Nordic Competence Profiles of Validation Practitioners and Competence Development

A mapping project 2014 - 15

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– A mapping project 2014 - 15

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

Competence Profiles of Validation Practitioners and Competence Development – a mapping project 2014 – 15 aims to contribute to the development and strengthening of validation of prior learning (VPL) in the Nordic countries by mapping competence profiles and focusing on professionalization of the validation practitioners in their work with validation in all steps of the validation process.

The essential activities have been:
- Mapping of tasks, roles and competence profiles of validation practitioners in the validation process.
- Identifying the need for competence development for the validation practitioners and outlining challenges and recommendations for competence development activities at a national and Nordic level.

This booklet contains the results of the project. The key chapter is Nordic Competence Profiles of VPL practitioners as a generic description. Prior to this chapter the approach to validation and the role of the VPL practitioners in each of the Nordic countries are described.

Regarding terminology, the project group opted to use the term "validation of prior learning" (VPL) which includes validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning. The project uses this term for validation as recommended by the Nordic Expert Network in Validation, NVL.

Although VPL is often related to educational systems, the philosophy, practices and tasks of VPL differ between systems. VPL is organized differently in European countries and in some countries, it is embedded in educational systems, in some there are independent bodies, and in some labor market institutions have the leading role. Yet, the main philosophy of VPL and the challenges and the tasks of VPL professionals are widely spoken the same. Many of the practitioners working in the field of VPL have other tasks besides VPL, and this condition makes it difficult to speak of VPL as a new profession. Therefore, it is challenging to develop distinct professional standards or to refer to the group of practitioners as having "VPL as a profession". In this sense, it is more adequate - for the moment - to describe VPL as a practice.

The participants in the project, even though experts in the field of VPL, have learned much about the complexity of the tasks of VPL practitioners, the need for clarification of competence profiles for validation practitioners and the need of further competence development for them. For the development and trust in validation activities it is crucial to have competent and well educated VPL practitioners.

The connection of the project to the Expert Network in Validation, NVL
The main objective of this project is tightly linked to the identified challenges in VPL by the Expert Network on Validation. Since 2009, competence development and professionalization of VPL practitioners, has been seen as one of the main challenges to promote and strengthen VPL.

The Expert Network in Validation in NVL has acted as a steering group for this project, which can be seen as an effort to implement Expert Network's initiatives and strategy to promote validation in an accomplished way. The connection of the project to international context Competence profiles and the need of competence development for VPL practitioners are formulated as a key issue in international / European policy papers and in research and development activities in VPL. Awareness of the need to clarify, who the VPL practitioners are and the need of competence development of the VPL practitioners is high in the VPL agenda in 2015.

The European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014 (Executive summary) concludes that development of professional competences of staff is an area that requires strong development in most countries. Only seven countries reported to have require-

ments specified for the development of VPL competences for staff involved in validation. The 2014 Inventory concludes that competence development is still an important topic for development and improvement of VPL in Europe.

High quality work of VPL practitioners is essential for the quality and trust of the outcomes of the validation process. However, based on the above-mentioned material, it seems that in practice competence development so far can be characterized as project based, sporadic and informal.

The Nordic Approach
VPL has some twenty years of history and it is well established in the Nordic countries. It encompasses formal, non-formal and informal learning and thus the term validation of prior learning (VPL) is used.

One of the historical reasons for this development is the tradition of strong adult education, strong labor unions and the political focus on social inclusion. Hence, the scorings for the Nordic countries in the PIAAC survey are quite high. The Nordic countries have a strong third sector and non-formal adult education is well established. Lifelong Learning is structured, easily accessible and mostly publicly funded.

Conditions for VPL
There are indications that the individuals who benefit the most from VPL on a Nordic level are people without formal qualification from upper secondary education or VET, and immigrants. In general, VPL within the educational sector is integrated and mostly free of charge. VPL is also used more and more within different industries to enhance and quality assure skills supply.

The systems for VPL may differ in the Nordic countries, but in all countries VPL is mainly used for access to and customizing of education in addition to enhancing the individuals' possibilities on the labor market. The individual is in the center of the VPL process and VPL is considered to be a learning process which promotes empowerment and social inclusion.

The need for competence development
Competent VPL practitioners are crucial for the quality and effectiveness of VPL. What competences are needed to perform the state of the art VPL is a common Nordic challenge and central in this project. There are examples of competence descriptions in the Nordic countries that can contribute to making more overall competence profiles for VPL practitioners to contribute to further quality development.

