European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Country Report: Norway

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1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

1.1 A historical perspective on validation in Norway

Non-formal and informal learning has deep historic roots in Norway and has been developed in parallel with the formal education system. It is highly recognised in civil society and is important for skill formation in the Norwegian economy. This role primarily relates to three features:

- The very high appreciation of non-formal and informal learning in the home, at the workplace and in the community goes back to the epoch of nation building in the 18th and 19th century (cf. Lauglo 2002). The slow evolution of an infrastructure of ‘local civic life’ resulted in local control of education, community control and power for parents.

- A widely shared political goal since the process of nation-building, to provide ‘Education for everybody’ (in a unitary education system). Later, systematic validation of competencies acquired in a variety of learning situations fitted into a policy based on egalitarian and democratic values. An ambitious state reform for lifelong learning, the Competence Reform launched in 1999, could therefore build on practices for validating learning outside the formal education system.

- A Law of Vocational Training dating back to 1952 allows individuals to take a crafts examination provided they have sufficient practical work experience. This implies that the candidates can have their theoretical training and/or apprenticeship period shortened.

For this reason, the terminology in use in Norway (‘Realkompetanse’) often refers to all types of prior learning – formal, non-formal and informal. The official Norwegian term for validation therefore translates as ‘documentation and validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning’.

There is a comprehensive legal framework in place in Norway to guarantee the rights of individuals to validation of their prior formal, non-formal and informal learning. Key legislation and national-level strategies / policies are listed below:

The 1980 Law on vocational training permits individuals to pass a crafts or journeyman’s examination based on practical work experience, rather than education and training in school and/or the apprenticeship which would normally be required. After a peak in the late 1990s the share of crafts examinations passed via this route is now back to the previous level, representing around one third of all crafts examinations. The age of those following the alternative route is on average 10 years higher than for the main route.

The 1976 Adult Education Act gave adults the right to have their knowledge and skills documented at all levels and areas within the public education system, independently of how these competences were acquired.

Since 1992, adults aged 23 and over can be admitted to higher education on the basis of five years of education and/or work experience, as well as prescribed minimum levels in six core subjects from upper secondary school.

The 1998 Education Act was a fusion of the laws on primary and upper secondary education, vocational training and adult education.

The 1999 Competence Reform (which contained a strand on Realkompetanse) aimed to establish greater equality between non-formal, informal and formal competences. One of its...
key objectives was to establish a national system for documenting and validating the non-formal and informal learning of adults, particularly people with low levels of education.

A national Validation Project (Realkompetanseprosjektet) was carried out over the period 1999-2002. Its objective was to form the foundations for a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In 2000, an amendment to the Education Act gave adults born prior to 1978, and without completed upper secondary education (which includes VET), a statutory right to upper secondary education. This education should be tailored to their needs and based on an assessment of their informal and non-formal learning. Today, validation in relation to upper secondary education (including VET) is available to all adults aged over 25.

The 2001 University Act enabled applicants without sufficient formal entrance qualifications to be admitted to Higher Education on the basis of age (25 years or more) and a combination of formal, informal and non-formal learning (this is different to the 1992 law, which prescribed a minimum of five years’ of education and / or work experience as well as minimum levels in six core subjects from upper secondary school, for adults aged over 23). This act applies to all state-owned university colleges, the universities and some private colleges.

In 2003, an amendment to the Education Act gave adults with the right to upper secondary education, a right to have their realkompetanse documented, including when not seeking further education.

The 2005 Act relating to Universities and University Colleges provides for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, relating to admission and also exemption (not previously included in the 1992 legislation, while the 2001 law did not cover all institutions at higher education level, as this law does):

- Institutions may grant applicants aged 25 years or older (in the admission year) admission to specific courses if they hold the qualifications necessary for the course concerned, on the basis of their prior learning (formal, informal and non-formal);
- Documentation of prior learning (formal, informal and non-formal) may be used to grant exemption from part of a study programme.

Over the period 2006 - 2008 some pilot projects were carried out between the Directorate of Labour and Welfare and the then Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning - Vox (now the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning), aiming to improve the offer of validation of prior learning for the unemployed. The general rule is that people having signed a ‘jobseekers’ agreement with the employment office can have their prior learning experiences assessed towards upper secondary education even though they do not have the statutory right. One precondition is that the employment office considers the assessment to be necessary for getting the job seekers back to work.

A 2006 White Paper emphasising that Lifelong Learning starts from the first day at school and even in the kindergarten, also gave priority to adults who lack basic skills or who have not completed upper secondary education. This included a reference to rewarding competences achieved in working life – by promoting and strengthening the system for validating prior learning. Among other things, the White Paper proposes to collect more

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1 In practice, adults aged under 25 who have competences which could be validated may be granted a validation procedure but this decision is at the discretion of the county and is likely to depend on whether the county has sufficient financial resources available.

data on the validation system, in order to learn about and later improve how the system is actually working\(^3\).

In 2008 a White Paper on the overall view of education in Norway launched a project to be led by Vox, with the aim of describing the status of the validation system. This project is a small part of the White Paper, which addresses issues throughout the education system. The paper recognised the need for an update of the Norwegian validation system and an analysis of any needs for improvements. The paper recognises that the Norwegian government wishes to emphasise that validation is an effective route into further education for adults.\(^4\).

The project, which is currently ongoing and should finish in October 2011, focuses on the quality assurance of validation in Norway and is identifying the challenges currently faced in implementing validation and will suggest measures to deal with those challenges. The challenges include, for example, the need for more targeted information in order to ensure that the information provided reaches out to the appropriate target groups, the need for better coordination between different educational levels and their specific rules and regulations (in particular between upper secondary and higher education), the need for cooperation between different sectors, such as between the labour market and the education system, and finally the need for national standards for quality assurance in the procedures established in the education sector. Most recently, in 2010 an amendment to the law on education has introduced the possibility for adults (aged 25 and over) to have their competences validated in relation to primary and lower secondary level education. This has not yet been applied in practice, since there are not yet any rules in place regarding the application of the right to validation at this level (these will be developed by the relevant department within the Ministry of Education). Since responsibility for primary and lower secondary education is held at the level of the community (of which there are 430) rather than at county (of which there are 19) level as is the case for validation in relation to upper secondary education, it is likely that it will be complex to implement.

Influence of other policy developments in education and training on validation

In February 2009, an internal project in the Ministry of Education and Research published its report on a National Qualifications Framework based on the education system but also opening up to other learning pathways. A National Qualifications Framework (Nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring – NKR) is now in development with a finalised proposal for the NKR expected by the first quarter of 2011. The legal impetus for this work comes from the inclusion of the 2009 EQF recommendation into the agreement on a European Economic Area signed by Norway. The Ministry proposes a step-wise approach to a qualification framework based on the assumption that “pan-European arrangements and tools should not imply any changes of the Norwegian education system”\(^5\). Instead, the maxim is to relate education at various levels to the EQF. In this regard, the higher education system took the first step through the Bologna process leading to the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). A national qualifications framework for higher education was adopted in March 2009. This includes VET at higher education level. HEIs are required to implement the Framework by 2012 in order to ensure that the self-certification process can be finalised in 2013, as required in the Bologna process.

The Norwegian qualifications framework for higher education consists of level descriptors for the three levels of higher education: Bachelor, Master and PhD. The level descriptors describe the knowledge, skills, and competence expected from all candidates successfully completing that level. There is one common descriptor for each cycle which covers all programmes, including professional programmes, fine arts etc.

