

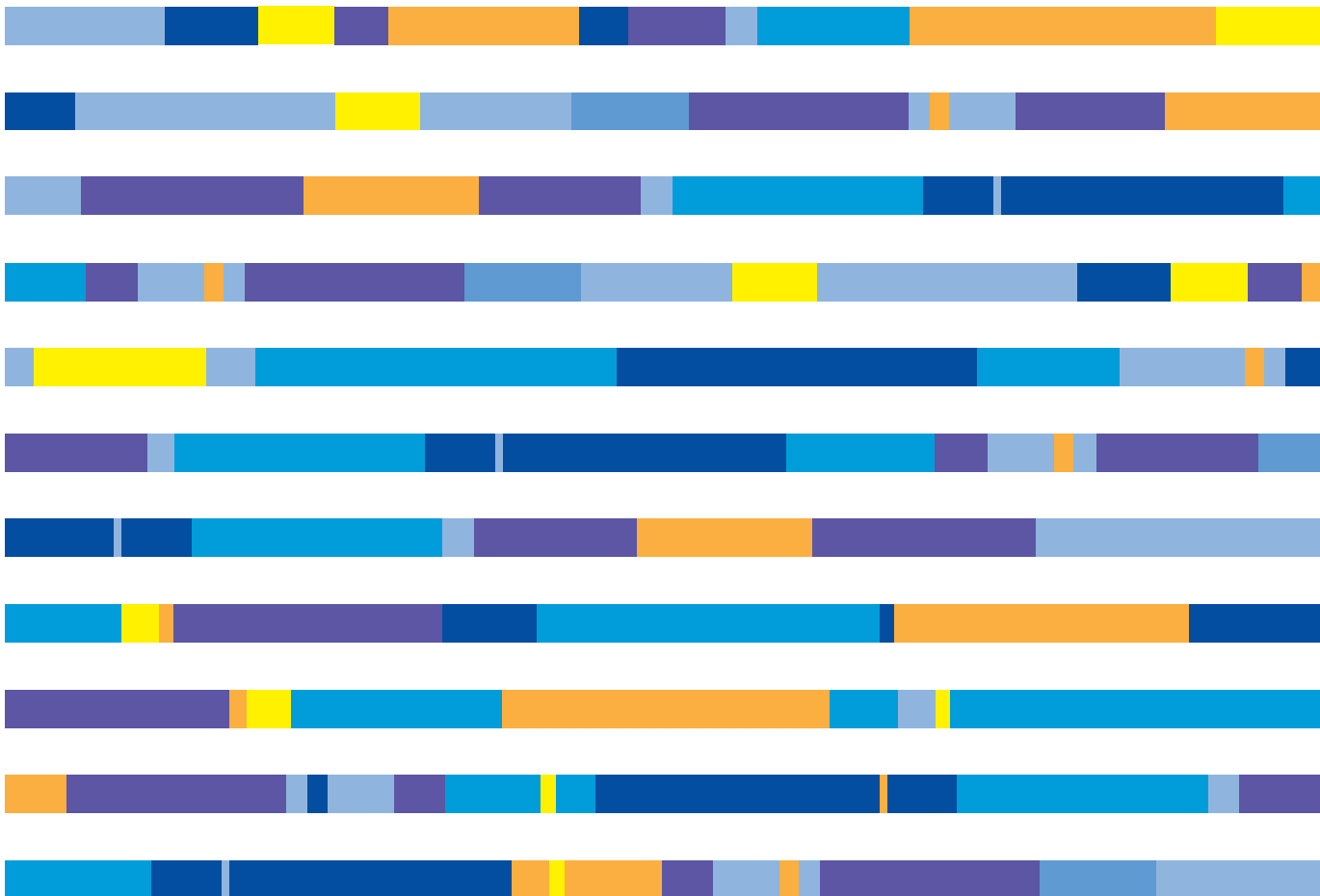


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# European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

COUNTRY REPORT:  
**ICELAND**

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## Acknowledgements

This country update was produced by Fjóra María Lárusdóttir, as part of the 2023 update to the European Inventory on validation, a project managed by ICF (lead consultants: Manuel Souto-Otero, Michael Richardson, Ilona Murphy, Valentina Musso and Flora Dussine) in association with 3s (lead consultants: Karin Luomi-Messerer, Monika Auzinger, Julia Fellingner, Mariya Dzhengozova and Daniel Unterweger) under the supervision of a Steering Committee formed by the European Commission (Koen Nomden, Aline Juerges and Klara Engels-Perenyi), Cedefop (Ernesto Villalba-Garcia), and the ETF (Maria Rosenstock).

The report has benefitted from feedback from the European qualifications framework Advisory Group (EQF AG) members for Iceland as well as other national-level quality assurance (QA) contacts with expertise in validation.

Work was carried out under DG EMPL Implementing Framework Contract EAC-01-2019 - Request for Services VT/2021/059

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Please cite this publication as:

Lárusdóttir, F. M., (2024). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update: Iceland*. European Commission and Cedefop.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/european-inventory-validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning-2023-update-iceland>

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# 1 Abstract

In Iceland, a national strategy for the validation of non-formal and informal learning is in place for people with low levels of education and qualifications. Most of the work that has been undertaken on validation has been coordinated by the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) in cooperation with 14 regional lifelong learning (LLL) centres. The ETSC was established in December 2002 by the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ) and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA).

Since 2010, the ETSC has also been owned by the Federation of State and Municipal Employees, the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland, and the Ministry of Finance. The target group for the work of the ETSC and of its validation activities is people with little formal education; around 22% of people (aged 25-64) on the labour market have not completed Upper Secondary Education (Statistics Iceland, 2021). Validation aims mostly at shortening study paths, which most candidates aim to complete. New developments have taken place with a focus on validation in working life against specific job criteria, leading to a professional certification linked to the Icelandic Qualification Framework (ISQF) level. Also, at university level there have been brief pilot projects conducted and establishment of networks for building a foundation for further developments. Validation practices lean on the regulation set forth in 2011 for validation of prior learning (1163).

Interest in validation activities in Iceland has increased on all levels over recent years. Authorities are aiming for increased access to the process.

# 2 Introduction

In Iceland the definition of validation of prior learning was introduced in the first guidelines in 2006 Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Iceland (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins, 2006): Real competences (Raunfærni) are all competences that a person has acquired through various means, such as work experience, apprenticeships, leisure studies, schooling, social activities and family life. All learning is valuable and important to document regardless of where it was acquired.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is a confirmation and validation of competence regardless of how or where an individual has acquired it. The goal is that the individual achieves recognition on the competence he/she possesses at any given time, for the purpose of not having to acquire education in what he/she already knows or in order to gain recognition that leads to job development at the workplace.

This definition is also used with slight rewording in the regulation for adult learning (2011/1163)

For the system focusing on shortening of study paths at Upper Secondary School level, the approach and methodology is coherent on a national level. The methodology was developed through close cooperation with stakeholders during the testing phase and allows for sectoral nuances. A steering group of stakeholders is established for each curriculum to create consensus on methods, tools and results.

