

Valuation and validation of
non-formal and informal learning
in Norway
- experience and challenges 2007
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1	Summary	4
2	Introduction.....	5
2.1	The content of the report	5
2.2	Definitions	5
3	The Norwegian Life Long Learning strategy	9
3.1	The Competence Reform (1999-2003)	9
3.2	Results of the Competence Reform.....	10
3.3	Further Norwegian strategy for LLL.....	11
4	The Norwegian Validation System	13
4.1	Background	13
4.2	The national Validation Project (1999-2002) Realkompetanseprosjektet	13
4.3	One system	15
4.4	Common principles	17
5	Validation in Higher education sector	18
5.1	Purpose	18
5.2	Laws and regulations.....	18
5.3	Technical arrangements, responsibilities	19
5.4	Methods and tools	19
5.5	Costs and numbers	20
5.6	Evaluation of the practice.....	21
6	Validation in upper secondary education	25
6.1	Purpose	25
6.2	Laws and regulations.....	25
6.3	Technical arrangements, responsibilities	26
6.4	Evaluation of the practice.....	27
6.5	Methods and tools	28
6.6	Evaluation of the methods.....	30
6.7	Costs and numbers	30
7	Valuation in working life and third sector.....	33
7.1	The Purpose.....	33
7.2	Methods and tools	34
7.3	Evaluations	38
7.4	The situation today	40

8	Current challenges and initiatives	42
8.1	Evidence of the benefits	42
8.2	Information strategy and the target group	44
8.3	Uniform practice	47
8.4	Cooperation between sectors.....	49
9	Summing up.....	51
9.1	Stakeholder cooperation.....	51
9.2	Central cooperation	51
9.3	Opportunities for the individual	51

1 Summary

Validation and valuation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has been on the Norwegian adult learning policy agenda since 1999 as a part of the national lifelong learning strategy. The first step in building up a system for validation was to establish the national Validation Project. The aims of this project were to develop methods and tools for documentation and validation of competences and skills from all learning arenas. The target group was all adults, both employed and unemployed.

Today we have put in place a framework of rights and opportunities for individuals. More than 60 000 adults have gain qualifications at upper secondary level, their non-formal and informal learning outcomes having been taken into account and a shortened period of training has been allowed for. More than 10 000 adults lacking formal qualifications have been offered admission to a study programme in higher education based on documented prior learning.

Different methods and tools for mapping, assessing and documenting competences and skills have been developed in the educational sector, the working life sector and the third sector (study associations, distant learning institutions, NGOs, folk high schools and voluntary work). Effort has been made to build bridges between the different learning arenas, and to promote a better understanding of the concept of “equivalent competence”. Despite this effort, it is still a challenge to find documentation methods that have credibility and legitimacy both in the workplace and the education system.

One of the main reasons for the difficulties with “equivalent competence” is that the different learning arenas have different criteria. As a result of recent reforms the standards in the education system are stated in national curricula and study plans where now the criteria at all levels are learning outcome oriented. The shift of focus from learning input to learning outcomes is believed to make it less complicated to assess learning gained outside the formal education system as “equivalent” to the requirements stipulated in the formal education system.

The tripartite cooperation between government, the social partners and other stakeholders has formed a shared responsibility and helped to build a strong agreement in supporting the Norwegian validation system. This is essential in the further steps for additional development and implementation of a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

2 Introduction

2.1 *The content of the report*

This report is a state of the art of the background, the efforts, the results and the challenges related to the Norwegian system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. In chapter three this system is seen in relation to the total lifelong learning policy in Norway. The national Validation Project is described in chapter four. Laws and regulations, development, results and evaluation of validation and accreditation in the higher and upper secondary education sector are discussed in chapters five and six. Arrangements, results and challenges related to documentation and validation in the non-formal and informal learning sector (working life and third sector) is described in chapter seven. In chapter eight some of the current challenges and relevant projects are discussed. Finally as a summing up some of the success factors are described in chapter 9.

Validation of learning outcomes is a global topic and many countries have developed or are developing systems for accreditation and recognition of prior learning.

Even though the intentions of validation are more or less the same in all of the countries working with validation the terminology is not uniform. To help communication among education and training stakeholders and to contribute to a better understanding, OECD and Cedefop have developed a multilingual glossary. The terms used in this report are based on the definitions in this multilingual glossary¹

2.2 *Definitions*

Informal learning: Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective.

Comments:

- Informal learning outcomes does not usually lead to certification but may be validated in the framework of recognition of prior learning schemes.
- Informal learning is also referred to as experiential or incidental/random learning.

¹ OECD, Cedefop (2007):Terminology of education and training policy, a multilingual glossary (in progress)

Source: Cedefop, 2003 and 2006.

Knowledge: The outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of study or work.

Source: European Commission, Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (presented by the Commission), Brussels, 2006;

Knowledge society / knowledge-based society: A society whose processes and practices are based on the production, distribution and use of knowledge.

Source: Cedefop, 2001 in European Commission, communication Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality, COM(2001) 678 final.

Learning: A process by which an individual assimilates information, ideas and values and thus acquires knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences. Learning may take place in formal, non-formal and informal settings.

Source: Cedefop and EQF Working group, 2006.

Learning outcomes: The set of knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process.

Learning outcomes can arise from any form of learning setting (either formal, non-formal or informal).

Source: Cedefop 2003 and 2006.

Lifelong learning: All learning activity undertaken throughout life, and which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.

Source: Cedefop, 2003 and 2006.

Non-formal learning: Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view.

Source: Cedefop, 2003 and 2006.

Qualification: The term qualification covers different aspects:

(a) formal qualification: the formal outcome (certificate, diploma or title) of an assessment

and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work. A qualification confers official recognition of the value of learning outcomes in the labour market and in education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade (OECD);

(b) job requirements: the knowledge, aptitudes and skills required to perform the specific tasks attached to a particular work position (ILO).

Source: adapted from: TESE - Thesaurus for Education Systems in Europe; European Training foundation, 1997; OECD, Qualifications systems: bridges to lifelong learning; ILO Thesaurus, 1998.

Qualification framework: An instrument for the development and classification of qualifications (e.g. at national or sectoral level) according to a set of criteria (e.g. using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes.

Source: adapted from: European Commission, Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (presented by the Commission), Brussels, 2006, as well as OECD, Qualifications systems: bridges to lifelong learning.

Recognition (of learning outcomes):

(a) Formal recognition: the process of granting official status to skills and competences either:

- through the award of qualifications (certificates, diploma or titles); or
- through the grant of equivalence, credit units or waivers, validation of gained skills and/or competences;

(b) social recognition: the acknowledgement of the value of skills and/or competences by economic and social stakeholders.

Source: Cedefop, 2003.

Skill: The resources (knowledge, know-how and/or experience) needed to perform tasks and solve problems.

Source: Cedefop, 2003 and EQF working group, 2006.

Validation of learning outcomes: The confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of an validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification.

Source: Cedefop, 2006.

Valuing learning: The process of promoting participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning, in order to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning.

Source: Cedefop, 2001 in European Commission, communication Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality, COM(2001) 678 final.

3 The Norwegian Life Long Learning strategy

Even though Norway has a high level of educational attainment, it may be not sufficient to satisfy the shifts in the demand for labour in the future years. Updated and new knowledge, competences and skills is necessary to improve competitiveness and increase flexibility in a changing working life. Both public authorities and the social partners have been preoccupied for a number of years with the risks of labour and skills shortages and mismatches; as a result the Norwegian Life Long Learning strategy was launched as the Competence Reform in 1998.

3.1 The Competence Reform (1999-2003)²

The Competence Reform was a result of the national wage negotiations between the state and the social partners and was based on acknowledgment of the fact that a well-educated population is the most important resource a country can have for the creation of new jobs, ensuring quality of life and preventing new class distinctions. The main objective of the reform has been to help meet the needs of individuals, society and the workplace in terms of skills and knowledge and give adult opportunities to acquire education and training to improve their qualifications.

The target group for the Competence Reform was all adults, both employed and unemployed and designed on a tripartite collaboration with a strong commitment from the social partners and the Ministry of Education and Research. The main elements of the reform were³:

- To give all adults a statutory right to primary and secondary education, and to give an obligation on educational providers to design the training offered in accordance with the needs of adults
- To ensure the right for individual employees to obtain study leave of absence for further education and training
- To provide state grants and scholarship for adults on equal terms with younger students

² KUF (1999): The Competence Reform. Whitepaper 42 1997-98.

³ UFD (2000): *Plan of Action for the Competence Reform 2000-2003*

- To establish a system for validation and formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes for people with low education
- To acknowledge the workplace as an important learning arena and a place for innovation

3.2 Results of the Competence Reform

One of the main results of the Competence Reform has been that the Parliament has legalised that all adults have a statutory right to primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. The legal right to upper secondary education was put in force autumn 2000; while the legal right to primary and lower secondary education has been in force since August 2002. In addition considerable efforts have been made in recent years to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups through adult education. This particularly applies to adults with especially weak schooling, various groups of physically disabled persons, adults with reading and writing difficulties and adult immigrants.

