts and decision-makers. It will be based on the self-assessment forms and on an oral presentation made by the person resource mandated by the DP (the one with the greatest knowledge of the “flagship” product) and by one or two beneficiaries who will report and explain their experiences.

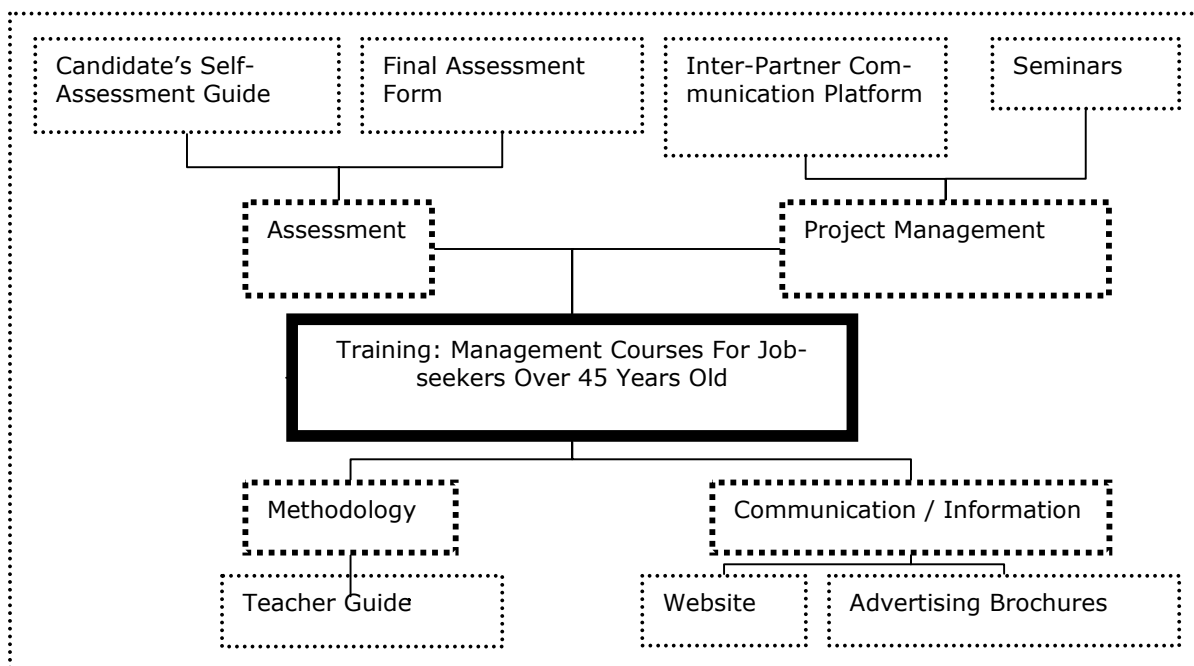
At the end of this process, your product will be included in a database making it possible to capitalise it, i.e. to accumulate the know-how and knowledge obtained through the product (implementation process, etc) in order to upgrade them. Thus, each co-ordinator will complete a form encompassing a succinct presentation of the product concept and will mandate someone to inform anyone who may be interested in that product.

This entire process will be centred on the “flagship” product, taking all of the “support” products that you have implemented into account. The “flagship” product “is the *output* of the product intended for the beneficiaries. The “support” products are all of the project’s outputs, sufficiently materialised, identified and visible, which are used to accompany the implementation of the “flagship” product. These “support” products are classified by theme (communication, information, assessment, and so on). The “flagship” product and the “support” products form a product “family”.

The product family idea relates to validation and transfer. Indeed, a product cannot be validated outside of the context in which it was implemented.


Overleaf is a concrete example of a fictitious “product tree” illustrating the concept of “flagship” product, “support” products and “product family”.

Table 1: Product Tree



Legend:

 "Flagship" Product

 Groups of "support" products, organised thematically

 "Support" Product

In this example, the "Training" (here management courses for jobseekers over 45 years old) is the "flagship" product.

