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

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1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The validation of non-formal and informal learning has been high on the policy agenda in Denmark for more than a decade. In 1995, legislation\(^1\) clarified competences in Adult Vocational Training Programmes (AMU) and in 2001 the further education system for adults\(^2\) was established as a parallel system to the ordinary education system. It consists of Preparatory Adult Education (FVU) up to Master’s level and aims to award adults certificates for competences, and offer further learning and education.

The key Act in this system was no. 488 of 31 May 2000\(^3\), entitled “Vocational basic education and further education (the system for further education) for Adults”. It consists of the vocational basic education for adults (GVU) and further education for adults at three levels: short-cycle post-secondary adult education (VVU); medium-cycle post-secondary adult education (Diploma programmes); and Master’s programmes. The (vocational) basic education for adults (GVU), in particular, was an important step in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning because it gave adults the right to have their prior learning validated in relation to the goals of the ordinary vocational education for young people.

A number of policy initiatives\(^5\) have been taken with a focus on lifelong learning and with special attention given to the validation of non-formal and informal learning aimed at all citizens, often with a special focus on low-qualified people. An important element is the Danish strategy for lifelong learning, expressed in “Education and lifelong skills upgrading for all”\(^6\), a report compiled for the European Commission in April 2007. This report states that the Government’s aim is to create better opportunities for individuals to have their knowledge, skills and competences assessed and recognised within the adult education and continuing training sectors, regardless of where and how skills are acquired. It promotes adults’ participation in adult education and continuing training and it intends to improve opportunities for adults in the labour market.

The 2004 policy paper “Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System”\(^7\) is also an important part of the strategy of validation of prior learning in Denmark. The paper contributes to a competence strategy intended to prepare Denmark for global competition and the knowledge society. It recognises that recognition of prior learning (RPL) is not a new phenomenon, especially in VET, adult education programmes and tertiary education. However, more needs to be done to recognise competences achieved at work and from taking part in non-formal adult education and training, etc.

The Danish concept of recognition of prior learning is based on common principles\(^8\) outlined in the policy paper. The principles are fundamental to the further political process and agreements amongst stakeholders:

- The individual citizen is able to request an assessment of his or her prior learning; based on the framework and regulations applicable within the individual areas of education;

\(^1\) Law no 1061 of 20.12.1995. Ministry of Education
\(^2\) http://uvm.dk/Uddannelse/Uddannelse%20og%20undervisning%20for%20voksne/Om%20uddannelse%20og%20undervisning%20for%20voksne.aspx
\(^3\) https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=23437
\(^4\) In Danish: “Erhvervsettet grunduddannelse og videregående uddannelse (videreuddannelsessystemet) for voksne”
\(^5\) Several of the political initiatives are described in the previous European Inventory, Denmark 2007.
\(^7\) http://pub.uvm.dk/2005/priorlearning/
\(^8\) http://pub.uvm.dk/2008/priorlearning/hel.html
The individual has a responsibility for contributing to the documentation of his or her prior learning;

A user fee may be charged for a competence assessment, except for the low skilled;

Competence assessment should always be based on the objectives and admission requirements of the education programme in question;

The individual's competences should be recognised, irrespective of where and how they were acquired, but without compromising the quality and standards of the education and training programmes;

The methods used must ensure a reliable assessment, inspiring confidence in the outcome; and

The result of the assessment should be documented by issuing a certificate.

Since the 2004 policy paper, “Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System”, the Danish Ministry of Education has launched a number of initiatives that seek to improve the understanding of prior learning assessment and promote its use. These initiatives include:

- A partnership agreement with the social partners regarding recognition of prior learning running from August 2007 to August 2009;
- A national information and networking campaign focusing on prior learning;
- An on-line skills portfolio that can be used to document skills when seeking prior learning assessments (www.minkompetencemappe.dk – an English version will be available soon at www.mycompetencefolder.dk);
- A handbook of prior learning to be used by the adult and continuing education institutions;
- Establishment of a National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning (NVR);
- Establishment of a counselling web portal that provides general information about prior learning (www.ug.dk); and
- A TV campaign aired on Danish National TV, conferences, seminars and meetings, etc.

Nevertheless, it is still a challenge in Denmark to achieve a well developed and sustainable approach to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. As noted in the 2007 report of the European Inventory, in 2006 the Government and the social partners agreed to strengthen adult education and training. Further negotiations on this will continue until 2011. The negotiations will include discussion on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The challenges in strengthening the validation of prior learning are connected to traditional perspectives on learning and education. Nevertheless validation of prior learning has a high priority among policy makers in Denmark. It is expected that the new “Adult and Continuing Training Centres”, established in January 2010, will have an important impact on the outcome, especially for the low-qualified.