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\(^5\) <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/tema/Livslang-laring/Nasjonalt-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk.html?id=601327>
Work on a framework for vocational education and training also took place in 2008, as a response request from the Ministry of Education and Research to the Directorate for education and training to prepare level descriptors for these qualifications which would enable referencing to the EQF.

Tertiary non-university (vocational) education has followed suit and a process is now underway of developing general descriptors and outcomes-based curricula for post-secondary vocational programmes. The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training has also commenced the development of level descriptors for compulsory school and upper secondary general education programmes. What remains to be completed is a framework for the level which sits between compulsory school and upper secondary school.

The social partners have criticised the ‘fragmented approach’ to the development of the framework and a national hearing revealed that social partner organisations considered that “the improvement of quality and mobility in vocational training is taken care of by other means than the preparation of a qualification framework” (other means’ referring to the tripartite mechanisms and self-regulation exercised by the social partners in collaboration with VET schools). However, the ministry’s schedule is to integrate the various qualification frameworks into one overarching structure in 2011. For this purpose, a reference group has been set up and more consultations will be held.

The Norwegian education and training system is now almost fully based on the principle of learning outcomes. Only tertiary vocational education and training (Fagskoler) is not yet described in terms of learning outcomes but it is suggested that the development of the NQF may help to make clear the relationship between post-secondary VET and the education and training system as a whole.

In higher education, the level descriptors used in the qualifications framework have been defined according to knowledge (kunnskap), skills (ferdigheter) and general competences (generell kompetanse). For vocational education and training, it has been proposed that knowledge (theoretical and factual), skills (cognitive and practical) and competence (responsibility and autonomy) be combined with with planning (of material and immaterial processes), execution of work (production/services) and documentation/evaluation. Developments in both sectors are thus aligned with the EQF descriptors.

It is suggested that the introduction of the learning outcomes approach has begun to influence the forms of assessment and evaluation used in education and training, in particular in VET. It is also suggested that the introduction of a national validation system has also increased awareness on the potential of the learning outcomes approach. It is possible that more information on the learning outcomes approach will be uncovered by an evaluation of the education and training system which is currently being carried out by the Directorate for Education and Training.

In terms of awarding credits or partial qualifications, the 1980 Law on vocational training permits candidates to achieve a partial certificate at any level through validation (as noted above, vocational training is found at the upper secondary level in the Norwegian education system). Candidates then have the right to access a modular course, in order to achieve a full apprenticeship certificate. These certificates are recognised on the labour market, as a documentation of parts of the demands in the trade. An example is a certificate for cooking breakfasts, as a partial competence for a fully trained cook. The person will be able to make breakfasts but will not be the right person to make a full dinner. Nevertheless, that may be sufficient for a specific job.

Norway has not yet developed a strategy for implementing a unit-based credit system in VET. The 2006 education reform takes a holistic approach to competences and these are

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6 http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/tema/Livslang-laring/Nasjonalt-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk.html?id=601327
7 Cedefop, NQF developments in Europe
expressed as learning outcomes, rather than qualifications divided into units. The curriculum does not specify modules or units within a qualification and it could be suggested that by breaking up the curriculum into smaller units, the competence objectives would have to be separated.

With particular reference to early school leavers, a relatively new scheme in upper secondary education entitled ‘certificates of competence’ (kompetansebevis) is important. These certificates are awarded to recognise that an individual has achieved certain objectives (learning outcomes) within an upper secondary curriculum. The certificates can serve as a stand-alone evidence of competences and can be used for example to support a job application. They can also be used to inform the learner’s participation in, e.g., non-formal further education courses, in order to deepen their knowledge and possibly later embark on a learning trajectory ending with a certificate of formal education.

Thus, the competence certificate does not entitle the holder to a full certificate of upper secondary education and training – gaps in knowledge / competences must be addressed before a full certificate can be obtained. The competence certificates do also embrace the scheme of craft certificates and journeyman’s certificates. No studies have been carried out in relation to these certificates and therefore it is not known how important they are to support participation in further studies or the labour market.

1.2 National institutional framework, division of responsibilities and provision of financial support

Validation in Norway is based on a national approach, with shared laws and common principles. However, there is certain degree of institutional autonomy, particularly at higher education level.

The standards used for validation of prior learning in the education system in Norway are the same as those used in formal education and training. At upper secondary level, the national curricula are used and in higher education, each institution’s study plans are used. This means that while there is some standardisation in the way that validation candidates are assessed at upper secondary level, there is some variation at the level of higher education.

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is an executive subordinate agency of the Ministry of Education and research. The Directorate’s main tasks are to promote quality development and to bear the overall national responsibility for supervision of primary and secondary education and training, including documentation and validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning (Vox)\(^8\) is an agency under the Ministry of Education and Research that works to promote participation in community and working life by improving the competence level of adults. Vox develops, analyses and disseminates knowledge about adult learning, including non-formal and in-formal learning.

All regional education authorities have set up one or more ‘assessment centres’ for validation of prior learning in upper secondary education, which are often located at upper secondary schools. The centres provide information, guidance and help with the validation process in relation to upper secondary education. The centres also collect data on the candidates who have undergone validation, which is incorporated into a national-level register. The regional education authorities are responsible for quality assurance of the assessment procedure, including the training of assessors. This regional approach has led to an element of inconsistency in the application of validation procedures, and this may lead to the result that learners’ opportunities vary, depending on where they live. This is, however, not documented.

\(^8\) http://www.vox.no
At upper secondary level, adults aged 25 and over\(^9\), and without completed upper secondary education, are entitled to have their competences validated. The validation procedure involves the assessment of the individual’s competences in relation to the national curriculum. The individual is assessed (see section 5 for assessment methods) against the objectives (learning outcomes) outlined in the curriculum for the subject in question and is awarded a Competence Certificate to show which of these objectives he / she has already met. Any ‘gaps’ in the learner’s competences can then be filled (through education, or further experiential learning) in order to apply for a full upper secondary qualification.

Higher Education Institutions set up their own procedures for validation, based on their own curricula for their study programmes. Each institution is responsible for the quality of these services. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, NOKUT, has overall responsibility for the quality of services in HE.

In addition, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) is expected to assist job seekers when applying for a new job by for example providing advice on how to document prior learning in CVs and in other forms of documentation. The background for this is that NAV is obliged to assist in defining ‘adapted qualification trajectories’ for each job seeker. Thus, unemployment centres in the Norwegian municipalities provide a sort of formative validation to job seekers, to enable them to identify and document their skills and thereby support their search for employment. A project developed routines for communication between NAV and the aforementioned assessment centres in order to enhance the use of validation of prior learning towards upper secondary education for the unemployed \(^{10}\).

Table 1:1 below illustrates the use of validation to grant exemptions to adult learners in relation to upper secondary vocational certificates or entrance qualifications for higher education over two annual cohorts from 2007 to 2009. The data relates to adult learners who completed their studies during this period. The table shows that on average, 66% of the curriculum was assessed for validation and of this share of the curriculum which was assessed, on average 75% was granted as exemptions in the form of modules or competence goals.

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Table 1:1 Exemptions granted to adult learners in 15 counties, over the period 1 October 2007 – 30 September 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of validated participants with exemptions (and as a percentage of total no. of validated participants)</th>
<th>Proportion of the curriculum against which the candidates have been assessed</th>
<th>Share of the curriculum assessed which is granted as exemptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health and social studies</td>
<td>2723</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^9\) In practice, adults aged under 25 who have competences which could be validated may be granted a validation procedure but this decision is at the discretion of the county and is likely to depend on whether the county has sufficient financial resources available.

