

Summary

Why a national strategy for validation?

To meet the demands of today's working life, a higher level of competence and professional skills are needed. But learning does not only take place in formal study programmes. It also takes place informally at work and during leisure time, and through non-formal learning in, for example, staff training and study circles. Validation means recognising and making skills visible, regardless of how the individual has acquired them.

Validation can facilitate skills provision in working life and contribute to more effective education and training. For the individual, validation of prior learning can open faster and more frictionless paths ahead in working life or in education and training. But access to validation is currently low, and varies between different regions, occupational fields and qualification levels. There is also a need to further improve quality in the validation that is conducted.

EU Recommendation on validation

In a Council Recommendation, the Council of the European Union has decided that the Member States no later than 2018 should have in place arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Sweden supports the Recommendation and it is high time to now put in place a system for validation adapted to Sweden's needs and priorities.

The Delegation's remit

The National Delegation for Validation 2015–2019 was appointed by the Government to follow-up and support the coordinated development of validation in education and training and in working life. One of the Delegation's tasks was to prepare a proposal for a national strategy.

In the strategy proposal, the Delegation expresses its view of the significance and function of validation, and of the development areas that need to be prioritised. The strategy is intended to be followed by concrete measures over the next five years and is aimed at politicians and officials in relevant organisations at national, regional and local level, education and training providers, as well as the social partners and their affiliated national trade organisations.

The strategy's objective

The strategy's overall objective is that significantly more individuals should have their prior learning validated. Validation should be available across the country, at all levels of the educational system and for a broader range of qualifications in working life. Validation as a pathway to a qualification should have the same high level of legitimacy as formal education and training.

To increase access to validation, a transparent, coherent and quality-assured system must be put in place. The structures need to be further developed and complemented.

Why validation and for whom?

The target groups for validation are many, and the aim of a validation can vary. However, in all cases, validation is a matter of ensuring that an individual's skills meet established criteria. Following a validation, the individual should receive a qualification that has legitimacy and value for further education or in the labour market. Validation can be a tool for people who:

- are in transition;
- possess skills obtained abroad;

- wish to advance in education and training; or
- are professionally active.

For many individuals, validation is one link in a chain, where other measures are also required – before, during and after the actual validation. These measures may include an initial skills mapping, study and career guidance, supplementary education and training, internships and so on. This places demands on well-functioning and flexible collaboration between different actors.

Five overarching priorities for the work ahead

The Delegation has identified five overarching areas that should be prioritised in the continued work on the coordinated development of validation in education and training and in working life.

Transferability between qualifications

In a system with many different actors, transfers between the system's various parts need to be frictionless. Skills profiles, skills criteria and learning objectives must be formulated uniformly and with high quality. The Swedish Qualifications Framework (SeQF) should constitute the common starting point. Learning outcomes should be used to describe skills criteria.

Responsibility at national and regional level

Clear responsibility and collaboration between actors at national and regional level is necessary. Agency mandates to promote and coordinate validation need to be clear and long-term. The social partners should also actively promote the use of validation. To create long-term collaboration on validation at regional level, validation should be included in the regional work for skills provision.

High quality

High quality in implementation lends legitimacy to the results of validation. The agencies' mandate of developing methodology support, clear guidelines and follow-up of validation activities is therefore important in order to improve quality.

Resources and organisation

The fact that validation is economically profitable also needs to be reflected in organisational solutions and in funding models within and between the activities. Stable funding and organisational solutions that provide incentives to validation should be developed within the ordinary systems. Development projects should be linked to established structures and be anchored at national level.

Information and guidance

With many actors offering validation of prior learning, clear and uniform information is required. Coordinated information is particularly important with regard to trade sector validation. Responsible agencies should collaborate on information on validation, and the social partners should provide information about validation in their own information channels. Validation needs to be closely linked to a well-functioning guidance function, and the competency of the person providing the guidance needs to be ensured.

The work ahead in education and training and in working life

Validation of prior learning needs to be developed within education and training and within working life. In addition to the overarching priorities for the work ahead, the strategy sets out the direction for what needs to be done in working life (trade sector validation), municipal adult education, higher vocational education, higher education, and with regard to regulated professions. Development

within trade sector validation and higher education should be given particular priority.

Working life qualifications

The social partners, with the support of the public sector, should initiate and pursue development efforts for more and increasingly uniform validation models and an increased use of validation for strategic skills provision. The focus of this development should be improved transferability between the various validation models and formal education, methods development and adaptation for validation of professional skills acquired abroad, as well as the development of models for validation of skills at post-secondary level.

Higher education institutions

To create long-term conditions for validation in higher education institutions, there is a need to review the regulatory framework. Investigating possible solutions for creating appropriate financial incentives for the assessment and recognition of prior learning for the award of credit by education institutions is also a priority. The possibility of providing advance notice of the award of credit is also important and should be investigated further. Similarly, the issue of actual admission to oversubscribed programmes for people who have been assessed as eligible based on validation of their prior learning may need to be analysed further.

Municipal adult education

For greater access, quality and equity, continued measures are needed to develop methodology support and clearer and more uniform criteria for validation in adult education. This is particularly important in the area of health care and social services, where the majority of validation within municipal adult education takes place today. The Delegation also highlights the orientation

course as a good way for school authorities to gain an overview of the validation that is carried out.

Higher vocational education

There is a lack of reliable statistics on the validation of prior learning within higher vocational education. Follow-up of the work on validation therefore needs to be prioritised. Similarly, the existing methodology support for validation needs to be promoted so that the education providers' awareness and knowledge of validation can be improved. A long-term sustainable funding model for the validation of prior learning should be examined.

Regulated professions

The Government's initiative on supplementary education and training programmes for people who have completed their education and training abroad is important for creating more coordinated paths towards certification in regulated professions. The programmes also need to be more flexible, with the possibility of gaining certification based on validation of prior learning, and more adapted to students' needs for supplementary education and training. More ways than today are also needed for gaining certification to practise regulated professions, such as the increased use of various types of tests and validation against the examination goals directly.

Implementation of the strategy

Implementation of the strategy depends on active efforts from relevant agencies, the social partners and trade organisations. Implementation can begin immediately within the responsibility and funding frameworks of each agency and organisation.

When the Government has considered the Delegation's proposed strategy, adjustments may be needed regarding the areas where the ambition level can be raised above the conditions already set out. It is the Delegation's hope that the strategy set by the

Government will be a powerful tool for strengthening the quality of and access to validation.

An analysis of financial and other consequences has not been carried out at this stage. The Delegation intends to return to this, and to funding proposals, when it presents proposals for concrete measures to strengthen validation work.

The continued work of the Delegation

The strategy proposal constitutes a starting point for the continued work of the Delegation, both jointly and within the organisations represented in the Delegation. Following up the implementation of the national strategy is an important part of the remit. The Delegation intends to:

- follow up developments in annual reports;
- investigate and present proposals on how validation within higher education can be improved;
- set up a working group to deepen the analysis of the further development of trade sector validation; and
- initiate enhanced cooperation in the validation area between the Delegation's agencies.