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9 http://pub.uvm.dk/2008/priorlearning/hel.html
10 http://www.uvm.dk/Uddannelser/Uddannelse%20og%20undervisning%20for%20voksne/Om%20uddannelse%20og%20undervisning%20for%20voksne/VEU-centre.aspx
1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

The key legislation on validation of prior learning in Denmark is Act no. 556 of 6 June 2007\(^\text{11}\), entitled “Development of the recognition of prior learning in adult education and continuing training” (Udbygning af anerkendelse af realkompetence på voksen og efteruddannelsesområdet mv.). This new legislation has been effective from 1 August 2007.

The legislation gives each individual (from 18 or 25 years depending of the educational filed), the right to have his/her prior learning experiences validated in relation to specific goals of adult education and continuing training. It focuses on the needs of the individual and aims to make the process as accessible and flexible as possible. A key aim is to motivate those with little or no education to participate in lifelong learning by making it easier for them to obtain recognition of prior learning.

Act no. 556 includes the following six educational fields:

- Single course subjects in general adult education (basic level - AVU);
- Single course subjects in general upper secondary education;
- Vocational training programmes; (AMU);
- Basic adult education (GVU);
- Short-cycle post-secondary adult education (VVU); and
- Medium-cycle post-secondary adult education (Diploma programmes).

This means that the legislation includes the education sectors that are covered by Act no 488 of 31 May 2000 (the last three mentioned in the list above) with one important exception: the Master’s level. As mentioned earlier as regards the Vocational training programmes (AMU), there were also possibilities to clarify competences in relation to the goals of specific training programmes before 1 August 2007. As regards single course subjects in general adult education and general upper secondary education (the first two mentioned above), the possibility of validating prior learning were relatively new.

The legislation for VET\(^\text{12}\) (2003) includes a general principle of individual competence assessments as a basis for preparation of personal education plans for each individual. The personal education plan is based on an assessment of the trainees’ competences and outlines an individual pathway through the VET system.

Since 2007, individuals can gain access to short-cycle and medium-cycle Higher Education (Bachelor-level degrees) based on an individual competence assessment. Validation in relation to shortening education periods (exemptions from modules, etc.) is not possible in tertiary level education in Denmark.

In 2010 - 2011 the Ministry of Education is carrying out an evaluation of the aforementioned Act, no. 556\(^\text{13}\). The evaluation will allow the Ministry:

- to estimate the effects and the quality of the law; and
- to estimate the role and the responsibility of the providers.

The first step of the evaluation was to invite The Danish Evaluation Institute\(^\text{14}\) (EVA) to conduct some research (completed in May 2010). The report, “Validation of prior learning..."
within adult education in Denmark. Status report regarding Act no. 556 of 6 June 2007”, is the most comprehensive mapping of validation of prior learning within adult education. The report covers the following themes:\(^{15}\):

- Prior learning assessment and credit transfer,
- The spread of prior learning assessment,
- Application of prior learning assessment,
- Barriers to spread,
- Practice at the institutions,
- Quality assurance,
- Appeals,
- Organisation and management,
- Skills development of employees,
- Information and communication.

The results of the study were discussed by the Council for Adult Education and Training (VEU-Rådet) in June 2010 with the authorities and organisations that were involved in the drafting of the Act. The Ministry of Education, on the basis of the stakeholders’ observations, will determine the impact and quality of the new arrangements and evaluate the role and the responsibilities of the educational providers. It will produce a new action plan to promote the validation of prior learning.

1.2 Relationship with the existing/ developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation

Competence assessment is always based on the goals and admission requirements of the individual education programme (or subject area standards within general adult education and upper secondary subjects for adults)\(^ {16}\).

At the time of writing, it was envisaged that the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning\(^ {17}\) would be fully implemented by the end of 2010. In Higher Education a NQF has existed since 2003,\(^ {18}\) but higher education is now also part of the Danish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning.

The Danish qualifications framework consists of eight levels. Each level is defined by a description based on skills, knowledge and competence.

The framework encompasses publicly approved degrees and certificates, including certificates acquired through adult vocational education and training activities. The

\(^{14}\) The Danish Evaluation Institute, EVA, is an independent state institution established under the Ministry of Education in 1999. The institute succeeded the Evaluation Centre which existed from 1992-1999. Research and evaluations are carried out on EVA’s own initiative as well as on request from ministries, local authorities and educational institutions among others. EVA evaluates, explores and develops the quality at all levels from day care centres and schools through upper secondary schools and vocational colleges to universities and adult education.

