

”There is a need to increase access to guidance in general to support validation practices.”

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Guidance in validation within the Nordic region

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Challenges and
recommendations

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Summary

In this report a working group from NVL, representing the Nordic region, including Åland, Faroe Islands and Greenland, explores and discusses guidance in Validation of Prior Learning (VPL). In the report, the acronym VPL will be used.

The content presented is based on information gathered through a mapping grid, SWOT analysis and cases obtained through combined efforts of representatives in the working group. Definitions and relevant literature are included in the discussions. The main products of this work are the identified main challenges and recommendations linked to guidance in validation in the Nordic region, which are presented in the chapter 7 and briefly summarized here below.

The following recommendations have been identified by the working group for further development of guidance in validation in the Nordic region:

- The Nordic countries should develop a set of **common principles or guidelines for guidance in validation** related to the different phases in the process, aiming at increasing the quality of guidance services and the VPL process.
- The Nordic countries should examine whether and how Career Management Skills (CMS) can be used as a tool to increase the efficiency and transparency of career guidance in general and specifically linked to VPL practices. **National or common Nordic guidelines on CMS/Career Competences** could be based on the Nordic approach (see the report “A Nordic perspective on career competences and guidance”, 2014).
- More focus needs to be on **how guidance activities within VPL systems can be financed**.
- **Education and training** of those who are to deliver guidance in VPL processes needs to be established.
- VPL should be a **part of the initial education** of professionals in education and counselling/guidance to enhance increased use of VPL.
- **National guidelines on guidance services** and policy development in the area of guidance in general can support the identification of ways to organize and coordinate guidance towards increased coherency and impartiality in practices. The individual should always be in the center.
- The knowledge on VPL needs to be strengthened in society at all levels. Organizations conducting VPL could play a part in **disseminating** their experiences to a more extent to various stakeholders.

A table of Contents

1	Introduction	6
2	Methods	7
3	Aims of validation and lifelong guidance	9
4	Definitions and interconnectedness of validation and guidance	11
5	Findings and perspectives related to the content of guidance in the validation process	16
6	Guidance in validation and Career Management Skills (CMS)/Career Competences	18
7	Main challenges and recommendations	20
8	Concluding comments	24
9	References	25

Annexes

1. Mapping grid
2. Blueprint for Life/Work Design (overview matrix)
3. Summaries of the status of guidance in VPL
in the Nordic region
4. Form for gathering cases
5. Form for SWOT analyses

1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to establish common ground for discussing and developing guidance in validation, which will hopefully be a step towards seeking opportunities for improving the quality of guidance in Nordic validation systems.

This report is produced by the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) through established efforts of the Guidance and Validation networks. A working group, including representatives from both networks, was activated in order to provide information on how guidance in the process of validation of prior learning (VPL) is carried out within the Nordic region. Representatives from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Åland, Faroe Islands and Greenland provided information for the study. Dr. Raimo Vuorinen, project manager and coordinator of European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) provided feedback and support during the development of instruments for information gathering.

Among inspirational reports for this study were: *Quality in validation in the Nordic Countries (2012)*; *European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (2009)*, *Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012)* and *Survey on Adult Education in Iceland conducted by Capacent (2014)*.

Chapter 2 briefly describes the methods used for collecting information. In chapter 3 the aims of validation and lifelong guidance defined in EU papers are reviewed and compared. The definitions and interconnectedness of validation and guidance are reviewed in chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the findings and perspectives on guidance in validation in each validation phase. In chapter 6 a connection is made with the concept of Career management skills (CMS) and Career Competences. Finally, the main challenges and recommendations identified within the Nordic region are presented in chapter 7, followed by concluding comments.

2 Methods

In order to get an overview of current guidance practices in validation, a mapping instrument in the form of a grid was developed (see Annex 1). The grid consisted of 7 focus areas, identified by the working group, divided into 3 categories (Policy level, Organizational level and Practical level), see table 1 below.

POLICY LEVEL (MACRO)

1. Laws and regulations, for guidance in validation
2. Policies and financing, for guidance in validation

ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL (MESO)

3. Responsibility for delivering guidance in the validation process? (Which institution/organization/specialists)
4. Qualifications of guidance personnel and need for expertise in each phase
5. Feedback for quality and evidence base regarding guidance delivery in validation processes

PRACTICAL LEVEL (MICRO)

6. The purpose of guidance in different phases of validation
7. Methodology used in the different phases of guidance in validation

TABLE 1: Overview of focus areas of information gathered in the study.

