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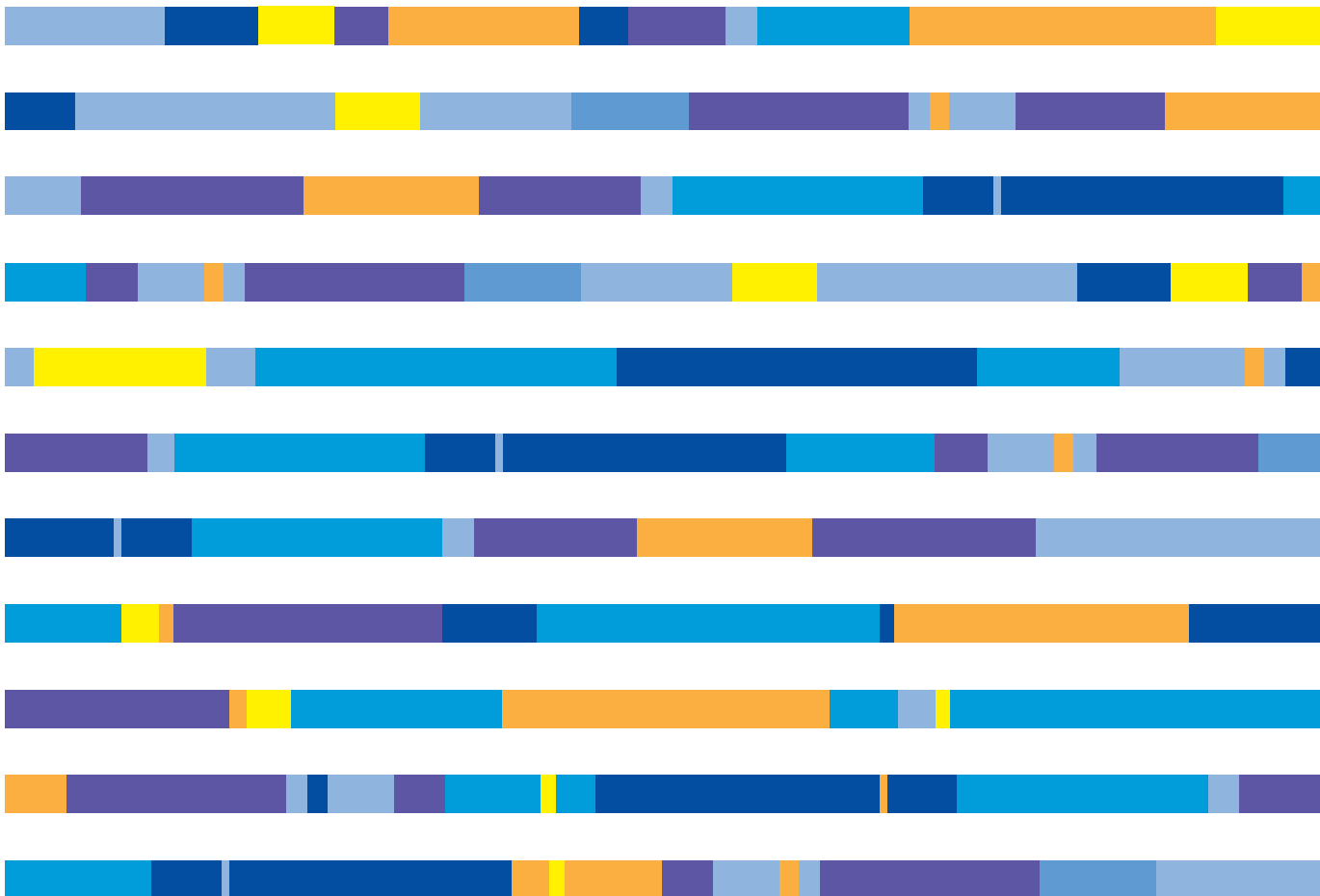
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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

COUNTRY REPORT:
NORWAY

Author: Ingvild Grini



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Contents

Acknowledgements	2
1 Abstract	4
2 Introduction.....	4
3 National perspective.....	10
3.1 Overarching approach to validation	10
3.2 Validation in education and training.....	13
3.3 Validation and the labour market	15
3.4 Validation and the third sector	17
4 Links to credentials and qualifications	18
5 Standards	20
6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination	21
7 Outreach, awareness raising, provision of information, advice and guidance	24
7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising.....	24
7.2 Information, advice and guidance	24
8 Validation practitioners.....	26
8.1 Profile of validation practitioners.....	26
8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners.....	26
8.3 Qualifications and experience.....	27
9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes.....	28
9.1 Funding and costs	28
9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes	29
9.2.1 Validation trends	29
9.2.2 Validation users.....	30
9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups	30
10 Validation methods.....	31
10.1 Methodologies and methods.....	31
10.2 Use of ICT in validation	32
11 Quality assurance	33
11.1 Quality assurance processes.....	33
11.2 Monitoring and evaluation.....	33
12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust	34
13 References	36
13.1 References	36
13.2 Sources	39

1 Abstract

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is an important objective in Norwegian education and competencies policy. Continuing a strong tradition for labour market and social inclusion, Norway is seeking to further develop its policy on VNFIL. The list below provides an overview of ongoing reviews that might, to various extent, affect NFIL, adult learning and validation in Norway.

In the following, Norwegian Official Reports (*NOU*) are referred to as Official Report or Green Paper, while Report to the Storting (Meld. St.) are referred to as White Paper.

Reports, papers and developments, Norway, 2018-2023

- National Skills Strategy 2017-2021¹
- White Paper on Competences Reform (2019-2020)²
- Official Report 2019:2³
- Official Report 2019:12⁴
- Official Report 2019:23⁵
- Official Report 2019:25⁶
- Official Report 2020:2⁷
- Official Report 2020:3⁸
- White Paper on Completion Reform (2020-2021)⁹
- Official Report 2021:2¹⁰
- Official Norwegian Report 2022:17¹¹
- White Paper on Future Skills Needs (2022-2023)¹²
- Prop. 126 L (2022-2023) Proposition to new law on universities and colleges (¹³)
- Prop. 57 L (2022-2023) Proposition to new education act¹⁴
- Innst.442 L Parliament Education and Research Committee on new education act¹⁵

This report aims to take stock of the validation process in Norway to date and highlighting any effects of the above developments to this process.

2 Introduction

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway (*'realkompetansevurdering'*) is clearly defined in the education sector, where it is used as a specific term in laws, regulations, and guidelines. In the validation system

¹ Nasjonal kompetansepolitisk strategi 2017-2021.

² Meld. St. 14 (2019–2020) - Kompetansereformen – Lære hele livet.

³ NOU 2019: 2 Fremtidige kompetansebehov II — utfordringer for kompetansepolitikken.

⁴ NOU 2019:12 Lærekraftig utvikling — Livslang læring for omstilling og konkurranseevne.

⁵ NOU 2019: 23 Ny opplæringslov.

⁶ NOU 2019: 25 Med rett til å mestre — Struktur og innhold i videregående opplæring.

⁷ NOU 2020: 2 Fremtidige kompetansebehov III — Læring og kompetanse i alle ledd.

⁸ NOU 2020: 3Ny lov om universiteter og høyskoler.

⁹ Meld. St. 21 (2020–2021) Fullføringsreformen – med åpne dører til verden og fremtiden.

¹⁰ NOU 2021:2 Kompetanse, aktivitet og inntektssikring — Tiltak for økt sysselsetting.

¹¹ NOU 2022: 17 Veier inn – ny modell for opptak til universiteter og høyskoler.

¹² Meld St. 14 (2022-2023) Utsyn over kompetansebehovet i Norge).

¹³ Prop. 126 L (2023) Lov om universiteter og høyskoler (universitet- og høyskoleloven).

¹⁴ Prop. 57 L (2023) Opplæringsloven (approved by Parliament June 2023, entry into force August 2024).

¹⁵ Innst. 442 L (2022-2023) Parliament Education and Research Committee on the new education act.

of the formal education sector, the term '*realkompetansevurderig*' includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. The reason for including formal learning is that it is viewed as a part of a person's total competences and therefore included in the term 'prior learning'.

There are laws and regulations in place for validation of non-formal and informal learning at each level of education and training in Norway. There is also a link with the labour market through the career guidance centres set up in the counties. These centres provide career guidance to adults, and they support validation procedures. Norwegian validation procedures are based on shared principles across all sectors. One such principle is that validation should be voluntary and of benefit to the individual. Moreover, while participation in validation is voluntary, the legal framework guarantees the rights of individuals to undertake a validation process.

The legal framework for validation of competences was strengthened in the aftermath of the Competence Reform (cf. Green Paper 1997¹⁶, White Paper 1998¹⁷). The sequence of educational sectors developing validation frameworks was determined by the pace of introducing statutory rights for adults to complete upper secondary education (by the autumn of 2000), and likewise for primary education in 2002. In higher education, the relevant legal changes were made in 2001. Hence, the Norwegian validation system came into place through a stepwise introduction across educational sectors.

Since the 2018 update to the European Inventory on Validation, the Norwegian system has not been modified. However, as a follow-up to a 2016 White Paper, the provisions on validation of competences have been modified for vocational college education (i.e., vocational programmes at ISCED levels 4 and 5). Applicants must now be at least 23 years old to be admitted based on non-formal and informal competencies (except in art, where the minimum age is 19). Also, the provision on exemption from part of programmes based on non-formal and informal learning has been transferred from regulation to law, to make the legal framework more similar to that for higher education. Another initiative since 2018 concerns the operationalisation of how skills held by refugees and immigrants could be documented and rapidly validated. In addition, Norwegian authorities have improved the provision of guidance to all learners who want to have their non-formal and informal learning validated and recognised. The latter point is explicitly mentioned in the EU Council Recommendation on validation, adopted in 2012 and later included in Norway's educational policy through the EEA agreement.

Alongside information and guidance on the benefits of and opportunities for validation, Norwegian guidelines cover the relevant validation procedures at each level of education. The application of these guidelines is reported to be most systematic on educational levels below higher education level. This observation, which however should be supported by more evidence, has to do with very clear administrative responsibilities for validation at the level of compulsory education (normally for 6 -15-year-olds) and upper secondary education (typically for learners aged 16 -19 years). Education institutions on higher levels enjoy more freedom and they are in general responsible for their own information and profiling. Yet, at those levels too, individuals who apply for admission and/or for exemption from parts of study programmes are entitled to a validation of their formal, non-formal and informal competences.

However, exemption from parts of programmes is not frequently practised at the VET and HE levels. In the context of the EU 2012 Recommendation, it could be stated that validation opportunities are available, but they are not widely used at these levels. For the vocational colleges, this provision is still quite new (2013 regulation), and as reported in previous versions of the Inventory, the offer of validation opportunities

¹⁶ NOU 1997:25 'New Competence'.

