

REPORT 2023

17 good practice cases from the Nova-Nordic project

NOVA nordic

Enhancing the link between National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) and arrangements for the validation of prior learning (VPL) with a specific focus on non-formal qualifications will create both better training and labour market opportunities for people as well as contribute to vocational education and training in line with labour market needs. It will also strengthen the inclusion of the third sector in both the work with NQFs and VPL. To enhance that link, to support further policy development, and strengthen the capacity of involved stakeholders the NOVA-Nordic project has been exploring the following questions:

- Non-formal qualifications – how and by who are they developed? Are they included in the NQFs and if so, how?
- How are learning outcomes designed and used for qualification development as well as in VPL arrangements?
- Are NQFs and VPL arrangements linked and if so, how?

By comparing different country approaches to the above questions and identifying and analysing good practices, the project has formulated a number of core messages aimed at policy makers. In addition, the project has developed a quality tool to support capacity building for those involved in the development of non-formal qualifications, defining learning outcomes, and linking these with VPL arrangements.

Read more about the project at novanordic.eu



Completed: 2023-11-30
DNR: MYH 2020/3787



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Good practise cases – overview

In this annex to the report Common elements for successfully putting all skills to use, short descriptions of all the 17 good practice cases identified in the NOVA project are included. In the table below you will find the title, country, and links to more information for each case

No.	Title	Country	More information
1	Sector specific validation	Sweden	Branschvalidering - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan (myh.se)
2	Qualifications and validation in the waste management sector	Sweden	Yrkesprofiler skapar samsyn och ett gemensamt språk Sobona
3	VQTS model for describing work-related competences (Erasmus+)	Austria	vocationalqualification.net
4	A Balancing Act – Describing skills acquired in the workplace	Norway	A Balancing Act - Describing skills acquired in the workplace - Hovedorganisasjonen Virke
5	Market qualifications and validation	Poland	ZSK - Home EN (kwalifikacje.gov.pl)
6	Levelling procedure for non-formal qualifications	Iceland	Hvað er íslenski hæfniramminn um menntun? Menntamálastofnun (mms.is)
7	Certification in working life	Iceland	Fagbréf atvinnulífsins – Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins (frae.is)
8	Competency profiling	Iceland	Haefnigreiningar A4 Baeklingur ENS.in dd (frae.is)
9	Piloting micro credentials	Sweden	KOMPETENSPASSET – A project about micro credentials
10	Continuous Learning reform	Finland	Continuous learning reform - OKM - Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland
11	Occupational map in the retail sector	Sweden	Yrkeskartan - nya KIH (karriarihandeln.se)
12	Levelling procedure for non-formal qualifications	Sweden	SeQF – Sveriges referensram för kvalifikationer - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan (myh.se)
13	Levelling procedure for non-formal qualifications	Denmark	Level Assessment - Danmarks Akkrediteringsinstitution
14	Validation in the retail sector	Ireland	Apprenticeship In Retail Supervision Employers - Retail Ireland Skillnet
15	Levelling procedure of non-formal awards	Ireland	National Framework of Qualifications Quality and Qualifications Ireland (qqi.ie)
16	HVE-flex: VPL process in Higher Vocational Education	Sweden	YH-flex - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan (myh.se)
17	Validation in liberal adult education	Finland	Koski service in liberal adult education - OKM - Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland

1. Sector specific validation in Sweden

4 steps to develop a sector specific qualification and validation model – Sweden

In Sweden, the social partners and sector organisations have been involved in the work with validation of prior learning since the mid 1990ties. As of the spring of 2021 there are about 30 sector specific validation models (branschvalidering) that encompass around 100 different job profiles. Between 2016 and 2020 (no numbers available before that) approximately 27 000 individuals have had their prior learning validated using these models. Many of these individuals are already employed in the sector and have been validated for re- and upskilling purposes, others have been offered sector specific validation through the public employment services (Arbetsförmedlingen).

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (MYH) is responsible for supporting the industry sectors when they develop, quality assure and inform about sector specific models for validation of prior learning. To further strengthen this work, MYH is managing a European Social Fund project, BOSS, in cooperation with around twenty industry sector organisations, aiming at capacity building for the sectors among other things. One important outcome of the BOSS-project is the development of competence standards for validation purposes that also can be used as the basis for non-formal qualifications that can be included in the Swedish National Qualifications Framework (SeQF).

The 4 steps

As part of the BOSS-project a process for developing competence standards described in terms of learning outcomes have been developed and tested. The standard is the basis for the validation model and the learning outcomes are used for the mapping and assessment of prior learning. The standard can also be used as the basis for a qualification that then can through an application procedure be included or “levelled” in the Swedish NQF.

The process is divided into four distinctive steps:

- first, identifying work tasks and competence areas for the occupation,
- second, defining core tasks and sorting them in competence areas,
- third, defining learning outcomes for skills needed to perform core tasks,
- forth, defining learning outcomes for knowledge, responsibility and autonomy to match the skills and core tasks.

The process of developing a competence standard according to the 4-step model is mainly managed by the social partners related to the specific industry sector, with process management and support from the BOSS-project and MYH.

Before being able to apply for the inclusion, or “levelling”, of a qualification to the SeQF, the competence standard needs to be described in a full qualification with the relevant part qualifications according to the competence areas in the standard. Furthermore, the systematic quality assurance needs to be described including relevant stakeholders, roles and responsibilities, quality indicators, etc.

When all this has come together, the awarding body of the qualification (usually the sector organisation) can apply to MYH for the “levelling” of the qualification to the best fitting level in the SeQF.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

Around twenty industry sector specific organisations have developed competence standards and qualifications according to this process over the last couple of years. So far, it has resulted in about ten high quality applications for “levelling” to the SeQF and about 50 to 60 more applications are foreseen to come in the following years. One of the benefits, both for the sectors and for the labour market, is the enhanced link between the SeQF and the validation procedures within the sectors.

