VALIDATION
IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

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Policy and Practice

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Forword

This Report has been commissioned by NVL, the Nordic Network for Adult Learning.

We want to thank the NVL Expert Network for Validation whose members contributed to the Report with information and facts from each country. A special thanks to Nils Friberg who is the coordinator of the network. Special thanks also to Odd-Bjørn Ure and Axel Hoppe who have contributed with viewpoints on earlier versions of the text.

The main work of assembling and writing the material for the Report has been done by Åsa Hult, BA. The project leader was senior lecturer of Linköping University, Per Andersson, who has also contributed to the work with the Report, and has been responsible for the final editing of the text.

The Report is mainly based on information about the development of validation in the Nordic countries up until 2 006 and information about certain changes planned for 2 007. Supplementary information about the development during 2 007 in each of the countries will be published together with this Report on the NVL homepage, www.nordvux.net. The English version of the Report does not include Appendix 2 which is available in Swedish only. Appendix 2 contains detailed descriptions of validation in each of the Nordic countries.

notes[1-8] in this report are presented on page 58.

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Per Andersson

Summary

Validation of knowledge and competence is a phenomenon that has attracted more and more attention concerning both policy and practical efforts in order to promote adult and lifelong learning, not least in the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. This Report is about validation, in some of concept's meanings, in these five countries. As the Report is originally written in Swedish the term validation is mainly used, even if other words also are used in the different countries. The purpose of the study is to describe and compare the policies for validation of the different countries, and how these policies have been expressed in practical measures and activities. The focus is on validation in three different sectors: The Adult Education Sector, the Labour Market Sector, and the Third Sector (e.g. folk high schools, study associations and volunteer organisations).

Validating a person's competence is a way of making visible informal learning, increasing the possibility of adapting an education programme to what people already know, increasing their employability, and making better use of their existing competences in working life. The sphere of validation is still being developed and the situation in the Nordic countries is constantly changing. Validation in the education system is the type of validation that is most developed and used in all the Nordic countries and the type that is least developed is validation in the Third Sector. The constant development is illustrated by the fact that in Finland, where validation has existed since 1994, there are even today changes in the system of how to assess and recognise competences. This Report mainly describes the development up to the end of 2006. Descriptions and analyses are based on data about validation from each country provided by the representatives of the Nordic countries in the special expert network for validation initiated by NVL, The Nordic Network for Adult Learning.

Initially the Report describes the different concepts that are used in the different countries for what is described in the Report as »validation«. Then a number of concepts are introduced that give a perspective on validation as a phenomenon and that also constitute the basis for the analysis of how the countries act concerning validation. The concepts that are emphasised are convergent and divergent, summative and formative, and formal, non-formal and informal. After that follows a short description of the development of validation in the different countries. This is illustrated by one typical case from each country. A major portion of the Report concerns a comparative analysis of the different sectors.

In all the countries concerned validation is primarily carried out in the Education Sector. In all the countries except Sweden validation has a convergent orientation towards educational criteria, to which the individual's formal and informal competences should be related. In Sweden a more divergent policy has been expressed which means that the validation can be more open and not only directed towards issuing the same kind of documentation as after having completed an education. In all the Nordic countries validation in the Education Sector is in some respect a right, even if there is a variation as to what this right includes.

Also the cost for participating in validation varies. Validation and individualisation have inherent problems in all the Nordic countries. Among other things, questions are raised in the Report concerning how traditional education can develop in relation to validation and individualisation, how validation can be economically profitable, and how education institutions can organise education and make budgets so that validation and individualised education do not become problems and obstacles in the work.

A person who has worked for a long time may have acquired competences in a vocational area that are different from those taught in school – by experiences from working life, in-service training etc. Validation in the Labour Market Sector concerns mostly competences from working life and assessments in relation to labour market demands. The starting point for validation in the labour market is the vocation or the vocational area, as distinguished from validation in the Education Sector where the education is the starting point. In practice the differences between these two sectors are not so distinct in the contexts that are described in the Report, where the starting point is the national policy and how this has been expressed in practice. In all the Nordic countries validation in a broad sense occurs in the Private Sector too, against different branch certificates and internal standards.

In all the Nordic countries the Third Sector is the sector where least has been done concerning validation and documentation of competence on the whole. Certain activities are clearly constructed as alternatives or complements to formal education. As a consequence there is some hesitation regarding formal assessment and documentation of knowledge in this sector. Nevertheless the possibilities inherent in validation arouse some interest from this sector. In this area much of the discussion concerns which competence can and should be documented in the Third Sector. Should qualities like personal development, cultural competence, social competence etc. be measured? Is it possible to confirm competence acquired in this sector and, if yes, how should it be assessed and what is the value of documenting competence from the Third Sector? An important aspect of validation in the Third Sector is that in the Nordic countries, to a large extent, the documentation of learning experiences from this sector is considered trustworthy, and consequently it is not absolutely necessary to translate them into formal competence in order to give them a value. Validation in this sector can aim at emphasising the individual and his/her competence. Validation can also be a type of »self-interest« for the Third Sector by raising the prestige of the popular adult education, the popular movements and associations by making visible the competences that exist and are being developed there.

Consequently there are similarities and differences between the five Nordic countries concerning the development of policy and practice in the area of validation. The existing variation also means that the countries face somewhat different challenges with respect to future development. Finland is the leading country in the area that has been chosen for development – vocational qualifications. As a result Finland's principal challenge will probably concern how to develop the possibilities of validating such knowledge that is not acknowledged by the existent system. In Sweden the current challenge is to continue the development on the basis of the work done by the Swedish National Commission on Validation *(Valideringsdelegationen)* in the last few years. Denmark and Norway have advanced relatively far and the most important challenges in these countries seem

to be how to implement and spread policy and methods to all sectors of society. Iceland is the Nordic country where the development of validation started most recently. The primary concern in Iceland is how to establish the possibilities and rights to validation on the basis of the experiences gained from different types of project activities.

A common challenge for all countries is to find out how the different sectors relate to each other. What kind of transparency and mobility between sectors exist and how are these stimulated by different policies and attitudes to validation? To begin with this concerns the relation between the Third Sector and the other sectors. In the Third Sector there is an interest in relating to the education and labour market systems, in the sense that the competence developed in different non-profit activities and in non-formal education is seen as valuable and consequently should be recognised by the formal education system and by the labour market. However, there is also a wish to maintain what is seen as the freedom of the sector based on the idea that the activity has an inherent value and that it is not necessary to relate it to the rest of the system in order to make it valuable. Secondly the relation between education and the labour market is interesting. Is it possible to find a balance between these two sectors, or should one of the sectors get priority? If the labour market is given priority it means that the demands of working life are the measure for what competence should be taken into account. This approach makes a clear link to the context in which competences are supposed to be used and makes it likely to expect that the result of a validation gets legitimacy in the labour market. At the same time this view means that the state more or less gives up the influence over the competence demands thereby refraining from steering by a certain policy. The consequence might be demands, dependent on the business cycles or regional methods, which do not provide equal value nationally and even less between different countries, and criteria formulated by branches of industry, which are not always interested in allowing just anyone access etc. If, on the other hand, the state influences by a steering policy the situation becomes the opposite, for good and for worse. A balance between steering from the state and the labour market actors seems to be the most practicable way. Thirdly it is also important in the future to pay attention to the relation to the sectors that are not included in this study – above all higher education, where the question is how to value experiences, competences and qualifications from schools and adult education, working life and the Third Sector concerning how to fulfil the demands of admission and accreditation. However, it could also be worthwhile to look closer into the relation to everyday and private life. Is there a reason for making visible and valuing, too, knowledge developed in private life and knowledge and competences acquired by handling one's economy and by taking care of other family members (children, the sick and elderly people), by media information, and by different kinds of household work?

Finally there are questions about how the countries relate to each other. How can the interest in the different forms of validation that exist in the Nordic countries be used to facilitate and perhaps even to stimulate transparency (with regard to how competence is documented and valued) and mobility in the Nordic countries as well in relation to other countries? A continued cooperation and exchange of information between the countries will be necessary to promote such development.

Introduction

Validation of knowledge and competence is a phenomenon that has attracted more and more attention with regard both to policy and praktical initiatives in order to promote adult and lifelong learning not least in the Nordic countries.

The concept validation

Different concepts are used in different countries with somewhat different meanings. Common terms in English are also recognition of prior learning, accreditation of prior (experiential) learning, prior learning assessment, and validation of prior learning. In Swedish the term *»validering«* is used, a translation from French, where *validation des acquis de l'expérience* is one of the concepts used. The concept *»validering«* used in Sweden puts the focus on the process of validation whereas in Norway, Denmark, and Iceland the term »realkompetens« (real/actual competence) is mostly used focusing on the actual competence that will be valued. In Finland there are several expressions (see below), among these, the wording »valuing what has been learnt« which includes both the validation process and the competence. Consequently the Report deals with validation, in some of these senses, in the Nordic countries. In this Report we mainly use the term validation as a generic term for the somewhat different meanings of those phenomena we describe. It should be noted that in English »validation« is also a term used to describe the process of auditing or appraising academic courses or programmes. The term is not used in that sense here, but synonymously with recognition/accreditation/assessment of prior learning.[1]

Regardless of what concepts are used there is a fundamental idea to the effect of making visible and valuing prior learning, knowledge, and competence acquired in different contexts, often in informal learning processes. By »validation« the aim is to make visible informal learning, increase the possibility of adapting education to what the student already knows, enhance the employability, and make better use of the already existing competence in working life. The process of making visible and recognising can be more or less comprehensive. A frequently used definition is that a complete validation process includes documentation, assessment, and recognition of competence, but also more limited processes might be regarded as validation in a broad sense.

Valuing and recognising knowledge developed outside the formal education system is not a new phenomenon. It has for instance been done for a long time in different vocations in the form of a journeyman's or a master's examination. However, it is only in the last few decades that the notion of validation has become more clearly expressed. An important starting point was the ideas about extended admission to higher education, with a selection based on »prior learning«, which were formulated and put into practice in the United States in the **1970**'s. In the Nordic countries the development has started later, even if there was an interest in widened admission to higher education already in the **1970**'s. An example can be seen in Finland. Early by Nordic standards this country crea-

ted a formal, validating system for assessment of vocational competence – a national competence-based qualifications system for vocational examinations was introduced as early as **1994**. In Sweden the concept of »validation« was introduced in **1996**, before the large-scale adult education initiative »Kunskapslyftet« (**1997-2002**). In Norway »Realkompetanseprojektet« – an important part of **»Kompetansereformen«** included systematic attempts at valuing real competence in working life, the Education Sector and the Third Sector. In **1997** Denmark introduced an individual »kompeten-ceafklaring« in the labour market courses for adults with a job but with a low level of education as the target group. In **2001** an adult education reform was yet another important step in the Danish development. In Iceland the testing of different methods of validation has been going on since **2004**.

Comparisons of validation in the Nordic countries have been made before. Bjørnåvold (**2000**) describes the situation at the end of the **20**th century in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden in relation to the rest of Europe. He does not want to speak about a »Nordic model« in the strict sense of the word, but he still sees a common denominator in the openness to change that exists with regard to recognising informal learning. This readiness for change differs from the hesitancy found in Austria and Germany despite similarities between the Nordic countries and these countries with respect to a well-structured system for vocational training with more or less strong elements of apprenticeships and practice. A possible explanation that Bjørnåvold offers is that the Nordic tradition of popular adult education implies that these countries are more open to recognising the value of the learning that takes place outside formal education.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has later made a description of the situation in the Nordic countries (Nordisk Ministerråd, **2001**; Nordiska Ministerrådet, **2003**). The Report from **2001** is a survey of the initiatives made so far in the five Nordic countries concerning »realkompetanse« in education and working life. In the Report from **2003** there is a general discussion about validation of »realkompetanse« and, in addition, more emphasis is put on valuing and giving recommendations in relation to the different countries and to the situation in the Nordic countries as a whole.

However, the rapid development in this area means that earlier studies become out of date and that there is now a need for a new comparison and analysis of policies and development concerning validation in the Nordic countries. Furthermore the earlier studies are mainly descriptive and as to the report from **2003** also evaluative, which indicates that there is a need for a more comparative analysis.

This study of validation in the Nordic countries has been commissioned by NVL, the Nordic Network for Adult Learning. The purpose is to describe and compare the policies for validation that exist in the different Nordic countries and how the policies have been expressed in practical initiatives and activities. These initiatives/activities sometimes consist of different kinds of pilot schemes and in other cases of more established activities.

In this study there is a focus on validation in or with a link to adult education, working life, and the Third Sector (e.g. folk high schools, study associations, and volunteer organisations). However, the validation carried out at universities and university colleges is not included in NVL:s commission and is consequently not dealt with in the study. The education system and working life/the labour market have thus been defined as two different »sectors«. At the same time there is

a clear link between these two sectors, especially with regard to vocational training. Later in this Report we ask ourselves to what extent one focuses on and/or starts from the education system or the labour market respectively in the different countries. Is this then a matter of which definitions of valuable knowledge are used for validation – is it the requirements of a vocational training that prepares one for a job or is it the competences that the labour market demands. On one hand it is a matter of what roles the different sectors play, on the other hand where the demands and criteria of knowledge and competence are formulated. An interesting aspect of this is also to what extent these demands actually are different or whether they coincide.

