

European Inventory

on validation of informal and
non-formal learning



European inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning Sweden

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1.0 Introduction

The validation of informal and non-formal learning is considered to be a key issue in Sweden with respect to the overall lifelong learning strategy.

Validation is defined by the Swedish government as: "A process which involves a structured assessment, evaluation, documentation and recognition of knowledge and competence possessed by a person independently of how it is acquired."¹

At the moment, no national regulation exists with respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning. The National Swedish Commission on Validation has been set up for the period 2004-2007 to enhance regional cooperation and to explore quality and methodological issues around the topic.

.The responsibility for validation is currently heavily decentralised to local and regional level and strongly embedded in the municipal adult education system. Emphasis is put by the Swedish government on the importance of involvement of educational authorities, business sector organisations, the social partners, universities and municipalities.

¹ Vuxenutbildningslag (Ds 2005:33).

2.0 Public Sector

2.1 Policy on validation

Since the late 1990s, the concept of validation has been mainly used in Sweden in the public education system for adults and is considered to be a key issue in lifelong learning¹. The first initiative in the field of validating informal and non-formal learning was the Adult Education Initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*) (1997-2002). This initiative aimed to combat unemployment through the expansion of adult education in Swedish municipalities. During this initiative a number of pilot projects were launched, focusing on developing new forms of accreditation of prior learning and validation.

This initiative was soon followed by the bill on Adult Learning and the Future Development of Adult Education (*Vuxnas lärande och utvecklingen av vuxenutbildningen*) (2000/2001:72). In this bill, emphasis is put on the fact that any resident in Sweden should be able to have his or her knowledge and competence validated within the framework of municipal adult education, and this validation should be documented. As a result, this bill granted additional funds - until 2008 - to municipalities to undertake further development projects in a range of issues, including validation².

Subsequently, in 2003, this bill was followed by the bill on Validation (Ds 2003:23) (*Validering m.m. - fortsatt utveckling av vuxnas lärande*). In this bill the government stated that it was too early to regulate validation. More time should be given to pilot projects to gather more experiences, and to further discussion before deciding on regulations and passing acts. In the bill, the government emphasises that the responsibility for validation should be shared between educational authorities, business sector organisations, the social partners, universities and municipalities and that especially regional cooperation is essential.

As a result, in December 2003, the Swedish government appointed the “Swedish National Commission on Validation” (Valideringsdelegationen) for the period 2004-2007 to promote and further develop validation methods and enhance (regional) cooperation. The

¹ *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006; *Implementing the “education and training 2010” work programme, 2005 progress report, Sweden*, December 2005, European Commission Education and Culture

² *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

Commission works under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Research (Utbildningsdepartementet). Its main responsibilities are the following¹:

- The development of common principles for validation to ensure quality, legitimacy and equivalence;
- The development of a methodology for validation;
- The strengthening of (regional) cooperation with educational authorities, business organisations, social partners and municipalities;
- To promote and inform about validation; and
- To work out proposals on what measures should be taken to assure validation activities after 2007.

In addition, the Swedish National Commission on Validation has been commissioned by the government to investigate, in cooperation with the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education and the National Agency for Services to Universities and University colleges, how validation of foreign academic degrees, education and work experience could be organised and carried out in a more efficient and qualitative way

One of the most stringent questions in Sweden at the moment is the quality aspect of validation. Due to the very varied nature of validation providers and their methods and models, it is difficult for individuals to identify the level of quality, legitimacy and equivalence of operations carried out by individual providers. As a result, one of the main objectives of the Commission is to describe and propose suitable methods for the development and implementation of quality-assured validation².

The Commission is financed by the Swedish government and has at its disposal €6.5 million (SEK 60 million) until 2007 for its activities. At present there are also a number of ongoing collaboration projects involving the Commission, central industry associations and existing validation providers³.

¹ Valideringsdelegationen website. Retrieved 31 August 07:
http://www.valideringsdelegationen.se/om_oss/in_english.htm; *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

² *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

³ *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

2.2 Top-down initiative

The Swedish government has given the National Agency for School Improvement (*Myndigheten för skolutveckling*) the task of extending adult skills validation pilot schemes in different sectors from 2003-2005. These pilots have been carried out mostly by trade organisations in cooperation with the labour unions and the institutions performing validation, particularly in the following sectors: plastic, chemistry and moulding; house maintenance; transport and environmental protection; building and construction; heating, ventilation, plumbing and sanitary engineering; and the service sector.