\(^{15}\) The report is in Danish, but there is a Summary of the report in English: “Validation of prior learning within adult education in Denmark. Status report regarding Act no. 556 of 6 June 2007. Summary and perspectives”. The Danish Evaluation Institute, 2010. www.eva.dk


\(^{17}\) Internet: http://www.uvm.dk/service/Publikationer/Publikationer/Uddannelses%20og%20undervisning%20for%20voksne/2010/Kvalifikationsramme.aspx

\(^{18}\) Internet: http://www.uvm.dk/~/media/Files/Udd/Verid/PDF07/07_europaeisk_kvalifikationsramme.ashx
framework operates with degrees and certificates for qualifications, and with certificates for supplementary qualifications.

Thus, the Danish qualifications framework operates with three types of qualification:

- Degrees - for example, Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees;
- Certificates - acquired in, for example, primary school, upper secondary education and vocational education and training; and
- Certificates for supplementary qualifications acquired in the adult education and continuing training system, for example vocational training and single subject courses in general adult education.

In 2010 the relevant publicly approved qualifications will be placed at one of the eight levels. Information on current regulations regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning and how degrees and certificates can be acquired on the basis of validation of non-formal and informal learning will be made available as part of the information on the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning on the website of the Ministry of Education. This way, the relationship between validation of non-formal and informal learning will be provided.

### 1.3 National institutional framework

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

There is no national institution responsible for validation. In 2007 a knowledge centre was established, the ‘National Knowledge Centre' (NVR), for Validation of Prior Learning funded by the Ministry of Education. The aim of the knowledge centre is to collect, produce and disseminate information and documentation on existing knowledge on VPL.

### 1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

The key national body for validation is the Ministry of Education, although there was some input from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs, to the 2004 Government Policy Paper.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the legislative framework for RPL and for taking national initiatives for implementing the legislation within its field (which does not include universities). The Ministry has developed policy guidelines and funded projects looking at developing tools, methods and procedures for RPL. The Ministry has developed My Competence Portfolio as a tool for use by all stakeholders, especially the education institutions. Furthermore, as stated above, the Ministry has partially funded a National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning.

In the area of Adult Vocational Training, as well as Vocational Education and Training, the social partners are usually involved in the validation process. They have contributed significantly and have had influence in a number of areas within the legislation. Thus the Government works closely with social partners, for example with the Council for Vocational Training (REU), the Council for Adult Education and Training (VEU-Rådet), the Council for

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Academy Profession Education and Professional Bachelor Education. These Councils advise the Government on their specific areas of education and training.

The ‘National Trade Committees’ define the contents of qualifications and labour market competence framework and they monitor labour market developments so as to develop suitable VET. There are also trade committees that act at a local level. Vocational Training Committees play a similar role in relation to adult vocational training programmes.

The educational institutions themselves are responsible for counselling/guidance, and for assessing and approving RPL within their educational and training programmes. The educational institutions also have the responsibility for quality assurance, review and evaluation. Other stakeholders act as guidance institutions, e.g. the job centres, the trade unions and the third sector are also involved in guidance and counselling.

Interaction and collaboration between stakeholders, from the policy level to the practitioner level, allows for the integration of a top-down strategy with a bottom-up strategy. Collaboration between stakeholders will further the strengthening of validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is essential in creating stable and visible practice in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Therefore it is important that stakeholders qualify their own effort and at the same time strengthen the cooperation between the stakeholders involved in the validation process. In this way a common use of terminology and knowledge about each other’s practices can be developed.

1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

Partner organisations from Denmark have been involved in a number of validation projects, which have been supported by funding from the EU. For example, the Validmaint project (http://www.utek.se or http://www.validmaint.be), which developed an online test to identify the competences and knowledge of maintenance technicians and the Accumulated Knowledge and Skills project, which 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.

1.6 Link between validation and the existing/ developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications

As noted in the 2007 European Inventory report for Denmark, a reform in 2005 introduced a credit transfer system in general upper secondary education, based on assessment of an individual’s prior learning. Students can obtain credits for previously completed studies, periods of study abroad, etc., and be granted admission to subjects at a higher 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, the credit system (ECTS) is in use and the modularised structure supports the validation process. Individuals can be awarded competence certificates on the basis of validation.

The credit system is not in use in VET. Work is still in progress regarding how ECVET in general can be applied to the Danish VET system.

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21 Focus on validation of prior learning, nr.3: www.NVR.nu
1.7 Funding framework

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is financially supported by the Ministry of Education, which has developed the following system:

- There is no cost to the participant for the assessment of reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic and mathematics skills in Preparatory Adult Education or in courses included in the “common competence description” in the adult vocational training system.

