



EUROPEAN
INVENTORY
ON NQF 2020

DENMARK

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Contents

DENMARK	2
European inventory on NQF 2020	2
Introduction and context.....	2
Policy objectives.....	3
Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications.....	4
Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement	7
Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways	8
NQF implementation and impact.....	10
Referencing to the EQF	11
Important lessons and future plans	11
Danish qualifications framework (DK NQF)	12
Acronyms	14
References.....	14

DENMARK

European inventory on NQF 2020

Introduction and context

Denmark is situated well above EU averages on all key education and training indicators and has exceeded EU 2020 targets for early leavers from education and training, adult participation in lifelong learning, participation in early childhood education and care, tertiary educational attainment and employment rate of recent graduates. Pupils show good average basic skills and the share of underachievers, as measured in the 2018 Programme for international student assessment (PISA) results, is well below the EU average and better than, or close to, the 15% EU benchmark (mathematics 14.6%, reading 16% and science 18.7%). Since 2012, the share of underachievers has remained broadly unchanged.

The lack of qualified teachers and support staff risks somewhat affecting teaching quality. The OECD TALIS 2018 study⁽¹⁾ shows that Danish teachers have high self-efficiency from the start of their careers. However, about 20% of teachers below 50 intend to leave teaching within the next five years (double the EU average). Teaching starting salaries are relatively high, but pay structure is rather flat and salaries increase little during the career. Government is reforming the access to teacher training to increase quality and reduce dropout. This introduces a qualitative element into access to teacher training, balancing the financial incentive for institutions to maximise the number of students. While initial teacher education is strong in areas like pedagogy, it is less so in preparing trainees for teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting. Opportunities for professional development are close to the EU average, but are lacking, more importantly, in relation to multicultural and multilingual teaching and special needs (European Commission, 2020).

Denmark has developed a learning-outcome-based, comprehensive national qualifications framework (DK NQF) with eight levels covering all types and levels of qualification awarded and quality assured by public authorities. As of 2019, qualifications awarded outside the formal education system in Denmark can be level assessed and included in the NQF. Implementation of the framework has

(1) OECD (2019). *TALIS 2018 results (volume I): Teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*. Paris: TALIS, OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en>
OECD (2020). *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and school leaders as valued professionals*. Paris: TALIS, OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en>

been a gradual process, starting in June 2009 when it was adopted via an administrative decision by the Ministry for Education (now the Ministry of Children and Education), the Ministry for Science, Technology and Innovation (now the Ministry of Higher Education and Science), the Ministry for Culture and the Ministry for Economic and Business Affairs (now the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs). The NQF itself has no regulatory functions; inclusion of Danish qualifications in the NQF and the quality assurance of qualifications are linked to the existing legal frameworks for publicly recognised qualifications.

Policy objectives

The overall objective of the NQF, as expressed in the referencing report, is to support transparency in the Danish qualifications system and to further the opportunities for mobility and lifelong learning by:

- (a) providing a comprehensive overview of qualifications approved by national authorities, while simultaneously making routes through the education system visible; thus making it easier for students and pupils to find out how to build upon the qualifications they already have;
- (b) aiding mutual recognition between Danish and non-Danish qualifications.

The framework supports development of a transparent education for the purpose of mobility and recognition and a training and learning system without dead ends; it supports learner progression irrespective of prior learning, age or employment situation and consolidates the learning-outcome-based foundation of Danish qualifications.

Creating more transparency in line with the emphasis on lifelong learning and strengthening the relevance of the framework for the labour market and the social partners is of utmost importance. Based on the Parliament's legislation on accreditation in 2017 ⁽²⁾, private and public qualifications not under the remit of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Culture ⁽³⁾ could be level assessed by the Danish

⁽²⁾ <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/r0710.aspx?id=198244>

⁽³⁾ The Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Culture regulate and award certificates and degrees in formal education and supplementary qualifications. Anyone who offers private or public education that is not subject to ministerial regulation under the three above mentioned ministries can apply to be level assessed. These can be, for example, in the areas of continuing education, leisure or culture. The education provider may, for example, be an individual, an association, a ministry (e.g. Ministry of Justice), a directorate or a trade union.

Accreditation Institution ⁽⁴⁾ in relation to the Danish NQF. The institution has, in cooperation with relevant ministries, developed principles and procedures for level assessment and inclusion of education programmes awarded outside formal education and training in the Danish NQF ⁽⁵⁾. The primary purpose of level assessments of private and public education programmes not under the remit of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Culture is to make visible the severity of the learning outcomes of these programmes and provide a better overview of the private education market. Level assessments of such programmes will strengthen the opportunities for interaction between non-formal and public education, such as through credit assessments and validation of prior learning, and thus provide better opportunities for a link between education and the labour market in a lifelong learning perspective. The increased transparency can help counter double education. The level assessments will also strengthen consumer information and can, at the same time, help to ensure that the providers work systematically with learning outcomes and quality assurance.