The process is well documented and a public web-based quality tool – [Kvalitetskompassen](#) – to support industry organisations have been developed and managed by MYH. Furthermore, there is financial support in the form of a government grant that sectors and social partners in cooperation can apply for, to partly finance their development of validation models and qualifications.

One of the main challenges is that there are very few national experts capable of facilitating this kind of development processes. The sector organisations cannot be expected to have expertise and resources within their own organisations. Capacity building and support for knowledge sharing is necessary and must be organised in cooperation between MYH and the sectors and between the sectors themselves. The BOSS-project will go on until spring of 2023 and capacity building activities and development of additional support tools will continue.

Possible further development of the process

For the industry sectors involved, the development of qualifications is the basis for a more efficient strategic skills supply which will support the industry sectors to become more competitive locally, nationally, and globally.

More information

www.myh.se/branschvalidering

2. Qualifications and validation in the waste management sector in Sweden

Municipal enterprises systematically describing job profiles in learning outcomes and developing validation procedures

Sobona – The Swedish employers' organisation for municipal enterprises – has recognised the member enterprises' need for support to secure future recruitment and development of staff in a sustainable way. It has been essential to find a method for identifying the actual competencies required to successfully perform a job. For many vocations in the branches where Sobona members are operating, much of the learning and training takes place in the workplace.

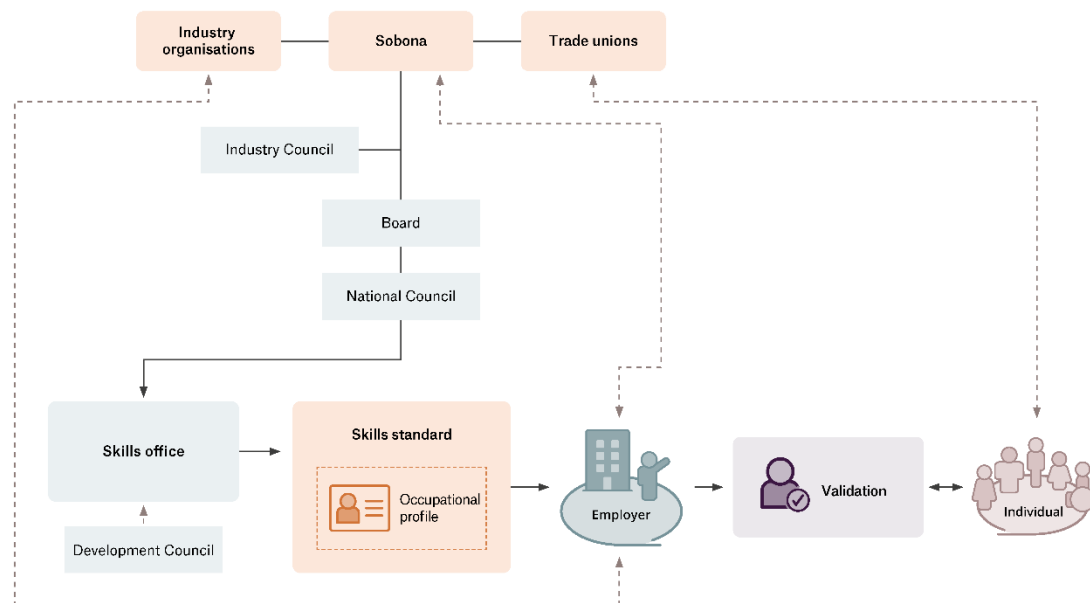
The methodology used is the Open College Network (OCN). This OCN-methodology was developed in the UK during the transformation of the mining industry in the 1980s. OCN provides a way to identify and describe the skills required to perform the key tasks of specific vocations. This includes learning outcomes and clearly defined criteria for validation of prior learning. Each job profile for a specific vocational role consists of several modules defining certain areas of skills required for the vocation and are developed by panels of experienced professionals.

These job profiles can be used for the design of preparatory courses for participation in the labour market and for development of education and training programs, as a benchmark in validation of prior learning. It also functions as a guiding principle in skills and career development and recruitment, for introduction in a workplace and in a job, in transition from one professional role to another as well as a basis for defining required skills in procurement of services.

Sobona oversees the process as well as related tools in this model that now has become established as a national model. The development process involves both the employer organisations and the labour unions, in accordance with the "Swedish model". There is also a close collaboration with other stakeholders. Besides the Sobona member enterprises, the Transition Funds also participate in the development of the validation model.

Currently the validation model developed by Sobona has been launched in six different branches and consists of 28 job profiles, of which five, so far, are also recognised as qualifications in accordance with the Swedish Qualifications Framework (SeQF) which is harmonised with the EQF. Three more profiles are planned to be levelled in accordance with the SeQF.

For further management and use of the Sobona validation model a national organisation has been established. It consists of a Steering group and a National Quality Board with representation of all essential stakeholders. The steering group reviews and confirms the results of the job profiling project.



Overview of process: using the OCN-methodology

- Pre-Study and preparations, collection of information about the specific vocation for which a job profile is being developed.
- Professionals describing the different core tasks in the specific vocation and the needed skills and competencies for performing these core tasks.
- Structured documentation according to the OCN in terms of different modules of competencies with learning outcomes and criteria for validation (assessment).
- Quality assurance by a panel of professionals and possible adjustments to profiles and modules.
- Matching the profiles in accordance with the SeQF and applying for levelling with the Swedish National Agency of Higher Vocational Education (MYH).
- Establishing a national standard with quality guidelines and organise maintenance and development of the sector industry validation model.
- Training of assessors and quality-auditors according to OCN.
- Implementation of the model and the tools connected to it e.g., software with descriptions, learning outcomes, validation (assessment) criteria, checklists, documentation support, at each enterprise.
- Using the sector industry validation model and its content for the development of competencies and validation at the enterprises.