- Within adult vocational training (GVU and AMU) persons have the right to request the assessment of their competences. This is for the award of certificates and to tailor programmes to take account of the competences the applicant already has. There is no cost to the participant for this; the institutions are paid one-off taximeter funds for competence assessment, personal study, training plan (GVU), and for the competence assessment (AMU).

- Within general adult education, a distinction should be made between two situations:
  1. Competence assessment for entry to programmes continues to be included in the tuition taximeter, combined with a modest tuition fee.
  2. For competence assessment without entry to a programme (from August 2008), where the goal is issuing competence certificates and documentation, no user fees will apply but taximeter funding will be used.

- Within tertiary education, user fees for competence assessment are only applicable for persons with higher education level qualifications up to and including upper secondary level. The educational institutions are paid one-off taximeter funds if the competence assessment results in the programme being shortened by 15% or more, or in the issuing of a certificate/diploma.

The public funding covers assessment at educational institutions. Public funding does not cover information, or clarification in the process with documentation of the individual’s application. Guidance institutions, enterprises and the third sector often deliver clarification and documentation for a formative and perhaps also career development perspective.

1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries

The table below shows the development of activity for validation and recognition of prior learning in 2008 and 2009, based on data from the Ministry of Education in 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual pupils</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training (AMU)</td>
<td>191.7</td>
<td>287.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic adult education (GVU)</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General upper secondary education (HF)</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General adult education (AVU)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVU - degrees and diploma degrees</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>53**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 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)

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[23] Ibid.
varies between 0.5 - 5 days, i.e. between 0.0025 and 0.025 annual full-time pupils. In 2009 there were 37,210 participants registered in IKV in AMU.

** On VVU-degrees and diploma degrees the activity is made up in number of persons. The number of persons who have qualified for a VVU programme or diploma is not registered. The figure of 53 individuals registered is a low estimate; the individuals which get access true validation are not registered.

There is still a need for more detailed statistics and registration of the activities. For example, the number of individuals who gain access to the diploma level through validation of informal and non formal education is not registered and it is not possible to track individual learners participating in Basic Adult Education (GVU) from the validation of prior learning throughout their participation in education.

Validation activity is still relatively low because the new regulations are still under implementation. But at the same time the development of activity is increasing within all fields of education.

A research report from NVR24 describes how many assessments individual educational institutions complete. For example, two adult vocational training providers have completed 500 VPL procedures each, while others have hardly completed any at all.

The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) has provided the following overview in the Status Report from May 201025 on the spread of prior learning assessment within adult education (see p. 7 of the English version of the report):

- 29% of institutions providing Short-cycle post-secondary adult education (VVU), conducted at least one prior learning assessment in 2009. None of the institutions have conducted more than 50 prior learning assessments within a single profiling process, and no prior learning assessments at all have been conducted within 7 out of 15 of the education institutions.

- 42% of adult learning centres (VUC) conducted at least one prior learning assessment in 2009 within general adult education. The largest number of prior learning assessments conducted within a single subject at an institution is 15, and only one institution has conducted prior learning assessments in more than ten subjects.

- 50% of institutions providing Diploma programmes conducted at least one prior learning assessment in 2009. One institution conducted more than 100 prior learning assessments and this was within a Diploma programmes course in management. Prior learning assessment has not been conducted within other commerce and economics Diploma programmes or within media and communication. Moreover, only one institution has conducted prior learning assessment within the technical field (including IT).

- 70% of adult learning centres (VUC) conducted at least one prior learning assessment in 2009 within general upper secondary subjects. Four institutions conducted prior learning assessments in more than ten different subjects in 2009. Moreover the majority conducted less than five prior learning assessments in 2009.

- 71% of institutions providing AMU conducted at least one prior learning assessment in 2009. Within the continuing training field for trade, administration, communication and management, four institutions conducted more than 100 prior learning assessments. Within transport, two institutions conducted more than 100 prior learning assessments, within the metal industry three institutions conducted more than 100 prior learning assessments, and


within other industry one institution conducted more than 100 prior learning assessments. In addition, within all 11 continuing training areas at least one institution conducted prior learning assessments in 2009. The questionnaire survey also reveals that a few institutions have conducted as many as about 1,000 prior learning assessments within AMU.

- 91% of institutions providing GVU conducted at least one prior learning assessment in 2009. Within the commerce field, three institutions conducted more than 100 prior learning assessments, within health, care and pedagogy one institution conducted more than 100 prior learning assessments, and within production and development also one institution conducted more than 100 prior learning assessments. In addition, within all 11 vocational education and training areas at least one institution conducted prior learning assessments in 2009.