\(^{10}\) Alfsen, C., Hagen, I.: Økt bruk av realkompetansevurdering for arbeidssøkere - i grenseflaten mellom utdanningspolitikk og arbeidsmarkeds politikk. Vox 2008. Oslo
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of validated participants with exemptions (and as a percentage of total no. of validated participants)</th>
<th>Proportion of the curriculum against which the candidates have been assessed</th>
<th>Share of the curriculum assessed which is granted as exemptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other vocational qualification</td>
<td>1306</td>
<td>74 %</td>
<td>79 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General university and college admissions certification</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>58 %</td>
<td>61 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General vocational / Various supplements</td>
<td>1185</td>
<td>67 %</td>
<td>84 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4166</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In terms of funding, there are no earmarked funds for validation, which forms part of mainstreaming efforts of the education and labour market institutions. It is thus not possible to provide estimates of how much is spent on validation in Norway. Only anecdotal evidence from school leaders is available, who have indicated that they are able to support more students than previously within the same budgets. This may be due to the fact that validation can be used to shorten the amount of study time required from an individual in order to earn a qualification. As indicated above, among validation participants who had been granted an exemption from at least one module from their study programme, on average 75% of the course was approved for the learner as exemptions.

For certain target groups (see below) the costs of validation relating to upper secondary education may be covered by the county councils (for adults wanting to complete their upper secondary education) or the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) (the unemployed, the disabled).

In the HE sector, funding for validation (both for admissions and exemptions) is held at the level of the institution and is linked to the institutional application procedure for being enrolled. The validation is free of charge for eligible applicants. Since little is known at national level about the actual procedures in place at each institution, it is difficult to say how expensive validation might be for HEIs. Nevertheless, the institutions indicate that they are required to use more resources – up to 10 times more - to assess an applicant on the basis of validation of prior learning, than is the case for an applicant with formal qualifications. This is because they must assess the supporting documentation which serves as proof of competences in addition to the standard application form (e.g. statements from employers). Moreover, while certificates granted for participation in formal education and training provide a grade from 2 to 6 for each topic, certificates granted on the

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basis of validation only state ‘approved’. This makes it difficult to assess the level of competence of the individual or to compare the applications.

1.3 Examples of EU funded initiatives

Norway has been involved in a number of projects relating to validation which have been supported by EU funding, some of which have been described elsewhere in this report. These include for example:

**ETAP for Tourism:** This project was funded through the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The aim was to evaluate existing tools and practices for the validation of non-formal and informal learning for both employees and job-seekers in the tourism sector, in order to identify the most practical and relevant ones. Eight partners from five countries were involved. Outputs from the project, including descriptions of the access methods and assessment methods used in the partner countries, can be found on the website of the lead partner for the project (Kaunas Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts). The ETAP for Tourism project now has a follow up in a project at a university in Kaunas entitled, "Validation of non-formal and informal learning of non-academic staff working at public education institutions". The project is financed by Norwegian Financial Mechanisms and EEA grants.

**EXEMPLO**\(^{12}\) (Experienced Employee to Knowledge Coach): This project brought together partners from seven countries, to test a documentation tool which describes competences acquired at work. Vox was the Norwegian partner in this project and its role was to develop a questionnaire to map attitudes to learning in working life. The project also presented an opportunity to Vox to test a tool – the ‘competence card for the workplace’\(^{13}\) (see below in section 3.3 for further information about this tool) developed in Norway in other national settings. The project concluded that the competence card was transferable to other international settings. The project also led to the development of a toolkit\(^{14}\) for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across Europe to assess non-formally acquired competences.

Other transnational projects in which Norway is a partner include: **Observal (the European Observatory of Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning)**, HIPPO, (How Individual learning Pathways are Possible for Offenders), TRANSFINE (Transfer between Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education), REFINE (Recognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal education), Europass+, VPL (Valuation Prior Learning), and VPL2 – Managing European Diversity in Lifelong Learning. Further details of these projects can be found on the Vox website.

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Public sector actors, including formal education providers and information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

As noted above, regional validation assessment centres only deal with upper secondary education and are often based in upper secondary schools.

In higher education (HE), admission requirements are regulated through national legislation and regulations. For admission on the basis of prior learning - for applicants without formal qualifications - individual qualifications are assessed and validated by the relevant HE

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\(^{12}\) http://www.exemplo.de/exemplo/index.html

\(^{13}\) http://www.exemplo.de/exemplo/Website_Produkte/Competence_Matrix/matrix_no.pdf

\(^{14}\) http://www.exemplo.de/exemplo/presentation/index.html
institution in relation to the specific study programme applied for. In general, there are variations with regard to the practice of validation between different institutions.

In terms of admissions in HE, it seems there was initially some scepticism towards validation but after a number of years of implementation, the application of validation procedures relating to admissions is now more established in most institutions – there is more awareness among students that it is available and the institutions have more experience in applying validation. Moreover, students who enter higher education on the basis of validation are sometimes seen as an asset to a study group, due to their practical experience. In terms of exemptions, a 2005 study of six institutions found that their assessment of prior learning for exemptions was carried out in an “ad hoc manner”\(^\text{15}\) and a recent study of three institutions in 2008 shows that there is still a need for further implementation\(^\text{16}\). Another analysis from a University College in Norway reports on how students admitted on basis of prior learning are coping\(^\text{17}\); they seem to do very well because of their actual experience from working life but need a bit more support than students who have been accepted on the basis of formal learning only, in topics such as mathematics and academic writing.

**Vox** previously held the responsibility for providing information on validation, particularly to education and training institutions. This has now changed and responsibility for information provision is held at regional level. It is the role of **Vox** to maintain an overview at national level of the Norwegian approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In the education and training sector, the responsibility for information and guidance is held at directorate and county levels in upper secondary education and training, and at institutional level in higher education. Information is generally provided via the internet or in the case of the counties, in local newspapers or other local channels of information.

The [Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service](https://www.nav.no) (NAV) is responsible for information and guidance in their labour market institutions - i.e. municipal unemployment centres - but they are dependent on input from the education sector in relation to educational matters. It is therefore important to enhance cooperation between these two sectors at local level.

The provision of information has been identified as one of the challenges faced by the Norwegian system of validation. Although the provision of information is already in general good, it appears that it does not always reach out to the appropriate target audiences. There is anecdotal evidence that for those who are not familiar with the education system – both individuals and stakeholders from the labour market – it can be hard to find information about validation and to understand how the validation system works. Furthermore, the provision of information tends to depend on the financial situation of the county in question.

### 2.2 Costs to organisations

In upper secondary education the cost of validation is funded by the educational budgets in the different counties. There is no specific ‘ring-fenced’ funding for validation and it is therefore not possible to identify the exact amount spent on validation in each county. The funding allocated to validation therefore varies across the different counties, since they have the autonomy to manage their own budgets. No information is collected at national level on the costs associated with validation but, as noted above, there is anecdotal evidence that thanks to validation, it is possible to support more learners than previously, within the same budgets.

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\(^{15}\) The REFINE project, quoted in Nilsen Mohn, T. (Vox), Valuation and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway – experience and challenges 2007


\(^{17}\) Icara da Silva Holmesland & Judy Deanne Lundin (Eds.): (2009): *Formal and Informal Learning: Shall the Twain Ever Meet in Higher Education?*
In HE, the institutions themselves cover the cost of the admission process. The costs of admitting a student on the basis of validated prior learning is said to be higher than for students with formal qualifications because the procedure for the assessment of prior learning demands more resources than for applications with standard documentation and diplomas. The actual cost however is not clear – interviews with institutions for the OECD RNFIL project identified higher administrative costs from double, to ten times the amount for students with formal qualifications. Moreover, HE institutions are allocated funding on the basis of the study points achieved by the individual learners. This means that if learners are granted an exemption on the basis of validation, the institution may receive less funding for that particular learner. This is probably a disincentive to HE institutions in relation to validation.