• • •

to bring forth a national view of main challenges and identify possible solutions

For area 6 in the table, competence descriptions from the Canadian Blueprint for Life/Work Design (see: www.blueprint4life.ca/blueprint/documents/ENbrochure.pdf) were used. An overview matrix of competences for managing one's life/work can be found in Annex 2

Overview summaries, based on the information gathered through the mapping grid, were produced by each country and are presented in Annex 3.

Cases were gathered for obtaining a better insight into the guidance process itself. The question form can be found in Annex 4.

Each country/area representative also conducted a SWOT analysis, based on the information gathered through the grid and the national summaries, (form in Annex 5), to bring forth a national view of main challenges and identify possible solutions. The results are presented in chapter 7 as common Nordic challenges and recommendations and are the main product of this study.

3 Aims of validation and lifelong guidance

The focus on Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) has been growing within Europe and the Nordic region over the last two decades. This also applies to lifelong guidance, which has been the focus of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN). The main aims of the two areas are linked in many ways as can be seen in various EU papers (e.g., Improving lifelong guidance policies and systems, Cedefop 2005; EU council resolution, 2008; ELGPN documents), namely to play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning (Council of the European Union, 2012).

The EU Council Resolution - Better Integration of Lifelong Guidance into Lifelong Learning Strategies states the following (Council of the European Union, 2008):

“The Member States should consider enabling people to benefit from support in obtaining validation and recognition on the labour market of their formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes, in order to safeguard their employment and maintain their employability, in particular during the second part of their careers“.

In table 2, the core aims presented in the beforementioned EU papers on Lifelong guidance and VPL are mapped together.

This simple mapping reveals that there is a close connection between the aims of the two policy areas which support an interrelatedness in action taken towards these goals.

AIMS OF LLG	AIMS OF VPL
Citizens recognize their own skills, competences and interests. ¹	Identification, recognition and possibly certification of knowledge, skills and competences of citizens. ²
Citizens make appropriate decisions regarding their learning and career. ³	The citizen should be able to make the best use of each phase of VPL in an appropriate manner (Identification, Documentation, Assessment and Certification), whether it is further learning or employment. ⁴
Citizens manage their individual paths in terms of learning, work and other activities. ⁵	The citizen is provided with individual paths according to the validation results that may lead to further learning or employment. ⁶
Working life receives motivated, employable and flexible employees with tools to develop themselves. ⁷	The citizen's existing competences are made visible in the validation process, which promotes motivation for further learning, employability and flexibility in working life. ⁸
Supports local, regional and national fiscal policy by developing more flexible and adaptable workforce. ⁹	The purpose of validation is to prevent redundant learning, shorten study times, provide faster access to the labour market. ¹⁰
Helps society to support the development of more socially aware, democratic citizens, who adhere to sustainable development. ¹¹	VPL makes the citizen's knowledge, skills and competences visible, thus empowering and activating the individual, and enhancing democratization and social awareness. ¹²

TABLE 2: Comparison of the aims of lifelong guidance and validation of prior learning. Sources can be found on the page 27.

4 Definitions and interconnectedness of validation and guidance

DEFINITION OF VALIDATION

In the Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2012), the following definitions linked to VPL can be found:

Validation of learning outcomes: 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 a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification.

Validation: A process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:

1. **IDENTIFICATION** through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;
2. **DOCUMENTATION** to make visible the individual's experiences;
3. a formal **ASSESSMENT** of these experiences; and
4. **CERTIFICATION** of the results of the assessment, which may lead to a partial or full qualification

Through the identified phases, the Council recommendation opens up a broader definition of VPL as a process. It is not focused solely on assessment and not only tied to the formal system. The documentation of competences and development of career competences could also be a part of the VPL process through the support of lifelong guidance activities.



...broader understanding of the word “career” is becoming increasingly common.

DEFINITION OF GUIDANCE

There have been discussions within the NVL guidance and validation networks, which have highlighted the complexity of definitions related to the concept of guidance versus career guidance. There are cultural differences in the understanding of the two terms, whereas in some countries/areas, the term career guidance is connected directly to the world of work and progression in one’s work related career specifically. In a Nordic report on career competences and guidance, this issue is raised and pointed out that a broader understanding of the word “career” is becoming increasingly common in guidance research and practice in the Nordic region and the international community, moving from the narrow perspective of the term to a more holistic view of “career” as the individual’s path through life with all the twists and turns this might entail (Thomsen, 2014). The definitions of the two concepts set forth in the European context do not seem to distinguish clearly between them. In the glossary on the ELGPN website (www.elgpn.eu/glossary) the definitions are the following:

Guidance: Help for individuals to make choices about education, training and employment. (ELGPN).