¹⁷ Report to the Storting (White Paper) no. 42 (1997–98) 'Competence Reform'.

varies between HE institutions. Institutions mostly offering education for specific professions (higher vocational education) receive and approve more applications for validation than do universities for careers in scientific fields which less frequently lead to a specific profession. This pattern applies both to validation for admission and exemption from courses forming part of a degree at HE level.

Concerning the uptake of validation practices in the labour market, the underlying rules and regulations are well acknowledged by stakeholders (NAV, employers, sectoral organisation) and increasingly understood by learners, though not across all occupational sectors. As reported in previous versions of the Inventory, one labour market obstacle also affecting Norway is that procedures for Human Resources Development (HRD) tend to follow their own logic. HRD as a scientific discipline and practiced by HRD staff at enterprise level is only indirectly affected by validation, because validation - as applied in Norwegian guidance and career centres - is closely linked to the formal education system and may not be seen as directly relevant for internal competence development.

Stakeholders from the third sector pointed out that it is necessary to find better ways to validate 'soft' skills and competences acquired through non-formal adult learning and to recognise learners' achievements in the third sector in the same way as in other sectors.

Overall, guidance and counselling are gaining ground and there are now career guidance centres or equivalents in all Norwegian counties. It can also be noted that Norway has made some progress towards implementing the 2012 EU Council Recommendation to offer validation through open educational resources (OER). One example is the inauguration in 2018 of a centre offering digital career guidance, amongst other things in matters of validation. The new centre serves as a regional office of Skills Norway (now part of the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills). In 2020, the Norwegian parliament passed a mandate requiring counties to provide free career guidance services to all residents¹⁸.

The 2012 EU Council Recommendation highlights that disadvantaged groups, including individuals who are unemployed and those at risk of unemployment, are particularly likely to benefit from validation arrangements. Ongoing cooperation between Norwegian labour market services and educational services at a municipal and county level ensures these disadvantaged groups are reached.

Through the annual state budget, funding has consistently been allocated to various measures enabling refugees to use their competences in view of rapid integration into working life. This includes mapping and validation of the skills and qualifications of refugees and other recently arrived immigrants. Special pilot bridging programmes have also been set up for refugees with professional qualifications in nursing, teaching, and engineering. Such programs could assist them in leveraging their qualifications within the Norwegian labour market. The Official Report 2019:2 on Future Skills Needs II emphasises that better structures are needed to validate skills and qualifications of workers with competencies from abroad¹⁹.

The 2012 EU Council Recommendation calls for the involvement of relevant stakeholders during the planning and implementation of national validation procedures. In Norway, this has been followed up through consultation and representation of social partners and other stakeholders, for example by being members of committees set up for producing governmental green papers and revising regulations in topics having a bearing on validation, as well as through open consultations on green papers and new and revised regulations.

¹⁸ Innst. 302 L (2019-2020).

¹⁹ NOU 2019:2 Fremtidige kompetansebehov II — Utfordringer for kompetansepolitikken.

Alongside the EU framework particularly set out in the 2012 Council Recommendation, validation policies in Norway have been influenced by practical policy learning exchanges among neighbouring countries. This has been instigated by the Nordic Council of Ministers and unfolds in meetings between practitioners in (semi-) public validation agencies, as well as occasional meetings between researchers in the field. Cross-country cooperation is also manifested in specific validation sectors, for example the Nordic network for validation in the third sector, which in 2016 issued a report about key competences and validation²⁰. Drawing lessons from the practices in other Nordic countries has been particularly beneficial in shaping recent policy developments and revisions. Although Sweden and Denmark employ varying systems and processes for validation, the Official Report 2019:12 on lifelong learning highlights their best practices.

In addition, the Norwegian Government proposed a revised law on vocational colleges in March 2018. The updated law, which has since been formally approved, upholds the current legal entitlement for enrolment based on validated non-formal and informal learning, but introduces a new requirement that access to vocational colleges after such validation should generally be restricted to students over the age of 23. As a result, the current practice of limiting vocational college enrolment to students under the age of 19 who have undergone validation is extended by four years. This change is viewed as advantageous for enhancing the overall quality and reputation of vocational colleges, which are still establishing their own identity within the spectrum of more established pathways for upper secondary and higher education.

The Ministry of Education and Research launched an open consultation in July 2018 resulting in a revision of the regulations on exemption from parts of study programs in higher education. The proposed changes incorporate a clear reference to learning outcomes as the foundation for assessments, including those related to validation.

A white paper on adult learning from 2016 argued that there are several hindrances to adult learning in the current system²¹. It noted that adults need a more flexible educational offer that can be adjusted to their life situations (e.g., work and family commitments). Trials promoting a more modularised structure for qualifications was put in place in three sectors: primary education, vocational education, and a combination of the two.

The Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy (2017-2021) included the following objectives related to validation:

- Make it easier to document skills acquired at work, so that they can be utilised more efficiently. Develop a method and model for evaluating skills acquired in the workplace as part of this work.
- Simplify and improve systems and the supply of recognition and assessment of foreign qualifications, professional qualifications, and supplementary education.

Additionally, validation is highlighted as an important skills policy strategy to ensure lifelong learning.

Various official reports from 2019 emphasize that most individuals seeking validation have Norwegian as their second language. Beginning in 2020, counties have been authorized to validate documents and qualifications in languages other than Norwegian and Sami, provided that sufficient language skills are available, such as through the use of a translator. The Official Report 2019:2 also recommends that the government works towards establishing a more comprehensive system for validation over the coming years, including a more standardized approach to validation across various sectors.

²⁰ <https://nvl.org/Content/Folkbildning-key-competences-and-validation>.

²¹ Meld. St. 16 (2015-2016) Fra utenforskap til ny sjanse – Samordnet innsats for voksnes læring.

The current legislation on education does not include a legal entitlement to validate primary education. However, the Official Report 2020:3 recommends that a new legal proposal, approved in June 2023 (Prop. 57 L (2022–2023) Opplæringsloven (approved by Parliament June 2023, entry into force August 2024)), be introduced to establish a general right to validate both primary and secondary education. The report also proposes the inclusion of a right to documentation for validation. The following table highlights some of the key findings from the consultations, reports, and evaluations conducted on validation between 2019 and 2023.

Table 1 Overview of governmental reports covering validation from 2019-2023.

2019	<p>NOU 2019:12 Lærekraftig utvikling — Livslang læring for omstilling og konkurranseevne</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The current validation system is not harmoniously applied, and the field is fragmented and underdeveloped. ■ Significant lack of data results in difficult analysis and policymaking. ■ Currently, for the HE sector, validation is only possible when a prospective students applies to enrol at a specific study programme. The Committee suggests widening the applicability of validation to any prospective students independent of their enrolment status. ■ The Commission suggests starting a long-term analysis and planning for improving the system of validation in Norway. ■ A first step should be to create a digital tool for validation. More funding to institutions conducting validation for capacity building and establishing knowledge networks are important measures. ■ To improve the data collection and statistics concerning validation, improved registration tools should be developed. Institutions should report, among others, the number of students requesting validation, the enrolment rate for students with validation and the extent of the validation. <p>NOU 2019: 23 Ny opplæringslov</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In 2016-2017, validation was applied on 2% of adults in lower secondary education. In 2016, around 3000 adults (10% of students in upper secondary education) were validated in upper secondary education. ■ The Committee proposes to stipulate a general right to validation for adults in primary and secondary education as well as the right to having the validation documented. <p>NOU 2019: 25 Med rett til å mestre — Struktur og innhold i videregående opplæring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system for validation is not well-functioning across the country, and highly dependent on the counties and institutions carrying out the validation.
2020	<p>Meld. St. 14 (2019–2020) - Kompetansereformen – Lære hele livet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government will review the existing legal framework for validation as a part of the review of the educational system.

2021	<p>Meld. St. 21 (2020–2021) Fullføringsreformen – med åpne dører til verden og fremtiden</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The government will assess whether changes are needed in the validation practices, especially as module structures will be introduced. ■ Improved procedures can make validation process smoother. ■ The government will assess whether a national framework or tools for validation in higher secondary education should be created. <p>NOU 2021:2 Kompetanse, aktivitet og inntektssikring — Tiltak for økt sysselsetting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Despite some positive developments on validation in the labour market in the past years, it is still a long way to go before the system for validation (documentation and evaluation) is fully utilised in the labour market. ■ Under the National Skills Policy Strategy (2017-2021), several social partners (Virke, YS, LO and NHO) developed a framework for measuring skills acquired in the workplace with different professions and roles under the project ‘Balansekunst’ (a balancing act). ■ The Committee recommends that the system for validation should be improved, but that specific recommendations on how is outside the scope of the Committee’s work. ■ An improved system for validation as well as improved career guidance can help activating a bigger section of the working population.
2022-2023	<p>NOU 2022: 17 Veier inn – ny modell for opptak til universiteter og høyskoler</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Today, a low number of applicants to higher education institutions apply on basis of validation. ■ Some of the limitations on the current process of validation are that the legal framework is difficult to navigate and understand by applicants, and the case-handling is resource-intensive. ■ In 2021, a total of 1.9% of all applicants to higher education requested validation. Only 20% of these applicants started the study programme they applied for. The low number can be that the applicants admitted based on validation were not ranked high enough in the admission to competitive study programmes requiring ranking of applicants and that not all admitted students take up studies. ■ Between 2011 and 2020, there is a general downwards trend in the number of applicants requesting validation. The Committee noted that while the number of validations is low, having a system for validation is important for the individual needing validation to enter higher education. ■ For competitive study programmes, admitting students based on the national grades-based ranking system, the case handler has to evaluate the validation request against fixed grades or scores of other applicants. This can sometimes prove difficult. ■ The Committee proposed to develop specific entrance exams to competitive study programmes, where admissions are based on grades, for all applicants that do not have grades from secondary education.