For the process towards professional certification in working life, there was cooperation between the confederation of employers and federation of trade unions/employees. The development was coordinated by the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC), and pilot testing conducted in cooperation with several LLL centres. One of the main aims of the pilot project was to develop a sustainable model for validation towards certification in working life, including accessible financing. Both the individual and companies can now use their rights within these funds to pay for the process.

In recent reports on development within the Universities, there is a focus on a common framework for all entities to base their processes on to secure transparency and coherency and transferability of the results.

Since 2018, validation is now conducted in a more diverse vocational education which has increase participation of women. Statistics from 2022 reveal that 58% of men and 42% women went through a validation process.

Revision of the law on adult education (27/2010) has taken longer than anticipated. It begun in 2017 and due to delays is now to be completed in autumn 2023. Within that work, the framework around validation of prior learning is being reviewed towards revision that focuses mainly on increased access, inclusion of more target groups and the possibility of more actors conducting the process. The regulation (1163/2011) linked to the law on adult education, chapter on validation, will also be revised in conjunction with the revision.

Main challenges are linked to the way the process is conducted as the costs are considered rather high. It is also notable that as the financing by the Education fund is limited, there could be more people going through the process with more or different financing. The current rules for funding have become limiting with regard to more inclusion of younger people and people who have completed Upper Secondary School level education – but in need of reskilling.

The system for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VINFIL) at upper secondary school level financed specifically for people with little formal education is well functioning. Around 600 people go through validation annually, many of whom go into the formal school system for completing studies. As mentioned before, it could be reaching more people with financing tuned appropriately. The central coordination of methodology, training of VNFIL staff and gathering of statistics has been seen as a strength. Having a clear regulation with definition of the process and role of stakeholders has been a means for maintaining quality and supporting development. The lifelong learning (LLL) centres coordinating the validation pathways are accredited specially for validation procedures and cannot receive financing from the Education Fund without it. The regulation (1163) is however focused on one target group mainly, those who have not completed Upper Secondary School level education. People who do not belong to that category need to find their own funding, which since 2022 can in many cases be through their specific vocational educational fund which are a part of the collective agreements (levy based).

Since 2017, the results from validation (credit units) have been registered directly into a national databased for upper secondary schools (INNA). This process has made the connection between systems a lot simpler and easier for the individual to enter the formal school system with their prior learning validated.

In 2019, the Education Fund funded a pilot project which focused on developing a sustainable model for validation in working life. It was coordinated by the ETSC in close cooperation with the Confederation of Icelandic Employers and the Federation of Employees. The project focused primarily on jobs with high numbers of people with little formal education on Icelandic Qualification Framework (ISQF) level 2 (EQF level 3), where there is no formal curriculum. Several levy-based educational funds can now support companies (possibly in cooperation with an external coordinator) to take on the process. The ETSC will issue professional certifications for participants once the process is completed and learning outcomes fulfilled. The 14 regional LLL centres can also apply for funding to the educational fund (for people with low-qualified background) to conduct validation processes in this area.

The picture below describes the process. Existing competences are confirmed through validation, followed by on-the-job training if/as needed. When full competence reached according to job criteria/standards, a certificate on an ISQF level is issued by the ETSC. Professional certification in working life is a confirmation of competences

in a specific job. Inspiration for the developments of this pathway stems from “Branchvalidation” in Sweden. The following process is presented in the guidelines Fagbréf atvinnulífsins Handbók um framkvæmd raunfærnimats og starfsþjálfunar fyrir vottun á færni í starfi, 2023.

Figure 2.1 Processional certification in working life (Fagbréf) – the process



In the part of the collective bargaining agreement made in 2022, there are orders to start work on developing a salary system where the certification of skills according to this system is evaluated.

On policy level, following the 2021 elections, adult education was moved from the ministry of education, science and culture (now the ministry of education and children) to the ministry of social welfare and labour. Education is now divided between three ministries, which affects developments regarding VNFIL (i.e., cooperation, quality standards, funding and governance). Stronger emphasis on VNFIL coordination within upper secondary schools is being discussed. The revision of the law on adult education (which started in 2017) is now coordinated by the new ministry and ongoing.

## 3 National perspective

### 3.1 Overarching approach to validation

A comprehensive national lifelong learning strategy has been implemented in Iceland based on laws for all education, except for university level. A law was passed in June 2008 for upper secondary schools, and in March 2010 for adult learning. Both laws state an individual entitlement for the validation of non-formal and informal learning towards credits/units at upper secondary level. The validation process requires that validation providers follow regulations which were set out by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in 2011. As described under section 5 below, the regulation for adult learning describes the validation process and details a step-by-step overview of the aim, focus, and results of the recognition of prior learning. The law on Adult Education is still in the phase of revision (since 2018) with the involvement of various stakeholders based on the experience and learning obtained throughout the years. This delay is to some degree hindering progress, due to the uncertainty of future developments.

Validation is mostly focused on the shortening of study time for adults with little formal education at upper secondary school level, based on the results of a validation process. It is now practiced evenly within certified trades and other VET pathways, in addition to several job standards and employability skills. In total, 52 pathways exist at upper secondary level, but not all sectors are yet covered. The methodology of validation has not been generally used at university level, but some university departments do, to some extent, consider work experience of candidates during intake procedures. University of Iceland has been doing recognition of prior learning for ECTS credits for students in the B.Ed. program for Preschool Teacher Education during the last two years and other faculties and universities have shown interest in

starting their own pilots. Plans are being made to start a network for recognition of prior learning at the higher education level, where all interested parties can share knowledge and form strategies. Projects validating against specific job standards have been undertaken in the banking sector, for sound technicians, lighting technicians, warehouse workers and research assistant – and in the processional certification process; in food processing, service representatives, trade and services and within two jobs in the tourism sector; reception in guesthouses and catering. These projects are primarily aimed at those who have not completed upper secondary education. The national strategy focuses on covering the sectors gradually and through close cooperation with stakeholders.

The main focus of the national validation strategy is opening up pathways for people with little formal education, “upskilling pathways”, through the four steps of VNFIL and with access to guidance through the process as well as career guidance.

Validation of prior learning is not specifically mentioned in the Agreement on the Platform for the Coalition Government (2021), which is an overall vision for anticipated aims, including in education. It is stated that: “Continuing education and lifelong learning will be strengthened and legislation on further education will be reviewed in broad consultation, to ensure that the further education system is equipped to deal with societal developments, e.g. due to climate issues and technological change in the labour market”.

In 2020, the Government issued a National Action Plan for the fourth industrial revolution. The plan introduces 27 actions focusing, among other things, on lifelong learning. Action 14 focuses on the priority of enhancing lifelong learning for people with little formal education and immigrants and describes the work of the ETSC and cooperative partners (LLL centres) as a foundation for continuing developments. Action 16 aims at an increased focus on connecting lifelong learning and the formal school system to a larger extent. Validation of prior learning is mentioned as a tool for supporting that connection as validation makes it possible for the schools to assess competence and knowledge from work and leisure activities for the shortening of study time. In that regard, focus should be on coordinating methods between systems and through that increase access. In Action 20, it is emphasised that universities should develop and utilise validation of experiences from the labour market to shorten studies.

The national action plan for the fourth industrial revolution and will be an integral part of the revised laws on adult education. It is also visible in policy documents from the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ) and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA). The focus on using the results of validation processes in working life as a foundation for a salary framework has become a part of the collective bargaining.