Validation is an initiative that can be used in different contexts and consequently the target groups may also vary. Different kinds of policy and ambitions might be reflected in the person whose competence one wishes to validate. As a consequence an aspect that will be highlighted in the study is for whom validation is meant to be used. Are the target groups different in the different countries? The following are examples of different target groups:

- Employees
- Unemployed persons
- Person with a foreign background
- Those seeking admission to an education programme

This reflects whether validation is emphasized as an initiative for unemployed persons, a measure for development in the work place, for better integration, or for extended recruitment to education programmes etc. In the same way the inclination to validate in certain vocational areas or subject areas indicates the priorities regarding which knowledge and competences that are regarded as most valuable.

The organisation of the study

Descriptions and analyses in this study are based on the data about validation in the different countries that have been provided by the representatives of the Nordic countries in the special expert network for validation initiated by NVL. The study has been accomplished in three steps. In the first phase the representatives for each country delivered written descriptions of validation in the country and in different sectors. These descriptions were unbiased, that is to say there were no specific questions to be answered. Instead each respondent chose to highlight the most interesting facts from each country, or used existing written descriptions of validation from their countries. Then these descriptions became the basis of a preliminary analysis and the results were presented for and discussed with the network group. With this pilot study as the basis, a questionnaire was drafted (Appendix 1) in order to obtain information, if possible, from each of the five countries in all the areas that the pilot study indicated as interesting, thereby acquiring a basis for making comparisons. In other words we wanted to supplement the first answers where each respondent chose what areas to focus on in order to find out if there was interesting information also in the areas that were not highlighted in the first pilot study. The questionnaires were answered in writing by each country's representative. The written material also included certain reports etc. from the different countries in addition to the answers to the questionnaire. In a third step the written answers were completed, if necessary, by oral and written contacts in order to clarify things that were not clear in the

answers to the questionnaire. All the material from the three steps of data collection has constituted the basis for the entire Report and analysis.

Validation is being developed and the situation in the Nordic countries is constantly changing. What is described in this Report reflects the national policy level in the Nordic countries up to the end of 2 006. In some of the countries bills were being prepared concerning validation intended to be in effect during 2 007. The cases known to us when the basic material for the Report was compiled are also described in the text.

The design of the Report

In Chapter 2, after the introduction and description of the design of the study, we explain the different concepts used in the Nordic countries to describe the activities that in this Report are brought together under the term »validation«. In Chapter 3 we introduce a number of theoretical concepts that are useful when validation is discussed. These concepts are also used in the study – partly as a starting-point for the analysis, partly in order to give a perspective on our results. Chapter 4 contains an overview of the field of validation and primarily of the policies concerning validation in the five countries and a typical case for each country. In Chapters 5 to 7 we consider validation in relation to the three sectors: Education, Labour Market, and »the Third Sector«. Chapter 8 contains a summary comparison and discussion where the five countries and the three sectors are linked together.

Different concepts
and definitions of validation

In the five countries studied in this Report, different concepts are used for what we describe as »validation«. This is not only due to the fact that the countries have different languages but also to the fact that each country focuses somewhat differently in their ways of defining the phenomenon.

Denmark, Norway and Iceland mostly use the concept »reell kompetens« (real [actual] competence; prior learning) – in Danish and Norwegian »realkompetencer« and »realkompetanse« and in Icelandic »raunferni« – which means that, within this concept, one focuses on the object of the validation, the competence that might be the target for evaluation. In these countries every competence is included, independent of whether it has been gained in formal/non-formal education, at work, or in everyday activities[2].

In Icelandic the term »raunfærnimat« is also used, which means real competence evaluation. This Icelandic expression includes a validation process in five steps: information, mapping, analysing interviews, verification, and documentation. However, the process may be concluded after the mapping, e.g. if it turns out that the competence in the area concerned is not sufficient in relation to the formal requirements. The result then becomes a kind of »non-formal validation«.

In Swedish policy validation has been defined as »a process that includes a structured assessment, valuation, documentation, and recognition of the knowledge and competences that a person possesses regardless of how they have been acquired« (Ds **2003:23**). In addition validation is defined as an *exploratory* (as opposed to a *controlling*) process with the aim of getting the existing knowledge assessed and recognised. The Swedish National Commission on Validation has emphasised that mapping as well as assessment, valuation, and documentation are parts of the process with assessment as the central part.

In Denmark there is no comprehensive expression that corresponds to »validation«. The real competence can be recognised (»anerkendelse«) in relation to an education by different kinds of competence assessment. The current initiative of the government, according to its title, deals with the final result: recognition of real competence in the education (»anerkendelse af realkompetence i uddannelserne«), but the current bill also deals with the preceding process to which the individual should have a right, namely the assessment (»individuel [real]kompetencevurdering«). The basis for the assessment (»vurdering«) may be a competence clarification (»kompetenceafklaring«), an individual competence assessment (»individuel kompetencevurdering«), and/or a documentation in a competence folder (portfolio).

In Norwegian the validation activity is called documentation and valuing of real competence (»dokumentasjon og verdsetting av realkompetanse«). The documentation implies a certified document showing the real competence that a person possesses. An official documentation is a document that has been valued

in relation to the requirements of the public education system and may be a competence certificate, »vitnemål«, or »fag/svennebrev«. A competence certificate will be issued after an evaluation (»verdsetting«) of the real competence. A valuation of real competence (»verdsetting av realkompetanse«) in turn implies a process in which the person gets his competence valued and recognised in relation to a certain type of usage e.g. working life, civic life, or the public education system.

In Finland validation is described as »valuing what has been learnt«. The expression in Finnish is »aiemmin opitun tunnistaminen ja tunnustaminen«, which can also be translated as recognition and validation of prior learning, but the Finnish word »validaato« is also used. This includes identification, recognition, and validation of prior learning.

Perspectives on validation

In this chapter we introduce a number of concepts that provide a perspective on validation as a phenomenon and that also constitute the basis for our analysis of what the attitudes of the Nordic countries are to validation. In connection to this we formulate a number of questions that help clarify how the different perspectives place the focus on different matters in the analysis. The concepts we highlight are 1) convergent and divergent, 2) summative and formative, and 3) formal, non-formal and informal.

Convergent – Divergent

A validation, as well as other forms of assessing knowledge and competence, might be designed in a convergent and/or divergent way. Convergent means that the validation implies an assessment *if* and to what extent the knowledge corresponds to certain demands determined beforehand – goals, criteria etc. However, a divergent validation aims at determining *what* an individual knows, from a more unbiased point of view. Any method of validation most often can be placed somewhere on the continuum convergent-divergent. In other words an assessment of knowledge is rarely absolutely convergent or divergent. In relation to this we ask ourselves what type of validation is advocated in the different countries. Are there differences between different sectors? The question is really what type is dominating, or, at least, if there exists any tendency regarding the type of validation used. Another option is that a model is used to the effect that during the process of validation one proceeds from a divergent approach to a convergent one.

Summative – Formative

A summative validation is primarily retrospective and its main purpose is to sum up prior learning, to document and value/assess what a person already knows. A formative validation, on the other hand, is primarily looking ahead with the purpose of being the basis for how the continued learning process should be designed. What is the purpose of the existing types of validation that are recommended in the different countries? A validation could both be given summative and formative functions but this is not necessarily easy to combine, since the different purposes put different demands on the method. A summative assessment is chiefly intended to give a reliable picture of what a person already knows, whereas the formative assessment is primarily intended to make the continued learning as effective and meaningful as possible.

Several possible ways of relating validation to continued learning could be seen here dependent on to what extent validation is seen as a separate phenomenon or something that is integrated in a well organised learning process.

- An entirely summative validation means that continued (organised) learning after the validation is not self-evident.
- An entirely formative validation is first and foremost intended as a basis for further studies or learning.

- Validation may be integrated in the learning process itself i.e. an individual is not *first* validated and *then* the individual proceeds with his/her learning, but instead an education/learning process is constructed in a manner that the continued learning is based on the prior learning and where the subsequent assessment is based on all that the individual knows at that moment.

Formal – Non formal – Informal

We use the concepts formal, non-formal, and informal to characterize different kinds of educational and learning processes but also different assessment and validation processes.

Formal education is used to describe education in the official education system – essentially schools, adult education, and universities. The »formal« learning by that becomes the learning attached to the formal contents, the curriculum, in such education. Non-formal education implies organised learning outside the formal education system, e.g. in popular adult education, further training, and other organised competence development in working life. Informal learning is the learning that takes place in everyday life, volunteer organisations, and working life, etc., and which is not organised with the primary aim to learn.

Concerning assessment and validation of knowledge and competence the formal assessment is the one leading to a documented result on the basis of an officially established standard e.g. a certificate, a professional qualification, or a license. A formal assessment may also lead to a non-formal documentation. For example a person who does not satisfy the requirements for obtaining a certificate or a license may still get a written certification of his or her real competence. A non-formal assessment/validation is made in an organised way but the result is not formalised in the same way as in a formal assessment. This may be the case when a divergent mapping is made resulting in an individual CV not based on any official patterns, or when a participant receives a certification without an official status. An informal assessment, however, is not organised as a special activity but is an informal part of another activity. This may be the case when an informal, formative assessment is made as part of a learning process – something that a teacher may do unnoticed but which affects the continued teaching and learning process.

Validation in the Nordic countries – an introductory overview

All the nordic countries have methods for valuing or validating competence, even if these are named differently in each country. Validation can be made in different sectors like the Education Sector, the labour market, the Third Sector, or in higher education. However, as mentioned before, validation carried out in higher education will not be described in this Report. Validation aimed at the Education Sector is the type of validation that is most developed and used in all the Nordic countries, whereas validation in the Third Sector is least developed.

In this Chapter there will be a brief description of validation in the different countries. After that a summary follows where some interesting aspects are described in a comparison between the different countries. As mentioned before a more comprehensive description of each country will be found in Appendix 2 (not translated into English).

Denmark

As early as 1997 »individuel kompetenceavklaring« (including »kompetencevurdering«) was introduced in the labour market courses, with employed low-educated persons as the target group. An important step in developing recognition of real competence in Denmark was the Adult Education Reform in 2001. A few years later this was followed by a report (a policy paper) to *Folketinget* on recognition of prior learning in the Education Sector and this is primarily developed for vocational courses.

An overall initiative has now been taken in order to recognise real competence from all three sectors dealt with in this Report. The Ministry of Education has coordinated the development work in cooperation with the social partners and representatives of the Third Sector. In November 2006 there was a new bill allowing persons from August 1, 2007 to have their competence valued and recognised – in relation to their education – by competence assessment. In order to facilitate this Denmark has produced two national tools for documentation in cooperation with the social partners and representatives of the Third Sector, one for competence acquired in all sectors including the labour market and another especially for competence from the Third Sector. These documentation tools are thus new and had not been in use when this study was made. The idea of producing these national documentation tools is to offer a personal tool to anyone who wishes to get an overview of the competences they have acquired. The tools can be used as a basis for competence assessment in relation to education or as a preparation for a job interview.

In the earlier Chapter on concepts and definitions we have already described different steps or measures concerning assessment and recognition of competence in Denmark. The description of these steps of the process towards recognition actually provides a picture of what is called validation (»validering«) in Swedish. In addition the expression competence clarification (»kompetenceafklaring«) is used concerning unemployed persons and refugees/immigrants – where no valua-

tion of competence in relation to concrete education goals is made but only in relation to their employability.

The typical validation case in Denmark

The typical validation case in Denmark is when a person with vocational experience gets his/her competence validated in relation to the requirements in vocational training. Validation in the school system is always carried out in relation to education goals or course goals, with the aim of issuing formal grades. According to a recent bill it is possible to get a certification in relation to education goals etc. if one only validates one's competence without participating in supplementary education. One can also get a certification even if one's knowledge does not meet the requirements for receiving a regular certificate. The assessment of the competence is made at a school, or in any case the school is responsible for the validation.

The validation itself is free of charge for a person who is low-educated (i.e. up to upper secondary level). For persons who apply for supplementary education on a higher level the validation will also be free of charge according to a bill that has been put forward, except for persons who already have an education above the upper secondary level. There might be a small additional fee paid by the person in question for the supplementary education (depending on what education it is). The person can get a study grant as a compensation for the loss of earnings during the period of validation and supplementary education. In some cases the employer covers the expenses for the employee's studies, i.e. the employer reimburses the costs for the study allowance. There is no legal right for a person to get a leave of absence to participate in validation or supplementary education – in this case there must be an agreement with the employer. But if a person has agreed on a leave of absence he/she is also entitled to a study allowance if he/she meets the criteria mentioned in the law.

Finland

Finland has a well-defined national competence based qualifications system for vocational examinations, a system introduced as early as **1994**. In Finland there is not one system for validation in education and another for the labour market. Instead there is a uniform and integrated system for both sectors. However, the Third Sector is not fully included – validation in the Third Sector is least developed in Finland even if certain work is in progress. In the competence based qualifications system exactly those competences that can be valued (and no others) are listed, how they should be valued and in relation to what criteria. The system may be regarded as driven by the needs of working life demands and the qualifications are developed in cooperation between the labour market and the education system. The assessment is always made in relation to the criteria of the education system.

It is the Ministry of Education that is responsible for legislation and financing and the National Board of Education is responsible for deciding about the structure and criteria for the competence based qualifications and it is also responsible for part of the financing. The Board also implements the laws and controls how these are followed. However, the Adult Education Centres are responsible for procedures and methods.

