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

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1.0 VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN SWEDEN

By Vasilios Nikitas (ECOTEC Research and Consulting)

1.1 Introduction

In the same way as in the other Nordic countries (Cedefop, 2000) policies are aimed at the development of methods and systems for validation of competences, form part an overall lifelong learning strategy. *Kunskapslyftet* (1997) was the first major initiative in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning paving the way for many of the projects we are seeing today. A survey in 2001 showed that 67% of Sweden's municipalities had been involved in validation projects.¹

In a government report validation is defined as, “a process of structured judgement, valuation, documentation and acknowledgement of knowledge and competence that a person possesses no matter how these were acquired”.² In the same report it is advised that the educational sphere (public) together with the industrial relations partners (social partners), should share the responsibility for developing a solid validation methodology. Considering the limited resources of the municipalities the report continues by recommending stronger regional co-operation, where the responsibility should be shared between different actors³.

According to the Ministry of Education (2003), almost 8000 individuals (300 with foreign background) were “validated” in 2000. The total time spent in validation process is estimated to match around 70 000 weeks of study corresponding roughly to a mean of 9 weeks per head.⁴

1.2 Existing Initiatives: Public Sector

1.2.1 National

In line with recommendations included in the Communication by the Ministry of Education⁵ the Government post 2004 created a “Validation delegation” (*Valideringsdelegationen*)⁶ to initiate and organise different actions, aimed at increasing the credibility of the validation process for the adult population.

¹ RTP Stockholms Län (www2.ab.lst.se/tillvaxtavtal/pdf/RTP_jan_2004.pdf)

² “Validering m.m. – fortsatt utveckling av vuxnas lärande”, Ministry of Education (Ds. 2003:23)

³ For instance Business Sector Organisations, Universities and Municipalities.

⁴ “National policies and practices in validation of non-formal and informal learning”, D. Colardyn and J. Bjornavold (2004)

⁵ DSs. 2003:23, http://utbildning.regeringen.se/propositionermm/ds/2003/ds_2003_23.pdf

⁶ www.valideringsdelegationen.se

The key task of the Delegation will be to create a more coherent and adaptable methodology when using the validation instrument, no matter whether the actor is from the public, private or “third” sector. The Delegation’s task will run until 2007 and will have SEK 60 million (€6.6 million) at their disposal for fulfilling its aims.

1.2.2 Sub-national

“The Validation Centre of Gothenburg”⁷; which is part of GR⁸. Has been developing validation methodologies and offering “validation processes”. The Centre is currently offering validation in the following sectors and occupations:

- **Health:** nurse assistant (*undersköterska*),
- **Construction:** bricklayer, site worker, wood/concrete construction skills,
- **Technology and Production:** workshop engineering, welder and electrician,
- **Business:** business administration.

The validation process includes three steps: i) review of work experiences, ii) during a week the person’s knowledge and competences are assessed by an adviser, who ‘shadows’ the person at work and iii) the person executes the task that he/she has chosen to be “validated” on under the supervision of the adviser and the vocational teacher. The duration of the validation process varies from 1 to 8 weeks depending on the sector.

"The Validation Project" (*Valideringsprojektet*) from Stockholm is another example of a regional project, which in this case is aimed at validating prior knowledge and skills of unemployed people. The project started in February 2004 and covers 30 municipalities in Stockholm and Södertälje. The project is led by Botkyrka municipality which has been providing validation services to unemployed people, as one of their active labour market policies, since 2001.

The Project has helped 500 unemployed people to get their skills and prior learning recognised. The project is a two-step process for the participants. At first they enter a three week initial assessment period during which the participants will;

- with the help of the project assistants, carry out a self-assessment of their own skills, experiences and prior learning;
- identify the line of work they would like to do;
- assess the skills they require to obtain a job in that field⁹; and
- spend one or two days in a local vocational school to help analyse whether they have made a realistic assessment of their skills.

⁷ *Valideringscentrum i Göteborg*, www.validering.goteborg.se/

⁸ Co-operation between 13 municipalities in West Sweden (860 000 inhabitants)

⁹ This assessment is enabled through the project's close co-operation with 30 different (bipartite) sectoral organisations who have outlined the skills required to acquire a job in their sector.