The law on adult education has been in revision since 2017, the framework has therefore remained the same. At this point in time, the system is being evaluated by the ministry of social welfare and labour market, based on how it can work more swiftly towards meeting labour market needs and better meet the needs of more vulnerable groups. Validation of prior learning is seen as an important tool in that regard.

In the Executive action plan for migrant issues for 2022-2025, one of the goals (3.6) is that migrants should have access to validation of their work related experience and competences from their home country in their own language and appropriate support to complete studies based on that on upper secondary school level.

Funding mechanisms linked to lifelong learning in Iceland are the following:

- **Education fund** (funding from the ministry of social welfare and labour market and the ministry of education and children). Access to shorter study pathways, validation processes and guidance through accredited regional LLL centres for people who have not completed education from upper secondary level. Limited

annual amount is distributed based on applications from the regional centres and emphases introduced by the board of the Education Fund.

- **Educational levy-based funds based on trade union membership.** Each fund has their rules for accumulation of rights and use of funding. These funds are now open towards funding for validation of prior learning which then covers those who have completed upper secondary school level education.

There is no overall national registry or a single national digital portal to quality assure the funding or document it.

Each regional LLL centre and centres for the certified trades advertise the validation pathways they will offer each year on their websites. Those can be specific curriculum on upper secondary school level, specific jobs or general employability skills. The annual offer is also visible on the information platform "Next step" ([www.næstaskref.is](http://www.næstaskref.is)), which also gives the public access to screening lists for exploring eligibility into validation pathways as well as the chance to connect with guidance personnel at the centres to obtain more information and support.

The national system, guidelines for VNFIL staff and the quality criteria for accredited centres has always been based on EU guidelines and the four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, certification). In regulation 1163/2011, validation is defined as only all steps included. ETSC coordinates coherency of practices in cooperation with VNFIL staff at the regional centres.

The Directorate of Labour (DL), overseeing the regional Public Employment Services (PES), puts emphasis on career guidance for unemployed individuals where the aim is to develop a job search plan (following registration) with each jobseeker, with a focus on skills audit. When job seekers are registered at the PES they fill in a form (database) where their past experience, job related competences and preferred jobs are identified for matching purposes. In addition, they are provided with support to develop their CV as an attachment to the skills audit form. PES also attend for competence assessment for migrants, refugees and people with disabilities to match them with suitable jobs.

To some extent the guidance personnel at the LLL centres provides assistance for CV development that can be based on competences portfolio work. In terms of the skills covered in skills audits, at PES, the focus is on sector specific skills.

It has become a part of the collective agreement that to a larger extent competence assessment should be the foundation for salary decisions, as a framework.

For the national system for people with little formal education, statistics are gathered by the ETSC on number of participants in validation against each curriculum, demographic information and number of credit units validated. Also for validation against specific job criteria, the ETSC gathers information for the certificate issued.

The Regulation for adult education (1163/2011) states that validation should be executed by accredited educational providers which provide services based on the Adult Education Act. Actors in validation processes are required to have appropriate knowledge and training in validation. The regulation also defines what validation is and describes a step-by-step process to be undertaken. The ETSC trains validation staff and ensures that each project is operated according to the set framework through cooperation with project managers from the validation bodies. All of ETSC's cooperative partners are accredited also through the European Quality Mark (EQM), which is a tool that was developed under projects supported by the Leonardo da Vinci programme (Accreditation of Lifelong Learning - ALL, 2003-2005 and Recognition of Quality in Lifelong Learning - RECALL, 2006-2008). Specific standards for delivery of learning, career guidance services and validation are now in place in the context of the EQM. The EQM was developed as an international tool with feedback and cooperative development with LLL centres in the participating countries. The ETSC



has a contract with an external evaluator who has had the role of evaluating the centres.

## 3.2 Validation in education and training

As mentioned in the previous section, the focus of validation has been on creating opportunities for people with low levels of formal education (who have developed competences on the labour market and in other settings), so that they can have their competences validated towards the shortening of studies based on curricula at upper secondary level. The process works well and has proven to be one of the strongest motivational factors for this target group to continue learning. Occupational councils have assisted the ETSC with sectoral developments in the area of validation, but often it is the stakeholders in a given sector and the local/regional needs that serve as a basis for initiating validation projects in specific sectors. The process is defined (all four stages of validation are to be followed) and is coordinated by LLL centres distributed around the country in close cooperation with upper secondary schools and relevant stakeholders in the field. In Regulation 1163 on adult learning it is stated that for each validation pathway a steering committee must be involved in preparing the pathway including relevant stakeholders such as representatives from the sector, educational provider, trade union as well as the project coordinator and career counsellor involved.

At this point in time, the opportunities now cover 54 educational pathways/curriculum offered at upper secondary school level and is being developed on a continuing basis. Competences from various arenas can be validated against the set learning outcomes used.

Upper secondary schools practice procedures of reviewing formal documents and study records of students applying for entering the school. Some of the content can be equivalent to courses within the educational pathway applied for and are evaluated.

Through a contract with the ministry of education and children, IÐAN, the training centre for regulated trades, processes applications for Recognition of Professional Qualifications within Crafts and Trades acquired in other countries. The Directorate for Education receives a statement from the labour market representative (IÐAN) if the applicants fulfil the educational requirements and work experience stated in regulation 585/2011, then there are no further demands on studies in the relevant field. The Directorate for Education informs the district commissioner that issues a licence. Information about this service is available on several websites. All relevant unions as well as The Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ) are informed and they approach migrants/employees in the workplace with information. The Directorate for Labour is also aware of this service. Regular meetings are held with the ministry of education and children, the Directorate for Education and IÐAN to review processes. Even though steps have been taken to improve the process there are always opportunities for improvement. There is a growing concern about how to support and assist individuals with qualifications or/and competences that are not standardised in recognised curriculum but are however of great value for the labour market as well as offering clear pathways to further education or career development.

As stated earlier the focus is on upskilling and the target group of low-qualified through adult education in cooperation with other stakeholders. That is due to the high numbers of people on the labour market who have not completed upper secondary school level but may have had extensive competence build up on the labour market. Also, the development of the professional certification based on validation against specific job criteria has the potential to reach people directly in their jobs through making their competences visible and recognised towards continuing competences development.

The process of validation in the sector is as follows:

- a) **Information:** all participants should be able to make an informed decision about taking part in validation processes. They must be informed about the process, time, cost and results as well as their individual rights.
- b) **Screening:** all participants go through screening, where they can get insights into the general competence standards that will be used as well as to hear about eligibility criteria.
- c) **Identification/documentation of competences:** all participants have guidance on how to fill out self-assessment lists based on the learning outcomes to be used in the assessment interview.
- d) **Assessment interview:** all participants have individual interviews with one or more assessor in the given curriculum where competences are discussed and reviewed. Information on results is provided.
- e) **Follow-up interview:** all participants can have a follow-up interview for guiding them on what the results of the validation process mean in their context and how they can proceed towards completion of studies.