	<p>Meld St. 14 (2022-2023) Utsynsmeldingen – Kompetansebehov på kort og lang sikt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In 2022, the Directorate for Education (Udir) was requested to improve the data collection concerning the use of validation in secondary education. Similarly, in 2023, the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) was tasked to map out the application of validation, including at county level, as well as proposed improvements to the validation of adults' education in secondary education. ■ A national network has been established between the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir), NAV and the country municipalities to share best practices in career guidance, validation, and training. <p>Prop. 126 L (2022–2023) Lov om universiteter og høyskoler</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Ministry of Education and Research proposes to continue the current legal framework concerning validation. <p>Prop. 57 L (2022–2023) Opplæringsloven (approved by Parliament June 2023, entry into force August 2024)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Ministry suggests continuing a general right to validation for all who has a right to primary education and for adults with the right to secondary education. Additionally, the Ministry advice to stipulate a right to validation for adults that do not have a right to secondary education because they have not completed primary education if these adults have been suggested by NAV or the municipality. The aim of this change would be to include immigrants arriving in Norway without documentation of completed primary education in their birth country.
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3 National perspective

3.1 Overarching approach to validation

Overall policy context

The development of skills and competences is a crucial objective for promoting a robust labour market and social inclusion in Norway. The framework for validating non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) is situated within both the educational and labour policy domains. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is possible at all levels of education and training and can be used to acquire modules and/or full qualifications. There are laws and regulations in place for each level of education and training, providing a general framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Conceptually, validation of non-formal and informal learning, known in Norwegian as '*realkompetansevurdering*', is clearly defined in the education sector, where it is used as a specific term in laws, regulations, and ensuing guidelines. In the validation system of the education sector, the term '*realkompetanse*' includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. Formal learning is viewed as a part of a person's total competences and therefore included in the term '*realkompetanse*', together with non-formal and informal learning. Given that the Norwegian validation system is established in the formal education sector, the reference point or standard for validation of learning from the workplace or the third sector are the learning outcomes defined in national and/or institutional curricula of the formal education sector. As

certification after validation is issued by the same institutions as formal certificates acquired through formal learning, the outcomes of validation of non-formal and informal learning are formally recognised as equal to formal learning outcomes. Following a validation procedure at higher education level, a prospective student's competences are evaluated as qualified/unqualified (*godkjent/ikke-godkjent*) which might negatively affect the admission of validated students into programmes that admit based on a grades-based ranking system, as validation students will only be offered a place in the study programme if there are places available following the ranking of those students admitted based on grades²².

Institutionally, the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) is responsible for overseeing national efforts to address cross-sectoral challenges related to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Since its creation in 2021, this government agency, which resulted from the merger of several other agencies and units, proposes actions to the Ministry of Education and Research and initiates relevant projects in response to them. The Directorate for Education and Training has national responsibility for validation of non-formal and informal learning in primary, lower and upper secondary education and training for adults. The Directorate monitors compliance with laws and regulations in this field and supervises provision at a county and municipal level.

Validation frameworks for primary and secondary education and training were progressively developed following the introduction of statutory rights for adults to complete *upper secondary education and training* (by the autumn of 2000), and likewise for adults to complete *primary education* in 2002. The statutory right to attend and complete education at these levels entails a right for the students to access validation for free. In addition, since 2001, adults without sufficient formal qualifications can have their non-formal and informal learning assessed to gain admission to *higher education*. Concurrently, in 2000, statutory rights for adults to complete upper secondary education and training were introduced, followed by the introduction of statutory rights for primary education in 2002. In parallel, higher education institutions were granted authority to grant exemptions from parts of study programmes based on assessment of non-formal and informal learning. While validation for admission purposes was introduced for post-secondary vocational colleges with the original law for this level in 2003, the possibility of granting exemption from parts of programmes based on validation was introduced only in 2013 for this level.

The Norwegian validation system is based on shared principles across all sectors. One of the guiding principles of the validation process is that it should be voluntary and beneficial to the individual. The objective of validation should be to assess the skills and competencies that a person possesses rather than highlighting what they do not have. Even though participation in validation is optional, the legal framework ensures that individuals have the right to undergo a validation process.

Differences in funding and governance mechanisms found in primary, upper secondary, post-secondary vocational and higher education affect the preconditions for setting up validation procedures. The sectors of education have therefore developed schemes for validation of non-formal and informal learning according to their specific needs and preconditions. Higher education institutions exercise the greatest freedom in the design and delivery of validation because responsibilities are devolved to each institution. This freedom also applies to post-secondary VET offered by vocational colleges. Nevertheless, the national government and its underlying administrations provide guidelines for all educational sectors.

As validation can impact on a person's educational as well as labour market status, co-ordination between relevant public services has its importance. The Norwegian

²² NOU 2019:12.

Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) is responsible for information and guidance for the labour market sector (i.e., via municipal employment centres), but municipal employment centres are dependent on input from the education sector in matters of validation. Hence, NAV might cover the costs of NFIL validation for jobseekers while educational institutions are responsible for carrying out validation assessments for all types of learners.

A report on the status of validation published in 2011 by Vox, the former Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning (now a part of the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, HK-dir), identified a need to improve cooperation and involvement in different sectors at county level, and between different levels of education. Quality assurance (QA) was also identified as important; both in terms of methods and with regard to the training of assessors.

In 2014, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training developed national guidelines for adults in lower or upper secondary education who claim the right to have their formal, non-formal and informal learning validated. This was done in cooperation with stakeholders from educational sectors. The guidelines focus on how to interpret the regulations relating to validation, and how to implement the different points described in the regulations. The purpose of the national guidelines for validation is to ensure that sound validation procedures are carried out, thereby leading to similar practices in all Norwegian counties and municipalities. By providing a national basis for local practices, the guidelines could spur confidence and legitimacy of the validation framework. These guidelines emphasised the documentation of the results of the validation process, which may instigate adult learners to make use of their legal rights as adults to apply for validation free of charge.

The former Skills Norway agency (now under the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills) developed guidelines for validation regarding admission to higher vocational education and exemption in higher education. These guidelines were developed in cooperation with stakeholders from the VET and higher education sectors. They are published on the directorate's website. A current challenge in the third and labour market sectors is to raise awareness of the available validation arrangements and ensure that stakeholders find them valuable and provide feedback to public validation services.

The Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy (2017-2021), hereafter NKPS, is a strategic document on skills that was signed in 2017 and involves multiple stakeholders. The aim of the strategy was to improve the transitions between different learning arenas by promoting coordination between various policy sectors, authorities, labour market entities, and other actors in the field of skills development. As such, the strategy points to three main objectives:

- Facilitating information and guidance for individuals and society to make informed choices.
- Encouraging learning opportunities and use of skills in the labour market.
- Strengthening the skills of adults with poor basic skills and little formal education.

Especially on validation, the strategy highlighted the need to make it easier to document skills acquired at work, so that they can be utilised more efficiently. This includes developing a method and model for evaluating skills acquired in the workplace. Additionally, the systems and supply of recognition and assessment of qualifications and supplementary education should be simplified and improved.

To follow-up on the implementation of the strategy, the Skills Policy Council (*Kompetansepolitisk råd*) and the Future Skills Needs Committee (*Kompetansebehvosutvalget*) were established. In June 2022, the Future Skills Needs Committee published a report on the future of skills needs in higher vocational

education for 2021-2023. The Committee, consisting of researchers, authorities and partners, highlighted that there is an increasing need for lifelong learning and that higher vocational education plays an important role in future trends like digitalisation and green transition.

Lifelong learning policies are to some extent relevant for validation, especially for vocational colleges. In 2021, The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), was tasked to review the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (*Nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring*, NKR). The review was delivered in three sub-reports in November 2022 (first report), February 2023 (second report) and May 2023 (final report)²³. From the first report, it is noted that the current NKR is scarcely applied in higher education institutions for the validation of learning. At the same time, vocational colleges generally find the current framework helpful for validation purposes. No data is collected on the learner's (users) awareness and familiarity with the qualification's framework related to validation of their prior learning.

EFTA will evaluate potential relevance of individual learning accounts (*individuelle læringskontoer*) under the EEA Agreement, and the Ministry of Education and Research will be the responsible ministry for the implementation any EEA decisions on individual learning accounts in Norway.

3.2 Validation in education and training

In Norway, validation of non-formal and informal learning is offered in all sectors of education. There are laws and regulations in place relating to each level of education and training (see the 2010 update for a comprehensive overview of the laws and strategies, which have been introduced over time), providing a general framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In terms of the four stages of validation, the Norwegian process for validation outlined below can - with small adaptations - be applied to any level of education and training:

1. information and guidance;
2. identification and documentation;
3. assessment; and,
4. certification.

Regarding the final 'certification' stage, a range of different outcomes are possible, depending on the level and the result of the validation process. The certificates from the validation prove equal to the qualifications awarded to students who undertake formal learning, except that for validation candidates, no grade is given. The document simply states 'approved' or 'pass'.

In lower and upper secondary education, the outcome can either be a document showing that the individual has achieved a full qualification (certificate); or, if the individual has not achieved a full qualification, a document is awarded called a 'certificate of competence'. In VET programmes, it is not possible to obtain a full qualification based on validation of non-formal and informal learning alone. Applicants must pass a trade examination to obtain the final VET (trade or journeyman's) certificate. At a national level, although data are collected by the Directorate for Education and Training, there is currently no overview of how validation procedures

²³ Kvalifikasjonar på ramme alvor: Evaluering av Nasjonal kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring, 4/2023 (NOKUT) <https://www.nokut.no/globalassets/nokut/rapporter/ua/2023/evaluering-av-nasjonalt-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk-for-livslang-laring-hovedrapport.pdf>.

are practised when validation of non-formal and informal learning is provided at the level of upper secondary education.

In post-secondary vocational education and training, to date, validation has mainly been used to support admissions, meaning that the validation process does not necessarily result in a formal document or certificate, rather the award of a study place (documented for example in a letter). The possibility to validate for the purpose of exemption from part of study programmes was only introduced in 2013 for these colleges.

Finally, in higher education, a student who achieves some courses through validation, and others via formal learning, will not receive a grade for the validated courses (only 'Pass'), whereas most other courses passed will be graded by the letters A to E. For validation students who wish to continue their studies, the lack of grades in certain courses might be a disadvantage when competing for a place at a master's degree level.

The extent to which each of the four stages is used in practice will depend on the needs of the individual applicant and the purpose of the validation application. An illustration of how the four stages are implemented and adjusted in practice can be seen in the 2014 guidelines for adults seeking validation of their non-formal and informal competencies at the lower or upper secondary level.