Overall, the spread of prior learning assessment is least within VVU, general adult education, general upper secondary subjects at VUC and Diploma programmes, while it is most widespread within AMU and GVU. In other words, the spread of prior learning assessment is greatest within vocational education and training at basic levels. The overall picture is furthermore characterised by the fact that there is a relatively large group of institutions, within all the education areas, with no prior learning assessment activity, except GVU. A small group of institutions, primarily within GVU and AMU, has a relatively high level of prior learning assessment activity.”

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

According to Act no. 556 each adult education institution is responsible for recognition of prior learning. The institutions can assess and recognise prior learning in adult education and continuing training for the purposes of:

- Accessing formal education, i.e. using non-formal/informal experiences to meet the admission requirements;
- Tailoring an educational programme or to give credit for certain classes up to Master’s level; and
- Awarding a “Competence certificate” if the participant meets the requirements of part of an educational programme or an “Education certificate” if the participant’s skills are the same as those obtained by completing an entire educational programme. The certificates have the same value as the certificates in formal education.

In Higher Education most validation of prior learning takes place at the diploma level. The qualification framework is used to provide criteria for the assessment for admission or for the award of competence certificates. A network is established between the University Colleges to ensure a common approach to validation.

In the mainstream education system there is currently action by the University Colleges to develop systems to ensure best practice in recognition of prior learning for access to the Medium Cycle Higher Education.

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26 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.
2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

The Ministry of Education provides extensive information about recognition of prior learning on its website. The educational institutions that offer assessment of prior learning also have a duty to provide information on their websites. Guidance bodies, e.g. Job Centres and Study Guidance Centres, and social partners inform and work on the clarification and documentation of recognition of prior learning. It is still an aim to extend information and guidance in general and to strengthen collaboration between different stakeholders with different tasks in relation to information and guidance.

2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors

As indicated above, in the area of Adult Vocational Training, as well as Vocational Education and Training, the social partners as well as private sector organisations are usually involved in the validation process. They have contributed significantly and have had influence in a number of areas within the legislation. The partnership agreement from August 2007 to August 2010 resulted in several initiatives (see section 1, introductory paragraphs).

Some private enterprises in Denmark use resources on competence development to a high degree, e.g. Post Denmark and Novo Nordisk Scandinavia. However, this is not common amongst small 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 for employees. The social partners have an important role in strengthening this collaboration. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is increasingly becoming part of competence development. Validation is in use in the development of companies and the downsizing and closing of enterprises.

A number of projects and initiatives are currently being implemented in order to develop and improve the collaboration between enterprises and formal educational institutions. One of these is described in the box below.

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Centre for the Development of Human Resources and Quality Management validation project

The aim of this project is to give approximately 20 enterprises the possibility of systematically identifying and recognising prior learning among their staff. This is taking place in collaboration with educational institutions. The project started in August 2009 and will complete in January 2011. The intention is to strengthen the awareness and development of competences and to strengthen the identification, documentation and assessment of competences for employees.

The project is an initiative of The Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality Management (Statens Center For Kompetence- Og Kvalitetsudvikling, SCKK). The Centre is financed as a joint venture between the state Employer’s Authority and the State Employees’ Organisations. The National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning is responsible for the consultancy provided to support the enterprises, as described below.

Consultants support the enterprises and the educational institutions to establish the strategic foundation for competence development and the recognition of prior learning. A variety of methods for validation of
prior learning are in use, such as interviews, portfolio methods, tests and practical exercises.

There are several expected outcomes for both the participating companies and the individuals.

The outcomes for the companies are expected to be:

- Knowledge of needed competences and competence development in the enterprise.
- Support to identify competence profiles in relation to strategic goals in the company.
- Increased motivation for competence development.

The expected outcomes for individuals are:

- Clarification of needs of competence development in respect to their present job and further job possibilities.
- Recognition of prior learning in the view of a specific education.
- Knowledge about possibilities of relevant activities for competence development.

The project is applied to all sectors of the participating company and the target group is low-qualified staff. The participating companies receive funding to carry out the project. There is no cost to the individual however the preparation for the validation process will often have to be carried out in the employees’ own time.

The project will be documented and evaluated by the National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning in Denmark.

Further information can be found at [www.sckk.dk](http://www.sckk.dk) and [www.nvr.nu](http://www.nvr.nu)

### 2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

The third sector is making an effort to help its participants to clarify and document the competences developed in a wide variety of activities in this non-formal sector. In 2007 the Ministry of Education launched a set of three e-tools addressing non-formal adult education, associations and voluntary work. Questionnaires on generic competences were developed on the basis of input from a wide range of stakeholders. The tools are an integrated part of the national CV-format "My competence folder", with a more specific tool for the clarification of general/personal competences developed in the third sector, e.g. non-formal education, participation in all kinds of associations, involvement in sports organisations, voluntary work, etc. The tools can be used for self-evaluation, but it is recommended that a facilitator also be used in order to improve the quality of the documentation. The national umbrella organisations of the sector provide courses for local facilitators.