VPL PRACTITIONERS IN DENMARK

Career Management Skills (CMS) are emphasized in order to meet with the rapidly changing labor market requirements and the importance of Lifelong Guidance (LLG) is underlined. This implies the need for competence development regarding those working with guidance in VPL. As it is often heard – "without my guidance counselor I wouldn't have been here!"

National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) are being developed and implemented, and new learning opportunities are emerging every day. VPL practitioners will need constant updating of their mindset about learning and the value of competences. In that context, relevant, up-to-date competence profiles and opportunities for further training will be increasingly important in the future. VPL practitioners in the five Nordic countries

In the following, national descriptions of VPL legislation and regulations to set the national context for each of the Nordic countries is briefly presented. Furthermore, a short introduction of national profiles of VPL practitioners, provision of training and support, roles and responsibilities of stakeholders is provided.

Legislation and regulations
The key piece of legislation on validation of prior learning in Denmark is Act no. 556 of 6 June 2007, entitled "Development of the recognition of prior learning in adult education and continuing training". The legislation gives each individual the right to have his/her prior learning experiences validated in relation to specific goals of adult education and continuing training. It focuses on the needs of the individual and aims to make the process as accessible and flexible as possible.

Since 2007, legislation allows individuals to gain access to short-cycle and medium-cycle Higher Education (Bachelor-level degrees) based on an individual competence assessment. The educational institutions are responsible for information, guidance and assessment of the individual.

According to Danish legislation, the assessment must be conducted by the educational institution offering the corresponding programs.

Profile of validation practitioners
Validation practitioners are counsellors/guiders, assessors, managers, teachers, administrative staff and staff from guidance organizations, e.g. job centers. The main practitioners are counsellors/guiders and assessors.

Provision of training and support to practitioners
In the last ten years, a number of different VPL competence development initiatives have been taken in the form of courses, peer learning activities and networking. A short description of the main activities:

Module in VPL in the Diploma Program
In 2011 NVR, The National Knowledge Center of Validation was asked to develop and describe a module in the formal Diploma Program.

The module was approved in the formal educational system. The University Colleges may offer the module. Including experience from practice and theory, the module aims to professionalize VPL practitioners in their VPL work in all phases of the VPL process.

Before developing the Module, NVR has implemented a training activity, under the auspices of SCK, The Agency for Competence Development in the State sector. Ca. 100 practitioners participated the training and the evaluation was very positive and indicated that competence development for practitioners is needed.

Training program for third sector
In the third sector the national umbrella organization DAEA, The Danish Adult Education Association, provides a training program for teachers and guidance counsellors, who are trained as 'prior learning guides'. The focus in the training program is guidance and counselling in relation to the process of identification and documentation of prior learning based on the latest research.

Development projects in VPL
Several development projects in validation focus on competences and competence development of VPL practitioners as a core part of the project activities.
- Peer learning activities and networking are fostered in different areas of the educational area to exchange experiences and collaborate in order to develop VPL activities.

Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders
The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education are responsible for the legislative framework for assessment of prior learning and for taking national initiatives for implementing the legislation. The Ministries have developed policy guidelines and funded projects aiming at developing tools, methods and procedures. The educational institutions are responsible for counseling and guidance, and for assessing and approving validation within their educational and training programs. The educational institutions also have responsibility for quality assurance, review and evaluation. The implementation of the legislation is decentralized to a high degree. Other stakeholders act as guidance institutions, e.g. the job centers, the trade unions, the unemployment funds and the third sector.

VPL PRACTITIONERS IN FINLAND

Legislation and regulations
In Finland, legislation regarding VPL is described separately for each level of education. In principle, the core of the legislation is quite similar in each law: prior learning should be identified and recognized irrespective of the learning context. Essentially, VPL is a subjective right of the individual. The legislation does not restrict validation provision in terms of age or years of work experience, but it is available provided that the individual has relevant competences regardless of how or where they were gained. The Law on Liberal Adult Education (non-formal) does not address validation. However, the AE sector is developing VPL tools and methodologies.

Profile of VPL practitioners
In the Competence Based Qualifications (CBQs) there are three main practitioner roles: working life assessors, assessors from VET (usually Specialists in CBQs) and guidance counselors. Working life assessors' role is crucial, as their responsibility is to see that the competences demonstrated by the candidate correspond to the working life standards and practices. The VET assessors see that the VPL process is carried out according to the guidelines. The guidance counselors provide support in planning the individual paths and further learning.

