National qualifications framework

The Danish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (NQF) consists of eight levels that all together contain all public approved qualifications including certificates and degrees from primary school up to the highest level at university. For each level there is a level descriptor that describes the overall learning outcome that can be achieved at each level in terms of: 1) Knowledge including types and complexity and understanding; 2) Skills including types, task performance, and communication; 3) Competence including room for manoeuvre, cooperation and responsibility. The aim of the levels and level descriptors is to make the learning outcome of qualifications more transparent, understandable and comparable and thereby promoting recognition of learning and lifelong learning.

The Danish NQF operates with three types of qualifications that cover all public approved education and adult education in Denmark: (1) Degrees in higher education, for example academy professional degrees, bachelor degrees and master-degrees; (2) certificates in primary school, upper secondary educations and vocational education and training; (3) certificates for supplementary qualifications in the adult education and continuing training, for example vocational training and single course subjects in general adult education. From 2010 degrees and certificates are placed at one of the NQF eight levels.
The development of the NQF has been carried out by an interministerial working committee (2007 to 2009) including: Ministry of Education; Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation; Ministry of Culture; Ministry of Economy and Business; EVA - Danish Evaluation Institute and the National Agency for Internationalization of Education and Training. A permanent national coordination committee was established in 2009 including the four ministries is responsible for implementation and further development of the NQF with involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the Danish education and training system. In May 2011 the Danish NQF has been referenced to the European qualification framework (EQF) by finalizing a report on the referencing of the NQF to EQF.

**Denmark’s strategy for lifelong learning**

Denmark has a strategy for lifelong learning – Education and lifelong skills upgrading for all http://pub.uvm.dk/2007/livslanglaering/ which says 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, regardless of where they are acquired. This is to promote the participation by adults in adult education and continuing training and to improve their opportunities in the labour market. This was to be promoted through implementation of legislation on increased recognition of prior learning in adult education and continuing training, from general adult education to diploma level, which was enforced in 2007 to 2008.

The Danish Ministry of Education has then launched a number of initiatives to improve the knowledge of prior learning assessment and to promote its use. It includes: A partnership
agreement with the social partners regarding recognition of prior learning is running from the 1 August 2007 until 1 August 2009 and national information and networking campaign focusing on prior learning. The network campaign includes: an online skills portfolio www.minkompetencemappe.dk that can be used to document skills when seeking prior learning assessments; a handbook of prior learning to be used by the adult and continuing education institutions; and an establishment of a National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning (NVR); and an 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.

A number of policy initiatives have been taken with a focus on lifelong learning and with special attention to the validation of non-formal and informal learning aimed at all citizens (often with a special focus on low-qualified people). An important paper is the Danish strategy for lifelong learning ‘Education and lifelong skills upgrading for all’ a report compiled for the European Commission in April 2007 (Report to the European Commission, 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 they are acquired. It promotes adults’ participation in adult education and continuing training and it intends to improve opportunities for adults in the labour market.

**New rules for RPL**

Denmark passed on new rules relating to the development and recognition of prior learning in the adult and continuing education system, which became effective on 1 August 2007.
The key legislation on validation of prior learning in Denmark is Act no 556 of the 6 June 2007 (Act 556, 2007), entitled ‘Development of the recognition of prior learning in adult education and continuing training’ (Udbygning af anerkendelse af realkompetence på voksen og efteruddannelsesområdet mv.).

The legislation gives each individual from 18 to 25 years, depending on the educational field, the right to have prior learning experiences validated in relation to specific goals of adult education and continuing training. It centres 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 access recognition of prior learning.

The legislation for vocational education and training (VET) includes a general principle of individual competence assessments as a basis for preparation of personal education plans for each individual (UndervisingsMinisteriet, 2003). 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 and 2011 the Ministry of Education is carrying out a law evaluation of the Act no 556 (EVA, 2010). As part of the evaluation the Ministry of Education has carried out an examination to 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 results of the examination were discussed by the Council for Adult Education and Training (VEU-Rådet) in June 2010 with the authorities and organisations etc. that were involved in the preparations of the Act. The Ministry of Education wants on the basis of the statements that the authorities and organisations give to the Ministry: the estimated effects and the quality of the new arrangements and the estimated role and the responsibility of the educational providers. From these consultations, the Ministry makes a new action plan to promote the validation of prior learning.

**Funding**

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is financially supported by the Ministry of Education, which has developed the following system (EVA, 2010): with 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 competencies. This is also 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 a one-off taximeter funding for competence assessment, personal study, training plan (GVU), and for the competence assessment (AMU), respectively.

Within general adult education, a distinction should be made between two situations: competence assessment for entry to programmes continues to be included in the tuition taximeter combined with a modest tuition fee; 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.