Career guidance and lifelong guidance: A range of activities that enable citizens of any age, and at any point in their lives, to identify their capacities, competences and interests; to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions; and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used. (ELGPN).

The first definition is broad and focused on making choices. In many cases, the guidance delivered may be in the form of information and delivered by various professionals. From that perspective, it may not cover all the outcomes of guidance, which could possibly take place in VPL processes, hence also the aims of VPL in Table 2. The definitions of Career guidance and lifelong guidance are identical and provide a larger coverage of possible outcomes of guidance through VPL.

The Network for innovation in career guidance and counselling in Europe (NICE, 2014) delivers a perspective on the concept of guidance through describing the professional role of career services and career counselling as supportive measures to assist people in making sense of the situations they are experiencing in a reflective manner in order to open up new possibilities and develop their role in society. NICE further describes *three types of career professionals; career advisors, career guidance counsellors and career experts*. The level of competences regarding career guidance deliverance progresses from advisor to expert. Whereas career advisors can be teachers, placement managers, psychologists, social workers or public administrators, career guidance counsellors are dedicated to the subject as defined, practicing all of the professional roles described above. Career experts work towards the advancement of career guidance and counselling in different ways. Some of them engage primarily in research, academic training and developmental activities.

In this report where the focus is on guidance in VPL, the full concept of Career guidance and lifelong guidance will not always be relevant. That is why the word “guidance” is used, as an intermediate between the definition of guidance and the definition of Career guidance and lifelong guidance (further discussion on this issue in chapter 6).



NICE further describes three types of career professionals

THE PHASES OF VALIDATION AND THE ROLE OF GUIDANCE IN THE NORDIC REGION

In the mapping procedure for this study the 4 important phases of validation presented in the Council Recommendation (2012) were used as a baseline, but with adjustments made to cover the Nordic view on how guidance can be used as an entry and closing point of the VPL process. It is to be noted that the notion and practices of guidance in general have a long history within the Nordic region, but the organization of its deliverance can be extremely variable based on areas, sectors and institutions. Based on best practices identified, the category INFORMATION was added covering the role of guidance personnel to introduce and inform individuals about validation possibilities and assist them in making an informed decision about participation or other options of competence development. FOLLOW-UP is also added as a part of the phase of certification, where guidance is provided towards the next steps of competence development.

This presentation of phases is in line with the European guidelines (2009) where it is pointed out that the VPL process includes an information phase, where the candidates are informed about the process and benefits of participation, and time should also be allotted to explore possibilities after VPL, which can be addressed as a follow-up (guidance) based on the process results. See table 3 below.

In the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2009) it is also highlighted that the individual should, during the VPL process, have access to *impartial counselling and guidance at the right times, focused on individual needs*. In the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012) it is recommended that *“the validation of non-*

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION 2012	NORDIC WORKING GROUP ON GUIDANCE IN VALIDATION
	Information and introduction on validation to individuals – rights of the individual – disseminating information on VPL through guidance deliverance
Identification of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning	
Documentation of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning	
Assessment of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning	
Certification of the results of the assessment acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of qualifications, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate	Follow-up based on the results – guidance towards continuing competence development and/or career perspectives

TABLE 3: Phases of validation used in this study – based on the Council recommendation 2012.

formal learning is supported by appropriate guidance and counselling and is readily accessible". The thematic report on guidance and counselling, based on the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2014), reports that:

"The importance of ensuring that the provision of support and counselling is designed to meet the specific needs of different groups is significant, particularly in terms of devising a process of validation that is equal, and inclusive in its approach to supporting all groups to progress towards employment and/or learning" (p.1).

It has also been pointed out in the European guidelines (Cedefop, 2009) that different professional skills sets are needed for guidance that evolve around the actual assessment versus the more general process. The difference between the roles of the assessor and guidance personnel in the VPL process has also been emphasized in various papers, and is in many cases kept separate. Guidance in the assessment phase alone, does not guarantee that the individual is receiving the more specialized guidance addressing his/her personal situation, needs in the process, and use of results. That type of guidance can be labelled as educational and vocational guidance or career guidance.



there is a lack of coherent practices regarding guidance in validation...

It is evident from the material gathered in this study that it varies considerably how guidance in VPL is conceived and executed within the Nordic region. In some countries/areas, guidelines on guidance are not used on a practical level or have not been developed. In other countries, guidelines exist and are used in a specific field/with a specific target group. This may also vary within different sectors.