Description of the process

The job profiling is a pre-determined process. The analysis is conducted throughout structured meetings with stakeholders within the relevant sector, this requires active involvement from labour market stakeholders.

There are usually at least three development meetings. A start-up analysis meeting with core stakeholders requesting the profiling project, a regular analysis meeting with a larger group or experts working in the professional field, and then a quality assurance meeting.

The competencies are presented in incremental steps, focusing on the responsibility, independence, and complexity of the work. The result of the competency profiling is a job profile, which is a brief description of the specific vocation, a list of core tasks and a description of the competencies, divided into modules. The competency profiling is reviewed, and its relevance guaranteed by an additional panel. A further review and quality assurance is required at least every fourth year.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

Since the process involves all essential stakeholders the validation model is very well anchored and agreed by all key actors. This is significantly strengthened by the fact that the descriptions of job profiles and competencies are created by the sector professionals for the specific sector.

The model encompasses well proven quality assurance principles, routines, and methodology. Guidelines and training for the validation professionals as well as quality assessment are also in place.

Implementation in the companies for regular and broader use of the validation model is a challenge. It is generally accepted on CEO-level. But, there seems to be a lack in actual practical set up with needed resources as well as mandates on department level. There is a need for more practical introduction on site, at the enterprises. A model for this has been developed and needs to be launched on a larger scale.

Possibilities for further developments

There is a huge potential and benefit using the validation model on a broader scale in all essential activities for skills development. Recruitment, introduction, mapping of competencies, setting up competence-development programs, developing and shaping education and training, and defining skills demands in procurement.

More information

[Yrkesprofiler skapar samsyn och ett gemensamt språk | Sobona](#)

3. VQTS model for describing work-related competences (Erasmus+/Austria)

The VQTS (Vocational Qualification Transfer System) Model

[The VQTS \(Vocational Qualification Transfer System\) Model](#) enables the transparent presentation of work-related competences and the process of competence development. It was originally developed to support transnational mobility in the context of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), through an EU funded project. However, it can also be used to develop qualifications, training programmes and occupational profiles, as well as for personnel planning, the allocation of qualifications to qualifications frameworks or increasing permeability between vocational education and training and higher education.

What are the core elements and procedures in the VQTS model?

The core element of the VQTS model is the **Competence Matrix** which displays competences structurally in a table according to core work tasks in a specific occupational field and the progress of competence development.

Competence areas form the vertical axis of the table and are identified based on empirically derived core work tasks. The empirical methods include work process analyses, company surveys, expert interviews, work-related comparison of existing qualifications or occupational profiles and moderated workshops with experts from the occupational field.

The acquisition of competences by a person in training with regard to core work tasks is described for each competence area as **steps of competence development** (horizontal axis). Between two and six successive steps of the competence development process within certain core work tasks are described (from novice to expert) for each area. For expressing differences between steps and the progress of competence development, certain dimensions are used - in addition to the context characteristics. These dimensions refer, for example, to the degree of necessary support or instruction, the ability to deal with a certain complexity, with quality standard demands, with dynamic situations, or with lack of transparency and ambiguity. The descriptions are also supplemented by specific examples providing information for different competence levels and ways of assessing certain level of competence (see example below).

A VQTS-based Competence Matrix can serve as the starting point for **developing qualifications** (in the formal as well as in the non-formal learning context) by indicating the competence areas and the respective steps of competence development that this qualification should cover. Thus, the profile of a qualification is formed from particular parts of a Competence Matrix. Moreover, the way the competences are described – expressing different performance levels – can inform the **levelling of these qualifications** to an NQF.

Competence Matrix „Electronics/Electrical Engineering“

Competence areas (core work tasks)	Steps of competence development			
1. Preparing, planning, mounting and installing electrical and/or electronic systems for buildings and industrial applications	He/She can prepare and carry out simple electrical and/or electronic installations (e.g., cables, electrical outlets, connection and distribution systems, modular electronic components, computer components) as well as carry out and check the necessary wirings and mountings.	He/She can plan, prepare and connect electrical and modular electronic installations (e.g., energy supply in private and business premises, incl. lighting; alternating and three-phase current; electronic systems as units, wireless LAN, multimedia systems). He/She can advise the customer and select the best implementation according to customer specifications.	He/She can plan complex electrical and/or electronically networked installations (e.g., systems of energy distribution, building management systems / KNX, regulation and monitoring systems, building access systems, RFID-systems) and fully wire them. He/She can configure, service and diagnose the functionality of the installation according to customer requirements and for this purpose can use computer-assisted tools.	
2. Inspecting, maintaining and servicing electrical and/or electronic systems and machinery	He/She can carry out basic and scheduled maintenance tasks, inspections and checks at electrical and/or electronic equipment according to maintenance schedules and predefined instructions (e.g., checking voltage tolerances, changing wearing parts in industrial plants, switching and control systems, electrical machinery, computer systems). He/She can use the measuring and testing tools necessary for it.	He/She can carry out and document preventative maintenance and alignment tasks at electrical and/or electronic industrial appliances and systems according to established quality assurance methods (e.g., continuous monitoring of a CNC machine tool)	He/She can analyse and determine availability and condition of electrical and/or electronic systems. He/She can analyse influencing factors on reliability and performance of electrical and/or electronic systems and find causes of malfunctions (e.g., leakage current analysis, power factor correction, EMC analysis).	He/She can develop and document maintenance and inspection methods for electrical/electronic systems based on production and service process analysis as well as on quality management and customer requirements. He/She is able to develop related maintenance, inspection and quality assurance plans (e.g., optimizing MTBF of a production line, planning reserve power supply).