The "support" products are classified in four thematic groups:

- The "Assessment" group encompasses the "support" product or products (here the Candidate's Self-assessment Guide and the Final Assessment Form) seeking to:
 - Evaluate the pre-requisites of a training course
 - Evaluate the knowledge acquired during or at the end of the training
- The "Methodology" group encompasses the "support" product or products (here the Teacher Guide) seeking to establish the training processes and procedures.

- The “Communication” group encompasses the “support” product or products (here the Website and the Advertising Brochures) seeking to promote and distribute the product.
- The “Project Management” group encompasses the “support” product or products (here the Seminars and the Inter-Partner Communication Platform) seeking to make the DP’s work more efficient and more effective.

2.2 Tools

This guide and the self-assessment and validation form that accompanies it are the tools that will be used for product validation.

3. The Self-Assessment and Validation Process

The self-assessment and validation process is organised in three major stages: Classification, Grid and Validation. These stages will be explained in the course of the three following paragraphs.

3.1 Pre-requisites

Before a product can be self-assessed, two stages must be accomplished: the creation of a product tree and the creation of an indicator table. The objective of these two tools is to facilitate the classification of the products and the completion of the self-assessment and validation grid.

3.1.1 Product Classification

The first stage of this process consists of identifying the “flagship” product in order to use the self-assessment and validation process correctly. It is recommended that you should classify the products by creating a table similar to the one presented below

Table 2: Classification Table

	“Flagship” Product	“Support” Products			
		Methodology	Communication/ Information	Project Management	Assessment
Products	– Management courses for jobseekers over 45 years old	– Teacher Guide	– Website – Advertising Brochures	– Seminars – Inter-Partner Communication Platform	– Final Assessment Form – Candidate’s Self-Assessment Guide

This table not only aims to offer a better legibility and visibility of your products, but also to clarify the links that exist between the various products.

The four stages for creating a “products” tree:

- Stage 1: Listing all of the products implemented by the DP.
- Stage 2: Identifying the “flagship” product or products. Generally, it is recommended that you should one or two (or even three) “flagship” products per project.
- Stage 3: Classifying the “support” products by major thematic family, such as: communication /information, assessment, your DP’s working procedure, etc.
- Stage 4: Classifying the products into categories.

Thanks to this table, the links and the place of each product in each project will be identified. Moreover, completion of the self-assessment and validation grid will be facilitated.

Once each type of product has been identified, you can move to Stage 2: the construction of an Indicator Table.

3.1.2 *Indicator Table*

The purpose of this tool is to provide a framework, a certain rigour, a certain degree of planning to the implementation of the product. **Consequently, this tool is in no way seeking to control or sanction anyone.**

It is recommended that “realistic” indicators be established, i.e. neither over- nor under- assessments. The assistance of an outside organisation (a consultancy firm) or the inclusion in your DP of someone with experience of constructing tools of this kind is strongly recommended.

Table 3: Indicator Table

Product	Implementation	Result	Impact
Management courses for jobseekers over 45 years old	Teacher Guide 100 Trainees	90% of the trainees obtain a diploma	50% of the trainees have obtained a job 6 months after the end of the training
Product 2			

Thanks to these instruments, the implementation of the products is classified and monitored, which enables the product to be self-assessed.

3.2 Grid

The grid is appended to this document.

To optimise the monitoring and the legibility of this process, only several copies of one grid will be used: one copy per participant in each self-assessment meeting and a copy for each participant in the validation meeting. Furthermore, this grid will be common to all of the players¹¹ involved in this process: the members of the DP, the peers, the experts and the decision-makers.

3.2.1 Criteria

Each grid is made up of four criteria, which are:

1. Coherence and Relevance:

- The coherence is the correspondence, the match between the various objectives of any particular intervention: those of the product, of the project and of Equal.
- The relevance is the match between the product objectives, the project objectives, and the Equal programme's objectives.