The competence based qualifications system has existed since **1994** and has offered the possibility of taking a test for a qualification (vocational examina-

tion) without having participated in a training program. As of March 1, 2 007, adult education in Finland has undergone an individualisation reform. This means that the education institutions have to consider what knowledge the person in question possesses and if possible give credit for it. If the student needs to complete his/her training to achieve a complete vocational qualification/diploma, an individual study plan must be prepared.

The typical validation case in Finland

In Finland the most frequent case of validation is when an employer suggests that a person who is already employed, should become an apprentice and get his competences recognised in an official vocational qualification/diploma. Actually the employer does not pay anything for this but is instead paid by the apprenticeship education centre, which among other things is responsible for allocating the money for validation. It is this centre that pays much of the costs for the validation. The person in question keeps his job but studies for 2-3 days a month. Those applying for an apprenticeship in order to achieve a vocational qualification/diploma must have at least three years of relevant work experience. For a basic qualification one does not need any work experience. For the special vocational qualification/diploma one needs about 5 years of work experience. One does not need to take a study loan during the study period. The employer is partly compensated economically for the time during which the apprentice is at school. The aim of the validation is that a person's competence will be officially recognised.

The vocational training is individualised. The individualisation begins with an interview of the individual in order to find out what he or she has been working with etc. Then the counsellor and the individual together look for vocational qualifications in relation to which it will be possible to validate. The participants are often at a workplace for 5-8 weeks where a workplace assessor decides what competences the individual has that can be tested.

The assessment process is always tripartite. One assessor represents the employer, one the employee and one the education institution. One of the assessors has to be a qualified assessor (Specialist in Competence Based Qualifications). This system is in place to ensure an objective and neutral assessment and to enhance the quality of the process.

One can also establish what »gaps« that the individual may have to »fill« at school in order to achieve the requirements of the vocational qualification/diploma. When there are gaps the individual can continue his/her studies or learn at the workplace. With the individualisation the time that an individual needs for his/her studies to fulfil the qualification and receive a vocational diploma has been reduced. Before individualisation was introduced almost everyone studied for 2-3 years. Now the study time may be 6 months to one year instead, or else an individual can study by distance learning. The study time can thus be considerably reduced.

Iceland

Iceland is working on formulating a national strategy for validation. Since 2 004 different methods have been tested and the work is till going on. The Education and Training Service Centre has acted as the coordinator of the pilot schemes and is responsible for the production of methods in cooperation with the social partners and education providers.

The unemployment rate is low in Iceland and for this reason validation is primarily intended for persons with a job but with a low formal education. Validation is mainly carried out in relation to the requirements of the Education Sector. The headmaster of each school decides if the school should be involved in validation or not. Some projects have been implemented in the Labour Market Sector and the persons involved have been assessed in relation to working life criteria. In the Third Sector there is work going on with portfolio assessment that can be used as a basis for validation against the criteria of the formal education.

The typical validation case in Iceland

The prioritised target group consists of those who have not finished their upper secondary education. Most of the persons who are validated in Iceland are already employed but they have not finished their upper secondary education and validation has initially been developed primarily for this target group.

The upper secondary schools have been validating students by their own process with a focus on formal documentation but also on work life experience. The process has been rather informal. The Education and Training Service Centre has been developing validation methods through pilot schemes. Most pilot schemes have concerned the Education Sector. Those who participate are persons employed in vocations with a shortage of skilled labour (for instance carpenters) and who want to study for an upper secondary certificate. By validating their knowledge they reduce the study time by getting credit for what they already know. The validation sometimes takes place in the evenings and sometimes in the daytime. The participants then have to make an individual agreement deal with their employers about taking time off from work. The validation itself usually takes place in a school and it is the practical competence that is validated against course plans. So far there has been no focus on validation of theoretical competence. The validation itself is free of charge for the individual.

The participant begins by making a portfolio together with a counsellor and/or a teacher. This is followed by an interview when a plan for the validation is made on the basis of what seems possible to validate. The confirmation of competence can be made in several different ways – for example by talking to employers, by observations, or by case studies (in the school). Then the person's actual knowledge based on the course plans is recorded and he gets grades if he passes a course. He may also have to solve some tasks to complete the course if his knowledge almost covers the course objectives. From the start the goal for the validation is that the individual should receive a certificate. The actual validation stops here. Then the intention is that the person should complete what is needed to get a certificate. The completion of the education is not financed. Everyone who studies in Iceland pays a school fee. Most of those who participate in supplementary education after the validation finance their studies by studying in their free time. They usually participate in evening courses and so they can work in the day-time. The individual has no right to be free from work for studies but in certain cases the person in question can take a study loan if he/she wants to study in the day-time. The employers can be flexible. In the pilot schemes, it has turned out that many persons withdraw from the supplementary education if they need to study for 2-3 terms. They do not think they get enough support. It is the theoretical subjects like Icelandic, English etc. that seem to be tough for them and that make them abandon their studies. For that reason supplementary education with a focus on individually adapted teaching methods could be part of the process for those who choose to validate their competence.

Norway

Norway implemented a project on real competence during the years **1999-2002** in which the purpose was to establish a national system that gives the individual a possibility to document his/her real competence and get it valued. The idea was to create legitimacy for the system in the Education Sector, the Third Sector, and in working life. A number of pilot schemes were implemented during these years and a national experiment was carried out in all the three sectors (education, labour market, Third Sector) in order to test different methods and tools. The education system, the Third Sector, and working life participated in the work of developing criteria and methods to give legitimacy to validation.

However, a comprehensive and uniform system for all sectors cannot be distinguished in Norway but there is a national *structure* with *documentation methods* for validation in all three sectors. Vox (a national centre/institute for adult learning) has been commissioned by the Ministry of Knowledge (»Kunnskapsdepartementet«) to coordinate and implement the validation work in Norway. Among the Nordic countries Norway has had a national structure and documentation methods for *all three sectors* over the longest period.

The attempt at a national structure is not equally developed in all sectors. The Norwegian validation is just as in the other Nordic countries targeted towards the Education Sector. Methods and tools have been produced for the assessment of competence in the Education Sector, and assessments are always made in relation to the course plans of the school. Even if national documentation methods have been developed for all sectors they are relatively new and not very frequently used, neither in the labour market nor the Third Sector.

The typical validation case in Norway

The typical case is a woman aged **35-50** who works part-time in the health care sector, for example in the care of the elderly. She has worked for several years and from the employer, a colleague, or somebody else she gets information about the possibility of validation to obtain a certificate of her competence. The most common motives for assistant nurses to validate their competence, get an abbreviated education, and a formal certificate are that they could get a permanent position and more work. The salary becomes insignificantly higher with a formal education and consequently economical reasons are not decisive. However, it is a factor that motivates the individual to get continuity and predictability concerning the salary. Getting more knowledge in the field is another reason. (Haugøy and others, 2006)

The process looks like this: The woman gathers all the documentation of her education, job certifications etc. and then she contacts the county authority (»fylkeskommunen«) responsible for the education. All counties have one or more resource centres that are responsible for the validation process. Someone at the centre receives her and makes an interview about what she has been working with, her education etc. In addition a mapping is made with the intent to determine against which courses she can validate. A subject specialist teacher then finds out what she can validate against in the course plans. The very assessment of the competence can be made with several methods based on what is best for the individual.

Often the assessment takes no more than a week. After that she is offered supplementary education if it would prove necessary to achieve a complete cer-

tificate. If a person does not meet the demands for a complete certificate he/she will get a certification of competence that is also an official document.

As the person in the typical case is employed, the validation itself (mapping, assessment, and documentation), according to an agreement with the employer, takes place during the working hours or in the individual's free time. This may be done in different ways. The supplementary education can vary in length but usually takes about 1-2 years. If a person is born before 1978 and lacks upper secondary education (»videregående opplæring«) the validation is free of charge as well as the supplementary education. Sometimes the participants can study during the working hours and get paid while they study, in other cases they have to take a study loan to finance their studies. A person is entitled to receive a leave of absence for a duration of three years for basic studies (»grunnutdanningen«).

Sweden

In Sweden the National Commission on Validation has been appointed and has during four years, 2004-2007 supported different initiatives among other things for development of validation methods in order to be able to present a proposal for a national structure for validation. The Commission has been cooperating with different actors from the different sectors and the different processes. Among other things the actors of the labour market have been involved in the development work as well as representatives of the popular adult education. The descriptions in this study are principally based on the policy that has been expressed through the work of the Commission – the decisions made after 2007 may of course take another direction.

In Sweden it is emphasised that validation should have an exploratory (divergent) starting-point in which an assessment of competences not necessarily will be made in relation to fixed criteria. This is supposed to make it possible for all persons to find the right path in the validation process – that is to say to create the appropriate expectations on what part of the process to start with and the prerequisites for doing so. Even if the starting-point is exploratory, in reality it is still mainly the competences at the upper secondary level that are validated in relation to the requirements of the Education Sector due to the fact that the Education Sector neither has had the mandate to do anything else, or other criteria to validate against, and also because certificates and grades are well-known and that there is a tradition of thinking in terms of educational criteria and grades. The work with exploratory validation at the national level has above all resulted in exploratory tools supporting mapping of competences. In the labour market area groups for developing methods have been formed, working to produce above all divergent validation tools for general, comprehensive competences of different sectors of industry. Validation criteria for specific vocations have also been added that also include assessment methods. In addition there is also certain validation activity in the Third Sector but there are no reliable statistics on how frequent validation is and no »officially established« documents have been produced.

The typical validation Case in Sweden

The largest group that has been validated in Sweden is persons employed with the municipal health care, lacking the formal competence that most employers demand to employ a person as assistant nurse. Most often it is a woman wor-

king in health care or the care of the elderly. She has not got a permanent employment but is working as a substitute or part-time. The employer (the municipality) can pay for the validation itself and the validation can be made as part of the job. A person must have an upper secondary education from the Health Care Programme in order to obtain a permanent position. This fact is one reason for the initiatives on validation and supplementary education.

The person in question has to validate the parts of the education that she already commands and then complete the rest in order to get an upper secondary certificate. First, a mapping is made of the individual's competence by a counsellor. After that, a specialist teacher makes a more detailed mapping. The participant makes a self-estimation and then a plan for the validation is set up. The very assessment of the competence may be made in several different ways. Most often theoretical knowledge tests in educational surroundings are combined with vocational practice at a workplace – not at the participant's own workplace however. At the validation workplace the person has an instructor who assesses the competence. The instructor reports to the teacher who makes the final assessment. In this way, the person validates what she already knows and then can continue to increase her knowledge to get a complete certificate. If she wishes she can get a certification (and grades for the completed courses) after the validation itself without having to supplement her knowledge with further studies. Normally the validation takes about three weeks to achieve. The completion of the education usually takes abut 20 weeks, that is to say one school term. During the completion the participant supports herself financially, most often through a study grant or an education allowance. If she is employed by the hour or part-time she can also study part-time and support herself on her salary.

Summary

In all the Nordic countries validation is mainly made in relation to the criteria of the education system. All the countries have more or less individually adapted education systems that to some extent are based on the individual's competence independently of how this is acquired. Most often the individualisation is not complete in the Nordic countries, but still there is some kind of adjustment to individual needs. The validation is least developed in the Third Sector in all the five countries.

Other common characteristics are that the labour market actors have been involved in the development of guidelines for validation and also that the Ministry of Education in each Nordic country is responsible for validation matters or has participated in the validation work. Another common aspect is that validation is still being developed and modified. In Finland for example where validation has existed since 1994, changes are even today being made regarding how competence should be assessed and recognised.

In the typical cases described in all the five countries the person whose competence is validated is already employed and wants formal qualifications. In some of these cases it is the labour market or the demands of the employer for formal qualifications that make people validate their competences and possibly also complete their studies. This is evident in the cases from Norway and Sweden where the municipalities or the private employers most often do not employ persons permanently in the health care area if they don't have a formal education. A secure employment, more work (for instance full time instead of part-time), and a predictable salary are mentioned as the principal motives for those who validate their competence in the area.

Validation in the Education Sector

In all the nordic countries validation is primarily made in the Education Sector. The policy and the activity dealt with in this study are mainly related to what, with a general term, may be called the upper secondary level. The school systems in the different countries have many similarities but still they are somewhat different and in addition the terms of the different activities vary between the countries just like the terms for what is described as validation in the Report. In this Report the expression *upper secondary level* (»gymnasienivå« »videregående opplæring«) is mostly used even if the formats and the names of the education at this level vary between the countries.

A fact that can be established from the start is that, despite a certain variation regarding the school systems, the methods used in the validation field are very similar. In all the countries except Sweden validation is carried out in a convergent manner in relation to educational criteria. The policy of the Swedish National Commission on Validation implies a divergent starting-point but in practice the assessment is also often oriented towards criteria/grades.

The advantages of validation that are formulated seem on the whole to be the same in all the Nordic countries. Increased understanding of one's own competence, self-confidence, and motivation for further studies are mentioned as advantages of validation and individualisation. Shortened study time saves both money and time for the individual and furthermore the individual can get supplementary education and learn more. However, despite the many advantages of validation the general standpoint in the Nordic countries is that the possibility of validation is not sufficiently known.