1. *Information and guidance*²⁴. This stage starts when the applicant contacts the county or municipal administration. Through guidance, it becomes clear whether the purpose of the validation is to be enrolled in lower or upper secondary education and training or undergo validation to prove competence (knowledge and skills) in individual subjects at the lower/upper secondary level. In the first case, there is a need to clarify which type and level of qualification the applicant aims to achieve by the end of the course ('*sluttkompetanse*'). The standards/reference for the validation are based on the formal curricula for lower/upper secondary education and training. This first stage also displays the breadth of the applicant's informal, non-formal and formal learning.
2. *Identification and documentation*. The municipality or the county administration works together with the applicant to provide documentation of the applicant's non-formal and informal learning. It is then decided if the documentation needs to be supplemented by further mapping of the competencies held by the applicant, specifying as well which mapping methods should be used.
3. *Assessment*. Professionals in the municipality or in the county assess whether the applicant's competencies are equal or equivalent to the learning outcomes set out in the national curriculum of lower or upper secondary education and training. If that is confirmed, the relevant subject for assessment is approved.
4. *Certification*. At the final stage, the municipality or the county administration documents the results of the validation through a formal decision ('*enkeltvedtak*'). If the applicant's competencies are assessed as equivalent, a documentation of competencies is issued to the applicant as soon as possible. As mentioned above, this document can either be a full qualification (a certificate), equivalent to those issued in formal education (but without grades) or a certificate of competence for those who have not completed the full education programme and can only demonstrate competences for certain subjects within the programme. As already mentioned, validation applicants for the VET programmes need to pass the final (trade) examination.

In Norway, there is no information available on the extent to which Open Educational Resources (OERs), such as MOOCs, are used for validation purposes. Currently, only

²⁴ The terms used in National guidelines for lower and upper secondary education are: 1) Guidance and clarification; 2) Mapping; 3) Assessment and valuation; and 4) Certification.

the number of national validations has been collected without specifying the validated content. If the providers of OERs, including MOOCs, are higher education institutions and the courses are part of their own degree programmes, the assessment is considered as recognition of formal qualifications rather than validation. In principle, there is no difference between OERs/MOOCs and other flexible provisions, as long as it is clear whether the course is part of a formal study programme, and it allows for the identification of course providers and participants for certification purposes. This perspective is also reflected in a Green Paper (NOU 2014:5) on MOOCs, which was submitted to the Minister of Education and Research in June 2014.

Since 2016, trials on a more modularised structure have been conducted. The trials are targeted to adults who aim at achieving a vocational qualification but either lacking primary education, vocational education, or both. The first evaluation of the trial is running until end of 2023, and the results will be assessed by 2026. Nordland County in Northern Norway is participating in the trials by offering the modules online. The county is reporting that their experience with modularised structures in online courses has been positive²⁵.

3.3 Validation and the labour market

The 2017 annual thematic report of the former Skills Norway agency, now part of the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, focused on the transformation of skills during industrial and economic restructuring. Given the globalisation of the entire economy and reorganisation of the Norwegian oil industries, the report predicts that there will be higher demand for non-formal training at the enterprise level, combined with continued efforts to validate non-formal competencies. This conclusion has been supported by several reports in recent years, including the National Skills Strategy and Report nr. 15/2022 from the Directorate of Higher Education and Skills, which estimates that almost 30% of private and public sector employers are unable to find candidates with the necessary skills and competencies²⁶. However, the report also notes that as of July 2022, the unemployment rate in Norway was at a record low of only 1.7%.

However, an Official Report on employment in Norway from 2021, noted that the current system for validation should be improved to utilise skills more efficiently in the labour market²⁷. In particular, the report argued that the current system for describing, documenting, and validating non-formal and informal learning is not good enough. The report highlighted the importance of validation as a tool to fill the skills gap in the Norwegian labour market. Similar conclusions were drawn in Official Report 2019:12 concerning validation in the higher education sector. In this sector, the report underlines that validation is limited to persons who apply for admission to a higher education institution. The report recommended expanding the availability of validation in the higher education sector beyond enrolment applications but acknowledged that funding was a limiting factor. Additionally, the report proposed allocating funds for the development of digital tools to assist in the validation process²⁸. Other proposed measures to strengthening the validation process in Norway included increased mutual learning activities.

Regarding social dialogue, the former Skills Norway agency initiated and funded a project to increase awareness of competence development among trade union representatives at the workplace. This project, described in the 2018 annual report,

²⁵ Meld. St. 21 (2020–2021) Fullføringsreformen – med åpne dører til verden og fremtiden.

²⁶ Rapport nr. 15/2022 Framtidige kompetansebehov – et oppdatert kunnskapsgrunnlag, Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (2022).

²⁷ NOU 2021:2.

²⁸ NOU 2019:12 Lærekraftig utvikling — Livslang læring for omstilling og konkurranseevne.

established a scheme with annual calls for proposals under the heading Competence Development in Working Life. The scheme encouraged regional partnerships to undertake projects that included career guidance centres responsible for validating non-formal and informal learning. This initiative led to activities aimed at documenting workers' non-formal and informal learning as part of a broader project to upgrade the skills of the workforce.

To improve the social dialogue on skills and bridge the gap between the labour market and training validation, the "A Balancing Act" concept was developed by the Federation of Norwegian Enterprise (Virke). This concept established competency standards in the labour market that could be used for validation purposes, similar to formal education. A method for translating non-formal and informal learning in the labour market into formal validation criteria was created based on pilots with Kiwi, Menu, and IKEA. In 2019, the concept was awarded the VPL Biennale prize for its relevance to the validation of prior learning²⁹.

As a first step to support the employability of low-skilled workers in all economic sectors, employers can apply for funding under the SkillsPlus programme ('*Kompetansepluss*'). SkillsPlus is funded by the government and provides subsidies to employers to support training at the workplace with the aim of improving employees' fundamental skills in areas such as reading, writing, numeracy, and digital proficiency. The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) is responsible for validating non-formal and informal learning experiences, and responsible for administering the SkillsPlus programme. This consolidation of responsibilities is seen as advantageous for the government's efforts to promote basic skills development and validate non-formal and informal learning experiences.

The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) and the county education authorities have concluded agreements to ensure targeted cooperation both at county level in matters of planning, and for practical collaboration at the local level. This cooperation concerns low-skilled individuals who need assistance from both the labour market and education sectors to increase their employability or to complete their training. Regarding the modularised structure trials, counties are reporting that the collaboration with NAV is positive as many of the participants are recruited through NAV³⁰.

As reported in the 2018 update, all counties now have at least one career guidance centre, or similar arrangements for the provision of validation services. This is made possible by close cooperation between county educational administrations and local employment offices (NAV). The Career Guidance Centres ('*karrieresentre*')³¹ make use of a variety of methods and tools to support users in their career planning. As mentioned earlier, since June 2021, counties have a duty to offer career guidance services to all individuals residing within their respective jurisdiction.

Developing systematic validation guidance to learners remains a challenge since the centres are staffed by advisers from various backgrounds and belong to different administrative levels, such as county and municipalities. The Career Guidance Centres are also aware that learners should not just receive face-to-face guidance. Hence, in 2020, the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) launched a digital platform for career guidance. The platform offers free, anonymous career guidance across the country.

In the period 2011-2014, the former Skills Norway implemented a project involving five counties trying out an alternative method for work-based vocational training of

²⁹ <https://vplbiennale.org/vpl-prize/>.

³⁰ Meld. St. 21 (2020–2021) Fullføringsreformen – med åpne dører til verden og fremtiden.

³¹ https://utdanning.no/tema/hjelp_og_veiledning/karrieresentre.

partially skilled workers³². A second consultation round with social partners and other stakeholders was held in 2017. The government decided in March 2018 that this scheme should be made permanent, and the necessary legislative amendment was adopted by the parliament (*Stortinget*) in May 2018.

The scheme begins when an employee with at least one year of experience in a specific occupation applies for validation of their skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Once the skills have been assessed, the employee can enter into an agreement with the training provider (e.g., VET county authorities) and the employer. The three parties then create a plan for the learning process that leads to an apprenticeship certificate. The alternative method, which is now permanent, involves guidance, instruction, and tailored learning at the workplace. This method, called "apprenticeship certificate on the job," (*fagbrev på jobb*) aims to attract employees who need specific support and adaptation to obtain the certificate³³. The program was further strengthened in the 2023 national budget, which allocated EUR 5m to encourage adults working in vocational trades to apply for validation.

Examples of internal validation procedures, linked to wage negotiations or competence development in companies can also be found outside of the formal system of validation. In these instances, the validation standards/references are based on local requirements defined by the company concerned. For example, the Municipality of Halden uses an electronic 'inventory' tool for employees to record their learning outcomes – covering both formal and non-formal learning. The information recorded in the tool can be used to support wage negotiations during the employee evaluation process.

In 2019, as part of an initiative to promote labour inclusion, NAV extended its educational and labour market training offer (e.g., support to obtain '*realkompetanse*') to broader groups of unemployed individuals. A 2021 report indicated that this change had a significant impact on the number of participants engaged in educational activities. The average number of job seekers participating in educational activities per month rose from 74 participants in 2015 to 757 participants in 2021³⁴.

3.4 Validation and the third sector

The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (VOFO) is pivotal in organising and supporting grassroots level activities in the third sector. In recent years, this umbrella association has promoted validation practices as part of its efforts to raise the quality of its wide array of courses for adult learners. These courses are coordinated by the member associations of VOFO, and now place greater emphasis on documenting the competences acquired by the course participants. In its discussions with VOFO, which receives government funding for liberal adult education courses, the Norwegian Ministry of Education emphasised the connection between quality and the documentation of non-formal and informal learning experiences. VOFO has dealt with the challenges of validating learning experiences by hosting a seminar in 2016 that focused on the types of knowledge that are documented when liberal adult education is subject to validation requirements.

The 2018 report explains that VOFO advocates the recognition of adult learning taking place outside of the formal sector. Although there is legislation in place on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the third sector, more needs to be done to ensure that this learning is recognised. The reference for validation is the learning outcomes set in national and/or institutional curricula. This means that the

³² <https://www.kompetansenorge.no/statistikk-og-analyse/publikasjoner/fagbrav-pa-jobb/>.

³³ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/fagbrev-pa-jobb/id2594833>.

³⁴ <https://www.nav.no/no/nav-og-samfunn/kunnskap/analyser-fra-nav/nyheter/flere-far-formell-kompetanse-etter-nav-tiltak>.

outcomes of non-formal learning, which are not included in the formal curricula, cannot be recognized through this validation process. The association recognizes a desire to recognize other outcomes, but due to the lack of tools to recognize these outcomes, they are measured against national curricula for formal learning. VOFO also identifies a shortage of trained assessors in the third sector and a lack of documentation of non-formal learning that is equivalent to the way formal learning is expressed and documented.

In the opinion of VOFO, the previous inventory described that, it is necessary to develop new tools that can facilitate the validation of learning outcomes obtained outside the formal education system. This will enable the documentation of the benefits of adult learning, particularly 'soft' outcomes. VOFO believes that those involved in assessing and providing guidance for validation in the formal sector should have a better understanding of adult learning and its potential outcomes. To achieve this, VOFO proposes increased collaboration between the non-formal and formal education sectors. Additionally, VOFO recommends conducting further research, either at the national or Nordic level, to gain a better understanding of the advantages of non-formal and informal learning.