2.3 Validation in the private sector

In the Basic Agreement for 2006-2009 (an agreement between the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry (NHO) and the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions), it was stated that “The enterprise is requested to have a system for documentation of the individual employees’ experience, courses and practice related to the conditions of work”. When the Agreement was renewed in 2010, the same wording was again included.

As part of the national Validation Project, Vox developed a ‘Competence Card’ which can be used in the private sector to describe learning at work. The Competence Card helps an individual to map and describe their professional competence such as branch knowledge, work responsibilities, working methods and personal skills. It is made up of two parts: a curriculum vitae and the competence card itself, which describes the individual’s main area of competence in the workplace, his/her professional skills and capability and also social, personal and management skills on the basis of a four-level scale. It has been qualified by the aforementioned Exemplo project as being suitable for transnational implementation and the toolkit for SMEs prepared as a result of this project and also the project website describe the competence card in more detail.

However according to Vox the Competence Card is not widely used as many firms have their own systems for validating competences. It is available on the internet but no data is collected on how many people have used it. It is more likely that it is used as a template by employers who wish to develop their own competence assessment tool.

A ‘Vox Barometer’ survey carried out in 2006 asked respondents a range of questions in relation to competence mapping. Some of the findings of the survey are described in the box below.

### Competence Mapping in Norwegian Enterprises

In 2006 Vox carried out a survey among enterprises to find out the extent to which they were using Competence Mapping and why they were doing so. The survey found that almost all - 98 % - of the enterprises in the sample felt that they had an overview of employee competence. However less than half - 44 % - of these said that they may use of mapping of employee competence in one form or another. This meant that 56 % of the enterprises surveyed did not actually map their employees’ competences but still felt that they had an overview of competence within the enterprise.

Amongst those enterprises which were not carrying out competence mapping, over half (55 %) felt that they had sufficient overview of employee competence and 42 % answered that they had no need to conduct competence mapping. A small number of the biggest enterprises identified time

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18 Carlsten, T.C., Mohn, T.N., Brandt, E., Turmo, A., OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of non-formal and informal learning, Country Background Report Norway 2006, Internet: http://www.oecd.org/document/83/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_37141759_1_1_1_1,00.html
19 See: http://www.exemplo.de/exemplo/Website/index/impuls25_screen.pdf for further information
Competence Mapping in Norwegian Enterprises

and cost as reasons for not carrying out competence mapping.

These results may be explained by the size of enterprises in Norway: at the time of the survey, more than 70% of Norwegian enterprises had less than 10 employees. For many of these small enterprises a formal mapping process would have seemed unnecessary, as an overview of staff competences would be more likely to come as a result of close cooperation between employees and management.

In fact, the survey results showed a clear difference in the number of employees between the enterprises that used competence mapping and the ones that did not. On average those that used mapping had 17 employees. The enterprises that claimed to have an overview of staff competences but did not perform mapping had an average of six employees. An analysis of the survey data thus revealed that competence mapping is generally speaking something that the largest enterprises are involved in.

Another pattern identified was that competence mapping was more likely to be undertaken by companies that had undergone considerable reorganisation during the last two years. The assumption can therefore be made that a company re-structuring highlights the need for an overview of employees’ competences.

In terms of sectors, the survey found that the highest degree of competence mapping took place in the public sector, and in the finance and insurance sector. Competence mapping was least used in primary industry, retail trade, hotels and restaurants and other business services.

The survey identified three main methods of competence mapping:

- informal talks with the employees “colleague-to-colleague”, (least common)
- the use of a database to systematically record the competences of the employees, and
- more formal processes, through annual reviews of employee satisfaction and performance, which have competence mapping as one of its topics (most common)

More systematic mapping tended to be undertaken by the larger enterprises and less so by small enterprises.

The most common reasons given for conducting competence mapping were to obtain an overview of the overall competence of the enterprise and to make the enterprise able to make the best possible use of its labour.

The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), the employers’ association and interest organisation for municipalities, counties and local public enterprises in Norway, has established a national agreement with the trade union for municipality employees regarding the use of a validation tool to support wage negotiations. The application of this agreement in one particular municipality (Halden) is described in the box below.

Municipality of Halden, Norway

The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) has established a national agreement with the trade union for municipality employees regarding the use of a validation tool to support wage negotiations. This agreement, which was established in May 2008, is compulsory for each employer member of KS and has been applied in the Municipality of Halden to the benefit of around 300-400 employees.

Since April 2009, Halden Municipality has used an electronic ‘inventory’ tool for employees to record their learning and achievements – both formal and non-formal learning. This inventory can be completed in the workplace or at home, as it is available online. Users are able to access
Municipality of Halden, Norway

Use of the tool is compulsory but no penalty is incurred if the employee does not complete it. However, the information recorded in the tool can be used to support wage negotiations during the employee evaluation process. This evaluation is carried out on behalf of the individual employee by their trade union representative and the employer. Employees who provide evidence of participation in one year of full-time formal learning are entitled to a wage increase of NOK 20,000 (EUR 2,473), while those who provide evidence of non-formal learning are entitled to a wage increase of NOK 5,000 (EUR 618). The minimum amount of non-formal learning which needs to be evidenced is either three months full-time, or 15 credit points (i.e. three months of full-time study), so they do not have to take time off their job in order to benefit from the wage increase (although some employees do).

To date, around 1,600 of the total 2,200 employees within the Community of Halden have made use of the tool, and of these, around 300-400 people have benefited from an increase in their wages as a result.

Although it is recognised as useful, systems of documentation are not often implemented in practice by enterprises. This is particularly the case for small enterprises, which do not have the time and resources necessary to dedicate to validation. Thus, while validation may be taking place in the private sector, it is not implemented in a ‘formal’ manner and is generally based on companies’ own methods.

A number of validation projects have been implemented focusing on specific sectors, such as the project described below relating to the electro-technical sector, which is described in more detail in the box below, and the project mentioned in section 2.5 relating to the tourism sector.

Accumulated Knowledge and Skills

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20 Christensen, H, Norway, in Singh, M. and Duvekot, R. (eds), Benchmarking national learning cultures on linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks, Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, Germany
Accumulated Knowledge and Skills

This Leonardo da Vinci project carried out further testing and development of a method and a tool created by the Norwegian Electro-technical Research and Development Centre (ELBUS) to map the competences of employees in electro-technical companies.

The method and the tool were originally developed as part of the Norwegian national validation project. The Leonardo project enabled the partners, from Denmark, Greece, Great Britain and Sweden, to test the tools and methods and try to find a system for validation of competence that could be used across borders. This would enable electricians who start working in a country other than their native one to present some kind of valid documentation of competence.

The partners in the project included organisations of both employers and employees (Norway and Great Britain) and schools (Greece, Denmark and Sweden.)

The project outputs included two books, one in which the method is described and one which presents the tool.

The project was chosen as one of the 32 success stories to receive the Leonardo da Vinci Award 2004.

2.4 Validation in the third sector

Currently there is a lack of information held at national level about the extent to which validation is carried out in the third sector. There is only anecdotal evidence from providers in the education sector that candidates with experience and competences developed in the third sector generally do not have documentation to evidence their competences. Vox may address this lack of information from the sector in the near future, as part of national work on the status of validation in Norway.