Other results are⁴:

- All adults have a legal right to leave of absence from work for education purposes after having worked more than three years
- At the end of 2006 more than 60 000 people have had their skills assessed with reference to upper secondary education
- A competence building program to promote innovation and development in the field of continuing education and training has been established. 740 development project including 80 000 persons have been funded for development and innovation of the learning market
- Individuals have been statutory entitled to seek admission to individual courses at universities or colleges on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning. Students have also been given the right to exemption from certain elements of their studies on the basis of documented prior learning.

⁴ Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (2004): the Competence Reform, a review of measures and results connected with the Plan of Action for the Competence Reform

- A system has been put in place to “translate” immigrant vocational competencies into formal Norwegian standards

The reform also led to the establishment of the Norwegian Institute of Adult Education (Vox) to oversee the implementation of the reform.

3.3 Further Norwegian strategy for LLL

The transition into a knowledge society has so far been a success in the Norwegian labour force; in March the unemployment rate was 2.7%⁵. Between 1995 and 2005, the Norwegian economy grew at an annual average rate of 2.8% of GDP⁶. But there is still a need for having LLL on the agenda to ensure a sustainable work force. It is also important to have in mind that the number of people receiving social security benefits (including disability pensions, sickness benefits etc) has increased.

The concept of lifelong learning at the beginning of the new millennium was often closely associated with continuing education and training and with competence development in working life. However since then lifelong learning has been further developed as a “perspective from cradle to grave” which also formed the basis of the subsequent educational reforms after year 2000.⁷

Many of the objectives of the Quality Reform⁸ in higher education (2003) were determined from the perspective of lifelong learning. Through the reform, a new degree system as well as a unified grading scale was introduced, making it easier, both nationally and internationally, to validate qualifications. The reform has also led to more emphasis on relevance to working life and more coherent study programmes.

Currently a reform of primary and secondary education called the Knowledge Promotion is being implemented. It focuses very strongly on one main element of lifelong learning: the importance

⁵ Statistics Norway 2007

⁶ OECD (2006) *OECD in Figures: Statistics on Member Countries*, Paris

⁷ Norwegian Ministry of Education and research (2007): *National report on the implementation of the education and training 2010 work programme* (in progress)

⁸ UFD (2001): *The Quality Reform*. Whitepaper 27 2000-2001

of having substantial basic skills. These skills are defined as the ability to express oneself orally; the ability to read; the ability to do mathematics; the ability to express oneself in writing, and the ability to use digital tools. The new curricula also have clear objectives for learning outcomes.

Although Norway performs relatively well in terms of adult learning, the ALL study reveals that a significant number of Norwegian adults experience difficulties with basic skills such as reading and numeracy⁹. The result has been an increased emphasis in lifelong learning policy towards addressing the needs of low skilled individuals, with more funding allocated to the Programme for Basic Skills in Working Life.

The reforms of recent years are subject to ongoing evaluation, and adjustments will be made when the results of these evaluations are ready. The strategy for lifelong learning will be an important frame of reference when the necessary adjustments are to be made, and the strategy itself will be subject to adjustment as part of this process.

The “Strategy for lifelong learning in Norway” covers all levels of education. The overarching challenges addressed by the strategy are¹⁰ :

- The need for focus on basic competencies on all levels of education
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Demand for more flexible learning methods and arenas
- Improved quality of and access to career guidance
- More emphasis on working life as a learning arena

In 2007 there are enough jobs for the unemployed and other people outside the labour market. The further strategy must be to find ways of keeping the employees in the labour market and methods for using the human resources in the right way. To evaluate and validate learning outcomes from all learning arenas is one important means to meet the need for a substantial work force in Norway.

⁹ OECD (2005b) *Learning and Living: First Results of the ALL survey*, Paris

¹⁰ Norwegian Ministry of Education and research (2007): *National report on the implementation of the education and training 2010 work programme* (in progress)

4 The Norwegian Validation System

4.1 Background

The intention of giving value to and to recognise non-formal and informal learning outcomes has a long historical background in Norway. Since, 1952, the Vocational Training Act has allowed citizens to take a crafts examination without formal training, provided they had sufficient practical work experience. Different stakeholders has a long tradition for valuing competences and skills obtained outside the formal educational system. These stakeholders are for example trade unions and associations providing liberal adult education.

It was the intention of The Norwegian Adult Education Act of 1976 to provide for adults to have their knowledge and skills validated and documented at all levels and areas within the formal educational system, regardless of where these competencies were acquired. But little progress was made in terms of technical and institutional arrangements to support this act, so as a result one of the objectives of the Competence Reform was to establish legal and procedural frameworks to ensure that these intentions from 1976 were carried out.¹¹

4.2 The national Validation Project (1999-2002) *Realkompetanseprosjektet*

According to the Plan of Action for the Competence Reform, one of its principal objectives was to establish a national system for documenting and validating informal and non-formal learning outcomes. This includes learning attained through paid and unpaid work, organisational involvement, and organised training.

In order to accomplish this, the national Validation Project was formed in 1999. The aim of the project was based on an agreement between the Ministry of Education and Research and the social partners. It was further based on the Storting (Parliament) resolution in connection with parliamentary discussions of White Paper no. 42 (1997–98) relating to the Competence Reform:

¹¹ Skule, Sveinung & Ure, Oddbjørn (2004): *Lifelong Learning - Norwegian experiences. Identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning*. Oslo: Fafo. Fafo-paper 2004:21.

“The Storting asks the Government to establish a system that gives adults the right to document their non-formal and informal learning without having to undergo traditional forms of testing.”

The priority areas for development in the project were as follows:

- Documentation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the workplace
- Documentation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the third sector
- Development of methods and tools for assessment and formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in respect of upper secondary education
- Development of arrangements of admission to universities and colleges for students who lack formal qualifications
- Adjustments and possible amendments of existing laws, regulations and agreements on the basis of experiences drawn from the project

The Ministry of Education and Research had the overall responsibility for the project. Vox, the Norwegian Institute for Adult learning, had the operational and professional responsibility in cooperation with the project board composed of members from the social partners, the educational system and the civil society.

During the three years 50 local development projects were funded. Different methods and tools for validation of non-formal and informal learning were developed in three sectors; educational, working life and third sector. Based on qualitative and quantitative data from these development projects and other surveys a new legalisation framework related to the individual rights for validation and accreditation in respect to upper secondary and higher education was set.

One of the results of the Validation Project was a circular from the Ministry of Education and Research with information on the implementation and further development of a national system for documentation and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

4.3 One system

After years of development, try out and implementation it is likely to say that the Norwegian approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes can be characterised by¹²:

- The outcome of the validation process needs to be beneficial to the individual
- The validation system is based on respect for diversity
- Competence development is contextual

The first bullet point addresses the issue about providing individuals that have fallen off the education wagon a second chance and give credits for their learning in the workplace, the home or any other activities. The second bullet point is an acknowledgement of the fact that not one assessment method will suit all people and that the assessor has to be sensitive to the needs of the individual. Respect for diversity is also demonstrated in the acknowledgement of many different learning arenas with different requirements to the documentation and validation of learning outcomes. The third bullet point indicates the importance in treating a person's competences and skills as something that is seen as more than objectively measurable. There has been a general understanding that competence and skills is created in relation with other people in a particular context and cannot be assessed in simple quantitative ways. It is not a "one size fits all" system.

Based on the experimentation and the above mentioned key characteristics, the Norwegian framework for the documentation and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes has reached a certain consensus. It contains:

- Shared laws, rules and agreements to ensure the rights of the individual. The shared laws include The Education Act, the Working Environment Act and the University and College Act.
- Shared procedure for various forms of documentary proof and validation. This includes decisions on: who is responsible; what is the documentation based on, possibility for complaints, the process of documentation and validation; and where the process takes place.

The shared procedure comprises the following steps:

¹² McHenry, Joyce Hartog and Torild Nilsen Mohn (2003): *Transfine – National Study Norway*, Oslo:Vox.

1. Information and guidance
2. Identification and systemisation of competences
3. Assessment
4. Documentation

- Various assessment methods, tools and documentary proof, which are suitable in relation to the requirements of the educational sector, the workplace or the third sector.

Table 1 summarises the four steps in the procedure for recognising and validation of learning outcomes in relation to the working life requirements, the third sector and the educational systems requirements¹³. Please note that the steps in relation to working life and the third sector are recommended, whereas the steps in relation to the curriculum in educational sector are required.

Table 1: Steps in the national procedure for recognition of informal and non-formal learning outcomes

Steps National procedure	Documentation in relation to the requirements of the working life	Documentation in the third sector	Documentation in relation to requirements of upper secondary education	Documentation in relation to requirements of higher education
1 Information and guidance	Information by: Employers Trade unions Branch org. Employment offices	Information by: Voluntary umbrella organisations, local org. inform their members	Information and guidance by county council centres and upper secondary schools	Information by: Higher education institutions NOKUT UCAS
2 Systemising and Identification	Creation of CV by individuals	Creation of CV by individuals	Creation of portfolio by Individuals and counsellors	Creation of portfolio by individuals
3 Assessment	Self assessment of actual work activities Verified by current	Self assessment of experiences / voluntary activities Self-declaration	Assessment in relation to national curriculum Certified by secondary/ vocational schools in cooperation with	Assessment in relation to requirements of each higher education institution.