This view is incorporated in an official report from 2019 (NOU 2019:12), which explains that a more established system for recognising non-formal and informal learning might help facilitate the validation of competences acquired informal learning. Furthermore, the report calls for an assessment of whether such learning should be assessed against the National Qualifications Framework (*Nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring*, NKR) or if a parallel system should be created.

As outlined in the previous inventory, students who have completed a one-year course in a Norwegian folk high school (Folkehøgskolene), considered as third sector organisation, earn two 'competition points' (*konkurranspoeng*) in recognition of the learning they have undertaken when applying for admission to higher education. The folk high school certificates are not graded but outline the subject studied, and the content covered.

Norwegian liberal adult education, which falls under the third sector, has looked to other Nordic countries for inspiration in the field of education and training. The Nordic Network for Adult Learning, operating under the Nordic Council of Ministers, published a report in 2015 that focused on identifying key competences in the voluntary sector and exploring how these competences could be validated. The report offers relevant suggestions for the validation of competences in Norway's third sector³⁵.

4 Links to credentials and qualifications

The Norwegian National Qualifications Framework (*Nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring*, NKR) was laid down by the Ministry of Education and Research in December 2011 after widespread consultations. The NKR was implemented three years later. The qualifications framework for higher education was laid down earlier, in 2009, with a deadline for implementation at the higher education institutions by the end of 2012.

The NKR covers today primary, lower secondary, both general and vocational upper secondary education, alongside post-secondary and higher education qualifications. It comprises eight levels. However, no qualifications are included on the first level. The three highest levels of the NKR are identical to the three cycles of the qualifications framework of the European Higher Education Area: i.e. Bachelor, Master and PhD.

³⁵ <http://nvl.org/Content/Folkbildning-key-competences-and-validation>

The aim of the NKR is to describe the formal national qualifications system in a transparent way. In doing so, the framework should increase mobility, support more flexible learning pathways and promote lifelong learning. Another objective of the NKR is to offer the opportunity to develop new instruments for valuing learning acquired outside the formal system. Consequently, a committee with wide social-partner representation was nominated in 2013 to investigate the possibility of including non-formal learning provision in the National Qualifications Framework. The committee report was finalised and handed over to the Ministry of Education and Research in 2015. The conclusions describe two alternative models for further development of the NKR in Norway³⁶. Both models met with numerous dissenting opinions. This has complicated the ministerial work for striking a balance between diverging recommendations. However, some of the definitions proposed by this committee have been integrated into the regulation on the NKR, of November 2017. In a 2023 report, The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) points out that informal learning qualifications are not included in the NKR³⁷. Including informal learning in the framework might help facilitate validation processes, though it might not increase the number of validations, the report notes. Also, the NOKUT report highlights that some experts find the current validation system to promote academic education and is questioning whether the system should be more accessible for practical and vocational educations.

As explained in previous sections of this report, a learner may gain access to education through validation. However, the individual must show (through documentation or other means) that s/he has the required skills and competences to enter a certain level of education and training. More specifically, the national qualifications framework in Norway outlines five areas in which the NKR could influence validation:

1. introduction of learning outcomes as the underpinning principle for all qualifications;
2. increased transparency of qualification levels;
3. development of more fit-for-purpose methods, supporting validation;
4. more consistent conceptual basis;
5. general shift of attention towards learning outcomes³⁸.

The White Papers on vocational college education (2016) and higher education (2017) emphasise the significance of the NKR learning outcomes principle in enhancing the quality of study programmes and ensuring quality assurance. The levels of the NKR are described using level descriptors that lay down the knowledge (*kunnskap*), skills (*ferdigheter*) and competences (*generell kompetanse*) expected from all successful school leavers and graduates at each level. There is one common set of descriptors for each level which covers all qualifications, except at the upper secondary education level (level 4) where there are two parallel sets of descriptors of equal value (one for vocational training and another for general study programmes). Overall, the Norwegian education and training system is now fully based on the learning outcomes approach.

This allows for the possibility of obtaining a complete qualification through validation in the university-preparatory Programme for General Studies at the upper secondary education level. However, in upper secondary VET, it is mandatory to pass the

³⁶ A presentation in English of these models is found on page 17 in "How informal and non-formal learning is recognised in Europe. Norway – country report". See: www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/vnfil-in-europe.

³⁷ Kvalifikasjonar på ramme alvor: Evaluering av Nasjonal kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring, 4/2023 (NOKUT) <https://www.nokut.no/globalassets/nokut/rapporter/ua/2023/evaluering-av-nasjonalt-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk-for-livslang-laring-hovedrapport.pdf>.

³⁸ Ibid.

relevant final (trade) examination in order to obtain a skilled worker's trade or journeyman's certificate.

In higher education, individuals can be exempted from parts of a study programme. On the diploma as well as on the Diploma Supplement, the relevant courses and credits will be identified as having been obtained through validation. In post-secondary VET, the possibility to give exemption from courses and modules on the basis of validation was introduced through regulations of 1 August 2013. There is not yet systematic reporting on experiences from these procedures.

In terms of awarding credits or partial qualifications after validation in primary and upper secondary education and training, the Education Act permits candidates to achieve a partial certificate qualification, called 'certificate of competence' (*kompetansebevis*) at any level through validation. Candidates then have the right to access further education and training, in order to achieve a full trade or journeyman's certificate.

The certificates can serve as independent proof of competence and can be utilised, for instance, to support a job application or to participate in further education courses. These partial certificates of competence are recognised on the labour market, serving as documentary proof that certain requirements in a particular trade are met by the applicant. For instance, a certificate for cooking breakfasts can serve as a partial competence certificate for a fully trained cook.

In a 2021 White Paper³⁹, the government highly recommends implementing modularisation in the Norwegian validation system. As a result, validation will need to be carried out more frequently and flexibly, as an important tool for placing the participants in the right module.

The ongoing pilot on a modularised structured training involves adults who aim to obtain a vocational qualification but lacking primary education, vocational education, or both. In 2021, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills developed a guide for use in the module trial. This structure is more flexible and targeted to the learner.

However, it is worth noting that modularisation can pose a challenging to the validation process. With the modularisation of learning, it may be that validation will have to be conducted more frequently. Prior to commencing modularised education, validation must be carried out to map the learning needs of the adult. Additionally, each module must provide sufficient documentation for validation. It should allow learners to receive partial validation, if, for instance, they complete one module and need a break before continuing with another. While this may increase the workload for the counties validating the learning, it is expected to save resources in terms of education, according to the White Paper Meld. St. 21 (2020–2021).

Moreover, the White Paper suggests that a new national framework for validation might be needed following the new educational act (June 2023). At present, the counties might use the validation system to a varying degree, and there would be a need to ensure a more standardised approach. A suggestion would be to increase the use of ICT in validation, see section 3.6 of this report.

5 Standards

In the Norwegian education and training system, the term 'standard' as such is not used. 'Reference' is more commonly used. The reference used for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Norwegian education system is the learning outcomes set in the formal curricula; the same as those used in formal education and

³⁹ Meld. St. 21 (2020–2021) Fullføringsreformen – med åpne dører til verden og fremtiden.

training. At the lower and upper secondary levels, the national curricula are used as reference, whereas in post-secondary and higher education, each institution's learning outcomes in the relevant study programme are used as reference. This means that while there is standardisation of how validation candidates are assessed at the lower and upper secondary levels, there is necessarily more variation in the way assessments are carried out at post-secondary and higher education levels.

The Norwegian Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (NKR), describes the qualifications and learning outcomes per education level. The learning outcomes are structured according to knowledge, skills, and competences. It was introduced in 2011 following the European Qualifications Framework and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is responsible for the implementation of the framework. In a 2023 report⁴⁰, NOKUT notes that the current legal assessment of qualifications for higher education outlined in the higher educational act is whether “the student has obtained a certain academic or professional level which equals the learning outcomes expected in the relevant subject”. The purpose of the NKR was, among others, to make it easier for the validating institutions to carry out validation. However, the report notes that higher education institutions tend to not apply NKR as a tool for validation, while vocational education institutions to a limited extent has found NRK helpful for validation. As a result, the NKR has only had a limited contribution on the application and use of validation⁴¹.

6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) – an executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research – is responsible for education and training of adults, including early school education, immigrants, higher vocational education, higher education and the documentation and validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning at these levels. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is responsible for quality assurance and for recognition and accreditation of programmes and institutions in higher vocational education and in higher education⁴².

The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) works to promote adult learning, including non-formal and informal learning. It has responsibility for overseeing the Norwegian approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The former Skills Norway agency developed two sets of guidelines for validation (both published in 2013) after consultations with two working groups - one for the higher education sector, and one for the post-secondary VET sector. The working group for the post-secondary VET sector brought together learning providers and representatives of the national council of post-secondary VET which includes sectoral social partners. Members of the higher education working group were appointed by Universities Norway - previously known as the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions UHR. Following the enactment of a new Vocational Education Act, the guidelines for the VET sector was updated in 2020. The updated guideline⁴³ targets employees in vocational education institutions who work on validation.

⁴⁰ Kvalifikasjonar på ramme alvor Evaluering av Nasjonal kvalifikasjonsrammeverk for livslang læring, 4/2023 (NOKUT) <https://www.nokut.no/globalassets/nokut/rapporter/ua/2023/evaluering-av-nasjonal-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk-for-livslang-laring-hovedrapport.pdf>.

⁴¹ Ibid page 101.

⁴² <http://www.nokut.no/en/>

⁴³ Veileder: Opptak til høyere yrkesfaglig utdanning på grunnlag av realkompetanse (Kompetanse Norge, 2020).

Municipalities and counties have responsibility for the delivery of validation services in relation to lower secondary education and upper secondary education respectively. For post-secondary VET and higher education, responsibility for the delivery of validation services lies with vocational colleges and Higher Education Institution (HEI) respectively. The national guidelines refer to the four stages of validation outlined above (see Section 2.2), but the assessment methods used are decided by the individual providers. Information about validation is generally provided via the internet or, in the case of the counties, in local newspapers or other local channels of information. The [Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service](#) (NAV) is responsible for information and guidance in their labour market agencies – i.e. municipal employment centres – but NAV receives input from the education sector in matters of validation.

As pointed out by several governmental reports, the collection of statistics and data concerning validation in Norway is sparse⁴⁴. Currently, data is mainly collected through admission data by the Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (Samordna opptak). To improve the data collection and statistics concerning validation, NOU 2019:12 proposes that a unified registration tools is developed where institutions would also report on validation data. The report notes that institutions should report, among others, the number of students requesting validation, the enrolment rate for students with validation and the extent of the validation. The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) collects data through various sources, including the Database for Higher Education (DBH), '*DBH Fagskolestatistikk*', and Statistics Norway. Moreover, the Directorate for Education published data and analysis which sometimes include validation in its annual "Education Mirror" (Utdanningsspeilet).