Among sports organisations interest in working with validation has decreased recently, while the voluntary sector is becoming more aware of the possibilities. A number of projects on validation have resulted in a number of alternative tools such as interviews, portfolios and practical methods, tailored for specific target groups among the providers of non-formal education. However the formal educational institutions are not making use of the documentation from third sector activities. There is a need to strengthen the knowledge between different bodies with different tasks and to combine the whole process to improve validation of prior learning for the individual.

### 2.5 Costs to organisations

The organisations involved in the recognition of prior learning must absorb the associated costs within their existing budgets, although education institutions can charge a fee for the assessment of prior learning. At the time of writing, all stakeholders were in discussion regarding the financial resources required and provided for the validation of prior learning.
3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

According to Act no. 556, individuals have the right to ask an education institution for an assessment of his or her prior learning in order to obtain recognition of his or her competences in the adult and continuing education system. The individual has a responsibility to provide educational institutions with the necessary documentation to enable them to assess non-formal and informal learning.

Assessment of prior learning gives the individual the opportunity to:

- Qualify for educational programmes;
- Receive tailored educational programmes, or receive credit for certain classes;
- Obtain a “competence certificate”, if the skills are the same as those obtained by completing part of an educational programme;
- Obtain an “education certificate” if the skills are the same as those obtained by completing an entire educational programme.

Moreover, the individual can appeal against certain prior learning recognition decisions to an appeals board, the Qualifications Board.

In Higher Education in particular, there are high expectations of the responsibility of the individual to provide documentation about his or her competences.

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

Educational institutions are obliged to inform the public about recognition of prior learning on their websites. But there is still an inadequate level of information about the possibilities of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Denmark and too many people are not aware of the opportunities available to them. This is an issue that needs to be addressed by the Government and the social partners.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

As indicated above, a counselling web portal that provides general information about prior learning (www.ug.dk) was established in 2007. The guidance institutions provide information, support clarification and documentation concerning the validation process, and provide guidance to the individual about choice of further learning and career.

Guidance, as one-to-one support and group support, is provided by educational institutions, job centres and Adult and Continuing Training Centres. Trade unions also provide guidance to their members as well as the non-formal adult education providers. However guidance is not currently coordinated between these different bodies.

3.3 Costs to individuals

As indicated above, recognition of non-formal and informal learning is financially supported by the Ministry of Education. Thus, there is no cost to the participant for: the assessment of reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic and mathematics skills in Preparatory Adult Education or in courses included in the vocational training system for a competence assessment within adult vocational training (GVU and AMU); for competence assessment for entry to general adult education programmes; or for general adult education competence assessment in order to issue a competence certificate.

29 http://pub.uvm.dk/2008/priorlearning/index.html
Within tertiary education there is a cost to participants for competence assessment which is fixed by the education institutions themselves and differs from one institution to another. This cost is only applicable for persons with a higher education level, qualifications up to and including upper secondary level.³⁰

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

Many initiatives are aimed at low-qualified people and are funded by The Ministry of Education. For example, the newly established “Adult and Continuing Training Centres” will focus on the low qualified. There are also initiatives provided by ‘production schools’ with the aim to motivate school drop-outs to start Vocational Education and Training.

In 2004 - 2008 the Danish government established five regional knowledge centres on documentation and recognition of prior learning for refugees and immigrants. These centres have collected and documented experiences and concrete methodologies. The centres have developed a tool for clarification and documentation of competences which is still in use in the job centres in Denmark. Assessment procedures themselves take place at educational institutions within the existing supply and legal framework. In addition, to some extent there are special possibilities for migrants in the vocational training programmes.

3.5 Evidence of benefits for individuals

No research with an explicit focus on the benefits for individuals has so far been carried out. The knowledge about effects is thus based on small analyses and case studies. Intermediate results from NVR projects and other institutions show, however, that validation improves the individual’s knowledge of their own competences. This motivates individuals to look for new jobs or to start again in education.