A level assessment of private and public education programmes is not a public recognition, and gives no rights in the form of grade requirements for credit transfer or access to admission to publicly recognised programmes. However, it increases transparency in the private education market and supports efforts to ensure and develop the quality of education programmes outside the formal education system ⁽⁶⁾.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The Danish qualifications framework is a comprehensive, eight level framework covering all types and levels of qualification awarded and quality assured by public authorities (general education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education (HE) and supplementary qualifications). Private and public education programmes not under the remit of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry of Children and Education and Ministry of Culture have been included. Level descriptors are defined by knowledge (*viden*), skills (*færdigheder*) and competences (*kompetencer*):

⁽⁴⁾ Danish Accreditation Institution: <https://akkr.dk/en/>

Danmarks Akkrediteringsinstitution: <https://akkr.dk/>

⁽⁵⁾ Guideline to level assessment: <https://akkr.dk/wp-content/filer/akkr/Vejledning-til-niveauindplacering-2.-udgave.pdf> (in Swedish).

⁽⁶⁾ Danish Accreditation Institution: <https://akkr.dk/en/about-us/other-assessments/>

Knowledge descriptors emphasise the following:

- the type of knowledge involved; knowledge about theory or knowledge about practice; knowledge of a subject or a field within a profession;
- the complexity of knowledge; the degree of complexity and how predictable or unpredictable the situation in which the knowledge is mastered;
- understanding; the ability to place one's knowledge in a context. For example, understanding is expressed when explaining something to others.

Skills descriptors refer to what a person can do or accomplish and reflect the following aspects:

- the type of skill involved; practical, cognitive, creative or communicative;
- the complexity of the problem-solving; the problem-solving these skills can be applied to, and the complexity of the task;
- communication; the communication that is required; the complexity of the message; to which target groups and with which instruments?

Competence descriptors refer to responsibility and autonomy and cover the following aspects:

- space for action; the type of work/study related context in which knowledge and skills are brought to play, and the degree of unpredictability and changeability in these contexts;
- cooperation and responsibility; the ability to take responsibility for one's own work and the work of others, and the complexity of the cooperative situations in which one engages;
- learning;
- the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning and that of others ⁽⁷⁾.

These descriptors are used to address both full and supplementary qualifications ⁽⁸⁾ and for level assessment of non-formal qualifications.

As some other NQFs, the Danish framework draws a clear distinction between levels 1 to 5 and levels 6 to 8. The latter are identical to the level descriptors in the Danish qualifications framework for higher education and contain explicit references to research-related outcomes. A broader descriptor has been drawn up for level 5 in the DK NQF than for the corresponding level descriptor in the national NQF-HE for short cycle degrees; this makes it possible to include qualifications at level 5 acquired through some vocational education and training and maritime vocational education and training programmes.

⁽⁷⁾ The Danish Evaluation Institute (2011), pp 17-18.

⁽⁸⁾ The role of supplementary qualifications is particularly important for adult education and for continuing vocational education and training. A supplementary qualification can be a supplement (addition) to a qualification, a part (module) or an independent entity not related to any other qualification.

Qualifications at levels 1 to 5 are assigned according to a ‘best fit’ principle, while qualifications at levels 6 to 8 are assigned according to a ‘full fit’ principle; this means that qualifications at this level have to be accredited ⁽⁹⁾ as meeting the legal requirements set by national authorities and according to the qualifications framework for higher education.

All current publicly recognised qualifications in the Danish education system at levels 6 to 8 are included in the qualifications framework for higher education.

The learning outcomes approach is widely accepted in all segments of education and training and is increasingly being used to define and describe curricula and programmes. However, the descriptions are often divided according to subject, meaning that there is not always a comprehensive presentation of the overall learning outcome for the entire qualification. In vocational education and training, for example, the student must comply with both defined learning outcomes and competence objectives to gain admission to the main course after the basic course, as well as to be awarded a VET certificate. In higher education all qualifications are clearly described using learning-outcome-based terminology. This shift from input- to output-based steering is supported by the Danish quality assurance approach of accreditation and learning outcome is an important reference point for accreditation of new and existing programmes (Danish Evaluation Institute et al., 2011).

For the vocational training system, it has been decided not to split up vocational education programmes into modules to which the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET), or other credit points, might be assigned. For foreign pupils in mobility programmes, the course of study is awarded ECVET points in relation to workload. A full-time equivalent programme corresponds to 60 points (ReferNet Denmark, Cedefop 2019) ⁽¹⁰⁾.

