

"MOOC is an abbreviation for
Massive Open Online Course."

MOOC for Nordic education for teachers in the field of basic skills for adults

A feasibility
study

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1

Introduction

BACKGROUND AND MANDATE

In the spring of 2014 a workgroup with the title “MOOC for Nordic Education for Teachers of Basic Skills for Adults” was established on the initiative of the Nordic Network for Adult Learning, NVL. The task of the workgroup was to investigate if and how NVL should establish a MOOC-based option to strengthen the competences of Nordic adult teachers with a special focus on the basic literacy of adult immigrants.

The workgroup was established in cooperation between NVL’s network for distance learning (hereafter Distans) Alfarådet, the Nordic Adult Literacy Network and the

European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) of which NVL is a member.

The group based its work on

- A stated need to enhance Nordic teachers’ competences in this field.
- The results of Alfarådet’s work describing teachers’ competences.
- Distans expertise in flexible study options and models, including MOOC.
- Inputs from the EBSN network wishing to apply a very loose and flexible approach to organising a MOOC-based “EBSN Academy”.

MEMBERS OF THE WORKGROUP

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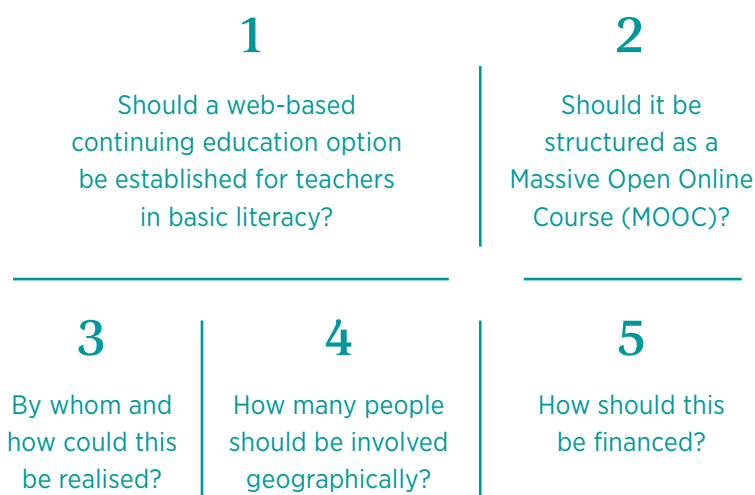
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THE WORKGROUP PROCESS

The workgroup held three meetings during the summer/fall of 2014: a physical/online meeting, Oslo (19.6.2014), a physical meeting, Copenhagen (26.11.2014), and one online meeting (23.9.2014).

The group based its work on five main questions:



THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

We started by describing the term MOOC and its concept and the workgroup's adoption and use of the concept. Thereafter, we have tried to identify the need for an option to strengthen the competences of Nordic teachers in basic literacy in relation to a MOOC solution. We presented the competence description developed by Alfarådet, the Nordic Adult Literacy Network, in order to attempt to describe the field and the presumptions for a possible realisation. Finally, we presented a proposal for a draft of a step-by-step implementation before concluding with recommendations.

2

What is a MOOC?

MOOC is an abbreviation for Massive Open Online Course. These open online courses are aimed at an unlimited number of students - anyone can join and no formal requirements are imposed.

The MOOC concept was first used in 2008 to denote an open, online course at the University of Manitoba in Canada. 25 tuition-paying students attended the course from the university as well as 2300 participants who took the course for free over the Internet. The course awarded credits for students at the university. All course content was available through RSS-feeds and participants even had the freedom to choose which platforms they would use to participate, for example, Facebook Groups, Wiki pages, blogs and forums. In the following years, several other universities/institutions copied and modified this course structure and many MOOC courses emerged. The list of courses now numbers thousands in many different subject areas.

The major development of MOOCs has led to two distinct types; cMOOCs and xMOOCs. A significant difference between the two is the educational approach applied in the courses. cMOOC denotes the first type of course which took place in experimental learning environments and grass-root communities. The c in cMOOC stands for connectivist, meaning that the learners are linked to each other in networks. These courses are built on a constructivist (sociocultural) view of learning. This learning vision builds on the assumption that our reality is socially constructed, i.e. that we do not perceive the world without using a “filter”, but rather that we interpret what we see on the basis of previous perceptions which we have reached through discussion and “opinion negotiation”. Learning something new is thus a matter of negotiating or “agreeing” on something new or possibly of agreeing to disagree. This approach to learning, therefore, presupposes discussion for all learning.