2. Implementation, Results, and Impact:

- The implementation is that which is financed and accomplished in the context of the Equal project.
- The results are the advantages that the beneficiaries obtain at the end of their participation. The result can be the acquisition of knowledge, obtaining a diploma, and so on.
- The impact is the consequence for the direct beneficiaries after the end of their participation. An example of impact is the employability of an individual.

3. Transferability is a product's capacity to be transmitted to another person, or to another organisation.

4. The "Equal" correspondence is a product's capacity to be innovative, and to promote equal opportunities and *empowerment*:

- The innovation criterion measures a product's capacity to provide a solution to a problem where the methods traditionally used are ineffective. The innovation can relate to:

¹¹ All of the members of the DP, peers and experts.

- The product: The target group, the business profile, the job creation experiences and the nature of the product.
 - The procedure: The methods, the technical content of the training, and the insertion models.
 - The management: Strategic management, knowledge management, and environmental management.
 - The organisation: The management methods and modes (partnership, networking), and the support tasks.
- The *empowerment* criterion measures a product's capacity to get its beneficiaries to participate in its formulation and implementation.
 - The equality of opportunity criterion measures a product's capacity to promote and develop equality of opportunity between men and women, conciliation of family and professional life, and finally access to employment for all.

It is recommended that the validation of a product be focused on the following criteria: relevance, coherence, innovation and transferability.

3.2.2 *Comments And Developments To Be Envisaged And The Personal Commitment Of The People Concerned.*

The Comments column will enable each participant to register the contribution of the product in relation to the indicator or the criterion.

The purpose of the “Developments To Be Envisaged And The Personal Commitment Of The People Concerned” column is to formalise each participant's commitment in relation to the implementation of the product and more specifically to each criterion or indicator.

For the correct completion of these columns, it is recommended that you should:

- To put comments that are as concrete as possible
- To keep the documents that can justify your answers
- To be as precise as possible (quantified data if possible),
- To be as brief as possible

3.2.3 *The Self-Assessment Process*

This paragraph seeks to present the five stages that make self-assessment possible:

Stage 1: Bringing together the people (one person representing each member of your DP) concerned with the self-assessment.

Stage 2: Setting a timetable enabling the progress of your product's implementation to be regularly monitored.

Stage 3: First self-assessment meeting:

1. Distribute a copy of this form to each person at this meeting.
2. Have the form completed individually with an indication of the results achieved in relation to each criterion.
3. Collate the answers.
4. Compare the opinions in order to reach a consensus on the response to be given for each criterion.
5. Write this common response in the "Comments" column.
6. Complete the last column - "Developments to be Envisaged and Commitment to Endorse the Results." Considering the results obtained and the objectives to be reached, the team must register the developments to be envisaged and the commitment (concrete) of each and every one to achieve the final objective and more particularly the results registered for the next meeting,
7. Confirm the date of the next meeting.

Stage 4: Organisation and course of the following meetings:

- 1) Repeat Stages 1 to 9.
- 2) After Stage 3:
 - a. Make an assessment (good practice ideas, etc) of the seminars and meetings... in relation with the products in which the members of the DP have taken part.
 - b. After Stage 3, it is important that each person can express what he or she feels about the organisation within the partnership, the achievement of the products' objectives and his or her personal commitment so that the good practices and the points for improvement can be identified at an early stage. This moment of the meeting, which will become a "ritual" at each meeting, will quickly enable the quality of the work and the relations within the DP to be improved.

- 3) During the penultimate self-assessment meeting:
 - a. Set the date of the validation meeting.
 - b. Invite the peers and the experts concerned with your product.
 - c. Invite the beneficiaries to make a presentation of their experiences as users (including the benefits and the utility of the product, and their participation.)

Stage 5: the last self-assessment meeting:

- 1) Repeat Points 1 and 2 of Stage 4.
- 2) Complete the overall assessment box on the entire implementation of the products, distinguishing as precisely as possible the good practices and at the points for improvement of the products and within the DP.