⁽⁹⁾ Hansen, J.B. et al. (2013). *Learning outcomes in external quality assurance approaches. Investigating and discussing Nordic practices and developments*: https://www.nokut.no/contentassets/a4895de04f3744f0ab9f31330ad12cd8/learning_outcomes_in_external_quality_assurance_approaches_noqa_report_-220413_250613.pdf

⁽¹⁰⁾ Cedefop; University College Copenhagen (2019). *Vocational education and training in Europe: Denmark* [From Cedefop; ReferNet. Vocational education and training in Europe database]. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/el/printpdf/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/denmark>

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The DK NQF for lifelong learning was established by administrative decision in 2009. No specific legal act on the DK NQF has been adopted. The framework is integrated into sectoral legislation. In higher education, it is implemented via the accreditation Act. On all other levels, it is integrated in educational orders.

Implementation of the DK NQF is coordinated by the inter-departmental National Coordination Committee for the Danish Qualifications Framework, established in 2006 with representatives from the ministries with responsibility for lifelong learning in Denmark: the Ministry of Children and Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture. After 2018, the Danish Accreditation Institution became an advisory member of the committee related to the referencing of private and public education programmes to the DK NQF. Stakeholders are consulted through the committee for all developments regarding the framework implementation and for regular updates. All stakeholders have, for example, been consulted on the principles and procedures for the inclusion of private and public education programmes in the Danish NQF.

At operational level, the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education is the official EQF national coordination point (NCP) ⁽¹⁾. The agency is part of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, established in 2017. The NCP functions as the information office for questions relating to the EQF and the correlation between the EQF and the DK NQF. The NCP informs all stakeholders about the correlation between the NQF and the EQF, including how the national qualifications levels reference to the qualifications levels in the EQF, provides information about the background and purpose of establishing the EQF and administers and develops the website on the Danish NCP and its referencing to the EQF. A main task for the NCP, in addition to coordinating stakeholders involved in framework implementation, is disseminating information to a wider public. Responsibility for other areas, such as quality assurance of qualifications in the national qualification framework and their levelling, lies with the ministries responsible for education and training. (Ministry of Higher Education and Science).

(¹) Denmark's information office for questions relating to the EQF:
<https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks/european-qualifications-framework/eqf-coordination-point>

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways ⁽¹²⁾

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been on the policy agenda in Denmark for about 20 years and is seen as a key element in promoting lifelong learning. A legal framework for validation of prior learning (VPL), based on common principles in adult education and training, has been in place since 2007 ⁽¹³⁾. This ensures individuals' legal rights to have their prior learning validated in relation to the standards of a given education and training programme, no matter where and how the competences have been acquired, and includes the possibilities of obtaining a full or part qualification. The recommended VPL arrangement basically includes four phases: identification, documentation, assessment and recognition. The implementation of VPL is decentralised at the provider level and carried out by the educational institutions in relation to the specific education and training in VET, HE and adult education and training. The results of the validation are guaranteed by the linkage to the national qualifications framework. Most qualifications in the Danish NQF can be acquired on the basis of validation.

In practice, validation of prior learning in Denmark, broadly speaking, provides individuals with the following opportunities:

- (a) to be granted access to formal education and training programmes if they do not meet the formal entry requirements;
- (b) to get exemptions for parts of a formal education and training programme and/or to have an individually tailored education and training programme;
- (c) to acquire a 'certificate of competence' leading to access/exemptions in adult education and training programmes;
- (d) to obtain 'education certificates' for parts of/or a whole education programme on the basis of validation of prior learning.

The certificates issued as a result of the VPL are the same as obtained for the formal programme.

⁽¹²⁾ This section draws mainly on input from Husted, B. (2019). *Vocational education and training in Europe: Denmark*.
https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Denmark.pdf

⁽¹³⁾ Law on changes of different laws under the merit of the Ministry of Education (in Danish): <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/ta/2007/556>

An evaluation of validation of prior learning in the adult education area in Denmark was carried out in 2018 by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) ⁽¹⁴⁾. The survey was sent out to 136 adult education providers and was based on perspectives from the educational institutions regarding their work on VPL. It resembled a survey conducted by the EVA of adult education in 2010 to enable comparison of results and describe the developments. The survey showed that assessment of prior learning was implemented at a larger percentage of institutions in 2018 than in 2010 and that there was strong support and more widespread use for the concept of recognising adults' prior learning, particularly within higher adult education (academy profession degrees, EQF level 5), where in 2010 just 29% of providers of academy programmes had completed at least one VPL and in 2018 this had risen to 88%. However, the survey also showed that there were weaknesses. The validation methodology could have been better (e.g. interviews were not always held and practical exercises not much used). Another challenge exposed by the survey related to the lack of competence development for staff involved in the assessment. There are indications that it is still hard to see how VPL can be a financially viable activity for adult education providers and more than half of the respondents fully or mainly agreed that there was a general lack of knowledge about VPL among the population.

