Joint Actions in Validation of Learning

JAVAL

Comparing practice and
policy of validation in
Nordic and Baltic countries

Policy recommendations

Nordplus Neighbour
Project 2005-2007

Joint Action for Validation of Learning (JAVAL) was a Nordic-Baltic project on the theme of validation and recognition of the learning outcomes on the third sector in years 2005-2007. The network activities were carried out by seven countries: Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden and the funding resource was the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The third sector is here defined by supporting non-formal and informal learning. That excludes formal learning. In the field of validation it excludes work-place learning, too.

Validation covers the whole process of gathering information, making an individual aware of his/her competences, documentation, assessment, final recognition and counseling whenever it is provided in the process.

The aim of the project was to gather valid data on the policy and practice of validation in the third sector in the seven countries in January 2007. The data formed the basis for a comparative reflection and the basis for recommendations for future development in this field. In two thematic and transnational conferences examples of tools and systems of validation used in partner countries were introduced. www.nordvux.net.

The partners came up with a list of recommendations to be used in each country for national efforts to promote recognition of prior learning. www.nordvux.net/page/480/validationconference2007.htm

Helsinki 13 September 2007

Vapaan sivistystyön yhteisjärjestö VSY
Finnish Adult Education Association FAEA

Eeva-Inkeri Sirelius
Network coordinator
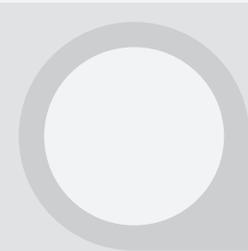
The JAVAL project partners have come up with the following recommendations. Some of them are addressed to the policy level for the decision makers and some on the institutional level i.e. to the actors on third sector.

Relevance of validation
Several national and international policy documents emphasize the importance of validation of learning outcomes together with comparison of qualification documents. The relevance of the validation process for individuals is closely linked with the motivation for lifelong learning.

The recognition of prior learning is a right of an individual

Assumption: **Recognition of prior learning will improve efficiency and achieve lower costs of formal education. Recognition of prior learning will increase social inclusion for population groups that are underrepresented and/or not well integrated in the society. Recognition of prior learning will raise people's self-confidence and insight into their own abilities.**

Challenges: **The challenge of the future is to invite all stakeholders to the development of possible new legislation and cross-sectorial development work where all partners (different ministries, social partners, professional organizations of education) are giving their contribution.**

Recommendations: **Political efforts should be made to ensure that validation of prior learning becomes an optional right of everybody in any formal system and on any level of education, labor market and civil society.**
The learner without formal qualifications, both natives and immigrants, should have a right to validation of prior learning.
The validation should be carried out by experts with knowledge of different learning paths and different learning opportunities.

Validation is a means of motivating adults for lifelong learning

Assumption: **Recognition of or formal respect for one's competencies and abilities will lead to a desire for more education and learning.**

Challenges: **An overview of the individual's competencies must be gathered, by the individual and possibly by a counselor or assessor. Especially when an individual is involved in articulating her/his own competencies validation can be a tool for motivation as well as identification of interests, and strengths that can be used in choosing further education or work. However, people must not be made to feel that they come up short; the overview must not give the impression of lack of knowledge, competencies, and skills.**

Recommendations: **Individuals should be actively involved in the validation process to obtain the best effect in motivation and to learn how to articulate their own competencies.**
Self-evaluation is a method that should be used in the validation process. Self-evaluation can be assisted by counselors or other people, or by working in a group of people with or without a group leader. Interviews or dialogues between a counselor/assessor and the individual can also have a motivating effect.
Formal documentation is needed for summarizing the competencies of an individual.

The cross-sectoral cooperation in policy making of validation

Assumption: **Each sector and each stakeholder has to make itself understood by the others in order to reach the common goals and benefits. The third sector is all too often "invisible" to the formal education system and the employers.**

Challenge: **Validation of learning should serve the interests of different stakeholders: the providers of public funding, employers, educational institutions and most of all a learner. The capacity for co-operation will be tested in future policy initiatives and in development efforts.**
The competence development in the third sector is not taken into account. There is also a gap between the terms used in validation in different sectors of education.