The second phase of the project includes a one-month work placement during which the skills of the participants are assessed in practice. At the end of the placement, the participants receive a diploma outlining their relevant skills and another diploma summarising the skills they are still lacking. The former diploma is aimed at potential employers, and the latter at jobcentres and vocational schools. A project evaluation is due to be ready in the beginning of 2006, but the mid-term results indicate just over 50 per cent of the project participants have found sustainable employment fairly soon after the project. The project differs from the majority of validation projects in the country with its close links to sectoral organisations

Furthermore, the Utbildingscentrum Tjön has developed a methodology to validate non-formal learning taking place in the workplace. Starting from the realisation that not all students learn equally well in a school environment. Many subjects required for the high school leaving diploma can be learned while working. The Utbildingscentrum Tjön developed the “Workplace education” system (FSG-System) which allows pupils to spend 3 days working – unpaid – in a business in order to accumulate the necessary credits, to be awarded the high school leaving diploma. Only the core subjects Swedish, Mathematics and English are taken in school. Under the supervision of a “hand leader”, the pupil learns the required skills at the most suitable individual speed. While competences are set, methods and succession of learning is flexible. The assessment takes place externally by the so-called pedagogical leader from the local Utbildingscentrum who is an expert in the educational standards to be achieved. The assessment of the student’s achievements relies on the hand leader. Grades and credits to be awarded are discussed between the hand leader, the pedagogical leader and the student. Once the necessary number of credits has been accumulated, the pupil is awarded the high school diploma. Due to the flexibility of the Swedish school system, the pedagogical leader can award credits for a wide range of competences acquired in a variety of settings, as long as verification of these skills is being done by a third party (i.e. not the student or their parents).

1.2.3 Higher Education

One university that has experimented with various approaches to validation of *reell kompetens* (“real competences”) is the University of Malmö. Currently a project is targeting nursery assistants (*barnskötare*) with previous university experience, is in its second year and will continue until 2006.

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. Ensuring, the person fulfils the requirement of 80 credits, needed for acceptance onto *Särskild Lärarutbildning* (“Special teacher programme”).¹⁰ The programme (60 credits) leads to a university degree for teaching at a nursery and/or primary school.¹¹

¹⁰ http://www.lut.mah.se/ruc/utv_2002.asp

¹¹ A requirement is that the person works part time at a nursery/primary school during the degree.

Malmö University has developed a specific methodology for validating the practical skills, nursery assistants have gained at work. The key issues highlighted in the validation process could be traced back to the curriculum of the introductory university courses¹² 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.

A target group of 110 individuals were identified with the help of a questionnaire, this was sent to the three districts of Sweden.¹³ 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 process¹⁴ have received university credits for their previous work experience.

1.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector

One recent initiative that combines key actors from the industry, social partners and the public sector is *Kunskapshuset* ("The Houses of Knowledge").¹⁵ This initiative includes ABB (Sweden), Skandia, *Metallindustriarbetareförbundet* ("Trade union for metal workers") and Lernia¹⁶, who all own, a similar share of the organisation. Since November 2003 they have offered welders the opportunity to participate in a one-day training course and gain a CNC Certificate. Currently, *Kunskapshuset* is offering three different types of certificates (green, blue and black) dependent on the employee's previous expertise in the field.

One of the key selling points for *Kunskapshuset* when offering their service, is the small amount of time required for the course, the organisation has put a strong emphasis on developing a strong and credible methodology. This was developed through close consultation with a network of industrial companies in the sector. The test consists of both a theoretical and a practical part, which includes answering questions on 14 different subject areas (theoretical) and the production of three details (practical).

Since the start of the programme over 160 people, have participated in the course and a further 700 are planning to attend in the near future. *Kunskapshuset* is planning to expand their services by offering certification courses in the maintenance of production equipment, as well as for plastics and moulding.

¹² *Att bli lärare* ("To become a teacher") (10 Credits) and *Utveckling och lärande* ("Development and teaching") (10 Credits)

¹³ Skåne, Blekinge och Halland

¹⁴ For further information see www.lut.mah.se/utbildning/validering/

¹⁵ www.kunskapshuset.com

¹⁶ Lernia is a publicly owned company that is engaged in vocational learning skills (www.lernia.se)

1.4 Conclusions

The experiences from *Kunskapslyftet*, and in particular the importance of making the best use of resources at local and regional level, have provided important input to the validation strategy which the Ministry of Education presented in its Communication in 2003. At this stage, the Communication does not suggest the introduction of legal framework supporting and regulating validation of non-formal and informal learning. Instead, a number of practical and budgetary proposals have been made (e.g. *Valideringsdelegationen*), aimed at a systematic development of methods and systems. The lack of legal proposal conflicts with the expectations of the 2001 preparatory proposal on validation¹⁷.

Finally, those responsible for Swedish adult education, training and learning will increasingly have to consider how a synergy between the diversity of learning provisions and provider's best can be achieved. Two important conclusions are:

- Policies on adult education, training and learning must increasingly focus on how in-house and work based learning can be better co-ordinated with public adult education and training provisions; and
- How to link formal and non-formal learning closer together.

The recent assignment of *Valideringsdelegationen* and emerging validation initiatives that involves partners from different sectors (e.g. *Kunskapshusen*) indicates an increasing awareness of the benefits of cross-border co-operation and could lead to a common methodological framework being created.