Provision of training and support for practitioners
Specialist in Competence Based Qualifications is a mandatory qualification for VPL practitioners in Finland. It is a 25-credit program that consists of three modules: Organizing Competence Based Qualifications, Personalization of CBQs and Quality Assurance in CBQs. Continuing education for Specialists in CBQs is also available. The CBQ providers are responsible for training the working life assessors regarding the CBQs, Qualification Requirements, assessment criteria, assessment methods, guidance and feedback.

In HE or IVET there are no mandatory training programs for VPL practitioners, but the training and support available is rather project based and peer learning within and between organizations.

Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders
- *Ministry of Education and Culture:* prepares provisions and the qualification structure and decides on financing

- *Ministry of Employment and the Economy:* allocates financing for VPL

- *National Board of Education:* appoints the Qualification Committees, prepares the contents of the Qualification Requirements, issues instructions to VPL providers and Qualification Committees, grants financing, provides training and support for Qualification Committees and VPL providers

- *Qualification Committees:* agree on organizing CBQs, issue certificates and diplomas for their part, decide on rectifying an assessment, QA

- *Working life and Labor Organizations:* participate in preparing Qualification Requirements, assessment, Qualification Committees and Education and Training Committees

- *Organizers of CBQs:* plan the competence tests together with representatives of working life and are responsible for communications, guidance and steering related to the attainment of CBQs

Perspectives and challenges

Even though the CBQs are well structured and organized there is a dire need for other sectors of education to start arranging structured training and quality assurance methods for the VPL practitioners. In general, guidance in VPL requires further discussion: what does guidance in VPL mean, who should be the provider of guidance and with what type of qualifications, what are the roles and responsibilities of guidance providers in VPL?

VPL PRACTITIONERS IN ICELAND

Legislation and regulations

The framework for validation in Iceland is based on an Act on adult education from 2010 and a regulation enforced in 2011. The purpose of the Act among other things is to:

- provide adult education to individuals with reduced educational and professional opportunities, taking into account their competences and unequal situation,
- support the recognition of the value of education and training that is acquired outside of the formal education system.

Individuals with short formal education who choose to embark on studies organized and based on the Adult Education Act or the Upper Secondary School Act are entitled to have their individual non-formal and informal learning evaluated (VPL).

A person must be 23 years of age and have minimum three years of work experience. Validation and guidance related to validation is free.

Profile of VPL practitioners

Validation is performed by authorized providers who operate on the basis of the Adult Education Act no. 27/2010 and the Upper Secondary School Act no. 92/2008. Lifelong Learning centers located around the country conduct validation in their regions and are the entrance for individuals into validation. LLL-centers are obligated to cooperate with stakeholders, including schools and working life when organizing and conducting validation programs. Validation is funded by the Educational and Training Fund (ETF). The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) provides the LLL-centers guidance on methodology, training for professionals, keeps track of statistics and monitors the quality.

By law, Upper Secondary schools can also perform validation, but that path is not very structured.

Provision of training and support for practitioners
Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) is owned by The Icelandic Federation of Labor, Confederation of Icelandic Employers, Federation of State and Municipal Employees, Association of Local Authorities in Iceland and the Ministry of Finance. The main objectives of ETSC regarding validation are:

- Development of national strategy on VPL
- Quality and methodology of VPL
- Guiding the implementation of validation
- Keeping track of statistic and costs

ETSC provides training courses, conferences, workshops and provides advice to the LLL centers about the implementation of validation. ETSC also publishes material related to validation, such as guidelines for implementation, checklists and detailed information on roles and responsibilities of VPL providers.

ETSC promotes the implementation of validation practices in new areas of collaboration with stakeholders, participates in international cooperation and disseminates information to partners.

Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders
Providers of validation establish a steering group for a profession or occupation category including the participation of educational and career guidance counsellors and professionals from working life.
The group is jointly responsible for the results of validation and the value of the results on the labor market and/ or the school system.
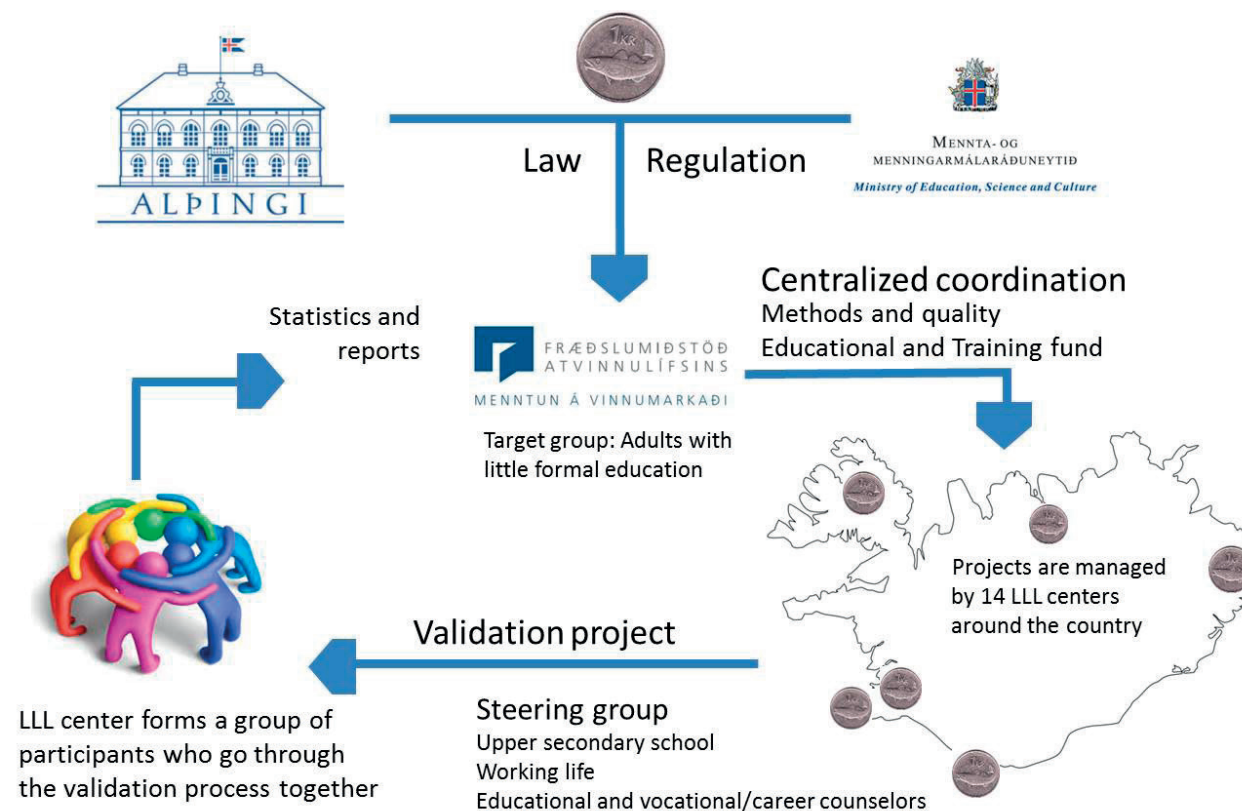
VPL PRACTITIONERS IN NORWAY

Legislation
VPL in upper secondary education, including vocational training (VET), is regulated by law in the Education Act. It short, it is limited to persons older than 25 years and without prior upper secondary education. The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is the national entity responsible for laws and regulations in VPL in primary and upper secondary education.

Profile of VPL practitioners
There are no formal, professional requirements for VPL practitioners, but the education authorities at county level are responsible for the quality of VPL provision and ensure that VPL practitioners meet the quality standards. Recommended profile of VPL practitioners is described in the national guidelines for validation in upper secondary education, published by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training:
www.udir.no/PageFiles/82345/retningslinjer_ realkomp_vgo.pdf?epslanguage=no

Provision of training and support for practitioners
The education administrations in each of the 19 counties have been delegated authority from the Ministry of Education and Research to deliver VPL and assure high quality of the service . They are responsible for provision of training and support for VPL practitioners. There is no national monitoring or follow-up of this provision. An earlier, non-published survey from 2003 indicated that all counties train their practitioners at regular intervals, at least once a year.

Some years ago, Oslo University College developed a course for validation practitioners by request of Akershus County. This course is no longer available.

Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders
The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is responsible for the national provision of upper secondary education, including VET. They administer laws and regulations and collect data. Education authorities in the 19 counties are responsible for the provision of upper secondary education, including VET, in each county. The provision is financed by block grants provided by the government.

VET in Norway is based on a strong link between the schools and the local working life. Schools provide theoretical training and working life provides apprenticeships or other kind of work-based training. The social partners are involved in VET by giving advice through a network administered by the Directorate.