Recommendation: **The third sector has to be included as a partner in networks of policy making and development work.**

Guidance and Counseling; competence of counselors

Assumption: **There is a need for counselors to better understand the third sector and the competencies developed therein.**

Challenge: **The counselor or counselors that an individual meets in the process of validation/the process leading to recognition of competencies, must be familiar with all learning arenas so that all competencies of an individual will be assessed. Efforts are required to ensure that social skills and personal skills become part of the formal requirements to be assessed. Counselors must not depend solely on one method to unveil the competencies of an individual; they must also be capable of assisting individuals in assessing their own competencies. The individual should be active in the process e.g. by means of self-evaluation. There should be an opportunity to demonstrate skills in practice by means of carrying out tasks.**

Recommendations: **Training is needed for counselors operating on different levels and sectors of educational institutes and labor market. Counselors/assessors assisting in making an individual's competencies visible must be familiar with the different areas where people develop their competencies.**
There is a need for a new profile of training of counselors.

Independent assessment bodies to be established

Assumption: **The validation process should include competencies developed in many different areas to fully benefit the individual. The neutrality and objectivity of the validation process is best guaranteed in the operations of independent bodies.**

Challenges: **The process of recognizing prior learning and validating the learning outcomes is closely related to career guidance and counseling. The great challenge of the future education policy is to combine there two elements the most efficient way to serve the most important stakeholder – the learner!**

Recommendations: **Creating an independent assessment body where the counselors and assessors themselves or the staff have knowledge about the different competencies developed in different arenas may be a good way to achieve this.**

Research and development resources required

Assumption: **A good understanding of the validation process is a necessary precursor for a set of mutually acceptable terms. The terminology should reflect the learning outcomes, competencies, and skills that characterize non-formal learning. The description of content must be rendered in competency terms. Self-assessment serves as a good tool to support the self esteem and motivation of an adult learner.**

Challenges: **Mapping out the procedure of validation – without going into bureaucratic detail – is a major challenge.**

Recommendations: **Research and Development resources are needed to develop methods and tools to be used as well as to map out the competences gained in non-formal learning.**
Development efforts are needed to identify a system or model for the validation process.
Self-evaluation forms (electronic or printed) should be developed and also respected as appropriate assessment methods among adult learners.
Different kind of portfolios should be used whenever they are suitable to describe or recognize prior learning e.g. arts & crafts, language skills, manual skills etc.
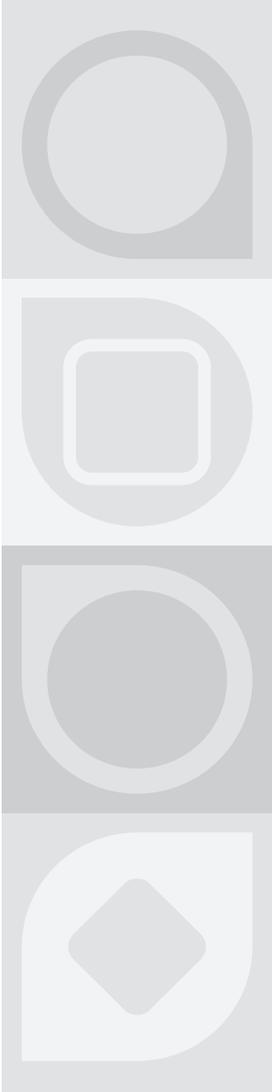
Clarification of the special competences gained in non-formal learning

Assumption: **Participating in the non-formal (third sector) activities gives a learner certain skills, e.g. teamwork skills, communication skills and social skills that are presently not made visible for assessment or validation in formal education or the labor market.**

Challenges: **The third sector has to develop relevant forms and documents to describe the development the learner goes through when participating in the third sector activities. Efforts are required to ensure that social skills and personal skills become part of the formal requirements to be assessed.**

Recommendations: **The non-formal institutes and third sector in general should create validation methods and tools on the learning outcomes of the specific skills mentioned above.**
The learning activities, goals, objectives, curricula/study plans plus working methods should be clearly described. This is crucial to make it possible for external assessors to analyze the outcome of learning and complete a recognition process.

