Country report

Denmark

2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

Author: Kirsten Aagaard
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1 Introduction and Evaluation

1.1 Abstract

The validation of non-formal and informal learning has been on the policy agenda in Denmark for about 20 years. It is seen as a key element to promote lifelong learning in Denmark. Competence assessment and the possible outcomes in terms of access, exemption or acquisition of certificates varies among the education and training sectors (VET, higher education and adult education sectors). A legal framework for validation of prior learning based on common principles in the adult education and training sector has been in place since 2007. In Denmark, the validation of prior learning is regulated by laws. According to Danish law, the assessment of the validation application must be conducted by the educational institution offering the corresponding study programmes. Other bodies can be in charge of information, identification, guidance and counselling, in a broader perspective, in the phase leading up to the assessment process (‘the pre-phase’). These bodies include, among others, trade unions, employers’ associations, job centres, unemployment insurance funds, civic education institutions, study committees and ‘eVejledning’ (online guidance service) that can be involved in the pre-phase and often collaborate with the educational institution in the validation process. The implementation of the legislation is decentralised in Denmark.

Barriers to stabilising and improving VPL in Denmark are summarized below; these issues are continuously discussed by the main stakeholders:

■ The allocation of resources from the state to schools could be more secure in making a more solid basis for VPL-activity. VPL-activity is undertaken in schools on the basis of a business case calculated together with economic risks. Resources could be more earmarked to VPL-activity, instead of a full dependency on taximeters (see http://eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/General/The-taximeter-system for an explanation of taximeters).

■ There is a need to link VPL-activity for individuals more to the development of job-profiles. This means involving employers at the workplace-level in a more responsible way in order to show the job-perspectives to the employees, potentially having a VPL.

■ In many ways Denmark has a well-functioning education system which provides good conditions for VPL. However, more commitent to VPL is called for, from stakeholders including employers at company level, social partners and key actors in the education system. This is especially the case at the VET and CVET schools where the social partners are occupying all seats in the boards and where they are able to be more strategic giving greater priority to VPL-activity.

■ Official statistics should be more comprehensive and systematic, covering all VPL-activity, and should be presented in an updated version.

These statements will be clarified in this report.

1.2 Main changes since 2014 update

Since 2014, the situation in relation to the validation of prior learning has not significantly changed. The legislation has remained the same in most sectors of education. However the legislation in the VET system on Vocational Education and Training programmes was changed as of August 2015 to include new VET programmes for adults 25 years old and beyond (EUV), building on an initial validation of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning and work experience.

By spring 2016 the government launched a number of new initiatives targeting refugees. These initiatives promoted the use of validation and recognition of refugees’ skills and competences which also included a new web portal on exiting measures and tools on the basis of a tripartite agreement with the social partners and a bipartite agreement with the municipalities in Denmark.
Concerns about the use of validation of prior learning as a coherent and integrated process (including the information, identification, documentation, assessment and certification stages) has been a focus of public debates in recent years. This means that awareness of different tasks and stages of the validation process has increased among different stakeholders, such as job centres, trade unions, guidance institutions, educational institutions, actors from working life and third sector. Funded projects, e.g. the Interreg programme, which aims to develop tools to be used in an integrated process include the above mentioned activities which then take place in a strong collaborative process between involved stakeholders. Nevertheless, the use of validation arrangements by the above-mentioned stakeholders remains low and thus needs further improvements.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

The validation of non-formal and informal learning has been on the policy agenda in Denmark for about 20 years and is seen as a key element to promote lifelong learning in Denmark. In practice, validation of non-formal and informal learning in Denmark broadly speaking provides individuals with the following opportunities:

- to be granted access to formal education and training programmes if they do not meet the formal entry requirements
- to get exemptions for parts of a formal education and training programme and/or have an individual tailored education and training programme
- to acquire a ‘certificate of competence’ leading to access/exemptions in adult education and training programmes
- to obtain ‘education certificates’ for parts of/or a whole education programme on the basis of validation of prior learning.

Competence assessment and possible outcomes in terms of access, exemption and acquiring certificates varies between the different education and training sectors e.g. VET, HE and adult education and training. For almost all formal adult education and training a legal framework for validation of prior learning based on common principles has been in place since 2007. VET programmes for adults are targeted at adults 25 and above but in the other sectors there are no age regulations.

Within this framework, it is a right for individuals to request an assessment of their prior learning in relation to the standards of an education and training programme no matter where and how competences have been required.

This procedure is known in Danish as the (individual) ‘assessment of real competences’ realkompetencevurdering (RKV) or individuel kompetencevurdering (IKV).¹

Validation has been developed in Denmark both from a top-down approach and a bottom-up approach. The legislation and the formal framework have been set nationally, but the implementation is decentralised at the provider level. Financial constraints still pose obstacles to implementation and great differences still remain between the educational institutions with regards to their level of activity.

¹ Both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science recommend the following use of the terms: "When prior learning assessment systems are referred to in general and in relation to the educational institutions’ overall task of assessment and validation of prior learning, the term RKV is used. In the case of prior learning assessments within the individual programmes both IKV and RKV are used, as the term IKV is used within all educational areas, with the exception of the further education system for adults, where RKV is used "(RKV Working Group Report, Annex 1, Ministry of Children and Education, November 2011). Source: http://www.viauc.dk/viden-om-realkompetence/rkv-hvad-og-hvorfor/hvad-er-realkompetence/Sider/begreberne-rkv-og-ikv.aspx
Validation of non-formal and informal learning has also been an important focal point for many years in the non-formal sector especially among organisations and institutions engaged in liberal education. Tools for documenting knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal education etc. have been developed.

In the field of adult learning, in 2010 – 2011, the Ministry of Education carried out an evaluation of the implementation of the 2007 Act no. 556 (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2010b) which provides the legal basis for validation of prior learning within adult education and training programmes. The evaluation concluded that validation of prior learning within the adult education and training programmes receives broad support from relevant stakeholders (including social partners) and is seen as a very important instrument to promote participation in adult and continuing training. However, there is still considerable potential for development and improvement concerning information/awareness raising, standardisation, quality assurance and cooperation between stakeholders (educational institutions, job centres, unemployment funds, trade unions, third sector, etc.).