Validation as a right

In all the Nordic countries validation is in some respects a right, even if there are differences as to what this right is actually called. In Iceland formally documented competence can be validated in a new context just like certain labour market experience. However, it is the headmaster of each school who decides if the school will validate knowledge that has not been documented before, which means that the individual must follow the decision of the school. In addition, the forms of validation mainly described in this Report have up to now only been used in pilot projects in Iceland, and for this reason also, everyone has not had the opportunity/right to validation. Instead the persons belonging to the target groups of the project have been prioritized.

In Finland validation is a right for everyone lacking a formal vocational qualification/diploma. In Norway validation is not a right for everybody but only for certain people. However, everybody has the possibility to validate their competence. Certain persons have a legal right today to validate their competence in Norway, namely those persons born before **1978** who have a right to upper secondary education (»videregående opplæring«) and also to validation. A bill has been presented in Norway proposing that validation will be a right for everyone above the age of **25** lacking upper secondary education (»videregående opplæring«). The State

Employment Agency and the municipalities can also make an estimation of the need for a person to be entitled to a validation. It is also possible for the individual to pay for the validation himself[3]. Even if the current statute does not use the expression *validation* it is still the intention that a person has a right to get his/her competence documented in a certification issued by an adult education centre. Such a certification will also be issued even if a person does not meet all the requirements to get a grade for a complete course. Thus validation is not formulated as a formal right in Sweden, but the right to get a certification may still be interpreted as a right to some kind of validation. Moreover a »special individual examination« (»prövning«), in which a person's knowledge is tested and a certificate is issued even if the person has not participated in the course in question, is a right in Sweden[4]. Validation will be a right for everyone in Denmark (according to a new bill of November 2006).

Financing

The cost for participating in a validation varies. In all the countries except Norway validation in the *education system* is free of charge. What is called »prövning« (special individual examination) in Sweden, but which could still be regarded as a kind of validation, is subject to a minor charge that must be paid by the individual. In Norway validation is free of charge for some persons but not for all. Those born before 1978 are not charged in Norway, just like persons considered to have a right to validation by the State Employment Agency or the municipalities. The individual may also pay for the validation himself/herself if no other organisation can finance it. There is a bill being processed now in Norway proposing that everyone above the age of 25 and who does not have a certificate from an upper secondary education will have the right to validation.

In Denmark validation is free of charge for everybody right now. There is a bill from November 30, 2006 proposing that competence evaluation will be a right for everyone also in the future. Low-educated persons (those who have not studied at the upper secondary level) always have a right to validation free of charge. This means that new possibilities/rights to validation related to adult education at a higher level will not be free of charge for persons who already have an education above the upper secondary level even if they have a right to be validated. In other words they have to pay for the validation themselves. However, the institution that carries out a validation in relation to further education at a higher level receives an extra grant from the state if the validation results in an individual study plan that shortens the education by at least 15 percent, or if grades are issued. For unemployed persons the State Employment Agency may pay for a validation.

Concerning the supplementary education that the validation may lead to – this is not free of charge in Iceland where every student pays a school fee. In Denmark there might be a fee for the course itself (the size of the fee depends on the education/course and especially the level – tuition fee is compulsory as a principle since all vocational training for adults should be organised to suit those who are employed). In the remaining countries the supplementary education is free of charge. In Finland and Denmark, for instance, apprenticeships are common and in those cases the persons are already employed and receive a salary. In Finland the employer and the apprenticeship training centre pay for the apprentice. There is a new possibility in the Finnish system – a person can vali-

date his/her competence without being accepted for an education or as an apprentice. It is not yet established how these cases will be financed.

Even in Norway, Denmark and Sweden the employers can sometimes allow the individual to study during working hours. If the employer in Denmark pays full salary to allow the individual to study, the employer gets the study allowance if the person in question is entitled to this. It also happens that employers pay the Danish school fee for employees who study if they regard the training as a kind of competence development. In Iceland the most common alternative is that the person works in the day-time and takes the supplementary courses in the evening. In all the Nordic countries it is possible to get a study grant (loan and/or allowance) for the supplementary education.

Convergent – Divergent

As mentioned before all the Nordic countries except Sweden basically have a convergent starting-point for validation in the Education Sector. The formal, non-formal, and informal competences of individuals should relate to educational criteria. However, in Sweden it is considered that course objectives are too narrow and that all competence cannot be made visible in this way. For this reason the starting-point for validation in Sweden is divergent.

Formal grades are not the most important results according to the central policy level (Ds **2003:23**) as validation should not necessarily be made in relation to a formal grade. Making the competence visible is the primary goal and the value of this documentation is then determined by the employer.

Even if the starting-point in Sweden is divergent, certificates are still considered to be important among certain employers as certificates have a great deal of legitimacy. In certain vocations formal certificates are required in order to obtain a permanent position. In the policy of the Swedish National Commission on Validation a difference is made between divergent validation and a convergent special individual examination (»prövning«) with regard to the Education Sector. In adult education practice, however, a difference is not always made between the concepts. For that reason much of the validation carried out should rather be called special individual examination (»prövning«). With regard to policy the Commission has been working for a divergent starting-point in all sectors. The fact that the starting-point is divergent does not mean that the Commission has only been involved in developing divergent validation but also to some extent convergent validation. The divergent phase has been much in focus because there has been a need for development of this phase, as convergent validation is in a way already established.

Formative – Summative

In all the Nordic countries validation might be both formative and summative in the Education Sector. A validation may have different aims and consequently the process of validation may have different approaches, but the same process may also have different aims. Those admitted to an education programme who, as a starting-point for the future studies, validate what they already know are then subject to a formative validation. But the same validation may also be summative. The aim does not necessarily have to be further studies. Instead the person in question may want a certification of what he/she knows in order to apply for a job. Likewise the validation becomes summative if it turns out that the indivi-

dual meets all the requirements in relation to the education programme in question and for this reason does not need any supplementary education.

In the Finnish system separate modules can be validated in the qualifications system. The validation is then regarded to be summative in relation to this module but it can have a formative function if the result is that the person in question will continue to add other modules to his/her education. However, the assessment that is finally made if a person qualifies for a complete vocational qualification/diploma will be more clearly summative.

Another example is taken from the Basic Adult Education in Denmark. In Denmark an assessment/validation is made of a person's competences in which the competence is measured in relation to the learning results in a summative way. With this assessment as a basis, a personal education plan is prepared and the person has the right to accomplish this plan within a period of six years, which means that the validation will be formative in the end. However, in the basic vocational training in Denmark the school directly has to prepare a personal plan for the training in cooperation with the student, based on the student's background. This means that the validation then must be seen as formative.

Validation in the Nordic countries is often used as a basis for further studies and offers a way of reducing the study time. Formal qualifications in the education system are regarded as important in all the Nordic countries, which often means that the supplementary education is the goal for the validation. At the policy level in Sweden, formal qualifications are not the most important thing, instead »useful documents« that increase the chances of getting a job are regarded as more important. The starting-point of the validation is then divergent and supplementary education is not always the goal and not any obvious part of a validation process in Sweden either.

Broadly speaking the goal in the Nordic countries is individually adapted education programmes or individually adapted possibilities of being admitted to an education programme. However, the education programmes are not completely adapted to the individual – there is a good deal of variation. Even if the goal is studies completely adapted to the individual this is not always feasible and in practice this may even vary depending on the education provider and the regional location.

Education versus validation and individualisation

In the Nordic countries most validation is carried out in the Education Sector in relation to course objectives and grades. In all the countries the idea is that validation might lead to admission to studies and a reduction of the time to achieve formal study qualifications by making it possible for individuals to get credit for the knowledge they already possess. Validation and education programmes, completely adapted to the individual and prepared to fill the »gaps« in an individual's background, in order to achieve a formal qualification in a short period, is the optimal alternative from the individual's perspective and from a socio-economic perspective.

Validation and individualisation have inherent problems in all the Nordic countries. For one thing how can validation and individually adapted education be economically profitable? For the society and for the individual the best solution (from the profitability point of view) is if the validation – and the following education, if any – takes as little time as possible. For the education institutions

validation and abbreviated, individualised education programmes may not be the most profitable and easiest alternatives. For example the education institutions in Finland and Denmark get less money if the education takes less time. This means that education institutions are interested in giving as many hours of teaching as possible. There is simply a lack of economical incentives in adult education to shorten the participants' study period as much as possible. The easiest and most profitable option for the education institutions is a complete education programme, not validation.

Validation in Denmark means in one sense that the education becomes shorter owing to the fact that the student most often can leave out a certain part of the course programme but participate in the rest of the programme. The time for a complete examination is not shortened but the student does not need to participate in all the courses, instead he/she gets »gaps« in his/her study programme.

There is another dilemma when the same education institution validates and also carries out the supplementary education. If the education institution gets money to educate there is an incentive for them to focus on the lack of competence and a wish to give more teaching than is needed. A solution to this problem discussed in Sweden is that validation is made by one institution and the supplementary education by another. This problem has also been discussed in Denmark but there are difficulties in letting an independent authority first make the validation when the expertise is to be found only in the education institutions. The result has been that, instead, an independent authority has been proposed in the bill where the individual can make an appeal against the assessment of the institutions.

When a more clearly summative validation is made it is easier to choose another education provider for a supplementary education. In Denmark, for example, the validation made for Basic Adult Education (see above) should be valid even if the individual chooses another education institution for the supplementary education. This possibility has not been created only to avoid that the validation gives a result that is unfavourable to the individual but perhaps rather to offer a freedom of choice within the education system.

There are more financial aspects to clarify concerning validation and individually adapted education. In most Nordic countries it is emphasised that the costs for validation and individually adapted education might be as high as or even higher than for a complete education program. There is always a risk that a validation is not made because of this. The reason that the costs are higher for a validation than an ordinary education is that the validation is made for an individual whereas an education programme is made for a whole group of students, which reduces the costs. Consequently there are no financial incentives to validate instead of teaching a whole group of students. This problem has been observed in several countries (Norway, Sweden and Denmark). The question is if the benefits of a reduced study period can compensate for the probably higher costs for the implementation.

The development costs of producing validation methods may also be so high that they exceed the costs for the education. This is a problem that is tackled in Iceland. Sweden and Iceland are still in the process of developing a model for validation. Nothing has yet been decided in Sweden regarding how many hours a validation can take and how much the different practical tests will be allowed to cost. This can make validations very expensive for example when practical

tests for vocations such as a bricklayer or a carpenter must be carried out in realistic surroundings. As a consequence the National Commission on Validation in Sweden has committed itself to producing good supportive tools and methods that make the validation more effective concerning resources. Today every institution concerned is making its own model and is developing its own methods at different levels and these take a long time to develop and implement.

Another reason for educating instead of validating is that validation is not regarded as equivalent to education. This is described as an attitude problem in the education institutions. The teacher/assessor wants everyone to have studied and finished the same courses. The idea that validation should be equivalent and not identical to an education has not always been accepted by the assessors and it seems to be a problem in most of the Nordic countries. According to a person who was interviewed the policymakers must put pressure on the providers in order to realise the idea of individualisation. In addition instructions are needed concerning the practical implementation of validation.

Some of the problems that have been experienced regarding validation and individualised education also concern the way education institutions are organised. The budget and the organisation of the courses are made in advance and validation and individualisation make it more difficult for the education institutions to plan. The problem has been observed in Finland and Sweden among other places. However, in Finland an interviewed person says that *»they are overcoming the problem«.* The solution is that nowadays they have built a modular system in Vocational Adult Education with those advantages that have been discussed: that the students can study exactly what they lack, the possibility of a flexible start, and the possibility for new target groups to have the opportunity to pursue studies.

In Denmark the state gives an extra subsidy to the providers for each person who participates in an individual competence evaluation and in some programmes also for the preparation of the personal education plan based on the competence assessment. This makes it possible to be more flexible in relation to the original budget as the extra subsidy is received after having reported the activity to the Ministry of Education. In spite of this it has been claimed that the extra subsidy is not large enough for the providers/institutions to consider validation as an attractive activity.

Supplementary education

Finally we want to sum up some experiences concerning supplementary education. In spite the fact that validation towards upper-secondary grades is free of charge in Norway for a person born before **1978** it is hard to make persons participate in validation and supplementary education. The problem is that the person does not want to apply for a leave of absence as this means that you lose part of your income. Persons lose economically by participating in a validation even if the validation process itself is free of charge. Accordingly there are problems recruiting persons to validation in Norway. In Iceland they also have problems in making people continue with the supplementary education. It has turned out that many people who need to complete their studies for some terms interrupt the supplementary education. The do not think they get enough support. It is the theoretic subjects that seem tough for them - Icelandic, English etc. – and make them interrupt their studies. The validation is then a waste, one

interviewed person thinks, and he is also of the opinion that the education system is not be so good for adults and above all that it is not adjusted to meet the needs of persons who has already interrupted their studies once. In Iceland the most frequent solution is that people work and at the same time complete their education in the evenings, something which can make many persons prefer not to complete their education. The experience from the pilot groups in Iceland is that the participants would like to continue studying as a group with an individually adjusted education programme. In Denmark the vocational training for adults, by law, shall be designed in a way suited to people at work, that is to say it should be offered as part-time studies (possibly full-time if you are granted a study support for adult students).

To sum up

To sum up it might be said that the problems concerning validation and individualisation for the educational institutions are all about economy, attitudes, and organising. Traditional education versus individual adjustment – how can it be done in the future? How do you make validation economically profitable? How do you change the attitudes to validation? How do you spread information about validation as an option? How can education institutions organise education and make budgets so that validation and individualised education do not become problems and obstacles in the work?