The ‘taximeter’ financing scheme for the funding of education and training programmes is the basic funding mechanism in Denmark to strengthen incentives to make the provision of, and participation in, various forms of lifelong learning more effective. Under this scheme, education and training providers (including private providers) are paid per capita grant by the state for each full time equivalent enrolment. The amount paid to an institution varies according to the stream of study programme in which a person is enrolled. An activity such as individual competence assessment in relation to a particular education or training programme or the preparation of a personal study plan on the basis of assessment and recognition of prior learning in which a person is involved, is also financed under the taximeter scheme. Every year the taximeter rates are set in the spending bill adopted by Parliament based on estimated costs per student completion in each of several streams. Schemes/allowance schemes for forgone earnings for adults during participation in education and training based on a co-financed system through public and private sources. Private sources include funding by companies through a national fond set up by the social partners and through collective agreements. Co-financing is more or less a universal rule.

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 a one-off taximeter funding if the competence assessment results in the programme are being shortened by 15 per cent or more, or in the issuing of a certificate/diploma.
The public funding covers the 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.

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

**Individual competency evaluation**

Denmark has a long tradition of individual competency evaluation. In the past it has resulted in a focus on individual skills identification for: vocational training (1997); basic adult education (2001); vocational education and training programmes (2003). Starting in 2004, an increased focus was placed on recognition of prior learning (RPL), and in August 2007 the educational fields covered by the legislation were expanded to include the following educational fields: vocational training; single course subject in general adult education and general upper secondary education; basic adult education; VET – Vocational education and training programmes; VVU-degrees and diploma degrees.

The National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning (NVR) was established in fall of 2007 and has been funded by a three-year grant from the Ministry of Education. The goal of the NVR is to collect, develop, and disseminate information about recognising prior learning, with special focus on methods for documenting and assessing prior learning.
**NQF linkage to lifelong learning**

The NQF in Denmark will be linked to lifelong learning and validation of non-formal and informal learning in two ways: First, with the use of learning outcomes to describe qualifications as the opportunity to validate and recognise if qualifications gained through non-formal and informal learning is corresponding to the demands of admission or to the education goals of a given qualification in an education programme in the formal education system, is strengthened. Second, with the general view of qualifications, learning outcomes and admissions through the system of education the qualifications framework is a tool to create opportunities within validation of non-formal and informal learning as well as lifelong learning visible.

The qualifications framework description of education levels is not a tool in itself to be validated. It is the qualification and not the individual which are validated against the levels. In the qualifications framework of lifelong learning, learning outcome is used to describe levels and qualifications instead of using curriculum or the length of an education. When qualifications are described as a learning outcome it is more qualifying to validate if the learning outcome gained through non-formal or informal learning can be recognised according to admission or education goals in an education programme.

In the NQF the term qualifications is used instead of education. A qualification is a public approved degree or certificate that documents a learning outcome, him or her has gained.

It is possible to gain qualifications in other ways than through education for example if ones prior learning through working life or liberal adult education, civil society activities etc. are recognised through validation. The NQF relates to the learning outcome of qualifications which means what a person with a given qualification is expected to know and able to do.
Recognition practices

Key features of recognition processes

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 level; 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 as criteria for the assessments for admission or for the award of competence certificates. A network is established between the University Colleges to ensure a common approach to validation.

Recognition of informal and non-formal learning is grounded at the references in the formal education and training system. In Denmark a competence assessment is always based on the educational objectives and admission requirements of the education programme in question. The individual’s competencies should be recognised, irrespective of where and how they were acquired, but without compromising the quality/standard of the education and training.

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1 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.
programmes. The methods used must ensure a reliable assessment, inspiring confidence in the outcome. Validation happens only in the education system in Denmark.

The summative recognition approaches are linking recognition validation and accreditation to a qualification framework. The formative approach links recognition validation and accreditation to human resource management through mapping, notional levelling, personal or career development planning proves. The assessment of prior learning gives the individual the opportunity: to qualify for educational programmes; to tailor educational programmes or receive credit for certain classes; to obtain a ‘skills certificate’, if the skills are the same as those obtained by completing part of an educational programme and to obtain a ‘programme certificate’ if the skills are the same as those obtained by completing an entire educational programme.

The scheme down under shows the development of activity for validation and recognition of prior learning in 2008 – 2010 based on the numbers of annual pupils from the Ministry of Education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual pupils*</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training</td>
<td>195,4</td>
<td>296,9</td>
<td>262,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic adult education</td>
<td>14,1</td>
<td>19,2</td>
<td>17,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General upper secondary education</td>
<td>2,1</td>
<td>2,1</td>
<td>2,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General adult education</td>
<td>0,37</td>
<td>0,37</td>
<td>0,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVU- degrees and diploma degrees</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>58**</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*An annual fulltime pupil is a measure used to calculate the annual activity of a certain course / certificate. One annual fulltime pupil equals one student in fulltime 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 fulltime pupils. In 2010 there has been 30.252 participants in IKV i AMU.

** On VVU-degrees and diploma degrees the activity is made up in number of persons.
The number of persons who has qualified for a VVU programme or diploma is not being registered.

The activity is still relatively low because the regulations are still under implementation among the educational providers. But at the same time the development of activity was increasing from 2008-2009 within all fields of education. Unfortunately there’s - probably due to the economical / financial crisis - registered a fall in the activity in 2010. The Danish Ministry of Education has recently in 2011 settled down a working group with representatives from the social partners, practical persons from the educational providers, unions and associations to discuss potential new initiatives to boost this field.