In February 2013 the government launched an ambitious plan for growth in Denmark (”Væktsplan.dk”) including the strengthening of quality in public adult education and training and a reform of vocational education and training. A renewed legal framework for vocational education and training also including further promotion and development of validation of prior learning especially for adults. This reform has been implemented since August 2015.

In Denmark, the validation of prior learning is regulated by laws, as follows:

- The legislation for upper general education including executive order BEK nr 130 of 21/02/2011 entitles students to get credit transfers for prior learning on the basis of an individual assessment.
- The legislation for VET2 (2015) for adults aged 25 and above (EUV) includes a general principle of individual competence assessment as a basis for preparation of personal education plans for each individual. The personal education plan is based on an assessment of the pupils’ competences and outlines an individual pathway through the VET system.
- Act no. 556 of 6 June 20073, entitled ‘Development of the validation of prior learning in adult education and continuing training’, effective from August 2007 gives each individual the right to have his/her prior learning experiences validated in relation to specific goals of adult education and continuing training programmes4. Citizens from other EU countries are granted the same rights to undergo validation processes. Act no. 556 includes the following six educational fields as part of adult education:
  - Single course subjects in general adult education (avu);
  - Single course subjects in general upper secondary education;
  - Vocational training programme (AMU);
  - Basic adult education (GVU) which by 2015 has been replaced by the new VET programmes for adults;
  - Short-cycle post-secondary adult education (VVU); and
  - Medium-cycle post-secondary adult education (‘Diploma’ programme).

According to Danish law, the assessment must be conducted by the educational institution offering the corresponding study programmes.

Since 2007, legislation5 allows individuals to gain access to short-cycle and medium-cycle Higher Education (Bachelor-level degrees) based on an individual competence assessment.

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2 www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=164802
3 https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/r0710.aspx?id=25349
4 In 2001 the further education system for adults was established as a parallel system to the ordinary education system. It consists of Basic Adult Education (GVU) up to Master’s level programmes and aims to award certificates of competences to adults, and to offer further learning and education.
http://uvm.dk/Uddannelse/Uddannelse%20og%20undervising%20for%20voksne/Om%20uddannelse%20og%20undervising%20for%20voksne.aspx
5 https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=145524
The educational institutions are responsible for information, guidance and assessment of the individual. The Ministry for Children, Education and Gender\(^6\) and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science\(^7\) are responsible for the legislative framework for the assessment of prior learning and for taking national initiatives for implementing the legislation. The Ministries have developed policy guidelines and funded projects with the aim of developing tools, methods and procedures.

In 2016, the Danish Ministry of Defence has initiated a review of the Danish Veteran Policy for Army Personnel. The Ministry of Higher Education and Science and The Ministry of Children, Education and Gender are participating in the review in order to help improve validation processes and access to education/training for veterans, including the promotion of greater awareness of existing opportunities in the field of education/training.

### 2.2 Validation in education and training

Educational institutions are responsible for counselling/guidance, and for assessing and approving validation within their educational and training programmes. Educational institutions also have the responsibility for quality assurance, review and evaluation.

Other stakeholders act as guidance institutions, e.g. job centres, trade unions, unemployment security funds and the third sector.

The implementation of the legislation is decentralised. The tradition in Denmark is that legislation provides a framework that outlines how the educational institutions have to act, in order to promote quality assurance and to ensure evaluation with a view to developing quality systems, methods, etc.

In 2010, the Ministry of Education made a national action plan on validation of prior learning with four initiatives taking place across all relevant adult educational areas:

1. Mapping out the key players in guidance and counselling,
2. Examining the possibilities of applying a broader perspective in the VPL in the adult educational system, including a vocational as well as employment-perspective,
3. Quality assurance with a special focus on developing a code of conduct for validation of prior learning,
4. An emphasis on improving information in order to support a broader implementation of validation of prior learning in all adult educational areas.

In Spring 2011, a committee was established in order to prepare the action plan. In the report of the committee, the model for validation illustrated in Figure 2.1 was proposed:

\(^6\) [http://eng.uvm.dk/](http://eng.uvm.dk/)
The model describes a coherent process of four stages including identification, documentation, assessment and certification.

It is the educational institution which is responsible for identifying one or more study objectives or admission requirements against which a candidate is to be evaluated, providing the specific counselling and guidance and conducting the assessment.

According to the Act No. 556 of 2007, each adult education institution is responsible for organising the process of validation of prior learning. The institutions can assess and validate prior learning in adult education and continuing training for the following purposes:

- To access formal education, i.e. using non-formal/informal experiences to meet the admission requirements for a given study programme;
- To tailor a study programme or to award credits for certain classes up to Master's level;
- To award a 'Competence certificate' if the participant meets the requirements of part of an educational programme; and,
- To award an 'Education certificate' if the participant’s competences are proven to be the same as those obtained by completing an entire educational programme.

8 Certificates of admission can be used for GVU, VVU and Diploma programmes. Certificates of competency can be issued for all six education areas, while certificates of education cannot be issued for general adult education and general upper secondary subjects at VUC.
certificates are the same as the certificates obtained through the respective education programme.

In the Higher Education (HE) sector, most validation of prior learning takes place at the Diploma level. The qualifications framework is used to provide criteria for the assessment of the validation application for candidate’s admission or for the award of competence certificates. A network has been established between the University Colleges to ensure a common approach to validation.

In the mainstream education system there is action by the University Colleges to develop systems to ensure best practice in validation of prior learning for access to the Medium Cycle Higher Education (academy professional degrees and bachelor degrees).