Education and training providers

All county-level (*fylke*) education authorities have set up one or more assessment centres for validation of non-formal and informal learning in upper secondary education, which often are located at upper secondary schools. The centres provide information, guidance and help with the validation process in relation to upper secondary education. The centres also collect data on the candidates who have undergone validation which are kept in a national-level register. The education authorities at county level are responsible for quality assurance of the assessment procedure, including the training of assessors. The municipalities have responsibility for validation in lower secondary education. Adult learners can apply for validation to any of the 250 adult education centres nationwide.

The validation guidelines for admission to post-secondary VET are based on a report that outlines how vocational colleges currently implement processes for *admission* (Vox, 2012b). The report shows that in 2011 survey, more than half (35 of 61) of the responding vocational colleges indicated having carried out assessments of non-formal and informal competencies in relation to admissions⁴⁵.

The Ministry of Education and Research has since 2011 published annual reports on post-secondary VET, based on the DBH-F database mentioned above. Data on validation-based admissions are included in these annual reports⁴⁶.

As explained above, HEI set up their own procedures for validation based on their own study programmes and curricula. Each HEI is responsible for the quality of its validation services. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) has overall responsibility for the quality of provision in HE.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

⁴⁴ NOU 2019:12 Lærekræftig utvikling — Livslang læring for omstilling og konkurranseevne

⁴⁵ Since 2012, The Ministry of Education and Research publishes an annual report on post-secondary VET.

⁴⁶ https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kd/vedlegg/fagskoleutd/fagskoler_f-4395_hele.pdf

The Norwegian validation system aims to establish a connection between work-based learning and the formal education sector. Validation can increase awareness of both the importance of work-based learning and of the opportunities offered by the formal education and training sector to capture such learning. Moreover, validation enables experienced workers who do not have formal educational qualifications to complete their formal vocational education and training in an efficient way⁴⁷.

Third sector organisations

The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (VOFO), which represents 12 adult learning associations, is involved, and consulted in the development of the validation system in Norway. As noted above, in VOFO's opinion, more still needs to be done to ensure that adult learning taking place outside of the formal sector can be recognised through validation. (Interviews with representative of VOFO, 2013 and 2016).

Coordination between stakeholders

The Directorate for Education and Training oversees early school education, primary, lower and upper secondary education and training, including VET, for adults. The validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning at these levels of education and training is also under the responsibility of the Directorate. In this context, the Directorate works together and is in regular contact with the Ministry of Education. The Directorate also has regular contacts with:

- County Governors – these governors are responsible for a number of supervision and management duties at the lower administrative levels on behalf of the national government.
- County education authorities – operation and development of upper secondary education and training is a major service provided by the authorities.
- Other stakeholders, including social partners, Skills Norway, VOFO and NAV (the welfare and employment service).

Since 2021, Skills Norway has been merged with other adult educational and skills agencies to the newly established Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir). Under the direction of the Ministry of Education and Research, HK-dir is provided its scope and mandate. Within its mandate for 2023, HK-dir is tasked to monitor and evaluate the knowledge and application of validation.

Following up on the 2017-2021 Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy, the mandate of the Norwegian Committee on Skill Needs (Kompetansebehovsutvalget, KBU) under HK-dir was renewed for the period 2021-2027. The Committee is assigned to analyse and assess skill policy and future skill needs, producing at least one report every second year.

Also, HK-dir is the secretariat of the National Vocational Education Council, an advisory body appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research, tasked to further develop vocational education in Norway.

NAV and the county education authorities have concluded agreements to ensure targeted cooperation both on a county level (planning), and practical collaboration on a local level. These agreements should enable public services to address low-skilled workers and unemployed people who need assistance, for example validation of non-formal and informal learning. This could allow learners to complete a training trajectory, which increases their job opportunities.

⁴⁷ Consultation on the promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL), Contribution from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, 2011.

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

7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

Promoting the opportunities and benefits of validation at both local and national levels is the responsibility of several stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education and Research, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service, and other relevant parties in their respective sectors⁴⁸.

At the lower secondary and upper secondary education and training levels, it is respectively the responsibility of the municipalities or the county authorities to provide information on validation opportunities to the public. The communication channels used may vary across the different counties but are generally websites, brochures, or leaflets and occasionally advertisements in newspapers. Likewise, it is the post-secondary VET colleges and the higher education institutions that are responsible for information about validation opportunities in relation to their provision. Higher education institutions also tend to provide information via their websites.

The website www.karriereveiledning.no provides free online career guidance and is run by the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. The website offers an interactive guide on obtaining new qualifications, changing careers, and the qualification procedures. It also provides links to county-level career centres and online resources. The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills is responsible for and runs the website www.utdanning.no which informs on rules, procedures, and opportunities for validation.

7.2 Information, advice and guidance

For upper secondary education and training, staff at the regional adult education centres/career guidance centres provide information, guidance and general advisory support to adults wishing to undergo validation. These centres are also responsible for advice and guidance at the lower secondary education level. The centres offer individual counselling sessions, although group sessions may be held at the start of the validation process. Information provided at the start of a validation process aims to support applicants in choosing the right curriculum to be used as a reference for validation. Depending on the resources available, guidance may also be provided during the validation process, for example on how to document competences, how to collect documentation from earlier employment. Information and guidance provided at the end of the process enable the candidate to identify any further education or training needs. For smaller centres with fewer resources, guidance to learners may be provided over the telephone or internet.

For validation in view of admission to post-secondary VET colleges and HEIs, the staff in charge of enrolment are involved in the provision of guidance to candidates for validation. This provision may depend on the type of institution and the number of applicants (for example, a large institution with many applicants may provide more information via the internet, while a small institution with fewer applicants is likely to provide more direct forms of guidance to candidates).

Staff responsible for admitting students to higher education believe that providing direct guidance to validation candidates with fewer applicants is more effective. They want to give candidates a realistic idea of what to expect in their study program. Interviews with staff responsible for admissions in Norwegian higher education show

⁴⁸ https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utdanning/voksnes_laering_og_kompetanse/artikler/all-kompetanse-teller--/id612256/.

that they prefer not to have very relaxed criteria for admitting candidates with non-formal and informal learning. Studies have found that candidates admitted to higher education with little knowledge of Norwegian tend to struggle throughout their entire study period (Stensen and Ure, 2010). Admissions staff believe that university studies require specific skills to understand theoretical knowledge. Students admitted on the basis of non-formal learning only receive support if they ask for it, as universities feel that they do not have enough resources to provide this support to all candidates. In one institution, the first semester acts as a test for these students. If they can pass this test, they tend to perform well for the rest of their time at the university. It was observed in one institution that the first semester serves as a kind of litmus test for these students. Once this barrier is passed, the remaining students tend to do well (ibid.).

In 2016, the information on validation possibilities for admission to higher education were revised on the portal of the Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (*Samordna opptak*,) to give applicants better and more realistic expectations. The revision has proven successful as it has reduced the gap between those declaring that they want validation and those actually undergoing a validation procedure, i.e. those with a fair chance of being judged qualified and admitted. If applicants have further questions regarding validation, they are advised to contact the university or college directly.

Regarding validation for exemption from parts of a study programme, institutions must provide thorough information and guidance to students so that they can determine whether it is relevant to apply for it. In such cases, institutions are frequently asked to advise students on how to present the documentation needed to support their application.

Most HEIs (or in some cases the relevant student welfare organisation) have career centres serving their own students, while post-secondary VET colleges are often smaller and do not provide career guidance in a similar structured manner. As mentioned above, all counties now have at least one centre or similar services. These centres reach out to a significant part of the adult population. In addition, the employment and welfare service, NAV, plays an important role in informing individuals about opportunities for undergoing a validation procedure⁴⁹. In a statistical report from 2021 on the use of career guidance, an average of 12% of career guidance users requested guidance on validation.

There has been no stocktaking of whether various Norwegian stakeholders consider validation arrangements as beneficial. The fact that social partners and civil society organisations have been active over the years in proposing and implementing an increasing number of measures for validating non-formal and informal learning is a sign that there is a common understanding of their benefits.

⁴⁹ Source: Consultation on the promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL), Contribution from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, 2011).

8 Validation practitioners

8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

The profile of validation practitioners varies depending on the context in which the validation services are provided.

- Assessors at regional adult education centres/local adult education centres tend to have a background in the relevant education or trade. They may be teachers of or skilled workers in the relevant trade; both with potentially a high level of knowledge of the learning outcomes in the curricula that are being used as reference for assessment.
- In HE, each institution is responsible for setting up validation arrangements. Applicants for admission based on validation of non-formal and informal learning may be assessed by a committee or by single members of the administrative or professional staff. Applications for exemption from courses may likewise be assessed by juries composed of academic and administrative staff, or by single staff members with insight in the chosen subject. There are no specific formal requirements for validation practitioners in HE.
- There are no national-level requirements for the practitioners who deliver guidance for validation in upper secondary education, and these vary depending on the county. Validation guidance practitioners are, for example, careers counsellors or teachers. The counties are responsible for ensuring that validation practitioners possess the necessary competences.
- In HE Institutions, the profile of staff in charge of providing guidance to validation candidates varies from one institution to another. For applications for admission, it may be experienced administrative staff who provide the advice and guidance. In the case of exemptions, there is currently no common practice in the HE sector for awarding exemptions on the basis of validation. However, many institutions follow the guidelines developed in 2013 by Skills Norway and representatives of Universities Norway. Exemption from courses would normally not be granted without the involvement of academic staff.

8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

County authorities or municipalities are responsible for the training of validation practitioners. In lower and upper secondary education, courses and seminars for assessors are delivered each year. Moreover, newly employed assessors are given mentoring support to rapidly acquire experience.

The validation guidelines on exemption from study programmes in HE and on admission to post-secondary VET provide practical information on how to deliver validation. They are both published online. Guidelines on validation at lower and upper secondary education level are also available online. In addition, these guidelines are disseminated by authorities at the regional and municipal level.

The 2018 report explained that the former Skills Norway agency organised national conferences, including some for HEIs, to elaborate on the national guidelines for validation. The production of guidelines for validation in higher education revealed frequent exchanges between the administrative staff in charge of validation, particularly between staff employed in university colleges dominated by professional education. This observation is supported by previous studies of validation practices in higher education (cf. Cedefop/ITB 2011), for example informal training offered by colleagues.