The pilots also resulted in an agreement with representatives of the different sectors on ten general competences or key qualifications that should facilitate the identification of knowledge, skills and competences in relation to certain subjects or vocations. These ten competences are: (1) ability to handle information; (2) ability to use the language of the country for communication; (3) ability to solve problems and to plan and organise the work; (4) ability to take responsibility and carry out tasks; (5) ability to cooperate; (6) ability to use different kinds of equipment and tools; (7) quality awareness; (8) aesthetic awareness and attitude; (9) awareness of and attitude to work ethics; and (10) ability to innovate, change and develop.

Although the experimentation period has been short, an evaluation of the University of Göteborg indicates that results have been positive. The following conclusions were drawn¹:

- Several different methods have been used for validation, but it has not yet been established how to guarantee quality, equivalence and legitimate authority;
- Validation must be carried out in close cooperation between the social partners and education and training institutes;
- Traditional methods of validation using written tests and practical work have dominated validation activities;
- There are great differences to be observed among sectors. It is necessary to develop general criteria, which are essential for all sectors; and
- Experimentation will have to continue before general principles can be decided upon.

¹ *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

2.3 Regional and local public sector initiatives

Swedish municipalities are very engaged in validation activities in the framework of municipal adult education. It is estimated that in 2000, two thirds of all municipalities were involved in validation projects and activities and that in 2005 this number increased to 90%. In 2000, approximately 2300 persons had their competence, knowledge and skills validated and in 2005 this number increased to approximately 8000 persons within municipal adult education¹.

In 2005, there were about ten regional operations which provided a “brokerage function” or were in charge of coordinating validation operations in their respective regions. This number has gone slightly up in 2006, but the problem is that their funding is mostly linked to a variety of projects whose funding is external and temporary. In most cases, the responsible authority for these regional operations tends to be the regional skills council (*regionala kompetensråd*), an association of local authorities or similar entity².

CityAkademin holds the role of the centre for validation in the Örebro municipality. The box below outlines its responsibilities and some projects which the organisation has carried out.

City Akademin, a local learning- and validationcenter for adults in Örebro

The commission of CityAkademin is to be the centre for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VPL) within the Örebro municipality through:

- coordination of the VPL process locally and regionally
- being responsible for study and vocational guidance prior to validation
- pursuing visiting work and information work
- developing instruments for validations towards new areas
- producing material for self-evaluation and mapping
- development of methods and documentation
- creating networks for validation of prior learning
- competence development within validation of prior learning

¹ *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

² *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

- follow-up, evaluation and quality assurance.

In May 2005, the Adult Education Board and the Labour Market Council assigned CityAkademin an enhanced commission to create a centre for validation of prior learning. A team (two full-time and four part-time employees), is working strategically and operatively with method development, organisation and spreading knowledge about validation to citizens, companies and education providers. The key goals are to increase the number of persons who are validated and the number of occupations which can be validated.

There are numerous areas of validation, but with a focus on cookery, ventilation and sanitation, industry, forestry, administration, information technology, transport and childcare. The number of validations has increased from 34 in 2004, to 128 in 2005 and 214 in September 2007.

Three method development projects have started with support from the County Administrative Board and the Swedish National Commission on Validation. During 2007, a project with support from the European Social Fund makes it possible to work with a model where the validation process is separated from the education plan with 100 long-term unemployed persons, in cooperation with the local job centre.

The CityAkademin also has a mission from the county administrative board to be responsible for a network with study and vocational counsellors and a web site www.orebro.se/valideringsguiden. In September 2007, the CityAkademin received a European VPL-award for its work on validation.

There are also about ten validation centres which have been established by a local authority, a skills council or a local-authority association. These centres are often involved in the actual performance of validation and the co-ordination and development of validation measures¹.

Another group of institutes involved in validation on a local/regional level are adult educational associations and folk high-schools².