The vocational education institutions providing AMU and the Adult Education Centres (VUC) all participate in 13 local Adult and Continuing Training Centres (VEU-centres). The 13 VEU centres were established in 2010 to provide a unified gateway to both general adult education and vocational adult education and continuing training, with greater focus on quality and effectiveness. The VEU-centres also have a responsibility for promoting programmes for validation of prior learning (VPL) and for improving the quality of the programmes in the participating educational institutions.

There is no national, coordinated concept for the validation of prior learning at the Business Academies. The institutions are free to build up their own concept within the legislation. In 2016 a FOU-project is being carried out, aiming to provide recommendations for a national concept regarding validation of prior learning for the academy professional programmes and Diploma programmes. The project targets refugees and the IT-area.

### 2.3 Validation and the labour market

Other bodies can be in charge of information, identification, guidance and counselling, in a broader perspective, in the phase leading up to the assessment process (‘the pre-phase’). These include, among others, trade unions, employers’ associations, job centres, unemployment insurance funds, civic education institutions, study committees and ‘eVejledning’ (online guidance service), who can all take responsibility for this part of the process often in collaboration with the educational institution.

Focus in the ‘pre-phase’ is on establishing objectives, identifying needs, direction and wishes. Companies can contribute by defining new tasks and future business plans with matching competence profiles. For individuals, both employees and jobseekers, this part of the process may include documentation of what they have previously learned. For both companies and individuals, the pre-phase helps clarify and identify objectives and the direction for career development, and it helps create a potential plan for the types of formal education which would be relevant in future.

The social partners as well as private sector organisations are often involved in the development of VPL programmes. They have contributed significantly to the development to VPL and have influenced a number of areas within the legislation on VPL. The Vocational Training Committees have decided the criteria for assessment in VET programmes for adults.

Private enterprises in Denmark use resources for competence development to a large extent, e.g. large enterprises such as Post Denmark (www.postdanmark.dk) and Novo Nordisk Scandinavia (www.novonordisk.dk). However, this is not common amongst small enterprises. Validation of prior learning is in use especially in cases of development of companies as well as in the downsizing and closing of enterprises.

In the area of adult vocational education and training, there is a tradition of collaboration between enterprises and formal educational institutions concerning competence development of employees including validation. The social partners have an important role in strengthening this collaboration.
The social partners

The Box 1 below describes the role of some of the main social partners in the validation of prior learning.

Box 1 Danish social partners and validation of non-formal and informal learning

The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) is very engaged and interested in the validation of prior learning. This is especially relevant now following the government’s latest proposal for VET reform, where validation plays an important part of the effort towards up-skilling adults.

LO sees validation as a very relevant tool in relation to educational policy that can move adults from unskilled to skilled workers and from skilled workers to highly educated and skilled. This is also known as the two-fold educational improvement.

LO believes that the main issue is for employees with vocational experience to gain recognition or validation of the skills that they have learned in practice. In this way, adults will be able to acquire skills that correspond to the set requirements of education/training level at a faster pace than young people without work experience.

LO is involved in the shaping of policies and strategies at the political level, it performs tasks and is represented at central, regional and local level in the bodies of the vocational education system.

So far, the use of validation of prior learning with regard to the twofold educational improvement has been scarce. LO believes that the greatest challenge is defining a common set of norms for the process of validation of prior learning. Another challenge reported by LO is balancing the individual validation assessments and the collective/group validation assessments in certain types of business so that more people than before can gain credits for the skills they acquired and thereby complete a vocational education level at a faster pace than the ones lacking work, practical experience.

LO believes that work still remains to be done in ensuring that the validation results in recognition, which in turn creates an educational process that improves the competences of each adult.

LO points out that Denmark has come far in its plans about validation and the implementation of validation. However the country still has a long way to go before declaring validation as well established, both within the responsible institutions and in terms of the content that enables it to become successful among employees and contribute to two-fold educational improvement.

This requires a steady and conscious effort from all stakeholders involved in the development of VPL.

The Confederation of Danish Employers (DA) is very focused on and interested in the validation of prior learning, especially in the field of adult education and continuing training.

DA believes that assessments of prior learning contribute to facilitating the access to continuing training and to creating the basis for shortening an education process or tailoring it to each individual. Also, assessments of prior learning present an opportunity for the individual to obtain partial or full certificates.

Like LO, DA is involved in the shaping of policies and strategies at the political level and is represented at both central, regional and local level in the bodies of the vocational education and training system including initial as well continuing VET.

9 http://www.lo.dk/English%20version/About%20LO.aspx
10 http://www.da.dk/default.asp
The Confederation of Professionals in Denmark (TFT)\(^{11}\) acts as a central organisation representing professionals’ organisations. The organisations under TFT take different approaches to validation due to the fact that they have different views on its applicability.

The organisations in TFT are concerned about the user fee to be paid by individuals for validation in higher education. The TFT believe that it is crucial to remove this fee.

Several TFT organisations list information about the options for validation on their websites and provide guidance for their members on validation pathways.

There is a lot of focus on the possible progress in the use of validation in TFT and many see the procedures of educational institutions, the actors primarily responsible for this task, as slow and complex. Many are also concerned with providing validation in relation to the labour market and jobs to a greater extent.

Several unions take part in working groups with other stakeholders in order to strengthen the effort towards skills development of their members through validation.

2.3.1 Skills audits

In Denmark, it should be noted that procedures for the validation of prior learning can also be interpreted as a form of competence identification and documentation or skills audit.

A number of tools have been developed for the documentation of competences. They facilitate a written, systematic mapping of competences divided into different categories.

In Denmark, a distinction is often made between general and specific types of competence assessment:

- A general or divergent assessment aims to identify all competences mastered by the individual. The focus of the process is for the person to clarify and describe all of his/her prior learning in order to identify future choices of job and education. Often, the process will follow a formative learning approach. Example of approaches include My Competence Portfolio: www.minkompetencemappe.dk and the tool for documentation of and dialogue about personal competences: http://www.realkompetence-folkeoplysning.dk/ . The Competence Portfolio is currently being updated by the Ministry of Children, Education and Gender.