Example of a Competence Matrix, see full Matrix here: [CORE INFORMATION PartI_CM_20090828.indd \(vocationalqualification.net\)](#)

Benefits, sustainability and challenges

In particular, a Competence Matrix can be used to facilitate the visibility of **similarities and differences of qualifications** preparing for the same occupational field, for example, in terms of steps of competence development included or not included. This approach was explored in the Cedefop project on *Comparing VET qualifications*.¹

A Competence Matrix can also support the **validation and recognition of competences** acquired in another country or achieved through non-formal or informal learning. This was, for example, the aim of the HCEU project that utilised the VQTS model in the context of comparing and recognising health care qualifications (in the fields of nursing and elderly care) obtained within other learning contexts than the national formal qualifications system.²

The methodological approach of the VQTS model itself has found its way into many qualification development processes. Many EU-funded projects have used this approach for various purposes, including supporting the transfer of vocational competences acquired abroad (mobility in VET) or improving permeability between VET and higher education. However, VQTS-based Competence Matrices are available for a few occupational fields and in few languages only and they are often not updated after the end of the project's lifetime.

The main challenges of the VQTS model lie in the development of a Competence Matrix. Among the crucial aspects is the use of the right empirical methods to identify the core tasks and distinguish the levels of competence development. In addition, the issue of the granularity of descriptions, the expression of different levels of competence and the use of the right examples must be well considered.

¹ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/comparing-vet-qualifications>

² <https://www.project-hceu.eu/>

Possible further development of the process

One possible step could be to collect the existing competence matrices, ensure that they are regularly updated with the support of experts and relevant tools (such as ESCO) and store them in a user-friendly and accessible database.

More information

vocationalqualification.net

[Project HCEU: HCEU: the project \(project-hceu.eu\)](http://project-hceu.eu)

4. A balancing Act – Describing skills acquired in the workplace in Norway

“A Balancing Act”

“A Balancing Act” (Balansekunst) is a concept developed by VIRKE3 in Norway to identify, describe and communicate skills acquired in the workplace to working life and to the formal education system. There are no procedures for linking qualifications directly to the NQF. Instead, A Balancing Act provides a method for documenting skills developed through non-formal and informal learning and thus, it serves as a springboard for a fairer validation process. Introducing learning outcomes in the workplace is a key: “The emphasis on learning outcomes and the connection of work-based learning to formal education makes the tool very suitable to get the private sector and enterprises involved – one of the major challenges in the establishment of validation arrangements” (From the jury’s justification for awarding The Global VPL Prize 2019 to “A Balancing Act”).

The framework of the Balancing Act model

The balancing act model is a framework based on the terminology used when describing the skills needed to adequately master a specific role in the workplace. It is referred to as a “balancing act” that occurs in everyday work lives, an act that makes it necessary to continuously develop skills as employees face new tasks and situations, and these situations are often pulling in rather contrasting directions.

The balance model can be applied to all workplace situations. Lifelong learning in the workplace is incredibly dynamic, and the most challenging aspect of developing “A Balancing Act” has been in devising the dynamics for skills development. A skill can be situated across the three dimensions on the model, and the right placement needs to be identified depending on the most important aspect of the “balancing activity” that occurs in that particular role (see the pictures below).

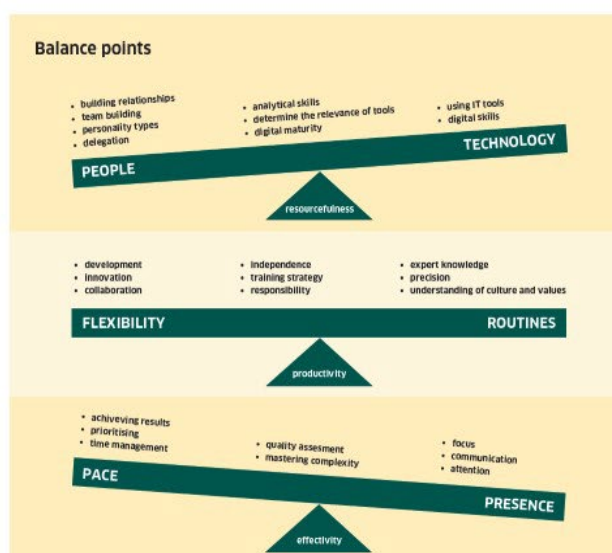
The three dimensions of the balancing model

The balance model has

three dimensions:

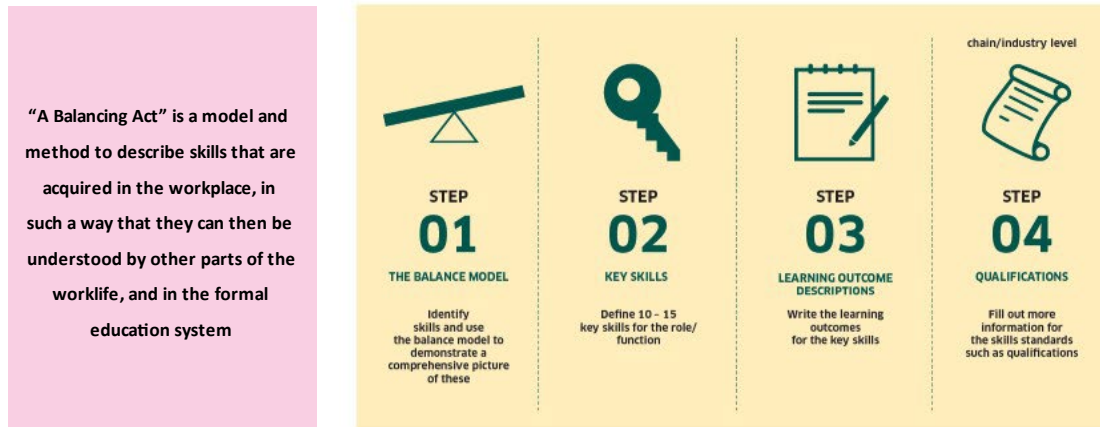
1. Maintaining a relationship with both people and technology
2. Being flexible while also having a good routine and specialist expertise
3. The need to find a balance between pace and presence, both in one’s everyday life and in the long term

VIRKE



³ [Virke - Hovedorganisasjonen for handels- og tjenestenæringen](#)

The four steps of the balancing model



The key skills with the corresponding learning outcomes constitute a skills standard for the specific role or an individual's skills set.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

“A Balancing Act” provides a common language and understanding for the dialogue between employer and employees about skills needed and skills development for any specific role in the company or organisation. Applying the same concept on skills standards in the workplace and for the description of an individual's skills set, makes the match/mismatch transparent and facilitates an easy and proper validation of skills for the labour market (all actors). Using skills standards in addition to education standards as a reference for guidance, makes a more concrete career guidance directed to prospects in working life.