The folk high schools (Folkehøgskolene), which are considered part of the third sector, also took part in the 1992 – 2002 national project on validation described above. The schools provide guidance and competence sessions with their students to prepare them for their future learning and work, which could be considered a type of validation.

The Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU) provides a description of learning in the voluntary sector on a ‘wiki’ website entitled “actiwicki”\(^ {21}\). Although this is not a validation project as such, it is useful for an individual who must describe his/her learning, as well as to employers.

It is suggested that there is also a need for more structured and reliable documentation of experiences gained in the voluntary sector. Although there are tools available in this sector, they are said to give too little description of content\(^ {22}\).

Some third sector organisations have developed a tool for the description of competences and skills acquired through participation in different activities in third sector called the ‘Personal Competence Document’ (PKD), described in the box below.

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\(^{21}\) [http://www.aktiwiki.no/wiki/AktiWiki](http://www.aktiwiki.no/wiki/AktiWiki)

\(^{22}\) GHK, 2009, Summary Report on Peer Learning Activity on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. Internet: [http://www.ksll.net/Documents/PLA-%20validation%20of%20non-formal%20and%20informal%20learning_June%202009.pdf](http://www.ksll.net/Documents/PLA-%20validation%20of%20non-formal%20and%20informal%20learning_June%202009.pdf)
The Personal Competence Document (PKD)

The Personal Competence Document is a self-declaration document for the presentation or 'mapping' of an individual’s learning (formal, non-formal and informal), including learning through voluntary work. The document was developed by the Norwegian Association for Adult Learning, (Voksenopplæringsforbundet, VOFO), in collaboration with two partner youth organizations, after extensive trials in some of these associations. Today, it is free to use and available on the internet (www.vofo.no/pkd) – the only costs associated are the technical costs associated with maintaining the website, which are covered by VOFO.

There are three different forms available from the PKD website, in Microsoft Word format (they can therefore be saved to the user’s computer and printed out, either after the form has been completed, or for manual completion). The first (the PKD form) covers all of the individual’s competences, while the other two are for competences related to single activities (e.g. a job or an activity carried out outside of work or education). In all three forms, there is an initial section where the individual provides information about the activities he/she has carried out and the competences developed as a result of the different activities. There are sections in the forms for the following information (if the individual does not have any information to include in a certain section, he/she can delete that part of the form, so that the form presents the competences that the individual does have, rather than what he/she does not have):

- Personal information;
- Work;
- Education;
- Extra-curricular activities (e.g. board membership/voluntary leadership tasks);
- Short term activities (e.g. projects, festivals, mobilisation for some sort of change (against building a highway through the city centre etc), competitions etc.);
- Other activities and personal interests (painting, car repair etc);
- International activity and stays abroad;
- Any other activity or interest.

The form thus enables the user to create a list of what he/she has done, when and for how long / how often, and which organisation it was for, if any. Although the tool was developed by organisations from the third sector, it was developed to incorporate learning of all types, not just from voluntary activities, since skills and competences can be developed and practised across all types of activities (e.g. ICT skills developed in a formal learning environment can then be used and further developed through voluntary work).

Users are encouraged to use the tool with support from other people, for example informally with friends, or via a course, in order to compensate for the fact that the PKD is based on written forms and guidance. It is often difficult for an individual to identify and describe what he/she knows and what skills / competences he/she has whereas a second person - a friend, colleague, employer, classmate or fellow volunteer for example - may be able to identify these skills and competences. A discussion around the PKD can therefore help the user to discover competences and strengths or to acknowledge these, or even to recognise weaknesses.

On completion of the form, the user will look at all the activities he/she has carried out and prepare an overall description of the competences he/she has developed across the different activities. Competences are described according to a number of different categories and within each one the user should provide information on his/hers knowledge, skills, attitude and experience. The categories are:

- competence in a chosen topic or subject area (mechanics, ICT, caring/nursing etc) - one or more according to the need of the user;
- social skills, attitudes and competences;
- organisational skills;
The Personal Competence Document (PKD)

ways of working, learning and problem-solving;
- language;
- any other competence.

There are guidelines on how to complete the PKD, which explain the kind of information which should be provided and give three examples of completed forms. The guidelines also provide questions to help the user to reflect and write about his / her competences in certain areas (cooperation, social skills, communication and attitudes, ways of working and learning and problem-solving). They also include an explanation of how to describe language skills according to the categories used in the European Language Portfolio\(^2\) (basic, good or very good).

The forms include a section for the individual to provide ‘proof’ of the competences described and then a section for references. All of the forms must be signed by the individual and the ‘single activity forms’ are also signed by a second person, e.g. a boss/colleague, a group leader, course teacher, etc. This second signature ensures the validity of the document, by providing a verification of the individual’s own description of the activities and competences described in the form.

The creators of the PKD suggest that it can be used for a number of purposes, including to prepare for a job interview or apply for a job, in relation to taking on a task/position in an NGO, to create an overview of any needs for further education/learning, to support a validation process or an application for education / training, or for employers to develop an overview of their staff’s competences. No data is collected on the users of the tool and it is therefore not known what the main reasons are for individuals to use the PKD, nor how many people have in fact used it to date.

A 2007 Green Paper on adult education\(^23\) \(^3\) claimed that PKD is not widely used by the study associations. This statement is supported by a survey showing that the PKD is not widely known among study associations, nor within the formal education system. The content provided in the document also depends on the level of detail the individual chooses to provide – while some may write in detail about the content and aim of their activities, others may not provide any information on the actual content of the course they followed, or the overall aim of the training, etc. The level of detail provided will depend on the purpose for which they use the tool. It is therefore flexible and can be tailored to the individual’s circumstances and needs, but at the same time demands decisions on the part of the user as to how to complete their own document.

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

Validation has now been used to the benefit of a large number of individuals in Norway. It has been reported that by the end of 2006, more than 60 000 adults had acquired formal qualifications at upper secondary level which take account of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes and allow for a shortened period of training. Around 80% of these were in vocational subjects. More than 10 000 adults lacking formal qualifications have been offered admission to a study programme in higher education, based on documented prior learning\(^24\).

In terms of the crafts examination based on practical work experience, the latest available data show that on average, around 6 000 individuals take this examination each year (see Table 3:1) and that around 95% of these are successful.

\(^2\) http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/portfolio/default.asp?f=e&m=/main_pages/welcome.html


Table 3:1 Experience-based trade certifications:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Total Candidates</th>
<th>Successful candidates</th>
<th>Success rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>6 820</td>
<td>6445</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>6 277</td>
<td>5919</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>5 894</td>
<td>5592</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>5 742</td>
<td>5464</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>5 952</td>
<td>5632</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training

The latest data identified for this report show that 3,162 of the 9,439 adults who applied for enrolment in upper secondary education and training in 2008 had undergone validation of non-formal and informal learning (source: Statistics Norway). The total number of adult participants in upper secondary education in 2008 was 41,347 (including adults who had just started, those in the middle of their education or at the end - all are counted as participants). A total of 41% of these had undergone validation of their non-formal and informal learning. Validation seems to be more common among students of health and social studies - as many as 57% of these students have undergone a validation process. Furthermore, among those who obtained a final qualification in health and social studies, a full 70% had undergone validation.