Making the voices of third sector (non-formal organizations) heard in development work

Assumption: **Communication and knowledge are key elements in establishing a voice in society. Understanding the third sector is vital to communicating the strengths of the third sector.**

Challenge: **We must articulate what is going on in learning activities of the third sector. More widespread knowledge about the organizations is a starting point for being heard. If the third sector can show good documentation and good quality routines we will more easily be seen as professional and trustworthy.**

Recommendations: **The organizations must provide relevant documentation of the activities as well as course documentation.**
The course certificates must show what has been studied, how and what the expected outcome is - especially when there are no exams/tests.
Non-formal institutions and the third sector should create validation methods and tools on the learning outcomes of certain skills, such as social skills, communication skills, and team skills.
Non-formal sector should limit the use of tests to maintain the characteristic feature of autonomy in the non-formal and informal learning environment.

The table is a result of the questionnaire survey filled in by the partners. This is an extract from a larger survey and this table looks at the issue of validation from the perspective of non formal learning sector.

JAVAL Questionnaire2006: practice and policy and developing models of validation

		Denmark	Estonia	Finland
1 . Practice and policy of validation in each country				
1.	Do you have any practice of validation in your country?	yes	yes	yes
1.1	If yes, in which sectors is validation practiced?	Third sector Formal AE Working-life	Third sector Formal AE Working-life	Formal AE Working-life
1.2	Which kind of competences gained in non-formal or informal learning is validated?	Third sector (from August 2007) Working-life	Third sector Working-life	Third sector Working-life
1.3	Try to translate the word used for validation in your language into English word by word.	Real competence clarification (IKA) Real competence assessment (IKV) Third sector 1.8.2007: RKV = real competence assessment	varasema õpi- ja töökogemuse arvestamine (abr. VÕTA) = recognition of prior learning	opitun tunnustaminen = valuing the learning outcomes
1.4	What is included in the process of validation?	Counselling, individual awareness and clarification, documentation or demonstrating competencies, assessment Counselling, individual awareness and clarification, documentation or demonstrating competencies, assessment, final recognition and certification Clarification and documentation in the third sector	Information, making the individual aware of his/her competencies, documentation, assessment, final recognition Counselling before assessment less developed	Identifying Documentation Assessment Recognition Valuing

Latvia	Lithuania	Norway	Sweden
yes	yes	yes	yes
Third sector Formal AE Working-life	Third sector Formal AE Working-life	Third sector Formal AE Working-life (A full official validation process ending with recognition only happens in relation to formal education)	(Third sector) Formal AE Working-life
Third sector Working-life	Third sector	Third sector Working-life Any documented competencies could be validated in the official validation centres linked to upper secondary school or for entering university/univ.college	Working-life
novērtēšana = appraisal, appreciation, assessment, valuation, estimation, evaluation	asmens įgytos kompetencijos pripažinimas = recognition of competence acquired by a person as a part of formal education programme or qualification	Realkompetansevurdering = assessment of actual/real life competencies Realkompetanse = "actual competencies", "real life competencies"	validering = validation
Summarization of the results of midterm tests, the analysis of the achieved results, the participation of studying people, the evaluation of the knowledge, the evaluation of the process	Generally (in the case of formal education): 1. curriculum description, 2. accreditation of the course, 3. assessment of the learning outcomes, 4. certification and, 5. recognition of the certificate. In case of non-formal education: 1. curriculum description, 2. assessment of the learning outcomes, 3. certification.	Validation centres: information, making the individual aware of his/her competencies, documentation, assessment, final recognition and counselling. Third sector (sporadic use except for the folk highs schools): information, making the individual aware of his/her competencies, documenting.	A structured assessment evaluation, documentation and recognition of knowledge and competence possessed by a person independently of how it is acquired.

		Denmark	Estonia	Finland
1.5	Has the validation policy a legal/formal status?	yes It is a part of the existing legislation labour market training (IKA) and regarding Adult vocational training (IKV). A complex of laws will make it a general right to have prior learning assessed from 1 Aug 2007.	yes In formal education (in all levels) and in applying professional qualifications	yes
1.6	How is the policy expressed?	Legislation National initiatives	Legislation: Act of Polytechnics, Act of University, Act of Professions. Lifelong Learning Strategy 2005-2008 National initiative: evaluation system of non-formal adult education centres and folk high schools, VÕTA process (APL)	Legislation on degrees and qualifications (university, polytechnics) Legislation on competence based qualifications National initiatives: The development plan of education and research 2003 – 2008 of the Ministry of Education ME committees on recognition of prior learning in the educational system and in higher education