VPL PRACTITIONERS IN SWEDEN

Laws and regulations
In formal Adult Education (AE) (including VET, not 3rd sector), the possibility for validation is regulated in the Ordinance for Adult Education (SFS 2011:1108). For Higher Education (HE) and Higher Vocational Education (HVE) the possibility to get non-formal and informal learning accredited for access and exemptions is regulated. Guidance is embedded in all formal education, but the link to VPL is not regulated.

Profile of VPL practitioners
There are no defined roles or qualifications within formal education for providing validation. Administrative staff, guidance counsellors, teachers and co-assessors from different sectors may be involved in validation. There is no validation-specific quality assurance or follow-up within formal education.

One could argue that Sweden has a dual system concerning VPL. Aside from formal education, there is sector specific VPL where the PES provide guidance and procure skills audits and validation services from different providers, some of them accredited by the sector-specific VPL model owners. For sector-specific VPL models there are sectorial standards for accredited assessors.

Regarding VPL provided by the PES, the focus is rather on target groups that are further from the labor market, especially immigrants and refugees. In this context, it is important to combine VPL with language development (SFI – Swedish for immigrants) and to be able to take the first steps with interpreters, preferably with sector knowledge.

Provision of training and support to practitioners
For VPL professionals within formal education (i.e. guidance counsellors and teachers), there are no mandatory courses regarding VPL and hardly any possibilities to get further training and competence development. For sector-specific VPL models there are sector standards for accredited assessors. The main challenge is to professionalize the provision of VPL by revising the educational standards for guidance counsellors and teachers and providing possibilities for further training.

Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders
In sector specific VPL models, stakeholders develop and have ownership of the standards. They accredit different providers of VPL. In formal education, stakeholders only have an indirect influence. They seldom take part in the provision of VPL.

THE ROLES OF THE VPL PRACTITIONERS IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Validation practitioners are involved in all phases of validation and may have many different roles. The practitioners' competences are therefore critically important to the long-term impact and credibility of validation. Counsellors and assessors are inevitably the main VPL practitioner roles. A number of other roles are also involved in some phases of the validation process, for example teachers and trainers, human resource managers and administrative staff. It is also be important to discuss their competences as a part of the entire validation process. Identification of all the different VPL practitioners and their roles in validation is a complex issue, as some of them cover one role and some cover many. Some practitioners require many different competences, while others can be more specialized.

The roles, skills and training of validation practitioners are discussed in the EU Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning (CEDEFOP, 2009). The guidelines emphasize that validation practitioners should cover all aspects of VPL and their roles may be differentiated into five distinct groups as outlined below (ibid; 66 ff):

The two main categories are counsellors and assessors, and at the same time, it is pointed out that interactivity between professionals through a community of practice is likely to contribute significantly to the development of individuals and to the more effective working of the whole system. (ibid; 67)

In this project, we have focused on competences the VPL practitioner needs in each phase of the validation process. The VPL practitioner may use the following grid to explore which competences and tasks are needed for each phase of the process, and relate them to the actual role the practitioner plays in the local context.

| Counsellors/ advisors	offer information, advice and guidance
Assessors	carry out assessment processes
Managers	manage assessment centers/procedures
External observers	external observers of the process
Other stakeholders	have an important but less direct role in the validation process without being directly involved in the process

NORDIC COMPETENCE PROFILES OF VPL PRACTITIONERS

Introduction
This is a generic Nordic description and overview of competence profiles of practitioners, who work with Validation of Prior Learning (VPL). The aim of this description is to inspire and contribute to a clearer overview of competence development and profiles of VPL practitioners. This can be an inspiration for outlining a picture of the VPL practitioners and for further competence development of VPL practitioners.

Each Nordic country has contributed to this work by mapping competence profiles of VPL practitioners in their respective countries. This compilation of Nordic competence profiles may or may not be relevant for all countries, but can, nevertheless, be viewed as a whole. The competence profile includes both tasks and competences.