In addition, RPL can be used to shorten a learner’s educational pathway, in particular in relation to the Basic Adult Education programme (GVU). Experience thus far of implementing RPL in relation to GVU demonstrates that adults are typically able to have their need for teaching at school reduced by at least half, compared with a normal course of education (their practical training experience being fully recognised). But in principle, a GVU education plan can be even shorter.³¹

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³¹ Preparatory Document (unpublished) for Denmark, for the Peer Learning Activity on the Costs and Benefits of Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, held in Reykjavik, Iceland 12-13 February 2009
4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

Quality assurance is central to validation of prior learning since credibility of the educational system is imperative. The competence assessment should always be based on the objectives and admission requirements of the education programme. The Ministry of Education has set out some principles for assessment and quality assurance which state that educational institutions are responsible for quality assurance. These principles state that the methods used must ensure a reliable assessment, inspiring confidence in the outcome, and the institutions are obliged to have an evaluation system.

Educational institutions have to develop practice that ensures transparency and quality in the process of recognition of prior learning. The methods used must ensure a reliable assessment, inspiring confidence in the outcome.

The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) has provided the following overview in the Status Report from May 2010 on quality assurance in relation to assessments of prior learning within adult learning (see pp. 13-14 of the English version of this report):

“Not all institutions have a documented system to ensure the quality of prior learning assessments. The percentage of institutions with a documented system fluctuates from 43% within VVU and 48% within AMU to 61% within GVU, 69% within general adult education and general upper secondary subjects at VUC and 89% within Diploma programmes. Therefore, there are some institutional differences in how widely a quality assurance system of prior learning assessment is used, and Diploma programmes stands out in particular compared to other education areas.

( .. )

It may be noted that information about the institution’s procedures and standards for prior learning assessment, e.g. on the institution’s website, is only made public to a limited extent, except for Diploma programmes, which all do so. Within GVU, general adult education and general upper secondary subjects at VUC around 30% replied that they have information available to the public, whereas this only applies to 19% within AMU and 13% within VVU (one in eight).

This is the reason behind the cross-education-area recommendation to all institutions providing prior learning assessment within adult vocational education/training (except Diploma programmes) that they should make information available to the public about the institution’s standards and procedures for prior learning assessment, e.g. on the institution’s website, and for instance to communicate this through ongoing dialogue with the target group.

( .. )

Documentation to ensure that decisions can be checked, is available ( .. ) in varying degrees. This documentation is available at all institutions conducting prior learning assessment within VVU, whereas this is only the case in two out of three within GVU and Diploma programmes. The figure for AMU is 60%, 56% for general adult education and 39% for general upper secondary subjects at VUC.

A decisive element in quality assurance is that the assessment is repeatable. This is the reason behind the cross-education-area recommendation to all providers (except VVU) that
all education institutions conducting prior learning assessment ensure that assessment and validation of prior learning are documented so that decisions can be tested to strengthen the legitimacy of prior learning assessment. As a minimum it should be possible to see how the process has taken place and on what the assessment is based.

The tools and procedures used by institutions to ensure the quality of the prior learning assessments taking place at their institutions vary considerably; cooperation with other institutions on quality development of prior learning assessment is one of the most common. This applies particularly within Diploma programmes, where all institutions cooperate with other institutions on quality development, while about two in three cooperate in other education areas, except for general upper secondary subjects at VUC, where 44% cooperate.

There are criteria or standards for use in prior learning assessment at all institutions conducting prior learning assessment within VVU, whereas the proportion is almost 80% in Diploma programmes (seven in nine) and around 60% in the other education areas. All institutions conducting prior learning assessment within VVU and Diploma programmes have procedure descriptions for the institution’s work with prior learning assessment. The corresponding figure is 78% within general upper secondary subjects at VUC, 67% within general adult education (six in nine), 55% within GVU and 54% within AMU. The other tools and procedures to ensure quality of prior learning assessment are generally used to a much lesser extent.

In all the education areas, about 50% reply that employees evaluate prior learning assessment. Letting the participants evaluate prior learning assessments is more the exception than the rule. Therefore, almost 50% (three in eight) let participants evaluate the prior learning assessment process within AMU and VVU, whereas 34% do so within GVU, general adult education and general upper secondary subjects at VUC. No participants make such evaluations within Diploma programmes. On the basis of this, the Danish Evaluation Institute recommends that institutions conducting prior learning assessment include participants in systematic evaluations of the prior learning assessment process and use these evaluations actively in improving prior learning assessment work. However, it should be stressed that there is no statutory requirement that participants evaluate prior learning assessment."

4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures

As stated above, the individual educational institution has to build its own system for quality assurance. The institution must also evaluate the procedure and the methodology used. The Ministry of Education has published a general handbook which includes guidance on quality assurance processes and the National Knowledge Centre offers seminars and competence development activities, including quality assurance.