1.5 Stakeholders' responsibilities

In the Communication by the Ministry of Education it was outlined that the responsibility for validation in Sweden should be shared between the educational system and the industrial actors. However, the Communication accepts that the support for establishing a single comprehensive system for validation is currently lacking from the relevant actors, especially from the business community. Below follows a brief discussion on the key stakeholders and their respective roles.

1.5.1 Swedish Government

The importance the Swedish Government attaches to the concept of validation has increased since the mid-1990s, as can be seen through the various initiatives such as *Kunskapslyftet* and a plethora of projects related to the integration of foreigners. The Lisbon process, which aims to increase the employment level within Member States, has also acted as a catalyst. The added importance given to validation by the Government could also explain why the Swedish labour market does not rely to the same extent as the other Member States on formal education and/or "regulated" occupations¹⁸.

¹⁷ "Validering av vuxnas kunskap och kompetens", SOU 2001:78

¹⁸ DSs. 2003:23, http://utbildning.regeringen.se/propositionermm/ds/2003/ds_2003_23.pdf

According to the Government the concept of validation is currently at an important development phase. Higher Education has moved faster, as it already a common system for the validation of “real competences” (*reel kompetens*), whereas such a system does not currently exist within industry. Although, the Government’s aim is the establishment a common and comprehensive validation system, it will act as a facilitator between the different actors rather than impose such a system.

1.5.2 State Agencies

The Validation Delegation was established in 2004, with the purpose of facilitating discussion between the different actors, implementing the development of the “merit portfolio” system. The agency is independent, but has close ties with the National Centre for Flexible Learning, which also promotes the concept of validation.

Lernia AB, a state owned company, is the market leader within the sector of skills enhancement and vocational training of adults. In 2003 Lernia educated and trained 47 000 people in more than 100 locations and currently have offices in 75 locations across Sweden. However, Lernia does not currently hold the right to issue certificates, which is exclusively held by the municipalities’ and county councils’ adult education institutions, the National Centre for Flexible Education and Liber Hermods AB. Lernia has made an application to the Government for obtaining the right to issue certificates for learning co-ordinators as well (*utbildningssamordnare*).

1.5.3 Regional Actors

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities (*Svenska Kommunförbundet*) and the Federation of Swedish County Councils (*Landstingsförbundet*) represents the governmental, professional and employer-related interests of Sweden’s 290 local authorities, 18 county councils and two regions.

Both organisations share the view of the Government, that the responsibility of validation should be shared between the education system and the business community. Although, the organisations do not envisage it will play an active role in the development of the validation process, they instead put a emphasise on the importance of the employment and industry policy, which should support the validation process.

Other regional initiatives include *Valideringscentrum i Göteborg*¹⁹, which is an initiative run by the local authority, adult education, trade unions and the business community.

¹⁹ <http://www.validering.goteborg.se/>

1.5.4 Trade Unions

The big trade unions (LO, TCO and SACO) all support the Government's initiative to strengthen the validation process, as outlined in the Government's Communication. However, SACO's position is that further analysis is required before establishing a common validation system. Whereas LO would rather see a committee established, instead of a new permanent authority. The decision by the Government to proceed with the establishment of *Valideringsdelegationen*, but restricting its life expansion to 2007, could be seen as accommodating the views expressed by the trade unions.

1.5.5 Employer's Association

The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (CFE) is a pro-business interest organisation representing close to 54,200 Swedish companies. It consists of 48 trade and employer association members, with a 1.6 million labour force covering 70% of the Swedish private sector. In contrast to the Government's initiative, CFE would rather see a more flexible validation system, where responsibility is shared between private education enterprises and other actors.

1.5.6 Higher Education and Third Sector

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. The University of Linköping has established an institution for adult learning. Folk High Schools (*Folkhögskolor*) around Sweden have also been involved in validation initiatives.

Finally, Encell²⁰ (the national competence centre for adult education) 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 unions.

1.6 Conclusions

The promotion of the validation process in Sweden has mainly been the responsibility of the state, complemented with regional and local initiatives. However, as the concept of validation has become increasingly important the Higher Education institutions have shown a greater interest.²¹ The Commission on Higher Education Admission²² mentions validation as one of the key tools when setting out to increase direct transition to higher education; change how the efforts of upper secondary school students are currently rewarded; reduce the incentive to retake grades in order to increase one's competitiveness; and help to broaden recruitment.

²⁰ http://www.encell.se/projekt_validering.asp

²¹ "Att värdera kunskap, erfarenhet och kompetens", P. Andersson, N-Å Sjösten and S-E Ahn

²² "Tre vägar till den öppna högskolan", SOU 2004:29