Videos, quizzes and webinars are examples of scalable methods.

In recent years, major attention on MOOC courses has been primarily focused on the development and emergence of xMOOC courses. These are based on a cognitivist view of learning. This approach is based on learning that occurs when knowledge is transferred from teacher to students. Students embrace the curriculum by processing it individually, e.g. by writing an assignment or solving a quiz by means of perception questions. Here we are talking about teacher/blackboard centred education - in English we say "The sage on the stage". In the MOOC world this type of learning is typical for MOOCs developed by major US universities and eventually also by educational institutions in other parts of the world. This learning approach is an extension of the learning approach that dominates most higher education institutions.

THE WORKGROUP'S APPLICATION OF THE MOOC-CONCEPT

As stated above MOOC is often defined as massive, open online course. By massive we mean that pedagogical tools and methods applied in the courses are scalable. When the methods applied are scalable the use of resources does not increase in relation to the number of participants, i.e. it does not differ whether there are 10 or 1000 participants. Videos, quizzes and webinars are examples of scalable methods. Teaching and guidance are examples of non-scalable methods. The scalable tools and methods are of interest because they make it possible to limit the cost of running courses while at the same time they contain new, interesting, pedagogical opportunities.

3

Target group and need

There is a great need for continuing education and retraining in the field of *basic literacy for adults with non-Nordic mother tongues*. Most of the teachers teaching this subject in Norway have a basic pedagogical education; many also have Norwegian as a second language in the field but lack, with very few exceptions, both adult pedagogic education and education in basic literacy. In the KAN report, which focuses on all the Nordic countries, it is confirmed that this is the case in all other countries:

“In the report “Alfabetiseringsundersøking i Norden” (Literacy Education in the Nordic Countries) from 2007, (updated 2009 and 2012) and complementing research it is revealed that in several Nordic countries there are very few formal requirements for teacher competences, little in the way of descriptions and curriculum and limited

guidance-related teacher training oriented towards initial literacy training for adults. It is also evident that in several Nordic countries requirements for specific teaching qualifications, for teachers of general second language skills to adults, are limited”.

During the Nordic conference arranged by Alfarådet in 2012, 200 teachers who participated were asked if they needed continuous education in basic literacy for adults with mother tongues other than the Nordic languages. A large majority answered that they needed more competences and were interested in both competence-yielding studies and shorter continuous education courses. A great many also expressed an interest in web-based studies, based on the distance from the educational institution and a need for flexibility in their studies because of their job.



...there is a great need for continuous education and retraining in this field.

During the Nordic conference arranged by Alfarådet in September 2014, some 160 teachers were again asked about their need for competences. They were then asked specifically if they were interested in a master's degree in literacy for adults. Again, a large majority answered that they were interested in both continuing and further education on a Nordic basis, on various levels, ranging from basic education to masters level and that the option should be web-based. It is therefore clear that there is a great need for continuous education and retraining in this field.

A narrow area with a limited target group and few researchers

The subject of "basic literacy" for adults who speak a foreign language is relatively narrow in scope.

For example, in Norway only 18 percent of about 43.000 participants in initial education in Norwegian received education in basic literacy (alphabetisation) as a part of their course in Norwegian¹. Because of the limited size of the target group and the lack of job openings for those taking this type of continuous education for teachers, many applicants

for this type of education cannot be expected in the long run. Expertise in this field in the Nordic countries is limited to a small number of persons. Nordic cooperation on curriculum and teachers/trainers would be of great interest in order to develop the field. There is negligible competence on basic numeracy for adults in the Nordic countries. For some time continuous education in this field was offered in Norway but, due to lack of professionals, this education is no longer offered.

THE APPLICATION OF MOOC AS AN OPTION FOR LITERACY TEACHERS IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Alfarådet is interested in cooperation with universities in organising university level courses, for example a master's education. But in this group of teachers, there is also a need for other types of courses, e.g. short courses where theory and practice go hand in hand. They can range in time from very short (1–20 hours) to longer (100–200 hours). Flexibility, as mentioned above, is very important for

¹ In English there is a distinction between initial literacy and functional literacy, which is the level of reading and writing skills needed to function in society and working life. Alfarådet has chosen to apply the term basic literacy to the level that applies to literacy. In Norway, functional literacy is denoted as; "grunnleggende lese- og skriveferdigheter".

this group. It is vital that teachers can attend courses when they have the time and interest. “On campus” can be excellent in the sense that there the participants gather and are able to discuss in groups, but this type of learning situation is restricted to time and place. Therefore, it can be difficult for some teachers to participate, because they most likely have to travel to the place where the teaching takes place and that may be costly both in time and money. It may also be difficult for the teachers to have to wait for months to be able to participate in courses, especially in subjects that they may have an acute need for. A way to meet these needs could be organized in online courses, preferably as MOOCs.