The SWOT analyses in this study have revealed that there is a lack of coherent practices regarding guidance in validation within the Nordic countries/areas. A common understanding of the concept of guidance situated in a VPL process is therefore fundamental: "What does the concept of guidance linked to the VPL process entail"? This is also stated in the Final synthesis report of the European Inventory (2014).

5 Findings and perspectives related to the content of guidance in the validation process

The information gathered through the mapping grid (Annex 1) from each country/area revealed that there is quite a difference in how guidance in validation is approached on a policy-, organisational- and practical level. Therefore, it was decided that each country/area would make a short summary based on their results from the mapping grid. Those can be found in Annex 3. The SWOT analyses conducted by each country/area were based on the mapping grid and summaries in order to focus on main challenges and possible solutions. Those results are the main product of this study and are described in chapter 7.

The detected variability in guidance connected to VPL within the Nordic region brings focus to the importance of discussing in more depth the actual practices and organisation. For example in Denmark, the practice of validation in institutions and by other stakeholders can be highly diverse in the way the practices are integrated at an organizational level and regarding the development of procedures and methods. The guidance delivered may be detached from the process itself or evolve around the actual assessment and provide little or no career guidance.

There has been an ongoing discussion about the need to establish independent guidance bodies to ensure career guidance for individuals in a lifelong learning perspective, but no decisions have been made so far. In the example of Iceland, VPL practices are focused on the target group of those who have not completed Upper Secondary school level. They are reached through Lifelong Learning Centres, based on defined national practices of VPL processes and guidance deliverance, which is embedded in the VPL process and publically financed.

In the mapping grid for this study a question was raised on a practical level (see Annex 1) regarding the purpose of guidance in the five phases of validation in the Nordic region. The answers from the Nordic representatives reveal that for each of the five phases certain aims/purposes are identified for guidance activities delivered. In the following table, examples of the most common aims are presented. The examples may present best practices of guidance in the validation process (in some cases presented as guidelines) and as mentioned earlier, actual guidance deliverance may vary considerably between countries, areas, fields and institutions.

5 PHASES OF VALIDATION	EXAMPLES OF AIMS/PURPOSE OF GUIDANCE IDENTIFIED IN EACH PHASE
INFORMATION and introduction to validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing understanding of the process, benefits and obligations • Reviewing competences and experience of the individual • Reviewing further/connected learning opportunities
IDENTIFICATION of competences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informing about qualification standards • Informing about evidence needed on existing competences • Reviewing competences and experience of the individual • Introducing documentation tools • Informing about available competence development
DOCUMENTATION of competences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding, assisting and motivating the individual through the documentation phase • Initiating and supervising portfolio work individually or in groups (formative approach) • Providing support in the process of self-assessment against qualification criteria (summative approach) • Guidance and advice on individual planning • Guidance on how to present/demonstrate one's competences and prepare for assessment
ASSESSMENT of competences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting the individual in understanding qualification criteria and assessment procedure • Guidance and support on how to present/demonstrate one's competences • Promoting fair results • Advising on further learning
CERTIFICATION of the results and FOLLOW-UP based on the results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing results of the VPL • Informing and guiding the individual towards continuing learning/career development (school, job, training) • Guidance on decision making

TABLE 4: Examples of identified aims of guidance in the 5 phases.

6 Guidance in validation and Career Management Skills (CMS)/ Career Competences

It was discussed in the working group that it would be interesting to explore the possible learning outcomes, which might derive from guidance in the validation process in this study. An attempt was made in that direction through reviewing the Career Management Skills (CMS) possibly addressed through guidance in each phase of validation (see Annex 1). The ELGPN glossary defines Career Management Skills (CMS) as “A range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals (and groups) to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions“. For the mapping purposes, Career Management Skills from the Blueprint for work/life design were used.

(See: www.lifework.ca/lifework/blueprint.html and Annex 2).

In career guidance, the focus is on assisting the individual in identifying his/her competences,

interests and strengths in order to make informed decisions regarding career/life issues. The learning derived from activities linked to that assistance has, in countries such as U.S.A., Canada and Australia, been presented as Career Management Skills (CMS). In CMS those learning outcomes are described which are viewed as important competences for being able to manage and develop one's career. In other words, building career competences for career development. Thomsen (2014) suggests that it would fit better into the Nordic culture to use the term “career competences” instead of Career Management Skills, due to differences in cultural understanding of the concept. Thomsen also suggests that the overall concept is at its core linked to the notion of career learning. Career learning focuses on the career competence building of the individual, while career education focuses on the role of the guidance personnel supporting career learning.