### 3.3 Validation and the labour market

The professional certification of working life has been in development in cooperation with social partners since 2019. That process consists of identifying and validating competence in a specific job, offering training in what is missing (if needed) and certifying competence in the job based on learning outcomes which are based on the ETSC competency analysis process. The social partners have shown great interest in the process and the feedback from the participants in the process is extremely positive. The visibility of competence at work and its certification gives the opportunity to reach more people in the target group with the ideology of validation. Through the process people obtain certification on an ISQF level, which can connect non-formal learning to formal learning and qualifications.

The focus of the pilot project was to build a base for developing a sustainable model for validation in working life. As of now, about 80 certificates have been issued, most of them within the retail sectors and food processing sector. The educational funds have agreed on providing funding which means that it can be accessible for multiple target groups. The tool is now being introduced to stakeholders and next steps discussed.

Validation of General Employability skills has been conducted through group processes at several LLL centres since 2014, focusing on job seekers and people who have been on social welfare. The aim of the process is for participants to self-evaluate, through group guidance, their employability skills based on prior competence development. The skills are presented in learning outcomes on ISQF levels and the assessment focuses on validating the presented skills linked to the work experience of each participant. Most participants so far, move into employment or studies following the process. This pathway has been on the top five lists of validation participation the last couple of years.

The professional certification/validation in working life is the main arrangement in development at this point in time. Coordination of the process will be open to the LLL centres, private providers or consultants or to the companies themselves.

There is also a focus on how to reach migrants and increase their access to validation pathways. ETSC and PES aim at closer cooperation in the area this year.

The outcomes of validation in working life resulting in the professional certificate is based on competence analysis of a specific job which produces learning outcomes on ISQF levels. This enhances the connection between the systems, within and

between sectors. In the retail sector the professional certification on ISQF level 2 has been allotted 30 credit units on upper secondary school level and is linked to additional 60 credit units of learning towards a formal qualification. This effort is based on the cooperation of all the social partners in the sector through several years. As of now, about 15 retail companies are involved and VR trade union (Labour union of employees in commerce, services and offices) one of the main drivers as well as the educational fund within the sector.

The four stages of validation are followed, but in a more swiftly manner since validation takes place on the job with internal assessors who are the daily trainers in the company.

Professional certification in working life is a confirmation of competences in a specific job. First, the sector related stakeholders are informed and consulted about the process. It begins with a competence analysis, producing the main competence factors and measurable learning outcomes on ISQF levels. Workers self-assess and an interview takes place. If gap training is needed it is mostly conducted through in-house training. When full competence is reached according to job criteria / standards, a certificate on an ISQF level is issued by the ETSC.

Figure 3.1 Professional certification in working life – overview of the process



### 3.4 Validation and the third sector

Validation measures in the third sector are mostly focused on assisting individuals with identifying and recording their competences. It is not a widespread activity and is not conducted in a systematic way. There may be certificates delivered in the youth and volunteer sector. The certificates and described outcomes may add value to applications for jobs on the labour market or for progression to further education. They can be taken into account in traditional validation against curricula or job standards. This is however conducted by individual organisations through their own processes and not specifically linked to other systems.

## 4 Links to credentials and qualifications

The Icelandic Qualification Framework (ISQF) includes all formal qualifications; lower secondary school, upper secondary school and universities in addition to about 33 non-formal qualifications are linked to the framework from the adult learning arena. The ETSC uses a process of competence analysis to develop learning outcomes on ISQF levels. That process is standardised and builds the basis for all curriculum and validation pathways produced. The framework acts therefore as a key element in linking non-formal learning and formal learning for individual pathways. The formation of measurable learning outcomes is a foundation for validation processes. All formal curriculum on upper secondary school level now include learning outcomes for each subject, which considerably facilitates validation, although they may need adjustments to serve as self-assessment lists for participants in the process. It seems that curriculum and subjects at university level are, however not as well developed when it comes down to measurable learning outcomes. There is a tendency towards more abstract formulations of learning outcomes at that level.

Validation is mostly used to shorten the time the individual is required to study at upper secondary school level, where a unit-based system is in place - it is possible however to obtain a full qualification through validation in some sectors. In the very few instances this has been the case, the main factors are that the individuals already carried with them an extensive amount of credit units and only needed validation in technical subjects. Also, it may vary between curricula if all subjects are available for validation or not. The reason being that some subjects may be considered too theoretical for validation by the steering group of stakeholders. The process focuses on assessing competencies within each subject of curricula with a specific unit value. The results are calculated as recognised credits and registered specifically as “passed” into a general databank (INNA) for upper secondary schools and formal adult learning. Participants also receive a certificate from the LLL centre indicating subjects and credits validated. If a validation participant fulfils the requirement of a subject through a validation process it is registered in his/her educational record.

Based on the subject approach, credentials obtained through validation can generally be combined to obtain a qualification on the NQF given that credit units for each subject within a curriculum are registered in the general databank for upper secondary school level education.

The professional certificate in working life covers the learning outcomes identified for a specific job and on an ISQF level. There is no measure behind the scope of a job as in studies (time, credits etc.).

The term “qualification” as used in conjunction with the ISQF is in Icelandic the term “completed studies” (námslok) and is used for learning that takes place within the formal school system.

Subjects validated and registered as such in the databank INNA are marked as ‘Evaluated’. A grade is not given through validation as it is usually practiced.

For a specific curriculum, the steering group of stakeholders for validation in that sector may have decided that some of the subjects taught will not be a part of the validation process. That decision is often based on the belief or experience of that very few participants may have related learning from other arenas than the formal school system.

The definition of a micro credential is still under development. Within adult learning it is translated as “örvottun”. At the HE level the term “örnám” (referring to “short education”) is used to describe micro credentials. The certificate delivered through the process under the name professional certificate in working life has been labelled as a micro credential, and the same may go for all shorter modularised learning ending with a certificate. It is not yet commonly used.

Validation against curriculum on upper secondary school level has 52 pathways available, although not all may be open for participants at the same time. It is up to the regional LLL centres to decide which pathways to work with annually. The professional certificate process, including validation, is being disseminated among different sectors and stakeholders aiming at swift take up in the coming years. The ETSC has based its model on Sweden’s sectoral approach which has been extremely successful in recent years.

## 5 Standards

In most validation projects, national curriculum standards for upper secondary school level qualifications (EQF levels 3 and 4) are used and adjusted by the ETSC in cooperation with stakeholders linked to each project/sector, so that they can be used for measuring competences of participants in validation through flexible and individualised methods. A clear focus on learning outcomes through the development

of the ISQF has been beneficial for the process of validation. The relationship between validation and the development of the qualification framework is therefore clear.

In several validation projects standards/learning outcomes have been developed directly for a specific job for validation purposes. The standards used are now based on a formal process linking competences for a job, through competence analysis, to ISQF levels. The competence analysis process is conducted with main stakeholders linked to the job at hand and therefore have a strong market value.

Further development of validation against specific job criteria will be a focus, and processes for identifying learning outcomes of jobs, resulting in a job profile, are now being conducted at a higher rate following a pilot project conducted in 2019-2021 in close cooperation with the social partners.

The focus of curriculum on upper secondary school are based on competence criteria that may stem from a professional association or teachers in the field. The occupational councils have through the years had the role to confirm those before they are used by the schools as a foundation for forming learning outcomes on ISQF levels. The occupational councils have not had a clear mandate in this regard over the past years.