¹³ McHenry, Joyce Hartog and Torild Nilsen Mohn (2003): *Transfine – National Study Norway*, Oslo:Vox.

	employer/ client		counsellors in county council centre	Certified by higher education institution / NOKUT
4 Documentary proof	Verified document	Self-declared document	Proof of competence Trade or journeyman certificate Diploma	Right of admission

4.4 Common principles

In the last phase of the national Validation Project all stakeholders agreed that the national system for validation should be based on some common principles. These principles are stated in the end report¹⁴ and are closely connected to the common European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning:

- Purpose of validation; according to the common European principles the purpose shall be both formative and summative. The tools and procedures developed in the Norwegian Validation project are meant to be both
- Individual entitlements; the result of the procedure is the individual's property and it is voluntary for the individual to participate
- Obligation of stakeholders; all levels in the companies and organisations is supposed to be involved in the planning and in the whole process
- Confidence and trust; it is only the individual who has the possibility to change anything in his/hers documentation, if possible both the employee and the employer shall sign the end document
- Credibility and Legitimacy; the end document is a result of a process and is therefore credible by the individual who owns it. It is the receiver of the document who shall give it legitimacy

¹⁴ Vox (2002): *Realkompetanseprosjektet 1999-2002- i mål eller på startstreken?* Oslo:Vox

5 Validation in Higher education sector

5.1 Purpose

The strategies for lifelong learning in Norway cover all levels of education and “access to learning for all” has long been a watchword of Norwegian education policies.

Until 2001 there was a demand for formal entrance qualification to get admittance to higher education. For adults with relevant prior learning but not sufficient formal education this was an obstacle for getting formal qualifications on higher education level.

In 1999 and 2000 16 university colleges and one University had a piloting of admitting students on the basis of assessed non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The evaluation of the projects influenced to a change in the legalisation for Universities and University colleges.

5.2 Laws and regulations

Following an amendment to the 2001 Act relating to universities and university colleges, adults aged 25 and over can have their non-formal and informal learning assessed in order to gain admittance to a specific study programme. The Act also allows for candidates to be exempted from exams or courses on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Act relating to Universities and University Colleges

All higher education, both public and private, in Norway is subject to the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges No. 15 of 1 April 2005. Two sections concern the validation of non-formal and informal learning, for admission and for exemption.

Section 3-6: Educational qualifications for entrance to higher education

1. The general basis for admission as a student (the general entrance requirement) is successful completion of the Norwegian upper secondary school and fulfilment of the requirements regarding subject combinations and hours of study laid down by the Ministry. The Ministry may stipulate that other suitable education or combinations of education and work experience shall constitute a general basis for admission. The institution shall consider whether applicants hold qualifications corresponding to the stipulated entrance requirements.

2. The institutions may grant applicants who are 25 years of age or older in the admission year

admission to specific courses if they on the basis of their prior learning (formal and non-formal) hold the necessary qualifications for the course concerned. The Ministry may issue further provisions concerning documentation, procedures and any coordination.

Section 3-5: Exemption from an examination or test

Exemption from an examination or test shall be granted when it has been shown that a corresponding examination or test has been taken at the same or another institution. Such exemption may also be granted on the basis of another suitable examination or test. Documentation of prior learning (formal and non-formal) may also provide a basis for exemption. The Ministry may order the institutions to coordinate their practice. The board decides whether the faculty concerned or a special body at the institution shall decide on exemptions.

5.3 *Technical arrangements, responsibilities*

In higher education, applications for admission based on non-formal and informal learning outcomes are assessed by the individual university or university college. The qualifications of applicants have to be assessed in relation to the subjects or the programmes they wish to study. Each institution has the power to assess what kind of knowledge and skills they consider to be necessary and decide on the appropriate course of action for carrying out this assessment.

The application form is sent to the current university or university college. It is the committee at each university/college who decides whether the applicant's documented prior learning fulfils the course entrance requirements. The application form is sent to the current university or University College. It is the committee at each university/college who decides whether the applicant's documentation of prior learning fulfil the course entrance requirements. Applicants seeking admission on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes are ranked in relation to applicants with general admission requirements on the basis of a rough appraisal; it is not possible to have the study points calculated since the learning outcomes described is seldom graded.

5.4 *Methods and tools*

In higher education applicants seeking admission to specific courses will be assessed if they on the basis of their prior learning hold the necessary qualifications for the courses. The assessment emphasises both the specialist content of the course and the teaching arrangements offered to

students. Informal and non-formal learning outcomes will be assessed mostly through written documents like self-declarations and portfolios. Interviews and tests are rarely used.

Information on criteria and assessment methods can be acquired from individual universities or university colleges. Assessments related to admission will vary from institution to institution as discretion will be exercised to a greater extent than in the case of regular admissions. Also the complaint procedure will be specific to each individual.

5.5 Costs and numbers

Validation and recognition of prior learning related to the higher education system is a procedure that is free for the individual applicant. The costs must be covered by the budget of the university or University College.

The number of prior learning applicants seeking for admission to a study programme was 6,000 in 2001 (the first year this was possible). The number of applicants decreased in the following years to 2,700 in 2006 (see table 2). It was expected that the number of applicants would be high when the possibility was opened up and that this would decrease somewhat over time. Approximately half the applicants want health and social studies and 1/5 want educational studies, mostly bachelor studies at university colleges¹⁵. (See table 3.)

Annually from 2001 to 2006, 50 % - 70 % of these applicants were found qualified for the study programme they want. In competition with other applicants, annually 45 % - 50 % of the applicants with validated and recognised formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes were admitted to the study programme they want.

The number of these new students has decreased annually to some extent, from 2,100 to 1,300 in the period 2001-2006. However, this is still an important scheme for adult lacking formal study competence to get access to higher education.

Table 2. Recognition provided by tertiary education institutions (public universities and university colleges) for admission to a study programme – Year 2001-2006			
Year	Applicants seeking recognition for admission to a study programme	Applicants found qualified for a study programme	Applicants offered admission to a study programme

¹⁵ Helland, H. & Opheim, V. (2004): *Kartlegging av realkompetansereformen*. Oslo: NIFU. Skriftserie 6/2004

2001	6,008	2,946	2,027
2002	5,784	3,037	2,122
2003	3,180	2,018	1,660
2004	3,356	1,991	1,598
2005	3,028	1,713	1,313
2006	2,709	1,908	1,324
<i>Source: Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS)</i>			

Table 3. Distribution of participants in the recognition process for admission to public universities and university colleges by type of study programme (ISCED 5) compared to applicants with formal qualifications – Year 2002		
Study programme	Applicants seeking recognition for admission to a study programme	Applicants with formal qualifications
Health and social studies	48 %	14 %
Educational studies	18 %	8 %
Business administration studies	4 %	6 %
Natural sciences and engineering studies	5 %	8 %
Other studies	25 %	65 %
Total	100 % (5,460)	100 % (77,784)
<i>Source: Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS)</i>		

5.6 Evaluation of the practice

The effects of the legal right to seek admission to higher education on the basis of prior learning have been surveyed by NIFU STEP.16 A main conclusion is that the new legal right is working

¹⁶ Brandt, Ellen (2002): *Høgskolenes erfaringer med realkompetansestudenter fra forsøksordningene i 1999 og 2000.*

Oslo: NIFU. Skriftserie 11/2002;

according to the intentions in providing a second chance for learners not usually linked with higher education. Institutions have worked out local guidelines for the methods and criteria of assessment (i.e. what is relevant work experience for different study programs).

How the assessment is organised varies with institution: central and/or local, academic and/or administrative staff. Informants in nine selected institutions underlined that assessment shall be individual and to the best of one's judgment, but also just and not too resource-consuming – which point towards standardisation.

Before the new legal right was implemented, there was scepticism in higher education institutions to the concepts of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. But, some years of experience has led to a positive attitude in most institutions. Admitted students, selected among the applicants, are found to be highly motivated and hard working and they achieve results comparable to those admitted on the basis of formal qualifications. It is also said that these students often bring with them an experience and maturity that enriches the learning environment.

There are regional variations in the extent to which higher education institutions may be willing, or able, to admit adults on the basis of their prior learning. Especially small university colleges in outlying districts value these students as a professional and economic resource – so now their policy is “let everyone try”. On the contrary- centrally located university colleges have too many applicants, they find it hard to locate enough resources to deal with these applicant's schemes – their policy is “do not pull the wool over their eyes” and not sustain unrealistic ambitions.

Interviews with representatives from some higher education institutions¹⁷ indicated that candidates who apply for admission on the basis of their prior learning often bring with them a diverse range of documentation. This often makes the process of assessment more difficult as well as time consuming. One representative indicated that the administrative costs of admitting students on the basis of their documented non-formal and informal learning are around ten times higher than for normal applications. At another institution they spend around twice as much on those who apply on the basis of their prior learning compared with applications from students

Helland, Håvard (2005): *Realkompetansestudenters bortvalg og studiepoengproduksjon*. Oslo: NIFU STEP. Rapport 6/2005.

¹⁷ OECD (2007): RNFIL Country Note

with a formal academic background.

How institutions practice *exemption* from an examination or test (i.e. course in a study programme) based on documented prior learning has been the focus of three recent surveys. Legally and in practice, admission and exemption are two separate processes connected to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

As part of the European REFINE project, the Norwegian sub-project had two main objectives: achieve insight in the processes concerning assessment of candidates with non-formal and informal learning who apply for exemption in higher education, and conduct case studies of a limited number of candidates using recently developed tools for documentation of prior learning.¹⁸ The report shows that the selected six institutions lack procedures for the assessment of exemption candidates, and consequently dealt with the candidates in an ad hoc manner. This does not necessarily mean that these institutions are negative to the idea of exemption. Some institutions have always practiced a form of validation of prior learning with regards to admission, as potential students have to document specific skills within the special field (i.e. music) they want to study. Other institutions made preliminary decisions and concluded that exemption might be granted, but that the documentation of skills was not sufficient and the candidates would have to produce documentation of actual competence rather than just a description of practice, however relevant it might seem.