Also, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills has held national conferences to provide information and training to raise the competence levels of administrative staff as well as validation practitioners. One example is a pilot programme comprising three courses delivered in 2017/2018 for validation staff in county-level administrations. While the Directorate financed the courses, their contents were designed by the university college OsloMet. Experiences from this pilot programme allowed OsloMet to include training in validation of non-formal and informal learning in its course catalogue. Therefore, if learners have their course fees financed by their employer or if they pay for it themselves, they can now receive permanent training covering the following topics:

- Validation with an emphasis on vocational education and training.
- The EU recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01).
- The legal basis of validation in Norway and the ensuing guidelines that have been produced.
- The meaning of 'equivalent qualifications' as an entrance point for understanding learning across contexts and cultures.
- Design and interpretation of course curricula.
- Validation tools and methods.
- The ethics of validation, including rules for protecting sensitive data.
- Reflections of the professional role of validating non-formal and informal learning.

Today, OsloMet offers validation as a course to anyone who holds a bachelor's degree and has at least one year of experience in career guidance, teaching, adult learning or similar, or alternatively provide sufficient formal, non-formal and informal learning in relevant subjects including Norwegian language skills⁵⁰. The course can be taken remotely online or hybrid, part-time commitment. It consists of the topics listed above and leads to 15 ECTS points in validation ('realkompetansevurdering').

8.3 Qualifications and experience

The national guidelines for validation in lower and upper secondary education recommend the qualifications that practitioners should have during different phases of a validation process. However, there are no centralised requirements except that the practitioners should be well qualified to validate learning outcomes and competence aims in the curricula. Municipalities are responsible for implementing these requirements for lower secondary education, while counties handle them for upper secondary education. In post-secondary VET and higher education, institutions are responsible for verifying that their staff are qualified to apply the validation procedures.

Validation practitioners need to have a broad understanding of learning, including competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Since validation is a subject-specific evaluation, it is conducted by subject-matter experts in relevant professions. The practitioner should have sufficient language skills to validate in the relevant language, such as Norwegian, Sami, or a third language.

⁵⁰ <https://www.oslomet.no/studier/loi/evu-loi/realkompetansevurdering>

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding and costs

As stated in the 2018 report, there are no earmarked funds for validation. Funding for validation procedures in the formal education system are given through block grants or other types of general funding established for education institutions. It is thus not possible to provide estimates of how much is spent on validation in Norway and no information is collected at national level on the costs associated with validation.

In lower and upper secondary education, the cost of validation is covered by the educational budgets in the different counties if the candidates have the right to education and validation. The funding allocated to validation therefore varies across the counties, given that they have the autonomy to manage their own budgets. In both post-secondary VET and higher education, funding is provided by each institution.

For distribution of costs, no information was identified during the research on costs for organisations.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning related to lower and upper secondary education is free for the following groups:

- People with a right to complete their education from primary school to upper secondary school (costs are borne by municipalities or by county councils);
- People who are unable to work due to disability (costs are borne by the Labour and Welfare Service);
- People having signed a 'jobseekers' agreement with the Labour and Welfare Service can under some circumstances have their non-formal and informal learning experiences assessed for free. One precondition is that the employment office considers the assessment to be necessary for getting the jobseekers back to work.

For those individuals who do have to pay, the price of a validation procedure varies depending on the course it relates to. For instance, the cost may be higher for vocational trades, because of the need to conduct practical tests.

In both post-secondary VET and HE, validation is free for the user (i.e., student and applicant); funding for validation (both for admissions and exemptions) is held at the level of the institution. However, HE institutions are allocated funding on the basis of the study points achieved by the individual learners. This means that if learners are granted an exemption based on validation, the institution may receive less funding for that particular learner.

For the national budget 2023, the government has announced an increase in the allocation of funding for the programme 'apprenticeship certificate on the job' (*fagbrev på jobb*), while reducing the financial support to Skills Plus (*Kompetansepluss*) projects.

9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.2.1 Validation trends

A limitation to describing validation trends in Norway is that there is a severe lack of reporting and data collection mechanisms on validation⁵¹. A 2019 report suggests that to improve the validation processes in Norway, it is important to gather more data on how many users are requesting validation, how many validations are being approved, and the contents of the validations that are completed. It is currently unclear how many users are applying for validation across different sectors in Norway each year, but some trends may provide useful insights.

For validation at *upper secondary education* level, the number of students aged 25 years or over enrolled in upper secondary education has steadily increased since 2018. In 2022, it 21,709 adults were enrolled in upper secondary education nationwide, compared to 19,766 in 2021 and 17,207 in 2020.

Regarding *post-secondary* vocational colleges, the 2021-2023 report from the Norwegian Committee on Skill Needs shows that during the period 2013-2021, there has been an increase in the number of applicants at post-secondary vocational education level from 15,000 students to 25,000⁵². The report notes that for 2021, a total of 12% of students admitted to post-secondary vocational education were admitted after undergoing validation⁵³. Students admitted based on validation, often undertake higher vocational education part-time while they are working, the report explained⁵⁴. For enrolment in post-secondary vocational colleges, the report shows that in 2021 administrative and economics programmes had the largest portion of students admitted based on validation, with up to 21% of students registered based on validation. For 2022, the trend had changed, according to a report by *Samordna Opptak*, showing that media and communication studies admitted the largest portion of students based on validation (12,5%) while health and social care had the lowest percentage of students admitted based on validation (3.6%) in post-secondary vocational education⁵⁵. It is estimated that among adults completing vocational training at upper secondary level, around two-thirds receive their certificates of apprenticeship based (partially) on informal and non-formal learning (e.g., work experience)⁵⁶.

In *higher education*, following data collected in the 2021 intake, it shows that less than 2% of applicants to higher education applied for admission based on validation of prior learning⁵⁷. Out of these applicants, a majority were deemed unqualified following the validation of their prior learning as assessed by the higher educational institution or did not receive high enough grades/scoring in study programmes that admit based on ranking. For 2022, it was estimated that around one in five validation applicants attended the study programme at semester start⁵⁸. This trend might indicate that a high number of persons who qualify based on validation do not receive sufficient points to be able to compete with students qualified from formal learning, as admission is based on a point ranking system. Several students admitted to higher education

⁵¹ NOU 2019:12

⁵² The exact numbers are not, presentation by the Norwegian Committee on Skills Needs [Fremtidige kompetansebehov: Høyere yrkesfaglig utdanning for et arbeidsliv i endring - regjeringen.no](https://www.fremtidige.kompetansebehov.no/Hoyere_yrkesfaglig_utdanning_for_et_arbeidsliv_i_endring_-_regjeringen.no)

⁵³ <https://kompetansebehovsutvalget.no/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/KBU-temarapport-2022.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ <https://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/om/sokertall/sokertall-2022/sluttrapport-fsu-2022.pdf>.

⁵⁶ <https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/publikasjoner/utdanningsspeilet/utdanningspeilet-2022/videregaende-opplaring/voksne-i-videregaende-opplaring/>.

⁵⁷ NOU 2022:17.

⁵⁸ NOU 2022:17.

institutions following validation might also, for personal reasons, decide not to attend the study programme after having been offered a place. No data has been collected on the course completion rate of students who were admitted to higher education based on validation.

9.2.2 Validation users

Despite a lack in reporting mechanisms and data on validation, some conclusion can be drawn based on the data from admissions to higher education institutions. As mentioned above, adults without sufficient formal qualification can have their non-formal and informal learning assessed in order to gain admission to higher education ('*realkompetansevurdering*'). The validation is thus done by the relevant higher education institution.

In a 2021 report, Statistics Norway analyses the data from the 2019 admissions to higher education, including looking at the background of applicants who applied based on validation of prior learning ('*realkompetanse*'). The report makes the following observations⁵⁹:

- *Men are more likely to apply for validation for admission to higher education than women.* Out of all male applicants, 3% applied based on validation, while for female applicants 2% requested validation.
- *A higher share of foreign applicants applied based on validation.* For all foreign applicants, more than 3% applied on the basis of validation of learning, compared to 2% of the general population.
- *Almost all applicants needing validation are above 26 years old.* This number can be explained by the fact the minimum age to apply for validation is 25 years. The highest number of such applicants were in the 30-34 age group (around 25%), and the lowest number of applicants were among people aged 55 or older (less than 5%).
- *Few validation applicants have parents with higher education.* For applicants whose parents had completed higher education, less than 0.5% applied for validation. The highest rate was among those whose parents had only completed primary education (6% of the total group).
- *Some regions have a higher percentage of validation applicants than others.* Out of all applicants residing in Northern Norway, 4% applied for validation, followed by the Oslo region (3%) and the inland districts (3%).
- *STEM-related subjects had the lowest number of applicants for admission based on validation.* For natural science, handicraft, and technical subjects, less than 1% of applicants applied for admission on the basis of validation. Subject such as transport, security, service had the highest amounts of admission applicants with a validation background (6%) followed by education and pedagogy (5%).

9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

Public debate on and awareness of migration policy has sparked more actions to meet the need for competence mapping and other measures directed towards refugees as well as immigrants. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is in charge of some of these measures, for example a *qualification scheme for refugees* who cannot benefit from the general recognition procedures administered by this agency⁶⁰. Under this scheme, refugees are to request an 'education form' within three weeks and complete it. Once completed, they are then scheduled for an

⁵⁹ <https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/attachment/444448?ts=17747f1a5f8>.

⁶⁰ <https://www.eaie.org/blog/refugees-qualifications.html>.

interview with the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education. After the interview, they receive a 'qualification assessment' which may be beneficial if they plan to pursue further education. Some refugees may be eligible for exemptions from certain parts of the study programmes through validation procedures that assess their prior learning. A toolkit for the recognition of refugees' qualifications was developed as a part of an Erasmus+ project⁶¹.

As stated in the 2018 report, Skills Norway was involved in the Erasmus+ project called Visible Skills of Adults (VISKA). The project focused on implementing validation techniques for various target groups, and the Norwegian agency specifically chose to validate the non-formal and informal learning experiences of refugees living in Norwegian integration reception centres. Refugees in Norway can apply for residency in one of four integration reception centres, provided they agree to attend a mandatory training programme. Those living in integration reception centres are among the refugees who are most likely to receive Norwegian residence permits. By charting and validating the non-formal and informal learning of these refugees early on, their future employability and societal integration can be expedited. The project report emphasised that the availability of validation for refugees is contingent upon the ability to validate in languages other than Norwegian and Sami, a possibility that was approved in 2020.

For immigrants, Statistics Norway estimated that 40% of immigrants in Norway are overqualified for their current jobs (2021) and that lack of validation can influence their possibility to find a job relevant to their education⁶².