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

5.1 Methods used

In Denmark there is a variety of assessment methods in use, with the educational institutions using different methods which supplement each other. Some are developing their own methods and are tailoring methods to the context and the experiences of the individuals.

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

The methods include:

- Interviews are used throughout the whole process as communication is seen as an opportunity to ensure that the validation process is credible.
- The Portfolio method is used as a declarative method. “My competence folder”\(^{34}\) (www.minkompetencemappe.dk) was launched in 2007 by the Ministry of Education. It is an electronic folder in which an individual may gather documentation for all competences, irrespective of where they have been achieved. It is the individual who updates the folder and it is up to the individual to decide who can have access to the folder. The intention of the “My competence folder” initiative is to have a common tool used by many and it is currently being revised to ensure wider use. One of the aims is to make it easier to use.
- Other methods in use are tests, practical exercises (cases, simulations, authentic problems e.g.), written papers and self-evaluation.

The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) has provided the following appraisal in the Status Report from May 2010\(^ {35}\) regarding practice at the institutions in relation to assessments of prior learning within adult learning:

“Common for all education areas is that they normally use interviews and include documentation such as CVs etc. in connection with prior learning assessment. However, interviews with participants reveal that there are also examples of participants who have not been to a personal interview. Typically, there is a clarification or guidance interview with a student counsellor within the prior learning assessment interview itself.

As a basis for the prior learning assessment interview, in many cases the participant has made use of a skills file (http://www.minkompetencemappe.dk/Default.aspx). Opinions on the usefulness of the skills file vary. Some point out that it would be better to increase the focus of the file towards the various target groups.

Furthermore, there are a number of differences between the education areas themselves with regard to which tools should be applied. Tests and exams are not used in Diploma programmes, while all respondents from general adult education and general upper secondary subjects at VUC, as well as the majority from AMU, GVU, and VVU stated that they used tests and exams. Instead of tests and exams, Diploma programmes uses various other tools such as reflection tasks, cases etc. (..)

\(^{34}\) http://www.minkompetencemappe.dk/Default.aspx

In the study by the Danish Evaluation Institute, several informants mention examples of good collaboration on prior learning assessment across institutions. The informants indicate that collaboration with other institutions provides good opportunities to discuss which tools are relevant, and it ensures a sort of alignment in the tools institutions use in a prior learning assessment. Therefore, collaboration can potentially enhance confidence in, and the legitimacy of, prior learning assessment."

5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the methods used

For formative validation, the methods in use can be described as declarative; the portfolio “My competence folder” (www.minkompetencemappe.dk) is relevant. For summative validation it is necessary to use methods appropriate to the concrete education or course, these might be interviews, portfolio methods, tests or practical descriptions of learning outcomes, i.e. involving a more specific assessment. For practitioners, it can be difficult to choose between different methods.
6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners
Validation practitioners are teachers and guidance staff. They must be educated practitioners from the educational institutions working in assessment and recognition.

6.2 Provision of training and support to practitioners
There is a need for development of practitioners’ competences and a number of different initiatives have been undertaken. The Ministry of Education has taken initiatives for competence development in the vocational area and in the third sector, some national umbrella organisations provide courses for local facilitators of the three third sector tools (3.4.). The National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning has also organised several seminars, courses and conferences in the past few years. Currently some specific initiatives have been taken to develop a more systematic and coherent education for validation practitioners. Some initiatives have been taken to offer a module at the VVU and diploma level.

The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) has provided the following assessment in the Status Report from May 2010 regarding the need for competence development of practitioners (see p. 15 and p. 10 of the English version):

“...A total of 80% of the providers have developed the skills of their employees working with prior learning assessment within general adult education and general upper secondary subjects at VUC, whereas this only applies for two in three within AMU and GVU. On the other hand, this is only the case for just under 40% within Diploma programmes and about 20% within VVU. Across education areas, skills development has primarily been externally at seminars, conferences and courses and through participation in exchange of experience across institutions.

(…) There is a shortage of courses for personnel working with prior learning assessment. This was the conclusion of around 40% of respondents within AMU, GVU, and VVU, and about 30% within Diploma programmes, general adult education and general upper secondary subjects at VUC. Therefore there seems to be an unmet need for relevant courses for those working with prior learning assessment at institutions. (…) the Danish Evaluation Institute recommends that the Danish Ministry of Education takes initiative to improve the opportunities for skills development for personnel working with prior learning assessment, possibly by developing formal courses in AMU.”

6.3 Qualifications requirements
According to the Danish legislation the qualification requirements of the assessors are the same as for those required to teach in the formal educational system. The educational institutions are responsible for the qualifications of the assessors and they also have to make sure that the assessors are able to attend the necessary courses and training.

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