On the basis of the survey results, the Danish Evaluation Institute gave concrete recommendations about better use of VPL, including intensified external communication, improved information on webpages, better support and training for assessors, restructured financial incentives, improved quality of methods and strengthened reliability of the outcomes of the validation (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2019).

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science are responsible for the legislative framework for the assessment of prior learning and for taking national initiatives for implementing the legislation. The ministries have also developed policy guidelines and funded projects with the aim of developing tools, methods and procedures which can help the educational institutions conducting VPL.

A project aiming at developing both common guidelines and digital tools for HE institutions' use of VPL was launched in December 2018, scheduled to finish in 2021. A working group with labour market and HE institutional representation has also been set up. The working group has been tasked with developing

⁽¹⁴⁾ The Danish Evaluation Institute (2019): *Evaluation of prior learning assessment in the adult education area in Denmark* (in Danish; English summary in appendix): <https://www.eva.dk/voksen-efteruddannelse/realkompetencevurdering-paa-veu-omraadet-danmark>

recommendations by the end of 2019 to promote the use of VPL. The working group sent the recommendations to the Danish Minister for Higher Education and Science in April 2020. It has not yet been decided how exactly the ministry will follow up on the recommendations

NQF implementation and impact

The Danish NQF is operational and well embedded in the national education, training and qualification structure. All qualifications from VET, higher education, general education and adult education have been assigned to NQF levels and included in the database <https://www.ug.dk/>. Currently nine private and public education programmes not under the remit of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Culture are level assessed by the Danish Accreditation Institution. Five of these had been included in the NQF by mid-August 2020 ⁽¹⁵⁾ and four have been rejected for not fulfilling the defined principles for being included in the Danish framework. Currently 10 applications are under evaluation.

Inclusion of qualifications into the DK NQF is quality assured through procedures for accreditation and/or approval of new qualifications and procedures for quality assurance of quality and level ⁽¹⁶⁾. The NQF and EQF levels are indicated on new certificates and diplomas in general education, initial VET, continuous VET and higher education, and on VET certificate and higher education diploma supplements.

The NQF is visible to the general public through two (interconnected) websites. The ufm.dk ⁽¹⁷⁾ provides information for an international target group, presenting the NQF and the qualifications it covers. The [ug.dk](https://www.ug.dk) website ⁽¹⁸⁾ addresses a national target group and provides comprehensive information on qualifications, programmes and access. This website also provides

⁽¹⁵⁾ CISPA (Copenhagen International School of Performing Arts), three-year professional acting course (level 6), Finanssektorens Uddannelsescenter, eksamineret finansrådgiver formuesrådgivning (level 6), AkupunkturAkademiet (level 5), Nordisk Akupunkturuddannelse (level 5) and Forsikringsakademiet, certificeret privatkunderådgiver (level 5).

⁽¹⁶⁾ Quality assurance of the inclusion of the qualifications in the DK NQF: <https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks/inclusion/quality-assurance>

⁽¹⁷⁾ [https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks?set_language=en&cl=en\[assessed 23/4/2020\]](https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks?set_language=en&cl=en[assessed 23/4/2020])

⁽¹⁸⁾ UddannelsesGuiden: <https://www.ug.dk/>

About UddannelsesGuiden: <https://www.ug.dk/programmes/aboutugdk>

comprehensive information on the NQF and qualification levels and explains the concept of learning-outcomes-based levels and how these can be used by learners.

Referencing to the EQF

The national qualifications framework for higher education was self-certified to the EHEA framework in 2010. The NQF was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in May 2011 (Danish Evaluation Institute et al., 2011).

The new process for referencing non-formal qualifications to the NQF, as well as the introduction of a new type of master level qualification, might call for an updated report by end of 2021 or beginning of 2022. This will be discussed in the autumn by the co-ordination committee of the NQF.

Important lessons and future plans

In general, the concept of learning outcomes, which were in place in Denmark before the implantation of NQF and EQF, is increasing transparency of qualifications and lifelong learning. The concept is used to support levelling of private and public education programmes, enhance quality assurance and strengthen consumer protection. It is further used to support recognition of foreign qualifications (e.g. in relation to the subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention). In 2020, it is expected that the Danish ENIC-NARIC office will refer to NQF levels in its recognition decisions.