**The role of social partners**

In June 2007, the Ministry of Education entered into an agreement with the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), the Federation of Danish Employers (DA), the Confederation of Danish Professionals (FTF) and the Danish Association of Managers and Executives, regarding recognition of prior learning. The goal of the partnership is to promote recognition of life skills and prior learning in order to encourage greater use of adult and continuing education programmes geared towards the labour market. The organisations agreed to pass on news about opportunities to receive prior learning assessments. In 2010 the National Council for Adult Education and continuing training (VEU-Rådet) has a special focus on that and will implement RPL. The role of government is in the learning process and the process of recognition validation and accreditation.

Target groups of Denmark are the low skilled people which mean unskilled employees or those with vocational qualifications that focus on practical skills. Given that employees in these groups are particularly vulnerable to outsourcing and automation, there are from a political point of view a potential employment and employability benefits to be gained.
So far no National Qualifications Framework exists in the Danish non-formal education. Objectives of non-formal adult education are to increase the individual’s general and academic insight and skills, to enhance the ability and desire to take responsibility of their own life, as well as to take an active and engaged part in society.

In Denmark a wide variety of descriptions and methods exists. Competencies can be described from all areas. E.g. In the third sector they are working on a common system of descriptions to. In the third sector in Denmark a system of descriptions to support the transparency and acceptance of the documentation of prior learning is being worked on.

In Denmark the educational institutions have the responsibility to recognise prior learning. Assessment is always done in relation to standards of the single education or training program. The NQF from March 2010 is new, but it is expected that the NQF will be important for credibility and reliability of the recognition of prior learning, especially because the NQF will promote a common use of criteria and standards and strength transparence.

**Tools, instruments and methods**

The educational institutions are free to choose the tools / instruments / methods. The important thing is that the educational institution can describe that the methods used are appropriate, reliable and trustworthy. Examples are: portfolio, interview, demonstrations, tests and self-assessment depending on what qualifications to be validated. Reliable assessments of the used methods have to be ensured. Different kind of proofs can be submitted, the criteria are grounded at the descriptions of aims and competence outcomes in the concrete education the assessments are related to.
Impact

Denmark has no systematically quantitative or qualitative analyses on data, outcomes and impact on RPL. The knowledge is still based on small analyses and case studies. But some small analyses indicate that RPL gives the learners admission or shorten their education. The authors have the political point of view that RPL in general plays an important role for the job opportunities, the employability and the mobility on the labour market.

All stakeholders involved in recognition of prior learning are very concerned about the needs of a more sustainable and well known practice. The practice is still growing and all the stakeholders are very concerned about how to qualify practice. In the autumn 2010, NVR has together with The Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality Management (SCKK) carried through a further competence project for professionalization of the staff working with recognition especially in the education institutions. It is an important initiative for quality and maybe the most important imitative at all (SCKK, 2010).

Challenges

The transition from system level to user level is challenging. In some aspects it’s difficult to convince particular the training providers that recognition of prior learning is a good idea. It may be a problem that learners and employers are not well informed about the right they have to get validation of their non-formal and informal learning. To overcome some obstacles it’s necessary to make it a “bottom-up” project.

A challenge for The Ministry of Education is now to develop a better combination between the formative and the summative approach to validation and recognition of prior
learning. In this aspect a discussion about how to connect the public and the private sector is needed.

Three important questions that Denmark wants to discuss in the future are those dealing with whether the Danish welfare model gives special opportunities for this connection, how to dialogue/network with all the relevant stakeholders, and whether partnership model is still a way for development and inspiration when it comes to implementation of RPL-

Another challenge is that we in general only have very limited data on outcomes and impact. It means that we would like to have more statistics from all the included educational areas. This quantitative and qualitative knowledge is important in relation to investments and outcomes of RPL both in relation to society, companies and the learners. In that matter it is necessary to not only look at the economic outcome but also on democracy, social inclusion etc.

For the future it is important; to build up a national coherent structure this will function in a flexible and practical way; to develop the system in a sustainable way; to inform to get knowledge about the possibilities at the individual level in the society; to have educational changes in the light of RPL and to strengthen the collaboration between the sectors: education, labour market and the third sector.

The Ministry of Education have the key recommendations on priorities, essential solutions and strategies towards recognising all learning:

A key recommendation is to make RPL a strategy doing it easier to go from being low skilled to become skilled and from skilled to get a VVU-degree and / or a diploma degree.

Guidance in the pre-fase about the possibilities for validation linked to a job perspective.

Involve stakeholders. Co-working and coordination between all relevant stakeholders.

It is very important that the system is transparent and that it is trustworthy for everybody so that it becomes legitimately in the same way as if you have taken a formal education.

It means common standards, principals and methods.
Competence development and professionalization.

Information about the possibilities directly to the target groups.

References

Act 556. 2007. Lov om ændring af forskellige love på Undervisningsministeriets område.


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