The suitability of documentation tools was discussed in most institutions. Some of the institutions consider the tools inadequate since they do not specifically relate to the field of study the candidate wants exemption from. Due to lack of national or even local procedures, the institutions had different views and conclusions about the nature of exemption.

A national survey carried out by NIFU STEP shows that in the period 2001-2004 all universities and university colleges, public and private, received only 123 applications for exemption from examinations based on non-formal and informal learning.¹⁹ Representatives of higher education have expressed scepticism about exemption on principle. However, the majority (72%) of the applicants were granted exemption, slightly more in university colleges (74 %) than in universities (65%). The extent of exemption is usually unknown to the central level, as

¹⁸ Haugøy, Grethe & Moe, Frank (2005): *REFINE: Recognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education. Final report from the Norwegian sub-project*. Bergen: SEVU, University of Bergen.

¹⁹ Brandt, Ellen (2005): *Avkorting av studier på grunnlag av realkompetanse*. Oslo: NIFU STEP. Skriftserie 5/2005.

applications and outcome are registered at faculty level only and assessment is carried out by academic staff in departments. Interviews with academics from different faculties on their experience with assessment of applications for exemption showed they were trying to develop some subject specific guidelines, the academics referred to discussions in their departments and national subject networks/associations.

A recent inquiry had group interviews with study administrative staff in two faculties at a university and two faculties at a university college on their experience with applications for exemption from examinations based on non-formal and informal learning.²⁰ Exemption cases were discussed in departments, faculties and personal networks; the administrative staff misses a national network to discuss principles, regulations and common problems.

²⁰ Engesbak, H. & Finbak, L. (2006): *En real avkorting?* Trondheim: NTNU ViLL

6 Validation in upper secondary education

6.1 Purpose

The purposes of recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes in upper secondary education are:

- to match the learning to formal qualifications set in the national curricula and shorten the study period
- to give possibilities for a more streamlined and tailor-made study programme for each individual
- to provide the individual with an accredited certificate or diploma (Proof of Competence) to gain promotion or career improvement, find a new job or increase mobility in the working life.

Validation “has made me believe that I can get the education I want to take” was agreed by 55 per cent of the candidates that had gone through validation of non-formal and informal learning at county assessment centres in 2001-2002; it was considered the most important effect by 30 per cent of the candidates. Validation “has made me more aware of my resources” was agreed by 60 per cent of the candidates, it was considered the most important effect by 20 per cent of the candidates²¹. There is no doubt that the validation process strengthens the ambition of the participants as their “hidden” knowledge is made visible and recognised.

6.2 Laws and regulations

During the development of the national system for validation and as a result of the implementation there have been changes in the legalisation leading to individual rights for adults.

Act relating to Primary and Secondary Education (Education Act)

The Education Act No. 61 of 17 July 1998 with later amendments covers both primary and secondary education. Chapter 4A concerns education and training organised especially for adults.

²¹ Agenda (2003): *Evaluering av Realkompetanseprosjektet. Hva mener ”brukerne”? Vedlegg til sluttrapport.* Sandvika: Agenda Utredning & Utvikling AS.

Adults who need primary and lower secondary education have a statutory right to such education from August 2002. This education must be adapted to the individual's needs and life situation, such as when and where the education is to be provided and the rate of progression. The municipal authorities are responsible for providing this education.

Section 4A-3. The right to upper secondary education for adults

- Adults who have completed primary and lower secondary education or the equivalent but who have not completed upper secondary education have the right to take upper secondary education. The first sentence applies to adults born prior to January 1, 1978. Education for adults shall be adapted to individual needs. This right may, among other ways, be met by means of distance education facilities. The Ministry may issue further regulations concerning issues such as the question of who shall be entitled to this right, admissions, ranking and preferential rights.

- Adults admitted to upper secondary education have the right to complete the full course. This applies even if they do not have the right to upper secondary education pursuant to the first paragraph.

- In the case of subjects where the syllabus requires a period of instruction longer than three years, adults admitted to upper secondary education have the right to education in accordance with the period of instruction laid down in the subject syllabus.

- No charge shall be made for tuition. The county authority may require adults attending upper secondary education to pay for the teaching materials and equipment normally required for their own use in connection with the course. The county authority may require payment to cover the cost of copying such materials. The Ministry of Education and Research may issue further regulations.

Section 3-5. Trade and journeyman's examinations without apprenticeship or schooling.

It is possible to sit a trade or journeyman's examination on the basis of sufficiently broad working experience of a trade of duration 25 per cent longer than the stipulated apprenticeship period. The County authority as represented by the county vocational training board decides whether the working experience stated by the applicant can be approved, and may in special cases approve periods of experience shorter than indicated above.

6.3 Technical arrangements, responsibilities

The Norwegian parliament (the Storting) and the Government define the goals and decide the budgetary frameworks for education. The Ministry of Education and Research is Norway's highest public administrative agency for educational matters, and is responsible for implementing

national educational policy. A common standard is ensured through legislation and through national curricula. The national curricula at upper secondary level are developed by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training in close cooperation with the social partners. The Directorate is the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research. In this capacity the Directorate has the overall responsibility for supervising education and the governance of the education sector, as well as the implementation of Acts of Parliament and regulations.

In recent years considerable responsibility and decision-making authority has been delegated from the central government to county authorities. County authorities have responsibility for upper secondary education, including vocational education and training.

As a part of the national Validation Project, every county authority received funding for building up an organisation of a validation and formal recognition system. Most regional authorities organise this work by means of one or more “assessment centres”. Adults can acquire information, guidance and help with the validation process in relation to upper secondary education from supervisors at these centres. The centres are also responsible for quality assurance of the assessment procedure.

6.4 Evaluation of the practice

Evaluation of operational systems in upper secondary education

The objective of the comprehensive Vox survey²² “Awareness of legal rights to upper secondary education” conducted 2003-2005 was to find out to what extent adults make use of their rights to have their non-formal and informal learning assessed and an individually adapted pathway of studies established. The survey focused on the following three areas: a) the extent to which adults made use of their rights to primary and lower and upper secondary education b) whether adults have their non-formal and informal learning assessed and whether they receive tailored training c) whether adults received adequate information about their legal rights and opportunities. Issues related to motivation, finances and life situation were also incorporated in the survey.

Annually more than 20 000 adults are participating in upper secondary education organised by the Norwegian county authorities. Most (84%) attend adapted courses organised for adults. The

²² Vox (2004): *I videregående som voksen*, Oslo:Vox

distribution between general studies and vocational studies is 60/40. Most adults can initiate their studies within six months of their application. The proportion of adults stating that fulltime or part-time employment is their primary activity is high, and this corresponds with the fact that 68% state that their own/partners income is the primary source of sustenance while they are in training. The reason might be that many cannot afford to take an unpaid study leave.

One important aspect of the statutory right to upper secondary education is that it increases the possibilities for adults to get formal training. The survey shows that only 25% are familiar with his/her legal rights and that awareness of rights also has an unequal geographical distribution. 85% do not know where to go for get formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Two out of five have no idea of where to go for getting information about their own legal right to training. 20% says that the public employment offices should give information about such procedures.

Those who need it most, i.e. those who have not completed upper secondary education, do not know about their statutory rights. Therefore, those who have the greatest need for new competencies do not know about, or are not adequately motivated to, make good use of his/her legal rights. The students were asked about which factors have been vital for their decision to start training. Out of those who responded to this question, 76% believed that their own motivation had had the greatest importance.

6.5 Methods and tools

During the national Validation Project the following methods have been developed for validation of non-formal and informal learning in respect to the requirements stipulated in the national curricula:

- Dialogue-based method: The dialogue-based method is based on discussions between assessor/specialist and the adult. The specialist focuses on the knowledge and experience of each individual and attends to specific problems and queries in the curriculum. The assessor/specialist can use a computerised or manual tool based on the curriculum in question.

This method requires individual preparation and a one-to-one meeting. The dialogue-based method can be combined with portfolio assessment, self assessment and testing. It has been tested out on a large number of candidates. The conclusion is that the method fits in with both

vocational and general subjects. Yet, the degree of testing has to vary from person to person. A dialogue-based method covers tacit knowledge, and seems to be good for adults who have difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics.

- Assessment of portfolio: Assessment on the basis of a portfolio is a method based on written documentation, photos, etc. The candidate sends a “charting” form to a “service centre” together with certificates and reports. Modules and subjects are approved on the basis of the documentation submitted, and additional education is offered so that individuals can acquire the desired certificates. This method demands good written documentation of individuals’ own skills and does not require one-to-one meetings. Undocumented and tacit knowledge is difficult to reveal. After admission to upper secondary education, a discussion takes place in order to arrange the course according to actual knowledge and skills.