The learning outcomes for subjects within a formal curriculum are reviewed and altered so that they can fit as a self-assessment list for the validation participants. The ETSC works on rewording and refining them into a language and a form suitable for that purpose. In that way the validation material is coherent and recognizable. The assessment lists are used in the training of VNFIL staff.

Standards/learning outcomes from curricula, used for validation purposes, have the same 'market value' as those used in formal qualifications. For the professional certificates, the value is still to be proven since the first certificates were only issued a couple of years ago.

Professional associations and teachers in the field (curriculum) review learning outcomes and update if needed.

When it comes to competence analysis producing learning outcomes for non-formal curriculum and validation, it is the social partners and employees for the competence analysis that form the learning outcomes in cooperation with the ETSC. Those learning outcomes can be used for validation processes and/or as a basis for a non-formal curriculum.

In the validation process, the assessor needs to think outside the traditional learning delivery and assessment within a given subject and solely focus on how the learning outcomes reveal themselves in the workplace. For that to be possible, the learning outcomes within each subject must be weighted and both the breadth and depth of knowledge needed to meet the set standards needs to be benchmarked. The methods used for assessment must fit the needs of the individual with regards to the ways in which candidates are offered to make their skills visible. That can however not be done if people are not prepared for the task. In general terms the assessment interview becomes more like a conversation between two professionals in a given job. With that in place, the scalability of validation can be highly improved. This requires training in the specific assessment methods and tools used in VNFIL.

Validation initiatives are changing in the sense that measurable learning outcomes are a key element for validation processes to be possible and fair. The focus on how competences reveal themselves in real life needs to be the foundation of the approach taken and methods chosen. Based on the learning outcome approach linked to referencing to the ISQF, validation has become easier, although it needs to be kept in mind that the language may need adjustments for them to be understandable for people coming from the non-formal arena.

## 6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The main change since 2018 regarding the respective role of institutions/stakeholders is that through the development of the professional certificate in working life, company managers and selected assessors can to a larger extent be involved in the process of shaping and producing job profiles and learning outcomes to be used on the validation process against job criteria. For a specific job, the focus is on a sectoral approach so that several companies take part in the competence analysis process producing a general assessment list which internal assessor base their assessments on internally. Also, with regards to the process behind the professional certification in working life, the role of coordination is open to more actors – it can be coordinated by accredited LLL centres, private consultants, or the companies themselves.

For the target group of people with little formal education, the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) has the responsibility for overseeing a national validation strategy in cooperation with regional LLL centres, upper secondary schools, labour associations and relevant stakeholders linked to specific sectors. Validation projects are funded through the Education Fund; funding is available to accredited LLL centres. They must apply for funding to support specific projects according to the framework of the Education Fund, which also has in place specific framework contracts with two centres for certified trades covering validation towards the shortening of study time within the certified trades. Stakeholders within the certified trades have been actively involved from the beginning in the development of a validation process for their workers and have worked enthusiastically on projects with the ETSC since 2006. The centres are located in the capital area and cooperate with LLL centres and local upper secondary schools around the country to reach rural areas. Other LLL centres have also received funding through the Education Fund for validation projects in other sectors.

The ETSC is responsible for promoting quality in the methodology used in projects through working closely with stakeholders when initiating validation in new sectors, advising in the process of organising validation projects, training validation staff in the validation process, developing the methodology and providing overall support. The ETSC obtains reports on projects which provide insights into the quality of practice and collects statistical information. Regular meetings are held with project managers to share information and discuss quality issues. The ETSC also distributes information about the concept of validation to relevant stakeholders. When a project has been initiated, the accredited LLL centre managing the project (i.e. a centre for the certified trades or a LLL centre in any given area of the country) will, based on the approval of stakeholders in the project steering group, advertise the project and provide information to participants. Participants who are interested are then screened in an interview with a career counsellor. The centre is responsible for providing career guidance throughout the project for each participant, if needed (also financed by the Education Fund), undertaking assessment, and documenting the results for each individual into INNA the database for upper secondary schools. Most assessors are teachers from upper secondary schools, but they may also be professionals drawn more widely from the labour market. When a project is completed, the LLL centre reports to the ETSC about project developments and results.

Representatives of the social partners (including trade unions and employer organisations) participate in steering groups when projects in a new sector are being initiated and developed. In the case of projects where the focus is on validation against job standards, representatives from companies are involved and/or fulfil the role of assessors. Private companies often motivate their employees to participate in validation and allow for flexibility in their working hours during the validation process.

The University of Iceland has recently conducted a pilot project where students studying to become Kindergarten teachers went through a validation process towards shortening of studies. The model from the ETSC was used as a reference and the project management at the university aims at mainstreaming methods and tools, adjusted in cooperation with internal stakeholders to the university environment.

All the regional LLL centres offer guidance services and reach out to the target group of people with little formal education about learning pathways, validation and career guidance available. Guidance is usually the first contact point towards a validation process. Guidance personnel working in social services and employment services are informed about validation pathways for example through the information platform Next step ([www.naestaskref.is](http://www.naestaskref.is)) and can refer their clients to LLL centres for a screening interview and guidance there.

The Education fund finances the process for the target group of people who have not completed upper secondary school. Funding goes to the accredited regional LLL centres who cooperate with other stakeholders.

The upper secondary schools can also take on validation based on the law on upper secondary schools Article 31 - Recognition of qualifications and competence: 'Students enrolling at upper secondary schools shall be entitled to the validation of their competence for course equivalence and for credits, provided that the validated competence is compatible with the school curriculum guide and the study programme description of the school concerned. Recognised competence that falls outside the core subjects for the relevant study programme shall be validated as elective courses'.

Accreditation is granted for three years. Each provider must apply for accreditation and fill out a self-evaluation list based on the set standards, which is then assessed by an external assessor. The annual fee for the accreditation is ISK 253.000 (as for 2023). More information can be found on the ETSC website [www.frae.is](http://www.frae.is).

To be accredited for financing on behalf of the Education Fund, a provider must fulfil the EQM+ standards and hold an accreditation based on that.

As the Education Fund is a limited resource established for a specific target group, the funding is allocated solely to the LLL centres who have the role to reach out specifically to the target group. Other providers, such as upper secondary schools, can also offer validation, but up until now specific funding for that process has not been available. Developments have, however been that for people who have completed studies on upper secondary school level the educational funds linked to their sector has stepped in with funding their validation processes.

## **7 Outreach, awareness raising, provision of information, advice and guidance**

### **7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising**

VNFIL opportunities are advertised by LLL centres through various media. On the information and guidance platform "Next step" ([www.naestaskref.is](http://www.naestaskref.is)), which the ETSC has coordinated and developed along with guidance experts, information on available VNFIL pathways are accessible in addition to screening lists where individuals can self-evaluate their possible eligibility into VNFIL opportunities. In that process they are encouraged to seek career guidance at the nearest LLL centre for further development.