2. Validation policy in third sector in each country

		Denmark	Estonia	Finland
2.1	What is the legal basis/formal status of validation in third sector?	Ministry of Education supporting a national project aiming at launching an ICT-based questionnaire; expected to be the framework for clarification of competencies gained in the third sector.	Legislation: Act of Polytechnics, Act of University, Act of Professions. Lifelong Learning Strategy 2005-2008 National initiative: evaluation system of non-formal adult education centres and folk high schools, VÕTA process (APL)	Legislation or formal requirements: Language proficiency tests ICT driver`s license
2.2	How is the policy expressed?	National initiatives Legislation from 1 Aug 2007	VÕTA process, not a unified system but regulated by legislation (see 3.1) non-formal learning is validated in formal education or work place regarding to what the candidate aims at	Legislation National initiatives

Latvia	Lithuania	Norway	Sweden
yes There is programme accreditation and certification that is carried out in formal, professional, and non-formal education. Each organisation according to its status can choose the steps of validation that it will carry out	yes: certification may have a legal status due to the legal status of the licensed training institution itself. no: curriculum description. Non-formal courses are not being accredited or approved. There is no accreditation system in the third sector.	yes	not as a legal right claimed by citizens
Legislation	National initiatives	Legislation for validation centres, universities, university colleges, colleges The Education Act n:o 61 of 17 July 1988, The Act relating to the Universities an University Colleges n:o 15 of 1 April 2005, the Folk High School Act (a duty to document learning for the use of employers and higher education National initiatives	Legislation National initiatives

There is a three-party convention among LAEA, Ministry of Education and Science, and Latvian association of Local and Regional Governments, which have to be taken into account by any institution that provides society with some educational services.		Legislation on rights for validation and duties of upper secondary centres and universities to accept on the basis of validated skills and shortened study-period	Formal status is not yet achieved for validation in its own right
Legislation	Official documents National initiatives	Official documents and legislation (see 2.7) National initiatives	Official documents National initiatives

Denmark	Estonia	Finland

3. Practice of validation of competences gained in third sector

		Denmark	Estonia	Finland
3.1	Which types of competencies gained in non-formal and informal learning are mainly validated - social, general etc.	Social and personal competencies, such as inter-cultural competencies, communication competencies, learning-to-learn competencies, creative-innovative competencies, etc (competencies defined by the DeSeCO-project)	Social skills, language skills, computer skills, fine arts, music, different work related competences	Foreign languages ICT Social and communicative skills Leadership Arts
3.2	By whom are the competences gained in non-formal and informal learning validated?	formal AE institutions employers	formal AE institutions other AE institutions national validation authorities independent of educational providers employers	A.employers

4. Process of developing models for validation of competences gained in third sector

		Denmark	Estonia	Finland
4.1	The process of designing models of validation etc. has been	Centralized De-centralized	De-centralized	De-centralized
4.2	What has been the impact of educational authorities on the process?	A common framework for clarification of competencies developed in the third sector is being developed. The Ministry of education will support and promote the model. (see case 3)		They have not been involved nor interested.

Latvia	Lithuania	Norway	Sweden

Latvia	Lithuania	Norway	Sweden
General and social	General competencies, e.g., foreign language learning "Professional" competencies – accounting, IT knowledge, acquired during the training programme Social competencies: as part of short-term programme, a pilot project activity etc., or in working-life as a part of work evaluation, or selection procedures.	Any competency relevant to the subject of study. In practice it is likely that the competencies directly linked to the subject of study or work will be more easily validated, especially if well documented in writing, than social skills.	A broad range of experiential learning, in many cases care and nursing.
other AE institutions employers	formal AE institutions other AE institutions employers - sometimes	formal AE institutions (mainly validation centres connected to the upper secondary school in each county, also universities, university colleges) other AE institutions (folk high-schools)	formal AE institutions employers