- Vocational “testing” starts off with an interview, where the background, training, work experience, language skills and objective of the adult are charted. After the first general interview a professional specialist interviews the individual in the particular subject, after which the individual shows the abilities in practice, so that both the theoretical and the practical side of the trade is assessed. Working on the basis of this practice, the adult may be offered either additional education to bring him or her up to a journeyman/trade certificate level or public certificate useful for job seeking. This method complements other methods in that the assessment of non-formal learning is also possible, and where required, parts or all of the practical side of the vocational subjects can be approved. Vocational “testing” provides adults – irrespective of their ethnic origins – with every opportunity to show what they can actually do in their own fields. This method picks up knowledge and experiences which are not documented and works well irrespective of learning and language difficulties. Vocational testing, on the other hand, requires inter-departmental co-operation between the education system, the employment service and possibly also the insurance office and social security office.

Both manual and computerised tools have been developed and tested in vocational and general subjects. The tools are used in different ways in the different methods dependent on the needs of the individual. Sometimes the assessor supplements the existing tools with locally developed tools.

6.6 Evaluation of the methods

The Validation Project was evaluated by Agenda. One of the surveys²³ was carried out among the people in the education system, supervisors and assessors/specialist. Both supervisors and assessors/specialists find that the documentation of non-formal and informal learning has positive effects on candidates; this gives the candidates more self respect.

Regarding different assessment methods, discussions have been held on how important it is for candidates to be called to attend a meeting or an interview. Meetings or interviews are perceived as being very important by 96 per cent of the supervisors and 85 per cent of the assessors/specialists. Geographical closeness to the place of assessment is also perceived as being important, even though this is evidently a relative concept.

The surveys revealed a major need for training: Around 96 per cent of the supervisors and 85 per cent of the assessors/specialists feel that they need training in the future, particularly in relation to a quality assurance arrangement which may lead to a national standard.

The survey carried out among candidates²⁴ confirms that the assessment of their non-formal and informal learning has been a positive experience. 80 per cent of the candidates taking part in the projects in the education system state that the identification, the systemising and the assessment of their non-formal and informal learning has been useful or very useful. According to the candidates themselves, the most important consequences are that the projects have made them believe that they achieve the education they want, and that it has made it possible for them to take part in upper secondary education / higher education.

Among the candidates who are studying for degrees, around 80 per cent say that they are doing as well as they expected, or better. The candidates have a good perception of the actual assessment of their non-formal or informal learning. Almost 70 per cent were of the opinion that the assessors were very accommodating in regards to their requirements, and almost 90 per cent said that the assessors were very good or quite good at finding out what the candidates' skills were.

6.7 Costs and numbers

The county authorities are responsible for adult education at upper secondary level and receive financial support as a part of national funding.

²³ Agenda (2003): *Evaluering av Realkompetanseprosjektet*. Sandvika: Agenda Utredning & Utvikling AS

²⁴ Agenda (2003): *Evaluering av Realkompetanseprosjektet. Hva mener brukerne? Vedlegg til sluttrapport*. Sandvika: Agenda Utredning&Utvikling AS

The validation procedure related to formal recognition in the upper secondary educational system is to a certain extent related to individual legal rights, and for the individual the procedure is for free. Some examples:

- If you are born before 1978 and do not have a general or vocational certificate from upper secondary level, the validation procedure (guidance, assessment and documentation) is for free. The costs are included in the county councils “adult learning budget”. The size of this budget is decided locally in each county
- If you are disabled to work, the social security office can pay for the validation procedure
- If you are unemployed, the employment office can pay for the validation procedure
- If you do not fill the criteria for getting the recognition for free, you have to pay yourself

The county councils in Norway charge more or less the same prices. The prices vary from €120 to €300 for an academic/general subject, €300 for a vocational subject and €1,800 for vocational testing.

From 2000 to 2005 approximately 60 000 persons went through a formal recognition procedure in relation to upper secondary level²⁵. Approximately 80% of the recognition has been done in vocational subjects, most related to health and care sector, see numbers from one county authority (Nordland fylkeskommune) in table 4.

Table 4 Distribution of participants in the recognition process by type of subject in one of the county authorities			
Subject	2004	2005	2006
Common general subjects	148	210	219
Building and Construction	6	12	16
Electrical Trades	14	17	17
Arts, Crafts and Design	31	14	18
Hotel and catering	8	1	15
Health and care	610	517	561

²⁵ www.ssb.no

Chemical and Processing Trades	3	15	3
Engineering and Mechanical Trades	55	68	76
Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry	10	13	9
Technical Building trades	9	3	4
Woodworking Trades	0	1	2
Media and communication	4	4	5
Sales and Service Trades	49	33	58
Unknown	69	37	38
SUM	1016	945	1041

7 Valuation in working life and third sector

Many Norwegian adults participate in learning activities that fall outside the formal education and training system, such as internal training courses within their organisation or courses organised by study associations. Furthermore, informal learning takes place in everyday work in the workplace. This type of learning has for a long time been highly valued.

The mandate of the national Validation Project was first geared towards the formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes for low skilled persons wanting to enter the education system. The social partners moved to extend the mandate to the development of validation tools for working life and third sector as well. Nine experimental projects targeting the labour market and five projects targeting the third sector were carried out during 1999-2002. The projects were carried out by the social partners in different sectors, study associations and county administrations which cooperated with enterprises. Some projects were directed at specific sectors or industries, other projects were focused on a geographical area.

7.1 The Purpose

One of the main reasons for the Competence Reform was the awareness and visualisation of the amount of learning at work. A survey concluded:²⁶

- Employees regard their workplace as the most important venue for learning
- Employers believe practice is best way of learning

However, valid data on budgeting and number of hours spent is difficult to obtain. The Learning Conditions Monitor²⁷ is an annual survey about adult learning, mostly focused on learning at work. In 2005 half of the employed have participated in course and other non-formal training during the year. 60% of the employed have learning intensive work- which can give indication to quantity of informal learning at work. The survey indicates that 83% learn from discussing or working with competent colleagues. Routines and schemes for facilitation of learning through working life are moderately dispersed through Norwegian working life. Twenty-three per cent of the employed have participated in organized colleague guidance and 22% in practical experience

²⁶ www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/501/501.pdf

²⁷ Fafo (2006): *Lærevilkårsmonitoren*, Oslo:Fafo

and job rotation schemes over the last year. The learning that takes place in day-to-day work is experienced by 77% of the employed as useful also for work in other enterprises. When looking at effects of participation in education and training 78% of the employees experience that further education and longer courses that this has helped them to do a better job one year on.

For the individual the documentation of competences and skills from working life and third sector could be useful when applying for jobs within the firm or the wider labour market. Mapping of skills can create new internal career advancement or project participation, and it can be helpful in the process of fulfilling employment requirement. The visualisation process and the final documentation of learning outcomes can reinforce self-confidence, increase self awareness and inspire people for participation in lifelong learning.

For the companies there are multiple purposes for visualising human resources. The documentation tools can help to map and identify the knowledge and skills of the employees in such a way as to help organise the supply of training more efficiently. Other common purposes can be to fulfil QA / international standard requirements, an option for search and find or strategic competence management.

7.2 *Methods and tools*

Many organisations have their own systems and procedures for documenting competences either as part of their HR management system or ISO requirements. Yet due to the Competence Reform more emphasis has been placed on the right of the individual to document non-formal and informal learning that has been developed over time in the work context. Especially among the small and medium sized organisations.

The national approach recommends taking the following procedure into use:

1. Information and guidance
2. Identification and systemising of all competences (CV)
3. Self-assessment of work-related competences (Employee dialogue)
4. Verified documentation

Tools in working life

In the national Validation Project different tools were developed. Most digital tools start with self-assessment of the kind of work tasks the employee has performed and responsibilities he/she has held in the company. This self-assessment is then subject to discussion, evaluation and ultimately validation and signed by the employer as a passport, to be combined with a CV. Some tools were jointly developed by employer association and union.

The existing commercial tools for charting competence in work tasks are for use within the company. The documentation tools have this use too, but aim also to be useful for the employee when applying for a new job or when applying for admission to an educational institution on the basis of non-formal and informal learning.

The different tools developed during the Validation Project still exist, but they are not free to use. Build on the experiences done in the Validation Project Vox have made available the tool “Competence Card” on their website. Together with the tool are also some examples and a database tool for the HRM.

Experiences have revealed that establishing good routines and to prepare well before starting is vital for a successful visualisation process. In relation to the Competence Card Vox has on the basis of different projects suggested the following steps of the mapping and documentation procedure:

1) DEFINE THE STATUS OF THE COMPANY

A short going through of today’s situation and future challenges is a good starting point.

Take a look at completed tasks/projects, who did them and what kind of competence that was needed to fulfil them. This course of action will give a good general view of the employees’ competence and project/task areas in the company.

2) AGREE ON THE AIM OF THE CHARTING AND HOW TO ORGANISE IT

Before starting the process, both employer and employees ought to agree on how planning stages best serve the project and who should have responsibility for the different phases in the process. It is important to discuss some of these elements in order to be prepared for diverse situations arising during the course of the project work.

A common understanding of what the purpose and utilisation of the mapping of competences and skills can be a complicated process.

Employees are often interested in:

- **developing their own competence**

Mapping competences and skills is important for defining the field of competence one has or in cases where one does not have sufficient competence.

- **Their own career possibilities:**

One wishes to document one's own competence and one's potential to be even better.

The company is most often interested in:

- **Strategic development of competence**

Where do we want to go and what do we need to get there?