Another large regional and local actor in validation is the employment agencies. They commission validation from a municipality or validation centre. In a questionnaire (September 2005) they filled in for the Swedish National Commission on Validation they indicated the follow sectors in which validation takes most frequently place: (1) production and manufacturing; (2) healthcare, (3) transport, (4) building and construction; (5) handicraft; (6) hotel, restaurant and meal services; (7) installation; (8) management and maintenance; (9) business and administration; (10) computers, ICT and communication; (11) pedagogical work; and (12) buying, selling and marketing. According to the Swedish National Commission on Validation, no validation activities have been commissioned in culture, media, design, environment, national resources or security³.

¹ *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

² *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

³ *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

The Malmö Centre of Validation carried out a project over the period 2004-2006, working with immigrants as a specific target group. The project is described in more detail in the box below:

Making newcomers competencies visible

The Malmö Centre of Validation, with support from ESF funding, ran a validation project with the specific target group of immigrants, during the period 2004-2006.

As part of the city's induction programme, newly-arrived immigrants prepared a portfolio of their competences. The participants, with guidance from teachers and counsellors, prepared a qualification portfolio which gave a detailed description of their knowledge and skills. 1200 participants took part - either newcomers or unemployed people with a foreign background. Among them there were 200 who carried out an occupational assessment and 100 who were given opportunities to validate their competencies against the upper secondary vocational programme.

The external evaluation of the project found, among other things, that the participants were able to better present their competencies. The support from teachers meant that newcomers were given better opportunities to learn basic Swedish language. The support from guidance counsellors and employment officers meant that they have a well-prepared document for matching individuals against work.

In an on-going project, "Making newcomers competencies visible in Skåne" with contribution from the (ERF) European Refugee Fund, the Centre of Validation is implementing this way of working in the 33 municipalities in the Region of Skåne. For the moment the Centre of Validation is co-operating with 24 municipalities. The aims of the new project are:

- that all newcomers in the Region of Skåne work with their qualification portfolio during their introduction to Swedish society and their training in the Swedish language.
- to create more assessors within a great number of occupations.

Another example of a regional validation project is Meritea AB, the Centre for recognition and assessment of prior learning (validation) in the Western Region of Sweden.

Meritea AB, Centre for recognition and assessment of prior learning

Meritea AB has two different areas of business: validation and strategic competence support. It has existed since 1998 and started as a project financed by the EU.

Today Meritea AB is still publicly financed and it is an institution, steered by many actors in society, with representation from the public as well as private business world and social partners.

One success factor of Meritea is its strong network of stakeholders, for example in steering groups and working groups. This close cooperation enables the validation process to be flexible to real demands and qualifications in the labour-market. In contrast to the steering groups, the working groups are operative, i.e. they work together to find out which methods are the most suitable ones to be used within the specific

sector/vocation.

The validation methods used have to take all kind of learning into consideration; formal, informal as well as non-formal. The setting where knowledge and competence have to be recognised depends upon the purpose and expected outcome of the validation. The documentation and outcome might be upper secondary school grades (not the grade “fail!”), competence certificates of different kinds as well as different kinds of qualification portfolios depending upon purpose, vocational background and ethnicity.

In the portfolio, the individual draws up his/her knowledge and competence based upon his/her own experience and ten general key competences, as well as those designed by the Folk High Schools. This is prepared individually, but in group for the benefit of reflection and coaching.

Another focus for the methods of Meritea AB is accentuating situated learning, which is expressed through an ambition to assess knowledge and competence in a “real/authentic” setting, i.e. a work environment. If this is not possible, a realistic setting in a VET-school is created.

A key aim of the validation process for Meritea is the individual’s employability. The results of validation for construction workers show its usefulness and importance - 85 % of participants in the whole validation-process to obtain the qualification for a skilled worker gained employment immediately after the validation process was completed.

2.4 Validation in practice

2.4.1 Benefits

For participants, validation of skills and competences can be seen as a “ritual” which increases their self awareness and gives them a chance to clearly identify their skills and competences which can help them to gain a documented qualification or to find the right level of education at which to start. It leads to a more professional and reflective attitude as the participant’s knowledge is confirmed and challenged, which leads to more reflections on what one does and wants to do in the future.¹

2.4.2 Legal framework

In order to qualify to enter a national upper secondary programme, a student needs to have completed compulsory education with pass grades in Swedish, English and mathematics. However, there are three ways to by-pass this regulation through the validation of prior learning²:

1. Municipal adult education accepts students without any formal qualifications. The student’s previous knowledge and experiences are validated and the student is accepted to enter a course when they see fit. Municipal adult education is part of the

¹ Fejes. A, power point presentation: *Transition of care workers to assistant nurses- recognition of prior learning in in-service training*. University of Linköping.