The structure for the description of VPL competence profiles follows the structure of the validation process used in the Quality Model for Validation in the Nordic Countries (**http://www.nordvux.net/validering**). It means that the competence profiles are described according to the eight steps in a proficient validation process.
See figure beside.
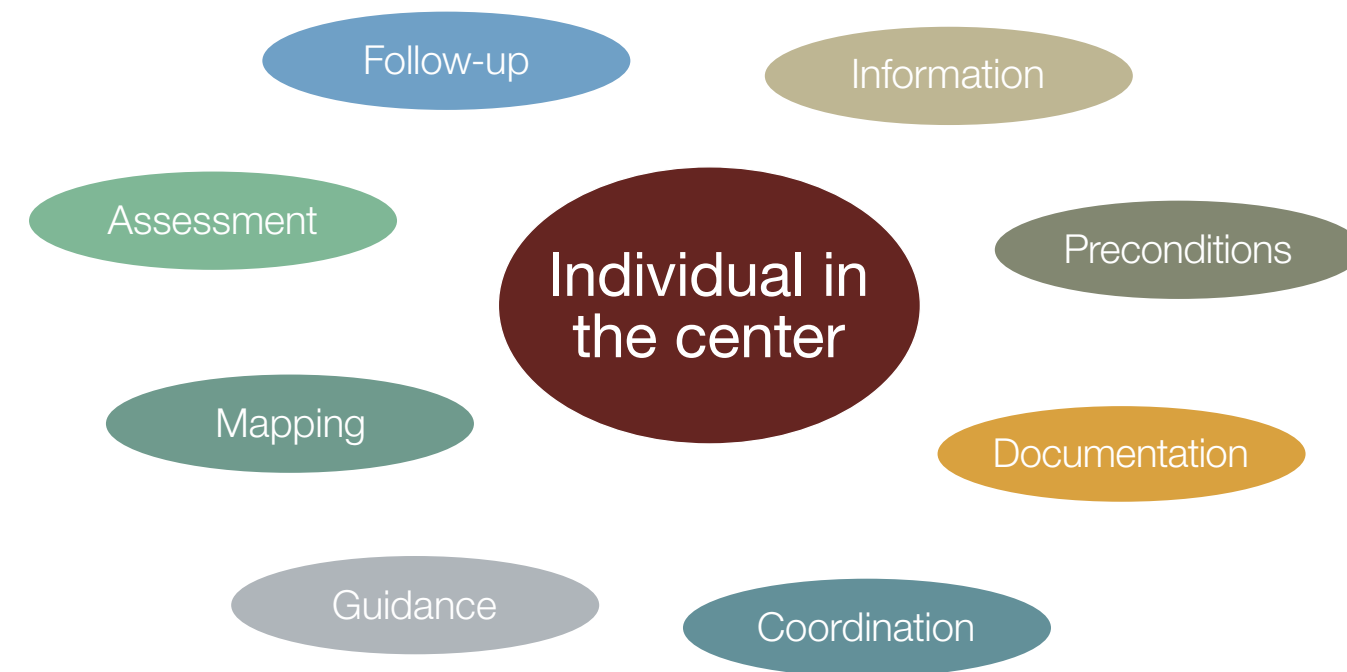
Competence profiles of VPL practitioners

Information

Phases
Information
- of who, what, why, how, where and when
- to individuals in the target group
- to and from stakeholders and collaborators

Competence profile
The practitioner is able to:

- provide information about the objectives, purpose and practice of validation to potential participants so that individuals can make informed decisions about participation
- draw out and demonstrate the potential benefits of validation for companies and educators

- extract information of the structure of the labor market and identify key ways to reach potential participants
- extract knowledge about the target group
- explain the rights of individuals

Preconditions

Phases
Preconditions
- the framework for validation
- national, regional and local policies and regulations
- financing

Competence profile
The practitioner is able to:

System Level
- display knowledge of the laws and regulations on validation
- provide information on the benefits, implementation and reliability for different stakeholders
- explain about possibilities of funding to the candidates
- draw out and demonstrate the benefits of validation for different stakeholders (all VPL practitioners)

- set up project plans and budgets (training managers / directors)
- compile a detailed contract describing the VPL process (including information and marketing, guidance, assessment methods and the assessors and their competences) and the stakeholders in the process.
- identify key stakeholders and investigate their attitude towards validation

Preconditions

Documentation

Phases
Preconditions
- the framework for validation
- national, regional and local policies and regulations
- financing

Phases
Documentation
- institution's documentation on internal working procedures and conditions, quality assurance systems and evaluation

Competence profile
Operational Level

- translate between language used in working life and used in the world of education
- train working life assessors
- interpret qualification requirements (or other VPL standards) in terms of working life tasks
- extract and interpret critical information regarding labor market developments
- assess whether the conditions are in place to start the validation

- identify key stakeholders and assess the options for establishing a validation procedure
- assemble and manage a group of key stakeholders responsible for the implementation and results of the validation process.
- extract and provide information about the possibilities of the formal and non-formal education system
- plan and provide individual further learning paths
- prepare any documentation linked with the VPL procedure