- **Charting the intellectual pool**

What is the potential of the working force we have?

- **Evaluation of employees and management**

A depiction of how the various sections in the organization function

- **Certification; prospects of registration within public enterprises**

3) CHOOSING TOOLS

There is a diversity of tools to be used for mapping and documenting competences and skills in working life. It is important that the use of chosen tools has been thoroughly thought through so that the work process does not falter or entirely cease due to practical difficulties with tools. Testing the suitability of the tools before the work process has been started, can be a smart move. Vox has developed a tool which can be downloaded free from www.vox.no

4) INFORMATION MEETING

Good information and implementation throughout the whole organisation is decisive for achieving a good result.

Before the information meeting you should understand the following clearly:

- "What do we stand for?", "what are we aiming for?"
- the need for competence, future tasks/assignments
- Purpose: why chart and document competence?
- Implementation, responsibility
- How should it be done?
- What happens after the process is over?

5) DESCRIPTION OF COMPETENCES AND SKILLS

How much help each individual needs to fill in the documents will vary. Some have done this earlier and only need up to date adjustments, while others have never done anything like this earlier and may need guidance. This can be done in various ways. Colleagues, shop stewards or a local manager could be of help.

It may be wise to pave the way for organised guidance to get the process started. Remember: those who need guidance are as a rule those who don't ask for it.

One good technique for getting started is to note down the various work tasks from a day at work.

It is useful to have a completed example readily available when filling in one's own competence. You can find examples of completed attestations in this start kit.

6) VERIFYING THE DOCUMENT

After the charting is over, it is useful to write the result in the form of an attestation/document of competence. This document will give a good description of what the employee is capable of and has learned.

It is advised that an attestation of competence contains the following:

- A statement concerning work tasks
- A statement of competence
- Vocational skill competence
- Personal and social competence
- Leadership/managerial competence
- Other relevant statements

The employee is the sole owner of the document. This implies that the employee decides how the document is to be used.

7) FINISHING PROCESS (SUPPLEMENTARY WORK)

A charting and documentation process like this must be continually kept up to date. The process will create expectations of change in one form or other – either in the form of further training offers, or other work tasks or increased esteem. If the plan for following up the work has been agreed on beforehand and information has been well organized en route, misunderstandings can be avoided.

Tools in third sector

Both the methods and the tools for charting and documenting non-formal and informal learning in the third sector are based on individuals' own efforts. Electronic tools have been developed. The idea is that individual organisations will provide information to students, course participants and voluntary participants within the organisation. Individual organisations are responsible for delivering guidance to people who want to make use of a documentation method, yet individuals draw up their own CV and identify and describe their own skills. It is also the individual who carries out a self-assessment of the skills identified and described.

An instrument developed called PKD is a “universally valid self-declaration for voluntary work”. This instrument contains:

- 1) an introduction in which the methodology for completion is described,
- 2) an example of a completed form,
- 3) a form ready for completion, and
- 4) the option of creating one's own reference.

A glossary has also been developed. In this glossary various voluntary organisations describe their specific activities and their skill profiles.

7.3 Evaluations

The evaluation²⁸ of the national Validation Project included a national survey in 2001 and a county survey in 2003 to employees and employers that had participated in pilot projects on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The validation was considered useful for local wage negotiations by 50 % (2001) and 65 % (2003) of the employees. The validation was considered useful for job seeking by 65 % (2001) and 85 % (2003) of the employees. Almost 10 % of the employees had got a new position in the enterprise/organisation in connection with the validation. Among employers, only 10 % considered validation useful for local wage negotiations. Employees seem optimistic as to the future economic gains of their validated non-formal and informal learning.

An evaluation of one of the tools developed in technological enterprises had views from employers and employees on possible important areas of application. Individual wage stipulation was considered important by 40 % of both employers and employees. Job seeking outside the enterprise was considered important by 60 % of employers and 80 % of employees²⁹. Both the stayers and the movers are likely to profit economically from having their non-formal and informal learning validated.

In 2005 Vox staff interviewed employers and employees in small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas on the advantages of charting and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

²⁸ Agenda (2003): *Evaluering av Realkompetanseprosjektet. Sluttrapport*. Sandvika: Agenda Utredning & Utvikling AS (pp. 126-128).

²⁹ Skule, S. & Andersen, B. (2000): *Dokumentasjon av realkompetanse i teknologiindustrien. Evaluering av TBL og Fellesforbundets dokumentasjonsordning for arbeidslivet*. Oslo: Fafo. Fafo-rapport 363 (pp. 42-44).

One example is a small cleaning enterprise that had the usual high turnover and much absence through illness, both are now reduced. The key is that all employees get work tasks that they are good at. The formal, non-formal and informal competences and skills of all employees were charted in 2001, resulting in surprises. Some employees had trade certificate in dress-making; their competence was used when the dry-cleaner's introduced less environmental harmful new methods. An employee had competence as gardener, so the enterprise took on maintenance of greenery as a task. The different social skills of employees are used to put together well-functioning teams.

Also productivity improvement was mentioned by some employers. One example is a meat processing enterprise had during the five last years increasing and conflicting demands from various sources: demands for high quality (customers), low price (retailers), good hygiene (government) and higher profit (owners). To meet the demands, managers and employees cooperated first to survey the working processes as well as the formal, non-formal and informal competences of all employees, then to make individual training plans connected to assigned work tasks. As an ongoing process, all future changes in work tasks will involve training and documentation of employee competence. Productivity and quality is improved.

A pilot project 2004-2006 on voluntary documentation in agriculture is supported by the State Agricultural Administration. Farmers are self-employed, but even so their economic situation may be improved by having their non-formal and informal learning validated. The national associations of farmers and small farmers cooperate with partners in Nordland County (the County Governor, the county agricultural administration, the Agricultural Guidance Service). For farmers, to document their non-formal and informal learning may be useful for further development as a farmer, planning future new production (i.e. in niche markets), demands for quality assurance and documentation in relation to the markets. The global changes in agriculture production and markets (EU, WTO etc) are important. Some small-scale farmers may need supplementary income from other kind of work. The national associations have developed a course in how to document their total competence, to be used in study groups of 6-8 farmers. Schemes for CV and Competence Passport (professional competence including economy and ICT, personal/social competence, managerial competence) are part of the course material. The farmers can in four meetings discuss their varied work tasks and learn how to assess their competence and document it, how to find partners that can validate and sign the Competence Passport (i.e. Agriculture Guidance Service staff) and discuss possible needs for more education.

7.4 The situation today

In the Validation Project the social partners stressed the importance of developing methods and tools to document the competence and skills acquired both in working life and wider social and leisure activities.

The Basic Agreement is an agreement between the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry (NHO) including all its national and local associations and individual enterprises, and the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) including all its unions and associations (divisions). The Basic Agreement for 2006 - 2009 Chapter VI on Development of competence has a new part, § 16-4 Documentation of formal, non-formal and informal competence: “*The enterprise is requested to have a system for documentation of the individual employees’ experience, courses and practice related to the conditions of work.*”

It has also been argued that time and money can be saved if an individual employee or group of employees brings a documentation of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes with them when entering a recognition process within the formal education system. A Vox case study³⁰ done in five counties in 2005 concluded that the documents provided from the companies to the employees do not include relevant information for the assessors. Four out of five cases use the dialogue based method in the assessment procedure, and do not give much attention to documents. While in the fifth case the assessment of portfolio is the main method.

While some of the tools developed in working life received favourable evaluations from human resource managers as well as from employees who took part in these projects³¹, the diffusion of documentation tools throughout working life has so far been limited. One reason is that the employees may be sceptical about how the documentation might be used by the employers in times of downsizing³². It is also possible that the already widely used and quite successful ‘practice candidate’ route may have removed any immediate incentive for companies to experiment with the new tools. Employers may also have been concerned that trade unions could use the new methods to advance claims for higher pay.

³⁰ Røstad, Sigrun & Storli, Randi (2006): *Realkompetanse i praksis*, Oslo:Vox

³¹ Skule, S. & Andersen, B. (2000): *Dokumentasjon av realkompetanse i teknologiindustrien. Evaluering av TBL og Fellesforbundets dokumentasjonsordning for arbeidslivet*. Oslo: Fafo. Fafo-rapport 363.

³² Skule, S. & Ure, O. (2004): *Lifelong learning – Norwegian experiences. Identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning*. Oslo: Fafo. Fafo-paper 2004:21

Another reason for the limited use might be that companies do not perceive that the pay-off is sufficiently high to expend the required resources. Even though the tools is designed to be simple and practical to use, there is evidence that some employers regard them as an extra cost and that they still question their value from a strictly business point of view³³.

The Vox Barometer autumn 2006³⁴ looked at attitudes and experiences related to charting of skills and competences, the survey included interviews with employers in 1008 companies. 43% of the respondents claim to do mapping of the employee's competences and skills, the size of the company is crucial when it comes to whether they do the charting or not. When it comes to the methods used for mapping 23% are using informal interviews, 44% are using annual interview/performance appraisal and 32% register systematically the employer's skills and competences in a database. The different methods used is among others influenced by size of the company, the systematically register method is used by 47% of the companies with more than 50 employees. When asked the question "All-in-all, how important do you think it is to map the employee's skills?" 93% of those who actually do the mapping responded that this was important (34%) or very important (59%).