The Network for innovation in career guidance and counselling in Europe (NICE, 2014)



The matrix has however not been adjusted to the Nordic context.

defines career education as “the professional role of career services and career professionals to support people in developing career management competences, i.e. the competences, which they need for careerrelated learning and development. Career management competences include the ability to become aware of own resources and needs, understanding the functioning of labour markets, vocational and educational systems, the mature use of career information systems, developing career plans, making career decisions, adapting to change proactively, self-presentation skills etc.” (p.19)

A definition from the Canadian Blueprint for Life/Work Design provides an individual perspective:

Career development is about growing through life and work; about learning, experiencing, living, working and changing; about creating and discovering pathways through one’s life and work. When intentional, career development is about actively creating the life one wants to live and the work one wants to do. (See Blueprint website: www.blueprint4life.ca/blueprint/whatis.cfm)

Validation of Prior Learning can be seen as a part of an individual’s career competence development based on the aims set for the concept f.ex. in EU policy papers. The map-

ping grid used in this study reveals that guidance throughout the VPL process in many cases addresses, to some extent, the three main areas of CMS which are identified in the Blueprint for Life/Work Design; Personal management, learning and work exploration and life/work building. Looking closer, the competencies (see Annex 2) most often mentioned are described as follows:

- Participate in lifelong learning supportive of Life/Work goals
- Build and maintain a positive self-image
- Change and grow throughout one’s life
- Locate and effectively use life/work information
- Understand, engage in and manage one’s own life/work building process

Using the Blueprint matrix in this study was a simple attempt to open up a discussion on how to identify career competences, which can possibly be developed through guidance in VPL and support the defined aims of VPL (see Table 2). The matrix has however not been adjusted to the Nordic context. That may be an interesting subject to develop further in order to support quality and outcomes for individuals taking part in VPL.

7 Main challenges and recommendations

Based on the findings from the mapping and the SWOT analyses, the working group identified the following main challenges linked to guidance activities in validation processes within the Nordic regions:

1. A NEED FOR A CLEARER AND MORE HOMOGENEOUS DEFINITION OF GUIDANCE ACTIVITIES IN THE VPL PROCESS SUPPORTED BY NATIONAL GUIDELINES

There is a need for defining more specifically the aims and content of guidance activities related to VPL processes. This could have a great impact on whether participants in VPL receive the guidance needed for fair and reliable processes and results. The aims of VPL can not be fully reached without sufficient career guidance/lifelong guidance. Definitions need to be developed both at policy and at organizational levels, and presented in a way that gives space for

quality services being delivered to people with various needs. In addition, there is a need for monitoring actual practices for securing quality in the services provided and encouraging further developments in the field.

The SWOT analyses reveal that:

- There is a need for defining the aims and content of guidance activities related to VPL processes and producing guidelines on a national level with a focus on roles and responsibilities of the guidance personnel. The purpose would be to enhance common understanding of guidance activities to be undertaken by practitioners and through that increase coherency of guidance services delivered in the VPL process.
- There is a need for national guidelines on the specific Career Management Skills (CMS)/Career Competences, which can

be developed through participation in VPL processes. That would increase the transparency of services to be delivered and highlight the competences needed among guidance personnel.

- There is a need to increase access to guidance in general (legal rights) to support VPL practices.

Recommendations

The Nordic region should develop a set of common principles or guidelines for guidance in validation related to the different phases in the process, aiming at increasing the quality of guidance services and the VPL process.

The Nordic region should examine whether and how Career Management Skills (CMS) can be used as a tool to increase the efficiency and transparency of career guidance in general and specifically linked to VPL practices. National guidelines on CMS/Career Competences could be based on the Nordic approach (see the report “A Nordic perspective on career competences and guidance”, 2014).

2. A NEED FOR FINANCING GUIDANCE SERVICES LINKED TO VPL

How specific guidance activities are financed linked to the validation process varies within the Nordic region. It can depend on the legal framework in place, and whether or not

guidance is a specific part of the process. In addition, it can be linked to how far the development of guidance in validation has come in the country/area. At municipality level, this may vary in regards to how guidance and validation are organized in general.

The SWOT analyses reveal that:

- There is a need for allocating financing specifically linked to validation activities.
- There is a need for developing additional financing for the VPL system. Lack of financing affects access to VPL and career development for many citizens.