(It is important to note however, as shown in table 3:2 below, that health and social studies are the most popular subjects for adult learners in upper secondary education). In contrast, 32% of participants in other vocational studies have undergone a validation process at the application stage. (This figure is based on data for adults who in 2008 participated in education/training in other vocational studies that had undergone a validation process at the application stage. It is based on data for all 19 counties. Also the data include adults who in the year 2008 were in training, whether they left their training that year, started their training that year or finished and received their certification that year) Table 3:2 below shows the number of adult learners in 15 counties of Norway (data only available for this number) who had undergone validation for exemptions in relation to vocational certificates or entrance qualifications for higher education over two annual cohorts from 2007 to 2009. The data relates only to adult learners who completed their studies during this period and only relates to 15 out of the 19 counties (due to availability of the data). The table shows that over half of the participants underwent a validation procedure and of these, a significant proportion (86%) were granted an exemption. The data shows that a much higher proportion (almost double) of adults studying vocational subjects underwent a validation than among adults studying for general university and college admissions certificates. The table also shows the number of adults who were granted an exemption (for at least one module or one competence goal) as a result of the validation process. Again, a much higher proportion of adult students of vocational subjects were granted exemptions than adult students of general university / college admissions certificates.

Note: these data are based on adults who applied for enrolment in upper secondary in 2008. That means that some of these adults may not have started their education yet. This explains why the proportion of adults who have undergone a validation is lower than in the data provided in Table 4:1, which is based on data describing adults who started their education/training in 2008.
Table 3.2 Use of validation for adult learners in 15 counties, over the period 1 October 2007 – 30 September 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total no. of participants</th>
<th>Number of validated participants (and as a percentage of total no. of participants)</th>
<th>Number of validated participants with exemptions (and as a percentage of total no. of validated participants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health and social studies</td>
<td>4669</td>
<td>2964 (63%)</td>
<td>2723 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other vocational qualification</td>
<td>2368</td>
<td>1473 (62%)</td>
<td>1306 (89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General university and college admissions certification</td>
<td>2528</td>
<td>855 (34%)</td>
<td>445 (52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General vocational / Various supplements</td>
<td>2173</td>
<td>1366 (63%)</td>
<td>1185 (87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8832</td>
<td>4850 (55%)</td>
<td>4166 (86%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: VigoVoksen, in Guthu, L. and Bekkevold, K, (2010): The Vox Mirror 2009 Key figures on adult participation in education and training in Norway

Data collection is undertaken by Vox, not by the counties. In order to collect the data on the number of people who benefit from validation, the results of each assessment are programmed into a specific computer programme. The programme includes all the competence goals from the curriculum and it can thus be recorded which goals the candidate has been assessed against, which the candidate has passed and which they have not. Since all the curriculum is in the system, it is possible to quantify the number of goals each person has been assessed against from the programme that he or she is going to study. It is also possible to count the number of pass and fails in the assessments. The resulting figure is a rough average of all the persons within each study programme and a good picture of how much formal accreditation comes from an assessment. It is however important to note that this is only an estimate of how much education/training that can be curtailed from the courses of study, not how the training is actually organised.

In relation to higher education, validation procedures apply both to admission to the studies and to being exempted from parts of the syllabus due to non-formal/informal learning experiences.

Around 1.3% of students admitted each year have had their prior learning recognised during the admissions process. The number of HE applicants who requested that their non-formal and informal qualifications be taken into account in their application to enter HE was 2,565 in 2008. Of these, 1,698 (66%) were considered ‘qualified’ for the course of study on
the basis of their prior learning and of these successful applicants the proportion who actually went on to start their studies was 47\%\textsuperscript{26}.

It is also interesting to note that 72\% of the applications based on validation of prior learning were women. This may be connected with the fact that, as in upper secondary education and training, the most popular subjects for validation applicants are, health and social studies – most applied for studies to become nurses (48\%), social educators (21\%), social workers (14\%) or child welfare officers (11\%). Teacher training was also popular. A large group of the applicants (41\%) were aged 31-40 and most applied to university colleges (80-90\%). It is suggested that VPL applicants find it harder to obtain a place on courses with high admission requirements (e.g. legal studies)\textsuperscript{27}.

Between 2001 and 2004, only 123 applications for exemptions from parts of studies on the basis of prior learning (formal, in-formal and non-formal learning) were received by all higher education institutions. The majority of these (72\%) were granted the exemption they applied for (slightly more in university colleges at 74\% than in universities, at 65\%)\textsuperscript{28}. It has been suggested that this low number of applicants for exemptions based on a combination of formal, in-formal and non-formal learning is an indicator of the need to better inform the target group of this possibility\textsuperscript{29}. A recent study from three HE institutions in Norway confirms this suggestion; it seems that this type of exemption is still not widely used\textsuperscript{30}.

To complete the picture, it could be added that as inter-institutional mobility is very common in Norway, exemptions from parts of study programmes on the basis of formal qualifications are awarded as a matter of course, in line with all higher education legislation in force since the 1980s.

### 3.1 Engaging individuals and supporting them through the validation process

For upper secondary education and training it is the responsibility of the county authorities to provide information on validation opportunities to the public. The methods used vary across the different counties but are generally websites, brochures / leaflets and occasionally advertisements in newspapers. Likewise, it is the higher education institutions that are responsible for information about validation opportunities in relation to higher education.

The Ministry of Education and Research and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation also provide information about validation on their websites. Many other stakeholders also provide web-based information, including the county authorities and higher education institutions.

Vox has commissioned a video film about validation, which is available from its website\textsuperscript{31}. The film is intended to serve as inspiration for both employers and the employees to find ways of visualising and documenting competences and skills.

It is suggested however that there is a lack of awareness about opportunities for validation in Norway, particularly amongst people with low-level formal education. National studies have found that only 26\% of employees are sufficiently informed about their rights and opportunities. In addition, relatively few unemployed people use the opportunities offered to

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\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Nilsen Mohn, T. (Vox). Valuation and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway – experience and challenges 2007
\textsuperscript{29} Christensen, H. Norway, in Singh, M. and Duvekot, R. (eds), Benchmarking national learning cultures on linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks, Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, Germany
\textsuperscript{30} Mohn, T.N., Størset, H. (2010): Realkompetanse innen høyere utdanning En studie ved tre institusjoner; Vox, Nasjonalt fagorgan for kompetansepolitikk, Oslo
have their learning validated, which is attributed to underdeveloped cooperation between the Labour and Welfare Administration and the county offices responsible for the recognition of learning at the upper secondary level\textsuperscript{32}. A project has been working on this specific challenge.\textsuperscript{33}

Staff at the regional assessment centres provide adults wishing to access validation relating to upper secondary education with information on guidance and other advisory support\textsuperscript{34}. This is mainly delivered on a one-to-one basis although group sessions may be held at the start of the process. Information is always provided before an individual commences a validation process, in order to support them to choose the right curriculum to apply for. Depending on the resources available at the assessment centre, guidance may also be provided during the validation process, for example on how to document competences, how to collect documents from earlier employment etc. It is generally provided at the end of the process, to enable the candidate to identify any further education / training needs. For those centres with less resources available, guidance may be provided by telephone or internet to cut down on costs.

There are no national-level requirements for the practitioners who deliver guidance in relation to validation and these vary depending on the county. Validation guidance practitioners may be careers counsellors or teachers for example.

In HE Institutions, the staff in charge of recruitment is involved in the provision of guidance to validation candidates. The provision of guidance varies considerably across the different institutions and depends on the type of institution and number of applicants (for example a large institution with many applicants may provide only information via the internet, while a small institution with fewer applicants is likely to provide more direct forms of guidance to candidates).

The provision of or need for guidance also depends to a large extent on the individual candidate. Some individuals are able to undergo the validation process without a need for support.