³³ PAYNE, J. (2006) *The Norwegian Competence Reform and the Limits of Lifelong Learning*, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 25, 5, September-October, 477-505.

³⁴ Bekkevold, Karl & Hilleren, Irene & Guthu, Lene (2007) *Vox Barometeret 2006*, Oslo:Vox

8 Current challenges and initiatives

Recognition of all types of learning is essential for a fully developed lifelong learning strategy, and Norway has for some years been in the forefront in developing a system for valuation and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However, as mentioned surveys and a new OECD report³⁵ points out; there are still challenges to be met:

- There is a need for more evidences of the benefits of the system
- There is a need for a more targeted information strategy
- There is a need for a uniform practice across regions
- There is a need for further cooperation between sectors.

8.1 Evidence of the benefits

The Competence Reform was rooted in the belief that a well-educated population, able to learn and update their competence throughout life, is the most important resource a country can have for the creation of new jobs, ensuring quality of life and preventing new social distinctions. A system for recognising skills and competences has been an important issue for making it possible for everyone to join the knowledge society.

The benefits of Norway's system for validation of non-formal and informal learning have largely been taken as self-evident. Upon initiation of the Competence Reform in Norway aiming to establish a validation and recognition system, a committee was summoned to address issues of costs and benefits. The committee suggested a slow mode of implementation due to financial risks, but concluded that a reform within the sectors of education, employment and trade was an important means in ensuring long-term financial benefits and skills distribution.³⁶ With the exception of an ECON analysis from 2004, no costs and benefits analyses of specific initiatives have been undertaken at a national level.

The White Paper introducing the Competence Reform refers to reduced costs related to recognition of competences as opposed to costs related to comprehensive programmes of formal education. Similar assumptions about gains and losses are presented on a theoretical level. Most

³⁵ OECD 2007 (in progress)

³⁶ UFD (2002) *The Competence Reform - Action Plan 2002-2003* 3rd edition.

of the cases described today are based on the benefits of the individuals and do not include calculations.

In a Vox study done in 2003 two main characteristics of county administrations' work related to adults were found.³⁷ One group of county administrations were focusing on finding flexible solutions for the individuals, and by this promoting an increase in the competency level of the region, as well as regional development. The other group of administrations was more oriented towards laws and regulations and applied the regulations to prioritise between applicants and to restrict access. It was reported that the focus of these administrations was not primarily on regional development. There was a mismatch between positive attitudes in general and their actual practice.

A qualitative analysis of the outcomes of accreditation of unskilled nursing assistant has been done in the Vox project "Effects of Validation in the Health and Social Sector"³⁸. The project group interviewed seven employees and their managers in four different nursing homes in Norway. The employees managed to achieve authorisation as skilled nursing assistants via validation and training. The project group interviewed them about their experiences during this process, and mapped the consequences of the process on their work performance and working conditions.

The employees participate in a validation process and achieve authorisation because they seek more knowledge about their field of work, and because they want more stable working conditions. They are satisfied with their employers' efforts in adapting their working conditions to their special needs as students. The transfer from "unrecognised" to "recognised" is not primarily based on a wish for higher wages. The respondent reports of greater self-confidence and control in their work performance as well as an awareness of a higher level of reflection. One main effect of this transfer process is the possibility of changing jobs and achieving a permanent position with an increased number of working hours. The managers wish to give their nursing assistants the possibility of achieving authorisation in order to hold on to qualified personnel. The managers seek to adapt the working conditions to the special situation of workers taking part in education, reporting that the employees are more responsible and confident in their work performance as a result of the process. In addition, they are better at sharing knowledge with

³⁷ Haugerud, Vigdis, Sigrun Røstad & Tor Arne Stubbe (2004): *Intensjoner og realiteter*. Oslo: Vox. Rapport 6 i Kunnskapsgrunnlaget.

³⁸ Haugøy, Fossan-Waage, Aune Servan (2006): *Effects of Validation in the Health and Social Sector*

other workers.

More effect studies may be needed to provide valid statistical evidence on where we stand five years into experience with a validation system. Further projects and surveys need to have focus on the output side of validation and recognition in terms of transparency, predictability and cost-effectiveness. More information is also needed to provide policymakers with valid input on individuals' succeeding labour performance and living standards. Vox is now working on how to improve the statistics for adult learning in the county authorities in cooperation with the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and Statistics Norway.

The validation and recognition system in Norway is quite complex and to develop accurate and reliable measures of the performance may not be possible. But for improving the system and for convincing the stakeholders of the benefits we do need more facts and numbers.

8.2 Information strategy and the target group

The Norwegian economic context today is very different to that which existed when the Competence Reform was launched and lifelong learning was in the forefront on the national agenda. In 1998 the target group for the Competence Reform was "all adults". Today the unemployment rate is very low and for workers who feel relatively secure in their jobs and/or whose positions are underpinned by claims to seniority, there may be limited enthusiasm for further education and training³⁹.

Knowledge about the legal rights

To get a picture of how widely known the different arrangements for adults are Vox carried out a survey in 2003 which is reported as "Awareness of legal rights"⁴⁰. Adults who had registered for the final examinations in upper secondary education in the spring term 2003 stated that they had obtained information about upper secondary education rights for adults from different sources. Most participants (more than 25%) stated that their source of information had been a supervisor

³⁹ Teige, B.K. (2004) Trade Unions Involvement in Lifelong Learning in Norway, in: R. Cooney and M. Stuart (eds) Trade Unions and Training: Issues and International Perspectives, National Key Centre in Industrial Relations Monograph, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, 2004, pp. 162-174

⁴⁰ Cf. *Kunnskapsgrunnlaget*. Oslo: Vox.

in an upper secondary school or an advisor in an assessment centre (often situated in upper secondary schools). The Norwegian Public Employment service (NAV) is also considered an important information source. Most respondents (85%) know that paid leave is not included in the legal right to education. It is also encouraging to find that most students are aware of the fact that adults have the right to have their non-formal and informal learning assessed (75%) and that schooling is free (60%). However, only a few (25%) know that adults who have this legal right also have the right to tailor-made training. The county authorities will therefore have to focus on distributing information about the purpose of the assessment of non-formal and informal learning, and the connection between this process and tailored training /shortened study period.

The opportunities for validation and recognition are not widely known amongst the potential users, particularly amongst people with low formal education. Many individuals may lack the motivation for further education particularly where this is associated with 'going back to school'⁴¹. The target group has changed, now with the focus more towards the unemployed, immigrants and those in receipt of welfare benefits. It is important to being clear on the actual target group in terms of the kind of channels through which information can be most effectively diffused to potential users. To give information in such a way that it motivates the target group is a main challenge in the further work with validation.

Target group: health and care sector

Based on demographic and economic models, Statistics Norway has estimated possible future supply-demand imbalances in the Norwegian labour market. The estimates show that there will be an increased shortage of nursing aids and engineers in the period from 2006 to 2010⁴². Validation of non-formal and informal learning plus possible supplementary courses has so far led to trade certificate as nurses' aide to many adult women with long relevant work experience.

For small rural communities far from regional centres, it has been difficult to recruit and keep qualified nurses and teachers. One solution is that locally based inhabitants, mostly adult women with family responsibilities, take part-time studies, often decentralised and ICT based. These locals are stable employees after their studies and are very much valued by the employers. Validation of non-formal and informal learning has opened up this possibility for more individuals. This positive effect was stated by university college staff in the pilot projects in

⁴¹ Payne, J. (2006) The Norwegian Competence Reform and the Limits of Lifelong Learning, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 25 (5), September-October, 477-505.

⁴² Stølen, N.M. (2001): Tilbud og etterspørsel for ulike typer arbeidskraft. *Økonomiske analyser 6/2001*. SSB.

1999-2000 before validation was officially decided⁴³. Statistics show that the majority of applicants to higher education on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning want professional studies at university colleges targeted at public employment. Of the applicants in 2002, 48 % wanted health- and social studies (31 % nursing studies) while 18 % wanted educational studies. Among the other applicants, only 14 % and 8 % wanted these studies⁴⁴. For the health sector and education sector, validation of non-formal and informal learning implies a larger recruitment of motivated professionals.

Target group: prisoners

In the project “Building a stepping stone for the prisoners” the target group is explicit. The average educational level for prisoners is low and they are provided education and training in prison, mostly on upper secondary level. Vocational testing and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are seldom used. To introduce such procedures to chart the prisoners’ competence will improve the training offers. This may also motivate the prisoners for further education and later employment. The Ministry of Education in a White Paper on prison education⁴⁵ stated: “The prison school shall arrange validation of non-formal and informal learning for prisoners that wish so and have the right to it. The validation is the basis for working out individual plans for education and training. The county and the local school find suitable arrangements for the carrying out of the plans. Also prisons without schools should arrange for validation. The prisons must be given information on validation of non-formal and informal learning and on practical local implementation. The Ministry will start a pilot project on validation of non-formal and informal learning for prisoners, based on the principle of adapted training. The project will be followed up with evaluation and dissemination of experience.” This project has now been established. Five counties have been funded for developing models for validation for prisoners.

Target group: Immigrants

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is useful for immigrants and refugees that often lack documentation of their education and work experience. Pilot projects for immigrants and

⁴³ Brandt, E. (2002): *Høgskolenes erfaringer med realkompetansestudenter fra forsøksordningene i 1999 og 2000*. Oslo: NIFU. Skriftserie 11/2002 (p. 9).