Methods of recruitment for VNFIL projects are identified for each validation project in a steering group and depend on the sectoral landscape. In most projects, an advertisement is published on social media or in local or national newspapers and brochures about the project are distributed in companies and among relevant

stakeholders linked to the sector. Guidance personnel and staff from LLL centres also visit companies to provide information directly to individuals. An information meeting is held for a group of interested individuals and guidance personnel provide information and guidance through individual interviews (screening) before admission. The main target group is people who have not completed upper secondary school (although they may have started studies) within a specific sector/occupation. Validation activities are increasingly promoted through various provider websites and social media.

The outreach measures and promotional activities are mostly focused on reaching those who have started a learning path but did not complete it yet, and those with experience that meets the criteria set out in the regulation (2011/1163); three years' experience in the field and 23 of age. They are related to policies in the sense that the main target group for up- and reskilling is approached specifically with the tool.

## 7.2 Information, advice and guidance

Providing information, advice and guidance on validation is mostly in the hands of the guidance personnel and other staff at the regional LLL centres, guidance personnel at other service providers such as PES and rehabilitation services; teachers; managers and supervisors in companies. This is part of the guidance provided at the LLL centres but may however not take place by default through the other actors.

Information about validation pathways open each year can be found on the information and guidance website [www.næstaskref.is](http://www.næstaskref.is), developed by the ETSC, including screening links and contact to guidance personnel at the regional LLL centres. Each LLL centre has their way of presenting validation offered – their selection and the guidance available for preparational purposes. For validation towards shortening of studies, guidance is embedded in the process through information; screening, identification and documentation and follow-up based on the results of validation. For that target group validation and guidance is free of charge.

Mentoring and counselling is available. Guidance personnel are available at the LLL centre. Many have formal training in vocational and educational counselling, teaching and pedagogy. The main competence is linked to interviewing skills and andragogy, including knowledge about the target group and the labour market.

Arrangements are in place to follow up with individuals after guidance interventions to assess if further guidance related to validation is needed. People going through validation process may have 3-4 interviews with guidance personnel, prior to, during and after. Follow-up interviews focus on reviewing results and connecting to upper secondary schools to plan completion of studies. Guidance is also focused on motivation and support in the transition of entering the formal school system again. The average age of people going through validation is around 40 years.

Information, advice and guidance about validation is free of charge at the regional LLL centre for people with little formal education. As a requirement from the Education Fund, the proportion of people in the target group and other groups needs to be at least 80/20.

Upper secondary schools and universities also provide guidance within their setting which is free of charge, but their activities are not yet directly linked to validation processes.



## 8 Validation practitioners

### 8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Practitioners implementing validation practices are as follows:

**The project manager** is usually a person who has experience and knowledge within the field of lifelong learning and project management. In many cases the project manager has background in guidance or a professional who has been involved in organising lifelong learning for the target group at a LLL centre.

**The guidance personnel/adviser** is a career guidance practitioner in a LLL centre, who usually has a formal background in vocational and educational guidance or in teaching and andragogy. The main role of the guidance personnel is to assist the individual in the process of identifying competences and support him/her through the process of validation. The guidance personnel look after the interest of the individual and offers guidance and support through group work and individual interviews if/as needed. The main skills needed for this role are interviewing skills, guidance processes focusing on adults and knowledge of the labour market.

**The assessor** is a specialist in the profession at hand. Many assessors are teachers in upper secondary schools, but they can also be other professionals from working life. In addition to professional knowledge, the assessor must have a positive mindset towards the concept of validation, have good communication skills, and experience and knowledge of evaluation methods and training. The assessor may be a senior trainer outside of the workplace or an expert within a trade association. Suitable people include vocational instructors associated with a particular profession. Important factors when choosing an assessor are credibility and impartiality, experience as an assessor, and the ability to assess aptitude.

Skills audit processes in PES are supported by career advisors who may have various backgrounds related to guidance of adults.

### 8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The ETSC training course for VNFIL staff was developed for the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MESC) in 2008 and has since then been in constant development and offered training as for project managers, assessors, and guidance personnel. It is a two-day course where the concept and practices are reviewed and discussed, methods introduced, and exercises conducted linked to the use of main tools. In the Regulation on Adult education (1164/2011), the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture states that validation practitioners should go through sufficient training in validation according to criteria set by the Ministry. This is also a demand in the framework of the Education and Training Fund.

ETSC provides the training. It is compulsory based on the rules of the Education Fund that provides funding of validation project to the regional LLL centres. It is also stated in the regulation on validation (2011/1163).

### 8.3 Qualifications and experience

The Regulation on Adult education (1164/2011) states that validation practitioners should go through sufficient training in validation according to criteria set by the Ministry. This is also a demand in the framework of the Education and Training Fund.

## 9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

### 9.1 Funding and costs

#### **Within adult learning (target group: people with little formal education)**

Funding is provided for validation projects and career guidance through the Education and Training Fund (state budget), which is allocated for people with little formal education (under the Adult Education Act). Funding has been in place since 2007. The accredited LLL centres can apply for funding annually and the ETSC makes contracts with the centres and allocates funding for specific projects and career guidance services. The overall budget has been increased gradually. The total budget for validation in 2021 was ISK 121 000 000 (EUR 810 193). In that year, 580 people went through the validation process. Funding is also provided for career guidance in validation which is a part of a larger budget for the overall career counselling offered to the target group of the ETSC. The overall funding for career guidance in 2021 was ISK 117 700 000 (EUR 788 073). Around 30% of guidance interviews conducted are linked to components of the validation process. Total number of interviews in 2021 was 8 600, including revisits.

#### **In upper secondary schools**

There is now specific funding for validation activities in upper secondary schools. Validated people are linked to the schools after the process managed by the regional LLL centres. There is interest in opening validation processes in upper secondary schools. Ways of financing are being explored.

#### **Universities**

There is no specific funding for validation activities in universities. A few pilot projects have taken place based on project funding. The School of Education at the University of Iceland is running validation at the Faculty of Education and Pedagogy but has not received additional funding for the process.

Public funding falls under the Education Fund, with funding intended for people who have not completed upper secondary school. For people on the labour market with more formal education, there has been an opening in the support of levy-based funds for validation processes.

In the past years there is more emphasis on making skills visible and recognizing them as a basis for salary decisions, in the collective labour agreements. The social partners are interested in the development of validation in working life, as in the form of the professional certificate described in this report.

For people who have not completed upper secondary school (EQF level 4), validation processes are financed by the state. For the validation against formal curriculum for the exemption of courses, the average cost per individual is ISK 252 000 (EUR 1 687). For going through the process for the professional certificate in working life, including validation, the cost per person is ISK 95 000 (EUR 636).

The Education Fund for the target group of people who have not completed education on EQF level 4 could be seen as an individual learning account (ILA) to some degree. The levy-based Education Fund provide support for competence development based on specific rules set. Each member can have funding for job related courses, general studies and leisure related courses, and companies can apply for annual funding and funding for training and education of employees. This funding can be used for validation activities (individual and company based).

Lack of financial support has been an obstacle for people outside the main target group that want to reskill for example. Funding for validation is not promoted specifically through the levy-based educational funds.