- A specific or convergent assessment aims to identify which of the individuals' competences are relevant in relation to the standards of a specific qualification. This can be carried out after a broad assessment. An example of an approach for technical professions and qualifications is the Misc. IT test tools, i.e. http://www.knowentia.com/ or www.IU.dk

Most tools include self-assessments during which the individual is to grade his/her experience, knowledge or competences on a scale typically ranging from 1 to 6. Often, the individuals themselves describe their competences. In other instances, the competences have been described in advance, and the individuals are merely required to assess their competences on a certain scale. Documentation through self-assessment enables individuals to reflect on their own competences and makes it possible to describe them in a systematic way. In order for the documentation to be reliable, self-assessments cannot stand alone. Other methods used for documentation are tests, i.e. multiple choice or written assignments.

2.4 Validation and the third sector

The third-sector stakeholders\(^{12}\), including actors in the field of non-formal education, fulfill two tasks related to validation of prior learning. They:

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\(^{11}\) [http://www.ftf.dk/index.php?id=33303](http://www.ftf.dk/index.php?id=33303)

\(^{12}\) [http://www.daea.dk](http://www.daea.dk)
provide information and guidance about the available options for validation of prior learning,

- support participants in clarifying, wording and documenting their prior learning.

For the folk high schools and the production schools\(^\text{13}\), the work related to clarifying and documenting the participants’ prior learning has become mainstreamed. It is now mandatory by law for the production schools to issue certificates of professional competence to pupils\(^\text{14}\).

Many institutions in the non-formal learning area, as folk high schools, independent vocational schools and \textit{efterskoler} (continuation schools) focus on clarifying the students’ personal and social competences together with their professional profile. The evening schools and \textit{Folkeuniversitetet} (adult education schools) see validation of prior learning as only relevant for a very limited number of participants, most of which are aged over 50.

In recent years, sports and youth organisations have not had a particular focus on validation of prior learning.

However, two research projects on how to build adults’ motivation towards learning and how to engage with hard-to-reach individuals disengaged from formal education suggest that a better identification and clarification of competences of participants is a key success factor of validation\(^\text{15}\).

DAEA, the Danish Adult Education Association\(^\text{16}\) uses the \textit{Realkompetenceforum} (Forum for real competences (an informal network)) as a meeting point for the exchange of updates and experiences in a professional context amongst stakeholders within non-formal education. The forum convenes once a year.

### 3 Links to national qualification systems

There is a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) in place in Denmark, covering all types and levels of qualification awarded and which is quality assured by public authorities. The proposal for the eight-level framework was adopted in 2009 and the NQF was referenced to the EQF in May 2011. Most qualifications in the Danish NQF are accessible /can be acquired on the basis of validation.

It has been considered that the framework may be opened up to qualifications and certificates in the private and non-formal sector, in a second stage of development and/or implementation (Cedefop, 2013).

### 4 Standards

As noted in previous Inventory country reports for Denmark, there is a credit transfer system in general upper secondary education, which is based on an assessment of an individual’s prior learning. Students can get transfer (not credit based as ECTS) for previously completed studies, periods of study abroad, etc., and can be granted admission to subjects at a higher

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\(^{13}\) The Danish folk high schools offer non-formal adult education. Most students are between 18 and 24 years old and the length of a typical stay is 4 months. Schools of production are open to youth under the age of 25, who have not yet completed youth education or find it difficult to see a way forward in further education or job.

\(^{14}\) Section 2, sub section 8: https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=141721


\(^{16}\) http://www.daea.dk/
level, to extra optional subjects, or a reduced advanced level course load (where the credit transfer is particularly substantial). Assessment is made after entry.

In HE, ECTS is in use and the modularised structure supports the validation process. Individuals can be awarded competence certificates on the basis of validation.

In Denmark, qualification standards and general procedures and executive orders are used as basis for validation in public funded programmes.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The Ministry for Children, Education and Gender\(^{17}\) and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science\(^{18}\), are responsible for the legislative framework for assessment of prior learning and for taking national initiatives for implementing the legislation. The Ministries have developed policy guidelines and funded projects with the aim of developing tools, methods and procedures.

The implementation of the legislation is decentralised to a high degree. As mentioned above, the tradition in Denmark is that legislation provides a framework that outlines how the educational institutions have to act in order to provide quality assurance and sound evaluation with a view to developing quality systems, methods, etc.

Educational institutions are responsible for counselling/guidance, and for assessing and approving validation within their educational and training programmes. Educational institutions also have the responsibility for quality assurance, review and evaluation.

In 2007, the NVR or National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning\(^{19}\) was set up. It was funded by the Ministry of Education until 2010. The aim of the knowledge centre is to collect, produce and disseminate information and documentation on existing knowledge about the validation of prior learning.

In the area of Adult Vocational Training, as well as Vocational Education and Training, social partners are usually involved in decisions about the assessment of prior learning. They have contributed significantly and have influenced a number of areas within the legislation. Thus the Government works closely with social partners, for example with the Council for Vocational Education and Training (REU), the Council for Adult Education and Training (VEU-Rådet), the Council for the Academy of Professional Education and Professional Bachelor Education. These Councils advise the Government on their specific areas of education and training.

The Vocational Training Committees define the content of VET qualifications and competence frameworks. There are also vocational committees that act at a local level. Vocational Continuing Training Committees play a similar role in relation to adult vocational training programmes.

As mentioned above, educational institutions themselves are responsible for counselling/guidance and for carrying out assessments against their educational and training programmes. Educational institutions also have the responsibility for quality assurance, review and evaluation. Other stakeholders act as guidance institutions, e.g. job centres; the trade unions and the third sector are also involved in guidance and counselling.

Interaction and collaboration between stakeholders from policy to practitioner levels assists the integration of a top-down strategy with a bottom-up strategy.