⁴⁴ Helland, H. & Opheim, V. (2004): *Kartlegging av realkompetansereformen*. Oslo: NIFU. Skriftserie 6/2004

⁴⁵ St.meld. nr. 27 (2004-2005): *Om opplæringen innenfor kriminalomsorgen, ”En ny vår”*. UFD.

refugees in two counties used vocational testing in the validation process⁴⁶. Most participants had Norwegian trade certificate as their goal, in order to enter the labour market or to get better jobs. The participants evaluated the vocational testing process positively, with interviews, showing what they could do and getting it documented. However, further guidance and cooperation between public services was needed to get training places in enterprises and supplementary vocational education for a trade certificate.

8.3 Uniform practice

Training offered to adults at upper secondary level is meant to be based on his/her assessed prior learning. Results of the survey Kunnskapsgrunlaget (Vox 2004) revealed that the number of assessed students is, however, still lower than expected. Only 34% of the examination candidates respond that they have undergone an assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, while 54% respond that they have not been assessed at all. Ten per cent state that they do not know whether their non-formal and informal learning has been assessed. However, there is cause for concern when more than 60% of our candidates are in fact working, but have not had their prior learning assessed and validated.

The same survey concludes that there is too much variation between the counties in their practice validation, and how far they go in exempting parts of the upper secondary education program. Variation is both related to the skills of the assessors as well as to different validation procedures and practices in the counties.

There are two main trends in the counties' work with giving education offers to adults. One trend is represented by those that primarily focus on finding flexible solutions for the individual and thereby increased competence as an investment for regional development. Another trend is represented by those that are more rule oriented, they use legal acts and regulations with a view to deciding on priorities and delimitation'.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Hagen, A., Svendsen, E. & Folkenborg, K. (2002): *Dokumentasjon av realkompetanse gjennom yrkesprøving. En kartlegging av erfaringer med kompetansedokumentasjon for flyktninger og innvandrere*. Oslo: Fafo.

⁴⁷ Haugerud, V., Røstad, S. & Stubbe, T.A. (2004): *Intensjoner og realiteter*. Oslo: Vox.

There is a need to achieve greater uniformity across the various counties when it comes to the implementation of statutory rights for adults to upper secondary education. This requires that local political actors review existing priorities and budget allocations (.The general finance rule is that the counties receive a block grant from the state for the provision of learning at the level of upper secondary education. To have evidences and reliable data on the benefits (as mentioned in 8.1) are important inputs to these reviews. Too big variations in practice may contribute to undermining the legitimacy of the system.

Higher education institutions benefit from a large degree of freedom in how they practice access and exemptions. Depending on their geographical location and the number of applicants there will always be variations in practice between the institutions. The institutions are in some way in contact in order to learn from each other and develop more coherent practice but there may be a need to share good practice for development of clearer procedures and approaches.

The national survey *Kunnskapsgrunnlaget* revealed differences in how the 19 county councils read and understand the laws and regulations for adult education. As a follow up Vox initiated a project with the aim of getting a more common and shared practice related to the counties arrangements with adults' individual legal right to validation and upper secondary education. Representatives from the county councils, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and Vox have discussed the challenges and differences, and a report⁴⁸ with recommendations and descriptions of how to understand the laws and regulations is now finished. The process and the results of the project have led to an increased agreement between the stakeholders and the next step is to implement these agreements on the different responsible levels in the county councils.

A case study⁴⁹ showed that the counties have different approaches of how to relate the training provided to the results of the validation procedure. One of the challenges is how to develop tailored training within the economical and organisational frames. In 2007 Vox coordinates a project where four counties have got funding for develop models for individually adapted training based on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Additional aims of the project is to get a common understanding of the benefits of validation, to get a better cooperation between the different authorities responsible for adult education and to get a picture of the costs related to the validation and training process for the county council.

⁴⁸ Vox (2007): *Rett og rimelig*, Oslo:Vox

⁴⁹ Vox (2007): *Verdsetting av realkompetanse i praksis*, Oslo:Vox

8.4 Cooperation between sectors

Effort has been made for giving individual legal rights for validation, and the educational sector has built a framework for validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

There is a general cooperation between the labour market (NAV) and different educational institutions on the local level in Norway, but there are some challenges linked to ‘who is responsible for what’- so finding solutions is mainly left to individuals alone. One of the main challenges is connected to responsibility for career guidance. A barrier to efforts of cooperation seems to be that the aims of the different political fields are quite distinctive. For the labour market, the goal is to get applicants into ordinary jobs as quickly as possible, while the goals for the educational institutions is to ensure increases in the level of competencies.⁵⁰

Unemployed persons with a right to complete upper secondary education can have an assessment of their non-formal and informal learning paid for by the employment office as part of an approved jobseekers’ agreement. To work effectively, this requires close cooperation and coordination between the public education system and the employment service at county level.

For adults with work experience seeking employment (including the long term unemployed, immigrants and physically challenged), it is important that validation of their non-formal and informal learning is a part of the Labour Market Services work to further qualify them for employment through individual plans and adapted vocational courses from the Services and the county. A pilot project on “Increased use of assessment of non-formal and informal competence for persons seeking employment” is set up in three counties from August 2006 to December 2007. The Ministry of Education through Vox cooperates with the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion through the Labour Market and Welfare Directorate in the project. The pilot project shall improve services in the interface between labour market policy and education policy. The main objectives are (i) Attain/gain joint expectations and better routines for cooperation between

⁵⁰ ECON (2005): *Skjæringsfeltet mellom arbeidsmarkeds-og utdanningspolitikk i 6 utvalgte land*. Oslo: ECON.

the services (ii) Increase use of validation of non-formal and informal competence for persons seeking employment, to make more purposeful/focused qualifying and job seeking in all counties.

Vox has started the pilot project together with the Labour Market Services (NAV) and counties/communities. The goals are:

- Coordinate tools for validation of non-formal and informal learning in counties with procedures and tools that are used by the Labour Market Services in charting/mapping competence for persons seeking employment, including the disabled
- Use validation of non-formal and informal competence as central means to set up purposeful qualifying courses for persons seeking employment.

Another arena where differences between sectors persist is how prior learning is valued in working life and how it is valued in the education systems. Companies are primarily interested in recording what the individual can actually accomplish in relation to the strategies and tasks in the company, while the point of departure for education providers is to map the lack of competencies compared with a given curriculum.

There is an ongoing discussion in Norway on developing a national qualifications framework. A framework of qualifications may provide an important link between standardization in assessment arrangements and procedures of quality assurance enhancing legitimacy to the formal recognition system. There is also believed that the implementation of learning outcome oriented curricula can make it easier to recognize non-formal and informal learning.

9 Summing up

9.1 Stakeholder cooperation

Tripartite involvement in policy-making on lifelong learning in Norway has been important for the success of many of the different actions in the Competence Reform and the follow up of this reform. The validation system in Norway is grounded in a framework of legal rights achieved on the basis of tripartite cooperation between the state, social partners and other stakeholders in the field of adult education. This is a strength of the Norwegian policy process and this provides a good platform for the further progress and the continued development of the validation system.

The national Validation Project had central steered bottom up approach, the overall responsibility lied with the Ministry of Education and Research and all the stakeholders were involved in the board and in the development projects. This formed a shared responsibility and a common ownership to the results of the project.

9.2 Central cooperation

Vox has the responsibility for the implementation and further development in close cooperation with the Ministry and the stakeholders. To establish a national approach built on shared laws and common principles in parallel with a high degree on local autonomy has been one of the success factors.

This has been possible because of networks have enabled representatives from the counties to work together and share experiences. Vox has also organised conferences and seminars for education officers and assessors. In addition to different projects these activities provide an important forum for debate and learning.

9.3 Opportunities for the individual

The framework of rights and opportunities that has been put in place gives opportunities for adults to gain formal qualifications at upper secondary level which take account of their prior learning and allow for a condensed period of study. New fast-track routes for adults into higher education have been opened up which are beginning to challenge traditional notions of

knowledge, learning and pedagogy within these institutions.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning has an important role to play in terms of helping the long-term unemployed, immigrants and those on long-term sick leave to re-enter the labour market. In 2005 Vox staff interviewed employers and employees in enterprises in rural areas on the advantages of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. One story presented is of a man named Per. He had problems reading and writing (dyslexia) and quit school early to work as an excavator driver. “When I grew up, it was not important with papers, because you always got a job. If there was an excavator, you could dig.” Per was employed by an oil drilling enterprise in 1991. He was unskilled, but capable. Gradually he worked his way up to become a manager. He got the main responsibility for reinjection work on two oil riggings in the North Sea. He travelled much and had heavy responsibilities, perhaps too heavy. So one day he had a breakdown. What should he do now? He would not go on in the same track as before. The employer gave him a choice. He could get new work tasks, but then he had to get a trade certificate as a mechanic. In cooperation with the employer Per mapped and described his prior learning related to his professional experiences. He had worked for many years as an unskilled mechanic both in the North Sea and on land. With his description of prior learning and other documents he contacted a skill centre in the county. In a dialogue with assessors he got recognised what he had learnt through practical work, and he passed most of the modules in the vocational curricula. The rest he studied on his own and did well in the final examination. Today Per has his trade certificate as an industrial mechanic, and has a new job in the same enterprise. “Now I’m finally standing tall”, he says.