² *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

formal education system so the credits and qualifications the student receives are equal to those in upper secondary education both in the labour market and as entrance requirements for higher education.

2. Folk high schools are part of the non-formal education system. They decide their own entrance requirements and have no fixed curricula but can decide what education and training programmes to offer. A three-year education at a folk high school qualifies for university entrance, which means an entrance into the formal education system. Folk high schools also offer vocational training programmes, of which their qualifications are usually accepted on the labour market.
3. Until 2008, an adult of 25 years old with at least four years of work experience and with a knowledge of Swedish and English corresponding to upper secondary school education, fulfils the requirements for basic eligibility to higher education. From 2008, universities and university colleges can decide themselves on the grounds of selection to be used for up to one third of their places. This gives the higher education institutions a possibility to assess informal and non-formal learning, work experience etc. with relevance to the education they are applying for¹

2.4.3 Participants in validation

Three main categories of adults can be identified as target groups for validation of their competences²:

1. Adult immigrants with vocational training and/or experience from their country of origin who apply for a job in Sweden or who might need additional training;
2. Adults who apply for education or training and who have competence from non-formal and informal learning. They can get their training duration reduced, if their competences can be documented and acknowledged; and
3. Employees and unemployed persons who wish to start a new career.

2.4.4 Elements of the validation procedure

In terms of the validation procedure itself, the National Swedish Commission on Validation has identified a list of elements in the validation process. This list does not imply that all elements must always be performed, or that they have to take place on a single occasion¹.

¹ This regulation is not entirely new, but an amendment has been made to increase the number of student places this ground of selection can be used for.

² *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

Elements of a validation procedure and structure to be followed²:

- **General competence mapping** :The individual performs - either alone or together with a guide or official - a first exploration of knowledge and skills. The reason for validation is examined and a decision is made on whether to continue to the next phase or not. Interviews and self-assessment tools are used to provide a more diverse picture of the real skills possessed by the individual. The estimated time for this phase is 1-2 hours and should lead to a recommendation or formal statement.
- **In-depth competence mapping**: Specialists (vocational teachers, occupational assessors, representatives of industry associations or a vocational committee) in the specific subject or occupational fields intended for validation should participate in this phase. Together with the individual, the specialist will agree on the level and status to which the knowledge and skills validated correspond. This phase will require 2-8 hours and consists mainly of various theoretical and practical elements resulting in a more detailed description of skills. Documents are to be issued in the form of a formal statement or a certificate.
- **Competence assessment – statement of attainment** : The third phase can consist of an assessment of skills in relation to established skills descriptions or course objectives. The assessment is done by a vocational teacher or occupational assessor. This phase normally lasts 1-10 days and is implemented in the form of theoretical and/or practical elements. A certificate is normally issued at the end of this phase.
- **Competence assessment by formal means – certificate, authorisation, examination etc.**:The fourth phase focuses on verification. The objective is to issue a final documentation in the form of a relevant legal document. There is a risk that the individual may not reach the level of knowledge required in the tests or exams. If this is the case, a certificate can be issued indicating the modules or elements that the individual passed during validation. This phase normally lasts 1-10 days and is to be performed by a quality-assured assessor.

The Commission indicates that each validation procedure should result in some form of documentation indicating³:

- The aim and objective;
- The model(s) used for validation;
- The method(s) used for validation;

¹ *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

² *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

³ *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

- The supporting materials or tools on which the assessment - if any - was based;
- The validation provider's authority to issue documentation; and
- The method used for quality assurance of the process.

The Commission hopes that lead times in the validation process are reduced - as models and methodologies are further developed - to between two and ten days at most¹.