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17 http://eng.uvm.dk/
19 http://www.nvr.nu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=105&Itemid=159
All active stakeholders wish to see more progress in relation to the validation of prior learning. They also agree that cooperation between the main stakeholders is important in order to make progress. Collaboration between stakeholders is expected to strengthen the use of validation of prior learning, to create stable and visible practice (Nistrup and Lund, 2010) and to develop a common use of terminology and to exchange knowledge about each other’s practices (Focus on Validation of Prior Learning, nr 3).

In order to strengthen validation work in some sectors of higher education in Denmark, the Danish Ministry for Science, Innovation and Higher Education initiated a Knowledge Platform for validation in University Colleges and Vocational Academies. The coordination of the platform is ensured by the knowledge centre NVR (www.nvr.nu).

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

The Ministry for Children, Education and Gender provides extensive information about validation of prior learning on its website. The educational institutions that offer validation of prior learning also have the duty to provide information on their websites. Guidance bodies, such as Job Centres and Study Guidance Centres and social partners, also provide information on validation of prior learning.

While educational institutions are required to inform the public about validation of prior learning, based on experiences from practitioners in the field, there is still an insufficient level of information about the existing validation procedures in Denmark and too many potential users are not aware of the validation opportunities available to them.

In the autumn of 2012, the Danish Ministry of Education launched an information campaign to increase awareness about validation of prior learning and promote the use of available opportunities in this respect. The campaign was carried out by the VEU centres at local level. The campaign was based on a recommendation from a report by the working group on validation of prior learning (November 2011). Both online and offline platforms were used to communicate the campaign's messages. The idea behind using different online platforms was to increase the visibility of the campaign and to generate traffic to the websites of the VEU centers. The campaign had a positive effect and increased considerably the public’s awareness of the validation of prior learning.

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

A counselling web portal provides general information about validation of prior learning (www.ug.dk).

Stakeholders, including study committees, job centres, trade unions and others, provide general information and support for documentation concerning the validation process, and also provide guidance to the individual about their choice of further learning and career options.

Guidance, such as one-to-one support and group support, with regards to the specific VPL-programmes, is provided by educational institutions and the Adult and Continuing Training Centres (VEU-centres). Job centres, trade unions and non-formal adult education providers also offer guidance on VPL. However, guidance is not currently coordinated between these different bodies and stakeholders.

20 http://www.uvm.dk/Uddannelse/Tvaergaende%20omraader/Temaer/Realkompetence/Om%20Realkompetence.aspx
21 http://www.veu-center.dk/shared/findditguld.html
‘eVejledning’ is an online guidance service that also provides information and guidance regarding validation of prior learning.

In 2014, a new course was developed within the vocational training programme (AMU) with the main purpose of supporting participants in identification and documentation of competences in regards to education and employment, including the different VPL-programmes.

A new website including information on validation and recognition which targets refugees will be put in place in 2016.

6.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

Within eVejledning (online guidance service), initiatives have been developed to train the guidance practitioners in order to enhance knowledge and awareness of the VPL-programmes.

The adult and continuing training centres (VEU-centres) have also, for a number of years, focused on qualifying their guidance practitioners with regard to guidance and counselling on the VPL-programmes which are linked to general and vocational adult education and training. Furthermore, some projects have been initiated in 2012 and 2013 through the transversal development pool (TUP) with the purpose of strengthening the use of individual competence assessments in the VPL-programmes in AMU; a primary or partial focus of some of these projects was on the procedure for qualifying guidance practitioners with regards to VPL. The TUP project is described in Box 2 at the end of this report.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

‘Validation practitioners’ in Denmark include counsellors/advisors, assessors, teachers, administrative staff and staff from guidance organisations (i.e. job centres). The main practitioners involved in the validation of prior learning are counsellors/advisors and assessors. Validation assessors are usually teachers and counsellors from the concerned educational institutions.

7.2 Qualifications requirements

There is no mandatory qualification requirements for the advisers and counsellors involved in the validation of prior learning.

The Danish legislation stipulates that the qualification requirements for the validation assessors are the same as for those required to teach in the formal education system. Educational institutions are responsible for ensuring that assessors possess the appropriate qualifications and skills to assess VPL applications; educational institutions also provide the necessary courses and training for the assessors.

7.3 Provision of training and support to practitioners

A number of different initiatives have been undertaken to support practitioners’ professional development.

The national umbrella organisation DAEA, the Danish Adult Education Association, provides a training programme for teachers and guidance counsellors acting as ‘prior learning guides’. The objective of the course is to help participants from the field of non-formal adult education and the third sector:

- To work with guidance and counselling in relation to the process of clarification and documentation of prior learning based on the latest research;
To use tools for clarification and documentation of prior learning, including the tools developed by the Ministry of Education; and,

To train and support others in working in a professional way as a ‘prior learning guide’ "(sparring partner)".

The course consists of two days of introduction, a hands-on phase, one day of research presentation and sharing of practical examples, some role play on how to act as a ‘prior learning guide’ and one day of discussion with representatives of the formal education system and the labour market.

As a working tool for clarification and mapping of competences in the third sector, the Danish Ministry of Education initiated in 2005 the development of a web-based competence mapping tool. This tool is in many ways too demanding to be used especially for low-skilled people, and this has called for innovative approaches to support the mapping process. To meet this demand, DAEA has developed a set of competence cards, which are based on the structure and content of the web-based mapping tool. The purpose of establishing a set of ‘prior leaning guides’ is that the target group needs support in order to acknowledge, identify and describe competences. The aim of the training is to make the prior ‘learning guides’ equipped to help participants in the non-formal learning sector to clarify and document their prior learning.

The National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning (NVR) has also organised several seminars, courses and conferences for ‘validation practitioners’ in recent years. In 2011, the NVR was asked to develop a higher education course (module) on validation of prior learning. The module has been approved in the formal education system and can be offered by University Colleges. The module covers both theory and practice, its objective being:

- to allow participants to gain an understanding of validation of prior learning as an extended pathway to competence development,
- how to support validation of prior learning in all phases of the process,
- and how to use methods and tools for identification, documentation, certification of prior learning and quality assurance.