A pilot project was carried out in 2021/2022 using the concept of “A Balancing Act” to establish an education standard for the stage production industry. It's a collaboration between the relevant social partners and Oslo Higher Vocational College, transforming skills standards for five roles into a formal higher vocational education curriculum.

Every description of skills acquired in the workplace is based on an interview with people talking about their experiences in working the role. The interviews conducted for “A Balancing Act” focus on the mastering of skills, and thus creates a positive experience for all involved leading to a heightened level of pride over one's own skills.

The concept can be applied to all sectors of industry, private or public. For mainstreaming the concept, we need a more active involvement of the education authorities and the public/private employment services.

The method based on interviews are time-consuming. The interview of 1.5 hour takes place in the interviewees' workplace. The interviewer needs a certain expertise for transforming individuals' narrative into the balance model.

Possibilities further development of the process

The model is now being digitalized, enhancing the speed for implementation in all sectors of working life. The pilot project will be followed-up with more examples by applying the concept to development of education standards.

Links to more information

[A Balancing Act - Describing skills acquired in the workplace - Hovedorganisasjonen Virke](#)

5. Market qualifications and validation in Poland

Levelling market qualifications and promoting VPL within the Polish NQF

Developments of the National Qualification Framework has been in development since 2006. The referencing report was delivered in 2013 and in 2019 a report on the implementation of the Council recommendation of 31 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning is presented.

The Integrated Qualification Act established and defined a typology of qualifications – full qualifications (formal education), other state regulated qualifications and market qualifications. Market qualifications are a new type of non-state regulated qualifications developed by training providers, corporations, social organisations, industry associations etc. that can be attained via VPL. Also established are principles for describing and registering qualifications in the Integrated Qualification Register (IQF), including VPL requirements – and requirements for becoming a market qualification and VPL provider (including procedures).

The Integrated Qualification Act also provided:

- Principles of describing and registering qualifications in the Integrated Qualification Register (IQR), including VPL requirements.
- Principles of quality assurance provided by ministry appointed entities.
- The role of all ministries in including market qualifications in the IQS (including mapping them on the PQF), appointing and supervising the quality assurance institutions and market qualification / VPL providers.
- The role of the Ministry of Education in coordinating the IQS as a whole.
- Requirements for becoming a market qualification and VPL provider and the procedure to do so.

The 2014 amendment to the act on Higher Educations establishes the possibility of gaining access to study programmes via VPL, which allows for a maximum of 50% of ECTS pertaining to a given study programme to be recognised, thus shortening the studies. The number of students admitted this way cannot exceed 20% of the total number of students in a given programme. Prior to VPL the candidate has to obtain an appropriate level of education in order to gain access to the process.

Since the 2008 amendment to the act on the Education System it is possible to obtain most qualifications awarded in general and vocational education by way of extramural examinations based on core curricula. Since 2010 these curricula are described in terms of learning outcomes. The Act on Employment Promotion and Labor Market Institutions establishes a system of public employment services that provide vocational guidance as part of public activities promoting employment and supporting the labour market.

Description of the process (VPL process)

Ad. 1. In the IQS the VPL process resulting in obtaining a market qualification is based on requirements described in each qualification individually, but otherwise can be designed by the provider. There is no general standard for the VPL process, although the Educational Research Institute appointed by the Ministry of Education to support the implementation of the IQS has produced a series of national guidelines and free tools based on the 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, including the stages of identification, documentation, assessment and certification (general guidelines, catalogue of VPL methods, database of good practices in VPL, digital portfolio tool, skills audit method).

Ad. 2 The VPL process in higher education is not standardised and every higher education institution can design it autonomously.

Ad. 3. Extramural examinations are legally regulated, supervised by the Central Examination Board and conducted by the Regional Examination Boards. For more see Gmaj et al.. (2019).

Ad. 4. Guidance provided by the public employment services is highly regulated on the county level but more flexible on the level of voivodeships, where more innovative approaches can be implemented. The result is not related to awarding qualifications but to linking the client with employment opportunities based on an individual profile. For more see Gmaj et al.. (2019).

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

In all cases described above the process is introduced on a national level, although opportunities provided by different institutions within IQS, higher education and public employment services can differ drastically, including their sustainability. Extramural examinations are highly standardised and similar across the country.

Ad. 1. As the stages/flow of the VPL process is not standardised within the IQS, labour market institutions developing market qualifications tend to lean towards traditional examinations (without guidance or support provided before assessment) when formulating VPL requirements for a given qualification. Furthermore, the market qualification / VPL providers by law must be business entities. As such they are motivated by the economical effectiveness of the VPL process they provide so they also lean towards traditional, mass examinations. Furthermore, they are entitled to charge a fee for undertaking VPL from the candidate, which has to balance the costs and provide income for the entity, so it is usually high. For more see Gmaj & Fijałkowska (2021).

Ad. 2. A study done by the Educational Research Institute in 2020 showed, that few higher education institutions implemented VPL in practice and if so – only a couple of students underwent the process. If VPL was introduced, it was mainly in private higher education institutions and in relation to practically and vocationally oriented study programmes, provided an individual fond of VPL was present among the staff. A general lack of funding, support by decision makers and promotion has been identified. VPL was also deemed by the higher education institutions as not financially viable. For more see Jędrzejczak, Michalik & Gola (2020) (only in Polish).