2.5 Higher Education

A factor which complicates matters in the field of higher education is that the concept of validation in this sphere is also used to refer to measures to "validate" foreign university graduates and the extent to which they can have their academic documentation "valued". As such, these measures do not fall under the definition of "validation of informal and non-formal learning" but under the definition of "professional or academic recognition". The Swedish National Commission on Validation emphasises this distinction. Professional recognition refers to the assessment of a completed and documented foreign academic degree and to value it in relation to the nearest equivalent Swedish degree while academic recognition refers to the "crediting" of subjects included in a non-completed degree. The validation of informal and non-formal learning does not involve an evaluation of documents but an assessment of the individual's actual knowledge and skills².

Since autumn 2003, all higher education institutions are obliged to assess prior and experiential learning of applicants who demand such an assessment and who lack the formal qualifications (or the documentation of such qualifications)³.

Higher Education institutions in Sweden have shown an increasing interest in validation and are expected to play an important role in the development of a common validation system. Several universities and Folk High Schools (Folkhögskolor) have either jointly or individually set up initiatives to explore the issue of validation.

An example is the centre for adult learning and lifelong learning in Sweden – Encell. The Centre has put aside funds for a research initiative, which aims to explore and develop the validation concept. The different projects in this initiative are "owned" by several of the key stakeholders, such as municipalities, universities, adult education institutions and trade

¹ *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

² *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006

³ *National reports 2004-2005, towards the European higher education area, Bologna process, Sweden*, 14 January 2005

unions¹. Encell has been set up in 2001 by the School of Education and Communication in Jönköping in assignment of the Swedish government.

Another example is the Association of Swedish Higher Education (SUHF) which is an organisation for institutional co-operation on a voluntary basis. In total, 42 universities and university colleges in Sweden are members (15 universities, 20 university colleges and seven university colleges of art). In the period 2002-2003 they undertook a project "Validering av reell kompetens inom högskolan" to coordinate an assignment given by the Swedish government to the higher education institutions – to develop methods for validation of competences. The project also functioned as a support to higher education institutes with respect to their work to build up their own systems for validation. The project was funded by the member education institutes (which receive funding from the Swedish government to undertake validation activities)².

Then, in the period 2005-2006, three universities (*Linköping, Umeå and Malmö*) have experimented with the validation of previous experience and competences to shorten the training for nurses and teachers. The University of Malmö developed a specific method to validate the practical experience of nursery assistants (*barnskötare*) with previous university experience.

The requirement is that the person will have been credited with at least 40 credits (*poäng*) at higher education level, and then also credited with 40 further credits due to their previous work experience within a nursery. This ensures the person fulfils the requirement of 80 credits needed for acceptance onto *Särskild Lärarutbildning* ("Special teacher programme").³ The programme (60 credits) leads to a university degree for teaching at a nursery and/or primary school.⁴

The key issues highlighted in the validation process could be traced back to the curriculum of the introductory university courses⁵ and their aims. The validation process includes tasks which need to be completed individually or within a group, in a report or in a seminar. By this process the examiners receive the required information to judge, value and confirm the nursery assistant's competence, in relation to the aims of the course.

¹ http://www.encell.se/projekt_validering.asp

² Information provided by email by the Association of Swedish Higher Education; SUHF website. Retrieved September 2007: <http://www.suhf.se/Templates/Article0.aspx?PageID=58c7c228-167e-47a2-8c6e-8ac7d250da94>

³ http://www.lut.mah.se/ruc/utv_2002.asp

⁴ A requirement is that the person works part time at a nursery/primary school during the degree.

⁵ *Att bli lärare* ("To become a teacher") (10 Credits) and *Utveckling och lärande* ("Development and teaching") (10 Credits)

A target group of 110 individuals were identified with the help of a questionnaire, which was sent to the three districts of Sweden.¹ The programme has so far had three rounds of admission and the last group will start this autumn. Currently, 45 of the 48 nursery assistants who have completed the whole process² have received university credits for their previous work experience.

¹ Skåne, Blekinge och Halland

² For further information see www.lut.mah.se/utbildning/validering/

3.0 Private Sector

3.1 The role of social partners

Swedish social partners play an important role in the education and training system in Sweden and are involved in validation projects with the Swedish National Commission of Validation and often involved – at sectoral level - in validation projects together with other national, local or regional stakeholders. Several examples below are illustrative of this.

The Swedish Locksmith's Association initiated a project focusing on criteria for validation of competence for locksmiths¹.