The target group for this module consists of staff who work with validation of prior learning, e.g. counsellors, teachers, coordinators and managers, counsellors at Job Centres, youth counsellors, counsellors in trade unions and third sector. To participate in this module, participants must have a short-cycle or medium-cycle higher education and minimum two years of relevant work experience (applicants with other experiences and equivalent backgrounds may be admitted through validation of prior learning).

Before developing this module, the NVR implemented a pilot course for establishing the SCK (the Agency for Competence Development in the State Sector22). About 100 practitioners participated in the pilot course; the evaluation was very positive and pointed out that further competence development for practitioners is needed.

8 Quality assurance

The validation of prior learning is always based on the objectives and admission requirements of a given educational programme. Educational institutions are responsible for quality assurance. The Ministry of Education has set out some principles for assessment and quality assurance, which state that the methods used must ensure a reliable assessment, inspiring confidence in the outcomes, and that institutions are required to have an evaluation system. Educational institutions have to ensure transparency and quality in the process of validation of prior learning.

In the national action plan (see p. 4), quality was identified as one of the principles cutting across all relevant adult education programmes and sectors with a specific focus on

22 http://www.kompetenceudvikling.dk/node/477
developing a code of conduct for validation of competences. In 2012, the VPL committee decided however not to recommend the development of a code of conduct but to recommend the production of a booklet about examples of good practices in all education sectors. The committee justified that there was a higher need for developing concrete tools to support best practice. The NVR published the booklet ‘Anerkendelse af realkompetencer - sådan gør vi’ / Validation of prior learning – how we do it (only available in Danish). This booklet includes examples of good practices about the validation of prior learning in the workplace and also individual experiences.

Denmark has also been involved in the development of a quality model in relation to the validation of informal and non-formal learning in the Nordic Countries (May 2013)\(^\text{23}\). The Nordic Expert network\(^\text{24}\) for Validation outlined quality as a key issue in the validation of prior learning. Experts from five Nordic countries – Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark - cooperated as part of a Nordplus project (led by the NVR) with the aim of developing a common model for quality assurance. In 2015, a Nordic research project was established to examine and develop the use of the model for improving quality in validation.

As stated above, each individual educational institution is required to build its own system for quality assurance. With the new development contracts between the local Adult and Continuing Training Centres (VEU-centres) and the Ministry of education, it is intended for the VEU-centres to play a role in supporting the development of common procedures and quality standards among the participating institutions in the VEU-centres.

In 2014, the organisation of vocational education institutions providing adult vocational training (AMU) established an audit network, where vocational education institutions cooperate on quality assurance of the AMU-programme, including VPL within AMU. The purpose of the network is to create a platform for the sharing of knowledge with a focus on streamlining interpretation of the legal framework and strengthening the quality of the programme. The concept of AMU audit consists of checklists and guidelines for announced and unannounced audits. Participation in the audit network is voluntary. About 80 % of the vocational education institutions participate in the network.

According to the principles set by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education on assessment and quality assurance, each individual educational institution is required to have an evaluation system.

Some evaluations have been carried out at national level. In the Status Report of May 2010 (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2010b), the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) has provided an overview on quality assurance in relation to assessments of prior learning within adult learning (see pp. 13-14 of the English version of this report).

9 _Inputs, outputs and outcomes_

9.1 _Funding_

Validation of prior learning is financially supported by the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender or the Ministry of Higher Education and Science. Public funding covers assessment at educational institutions, but does not cover the information, or clarification in the process about the individual’s application. Educational institutions can charge a fee for the assessment of prior learning with regard to the VPL-programmes covering higher education.

Organisations involved in the validation of prior learning must absorb the associated costs within their existing budgets.


\(^{24}\) [http://www.nordvux.net/page/601/](http://www.nordvux.net/page/601/)
9.2 Distribution of costs

The assessment of reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic and mathematical skills in Preparatory Adult Education, or in courses included in the ‘common competence description’ in the adult vocational training system, is free of charge for participants. Within adult vocational education and training (EUV and AMU), validation is free of charge; the institutions are paid one-off taximeter funds\(^{25}\) for competence assessment, personal study, training plan (EUV), and for the competence assessment (AMU).

Within general adult education, the validation of prior learning in terms of issuing a competence certificate (from August 2008), there are no user fees but taximeter funding will be used.

Within the AMU-programmes, VVPL participants are entitled to a fixed VEU-allowance financed by the State (VEU-godtgørelse), corresponding to 80 % of the maximum unemployment insurance benefit rate. As most participants are employed and receive full salary during the validation period, this allowance is primarily paid to employers as partial wage reimbursement. As with education and training within AMU, expenditure for the allowances is covered by the employers’ reimbursement scheme (Arbejdsgiverenes Uddannelsesbidrag, AUB) to which all enterprises contribute a fixed amount regardless of levels of participation in adult education and continuing training activities, as well as State financing.

User fees for competence assessment are only applicable for individuals with higher education level qualifications up to and including upper secondary level. Higher education institutions are paid one-off taximeter funds if the validation of prior learning results in the programme being shortened, or in the issuing of a certificate/diploma.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

There is no evidence so far of the benefits of validation arrangements to individuals in Denmark, according to the stakeholders interviewed.

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

The table below shows the number of users of validation of prior learning from 2010-2012, based on data from the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9.1 Validation of prior learning in 2010-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual students</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{25}\) For an explanation of taximeter funding, see: [http://eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/General/The-taximeter-system](http://eng.uvm.dk/Fact-Sheets/General/The-taximeter-system)

\(^{26}\) An ‘annual full-time pupil’ is a measure used to calculate the annual activity of a certain course or certificate. One annual full-time pupil equates to one student in full-time training for one year. The training-period of individual competence evaluation within vocational training (IKV in AMU) varies between 0.5 - 5 days, i.e. between 0.0025 and 0.025 annual full-time pupils. In 2012 there were 8 683 participants registered in IKV in AMU.