Ad. 3. Extramural examinations, although affordable and widely available, are centralised exams that do not include any guidance stages in themselves. The school or public employment service has to provide such support. Furthermore, it is possible to apply for such examinations only after reaching the previous level of education. But the examinations are generally affordable.

Ad. 4. The public employment services, although widely available, are underfunded, need modernisation and more flexibility in relation to the guidance methods used, especially on the county level. For more see Gmaj et al. (2019).

In general, the main challenges are linked to limited take-up, general lack of funding, support by decision makers and promotion.

Possibilities for further developments

Poland adopted an Integrated Skills Strategy 2030 in 2019 (general part) and 2020 (detailed part), which was based on the guidelines for the New European Skills Agenda and the framework established by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for developing effective skills policies. It describes the policy for developing skills in accordance with the idea of lifelong learning and includes the whole system of education, as well as non-formal and informal learning.

More information

[ZSK - Home EN \(kwalifikacje.gov.pl\)](https://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/)

Polish referencing report is published (Chłoń-Domińczak et al., 2013).

The Polish parliament adopts the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System in December 2015, which introduced the Integrated Qualification System (Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji).

The updated Polish referencing report is published (Kraśniewski et al., 2015).

Poland's one-off report on the implementation of the Council recommendation of 21 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Poland (Gmaj et al., 2019) for the EQF Advisory Board.

6. Levelling procedure for non-formal qualifications in Iceland

Levelling procedure conducted by the Directorate of Education

The Icelandic National Qualification Framework (ISQF) is on seven levels and currently mainly includes curricula within the formal school system. It is however stated that it is to reflect on progressing competence demands in formal and non-formal learning in Iceland.

However, as an example of non-formal education, adult education is an important component of the education system. Article 5 of the Adult education act no. 27/2010 does not dictate the division of adult education programs into levels, based on skill and learning outcome (NQF) but rather give the Minister of education the authority to set specific rules regarding it. At the same time, it is stressed that adult education should be organized “so as to ensure that it is compatible with other education programmes, and that studies defined as adult education can be evaluated for credits within the general education system.”

Article 6 states the legal formality of certification of adult education. Individual courses of study aimed for adults are formulated into a curriculum (minimum 40 hours and up to 600 hours) and course descriptions should be submitted for accreditation. In practice, the Minister of education delegates this role to the Directorate of Education, as the law suggests.

Description of the process

The accreditation process is divided into several steps:

1. Education provider authors a course of study/curricula in “Námskrárgrunnur” (official name of a computer format designed for submitting a curricula) and submits it for review. The education provider suggests the NQF level to which the courses of study/curricula should be placed. Námskrárgrunnur is currently available only to official education providers (currently 26 educational providers) who have been authorised by education authorities.
2. Directorate of Education reviews the submitted curricula in accordance with a pre-defined checklist. The checklist in question is based on official standards published by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in 2013. The importance of linking courses of study/curricula into the NQF is unequivocal in these standards, as it is stated that at least 75% of offered courses’ subjects should be on the same level as the study course itself.
3. If the submitted study course/curricula abide by the official standards, it is formally accredited by the Directorate of Education. In case it does not, it is returned the education provider for review, and they’ll be able to submit again, at a later date.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

Process ensures the quality and transparency of adult education and simplifies the process of credit evaluation into the formal education system, ensuring a smoother transition for students from the former to the latter.

The process of accreditation for education providers is an integral part of being able to submit a study course/curricula for evaluation within the ISQF. This process could be made more visible and transparent. All accredited education providers are allowed to submit study courses/curricula for review. It is usually the preferred way by the larger ones, most notably The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) a coordinating body within adult learning specifically servicing people with background of little formal education. However, it is not mainstreamed in the sense that not all accredited providers use this method.

Finding the correct qualification level for the submitted course of study/curricula as well as individual courses within it is always a challenge. It requires deliberation between stakeholders. Part of the study course submission is the description of the knowledge, skills and competence linked to the outcome of the course. In practice, it is usually challenging to keep these descriptions on point and clear as to how they relate to the NQF level of the course. Another challenge is that there are fewer options available for the non-formal education providers to build their study courses/curricula within “Námskrárgrunnur” compared to the formal ones. This process is limited to accredited education providers, and not open example levelling company training or for companies to apply for accreditation of learning/qualification in working life.

Possibilities for further developments

Further developments might include increasing the transparency of the process for stakeholders and deliberate on it. There is need to make the study course/curricula submission process more visible and accessible. At the same time, this process needs to be clear and formal to ensure the quality of submitted study courses.

Another possibility for improvements could be to shift the way of thinking about the connection between formal and non-formal education as a tool for social inclusion and motivation for individuals who choose a different path from the formal education system.

More information

[Adult education act no. 27/2010](#)

[1163/2011 Reglugerð um framhaldsfræðslu](#) (regulation on adult education. Official translation unavailable)

[Viðmið um gerð námskráa í framhaldsfræðslu](#) (standards of adult education study course description. Official translation unavailable)