## 9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

### 9.2.1 Validation trends

Since 2007, 7 315 people have undergone validation and 89% was financed by the Education Fund. In 2022, 567 went through validation in adult education. The majority were male 58.2% and the mean age was 37.7. Migrants were 12% of participants. Most of the people went through validation in General Employability skills (N=55), Kindergarten assistant (N=45) and Carpentry (N=44). The high numbers last year were linked to a newly opened pathway Assistant nurse (N=36). There are 52 pathways, but the selection each year is based on applications from the regional LLL centres. Most validation takes place in the capital area and in the Southern part of Iceland. Annual numbers are quite stable or between 500-600 participants (as financing allows).

More information can be found on ETSCs statistical dashboard: <https://frae.is/fraedslusjodur/tolfraedi-ur-starfinu/>

Over the last four years the number of individuals who have entered, gone through and succeeded in the different stages of validation have been quite stable. Between 500-600 participants complete the process. That is in line with the financing. The categories have developed according to Table 9.1.

Table 9.1 Share of participants across VNFIL categories 2018-2022

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>General subjects</b>	2%	3%	3%	4%	2%
<b>Certified trades</b>	42%	43%	38%	46%	38%
<b>Vocational education</b>	53%	50%	44%	28%	45%
<b>Standards in working life</b>	3%	4%	16%	22%	15%

Opening new pathways in cooperation with stakeholders is one of the roles of the ETSC. It is a process to get all stakeholders on board and creating consent about opening curriculum subjects to validation. In the past years the aim has been to increase pathways in vocational education where there is a need for skilled workers. Based on that increase, the gender differences diminished considerably in the overall numbers of validation participants. Examples of vocational educational pathways that have been successful are fish-technology, assistant nurse, food processing, care support and ship captain.

The average number of credit units validated within curriculum is quite even between years. The main factors effecting that number is how many subjects are offered in validation and the competences participants going through the process. The average age is around 40 years, who are people with extensive work experience. Interviews are now to a larger degree taken through digital platforms, for example in curriculum in ship captain, fish technology and agriculture.

### 9.2.2 Validation users

Most people undergoing validation are 26-45 years of age, and most of them are around 40 years of age. The higher proportion of males can be explained by the large take up in the certified trades. This has evened out slowly based on increase in pathways in vocational education. Most people obtain exemption of about 40-50 credit

units (full curricula can be around 90-140 credit units), and remaining studies are often adjusted specifically to them so that they can study and work, since the vast majority of participants are working in the field at hand. The proportion of citizenship status is that in the past years the number of people with foreign citizenship has been between 10-12%. The target group is mainly people who have not completed formal education on EQF level 4.

### 9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

As mentioned, the main focus is on validation as an upskilling pathway for people with little formal education. Development of pathways for other groups has started with a focus on long term unemployed and migrants in cooperation between the ETSC and PES. Translations of selected VNFIL assessment lists into English is in process. Increased inclusion of people with disabilities and cooperation with service providers (Fjölmennt) has begun.

Mentioned in the report in 2018, the VISKA project (KA3) focused specifically on validation for migrants. In Iceland the tools for validation in carpentry were translated to Polish and VNFIL staff took part in training in cultural understanding linked to Polish culture. The tools worked well and 50 Polish workers in went through validation. Their results were in line with those for the Icelandic participants. There is a need for translating VNFIL material to more languages. The results of the VISKA project (Visible Skills of Adults, 2017-2020) in Iceland also revealed that after validation, there was a lack of the formal system being equipped to receive the Polish students because there were not sustainable resources for language support in the upper secondary schools.

## 10 Validation methods

### 10.1 Methodologies and methods

#### For validation against curriculum standards

Identification is executed through a screening interview with a guidance personnel or a project manager and in many cases a brief screening list based on the relevant standards are used. Portfolio work and self-assessment may be initiated at this stage. The portfolio method is used during documentation with guidance. At the same time, self-assessment against the relevant standards is carried out, with support from the assessor(s). During the assessment phase, methods fit for purpose are selected. The method mostly used is interview, where the assessor(s) and participant have a conversation (including declarative methods/debate) about competences brought forth in the portfolio and in the self-assessment form. During the assessment interview, participants are asked to describe how they would solve a specific problem (case examples) and even perform tasks with tools (simulation and evidence extracted from work). The use of cases has proven to be a very effective tool in validation with the possibility of measuring various standards through a work-related assignment.

When validation processes are developed for a new sector, a steering group of stakeholders has the role to identify the optimal ways of methods and tools. The assessors are chosen by the steering group, and they as well can adjust methods in practice.

Screening lists for various VNFIL pathways are available on the information and guidance platform “Next step” in an electronic form. Regarding the portfolio work, a specific set of portfolio tools are used which were developed through a Nordic cooperation. It is formative in nature and can be filled out on paper or completed electronically. Self-assessment lists (summative) with the assessment criteria can

also be filled out on paper or completed electronically. It is important that both versions are available based on the needs of participants. Most people complete the documents electronically.

### **Validation linked to professional certificate in working life**

That process takes place in the companies and focuses on recognizing skills that participants already possess since they are able to solve main tasks of their jobs. The analysis of job competences is articulated in learning outcomes based on ISQF levels. Assessors in the process are experienced trainers in the companies who are familiar with the skills of the employees being validated. That process is therefore swifter and does not require specific outreach or career guidance. The same methodology as in validation against curriculum is used in the assessment interviews and the training of assessors focuses much on the use of learning outcomes.

In the training of validation staff, it is emphasized that validation methods and approaches should take into account the needs of individuals. In the EQM VNFIL quality standards it is required that factors that might limit performance of an individual in the validation process should be sought after and taken into account in the whole process. This could for example be linked to reading or writing difficulties, anxiety, location and other personal issues. It is also required that variable methods should be available to meet the needs of participants. The embedded career guidance also supports an individual approach hence as needed. Guidance and support are available if needed. Research has shown that to a large degree most people manage through the process with information and support (general guidance), about one-third are in need of more personal support and follow-up.

## **10.2 Use of ICT in validation**

Screening lists can be filled out on the website [www.næstaskref.is](http://www.næstaskref.is) and printed out for review with guidance personnel and project managers. The self-assessment lists are both paper and word documents that participants fill out based on what suits them better. Assessment interviews are to a larger extent being conducted through digital portals. That is especially relevant to sectors where people may be distributed around the country or for example with regards to fisherman, at sea. During the pandemic, this mode became more widely used by practitioners since it was the only way to keep projects going. Assessors who meet with participants this way consider it equal to meeting people in person. This set up does require some preparation for all parties to be ready to act on assessment request.

There have also been developments through a project supported by the Education Fund, where IDAN – centre for the certified trades, the ETSC and Advania worked on a digital process for coordinating validation projects (project referring to a group going through validation in a specific curriculum). It is anticipated that this system will be mainstreamed and through that all material and documents digitally available and stored.

In the INNA database for upper secondary schools, the results from validation processes – validated subjects and credit units are registered. There they become a part of a student's study profile. Since 2017, the regional LLL centres have been able to insert validation results into INNA directly – while before that people needed to take the results to the schools for insertion.