De-centralized		De-centralized	De-centralized
The Centre of Professional Education has developed the criteria for validation process, but one does not have obligation to observe the criteria.	Ministry of Education and Science (MES), shapes and implements State education policy. Representatives of Lithuanian educational institutions (e.g. universities) join the expert workgroups developing the national qualification framework.	There have been projects developing tools and methods for validation among actors in working life, formal education (county councils) and the third sector. The different projects met for discussions and were financed by public funds from the Ministry of Education through VOX. The different tools/methods were other wise developed independently.	Little so far, but…

		Denmark	Estonia	Finland
4.3	Have the social partners had an impact on the development of models for validation?	yes Social partners are part of the steering committee for development project	yes Social partners are members of different work groups	no Employers active only in competence – based qualificat-ions system, (working-life skills). Civil society representatives passive ex-cept for the liberal AE umbrella organisa-tions.
4.4	Has the third sector had any influence in the process?	yes Wide range of organizations have been represented in project steering committee Several interim presentations of the mod-el aiming at getting feed back from third sector organizations	yes ENAEA works with the process of study centres and fhs evaluation system. The Youth organisations participate in analys-ing of informal knowledge Third sector organisations participate in different work groups of Qualification Au-thority	yes There are local and regional initiatives used to limited extent.
4.5	Are there any pilot programs, develop-ment work etc. (efforts made as an ex-pression of policy) in third sector?	yes National	yes National	yes Local
4.6	Has the development work resulted in any kind of official implementation?	not yet	yes ENEA initiative for developing evaluation system of fhs and study centres is written in Lifelong Learning Strategy as a part of LLL activity	no
4.7	Are there financial resources available for development work of validation in third sector?	yes Costs of the development work provided as wages for the group of researchers, in-terim presentations free of charge for the participants	yes European Structural Funds and some State financing	yes Project funding available to develop and to test new methods or systems locally and regionally
4.8	Who pays for the development work?	National funding	National funding EU funding Nordic funding	National funding: Board of Education has given out some project money Nordic funding

Latvia	Lithuania	Norway	Sweden
yes Employers influence the development of validation models declaring their needs	yes Social partners provide suggestions on VET standards and training prog-rams and participate in examination commissions. Social partners have the responsibility of the assessment of acquired qualifications of vocational s	yes See above.	no
yes The third sector has its own requirements.		yes In the frequent meetings and work of the national validation project (Realkomp-etanse-prosjektet) the third sector representatives worked together with the other actors. The same goes for the actors from working life and the actors from the formal education sector.	no
yes Regional Local	yes National	yes National	yes National
yes A three-party convention (LAEA, Ministry of Education and Science, and Latvian association of Local and Regional Governments), has to be taken into account by any institution providing educational services	not yet	yes There are validation centres in use, there are validation systems/activities in higher education and there are tools in the third sector available for use.	no
no	yes National funding EU-funding	See 5.4.	yes Funding by the National Commission on Validation
EU-funding Nordic funding Separate projects can get financial support	National funding EU-funding	National funding	National funding EU-funding

JAVAL - Joint Actions in Validation of Learning

Partners

Denmark
Ms Agnethe Nordentoft
Dansk Folkeoplysnings Samråd
Danish Adult Education Association
www.dfs.dk

Estonia
Ms Tiina Jääger
Eesti Vabaharidusliit (EVHL)
Estonian Nonformal Adult Education Association
www.vabaharidus.ee
Ms Larissa Jögi
Tallinna Ulikool
Tallinn University
www.tlu.ee

Finland
Ms Leena Saloheimo
Ms Eeva-Inkeri Sirelius
Vapaan sivistystyön yhteisjärjestö –
Samverkande bildningsorganisationerna VSY
Finnish Adult Education Association
www.vsy.fi

Latvia
Ms Ingrida Mikisko
Latvijas Pieaugušo izglītības apvienība
Latvian Adult Education Association
www.laea.lv

Lithuania
Ms Ieva Urbanaviciute
Ms Aurelija Cepiene
Lietuvos Suaugusiųjų Švietimo Asociacija (LSŠA)
Lithuanian Association of Adult Education
www.lssa.smm.lt

Norway
Ms Catherine Thue
Mr Udd Haddal
Voksenopplaeringsförbundet
The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (NAAL)
www.vofo.no

Sweden
Mr Nils Friberg
Nordiskt Nätverk för Vuxnas Lärande
Nordic Network for Adult Learning
www.nordvux.net