** in contrast to the data from the 2010 inventory, the activity on GVU includes both employed and unemployed participants. The data can therefore not be directly compared to the activity noted in the 2010 inventory. GVU was in August 2015 replaced by the EUV.

*** On VVU-degrees and diploma degrees the activity is shown in number of persons. The number is based on the paid taximeter funds to Higher education institutions for validations, that results in exemption of 15 % or more of the educational programme. The number of individuals registered is a low estimate, since the individuals who get access through validation or exemption from less than 15 % of the programme are not registered.
It should be noted that the method of calculation is different for the various educational programmes, and the numbers of users are therefore not directly comparable. There is still a need for more detailed statistics and registration of the use of VPL in the vocational academies at Diploma level. For example, the number of individuals who gain access to the Diploma level through validation of informal and non-formal learning is not recorded. Validation use is still relatively low, but it is increasing within vocational academies and GVU (now EUV) since 2010 and within HF and AVU since 2008. Within AMU, the validation use has decreased significantly, which can be partly explained by a general decrease in the education activity in the AMU programme.

Within the diploma programmes, VPL often results in admission to or exemptions from part of an educational programme. Participants rarely receive validation for an entire educational programme. The number of individuals who gain access to the ‘diploma’ programme (higher education for adults) through validation of prior learning is not recorded, which means that the number of individuals registered is underestimated compared to the actual level of use.

### 9.4.2 Validation users

There are no systematic statistics on the characteristics of the validation users distributed according to age, gender etc.

### 9.4.3 Validation and migrants / refugees and other disadvantaged groups

The legislation on VPL does not identify any special need groups such as refugees, disadvantaged groups or others. Existing projects are generally targeted at unemployed people and at those at risk of unemployment. Other projects are part of the national strategy for competence requirements for low-qualified people.

Since autumn 2015, the topic of refugees has been high on the VPL policy agenda. In January 2016, a three-party working group (made up of representatives from the Government and from the social partners) discussed the integration of refugees including through VPL. A decision on how to use VPL for the integration of refugees is expected to be released in spring 2016.

### 10 Validation methods

In Denmark, there is a variety of assessment methods in use. Each educational institution uses different methods which complement each other. Some are developing their own methods and/or are tailoring methods to the context and the experiences of the individuals they serve.

The methods are not standardised and an exchange of experience would be helpful. In some sectors of the education system, there are established networks working to develop a common approach to ensure credibility and validity in the use of methods for validation.

According to the evaluation prepared by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) in 2010, the dialogue-based method is the most common assessment method used across the Danish training and education system.

The declarative method is also very common. It means that the individuals are also responsible for making the prior learned competences visible. The table below refers to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocational training (AMU)</th>
<th>279.3</th>
<th>197.4</th>
<th>53</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic adult education (GVU)**</td>
<td>32.97</td>
<td>34.84</td>
<td>78.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General upper secondary education (HF)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General adult education (AVU)</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVU - degrees and diploma degrees***</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
validation in relation to the adult education sector as covered in Act No. 556 on the ‘Development of the recognition of prior learning in adult education and continuing training’.

Table 10.1 Assessment methods in the adult education sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Simulation</th>
<th>Authentic cases</th>
<th>Tests and exams</th>
<th>Written assignments</th>
<th>CV documents</th>
<th>Portfolio</th>
<th>Self-assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMU</td>
<td>95 %</td>
<td>65 %</td>
<td>34 %</td>
<td>75 %</td>
<td>49 %</td>
<td>83 %</td>
<td>57 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GVU</td>
<td>98 %</td>
<td>64 %</td>
<td>35 %</td>
<td>75 %</td>
<td>55 %</td>
<td>87 %</td>
<td>53 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVU</td>
<td>88 %</td>
<td>22 %</td>
<td>22 %</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>77 %</td>
<td>88 %</td>
<td>22 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common academic gymnasiu m</td>
<td>94 %</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>94 %</td>
<td>77 %</td>
<td>94 %</td>
<td>17 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academies</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>25 %</td>
<td>50 %</td>
<td>62 %</td>
<td>62 %</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>50 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomas</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>22 %</td>
<td>44 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>44 %</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>77 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry for Children, Education and Gender

The methodology used can be a combination of the declarative method, written test, examination and self-assessment. It can be supported by the use of tools online and offline. It is common in Denmark to combine different methods in order to secure or strengthen the reliability of the assessment (triangulation) of validation (Aagaard and Dahler, 2010).

Oral assessment or dialogue-based methods involve a one-to-one discussion, dialogue or interview with the candidate. The interview can sometimes take place at the beginning of the assessment and thus can be the primary method used. The interview can also take place after the test, written assignment or the self-assessment and can be a supplement to these other different methods. It can support the reflection and verification of individual competences.

Interviews are often combined with tests and exams and practical assignments at AMU and VET. Practical assignments are mostly used at AMU and VET levels in Denmark.

Written assignments are often combined with interviews concerning general qualifications.

Concerning the ‘diploma’ and higher education qualifications, interviews are often combined with a portfolio/CV, self-assessments and written assignments.

Practice-oriented methods (i.e. observation of problem solving in practice in the workplace, solving practical tasks and problems in a simulated workplace and solving real cases) have been, to some extent, applied in relation to the validation of prior learning in Denmark, (although they turned out to be difficult to apply). Such methods are therefore often combined with other methods, such as tests, interviews or written assignments, which reflect on problem solving.

