

POLICY BRIEF

Quality in validation of prior learning in the Nordic region



Nordic Network for
Adult Learning



The knowledge base for the policy brief has been created by the NVLs Nordic Expert Network on Validation.

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief has been developed by the Nordic Network of Adult Learning (NVL) in order to highlight the results achieved in the field of quality in validation of prior learning, and to point out further actions needed to support the Nordic agenda for the competencies of the future and to strengthen the Nordic economies.

The network consists of the key organisations involved in the development of policy and practice of validation

→ www.norden.org/en/information/competencies-future

in all the Nordic countries and Greenland, Faroe Islands and Aaland. The network has been operating since 2005 when the Nordic Council of Ministers set focus on recognition and validation of prior learning (VPL) as one of the priorities within Nordic adult education cooperation.

STATE OF THE ART

– Quality in VPL in the Nordic region

The network on validation conducted a SWOT analyses among the key providers and educational authorities in the Nordic region in the fall of 2020. The participating countries were Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden as well as the autonomous areas of the Faroe Islands and the Aaland Islands. Altogether 10 organisations took part in the survey representing higher education, vocational education and training, non-formal education (liberal adult education) and government organisations.

Quality of VPL includes

- **Governance** of validation policies and practices
- **Quality assurance** of validation procedures
- **Competence development** of practitioners

BACKGROUND

The NVLs Nordic Expert Network on Validation has been engaged in developing quality in VPL since 2011 as a number network's organisations were awarded a Nordplus project focussing on quality issues in VPL in the Nordic countries. The network served as the steering group for the project. This project paved the way for further development projects within the realm of quality in VPL.

The network has meticulously looked at different viewpoints of quality assurance ranging from developing tools for VPL practitioners, VPL providers and policy makers to advocating quality issues in the Nordic region, Europe and beyond.

Quality in VPL is a core issue for several reasons. Firstly, in order to have successful validation systems and procedures in place, the stakeholders and the surrounding society as a whole has to have *trust in the system*. Through systematic and transparent procedures that include quality assurance mechanisms trust can be better achieved. Secondly, there are *little or no practical tools* for practitioners, providers or policy makers available in the Nordic countries or Europe. Thirdly, quality in VPL is a wide and complex area, and therefore requires constant support and development, and **demands commitment from the practitioners, providers and policy makers**.

Strengths

Most common strengths overall in the Nordic region were **stakeholder cooperation, individual entitlements** as well as **robust legislation and national policies** that steer VPL.

"Strong motivation to develop processes in cooperation with various sectors."

"Cooperation with the fields of research, development and innovation."

"Commitment to working-life oriented and competence-based education, which both enable VPL development."

"Faster training paths."

"Shorter way to education and training and general competence development."

"Legislation on VET promotes validation."

"The roles of actors in VNFIL process are described in the legislation."

"Legal framework is in place, a right for each individual."

Weaknesses

Weaknesses were slightly more varied, but **insufficient guidance and support**, **quality assurance** as well as **insufficient statistics and follow-up** were most commonly outlined.

"Inadequate information and guidance to citizens about the possibilities and benefits of VPL."

"Guidance is more centred to study counselling, not seen as a more wholesome point of view of career counselling and competence development."

"The lack of national quality criteria forms a barrier for a uniform practice between providers."

"There is no education or competence development for VPL professionals."

"Quality Assurance mechanisms do not specifically describe VPL but are more embedded in different aspects, e.g. assessment of learning."

"No data collection or statistics in place, for instance number of individuals being validated."

Opportunities

Opportunities consisted mainly of **cooperation with stakeholders** and **individual entitlements**.

"Solid and long-term cooperation with companies: development of full degrees where context-specific validation is a key element."

"Network cooperation and professional discussions among various VPL actors regionally and nationally contribute to ensure uniformity in the VPL work and the quality of the assessments."

"Cooperation with teachers' training departments for enhanced research opportunities and dissemination of good practices."

"International peer evaluation is carried out more."

"Competences acquired through non-formal learning widen an individual's learning profile and provide a comprehensive view of their capabilities."

"The opportunity to use competences acquired in leisure time activity for formal study and work."

"The migrants would have better chances entering working life if competences were assessed against working life requirements."

Threats

The survey indicated that **competence development** of practitioners and authorities as well as **financing & resources** were seen as most prevalent threats.

"There is a need for an increased focus on the validation practitioners' competences."

"The lack of training requirements for VPL practitioners also means that there may be a lack of knowledge of the overall field around VPL."

"Training providers have varying practices and competences in VPL."

"Making sure that the working life representation exists and that their skills and competences are up-to-date concerning the VPL processes."

"The funding for VPL providers makes it less attractive to invest many hours into the validation."

"Restricted budgets"

"Lack of resources makes it difficult to develop and follow-up development of more specific questions."

The Nordic Quality Compass for Validation of Prior Learning

The network on validation released a set of web-based tools in December 2020. The Nordic Quality Compass tools are based on the work carried out earlier (2011–2016) by the network.

The tools can now be fully operated online with a possibility of creating a personal

→ The tools are available for free in <https://qualitycompass.eu>.

account and development plans. The set of tools consist of two tools for system and procedure evaluation purposes and three tools for practitioners (assessors, counsellors, and coordinators) for self-assessment purposes.

Expanding of VPL is needed

The survey across countries reflects the situation that VPL is predominantly carried out and systematically supported in relation to formal education.

Major and rapid changes in societies demand more than ever that validation in working life gains legal support and stakeholder cooperation in order to support employees' benefits of VPL for competence and career development. Recommendations from NVL Network for Working Life strongly advocate for this focus.

NVL publications on quality in VPL

- 2012
→ [Quality in Validation in the Nordic Countries](#)
- 2013
→ [Quality Model for Validation](#)
- 2015
→ [Nordic competence profiles for validation staff](#)
- 2016
→ [Validation and the Value of Competences – Roadmap 2018](#)
→ [ValiGuide – A PractitionersGuide to Validation](#)
- 2018
→ [Quality in Validation– research report](#)
- 2020
→ [Nordic Quality Compass for Validation of Prior Learning](#)

Future aims and recommendations for providers and decision makers

- Further advocate quality issues both in the Nordic countries and Europe through upcoming events and fora, like the 4th VPL Biennale in 2022, European Validation Festival and Nordic events.
- Support systematic validation of competences gained in working life, outside of formal education system.
- Encourage co-operation and dialogue between stakeholders to guarantee quality in VPL and to uncover latent talent in the workforce (including micro-credentials).
- Promote the Nordic Quality Compass on VPL in national Nordic languages and ensure translations, e.g. via EPALE and NVL cooperation as well as national resources.
- Promote the Nordic Quality Compass on VPL and make quality in VPL count in reaching the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and the Nordic Vision 2030, norden.org/en/our-vision-2030.
- Strengthen guidance in validation via producing common Nordic guidelines.
- Enhance the link between NQFs, non-formal and informal learning and validation for transparency and quality.
- Increase international co-operation on quality in VPL (EPALE, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, VPL Biennale, Validation Festival etc.).