Enhancing teachers’ general digital competences is an expressed goal in the EU Commission’s current Agenda for Adult Learning. The Commission’s “Working Group for Adult Learning” has declared the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) and OER (Open Educational Resources) to be one of three main focus areas in their work during 2013–2015 and plans to publish a report on this theme in 2015. There is a general consensus among European policy makers that it is essential to update teaching personnel competences for adult learning promptly,

A way to meet these needs could be organized in online courses

and this challenge has already been taken up in EPALE, the new platform for adult learning in Europe. (See <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/blog/basic-skills-adult-learning-staff>)

Most of the Nordic teachers are quite competent in the use of ICT and many use it in one way or another in their work. Many teachers have tried online education (distance learning) already and most use topics from the web in one way or another. The prerequisites for participating in MOOCs should therefore be well satisfied. Through a MOOC it is possible to create a community where teachers can discuss and debate the theme and share their experience and circumstances.

If a platform for courses for teachers in literacy is successfully created, it might not only be beneficial for the teachers personally but also enhance competences and professionalism in the institutions where the respective teacher works.

4

Competence goals and content

Alfarådet has compiled a description of the competences required of a professional teacher of initial and functional literacies to adults whose mother tongue is not a Nordic language. The work was completed in 2013. The competence description is meant to serve as a basis for developing and implementing studies and courses in and between the Nordic countries. It contains six competence areas of which the first two are comprehensive - the third covers learning resources and the other key competences:

1

Literacy in a Global, Local and Individual Perspective.

Theoretical and didactic aspects and approaches.

2

Adult Formal Learning in a Creative and Critical Learning Environment.

Based on teachers' reflective practice and learners' learning goals.

3

Materials for Adult Learning.

Multimodal, up-to-date and challenging.

4

Teaching Oral Communicative Competence without Written Support

to Adult Second-Language Learners.

5

Initial and Functional Literacy

for Adult Second-Language Learners.

6

Basic, Everyday Mathematics (Numeracy)

for Adult Second-Language Learners.

5 Scope

As stated in the sections above, an opportunity for competence enhancement for teachers in basic literacy in the Nordic countries is both desirable and necessary.

The competence description by Alfarådet is compiled on a Nordic level and therefore has a Nordic platform. In addition, there is a consensus between the Nordic countries that it is desirable to enhance expertise and competence in all the above-mentioned areas.

Nevertheless, the Nordic countries are lagging behind when it comes to expertise in this field, especially in the area of numeracy. It appears to be a narrow field of expertise with a small target group and few researchers. Therefore, it may be advantageous to seek experience from other European countries with extensive experience of immigra-

tion, and more and wider areas of expertise to gather from.

The group behind the EBSN Academy has advocated the initiation of preparation for MOOCs for “Continuous Professional Development” by gathering knowledge:

relevant articles or anthologies of academic texts, videos of expert presentations at conferences or courses, recordings of webinars, podcasts, the initiation of professional discussions in social media, etc.

It is natural for NVL to cooperate with EBSN on this matter, so that the content can be useful to both target groups. These elements would be widely available to the teacher’s own autonomous learning, and could also be used as building blocks for courses adapted to national or local level. Some of these courses might even be

structured in such a way that they lead to examinations and qualifications, i.e. continuous education could become further education.

Some of the advantages of such an approach:

- Existing blocks both from Nordic countries and European countries with longer experience of the field of expertise could be used.
- The knowledge could also be available to teachers who have neither the time nor the motivation to take a complete course.
- The different Nordic countries could utilise each other's resources without being restrained by national educational structures that might function as barriers between those countries.
- It would not be problematic to establish a gradual transition between 1) plain gathering of OER, 2) structural MOOC without teacher guidance (i.e. a course without a determined start and finish),

NALA's tutor pages, on [nala.ie/tutors](https://www.nala.ie/tutors)

3) structured online courses without examination, or 4) pure, continuous education with examination at an authorised college or university.uten lærerveiledning (dvs. et kurs, men uten fastsatt start og slutt), 3) strukturert online-kurs uten eksamen, 4) ren videreutdanning med eksamen ved anerkjent høgskole eller universitet.