When the self-assessment has been completed and the product is terminated, the validation process can be implemented.

3.3 Validation

The validation of the product is the final stage.

In order to validate the product, it is recommended that you should work in three stages:

Stage 1: Preparing the oral presentation:

- Assemble all of the documents that support the self-assessment.
- Prepare a “succinct, objective and relevant” 10-minute product presentation.

NB: the objective of the presentation is to give a more living, more complete presentation of the data contained on the forms. Consequently, it is not a question of repeating the contents of the forms but of presenting an added value.

Stage 2: Presentation:

- Presentation of the “flagship” product by the people mandated by the DP.
- Presentation of their experience by one or two beneficiaries.
- Questions/answers and discussions between the promoters and the peers, the experts and the decision-makers.

Stage 3: Deliberation:

- Meeting behind closed doors of the experts, the decision-makers and the peers in order to validate the presented product.
- Choice of the good practices within all of the validated products.

Intervention of the peers, the experts and the decision-makers:

The peers are there to validate the product technically.

The experts are there to give their opinions on the appropriateness of the product validation criteria.

The decision-makers are there to give their opinions concerning any possible development of the product.

4. The Capitalisation Process

The objective of this final stage is to capitalise the know-how and the knowledge obtained during the implementation of this product and the product itself.

Capitalisation proceeds in two stages: integrating ones product in the “Product Box” and establishing a relationship with the product’s future co-ordinator.

4.1 The “Product Box”

The objective of this toolbox is to capitalise the know-how and the experience acquired within the Equal programme. The key words are Simplicity, Functionality and Accessibility.

In order to aliment this “Product Box”, it is recommended that each co-ordinator should make a succinct written presentation, in just a few lines, of the very concept of his or her product.

Furthermore, each co-ordinator should attach the particulars of a person resource chosen within the promoter organisation. This person will be mandated by the DP to represent it. This person will have to inform the future persons involved about the product’s principal characteristics, its implementation process (lessons learnt, good practices, points for improvement) and finally will have to be able to direct them towards the qualified people if they do not have all the answers.

Two points must be emphasised. In the first place, the choice of this person is a key element of this capitalisation and validation process. Indeed, this person will have to be able to inform all the people interested in the Equal product for a transfer, an adoption or a re-development of it. In the second place, the product carrier will therefore have to be proactive in keeping the network between the members of the DP active.

4.2 Future Product Carriers

The people who will take over all or part of the product, in order to develop and expand it, will have to report on their progress and their good practices to the contact person. This “feedback” system will enable rapid mutualisation and capitalisation of the know-how and knowledge within the Equal programme.

5. *Appendix: The Self-Assessment and Validation Grid*

Themes	Comments	Developments to be Envisaged. Personal Commitment of the Persons Concerned
1. Relevance/Coherence		
2. In relation to the Equal objectives		
3. In relation to the sector's objectives		
4. In relation to the project's internal objectives		
5. Implementation/Result/Impacts		
6. Efficiency/Effectiveness		
7. Achievement of Objectives		
8. Resolution of Identified Needs		
9. Effect of the Activities on the Beneficiaries		
10. Perenniality /Transfer		
11. Product Assessment		
12. Financial resources to ensure your product's perenniality and/or transfer		
13. Resource Management persons or entities external or internal to the DP that you have contacted to ensure your product's perenniality or effect its transfer.		
14. Communication/Promotion: Means by which you communicate your product in order to ensure its transfer.		
15. Correspondence with the Equal objectives		
16. Innovation		

	17. Distinction between your product and those of the market (product, procedure, management, organisation)		
	18. Added value compared to traditional solutions.		
	19. Empowerment of the beneficiaries		
	20. Target audience's adoption of the product		
	21. Degree of participation		
	22. Equality of Opportunity		
	23. Active promotion / endorsement of the equality of opportunity between men and women and the conciliation of family and professional life.		
	24. Equality of access to employment for all.		