An evaluation was carried out prior to 2018 by the Danish Evaluation Institute ⁽¹⁹⁾ to assess the speed and quality of the formal implementation process, to check how the framework is judged by potential users and to provide a basis for future improvements. The evaluation showed there was good awareness and understanding of, and overall satisfaction with, the Danish NQF for lifelong learning. There is currently no real demand from stakeholders or any national partners to develop the NQF further (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

⁽¹⁹⁾ Danish Evaluation Institute (2013). *Evaluation of the DK NQF* (in Danish). <https://www.eva.dk/ungdomsuddannelse/evaluering-danske-kvalifikationsramme-livslang-laering>

Main sources of information

- The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education hosts the EQF NCP: <https://ufm.dk/en/education/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks/european-qualifications-framework/eqf-coordination-point>
- Danish NQF website: <http://ufm.dk/en/education-and-institutions/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks>
- The Danish Accreditation Institution: <https://akkr.dk/en/>
- Register of qualifications and programmes included in the NQF: <https://www.ug.dk/>
- The Danish Evaluation Institute et al. (2011): *Referencing the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework*. https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-05/DK_Qualifications_Framework_Referencing_Report_and_Self-certification_Report.pdf

Danish qualifications framework (DK NQF)

NQF levels	Certificates and degrees	Certificates for supplementary qualifications (*)	Level assessed private and public education programmes(**)	EQF levels
8	PhD degree (<i>Ph.d. grad</i>)			8
7	Master degree – Candidatus (<i>Kandidat og masteruddannelser</i>) Master degree in arts/fine arts Master degree			7
6	Bachelor degree (<i>Bachelor og diplomuddannelser</i>) Bachelor degree in arts Professional bachelor degree (<i>Professionsbacheloruddannelser</i>) Diploma degree		CISPA 3 years professional acting course Financial advisor wealth advisory (<i>Eksamineret finansrådgiver formuesrådgivning</i>)	6
5	VET certificate Academy profession degrees (<i>Erhvervsakademi uddannelser</i>)	Certificate for supplementary single subject courses at academy profession level Adult VET certificate	Acupuncture (<i>AkupunkturAkademiet</i>) Nordic acupuncture education (<i>Nordisk akupunkturuddannelse</i>) Certified private client advisor (<i>certificeret privatkunderådgiver</i>)	5

NQF levels	Certificates and degrees	Certificates for supplementary qualifications (*)	Level assessed private and public education programmes(**)	EQF levels
4	General upper secondary school certificate (<i>Gymnasiale uddannelser</i>) Certificate for two-year general upper secondary programme (higher preparatory examination) VET certificate	Certificate for supplementary single subject courses at upper secondary level Adult VET certificate Certificate for single subject VET		4
3	VET certificate Certificate for preparatory basic education and training (FGU)	Basic programme VET Certificates for supplementary, single subject VET courses Higher preparatory courses, single course subjects General adult education level D Adult VET certificate Certificates for single subject courses in VET		3
2	Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school – 10th grade (<i>10. klasse afgangsprøve</i>) Certificate for preparatory basic education and training (FGU)	Basic VET certificates General adult education (levels E and F, approximates to 10th grade) Adult VET certificate		2
1	Leaving certificate for primary and lower secondary school (ninth grade) (<i>Folkeskolens afgangsprøve</i>) Certificate for preparatory basic education and training (FGU)	Certificate for preparatory adult education Certificate for general adult education (level G, approximates to ninth grade)		2

(*) Acquired in adult education and training.

(**) These are level assessed private and public education programmes outside the remit of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Ministry of Children and Education and Ministry of Culture.

Source: Adapted from the website of the Danish Ministry of Higher education and Science, 2020.

<https://ufm.dk/en/education-and-institutions/recognition-and-transparency/transparency-tools/qualifications-frameworks/types-of-certificates-and-degrees/hardttableview>

Acronyms

DK NQF	Danish national qualifications framework
EQF	European qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training
VPL	validation of prior learning

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Danish Evaluation Institute et al. (2011). *Referencing the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning to the European qualifications framework.*

https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2020-05/DK_Qualifications_Framework_Referencing_Report_and_Self-certification_Report.pdf

Danish Evaluation Institute (2019). *Evaluation of prior learning assessment in the adult education area in Denmark* (in Danish, English summary in appendix).[https://www.eva.dk/sites/eva/files/2019-](https://www.eva.dk/sites/eva/files/2019-01/Rapport%20om%20evaluering%20af%20RKV%202018_med%20summary_al.pdf)

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