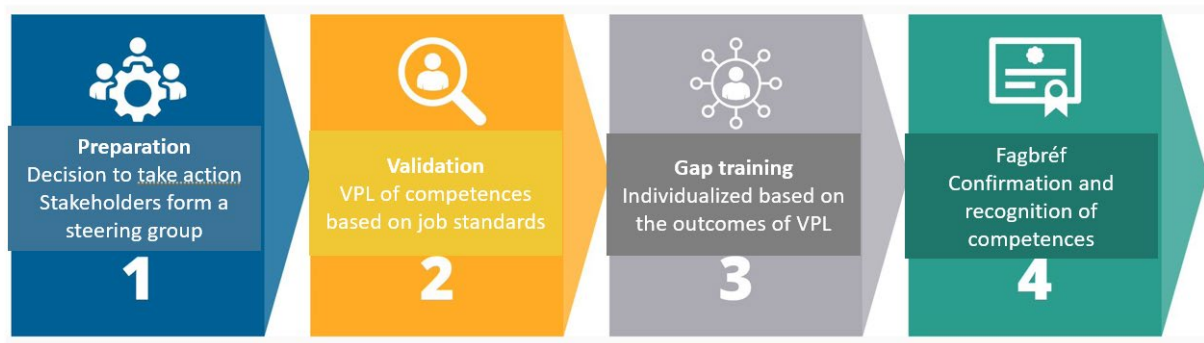
7. Certification in working life in Iceland

Certification in working life (Fagbréf atvinnulífsins)

The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) has developed a process for identifying and certifying competences based on specific job criteria and mapping them to ISQF levels. Clearly defined competence criteria are used in close cooperation with stakeholders for identifying the skills required to perform essential functions of particular jobs (see example on Competency profiling in Iceland). The process of making skills visible, validating existing skills and providing gap training when needed leads to certification for a specific job. The jobs that have been in focus until now have been mapped on ISQF level 2 (EQF level 3).

What are the core elements and procedures in the certification model?

Companies or accredited bodies apply for funding. The ETSC supports the development of job profiles, assessment tools, and training of VPL staff. Validation takes place and gap training is provided if needed. On completion, Fagbréf in the specific job is issued and handed out to participants.



The process provides structure and coherence in competence profiling and provides a foundation for the development of competence standards for specific jobs. Within companies, the process makes existing competences visible for validation and can identify where training is needed (gap training). Processes of in-company training become more formalised, and the employees can better understand their own competences and what is required of them, in addition to being able to identify how to improve (upskilling/reskilling).

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

The process can be beneficial for both the employer and employee:

For the company:

- Overview of employees' competences – jobs conducted by people with the right skills
- Visible competence standards for job development and recruitment
- Targeted training in line with skills needs (e.g. in response for rapid changes in technology)
- Facilitating decisions linked to job development and salary

For the employee:

- Competences become visible and can thereby be confirmed/validated through a reliable process
- It becomes clearer what competences are needed with regards to training

- Validated competences can enhance job development, job terms and mobility on the labour market
- Increased respect for the job and improved image

The model presented is sustainable and emphasizes specific quality criteria with regards to the process conducted (handbook for the process, training of inhouse assessors and project managers).

The process was developed in close cooperation with the Confederation for employers and the Confederation of employees and tested in five pilots in close cooperation with companies and several lifelong learning centres. The model for financing has been set up with an agreement with the educational funds (company shares), allowing companies to apply for financing for the certification process (validation, gap training, certification). Accredited educational providers can also apply for funding from the educational fund for people with low qualified background. Coordination of the process (project management) can be in the hands of the companies themselves, educational providers, and independent consultants. Quality criteria for the process have been developed (coordination, aims and administration; information, data security and publishing of certificates; preparation of VPL and gap training) and guidelines, also for project coordinators. The Education and Training service centre has the role to secure quality, value of results, disseminate information about the process, revise competence criteria, publish the certificates, train VPL staff and accredit coordinating bodies. The development in the next 2-3 years will determine if the process becomes a mainstream pathway within occupational sectors.

Now that the process is sustainable, the next challenge is to get the companies and trade unions to implement the process. There is a high interest within occupational sectors, specifically due to the rapid changes on the labour market, but the process and the certificates still needs to earn trust as more sectors join the process. The Icelandic labour market is small and most companies small/medium sized. Finding the time and having stable enough staff is a prerequisite. Updating the job criteria regularly will need a formalized process.

For implementation in individual companies, both employers and employees need to see the benefits of going through the process. Consensus and cooperation are a foundation for building trust between the social partners and with regards to.

Possible further development of the process

The process is well functioning and continuously developing based on labour market needs. The mobility of workers is quite extensive, and companies find it to be challenging to retain workers. The certification process opens opportunities for job development within the company and may also build a stronger connection between employers and employees. The method could be expanded, especially to companies and sectors in cooperation with social partners. Competence profiling, VPL, training and certification can support job development, provide information for salary negotiations salary frameworks, and increase overall competence development in the labour market. The process benefits people who are unemployed as well as people with an immigrant background.

Cooperation with social partners on further developments could strengthen the process as tool for example with regards to updating job criteria regularly. Securing further financing of the process and general coordination of distribution of competence profiling for the labour market can facilitate the use of and access to the tool.

Links to more information

[Information on the ETSC website](#)

[Introduction video](#)

8. Competency profiling in Iceland

Competency profiling in Iceland

The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) has developed a method for identifying the competencies required to successfully perform a job. Clearly defined competencies criteria are used for identifying the skills required to perform the essential functions of particular jobs in close cooperation with stakeholders. Job competencies can be used in the design of preparatory courses for participation in the labour market, as a benchmark in validation of prior learning, or as a guiding principle in career development and recruitment. The method is a practical, effective way of identifying the necessary job competencies, including personal competencies, which for an effective employee are an essential set of skills. The ETSC oversees the process as well as related tools and trains designated profiling specialists for the profiling work. The process is used within adult learning and serves as a foundation for 43 curricula and VPL pathways.

How is the competency profiling done?

Competency profiling is a pre-determined process. The analysis is conducted throughout three structured meetings with 10-20 participants of stakeholders within the relevant sector.

The profiling specialist prepares and organises the analysis meetings together with a steering group consisting of 5-6 key members from the profession. The steering group includes representatives from the entity requesting the profiling project, employees, and managerial representatives from the profession, along with other stakeholders. Their role is to define the project and involve participants in the analysis meetings who have knowledge of the profession. The steering group reviews and confirms the results of competency profiling. It is assumed that the steering group will also participate in the analysis meetings.