3.2 Costs and benefits to individuals

Recognition of informal and non-formal learning related to upper secondary education is free for certain individuals:

- People with a right to complete their education from primary school to upper secondary school (costs are normally borne by county councils);
- People who are unable to work due to disability (costs are borne by the Labour and Welfare Service);
- Immigrants who cannot provide enough documentation for their skill level can go through a vocational testing in order to assess their prior learning;
- People having signed a ‘jobseekers’ agreement with the Labour and Welfare Service can under some circumstances have their prior learning experiences assessed for free. One precondition is that the employment office considers the assessment to be necessary for getting the job seekers back to work.

For those individuals who do have to pay, the price of a validation procedure can range from EUR 120 – 300 for an academic/vocational subject and EUR 1 800 for vocational

\textsuperscript{32} GHK, 2009, Summary Report on Peer Learning Activity on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. Internet: http://www.ksill.net/Documents/PLA-%20validation%20of%20non-formal%20and%20informal%20learning_June%202009.pdf
\textsuperscript{33} Alfsen, C., Hagen, I.: Økt bruk av realkompetansevurdering for arbeidssøkere - i grenseflaten mellom utdanningspolitikk og arbeidsmarkedspolitikk. Vox 2008. Oslo
\textsuperscript{34} Nilsen Mohn, T. (Vox), Valuation and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway – experience and challenges 2007
testing (see below in section 5 for further information on ‘vocational testing’).\textsuperscript{35} The fees charged are decided at county level and have been calculated based on the costs incurred by the county authorities in delivering validation. The costs to be charged are generally decided upon based on how long the validation process takes on average for a specific qualification. Vocational qualifications can also be more expensive due to the costs associated with the resources required for vocational testing.

Recognition in relation to admission to a HE institution is free for the applicant – the cost is covered by the individual institution. This is the same for validations concerning exemptions from part of a study programme.

Benefits to individuals vary, depending on the sector in which the validation process is implemented:

- In working life, validation can support career development, salary / wage grading and can be useful when applying for jobs, because the competencies of the job applicant are identified and recorded through the validation process – although no statistical data is gathered, there are individual ‘success stories’ of participants who have found ‘better’ employment after the validation process;
- In terms of education and training, validation can lead to the shortening of courses, individualised learning plans and the achievement of certificates;
- In the third sector, validation can lead to personal development and the acquisition of certificates\textsuperscript{36}.

For adults applying to upper secondary education and training, validation is used to enable exemptions to be granted in recognition of their existing skills. This means that they only need to follow the education and training required to ‘fill the gaps’ in their skills, rather than participating in a whole course, including the teaching of skills they already possess. Since upper secondary education is almost a minimum requirement for employment in Norway, it could be argued that validation of prior learning helps adults to improve their employability. In Higher Education, validation is seen as a way of giving a ‘second chance’ to applicants from non-traditional backgrounds.

As indicated above, across the 19 counties of Norway, in 2008 41 \% of the adult participants in upper secondary education and training (16 871 from a total of 41 437) had undergone the validation of their non-formal and informal learning. However, it is suggested that the extent to which the education and training is actually adapted to their needs may vary, since in practice this can be a challenge to implement.\textsuperscript{37}

As explained above (see table 3:1) at upper secondary level adults can pursue vocational certificates or entrance qualifications for higher education. With regard to the latter, it is reported that for those adults who completed their entrance qualifications, there appears to be some variation in the way that subjects approved through the validation process are calculated as credits for admission. It is suggested that adults who have undergone validation “\textit{tend to be pushed backwards in the queue of applicants}”. For this reason, some county administrations do not recommend validation for adults wishing to obtain entrance qualification for HE\textsuperscript{38}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{37} Guthu, L. and Bekkevold, K, (2010): The Vox Mirror 2009 Key figures on adult participation in education and training in Norway. Internet: \url{http://www.vox.no/upload/10712/VOX_mirror_2009_web.pdf}
\item \textsuperscript{38} Guthu, L. and Bekkevold, K, (2010): The Vox Mirror 2009 Key figures on adult participation in education and training in Norway. Internet: \url{http://www.vox.no/upload/10712/VOX_mirror_2009_web.pdf}
\end{itemize}
The evaluation of the Validation Project (Realkompetanseprosjektet) found that supervisors and assessors/specialists felt that validation gives an individual more self-respect\(^{39}\). Candidates themselves felt that the most important outcome of the validation procedure was their belief that they could achieve the education they wanted and the possibility to take part in upper secondary or higher education.

The Validation project undertook two surveys (in 2001 and 2003). In 2003, the survey revealed that 65% of employees felt that validation was useful for local wage negotiations and 85% thought it was useful for job seeking. Nearly 10% indicated that they had gained a new post with their employer, as a result of the validation.

It is also suggested that validation has positive side-effects for marginalised groups. It can help immigrants and refugees in their process of integrating into society for example, while for senior workers, validation of non-formal and informal learning can contribute to enhancing their career, both in content and in duration. Young school drop-outs can return to education or access employment through validation combined with tailored training schemes.

3.3 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

Three pilot projects were carried out over the period 2006-2008 with the aim of improving links between county councils and employment offices. The objective was to increase the number of unemployed persons who undergo validation at upper secondary level, in order to improve the procedures for supporting job-seekers to obtain qualifications and to look for work\(^{40}\).

A White Paper on prison education stipulated that the prison school should arrange validation of non-formal and informal learning for prisoners that wish and have the right to validation undergo validation. As such, a three-year project has been performed to pilot the use of validation for prisoners\(^{41}\). This project is described in the box below.

### Validation of prior learning as a tool for the reintegration of inmates (2007-2010)

This project aimed to use the validation of prior learning (VPL) to provide offenders with an education that is adapted to their backgrounds and needs. It was set up in response to a 2005 White Paper from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, which suggested VPL could be of particular use to this group of learners\(^{42}\).

Vox held overall responsibility for coordinating the project, which was initiated by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and the County Governor of Hordaland. The project objectives were to:

- Trial and establish VPL (including vocational testing) as a tool for competence mapping and adapted training within prison education;
- Establish cooperation forums involving school authorities, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, the Prison and Probation Services and user organisations;
- Using VPL as a starting point, launch and develop models that safeguard individualised/adapted training;
- Develop and implement measures to increase competences in VPL among project employees/teachers and others;
- Produce relevant documentation (a report).

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
Five local projects were implemented in the following counties: Østfold, Vestfold, Hordaland, Møre og Romsdal and Sør-Trøndelag. Each group had members from the school department, prison staff and Norwegian Welfare and the local office of the labour administration.

Some observations can be made on how the project was organised and the outputs and results which were achieved:

Outputs:
- Information materials have been prepared which are available in the schools / prisons and have been disseminated to relevant target audiences;
- Formal procedures for VPL have been established in the project schools;

Results:
- the employees involved in the project have increased their knowledge of VPL and as a result are able to inform offenders about how to access VPL opportunities;
- the schools involved have introduced systems for cooperation between the main school, county administration, job training personnel in prison, Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service;
- in total, 186 prisoners were assessed, mainly in vocational study programmes, with the result that they were able to achieve a journeyman’s / trade certificate or to shorten their study periods by 1.5 – 2 years.

Impact
VPL has been established within the school departments/prisons that participated and the participants have built up experience and competence in this field. In this way the project has created a basis for further work in establishing VPL in prison education in Norway.

An evaluation report has now been produced, which makes a number of recommendations:

- **Information**: Teachers and workshop instructors in prison, including all new employees, should be informed about validation and its potential to motivate prisoners for further education and later employment. New inmates should also be given information about validation, as well as other prison personnel, so that they can inform other employees and inmates.