Validation in the Labour Market sector

A person who has worked for a long time may have acquired other competences in a vocation/vocational field than those that are given at school – from working life experience, on-the-job training etc. Validation in the Labour Market Sector concerns principally competence from working life and assessments in relation to the demands of working life, for example validation against accepted vocational certificates or international standards and vocational certificates. Validation in the Labour Market Sector may also be a matter of producing criteria for a vocation in those cases when there is no real training for this vocation to base the validation on. Validation can also be about documenting and confirming competence in another way than in relation to education programs, for example by taking into account competences that are specific for an entire vocational field instead of a single vocation. The starting point is requirement specifications that cover a certain job and this may include both knowledge that a person has acquired from an education and experiences from working life. A job in a certain sector does not always require a certain training or education. The starting point of the validation in the labour market is the vocation or the vocational field unlike validation in the Education Sector where the education is the starting point. In other words it depends on whether the competence requirements are formulated in the company/branch of industry or if the requirements are phrased in formal curricula/course objectives. Besides, in all the Nordic countries validation in a broad sense also exists in the Private Sector, carried out against different branch certificates and internal standards. However, the exact extent of this type of validation is not known.

The dividing line between what could be included in the Education Sector and what could be regarded as belonging to the labour market is not very sharp. Instead the sectors may very well overlap and different countries define them somewhat differently. For example Finland has totally integrated both sectors and does not differentiate between the Labour Market Sector and the Education Sector regarding validation. Iceland on the other hand makes a special division between labour market validation and validation in the Education Sector. In Iceland it is regarded as validation in the labour market if the validation is made against the requirement specification that applies to a certain vocation or job – the validation is not based on the criteria of the school's course plans. The validation takes place at work places and results in a certification. It is the future employer who decides the legitimacy of the certifications. However, validation in Iceland in the Education Sector takes place in school, against the school's course plans and criteria, and results in grades that have legitimacy throughout the whole country.

To sum up, it can be said that Denmark and Norway have produced a special national documentation tool in (or comprising) this sector. Sweden and Finland have different kinds of methods at the national level, whereas Iceland is developing national documentation tools and methods. Regarding the question whether each country has a convergent and/or a divergent orientation of its validation in

the Labour Market Sector the picture is not completely clear. Denmark, Iceland and Norway are using a vocational (»fagligt«) recognition of competence that can be regarded as convergent but the documentation form used is more divergent. Sweden has, as in the Education Sector, a policy in which the starting point is divergent but convergent approaches are sometimes used in specific vocational fields – also among the initiatives supported by the National Commission on Validation. Finland, however, uses more clearly convergent methods.

Different aims and approaches in different countries

Validation made in the labour market can be decentralised and run by different branches of industry or in separate vocations. Most often validation against standards and branch certificates is not run at a national level but is decentralised to the different branches of industry. As mentioned before this type of validation that the branches and separate vocations run on their own exists in all the Nordic countries.

In *Denmark* validation in the labour market is intended for both the individual and the company. It can be used both by unemployed persons, to help them get a job, and by persons who already have a job or are looking for a new job. Also the companies could benefit from validation in connection with competence development. In Norway, too, validation is intended to be useful both for the employees and the employers. Norway and Denmark have both developed *national documentation tools* for the labour market. The aim in Norway was that the documentation, called Kompetensattest[5], would have legitimacy both in the labour market and in the education system but things did not exactly turn out this way. The competence certificate has not been in use for a very long time and has not yet had an impact in the Education Sector. It is not known at the central level in Norway how frequently used the documentation is but the general opinion is that it is not used to any large extent. In Denmark the documentation tool has recently been completed and was published in September 2 007[6]. In both countries the documentation of competence from working life is intended to be used in relation to an application for an education and in the labour market in connection with a job application. That is to say the Education Sector should be able to decide for example how much of the experiences from working life a person may get credit for in relation to the desired education. In Denmark the intention is that the Education Sector should be able to use the documentation as a base for a competence assessment and the documentation tool is intended to be comprehensive, by also comprising education and experience from the Third Sector (in addition new documentation tools are being produced specially for the Third Sector).

In *Finland* validations in the education and Labour Market Sectors are integrated and cannot be separated. Validation in Finland is intended for those who lack a vocational qualification/diploma. The purpose of validation in Finland is to make use of all kinds of learning whether it has been acquired in a formal, informal or non-formal way. Another purpose is to raise the education level for all age groups. A third purpose is cost effectiveness by shortening the study time.

In *Sweden* the main purpose is to facilitate for people to get a job by making visible a person's competences so that he/she could more easily apply for a job. The target group is mainly the unemployed (or those seeking a job), but also persons who are employed may validate their competence in connection with

staff development. Three target groups are identified in Ds 2 003:23.
»Validation should be used primarily in three contexts:

- As part of an ongoing education with the aim of clarifying the level of knowledge, adjust the contents in and/or abbreviate the study time for the individual.
- In connection with study guidance to define the starting level for further studies and
- In order to document real knowledge and skills before a job application or in connection with staff development at the workplace«

The National Commission on Validation has emphasised that it is chiefly the third point that is important to develop as this is the area that is somewhat neglected in the validation activities, among other things owing to the fact that there are no specially appointed vocational assessors.

Sweden and above all Finland have developed *validation methods at the national level.* In spite of this similarity the differences are substantial between the two countries. What has already been reported from the Education Sector in Finland also applies to the Labour Market Sector. In Sweden tools for divergent, but also for convergent, competence mapping for the labour market have been developed. With the divergent starting point the branch organisations at the central level have been engaged in developing areas of competence in working life that are not specific for a separate vocation but instead specific for a branch of industry. In addition specific (convergent) validation tools have been developed for some vocations.

In *Iceland*, finally, the purpose of validation in the Labour Market Sector is to strengthen a person's position in the labour market and to raise the formal level of education in the country. Validation is, regardless of which sector, chiefly intended for persons with a job and with low formal education, but also for employed persons with an education. National guidelines for validation are being developed. Consequently so far it is unclear how validation in the Labour Market Sector will be organised in the future.

Accordingly the purpose of validation may vary in this sector. It may be intended for and used by both individuals and employers. One aim is to bring unemployed into the labour market, to the benefit of the unemployed as well as the employers in demand of manpower. The second aim is to strengthen the position of employees, by the visualisation and formalisation of their competence. Thirdly validation can be a tool for the employer to promote organisational development and in-service training.

The unemployed as a target group for validation

The State Employment Agency may finance competence mappings, the entire validation process, and if necessary also supplementary education. In Sweden and Denmark mostly vocations with a shortage of skilled labour are validated when the State Employment Agency finances the validation, as the goal for the agency is that persons should get a job as soon as possible.

Even in Norway the State Employment Agency may pay for a validation but up to now validation and education have not been used for the unemployed to a very great extent. This group has not been prioritised. The State Employment Agency has had some fears that people would exploit the system and not participate in education. Instead they would register as unemployed, validate their competence and get their education paid, says one person who has been

interviewed. In cooperation with the central employment authorities (»Nav, arbeids- og velferdsforvaltningen«) Vox is running a project aimed at encouraging more unemployed persons to validate their competences and participate in education.

In Finland there is a discussion going on about the way the unemployed can benefit from the individualisation of vocational training. The Ministry of Labour pays the costs for validation of unemployed persons and the Ministry buys education programmes for the unemployed. In Finland, too, the State Employment Agency can decide to pay for a validation process.

In Iceland there is hardly any unemployment – only 2 percent – so the unemployed are not a group with priority. Accordingly it is not very strange that validation mainly is aimed at persons who already have a job. However, the portfolio method and other tools for mapping are also used for unemployed persons at the employment agencies. One prioritised goal is to raise the formal education level and strengthen the position of risk groups in the labour market.

In the Labour Market Sector the financing of validation is not clear. The companies must see a need for validation if they will use it and partly finance it for their employees. The employment agencies do not as a matter of course finance validation for the unemployed either, but instead the needs of the labour market may determine if persons can get access to validation. In case there are national documentation tools and methods the individual can use these free of charge. However, to go through an entire validation process that also includes an assessment of competence is not as self-evident, if the individual himself/herself must pay for it. Getting the supplementary education that is required if the individual wants to get an education certificate or a branch certificate is not either self-evident, if no one is financing. Even if there are documentation tools for working life competence (in Denmark and Norway) and methods for mapping and self-evaluation (in Sweden) there are no indications that the tools have actually been used to any large extent. The information about the tools does not seem to have reached individuals and companies or else they do not see the need to use these tools.

The roles of the branches of industry in validation

So far the branches in the Nordic countries have not to any large extent chosen to develop special validation and assessment methods at the national level based on vocational criteria instead of educational criteria. However, working life/the branches participate in the work of designing the requirements of the vocational training. Among the Nordic countries Sweden has been developing most divergent (and in some cases convergent) mapping and self-evaluation methods. In Sweden the goal has been to start from the vocation/vocational field instead of starting from educational criteria and course plans. In the convergent validations that have been constructed on the basis of the vocational requirements these vocational criteria still end up in (existing) educational criteria to a great extent.

To change perspectives and start from a divergent validation, instead of a convergent one and assessment of competence against educational criteria, is a new idea and not particularly easy to accomplish as it means using another starting point. There may not be very strong incentives either for branches to develop other assessment criteria when there are already educational criteria to base the assessment on – the branches have often been involved in formulating these criteria as well. Developing other criteria than those linked to the basic vocatio-

nal training is expensive, means a lot of work, and does not with certainty give the same legitimacy as a school certificate. On the other hand other competences than »school knowledge« are also on demand nowadays in the labour market in order to make a person employable. For example it may be more important in commerce that a person is service minded, has communication skills, knows how to make quick calculations etc. than to have completed a certain education. In other words it is not only subject knowledge that is important

In the Nordic countries validation is made by the branches of industry themselves regarding the issue of vocational certificates etc. In all the Nordic countries except Iceland, people must usually apply to the Education Sector to be validated and get supplementary education oriented towards the labour market, if the validation concerns something other than vocational certifications or certificates (which the branches themselves are responsible for). In Sweden also, where there are national methods for assessment in certain branches (and for mapping in other branches), validation in the labour market is still a matter of starting from the Education Sector however on the basis of the needs of the labour market. The fact that the education system is used in connection with validation in the labour market too is probably due to the need for legitimacy.

Formal och informal competences

The informal competence is important for the job and for employability but hard to prove or document in a reliable and fair way. It might be qualities like if a person is nice, stress tolerant, can easily talk to the customers etc. These qualities are demanded and are important in (parts of) the labour market. However, they might be visible in other ways, without the need for a validation. To validate subject/vocational knowledge – knowledge that corresponds to the contents and requirements of a certain education – and to translate this knowledge into formal vocational qualifications seem (so far) to be what validation can contribute to in the labour market of the Nordic countries.

Validation in the Third Sector

The »third sector« does not consist of any uniform activity. Instead the sector is made up of different organisations with different aims. In international terminology the term Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) is used. The sector includes popular adult education (folk high schools, study associations, certain forms of schools for special target groups, day folk high schools) non-profit organisations, sports associations, associations for voluntary social work – in fact all associations that are not run for economic profit and not owned by the state. Here courses with varying contents are offered – studies of developing countries, language courses, ICT[7] courses, creative courses etc. The courses carried out in the Third Sector are most often regarded as non-formal, unlike the formal school system with primary schools, upper secondary schools, and universities. In addition much informal learning takes place in the activities of different non-profit associations and the competence developed there does not always become visible although it may have great value.

The Third Sector is in all the Nordic countries the sector where the least has been done concerning validation and documentation. Maybe this is not so strange considering that the sector is so wide and contains many varying activities – and competences. Certain activities are explicitly constructed as alternatives or complements to formal education. The fact that the competence acquired in the sector is of many different kinds and that this is done in many different types of activities means that the need for documentation may vary. A comprehensive system for a complete process of validation (documentation, assessment, and recognition) of the different competences is impossible in principle. Validation as a complete process is not an obvious option for all types of competences acquired in the sector.

There are many questions that are currently discussed concerning the Third Sector and validation. What is considered to belong to the Third Sector? What competences can and shall be documented? Should personal development, culture, and social competence etc. be measured? Is it possible to confirm competence acquired in the Third Sector, how should it be assessed and against what standards? What is the value of documenting competence from the Third Sector and for whom?

Yet another aspect of validation in the Third Sector is that to a large extent in the Nordic countries one trusts in the documentation of experiences from this sector and for this reason these do not necessarily have to be translated into formal competence in order to get a value. In addition many people in the Nordic countries have a relatively extensive formal education. Then the experiences from the Third Sector have primarily a value as »additional qualifications«, a value these experiences possess without having to be formalised.