SFCC (Swedish Federation of County Councils) and SALA (Swedish Association of Local Authorities), and their members engaged in the development of methods for validation of competences for teaching, care and health care at upper secondary and university level².

The Non-manual Workers' Union developed an interactive tool for members to identify and organise existing competences and to identify competences that need to be developed through further studies³.

The Food Workers' Union initiated a lifelong-learning project focused on validation and skills development for employees in the food sector⁴.

3.2 Individual companies

Validation by individual Swedish companies is mostly used as a tool when recruiting new employees - for example when identifying competences in relation to job tasks – and as a tool to secure and value competence at the work-place⁵.

¹ UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

² UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

³ UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

⁴ UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

⁵ UNICE, CEEO, UEAPME, 2005, *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications, third follow-up report 2005*

4.0 Take-up of validation activities

4.1 Take-up rate of validation activities

According to the Swedish National Commission on Validation, approximately 25,000 people had their competences or part of them validated - taking into account validation activities of employment agencies, folk high schools and in-service training in companies. Of these, approximately 10,000 have so much of their informal and non-formal competences validated that they can get documentation or credits for it or can use it to reduce their period of formal training¹.

The Swedish National Commission on Validation estimates that the beneficiaries of validation can be divided into three groups²:

- (1) unemployed (often immigrants) and have their competence validated as part of a counselling or training programme;
- (2) employees in municipalities or private companies and have their competence validated as part of an in-service training programme;
- (3) students who want to change career or enter a new programme and therefore need to have their competence validated.

The main reasons to participate in validation are: employability, change of career or wish to have to follow reduced period of training.

However, there are reports of validation costs as high as €5000. In this case, formal education would actually cost less.

4.2 Barriers influencing the take-up rate of validation activities

The following factors and circumstances are mentioned to be a barrier blocking the take-up of validation activities³:

1. Many social partners and other organisations are reluctant to start validation activities because they are concerned about how much work is involved;

¹ *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

² *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

³ *Thematic overview, the vocational education and training (VET) system of Sweden*, refernet CEDEFOP

2. Most municipalities and other actors are only small and only have limited competence;
3. Sometimes validation is seen as a part of training activities and thus only available for enrolled students;
4. Validation is particularly difficult for immigrants who lack a thorough understanding of the Swedish language. Most institutes demand that they first learn Swedish instead of integrating it in the same process.
5. Lack of motivation among individuals because Swedish education institutes (folk high schools, municipal adult education and higher education) offer access without formal qualifications. Thus validation is not necessary.
6. Adults with basic education are often not convinced that it will lead to a job.
7. The Swedish labour market is open and not regulated, with few regulated occupations. So employers do not ask for formal qualifications or documents, but increasingly ask where the individual worked before and then hire him or her on a trial basis. Formal qualifications do not automatically lead to higher salaries as personal performance is more important, reducing the need for validation.

5.0 Conclusions

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is considered to be a key issue in Sweden with respect to the overall lifelong learning strategy. The first initiative in the field of validating informal and non-formal learning was the Adult Education Initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*) (1997-2002). This initiative aimed to combat unemployment through expansion of adult education in Swedish municipalities. During this initiative a number of pilot projects were launched, focusing on developing new forms of accreditation of prior learning and validation.

At the moment, no national regulation exists yet with respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The responsibility for validation is currently heavily decentralised to local and regional level and strongly embedded in the municipal adult education system. Emphasis is put by the Swedish government on the importance of involvement of educational authorities, business sector organisations, the social partners, universities and municipalities.

Due to the much decentralised nature of validation and varied nature of validation providers and their methods and models, it is difficult for individuals to identify the level of quality, legitimacy and equivalence of operations carried out by individual providers. As a result, the National Swedish Commission on Validation has been set up for the period 2004-2007 not only to enhance regional cooperation, but also to describe and propose suitable methods for the development and implementation of quality-assured validation¹. The Commission is responsible for working out proposals on what measures should be taken to assure validation activities after 2007.

At the moment, Swedish social partners are involved in initiatives of the Commission and in other local/regional initiatives. Several individual companies are offering validation to their employees, but our research suggests that this is not taking place yet on a very high scale. Validation activities in the third sector seem to be negligible.

¹ *Interim report of the Swedish national commission on validation*, 15 December 2006