An example of a collection of building blocks for a MOOC teacher's education can be viewed on NALA's tutor pages, on <https://www.nala.ie/tutors>, which, among other things, contains videos from conference presentations or presentations of models and resources, thematically categorised. NALA stands for Irish National Adult Learning Association; the Association has close cooperation with the Irish government on the development and implementation of national programmes for adult learning, with special focus on basic skills.



Articles can also be translated and videos can be texted with subtitles.

LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATION

Within most of the competence goals it is not difficult to find a fine selection of Nordic texts that could function as building blocks for continuous education for teachers. Texts in Scandinavian would be available without any difficulty for teachers in Denmark, Norway and Sweden and to some extent to Icelanders. Some translations from Scandinavian languages into Finnish and maybe into Icelandic should also be expected.

EBSN is interested in contributing both with content and with building blocks from experts in the network and with getting access to the Nordic material. The initial proposal is to gather material on “Numeracy for Immigrants”, as Alfaráðet has identified this as an area where countries in the Nordic region lack expertise. Studies in numeracy would have the same basic content regardless of national language and because English is common as a study language for teachers in Norway/ Nordic countries, this should be an applicable method.

Articles can also be translated and videos can be texted with subtitles. Obviously, economic circumstances may limit these types of activity, but if there is interest in using this model for further development, it would be possible to start with a selection of articles and videos to be expanded with finances from, for example, Nordplus or Erasmus+ projects.

The need for and interest in this topic is not only evident in the Nordic countries – it is affirmed in a report by the Alfie partnership² (Alphabetisation of Immigrants to Europe). Therefore, this could also possibly be scaled up for a larger mass of users outside the Nordic countries in Europe, which would be in line with the Nordic Council of Ministers’ policy to brand the Nordic region globally.

2 www.vox.no/English/projects/ALFIE---Alphabetisation-of-Immigrants-to-Europe

6

Preconditions for realisation

In order to realise a MOOC-option financing for a system containing technical infrastructure, human resources, marketing and information must be in place. Another precondition must be that there are available teachers motivated to initiate and experiment with such an option, and competence, and sufficient time for quality assurance of the resources included in the database.

There have been previous attempts to establish educational options in adult learning on a Nordic level, but the universities have not succeeded. We believe, therefore, that it might be wise to learn from earlier efforts and to propose the opportunity to involve a mass of participants - to establish an initiative and then to invite the universities to join in. Cooperation between the Nordic universities and the adult educational institutions could also be organised.

A process and cooperation of this kind is also innovative in contrast to what has been achieved up to now.

In working towards realisation it is important to make thorough preparations, for example by working with a focus group. The group could be responsible for gathering existing texts and material mainly from the Nordic countries but also, as mentioned earlier, from other countries in Europe.

A marketing strategy could involve establishing a net community - for example on a social medium such as Facebook.

The group could lead a professional discussion and set up a platform for exchanging experiences between participants and at the same time post short appetisers for course material, (texts/videos/quizzes etc.) and expert material for testing.

This way a MOOC may be developed based on its own Nordic model.

The focus group can also follow individual participants to see if some of them are especially active, and, if so, invite them to become test persons. That would give the members of the test group an opportunity to provide feed-back and recommendations. Thus, the course material could be tested and refined before being published to a broader public. If this work is successful and a continuous work towards further development for a larger mass of participants can be achieved, then it is possible to start inviting universities to join in a more extensive campaign – for example

for formal education in the form of a Nordic-MOOC. This way a MOOC may be developed based on its own Nordic model.

Such ground work could attract attention and interest from future participants, at the same time providing for discussion on desirable course content – this would ensure that a relevant option is developed, matching the actual need – and interest and motivation of the target group is considered as a precondition for realisation.

7 Step by step implementation

In this section we draw up a possible step by step implementation for a competence enhancement option for Nordic teachers who teach basic literacy for adult immigrants. The description is not by any means comprehensive, but may serve to provide some ideas about how to proceed with an implementation.

STEP 1: Collecting links to resources

The first thing to do is to initiate a collection of content for a course database. It can, for instance, start as a structured blog, to make it easily accessible and simple. This will be heterogeneous material, and it might be wise to organize it with #subject codes to facilitate sorting into different categories (such as which learning objectives the content matches and what type of material it is). The blog can be a precursor to a future learning platform. Alfarådet, EBSN and others can contribute with learning content.