Hesitation towards validation in the Third Sector

We have not asked representatives of all the activities in the Third Sector about their opinion of validation. As mentioned we have asked representatives in cen-

tral positions in each Nordic country about validation in the different sectors. These representatives feel that there are doubts about and a resistance towards validation in the Third Sector or actually towards the fact that persons should be assessed. Of course this does not apply to everyone in the Third Sector but an obvious resistance is still encountered in most of the Nordic countries. The people interviewed in Denmark and Iceland do not feel this resistance – instead the attitudes to validation in these two countries are felt to be more positive. In Iceland, however, there is a certain resistance in the formal education system against competences from the Third Sector – in the formal education system they do not like to validate certifications from the Third Sector. In Denmark other sources show that the discussion and the resistance still exist in organisations in the Third Sector. The resistance against validation in the Third Sector that can be discerned in the Nordic countries has been expressed in the following way:

> *»Why do we need a systemized RPL?« »Why should we create any system?«*
> *[RPL=Recognition of Prior Learning]*

The resistance against validation is based on a basic principle implying that persons do not come to the Third Sector to be assessed. It is not certain that those who come to the popular adult education for instance actually want to validate their knowledge. Some people think that the popular adult education should not value competence as its role is to be a free zone where a person does not have to be assessed. Persons participate in popular adult education for other reasons than to be assessed – for example they want to study democratic values, personal development, process learning, views and values. Another reason that is mentioned is that all learning in the popular adult education is not suitable for validation.

Consequently, by some people in the Third Sector, validation and assessment in a broad sense might be regarded as contradictory to the purpose of the activities of the sector. In all the Nordic countries the Third Sector includes educations of different kinds of languages, ICT etc. – courses and knowledge that are also offered and taught in the formal education system. In the Third Sector there are also subjects and courses that in principle only exist in the popular adult education – for instance some creative subjects. In other words the Third Sector contains a wide variation of activities and the attitude to validation may vary depending on the type of activity dealt with. Certain study associations offer courses that may lead for example to a hunting examination, courses in languages that may lead to certificate in relation to national or international examinations etc. More people in the popular adult education seem to be interested in being able to validate these competences, at least in Sweden. (There is also a variation between the countries regarding if and in what way the popular adult education can give some kind of certification.)

As mentioned above, the opinions are different and some think that it would be interesting to have the competence acquired in the popular adult education valued and recognised. Those who see possibilities in validation for the popular adult education emphasise the unique competences that it can create and that by validation would be visible and receive quite another value – competences like special knowledge and »overall« competences, for instance social competence. In addition to increasing the status of the popular adult education the result of such a validation could also work as a selection instrument for educations and professions that precisely require social competence.

In the interviews other advantages of validation in the Third Sector are also stressed: the individual gains an overview of his/her competences and also gains strengthened self-esteem. The participants can be motivated for further studies. In certain cases they may get credit for parts of what they have read and get a certificate from the formal education system, which thus shortens the study time[8].

Purposes of validation

What is the purpose of validation in the Third Sector? And for whom is it meant for? The answers can be summed up in three main parts:

1. *The individual*

   Persons who in one way or other participate in activities in the Third Sector might want to use their competence as a qualification and write in a CV that they have been working or participating in an activity in the sector. In several interviews it is clear that it is believed that individuals will increasingly wish for documentation of competence from the Third Sector. People are believed to be more goal-oriented nowadays and that they can see the necessity of documenting and validating their competence in order to use their qualifications in the future. Besides this is a way for the individual of making visible and becoming aware of his/her own competence, strengthening his/her self-confidence, and being motivated.

   It could be of special value for the individual that it is possible to get credit for studies. What happens with all the courses an individual has studied if they are not documented (and valued), if for example an individual wants to study in another place, in another institute etc? Then the individual needs competence that is documented, to be able to »exchange« and get credit for what he/she has already studied, instead of studying it once more.

2. *Employers*

   Employers might be interested in the competences that a person has acquired through his work or participation in a course in the Third Sector.

3. *Self interest for the Third Sector*

   Raising the status of the popular adult education and the movements/associations by making visible the competences that exist and are developed there is yet another purpose for validating competence from the Third Sector.

Varying types of validation in the third Sector

Validation in the Third Sector varies in different respects. To start with we can see a variation regarding two different aspects – the type of competence that is validated respectively who is responsible for the validation. The first aspect is about which **type of competence** that is acquired in the sector. There are two different types of competences to consider.

1. Validation of competences that are described as »special« for the Third Sector, dealing with such things as social competence, democratic processes, active citizenship, intercultural competence, creativity etc. Here special courses are included, for example in handicrafts that are not offered anywhere else than in the popular adult education.

2. Study associations, folk high schools, and similar institutions may offer courses in languages and ICT etc. These are courses of a general kind that can also be taken in the formal education system.

The other aspect is about *what persons who validate* or document their competences.

1. Competences acquired in the Third Sector can be validated by other actors outside this sector. For instance the formal education system can validate knowledge in languages and ICT. A validation can also be made against working life criteria.

2. The Third Sector can itself validate or document competence acquired through organised activities in the Third Sector (non-formal competence) or acquired outside courses etc, that is to say in everyday life and in workplaces, and not the least through those activities in the Third Sector that do not involve participating in organised learning activities (informal competence).

The most evident difference between the countries relate to another aspect – whether there is a national *documentation tool for real competence* in the Third Sector or not. In Norway and Denmark there are such tools for documentation whereas they are under development in Sweden, Finland, and Iceland (see Appendix 2 (available in Swedish only) for more detailed descriptions of each country).

Reflections on the Third Sector

Validation of general competence acquired in the Third Sector may be hard to assess and to confirm. How does one for instance assess social competence and democratic values? In relation to what does one measure these competences? Here the solution is often to make a mapping, self-evaluation, and a documentation of competence in some kind of portfolio. Also subject knowledge like ICT or language knowledge can be documented and self-evaluated in the Third Sector, if courses etc. are not already accepted as equivalent to formal education. A validation in the Third Sector is most often about documenting competence, a measure that should not be regarded as a complete validation process, since an (external) assessment of the competence is lacking in many cases.

As mentioned above, a difference between the Nordic countries is whether *national documentation* has been produced for the Third Sector or not. Those responsible for validation nationally in Denmark and Norway have cooperated with the organisations of the Third Sector and developed national documentation models mainly for general competence. In both countries it is a self-evaluation model in the form of a CV or a portfolio that implies documentation of competence, not assessment of competence. Principally it is a divergent, exploratory description of the competences, even if it is possible (at least in Denmark) to use the result formatively. In Sweden and Finland there are separate projects for validation of general competence in the Third Sector. Questions about how to document general competence, what should be documented, if it should be documented, and by whom are discussed in the Third Sector in both Sweden and Finland, but there is no national documentation available so far.

Iceland is different from the other countries and concentrates above all on subject knowledge (even if general competence also is documented). In Iceland validation is to the greatest extent about how subject knowledge can be documented in a portfolio so that the person can get credit for this in the formal education system. The portfolio work itself in the centres for lifelong learning is divergent (exploratory). However, when the result is validated later in the formal education system it is a matter of convergent validation against fixed course plans. The school then decides if and how the validation will be carried out.

In Finland it is common for all validation regardless of sector to be carried out convergently against officially recognised vocational qualifications/diplomas. Consequently it is not surprising that most of the validations made in relation to the Third Sector in Finland deals with subject knowledge validated against official qualifications. Iceland and Finland clearly emphasise validation of subject knowledge. As mentioned, the validation policy in Sweden has as a general starting-point that validation should be divergent. If competence is validated against course plans in the formal education system the validation may be divergent, but most often it is convergent.

Translation of competence
Validation in the Third Sector might be about translating informal competence into non-formal competence. This is done for instance when general competence and subject knowledge are documented. The informal competence from everyday life, activities in volunteer work etc. are focused by being documented and non-formal. That is to say the competence is documented but not in the shape of formally established certificates from the school system.

An example of this, in addition to those already mentioned, is a study association that validated persons with social security support being recruited through the social service centre. The participants were not at all job ready but the administrative officials had selected the participants because they believed that the validation activity could help them to return to the labour market in a long-term perspective. The purpose was to help the participants to »find themselves« and to energise them. The validation was intended to make the participants conscious of their competences and make these competences visible no matter if these could lead to a clearly expressed goal set up in advance in the shape of an education programme or a certain vocation. The validation had a divergent orientation. Certain teaching was carried out in order to give the participants tools to understand their own and other people's deeds and experiences. In addition there was also a »popular adult education ambition« wishing to give people knowledge that could give them a perspective on their life situation and a possibility to change it. The purpose was to strengthen the individuals, to give them tools to understand themselves and to make visible their knowledge. There were certain tests and self-evaluations of competences. Education and working life experiences together with self-evaluations of competences were documented in a Euro-CV (Andersson, 2005).

Validation in relation to the Third Sector may also be about validating competences acquired in non-formal education and getting credit for them or translating them to formal competence in the formal education system. The validation of subject knowledge acquired in non-formal education against fixed course plans in the formal education system means that a convergent validation will be made. This case can also be regarded as a complete validation process where assessment is also included, but then it is important to note that this type of assessment from the Third Sector must be made in the formal system.

The translation of competence from informal to non-formal competence takes place in different projects and also through national documentation models in two countries. There is also an intention and an expectation regarding for instance national documentation models to get credit for general competence in relation to studies and to the Education Sector. Even if there are no national

documentation models in Finland there is a wish that better descriptions from the Third Sector of each individual's competences could be the base for accreditation in the individualised education. So far it is probably fairly unusual that general competence can be accredited and become formal competence, says an interviewed person in Finland. However, this is, to a certain extent, done with subject knowledge that is often easier to validate.

Making competence visible and making persons consciuos of competence

Much of the work in the Third Sector is about helping the person in question to become conscious of his/her competence, to self-evaluate the competence, and to document competence. One of the interviewed persons expressed it like this: *»Many people have very little training in identifying, talking about or describing their competences.«* The purpose of documenting competence from the Third Sector is above all up to the individual, that is to say the individual should be able to use the documentation as she/he herself/himself wishes. However, assessment of real competence is not an obvious element in the Third Sector. Even if the individual cannot always get credit for general competence or subject knowledge for studies he/she may still, by making visible and becoming conscious of his/her competence, get motivation and self-confidence to study further or seek a job for instance.

Assessment of competence acquired in the Third Sector

It is not given that competence acquired in the Third Sector might be assessed in the school system and become formal competence. The competence that is easiest to assess is of course all about languages, ICT-knowledge etc. and can be assessed by formal education institutions. Social competence, intercultural competence, knowledge of democratic processes etc. might be more difficult to assess as there is not any established »scale« or proof of the competence, only *the fact that* the individual participated in activities with those goals and purposes.

The attitude in the Third Sector towards assessing competence is, as mentioned before, divided. Some people think it is good while others are against it. It is hard to measure and assess general competence and the question is if it should be done at all. It could also be argued that persons are not in the Third Sector to be assessed but they are there for quite different reasons.

The question is also how much energy should be used to develop national documentation tools. How much are they used by individuals and how are they valued by employers and by education institutions? In order to get admission to education programmes a clear documentation is needed but perhaps also a more open attitude in the formal education system regarding the accreditation of informal and non-formal competence.

An advantage with the Third Sector is that everybody can document their competence. It may not be possible to get it validated in the sense that an assessment is made, but nevertheless to get it documented. However, there is variation concerning to what extent an individual can get help in the form of documentation tools and guidance.

General competences, for example social competence, cannot be measured against any real scale, but these competences are by nature divergent. They are part of a validation process and not at all unimportant, instead they may be vital for the individual's chances to proceed in the labour market or in education.

The person in question sees what he/she knows, is strengthened as an individual, and may shorten his/her education thanks to this. One might ask if competences of this kind can really be used for such things as reducing the length of education programmes, or if only »hard currency« in the form of subject knowledge, which can be measured against course plans, should be possible to validate.

Comparison, analysis and discussion

This final chapter begins with a return to and a discussion of the typical cases that have been reported for each country. After that we start a comparative analysis and a discussion about the results as a whole where, among other things, we introduce a discussion about the orientation of validation, its functions, and target groups and also the relation between education and the labour market in the context of validation and between validation and further learning. Finally some future challenges are discussed concerning validation in the Nordic countries.

Reflections on the typical cases

Common for all five typical cases is that the persons are validated against the demands of the school, against formal criteria, and grades. The fact that these cases in all five countries are related to the Education Sector shows that this is the most frequent form of validation. It is also the sector that the validation organisations in the Nordic countries are most familiar with and where they have an overview of how the validation should be accomplished. Validating against known criteria like grades means that the documentation has legitimacy in society. The fact that the validation leads to a certification – without the same formal status as grades – does not necessarily give legitimacy to the validation and instead it will be up to the employers for example to decide about the value of what has been validated and documented. Most often the Nordic countries keep on making »safe« validations and »safe« forms of documentation like grades. Validation against grades means a convergent validation, that is to say one wants to find out what the person knows in relation to fixed criteria. In all the Nordic countries except Sweden validation in the Education Sector is already from the start intended to be convergent and in relation to course plans and grades. In Sweden convergent validations are also possible to accomplish and, as the typical case shows, they are also very frequent. However, the starting-point in Sweden is divergent, at least at the policy level, and the course plans of the school need not be the basis for a validation.

In all the typical cases the goal is that the person will be able to achieve formal competence. The idea of validating is then already from the start that the person will learn more if it would be necessary in order to obtain formal competence. Validation may be either summative or formative. It is hard to say which type is the most frequent one in each country as both forms exist. What we can say something about instead is if it is the intention from the start that the person will study further (if needed) to obtain formal competence. In Finland, as the typical case describes, it is usual with a validation in the form of an apprenticeship system, where persons complete with studies in the cases it is needed to obtain formal competence. In the other Nordic countries, too, the idea from the start in the typical case is that the persons will be able to study further after the validation in order to obtain formal competence.