# 11 Quality assurance

## 11.1 Quality assurance processes

The Regulation for adult education (1163/2011) states that validation should be executed by accredited educational providers which provide services based on the Adult Education Act. Actors in validation processes are required to have appropriate knowledge and training in validation. The regulation also defines what validation is and describes a step-by-step process to be undertaken. The ETSC trains validation staff and ensures that each project is operated according to the set framework through cooperation with project managers from the validation bodies. Accreditation of educational providers is based on standards set by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. All of ETSC's cooperative partners are accredited also through the European Quality Mark (EQM), which is a tool that was developed under projects supported by the Leonardo da Vinci programme (Accreditation of Lifelong Learning - ALL, 2003-2005 and Recognition of Quality in Lifelong Learning - RECALL, 2006-2008).

Specific standards for career guidance services and validation are now in place in the context of the EQM. The EQM was developed as an international tool with feedback and cooperative development with LLL centres in the participating countries. The ETSC has a contract with an external evaluator who has had the role of evaluating the centres. Through participation in the Nordic network for adult learning (NVL), the ETSC has taken part in defining and developing quality processes in VNFIL with the individual in the centre (see various reports: <https://nvl.org/Rapporteur/NVL-rapporteur/Validering>), in addition to the Roadmap 2018 – validation and the value of competences which focuses on central aspects that must be covered to facilitate a functional validation system (see: <https://nvl.org/Content/Validation-and-the-value-of-competences-Road-Map-2018>).

The regulation on validation is in need of updating since extensive development have taken place since 2011. Now there are more actors interested in conducting validation and there is much more know-how in the various sectors. Also, for the process developed for the professional certification in working life, there is for example not as much emphasis on outreach, recruitment and educational- and vocational counselling. It is more of an inhouse assessment based on job related skills. While in the third sector there may need to be more focus on the identification and documentation phase and related guidance. Most assessors working with the validation against curriculum have a background in teaching and assessing learning within the formal school system. Part of the training of VNFIL staff is a focus on how learning outcomes reveal themselves in working life. Methods need to be chosen based on the context where the competence was developed. Steps in the process underpin reliability whereas assessors review self-assessment lists, CVs and coordinate assessment interviews where individual needs are in focus. Testing is for example not used in validation. Results of validation are portable between educational providers.

There is a handbook for assessors and checklists to support them in the process. Emphasis is put on individual needs and a variety of methods in that regards. User feedback is to be discussed in the final interview with the guidance personnel, and there it can be discussed if the participant is not satisfied. This is also in the hand of the project manager who oversees the process and is in contact with participants and assessors. After each validation project, a short report is delivered to the ETSC and findings discussed if needed. Complaints are very rare. Most assessors in validation against curriculum standards are seasoned teachers or professionals from working life chosen by the steering group of stakeholders for each field. Guidance personnel

have background and education linked to guidance, teaching and andragogy. The EQM standards also address the above.

It is a joint effort to uphold quality. It requires ongoing conversations and sessions for reviewing status and developments. ETSC holds regular meetings with directors, project managers and guidance personnel from the regional LLL centres to work with quality issues. The EQM standards are regularly reviewed with the cooperative partners, last revision made in 2019.

## 11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

Accredited LLL centres receiving funding from the Education Fund need to turn in statistical information for each year on number of participants undergoing validation in different curriculum, general employability skills or validation in working life (now professional certificate in working life); age, gender, citizenship and number of credit units available for validation and number of credit units validated. Also, a report on cooperation with stakeholders, project plan, description of the working process, ways used to approach the target group, training of VNFIL staff, time allotted to project management and guidance. The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) gathers the statistics and presents in its annual reports. Statistics are also presented in the annual reports of the Education Fund. The information is used internally and through external meetings with stakeholders to monitor progress and underpin further developments.

It is common knowledge among those who work with participants in validation projects that they experience the process in a very positive way; it presents a second opportunity to reach a goal that had seemed unattainable for a long time. It is an extremely effective motivational factor towards continuing learning and raises self-awareness and self-esteem. Annually there are several testimonies presented by participants in validation processes. They are usually describing a transformative process for them, especially the more vulnerable groups that in beforehand did not believe that they would get much validated. Several older Master theses based in qualitative research have supported this. The validation and the discovery of own competences is a strong motivational factor towards completion of studies in the field. Most people do very well in their studies, following validation processes. A master thesis on validation in general employability skills revealed that participants experience empowerment, increased self-confidence, increased knowledge on own competences and ways to utilise their skills (Jónatansdóttir, 2021). Another qualitative master thesis showed that participants going through the validation process against formal curricula are positive towards the process and experienced increased self-confidence, increased self-efficacy as well as more security in their job (Sveinsdóttir, 2023).

The results show that validation is a practical choice for individuals who have not finished any education beyond compulsory schooling. It has been emphasised in the Icelandic model that individuals should have an open opportunity to complete their studies at an upper secondary school in conjunction with the validation process, if they choose to (the majority does). In many cases, upper secondary schools offer groups of participants from a validation project to study towards completion in tailor-made programmes.

In a survey conducted by Capacent (2014) linked to an external evaluation on VNFIL, participants one to three years back in time were asked about their status. Their answers (N=419) revealed that 27.7% were studying; 34.1% had completed studies; 13.8% were aiming at completing studies. A total of 90% reported that they were doing very well or rather well in school and 81.7% reported that the validation results were fair.

Validation linked to the professional certificate in working life has also proven to be highly motivating for employees. Based on a survey conducted among participants (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins, 2020) they expressed that their requirements of their job became clearer and that they felt more secure in their work.

As mentioned before the ETSC gathers statistics (listed above) from each accredited regional LLL centre according to the requirement of the Education Fund. Overall statistics can be seen on the ETSC statistical dashboard: <https://frae.is/fraedslusjodur/tolfraedi-ur-starfinu/>

## 12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

Each LLL centre decides which VNFIL pathways to apply for annually in cooperation with regional stakeholders, based on local trends and needs. Although validation is not a mainstream activity yet, validation has become increasingly known among various educational actors and the public in recent years and new projects/initiatives are developing for example in HE and in cooperation with companies.

The concept and the effectiveness of the approach is spreading based on the experience obtained. In the preparation of new validation pathways, representatives from all relative stakeholders take part – including employers and educational institutions. That is of high importance in order to create trust in the results of validation processes.

Based on the revision of the Law on adult education, there will be changes coming up in the coming year. Increased access to validation is on the agenda and discussions have begun with and among upper secondary schools to offer validation processes directly into their educational pathways.

Universities have created a network and a learning platform to develop coherent methodology to be used in the different schools and departments. These developments are in their early stages, but interest is now more evident than before. The ministry of education and children and the ministry of social welfare and labour market emphasis increased take up in validation.

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# European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

This report is part of the 2023 update of the [European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#). The inventory provides a comprehensive overview of validation practices across Europe, covering 32 systems in EU-27 Member States and EFTA countries.

The European inventory is the product of a long-standing cooperation of the European Commission, Cedefop and ETF on the field. The inventory was endorsed by the [Council recommendation of 2012](#) on validation and works together with the [European guidelines](#) as a tool to support countries in developing and implementing validation arrangements.

A rich source of information, the inventory informs dialogue and learning between countries and stakeholders developing and implementing validation in Europe. Our key objective is to support Member States so that more learners and workers can acquire and make visible new skills, which will support their career and further learning and improve their quality of life.

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