STEP 2: Organising the learning resources

Contributions can be categorized by Alfarådet's 6 competence descriptions. Introductory texts to videos and subject material should be produced to explain to the user what is available. The content must also be quality-assured by someone with sufficient professional expertise. Where there are gaps in the material, new content must be produced. This could include video interviews, blog posts, texts ordered, recordings of webinars etc.

STEP 3: Pedagogical viewpoint

Prior to choosing building blocks for an eventual MOOC, there should be discussion concerning which pedagogical approach is best suited to the professional content of the course. For instance, fact-oriented content will be better suited for xMOOC-methods, while a "softer" content would be better served by

cMOOC-methods. It does not have to be either – or, there may be some advantages in being pragmatic and choosing elements from both approaches.

Below we have listed a number of examples of building blocks that represent a cognitivist approach to learning (a.). Furthermore, we have taken a number of building blocks based on a constructivist (sociocultural) view on learning (b.). In practice, the boundary is fluctuating without a precise dividing line. There are also comments on an item that is not scalable (c.). This goes beyond what a MOOC can usually offer and here we are dealing with a central element in web studies.

a) Cognitive “building blocks” (xMOOC):

Video clips

A video clip is a typical learning resource whereby a subject is introduced. This may be an existing video clip, already available online, or it can be a video clip that has to be produced especially for this specific purpose.

Webinars

Webinars with professional presentations are recorded and made available online as videos. This method enables the investigation of exceptionally challenging themes or fills gaps in the existing material. .

Texts

Links to texts, such as articles or websites.

Quizzes/tests

Quizzes are usually best suited to testing factual knowledge – the answers are either right or wrong.

b) Constructivist “building blocks” (cMOOC):

Discussion groups (writing fora)

The participants are asked to write posts in fora where they relate to a subject. They then comment on each other’s posts. A minimum number of posts may be set as a requirement, for example one subject for discussion, commenting on at least three other posts and taking on the role of moderator for one’s own post.

Blogs

The participants are asked to write blogs, preferably on a public blog and to share them with other participants. A closed blog could also be established, which would function as a forum for discussion.

Wiki

The participants jointly prepare a common “wiki” - this entails compiling a document together, where they account for key professional concepts. In a wiki the participants can add to and edit each other’s contributions. Through a joint process they write a common document, and could possibly explain different definitions and points of view.

**Reading groups
on the Internet**

The participants are divided into reading groups that meet and discuss online, for example via Skype.

Brainstorming on the Net

There are many online tools enabling collaboration online – brainstorming sessions, idea development through joint notes, mind maps etc.

Student evaluation

Participants write papers. Their papers are not commented on by a teacher, but by other participants, providing feedback based on their own knowledge and experience.

Webinar

Webinars can be arranged in a more collaborative and interactive way. Participants can be divided into several “group-rooms” for discussions. Most commonly, however, the general discussion is in the “chat field”. It is also possible to connect different web tools to the webinar platform, thus expanding the potential for cooperation. For instance, a tool for brainstorming with voting can be included in the webinar, thus creating a basis for cooperation on the content of the webinar.

c) Not scalable:

Continuous guidance from a professional, which includes comments on assignments, is a “non-scalable” method, because the use of resources will rise in proportion to the number of participants. Guidance from a professional is a key element in pedagogics for online studies. If the goal is to develop a continuing education course that students can earn credits for, it will be preferable and maybe necessary to provide professional guidance in order to ensure the quality of the courses offered to the teachers.

STEP 4: Establish a focus group

To ensure the implementation of the content and to meet the needs of the participants, it is important to involve interested parties working in the field. Establishing a focus group or a developing network of engaged literacy teachers is an excellent way to involve them. This could be in the form of a Facebook group and their task could be to bring in real life experience from praxis, to comment on the material provided, to support planning and to discuss pedagogical approaches. This development network should be a part of the continuous process of developing the content and the courses.

STEP 5: Finding a platform

It is wise to build the platform step by step. The “problem” with platforms is that they require a login. (A login is either controlled by an administrator or via private registration with a chosen password.) Open learning resources should preferably be accessible without a password. The possibility/option of using ordinary web sites should be preferred.

An excellent example of an open learning resource is: www.norsksidene.no

Some examples of existing platforms:

PEDIT (Norwegian Online School): Built on pedagogic premises aimed at groups/classes. Intuitive and user friendly.