Different orientations: Convergent – Divergent

In this section we will sum up and discuss which orientation the validation policy has in the different countries regarding the dimension convergent and divergent validation (see Table **1**). The main features are that the view on validation to the greatest extent is convergent in the Education Sector and mainly divergent in the Third Sector.

Table 1
The main orientation regarding convergent respectively divergent validation in different sectors in the policies of the Nordic countries.

COUNTRY	EDUCATION	LABOUR MARKET	THE THIRD SECTOR
Denmark	Convergent	Divergent	Divergent
Norway	Convergent	Divergent	Divergent
Finland	Convergent[*/]	Divergent	
Iceland	Convergent	Convergent	Divergent
Sweden	Divergent	Divergent	Divergent

[*/] *The Finnish convergent competence based qualifications system is common to the education and Labour Market Sectors and is partly used in relation to the Third Sector, too.*

The description in table **1** refers to the validation policy at the national level. In Sweden the central policy is a divergent starting point in all three sectors. In practice there is convergent validation in Sweden too, even if it is not the starting point. Contrary to this situation Finland has a convergent starting point in the national competence based qualifications system (vocational qualifications that lead to a vocational qualification/diploma). Only criteria included in a vocational qualification can be validated in Finland. The system for vocational qualifications includes the Education Sector and the Labour Market Sector and partly the Third Sector. In the Third Sector it is mostly subject knowledge in languages and ICT-knowledge that are included in the competence based qualifications system (vocational qualifications that lead to a complete vocational qualification/diploma).

Norway and Denmark have also developed national divergent documentation tools for competence in the Third Sector. At the national level there are few projects going on in the Third Sector in the other countries, that is to say Finland, Iceland, and Sweden. Validation is mostly divergent in the Third Sector even in these countries, as far as there is any validation at all.

Formative and summative functions

The formative and summative functions are difficult to separate in the existent models. The models vary, and, besides, one and the same model may have double functions. For example competence may be assessed and documented in a summative way in relation to a certain module or course but at the same time

this assessment may work formatively in relation to the supplementary courses that will follow. Still, we provide some examples of what these different functions might mean in different sectors (see Table 2).

Table 2
Examples of formative and summative functions in validation.

	EDUCATION	LABOUR MARKET	THE THIRD SECTOR
Formative	**Diagnosis**	**Mapping**	**Diagnosis**
Summative	**Examination, documentation**	**Certification, dokumentation**	**Dokumentation**

In education formative diagnoses and summative examinations and documentation are clear examples. In the labour market a way of working with validation may be a formative mapping of competence resulting in a continued organised competence development while a summative approach might be a certification of vocational competence. Diagnoses, probably rather informal, could probably be a natural part of non formal education in the Third Sector, while a divergent documentation of competence can have a summative function in this sector.

Can everybody participate in validation?

In principle everyone can of course participate in validation, since everyone probably has knowledge and experiences that have not been made visible and documented. Raising the question if everyone can participate in validation is consequently a matter of how, in different contexts, one looks upon the possibilities to validate the competences of different persons and groups, depending on the limitations that exist in the specific context.

Based on policy everybody can participate in all the Nordic countries, but in practice this is not true. Even if in theory validation is intended for all, in practice this possibility depends on several factors. Validation is not always based on the needs of the individual. Instead other factors like the needs of the labour market, financing, against what criteria the validation is made, and who is in charge of the validation process, may influence which persons will be offered the chance to participate in validation.

The labour market sets the framework

In Finland it is the labour market that decides what qualifications that are currently needed and it is only these qualifications that can be tested, no others. Each year qualifications are removed and new ones are added, which means that the national qualifications system and with that the validation is totally controlled by the needs of the labour market.

Financing

Recently in Sweden it has often been the State Employment Agency that has paid for the validation. The State Employment Agency has been assigned the task of helping people into employment and in consequence it is often persons with competences in vocational areas with a shortage of labour, for whom the agency pay the validation. In Denmark, too, the State Employment Agency pays for certain validations and the situation there can be described in the same way.

In Norway there are also certain limitations concerning validation. If a person was born before **1978**, he/she has the right to be validated free of charge but if a person was born after that year, he/she can only be validated for free if the State Employment Agency or the county will pay for the validation. (A change in policy is in progress, however). The individual may pay for the validation himself/herself in both Norway and Sweden, but it is not at all frequent.

So far the development of validation in Iceland is done on the basis of projects and the validation is also to a large extent governed by the needs in vocations with a shortage of skilled labour. This is due to the fact that the validation so far has been co-financed by the validation organisation (The Education and Training Service Centre) through the Ministry of Education and different education funds as well as the vocations/organisations that have an interest in validation.

Too little competence to validate
A person who after a mapping is considered/assessed to have too little competence to validate in relation to a school or a vocational certificate might be excluded from the chance to validate. This is self-evident in Norway and Denmark, where the validation systems are primarily made for the Education Sector and where the validation should always be made against grades if possible. Iceland also practises convergent validation against grades. In Iceland the validation starts by making a portfolio and a self-evaluation and if it is estimated that the person does not have enough competence to validate, the process ends there. However, a non-formal validation has still been made together with a counsellor in the form of a portfolio and the person has been informed about other possibilities. In Finland the person contacts the adult education system and will be assessed and will get credit for his/her existing competences according to the individualisation principle. If the person is estimated to have no competences at all in the field he or she can of course participate in a complete training programme in order to achieve the requirements for that specific qualification.

Accordingly when the validation is convergent and the assessments are made against established criteria, the individual may risk being assessed as not having enough competence to be validated. If a person for example has competences from another country there are not always comparable criteria in course plans etc. to base the validation on. With a divergent starting-point there are no established criteria to assess against beforehand and with that approach the individual always has competences that can be documented. In Sweden, where a divergent approach is prevailing, the National Commission on Validation is of the opinion that no one can be considered to be »not validatable« for the reason that there is too little to be validated, as it is not necessary that there are established criteria to validate against. In reality those who carry out the validation itself in Sweden may of course be of another opinion and may very well think that persons have too little competence to be even considered for a validation. The person could then be recommended to take a complete education programme or to participate in a short vocational assessment (which may be regarded as a form of validation, even if it is not called that – see below!). The reason that persons are recommended a complete education programme instead of a validation is, among other things, financial. Participating in an education programme might be cheaper than an extensive validation.g kan vara billigare att genomföra än en omfattande validering.

All vocations are not validated

Sweden has a divergent starting-point. Still a person often ends up in a situation where the Adult Education Centre carries out the validation itself and most often it is a convergent validation against course plans. Validation organisations cannot and do not want to validate all vocations because they have not developed methods and criteria for this. At some regional locations validation is only made against school criteria or known vocational certificates.

The branch organisations, too, have an impact on determining which vocations shall be validated. Vocational committees, for example, can participate in the process and exert influence at the local and regional level on the basis of the needs of the labour market. Local validation organisations can then, according to these wishes, develop validation methods for the vocations in demand.

Vocational testing

Vocational testing is a concept that is sometimes used in certain contexts to describe a less extensive process than a validation. Sometimes a shorter vocational testing (or vocational assessment) can be offered instead of a more extensive validation. Both in Norway and in Sweden (in some places) an individual can participate in a vocational test instead of a validation, for instance because of language problems, that is to say the person in question does not sufficiently understand the language of the country where the validation is taking place.

In Sweden vocational testing can also be done for instance if validation is only offered in a certain number of vocations and if a person wants to validate in another vocation that cannot be validated in the geographical region in question. If the vocation is not validated in the geographical region, but if there is still a wish to offer some kind of mapping of all competence – the vocational test may serve as »compensation«. It may also serve as an early stage in a validation if it is not certain that the individual has enough competence to go through a validation (against grades or other criteria fixed beforehand). Vocational testing then serves as a preliminary probing of the person's competence in order to decide if he/she knows enough in an area to be validated.

To use an expression like »vocational testing« for a more limited process is something that can be discussed. If the starting-point is a more general definition of what validation is about, the vocational testing in the sense applied here is also a form of validation. The reason for introducing an additional concept in this context may from one point of view be a wish to emphasise and make clear the requirements of a »real« validation. From another point of view it is not self-evident that there is a comprehensive concept – in Denmark, as mentioned before, different expressions are used for different types of documentation and assessment of competence that everyone could include in the broader validation concept that is the basis for this Report. In addition, in Sweden, the use of the concept »vocational testing«, as an alternative to validation, shows that local policy and practices are not always in accordance with national policy. The national Swedish policy is based on the approach that vocational assessment shall be regarded as part of the validation process, while in some regions/areas a difference is made between the two types of assessment.

Formal competences – competences in demand

Another difference between the countries that is noticeable is how emphasis is put on formal competence respectively on the competence requested by the labour market. Two models with emphasis either on the formal educational qualifications or on »useful documents« can be distinguished in the Nordic countries. Finland and Sweden serve as examples of this model.

Formal qualifications are by far the most important thing in Finland and validation is in principle made only to determine formal qualifications. As only formal competence is counted, »all« competences that are needed in the labour market are converted into formal vocational qualifications that can be validated. This means that even for instance »social competence« may be included as a competence criterion in a vocational qualification/diploma, if this competence is regarded as necessary in a vocation.

The Swedish policy, unlike the Finnish one, is based on the principle that it is not necessary to convert everything into formal competence in terms of education certificates etc. Other documentation, too, must have a value and be usable. According to the National Swedish Commission on Validation all competence cannot always be converted into formal competence in relation to the formal education system. Some competence acquired in working life does not correspond to the education goals. Certain competence may be of another kind and at another level than the education goals. The most important thing with this approach is that the validation results in a document of one's competence and that this is a »useful document« for the person in question.

The other countries, Denmark, Norway and Iceland, are not as clear in their policies but find themselves somewhere half-way between these viewpoints. In Denmark, for example, the national initiative is intended to give people the possibility to get their real competence from working life recognised in the formal system. At the same time it is clear that there is a need in the labour market for the labour market actors themselves to choose the competence standard in relation to work tasks and competence development.

The different viewpoints focusing on »formal educational qualifications« or »useful documents« are really a matter of what is in demand in the labour market or by employers. Do the employers demand formal qualifications or are other forms of useful documents also accepted? Formal qualifications in the form of grades have legitimacy in the whole society. That is probably the reason for the fact that validation to a great extent can be related to the education system. When there already exists a practicable national system with grades it is not certain that there is any substantial need of another assessment and documentation form, especially not if separate branches already have their own ways of treating the recognition of real competence against their own standards and certificates. At the same time the labour market demands other knowledge too than what is included in formal education programmes. The question is whether education programmes completely cover labour market needs of competences or if it would be profitable for the labour market if new assessment forms were developed in order to give credit for competences from working life and other parts of society that cannot be related to formal education. The question is whether there is any need in the labour market for documentation and assessment of competence in another way than against education standards. Will other documentation forms than certificates be accepted? Do employers trust »useful docu-

ments« and consider them legitimate? In Finland they have solved the legitimacy problem by always converting the competence that is requested in the labour market to a formal vocational qualification/diploma that in itself conveys confidence and legitimacy.

Even if there are alternative documentation forms for competence gained in working life and in the Third Sector, the question is to what extent these are in fact requested and used. To what extent are »useful documents« actually useful? Today we do not know how great the need is for "useful documents" in the countries where these documents are intended to be used. Nor do we know how much interest there is in using other documentation forms than the established school and vocational certificates etc. and we do not know how frequently they are actually used. It would be interesting to follow this up in the Nordic countries.

Labour market and education

We can see how validation in the Labour Market Sector to a large extent is still directed towards the Education Sector. To start from the requirements of the vocation when a validation is going to be made means in most cases to start from educational criteria. There seems to be a lack of motives for trying to find other criteria to start from that give the same legitimacy as educational qualifications.

Finland is the country that has the most evident link between validation and the Education Sector. Validation does not actually exist outside the education system but the labour market has completely accepted that qualifications should be formal and validated by the education system. Denmark is directing its validation more and more towards the education system, or more correctly, they do not try to build up a validation at the national level for the labour market which has another starting point than the Education Sector. The same goes for Norway.

Both Sweden and Iceland have attempted to base their validations on vocational criteria instead of educational criteria. In Iceland, after a validation against vocational criteria, they have still said that the validated persons may try to validate their competences against educational criteria. What the system will look like in the future has not yet been decided. Sweden is the country that most clearly has attempted to base validation on something else than educational criteria. Nevertheless it has been difficult to change the starting point and not to start from educational criteria even if divergent and exploratory branch criteria have been developed. When the branches of industry themselves are going to develop criteria for convergent assessments in a vocation they often, but not always, end up in assessment against educational criteria. The educational qualifications have legitimacy and are well known and to break away from these seem to be difficult, or else there are not enough incentives to start from something else.

Continued learning

In all the Nordic countries validation may have both summative and formative functions. As a consequence we cannot say which function is most frequent in each country and sector, What we can say instead is what is most often the idea behind validation, if it implies continued studies or not. In Sweden continued learning is not in focus in the same way as in the other Nordic countries, but it is still a possibility even in Sweden.

As mentioned before, all the countries except Sweden have a convergent starting point for validation in the Education Sector and the goal is most often

(but not always) that persons will get formal educational qualifications. In countries where validation is convergent against educational criteria it is more natural to imagine that the validation is intended as the starting signal to continue with supplementary education. To raise the level of education through supplementary studies is also one of the ideas behind the models that have a convergent starting point.