- **Training**: Personnel that work in prison education or with work training could be trained as evaluators

- **Procedures**: Prisons should establish internal routines for the validation procedure (information/guidance, competence mapping/validation, assessment, documentation, tailored training/adapted education), which should start as soon as possible.

- **Collaboration**: Prisons should establish a network of partners/collaborators who can contribute to the validation work (e.g. Labour and Welfare Service)

- **Financial allocation**: If possible, prisons should earmark financial resources for validation activities

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4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is responsible for quality assurance for primary, Lower Secondary and Upper Secondary Education and Training. At the moment, there is no national framework for quality assurance and its application varies across the different counties, which presents a challenge at national level to ensure that an overall standard of quality is maintained. A need for quality assurance standards has been identified, which will be developed by the relevant governmental institutions, coordinated...
and overseen by Vox. It is envisaged that these quality standards will include provisions for the qualifications requirements for validation practitioners, which are not currently standardised at national level, and for the standardisation of procedures used for validation, which currently vary across the regions.

Currently, responsibility for quality assurance lies with a number of different organisations, depending on the sector in question.

- Responsibility for quality assurance in higher education is held at the national level by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). The 2003 Quality Reform affecting higher education introduced a new degree system and a unified grading scale, which has made it easier to validate qualifications.

- The education authorities in the counties have responsibility for quality assurance of the assessment procedure used for upper secondary education, including the training of assessors. This means developing common practices in relation to the procedures and methods used for assessment, the attitudes of the assessors towards candidates and the validation process, the discussion of cases and results, and supporting networking. The Education Act, Chapter 13, Section 13-3c emphasises the duty of the county authority to ensure the provision of guidance and quality development issues. If necessary the Ministry can give further regulations concerning these tasks. This amendment of the Education Act has been in force since 1 August 2009.

In terms of evaluation, while data is collected at national level on the number of validation participants, the number of qualifications awarded etc, routine evaluations of the system of validation are not currently carried out.

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

A four-stage process for validation has been developed in Norway which can be applied to any level of education and training. These four stages are:

1. information and guidance;
2. identification and systematization of competences;
3. assessment; and
4. documentation.

At upper secondary level (including VET), validation involves the assessment of the individual’s competences in relation to the national curriculum. Individuals are awarded with a ‘Competence certificate. The dialogue-based and portfolio assessment methods (described below) are common and vocational testing is also used for certain subjects:

Dialogue-based method: This is the most commonly used method. It involves a one-to-one discussion between the individual and assessor and can also be supported by the use of electronic or manual tools. The method can be combined with portfolio assessment, self-assessment and testing. The dialogue based method has proved appropriate for both vocational and general subjects. Tacit knowledge can be identified through this method.

Portfolio assessment: This method may be used to support the dialogue. The portfolio is based on written documentation, photos etc. Portfolio assessment is dependent on good

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43 Nilsen Mohn, T. (Vox), Valuation and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway – experience and challenges 2007
written documentation of the individual’s skills and undocumented or tacit knowledge is harder to identify through this method.

**Vocational ‘testing’**: is based on both interviews and practical tests to show the individual’s practical abilities. This method offers candidates a chance to demonstrate their practical expertise and learning and language difficulties may not be a barrier. The first stage is a general interview which is carried out by a professional specialist, to chart the background, training, work experience, language skills and objectives of the candidate. This is followed by a practical demonstration of the individual’s skills. Once the assessment has been completed, the individual may be recommended for additional education in order to achieve a journeyman/trade certificate, or a Competence Certificate useful for job search. However, this method is not commonly used, which may be due to the fact that it can be more complicated and more expensive to administer.

A study of validation in Norway suggests that it is still a challenge to find documentation methods that have credibility and legitimacy both in the workplace and in the education system. The different learning arenas have different criteria, making it difficult to establish ‘equivalent competences’\(^{44}\).

In **Higher Education**, assessments related to HE admissions will vary from institution to institution. Self-declarations and portfolios are most often used to assess non-formal and informal learning. An extensive application form must be completed by applicants wishing to have their prior learning validated as basis for admission. Supporting documentation to provide evidence of the individual’s competences must also be provided, such as statements from employers. On the basis of this application form and the supporting documentation, applicants can be considered qualified for the specific study they apply for. Where further detail is required, the candidate may be asked to participate in an interview. However, even if the candidate is considered ‘qualified’ this does not necessarily mean they will be granted a study place. They have to compete with applicants with formal qualifications if the relevant study has limited access.

For individuals who have been granted an upper secondary certificate on the basis of validation, the certificate is not graded, as is the case for those acquired through participation in formal education and training (from levels one to six). Instead the certificate will simply state ‘approved’. This makes it harder to identify the level of competence of the individual and to compare individual applications at higher education level.

As noted above, the 2006 Vox Barometer included a survey of over 1000 companies. Of these, 43% claimed to do mapping of their employees’ competences and skills and the methods used for this were informal interviews (23%), annual interview / performance appraisal (44%) and recording the skills and competences in a database (44%). The methods used depend on the size of the company\(^{45}\).

## 6 Validation Practitioners

The **profile** of validation practitioners varies, depending on the context in which the validation is delivered:

- Assessors at regional validation assessment centres tend to have a background in the relevant education or trade. They may be teachers of the relevant trade, or people working in the trade who have a good knowledge of the course curriculum

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\(^{44}\) Nilsen Mohn, T. (Vox), Valuation and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway – experience and challenges 2007

\(^{45}\) Ibid
which is being assessed. There are no national qualifications requirements for assessors and at county level these requirements vary.

- The assessment of applications for a trade or journeyman’s (vocational) certificate on the basis of work experience is carried out by the county vocational training board, on behalf of the County Authority. There are different vocational training boards for the different subjects and each is made up of representatives of the relevant trade and also from the social partners.

- In HE, a committee at each university / college has the role of assessing applicants who use the documentation of prior learning as evidence for their application. Applications for exemptions are assessed by academic staff in the different departments.

- There are no national-level requirements for the practitioners who deliver guidance in relation to validation and these vary depending on the county. Validation guidance practitioners may be careers counsellors or teachers for example.

- In HE Institutions, the staff in charge of recruitment is involved in the provision of guidance to validation candidates.

There are no centralised requirements for qualifications, other than that practitioners should be well qualified for performing the task of validation towards the objectives in the curricula. It is up to each county (upper secondary education)/each institution (HE) to make sure that the staff are qualified in their handling of issues related to validation. In upper secondary education the education authorities in each county arrange training for the assessors at least once every year.

As noted previously in this report, there are also no specific qualifications requirements for validation guidance practitioners. There is however a proposal to introduce a qualification for guidance practitioners. If this proposal is taken forward, guidance practitioners would need to have a qualification in teaching and would need to complete a specific period of training in counselling as well.

The evaluation of the Validation Project revealed that around 96% of supervisors and 85% of the assessors/specialists felt that they needed training in the future, particularly in relation to a quality assurance standard.

As noted above, it is the responsibility of the county authority to provide training for validation staff. Courses and seminars for assessors are delivered annually and inexperienced assessors are also given mentoring support. Once they have received their training, assessors are registered on a list at the regional assessment centre.

Specific training modules for counsellors in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) have been designed for staff who support job seekers through advice on how to document their prior learning.

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46 Ibid.
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**Stakeholders consulted:**

Ministry of Education and Research

Vox (Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning)

VOFO

Municipality of Halden