MOODLE: Not as intuitive, may become confusing and ambiguous - but that depends to some degree on the person who sets it up.

CANVAS: Translated into Norwegian by Bibsys. Has been applied by two or three MOOCs so far. Poor on content presentation.

FRONTER and **IT'S LEARNING:** These are designed for schools and are probably not suited to our aim.

Several other platforms are available. In addition, some of the Google tools may be useful. But before a decision on a platform is made, it must be clear what the content will be and how close the relationship between the content/learning resources and the course should be. Another important question is: Who should administer the platform and maintain and develop/build the content?



Establishing a forum can be useful independently of the choice of how to start.

STEP 6:

Establish a forum

Probably a platform should be chosen that can serve both as a learning resource and as a forum as well as being suitable for the course. But it is also possible to start with a website to gather learning resources and then to proceed to a learning platform when it comes to launching a course.

Establishing a forum can be useful independently of the choice of how to start. In the forum new threads for chats/themes for discussion and exchange of experience can be added as activities increase. The forum should have a mentor/leader that follows each theme and activates and engages participants accordingly.

STEP 7:

Create MOOCs

After collecting specialised educational material and learning-resources, they can be organised in modules with assignments, reflections, and co-students' comments

The plainest form: "How to follow a learning path" This could contain a combination of content (videos, texts, webinars etc.) in connection with a specific learning objective, organised chronologically with relevant assignments, reflections etc. Documentation for

a completed MOOC could be through a quiz or after fulfilling certain requirements (i.e. writing a blog, an entry in the forum and/or after commenting or evaluating others' blogs etc.). It could be important option to have a course certificate or another type of documentation of completion (Ref. Open Badges).

More advanced (exceeds the MOOC-concept): A course based on the same type of building blocks but with guidance from a professional (see step 3c).

Even more advanced: A course awarding credits for an example towards a master's degree (see step 7).

STEP 8:

Establish online study certified at university/college level

The development of web-based study has to be done in cooperation with a college/university with examination rights. The scope – possible counsellors, number of credits the education should award – needs to be clarified. Alfarådet has already established a work group whose job is to investigate the options and it is clearly useful to base the development on the established knowledge base (step 1–7) and the conclusions of Alfarådet's work.

8

Conclusion / recommendation

As mentioned at the beginning the group based its work on five main questions:

1. Should a web-based continuing education option be established for teachers in basic literacy?
2. Should it be structured as a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)?
3. By whom and how could this be realised?
4. How many people should be involved geographically?
5. How should this be financed?

This web-based option should be based on existing professional resources that can be made available without difficulty. Furthermore, it should be based on the competence goals set, formulated and defined by Alfarådet for literacy teachers. For 2015 and 2016 Alfarådet has especially prioritised two learning goals: 4: *Teaching Oral Communica-*

tive Competence without Written Support to Adult Second-Language Learners and nr. 6. *Basic, Everyday Mathematics (Numeracy)* for Adult Second-Language Learners. If an evaluation or examination of a continuous education offer is initiated, it would be natural to base it on these priorities. We propose that this examination should start by gathering building blocks for these two above-mentioned areas. At the same time, a focus group should be established with experts who are able to provide input on needs, knowledge-based structure and course content. The focus group could simultaneously provide examples and comments based on their experiences. In this way, appropriate options, including both expertise and praxis could be established.

We consider it essential to build such an option from the bottom up. A prerequisite for success is to establish a dynamic discussion with practitioners in the field and to call on their expertise and experience.



...we recommend that they should be further examined in the follow-up to this feasibility study.

Initially, it will require many resources to structure and ensure the quality of the collection of learning resources. We recommend a project group/a pilot project to initiate the process, which is also able to define a more precise plan for implementation. We also recommend that this group establishes close cooperation with ESNB to gather input from European sources. This is especially important for competence goal nr. 6. *Basic everyday numeracy*.

There are a number of practical prerequisites for the realisation of this vision. We have drafted some, but we recommend that they should be further examined in the follow-up to this feasibility study.

We consider it natural that NVL takes on a leading role in the follow-up to this report and recommend that resources from Alfarådet and Distans are utilised for any ongoing follow-up. Establishing this database will require both some external and some additional financing. If this task is done thoroughly, we will have established a solid foundation for a goal-oriented, flexible and future oriented continuing education option for Nordic teachers of basic literacy for adult immigrants.



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