From a policy standpoint, formal educational qualifications are not in focus. Nor is the ambition to raise the level of formal education emphasised. Instead the validation policy is a matter of giving the individual the possibility to obtain useful documents to be used above all in the labour market but also in connection with studies. Useful documents may imply formal grades but do not necessarily do so. In Sweden validation can thus be summative and be documented in a certification. This can be done in the other countries as well but the idea is most often that the validation should lead to continued studies in order to give the individual formal qualifications.

Future challenges for the validation in the Nordic countries

Thus there are similarities as well as differences between the Nordic countries regarding the development of policy and practice in the field of validation. The existing variation also means that the countries face somewhat different challenges concerning the future development. Finland is the leading country in the area one has chosen to develop. The main challenge for Finland will probably be if, and, in that case, how the possibilities should be developed to also validate knowledge that is not recognised in the present system, that is to say knowledge that cannot be directly linked to certain vocational qualifications/diplomas. In Sweden they face the challenge to continue developing validation from the basis created by the work of the National Commission on Validation. An important factor influencing future developments in Sweden is what role validation will be given in the education policy that is undergoing major changes, but also how validation will be treated in relation to labour market policy. In addition the different actors in the labour market are important in determining what happens in that sector the same way the actors in the Third Sector are important concerning validation outside formal education and the labour market. Denmark and Norway have proceeded relatively far in the development. The biggest challenges in these two countries seem rather to be the implementation of policy and methods and how these are distributed in different sectors of society. Iceland is the Nordic country where the development of validation has started most recently, and there it is primarily a matter of how possibilities and rights to validation are established from the experiences of different kinds of project activities.

A general challenge for all the countries is how the different sectors relate to each other. What »transparency« and mobility between the sectors exist and how is this stimulated by different policies and attitudes to validation? In the first place there is the question about the relation between »the Third Sector« and the other sectors. In the Third Sector there is on the one hand an interest in relating to the education system and to the labour market, in the sense that the competence developed in different kinds of volunteer activities and in non-formal education will be regarded as valuable and in consequence should be recognised in formal education and by the labour market. On the other hand there

is also a wish to maintain what is considered to be the freedom of the sector, based on the idea that the activity has its own value and that it must not necessarily be related to the rest of the system in order to be valuable. Probably both these views are justified, in different parts of the multi-faceted Third Sector.

Secondly the relation between education and the labour market is interesting. Is it possible to find a balance between these sectors or should one of the sectors be given priority? If the labour market is given priority does this mean that the requirements of working life are the measure for what competence that should be counted? This gives a clear link to the context where the competence is expected to be used and one can expect that the result of a validation has legitimacy in the labour market. At the same time this means that the state more or less gives up its influence over the competence requirements and with that refrains from controlling by promoting a certain policy. The consequence might be requirements that are dependent on business cycles, regional solutions that do not offer national equivalence and much less equivalence between countries, criteria formulated by commercial branches that are sometimes more interested in restricting access to certain individuals, etc. If, on the other hand, the state exerts its influence by means of a steering policy, the situation becomes the opposite, for better or for worse. A third alternative is that education and the labour market function separately in this respect and that each sector has its own system for competence assessment. The fourth alternative is that the two sectors relate to each other and that some sort of balance is found. In Finland there is an example of a system that integrates education requirements and labour market requirements. In the other countries there are certain links between the sectors but there is room for development. In the same way it is not self-evident that the Finnish system is the optimal one for cooperation between education and labour market but other approaches are also possible.

Thirdly it is also important in the future to pay attention to the relation to those sectors that are not included in this study – above all higher education, where the question, among other things, is how to value experiences, competences, and qualifications from schools and municipal adult education, working life and the Third Sector regarding how to fulfil the demands for admission and accreditation. However, it could also be worthwhile to look closer into the relation to »the Private Sector«, that is to say not the private business world but private life. Is there any reason to make visible and to value knowledge developed in private life too? For example we think of the knowledge and competence that an individual acquires by handling his/her own private economy and by taking care of other family members (children, the sick, and elderly people), by information/knowledge conveyed through the media, and by different kinds of household work?

Finally there are challenges about how the countries relate to each other. How can the interest in the different forms of validation that exist in the Nordic countries be used to facilitate and perhaps even to stimulate transparency (with regard to how competence is documented and valued) and mobility in the Nordic countries as well in relation to other countries? Hopefully this Report will be a step along the way, but continued cooperation and exchange of information between the countries will also be necessary to promote such development.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire

A study of validation policy and practice in the Nordic countries

General remarks

Sectors

In all Nordic countries there are three sectors that we want to describe:

- (Formal) Adult education
- Labour market
- Third sector (incl. Non-formal adult education)

The starting point concerning sectors and validation is the validation that is taking place in the sector in question. For example, »labour market« includes validation that takes place in the labour market, or organised by labour market organisations. Of course the competence that is validated could have been developed in the labour market. But – if adult education is validating vocational competence from the labour market, this validation process is here part of the sector »adult education«, not the sector »labour market«.

In each sector we want to know about policy and practice

General questions to bear in mind concerning policy:

Who is expressing the policy? Refer to texts, web pages, persons etc.!

How is the policy expressed?

Policy could be expressed in different ways:

- in official documents
- written or orally by representatives of the state, or of national organisations
- through national initiatives that have been taken

Please provide information about the sources!!

General questions to bear in mind concerning practice:

note: The data from practice should be descriptions of a ›typical case‹ of validation in each sector/country!

What are the sources of the descriptions of (experiences from) typical cases?
To what extent is the practice described implemented? Is it experimental work?
Established practice? How extensive?

A. Description of the context

a1. Some general description of the context in each country is needed, to promote understanding of the data. For example – what is included in »adult education« and in »third sector« in the country?

a2. What concept is used for ›validation‹? (Validering, erkännande av realkompetens etc.) What is included in the concept validation, real competence etc.? (Define the concept(s) used in the context/country in question.

  a2:1. Relate to the nine categories presented by the Swedish National Commission on Validation! (see last page)

  a2:2. What categories are represented in what explicitly is described as

  a2:3. Something that falls outside these categories that still is defined explicitly as validation?

  a2:4. Something that is not called validation, but that implicitly falls within these categories?

a3. Is validation a legal right?

B. Adult education

Validation policy

b1. Aim of validation?

b2. For whom? Target group(s)?

b3. Is everyone »assessable«?
Are there limitations (discrimination?) concerning target groups? (For example because of language problems, who is financing (for example only knowledge in occupations that are needed in the labour market are validated), have too little competence in relation to formal education so it´s not worth validating etc.?)

b4. Who is financing validation?
b4:1. In relation to target groups
b4:2. Costs for validation vs. costs for training/education. Are there differences in focus depending on costs? Is validation more expensive than education?
b4:3. Other aspects of financing policy/practice, problems?

b5. Convergent/divergent approach in validation?
Convergent = check **if** you know, in relation to criteria, formal study plans etc.
Divergent = explore **what** you know, not in relation to criteria or study plans etc.

b6. Is the responsibility, design of models etc. centralized or de-centralized?

b7. Influence from the labour market and/or social partners?
For example concerning target groups – validation only within vocations with lack of work force, or for everyone – who defines the focus?

b8. Pilot programs, development work etc. (efforts made as an expression of policy)
To what extent?
Who pays?

b9. To what extent are validation methods and policy developed in the sector?

b10. To what extent is validation actually used in the sector?

b11. Which competencies are mainly validated: informal, non-formal, formal? Valuing of informal, non-formal and formal competence – equivalency, differences etc.?

Validation in practice

note: The data from practice should be descriptions of a ›typical case‹ of validation in each sector!

b12. Please cover the same aspects as above.
When it comes to practice, the following aspects could be added, focusing on the experiences of validation in the typical cases:

b13. Evaluations made? Conclusions?

b14. What methods work? What does not work? Why?

b15. What are the main problems identified? The main possibilities?

b16. (If available, provide descriptions of how participants express their experiences!)

C. Labour market

Validation policy

C1. Aim of validation?

C2. For whom? Target group(s)?

C3. Is everyone »assessable«?
Are there limitations (discrimination?) concerning target groups? (For example because of language problems, who is financing (for example only knowledge in occupations that are needed in the labour market are validated), have too little competence in relation to formal education so it´s not worth validating etc?)

C4. Who is financing validation?
    C4:1. In relation to target groups
    C4:2. Costs for validation vs. costs for training/education. Are there differences in focus depending on costs? Is validation more expensive than education?
    C4:3. Other aspects of financing policy/practice, problems?

C5. Convergent/divergent approach in validation?
Convergent = check *if* you know, in relation to criteria, formal study plans etc.
Divergent = explore *what* you know, not in relation to criteria or study plans etc.

C6. Is the responsibility, design of models etc. centralized or de-centralized?

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For example concerning target groups – validation only within vocations with lack of work force, or for everyone – who defines the focus?

C8. Pilot programs, development work etc. (efforts made as an expression of policy)

To what extent?
Who pays?

C9. To what extent are validation methods and policy developed in the sector?

C10. To what extent is validation actually used in the sector?

C11. Which competencies are mainly validated: informal, non-formal, formal? Valuing of informal, non-formal and formal competence – equivalency, differences etc.?

Validation in practice
note: The data from practice should be descriptions of a ›typical case‹ of validation in each sector!

C12. Please cover the same aspects as above.

When it comes to practice, the following aspects could be added, focusing on the experiences of validation in the typical cases:

C13. Evaluations made? Conclusions?

C14. What methods work? What does not work? Why?

C15. What are the main problems identified? The main possibilities?

C16. (If available, provide descriptions of how participants express their experiences!)

D. Third sector

Validation policy
D1. Aim of validation?

D2. For whom? Target group(s)?

D3. Is everyone "assessable"?
Are there limitations (discrimination?) concerning target groups? (For example because of language problems, who is financing (for example only knowledge in occupations that are needed in the labour market are validated), have too little competence in relation to formal education so it´s not worth validating etc?)

D4. Who is financing validation?
D4:1. In relation to target groups
D4:2. Costs for validation vs. costs for training/education. Are there differences in focus depending on costs? Is validation more expensive than education?
D4:3. Other aspects of financing policy/practice, problems?

D5. Convergent/divergent approach in validation?
Convergent = check *if* you know, in relation to criteria, formal study plans etc.
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Validation in practice

note: The data from practice should be descriptions of a ›typical case‹ of validation in each sector!

D12. Please cover the same aspects as above.
When it comes to practice, the following aspects could be added, focusing on the experiences of validation in the typical cases:

D13. Evaluations made? Conclusions?

D14. What methods work? What does not work? Why?

D15. What are the main problems identified? The main possibilities?

D16. (If available, provide descriptions of how participants express their experiences!)

E. Cross sector aspects

E1. Is any policy common for all or two of the sectors?

E2. Are some experiences from practice common for all or two of the sectors?

Categories, analysis from the Swedish National Commission on Validation

METHOD	ACT OF PERFORMANCE	PERFORMED BY, RESPONSIBLE
A	Mapping of competence made by the individual, no structured assessment is performed.	Counsellors in education, office of unemployment, agency for state insurance, integration agencies of foreign nationalities.
B	Mapping of competence in one area of competence by a structured assessment model.	Competence specific counsellors in education, office of unemployment, agency for state insurance, integration agencies of foreign nationalities.
C	Structured assessment in several areas of competence and documentation by an individual study/action-plan.	Competence specific counsellors in education.
D	Structured assessment in one defined subject/knowledge area according to a set of criteria. Individual examination that gives a formal grade.	Teachers in the subject or in the profession.
E	Groupvalidation, a number of individuals with a common background in a profession are assessed from the number of years in the profession and the responsibilities.	Teachers in the subject or in the profession. Special pedagogs trained for validation assessment.
F	Skill-assessment, by visual assessment in real practice. Experts in the profession decide criteria. Documentation in form of description of competence.	Professional experts at the working site.
G	Skill-assessment, in artificial real practice at an educational environment. Assessment from secondary school curricula. Documentation in form of description of competence or complementary study-plan.	Teachers in the profession. Special pedagogs trained for validation assessment. Professional experts appointed by the professional organisation.
H	Skill-assessment, in order to confirm the level of competence according to criteria set by the central professional organisation.	Professional experts appointed and quality certified by the professional organisation.
I	Validation during education and job-training.	Teachers in the subject or in the profession. Special pedagogs trained for validation assessment.

Notes

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1. A more detailed description of the concepts used in the diffrent Nordic countries and their meanings will be found in Chapter 2.

2. The meaning of the concepts *formal, non-formal and informal* are discussed in Chapter 3.

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3. In 2003 the right for adults to a real competence assessment was extended and **Opplœrings-loven** § 4a-3 now states: »Adults who have a right to upper secondary education have a right to an assessment of their real competence and a competence certificate. Persons who do not have the right to upper secondary education will have their real competence assessed if they are referred to an assessment by a municipality or the State Employment Agency. The Ministry can issue more detailed regulations.« The new bill can be found in St.meld. no. 16 (2006-2007)

4. **sfs** 2004:640 Chapter 1 and 4., Ds 2003:23, page 37.

5. http://www.vox.no/templates/CommonPage.aspx?id=1698

6. http://www.minkompetencemappe.dk

7. Information and communication technology.

8. In addition to our data, material for this section has been collected from Mustel (2005).

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VALIDATION
IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES
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Policy and Practice