11 References

11.1 References

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http://www.industriensuddannelser.dk/luu/materialer/fkb2752/materialer/3997/4000.pdf

http://www.industriensuddannelser.dk/luu/materialer/fkb2752/materialer/3997/4001.pdf (Danish)

Focus on Validation of Prior Learning, nr 3. http://www.nvr.nu (Danish)


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The Danish Evaluation Institute, 2009. [www.eva.dk](http://www.eva.dk) (Danish)


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*Validation of prior learning in a Nordic perspective.* The Danish Evaluation Institute, 2010. [www.eva.dk](http://www.eva.dk) (Danish)


### 11.2 Sources

2014 Sources:

- The Ministry for Children, Education and Gender
- The Danish Ministry of Education: [www.eng.uvm.dk/](http://www.eng.uvm.dk/)
- The Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education: [http://fivu.dk/en](http://fivu.dk/en)
- Department of Political Science, Aalborg University
- LO, the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions
- FTF, the Confederation of Professionals in Denmark
- DAEA, the Danish Adult Education Association

2016 Sources:

- The Ministry for Children, Education and Gender
- The Ministry of Higher Education and Science
- Department of Political Science, Aalborg University
- LO, the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions
- FTF, the Confederation of Professionals in Denmark
- DAEA, the Danish Adult Education Association

### 11.3 Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives

The different initiatives undertaken in Denmark to strengthen and develop the use of validation of prior learning are presented in the boxes below.

#### Box 2 Programme on Transversal Development – TUP, 2012

The purpose of the Tværgående Udviklingspulje (Programme on Transversal Development), TUP, is to improve the quality and impact of AMU by promoting transversal
innovation, experiment and development of the pedagogical tools and the organisation of the teaching content in AMU courses. AMU suppliers, including the VEU-centres and the committees for continuing education, can apply for funding from the pool.

In 2012, 10 projects were awarded financial support from the TUP and each got a share of the pool of 13 million Danish kroner, allocated by the Ministry of Education to strengthen the use of individual competence assessments in labour market education (IKV in AMU).

The main objectives of TUP for 2012 were:

- A better use of individual competence assessments in relation to AMU educational structures.
- Strengthening the AMU suppliers’ work with individual competence assessments in AMU.

One of the projects, initiated by the Education Centre Ringkøbing-Skjern, aims to standardise the way in which educational institutions are working with individual competence assessments in the welding area. The aim is to develop an advisable, credible and reliable IT-enabled clarification of tools for VPL. The results of the project have been implemented in the ordinary VPL practices in the involved institutions.

Box 3 ‘From unskilled to skilled in no time’

The ‘From unskilled to skilled in no time’ project\(^\text{28}\) is a significant educational initiative. One of its main purposes is to improve the skills of the workforce to a level that matches the needs of both companies and society. The project is a comprehensive educational initiative that responds to the expected increase in unemployment among the unskilled and the future shortage of skilled labour in the capital region. The project was carried out in 2012-2014 with financial aid from the Capital Region of Denmark and the European Social Fund.

In this project, three vocational training schools and two adult education centres (VUC) that cover a large area of the capital region, participated as project partners: CPH WEST, Erhvervsskolen Nordsjælland, SOPU København & Nordsjælland, KVUC and HF & VUC Nordsjælland.

Part of the answer to future challenges is Basic Adult Education (GVU). GVU provides unskilled workers with practical experience documentation of their skills and the necessary complementary education, which turns them into skilled workers. The validation of prior learning allows for a tailored training plan and personal study activities.

Box 4 The regional action plan on the validation of prior learning in the Central Region of Denmark

Validation of prior learning is an essential tool in the efforts to ensure that businesses in the Central Region of Denmark have the competencies which they require at any time. The Regional Action Plan sets out the aspirations for the research and development of validation of prior learning on a regional level\(^\text{29}\).

\(^{28}\) [http://www.uffa.dk/default.asp](http://www.uffa.dk/default.asp)

\(^{29}\) Central Denmark Region is one of 5 regions in Denmark. [http://www.centraldenmark.eu/english/centraldenmarkandmidjutland/](http://www.centraldenmark.eu/english/centraldenmarkandmidjutland/)
The purpose of the plan is:

- To intensify activities regarding validation of prior learning and enhance transparency of the process;
- To enhance the collaboration among key stakeholders (educational institutions, job centres, unemployment insurance funds, trade unions etc.);
- To develop a comprehensive perspective on education and employment.

The intention is to form the basis for collaboration among relevant stakeholders in relation to specific initiatives and tasks concerning validation of prior learning. The plan includes experiences and ongoing activities as well as target setting for future activities in the region.

**Box 5 The Knowledge Platform on validation in the Higher Education sector in Denmark: www.nvr.nu/http://viden-om-realkompetence.via.dk/**

In order to strengthen the use of validation in some sectors of higher education in Denmark, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science initiated a Knowledge Platform for validation in University Colleges and Vocational Academies. The coordination of the platform is led by the Knowledge Centre NVR.

The **online platform**, which includes a forum for FAQ and debate, is meant to be a source of information for stakeholders on:

- Context, policies and legislative framework on validation in Denmark and in the EU;
- Organisational issues (information, guidelines and examples of good practice within educational institutions);
- Procedures for the clarification and identification of competencies of the applicants to support documentation, assessment and validation (with examples of good practice and tools, models and methods);
- Guidance (for different target groups) and ethical issues concerning guidance and counselling;
- Cooperation with partners outside of educational institutions.

Various stakeholders in Denmark are partners in many Nordic and EU-funded projects. For example, the national knowledge centre NVR- a partner - is involved in the following projects:

- **AllinHE** – Access to lifelong learning in higher education, Erasmus European Project. [www.allinhe.eu](http://www.allinhe.eu) (2011- 2014) AllinHE developed a model for VPL including a coherent VPL process for the individual.
- **LEVER** intends to model informal learning and transversal competences in voluntary service experience to increase employment and mobility of citizens (2014 – 2016)
Country report Denmark
2016 update to the European inventory on
validation of non-formal and informal learning

The 2012 Council recommendation on validation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

This country report is one of 36 that, together with a synthesis report and thematic reports, constitute the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory is a regularly updated overview of validation practices and arrangements in all Member States, EFTA countries and Turkey. It is a reference point for information on validation in Europe. It is organised around the principles defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation that were further elaborated in the European guidelines for validation. This is its sixth update (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016).