Competence profile
The practitioner is able to:

- demonstrate good knowledge on laws and regulations on validation
- record the VPL results so that they are legitimate, carried out according to requirements, and have value regardless of where validation was performed
- to enforce the requirements of clarity and traceability of the results of validation

- document each step of the validation process
- foster the certification process in his/her role
- identify the participants' rights regarding confidentiality and the ownership of results
- foster and advance the quality assurance procedures in VPL
- provide key information for statistical follow up

Coordination

Phases

Coordination

-of all elements/actors included in the overall VPL provision
- of establishing and developing a VPL system, procedures, methods and definitions
  of roles of the staff in an institution
- of further services after implementation

Competence profile

The practitioner is able to:

- act according to the laws and regulations on validation   in validation
- manage the processes and procedures for VPL
- follow up VPL procedures and budgets
- to reconcile different viewpoints and mediate between
  stakeholders
- build trust between other stakeholders involved
- derive information on possibilities for further learning
  opportunities
- make decisions and follow through

Guidance

Phases

Guidance

- supports the user in making choices, motivating and carrying out the VPL activities
- an ongoing process throughout the VPL process and an integral part of all validation activities
- has many forms: varies from provision of information to advice and career counselling.
- should be tailored according to the needs of the individual

Competence profile

The practitioner is able to:

- provide advice and information about (sectorial)
  competence requirements / qualifications and the
  potential for career development
- deliver information and advice on the formal and
  non-formal education system and other possible
  learning paths available
- assess the candidate's competences to seek further
  learning after validation
- identify the individual's overall competence profile and
  appropriate tools to make the competences visible
- guide / suggest the individual to the right qualification
  and qualification level
- identify possible learning difficulties and help the
  candidate to seek help / special support to go through
  VPL procedures

- provide advice on the rights of the individual and data
  protection issues regarding VPL guide individuals,
  who do not meet the criteria for validation, to other
  career or learning opportunities (cf. gap-training)
- understand that the reliability of the results is the key
  to sustainability in validation
- determine whether validation is performed
  independently and with the interests of the individual in
  mind
- provide information on different types of portfolios
  (work-samples, career path etc.)
- provide individual counseling and support
- provide group counseling and support
  provide guidance and counseling after validation

Phases

Mapping

- the process of making the individual's competences visible in a reliable way
- in most EU documents mapping is referred to as documentation

Mapping

Competence profile

The practitioner is able to:

- Display appropriate knowledge about the criteria for mapping and the relevant qualifications for the applicant
- identify the purpose of validation for the individual
- explain the criteria and the performance requirements imposed by the qualification / VPL standards
- comprehend the importance of self-assessment and its value as a key mapping procedure
- determine appropriate mapping tools and understanding of how they should be used
- guide individuals, who do not meet the criteria for validation, to other career or learning opportunities

- distinguish between summative and formative mapping procedures and their purpose
- guide the mapping procedure (relevant documentation and evidence of competences)
- interpret and evaluate the results of mapping and compile a progression plan with the individual
- provide advice and information on the entire validation process
- apply different interviewing and communication techniques display a positive attitude towards validation

Phases

Assessment

- to assess the result of the mapping against criteria/standards for validation
- should be reliable, valid and impartial
- should have legal/formal status and impact on the further learning and/or working life advancements of the individual

Assessment

Competence profile

The practitioner is able to:

- demonstrate relevant professional knowledge, skills and competences as an assessor
- display appropriate knowledge about the validation system in question
- understand the VPL standards and assessment criteria and is able to relate them to educational standards and real work life situations and performance.
- support the individual in the assessment process in appropriate ways
- relate that the assessment procedure is also a learning process
- recognize the depth, width and scope of the competences of the individual
- effectively negotiate with the parties involved in the assessment process

- identify individual's knowledge, skills and competences and to present justification for the assement results
- record and document the results of assessment
- present the results of assessment for certification purposes
- take appropriate action to ensure confidentiality and individual rights
- appreciate the importance and aims for neutrality of assessment
- demonstrate knowledge, skills and competences in employing diverse and enriching assessment methods (triangulation)
- demonstrate knowledge, skills and competences in different interviewing techniques and communication methods

Phases

Follow-up

- how to further use the results of validation
- is aimed both at the individual, and at development and improvements of the validation process

Follow-up

Competence profile

The practitioner is able to:

- provide personalized counseling following validation regarding continuing learning and possible career opportunities
- provide advice and information on available education or training, where it takes place, the costs and possible entry requirements
- encourage the individual to set goals and plan for further education or training

