

**POLICY BRIEF**

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# **VALIDATION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

**in the  
Nordic region  
– Connecting  
People and Policies**



Nordic Network for  
Adult Learning

"The NVLs Nordic Expert Network on Validation has been operating since 2005"

## NORDIC CHALLENGES IN VPL

- 1 Emphasis of VPL as a matter of policy
- 2 Need for a national, coherent VPL structure
- 3 VPL links with EQF/NQF/ECVET
- 4 Need to identify target groups in VPL via improved statistics
- 5 Need for data on investments, effects and sustainability
- 6 Need to develop practices for special target groups
- 7 Awareness rising in VPL
- 8 Strengthening of guidance in VPL
- 9 Competence development of VPL practitioners
- 10 Development of VPL methodology
- 11 Closer interaction between working life and education
- 12 Closer interaction between 3rd sector and education/workplaces
- 13 Interaction within HE
- 14 Educational implications of VPL
- 15 Change of attitude towards VPL

## INTRODUCTION

This policy brief has been developed by the Nordic Network of Adult Learning (NVL) in order to highlight the results already achieved in the field of validation in the Nordic region, and to point out further actions needed for the implementation of the European Council recommendation. The recommendation calls upon all the member states to put a holistic and high quality validation system in place by 2018.

The knowledge base for the policy brief has been created by the NVLs Nordic Expert Network on Validation. The network consists of the key organisations involved in the development of policy and practice of validation 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.

## BACKGROUND

It is essential for the Nordic countries to be forerunners in VPL practices and policy-making, since validation of prior learning has great significance to the Nordic economy, flexibility of workforce, access to further training and improving second chances for individuals.

In 2005 the VPL systems were at different development stages in the Nordic countries and the autonomous areas of Faroe Islands, Aaland Islands and Greenland. In Finland and Norway, there were established VPL procedures as well as legislation, whereas Sweden was more focused on validation against the labour market competences. Iceland had just started developing the VPL system and Denmark enforced initial legislation stipulating VPL. In the autonomous areas VPL practices were virtually non-existent.

In 2008 the expert network started working on the document *"Challenges in the work of recognition/validation of prior learning in the Nordic countries"*, which outlined 15 key points that required further attention in the countries. The document has been a guideline for the work of the expert network; various tools for practitioners and decision-makers have been developed since, responding to the needs of the Nordic countries, not forgetting the connection to the European policy-making and guidelines, especially the Council Recommendation of 2012.

### Making Nordic VPL work visible

The expert network cooperates with the EU Commission, European Association for the Education of Adults, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and EPALE

## AWARENESS RAISING IN THE CORE

Awareness raising has been in the core of the expert network. Over the years several Nordic and national conferences on VPL have been organised to address pivotal issues in VPL, which has had tangible effects on the VPL developments in the Nordic countries. For example, the Faroe Islands now have a legislation stipulating VPL and Lifelong Guidance. The Faroe representatives of the NVL expert network have stated that the knowledge and expertise of the network has strongly influenced the development process on the Faroe Islands. In Sweden VPL MOOCs have been developed; in Finland the quality tool developed by the network is used in VPL practitioner trainings;

in Denmark a VPL task force (ministerial level group including labour market organisations and education) has been established; in Iceland, the Roadmap 2018 has been utilized by the Ministry of Education as a benchmarking tool.

The Expert network has become a trusted partner for the EU Commission, the EAEA, and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in terms of co-operation and sharing expertise and experiences. Several international VPL conferences have been organized in co-operation with the Expert network.

The Expert network has developed several tools that deal with quality in validation, competence

profiles of VPL practitioners, e-tools used in VPL, a recommendation on guidance in validation as well as several research papers on validation. A dedicated website for practitioners was developed, as well as a tool – Roadmap 2018 – to monitor and benchmark the Council Recommendation developments in the Nordic countries. The tools have been highlighted on national, Nordic as well as European fora in seminars and workshops.

Additionally, the Expert network is closely co-operating with the EU Commission's Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe – EPALE. Via EPALE the Expert network's development work is disseminated throughout Europe.

### Policy advocacy and Nordic values

- European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning
- European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning
- VPL Biennales

## POLICY ADVOCACY AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

Over the years, the VPL expert network has had the opportunity to influence European policy-making. The network provided comments on the 2014 European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning expressing Nordic values, such as the importance of guidance, competence development of the practitioners and the centrality of the individual in the validation process. Comments were well received and introduced in the European guidelines.

Several expert network members have written country updates to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning updated and published by CEDEFOP and the European Commission. The Inventory reports include good practices from countries

and they are highlighted in the thematic reports derived from the Inventory reports. Nordic practices have gained high visibility and steered the policy-making accordingly.

One of the biggest international validation events in Europe is the VPL Biennale. It was first organized in the Netherlands, the second Biennale was held in Denmark and the third, upcoming event will be held in Berlin, Germany in May 2019. The Expert network has been deeply involved in all the conferences in terms of planning, providing expertise and producing content. Tools developed by the network have been presented in the events and they have thus gained a widespread audience.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Nordic co-operation in the field of adult learning and validation of prior learning is a unique concept and has a strong potential. To achieve optimal impact closer co-operation between the Nordic expert network and the educational authorities as well as other decision-makers on a national level in the Nordic countries is required.

The Nordic countries have emphasised the role of the individual in the centre of the VPL process. In order for the individual to be aware and take full advantage of VPL systems, the policy makers should ensure that the needs of different target groups are appropriately addressed.

Models for follow-up systems and better co-ordination should be further developed.

The world of work should be better integrated with the VPL and lifelong learning processes in terms of competence forecasting and quality assurance.

Competence development of VPL practitioners should be a common Nordic effort in order to maintain and enhance quality in VPL.

As Validation of Prior Learning carries ever more weight in the European policy-making, it should be ensured that the Nordic views and values are taken into consideration in the policy-making processes in Europe. The link between validation and the National Qualification Frameworks should be strengthened, especially concerning non-formal learning; the Nordic countries could have a significant role in paving the way for that process.

## THE NEXT NORDIC STEPS

- Systematic policy advocacy of Nordic views on VPL in Europe
- Closer co-operation between NVL and national decision-makers
- Enhanced link between NQFs and non-formal learning
- Improved follow-up and co-ordination of VPL
- Enhanced working life connections in competence forecasting and quality assurance
- Competence development of VPL practitioners



## Timeline of publications

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- A vertical timeline with a light blue background and a central vertical line. The line has circular markers at each year. The text is in blue and underlined. The timeline ends with a downward-pointing arrow.
- 2008 — [Validation in the Nordic Countries – Policy and Practice](#)
  - 2009 — [E-tools for Validation](#)
  - 2010 — [Challenges in Validation](#)
  - 2012 — [Quality in Validation in the Nordic Countries](#)
  - [Nordic Validation Research and Cases from Practice](#)
  - 2013 — [Quality Model for Validation](#)
  - 2015 — [Nordic competence profiles for validation staff](#)
  - [Guidance in Validation](#)
  - 2016 — [Validation and the Value of Competences – Roadmap 2018](#)
  - [Folkbildning, key competences and validation](#)
  - [ValiGuide – A Practitioners Guide to Validation](#)
  - 2018 — [Quality in Validation – research report](#)