Looking at other initiatives for disadvantaged groups of learners, a three-year national project was carried out between 2007 and 2010 to pilot the use of validation for prisoners⁶³ (cf. also Alfsen, Hanssen, Ramstad, 2010). The County Governor of Hordaland has responsibility for prison education in Norway, including validation. While the original pilot only covered five counties, validation is now available in all Norwegian prisons. However, the extent to which validation is offered varies across the prisons. Also, the number of prisoners participating in validation processes has fallen after the pilot project ended – from around 200 in 2010 to around 81 in 2012, and further down to 47 in 2014. Yet, this does not show the full activity, because 247 candidates were considered for validation in 2014 but did not carry out a full validation process.

10 Validation methods

10.1 Methodologies and methods

There is no standardised procedure for validation imposed on the local providers. As mentioned above, there is an overall four-stage process which can be applied to any level of education and training. These four stages are:

1. information and guidance;
2. identification and documentation;
3. assessment;
4. certification.

The method of assessment used varies, but it is a basic principle that the candidates should be able to document their competence without going through traditional tests

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https://www.nokut.no/globalassets/nokut/artikkelbibliotek/utenlandsk_utdanning/veiledere/toolkit_for_recognition_of_refugees_qualifications.pdf.

⁶² <https://www.ssb.no/arbeid-og-lonn/sysselsetting/artikler/hvor-mange-innvandrere-er-overkvalifisert>.

⁶³ described in detail in the 2010 country update for Norway and a case study devoted to this specific project.

or exams. However, as mentioned in Section 2.2, it is not possible to obtain a full vocational qualification in upper secondary education based on validation of non-formal and informal learning alone. Applicants have to pass the trade examination to obtain the final VET (trade or journeyman's) certificate.

At lower and upper secondary levels, the national guidelines on validation emphasise that providers should use the methods that are relevant for the individual case. This means that some learners/candidates, in addition to providing documentation, may need to undergo a small test; while others may participate in a dialogue to describe their competences or demonstrate them in practice. What is required is that the methods used are adequate to visualise the learning relevant for the particular validation standards/reference. It is also important to note that some individuals may require more guidance or dialogue to help them identify, describe, and prove their own competence/learning. Thus, the method used should be tailored to the individual.

A commonly used method of assessment is the portfolio. However, the national guidelines for validation in upper secondary education state that a portfolio alone is not enough as an assessment – written documents should be combined with an additional form of assessment such as a dialogue. The reason is that written documents may not describe well enough what the person can do with what they know. This particularly applies to learners wishing to use validation towards a qualification at upper secondary level; because many of them are not aware of their own competences or are not able to express them. The guidelines therefore aim to inspire the counties to use a combination of methods, including the portfolio.

At lower and upper secondary level (including VET programmes), validation involves the assessment of the individual's competences in relation to the learning outcomes/competence aims in the national curriculum. As noted in the 2010 update of the Inventory, the portfolio and dialogue-based assessment methods are common; and vocational testing is also used for certain subjects/programmes offered at this level. For individuals who have been granted an upper secondary certificate on the basis of validation, the certificate is not graded and simply states 'approved'.

In post-secondary VET and Higher Education, assessments for admission will vary between institutions and, in particular, between programmes and fields of study. A case study of validation for professional studies in a university college found that self-declarations and statements from employers were the main methods for identifying relevance or equivalence. There was less evidence of the use of the portfolio method. At some HE institutions, the candidate may be asked to participate in an interview in order to provide further details (Ure, O-B, 2011).

In 2020, *Kompetanse Norge* (now part of the Directorate of Higher Education and Skills) disseminated an updated version of the 2013 handbook on validation to understand what qualifications a student might have that can allow them to shorten their study programme. The handbook targeted to validation practitioners at HEIs and includes methods and tools that can be useful when carrying out a validation process⁶⁴. It includes examples of documentation needed for validation and how to compensate for missing documentation (e.g., presentations, tests, videos, reflection notes). Additionally, it provides the validating institution with various checklists relevant to the validation processes.

10.2 Use of ICT in validation

In Norway, validation is completed at county or higher education level based on applications. Currently, there is no unified use of ICT in validation. However, in a 2021

64

https://www.kompetansenorge.no/contentassets/5f2020b0d0ab41bdb5dabe9eab0bfdd4/fritak_uhsektoren_veiledning2.pdf.

White Paper, it is noted that ICT can be helpful in ensuring an equal and more efficient validation process⁶⁵. It is suggested to establish new digital tools for validation, which has received positive response from stakeholders.

It is expected that the new educational act (2023) will include a change in the main approach to validation, e.g., a more modularised approach to learning. As a result, validation will need to be carried out more frequently and flexibly. It will also allow validation of just one or a few modules, instead of the current system. Digital tools might be necessary to ensure an efficient validation of such learning approaches.

11 Quality assurance

11.1 Quality assurance processes

Validation in Norway is closely linked to the formal education system and will undergo the same quality assurance procedures as implemented in each education sector.

Regarding validation in lower and upper secondary education and training, the municipalities and, respectively, the counties are responsible for quality. The standards (reference for validation) are given by the learning outcomes/competence aims in national curricula. For example, the counties can decide on the requirements they set out for validation practitioners. The guidelines launched in 2014 will also help to encourage more standardised practices in the counties.

In HE, it is up to the individual institution to ensure the quality of their validation services. Responsibility for external quality assurance in HE is held by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). However, institutional practice in validation is not explicitly included in the quality assurance processes used to evaluate higher education institutions and/or programmes (National Report regarding the Bologna Process Implementation, 2009-2012, Norway).

As mentioned above, Skills Norway developed two sets of guidelines to support the HE and post-secondary VET sectors in the delivery of validation opportunities:

- The first set of guidelines relates to post-secondary VET and covers validation of non-formal and informal learning to support the admissions process;
- The second set of guidelines relates to HEIs and covers the use of validation to grant exemptions.

An important aim of the revision in the regulation on exemption from study programmes in higher education, was to improve the procedures for validation of non-formal and informal competencies. The municipalities and the counties are subject to regular state inspections, which should take account of the validation delivered by the municipality/county, as well as formal education. Similarly, NOKUT conducts controls of post-secondary vocational education and HE institutions.

No specific evaluation framework for validation is being used.

11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

As reported above, it is pointed out in the Official Report (NOU 2019:12) that there is a lack of data and reporting on the use and impact of validation. This was highlighted also in Official Report 2019:25 saying that the statistics collected is insufficient and that for example there is no data on the take up and success of validation practices. Validation in primary education is bound by national guidelines, while in HE and post-vocational education, each institution practices validation according to own study

⁶⁵ Meld. St. 21 (2020–2021) Fullføringsreformen – med åpne dører til verden og fremtiden.

programme standards. Each institution can independently carry out validation, hence it is difficult to collect and compare data.

The most reliable data is collected by The Norwegian Universities and College Admission Service (NUCAS) when students apply in the yearly national intake to higher education and tertiary vocational education. The applicants should inform of their highest level of education and request a validation of former learning. However, as mentioned above, there is no detailed data to explain how the validation practices are completed, the evaluation, outcomes, and completion rate of those applying based on validation. NUCAS collects data both on number of applicants and intake for tertiary vocational education. Data on intake to Higher Education based on validation is collected by NUCAS who publishes reports and analysis on the data collected. As for tertiary vocational colleges, data is collected both by NUCAS and by DBH Fagskolestatistikk (initiative of the Ministry of Education and Research) which the colleges are obliged to report to.

As a result, some data concerning validation application is collected. However, there seems to be increasing support for using digital tools in validation, which might make it easier to collect data⁶⁶.

12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

Validation is becoming a visible part of national learning strategies and structures through four main processes. Firstly, the gradual inclusion of validation procedures in laws and regulations across educational sectors. Secondly, the production of validation guidelines for implementing validation in various educational sectors. Thirdly, systematic dissemination at all educational levels, carried out by public authorities, stakeholders and partly also by organised labour market interests alongside voluntary organisations. Fourthly, visibility in the form of training arrangements (including exchange of practices) for staff that oversee validation in educational institutions and service centres.

The gradual extension of validation procedures and practices suggests that their outcomes are fairly well trusted by employers and educational institutions and in society. The fact that validation has seldom been a contested item on the public agenda, and the ensuing debate, could confirm this trust.

Validation procedures and practices put much trust in the Norwegian educational system. This comes from the fact that the reference used for validation of non-formal and informal learning is the learning outcomes/competence aims set in curricula of formal education and training (cf. Section 4 on standards, see above). There is growing concern about a high number of young people who drop out of formal education, above all before completing vocational or general education at upper secondary level. The public debate also mirrors concerns about adults, often long-term unemployed people, whose competencies are not considered relevant for re-employment in an increasingly internationalised Norwegian labour market, which younger European workers have found attractive following EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007. Moreover, there is concern about immigrants and refugees with informal and non-formal competencies, but also formal competencies that cannot be sufficiently and rapidly documented.

Against this background, the trust in validation is linked to concerns about shortcomings in the Norwegian labour market and welfare system, notably the challenge of validating the competencies of those on the brink of the formal education and employment system. In addition to trust in the education system, trust in validation

⁶⁶ NOU 2019:12

depends on the coordination of several policy fields for charting and utilising competencies held by different groups of learners.

A national consensus to strengthen validation practices is witnessed by the tripartite 2017–2021 paper for a national strategy for competence policies. Yet, in spite of this will, which notably is followed by a gradual deconstruction of administrative barriers between, e.g., public employment and educational services, validation procedures and practices (the validation system) are still regulated by different laws according to level and type of education, with differences in rights for individuals and systems or schemes of financing. In addition, a registered jobseeker enjoys the right to services aimed at re-integration in the labour market, including a mapping and clarification of his or her prior formal education and training.

This intertwined validation system imposes caution on those practising its rules and procedures, for example to avoid double funding, at the same time as individual rights to validation services are respected and catered for. This can lead to cautious navigation between laws and jurisdictions, which may complicate the lower-level implementation of validation procedures by the rank-and-file practitioners in the field. Such caution could again render the validation services less visible for learners who need them and have a right to access them.

The legal framework that provides the right for individuals to have their non-formal and informal learning assessed, typically at no cost, demonstrates a legislative approach aimed at securing and institutionalizing individual rights. This process of judicialization has often received support from all social partners, thereby reinforcing the concept of a Norwegian societal model. One possible disadvantage of embedding validation procedures into individual rights guaranteed by the State is that the mobilisation of stakeholders, like social partners and voluntary organisations, is reduced and very much trust is put into the public will of the Welfare State (cf. Ure, O. B. 2015).

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13.2 Sources

Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research

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.

**CEDEFOP**European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, Thessaloniki (Pylea), GREECE
Postal address: Cedefop service post, 57001 Thermi, GREECE
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu

visit our portal www.cedefop.europa.eu