- provide assistance with applications and information
- interpret the labor market barometers
- interpret candidates and stakeholder feedback and take appropriate action accordingly
- interpret statistics and draw appropriate conclusions
- understand the Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Guidance aspects of VPL
- revise and improve the system

Phases

- Personal attributes and overarching competences - general competences
a validation practitioner should have

Competence profile

The practitioner is able to:

- express a positive attitude towards validation
- demonstrate appreciation of whole
- A holistic view of the VPL process and the placement of the candidate at the center
- indicate attention to detail
- Highly observing
- display cultural and linguistic sensitivity
- empathetic approach
- demonstrate integrity
- maintains ethical norms
- Respect for the privacy of the candidate
- express interpersonal sensitivity
- communicates verbally and non-verbally and is able to put him/herself in the place of the candidate
- respects the feelings of the candidate
- express intrapersonal sensitivity

- Awareness of the impact of the own behavior upon other people
- Readiness to listen
- Asks relevant questions to clarify what is not clear
- Listens attentively to the candidate
- promote support
- creates pleasant non-oppressive atmosphere
- boast tenacity
- Perseverance and ability to follow through problems at hand
- display tolerance
- performs under pressure and/or opposition
- employ teamworking and networking skills and competences
- seeks for expert advice and support for own decisions

MAIN CONCLUSIONS BASED ON THE NORDIC COMPETENCE PROFILES

VPL is considered as one of the core activities of the Lifelong Learning agenda in the Nordic countries. However, the development of VPL practices is at different stages. The roles and competence profiles of VPL practitioners should be further developed. Every VPL practitioner, who takes part in validation activities, needs to understand the fundamental principles of validation, as stated in the European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning (Cedefop 2009, 70):

- Validation must be voluntary.
- The privacy of individuals should be respected.
- Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed.
- Stakeholders should be involved in establishing systems for validation.
- Systems should contain mechanisms for guidance and counselling of individuals.
- Systems should be underpinned by quality assurance.

- The process, procedures and criteria for validation must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance.
- Systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek balanced participation.
- The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.
- The professional competences of those who carry out assessments must be assured.

From the grid presented above, we have derived the following key competences for VPL practitioners:
- To be able to promote an motivate for the validation process
- To recognize and be able to validate competences from a vast range of learning arenas
- To be able to analyze and make use of learning outcome descriptions

- To be able to provide necessary and relevant guidance in the different phases of validation

Challenges and recommendations
This project has revealed some major challenges regarding professionalization and competence development of VPL practitioners. The process of validation
- involves many different roles
- includes many different phases with different competence requirements
- involves practitioners with no formal competence requirements in VPL procedures

Lack of professionalization of VPL practitioners may not be a problem if all the stakeholders and actors in the validation system are following general quality procedures and criteria. However, it may be useful to develop specialized courses for VPL practitioners to support their performance and make the specialized competences more visible and valid.

There appear to be many learning activities going on in the field of VPL, but they are mainly organized as short courses and seminars. There seems to be a need for developing formal educational offers, especially for counsellors and assessors.

Networks, peer-learning activities and projects across the EU are opportunities that should be taken advantage of in order to share experiences and knowledge on the VPL practices (e.g. OBSERVAL-Net).

To strengthen the professionalization of validation practitioners is central to effective validation processes and their quality. A variety of training activities are needed to match the different needs for competence development for VPL practitioners as

- Courses
- Education in the formal system
- Peer learning activities / networking
- Development projects

All Nordic countries have valuable experiences with competence development of VPL practitioners. This project has described competences required in the different validation phases and it contributes to a clearer overview of roles, competence profiles and the need for competence development of VPL practitioners.

The partners in a new project may investigate the possibilities to improve and strengthen the use of training activities, education and other activities in the Nordic countries and on a Nordic level.

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MEMBERS OF THE PROJECT GROUP

Anni Karttunen, FI-Savon koulutuskuntayhtymä - Savo Consortium for Education, EUedu - Centre for European Educational Policy (FI),

Camilla Alfsen, NO-Vox , Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning (NO),

Haukur Harðarson, IS-Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins, Education and Training Service Centre (IS),

Kirsten Aagaard, NVR, National Knowledge Centre of Validation of Prior Learning, VIA University College (DK),

Pär Sellberg, SE-Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, Departement of Analysis and Research (SE).

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Nordiskt nätverk för vuxnas lärande