Recommendations

More focus needs to be focused on how guidance activities within VPL systems can be financed.

3. TRAINING OF VPL STAFF/ SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE OF GUIDANCE PERSONNEL - EFFICIENCY AND QUALITY ISSUES

There is a need for strengthening the education and training of the professionals providing guidance within VPL practices. Defining the competences needed for the guidance personnel is crucial for identifying what type of competences VPL guidance practitioners need to possess. In many cases there is a need to place more emphasis on value in the initial training of professionals in the field of adult edu-



Common Nordic guidelines could be developed.

cation and for developing specific training for validation staff.

The SWOT analyses reveal that:

- There is a need for specialized training for VPL guidance personnel.
- In some countries/areas, there is a need for more professionals in the field of career guidance. That may also apply to rural areas within a country.
- Competences related to the learning component of guidance (career education) need to be enhanced among guidance practitioners. Career Management Skills (CMS)/Career competences can support this development. National guidelines do not exist within the Nordic region.
- Knowledge of VPL and related guidance processes should be provided in the initial training of adult education practitioners in general (i.e. teachers and counsellors).
- There is a need for developing coherent practices in guidance methodology linked to VPL practices.
- VPL guidance activities provided to immigrants need attention for development.

Recommendations

The education and training of those who are to deliver guidance in VPL processes should be established (for supporting appropriate and individual guidance).

VPL should be a part of the initial education of professionals in education and counselling/ guidance to enhance increased use of VPL.

Career Management Skills (CMS)/Career Competences need to be implemented in the Nordic context in order to emphasize the possible career educational components of the VPL process and through that assist in defining the role of guidance activities (career guidance). Common Nordic guidelines could be developed.

4. THE COORDINATION OF GUIDANCE IN VPL

How guidance is coordinated and organized in general varies between countries/areas and within municipalities. Attention needs to be placed on how to develop impartial practices of guidance activities within the VPL process to ensure quality services and efficiency. The focus must also be on how adult guidance in general is organized. In some countries, there is a lack of impartiality in guidance. There must also be a focus on how the connection is between the career guidance before and after the VPL and the guidance within the validation process because in some countries there is only little or no career guidance within the VPL process.

The SWOT analyses reveal that:

- There is a need for clarifying the organization and coordination of guidance activities in the different phases of VPL.
- There is a need for coordination of guidance services related to VPL in different sectors (f.ex. employment sector, educational sector, 3rd sector) and between various stakeholders.
- The impartiality of the deliverance of guidance in VPL needs focus.

Recommendations

National guidelines on guidance services and policy development in the area of guidance in general can support the identification of ways to organize and coordinate guidance towards increased coherency and impartiality in practices. The individual should always be in the center.

5. INFORMATION

For the concept and practices of VPL to develop further and become useful as a tool for more people it is important that information is disseminated to various stakeholders including professionals in education.

The SWOT analyses reveal that:

- There is a need for increased dissemination of information to stakeholders at different levels about the possibilities and benefits of VPL.

Recommendations

Knowledge on VPL needs to be strengthened in society at all levels. Organizations conducting VPL could play a part in disseminating their experiences to a greater extent to various stakeholders.

8 Concluding comments

Findings from this study lead to the question whether further work on identifying learning outcomes in the VPL process could assist in developments towards identifying guidance activities that support the aims of lifelong guidance and VPL. That would put more focus on the needs of the individual and empowerment measures towards lifelong learning based on existing competences. In turn it would also call for looking into the responsibility of those who organize and deliver guidance activities, as well as directives from policy level.

As presented in the EU principles and guidelines (Council of the European Union, 2004 and Cedefop, 2009), the roles of validation practitioners differ when it comes to knowledge and competences regarding providing guidance, conducting assessment, coordinating procedures, etc. To guarantee fair results for service users, the division of roles and responsibilities in each phase of the validation process needs to be clear.

The roles of the guidance personnel and assessors should f.ex. be separate in this respect. This study reveals a need for further development of competences among validation practitioners in terms of guidance and in understanding the aims of validation.

The challenges identified in this Nordic study reveal that guidance activities linked to validation practices are not transparent and that there is a need for measures which increase understanding of the VPL concept and related processes among guidance practitioners. Such measures could lead to more coherency in practices and support for more individuals in experiencing career learning and therefore give more value to the meaning of the validation process in regards to further career development based on their personal situation and context. It is also feasible to explore further what competences/qualifications are needed for that service delivery. This work calls upon action and cooperation at policy level, organizational level and practical level.

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