A larger group is invited to participate in the analysis meetings, consisting of 10-20 individuals who carry out the job in question, managers in the profession, and other parties who possess a broad understanding of the job, both regarding connections with other professions and future prospects for the sector. Three analysis meetings are held with the profiling group, each lasting three hours. Participants in the analysis meetings are selected based on their connections with the job in question. The aim is to have the widest representation possible within the profession. No preparation is required for the meetings.

Specific units of competences described using learning outcomes are presented at the first meeting to identify main competences and build up the profile. Part of these units are objectively described as essential competencies for the labour market. Competences are identified and selected during the analysis meetings. In accordance with the Icelandic Qualification Framework, the competencies are presented in incremental steps, focusing on the responsibility, independence, and complexity of the work. Competency descriptions are presented on cards, given due consideration, and sorted in a simple process. The result of competency profiling is a job profile, containing the job definition, which is a brief description of the job, a list of core tasks and a description of the competences needed to perform the job successfully. The competences are placed on NQF levels (learning outcomes).

The competency descriptions used by ETSC come from the Canadian consulting firm HRSG, which has been developing competences for over 30 years. ETSC has translated and adapted the material to the Icelandic environment.

OVERVIEW OF THE COMPETENCY PROFILING PROCESS



The process requires active labour market participation. A vital component in this process is for the labour market to define the competencies which are needed so that learning aimed at preparation for participation in the sector is concise, cost-effective, and based on broad involvement from the profession in question.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

The process provides structure and coherence in competence profiling and provides a foundation for the development of competence standards and curricula. Through close cooperation with relevant stakeholders, consensus can be reached regarding learning outcomes and NQF levels.

Experience shows that participating in the analysis meetings is both useful and provides a learning opportunity. Surveys have revealed that the majority of participants would be happy to take part again if asked. Many add that participation has been beneficial to them, personally and/or at work.

The process includes a toolbox consisting of guidelines and a suite of competency cards. Sustainability is achieved as ETSC coordinates training for profiling specialists who can coordinate the process based on requests from working life or other stakeholders.

The profiling process relies on the interest and goodwill of the labour market actors to draw conclusions that are in line with their needs. It can be a challenge to recruit company representatives for the work as well as gathering all the stakeholders (especially from rural areas) for each meeting since the work is not paid for. Some stakeholders find the work too time consuming.

The competences are described in rather general terms which demands them to be developed further in more detailed learning outcomes when writing them into curricula or for assessment criteria for validation of prior learning.

Assuring coherence in practice needs consistent attention and the linking to NQF levels relies on the expertise of the specialists using the tool. In some cases, specific competence factors (learning outcomes) for a job can be distributed over more than one level which makes it challenging to define the overall NQF level.

Possible further development of the process

The process is well functioning and in continuous development based on labour market needs. The process and tools are currently being developed to be an online process, which hopefully facilitates recruitment of stakeholders. The work can also be blended as IRL and online meetings.

The method could be introduced to a larger extent, especially within companies and sectors in cooperation with social partners. Competency profiling can support job development, provide information for salary frameworks, and increase overall competence development in the labour market.

Cooperation with labour market partners on further developments could strengthen the tool. Securing financing of the process and general coordination of distribution of competence profiling for the labour market can facilitate the use of the tool.

More information

[Haefnigreiningar_A4_Baeklingur_ENS.indd \(frae.is\)](#)

9. Piloting micro credentials in Sweden

Exploring and piloting micro credentials in Sweden – Kompetenspasset

Kompetenspasset is a project which explores the potential of micro-credentials – what they are and could be, the added value of micro-credentials, and skills gaps micro-credentials possibly could fill. The project both explores standards for content and technical format and model for interoperable sharing of data through the European Learning Model, ELM. Content and added value for end users are explored through five pilots which operate in different sectors with different identified skills needs. Most skills gaps that are explored are in the non-formal sector where no clearly stated learning outcomes or previous education opportunities exist, but there are cases in which the pilots use elements or parts from the formal education sector in new combinations. There are such examples in Swedish for immigrants in vocational settings with practical use of for the specific jobs, or training in which learning modules from different qualification-levels are combined.

Kompetenspasset is financed by Vinnova, Sweden's innovation agency. Project partners are RISE, the Research Institutes of Sweden, the Swedish Public Employment Services and MYH, the Swedish Agency for Higher Vocational Education. UHR, the Swedish Council for Higher Education *i.e.*, the national Europass centre, is an associated partner.

What are the core elements and procedure in the Piloting micro credentials in Sweden?

The approach is agile and explorative. It evolves around two pillars, content and technical model, both of which are informed by the EU [recommendation on micro-credentials](#) and the standard elements needed to describe a micro-credential.

For exploring the content of micro-credentials, five pilots were selected to represent a variety of sectors and needs for skills provision. For each pilot there is a process manager funded by the project. The process manager is tasked to explore possible micro-credentials by identifying and documenting skills gaps in cooperation with stakeholders, take lead in the process of defining and writing learning outcomes, and to document the process to generate data for the project. The pilot managers have been given a crash course in how to define and write learning outcomes and have been given opportunities to iterate the process to define intended learning outcomes, with an action verb set in a context, in cooperation with the stakeholders of the micro-credential. The project managers have taken part of bi-monthly seminars in which they have presented their work-in-progress to other project managers and the project partners. The seminars have both been used for giving feedback to each other, to discuss and share insights encountered during the process. Each process manager has taken part in a weekly dialogue with the project partner team to keep pace with the project plan and to discuss progress and challenges. In addition, the project team has written two 'handbooks' to support the development of micro-credentials by drawing on the experiences, enablers, and challenges, of the process managers.

For the technical solution, a team has been exploring ways of handling and documenting data generated by the pilots with an aim to securely export the data through ELM to the Europass platform. The data were at first collected through an excel spreadsheet for the pilots to deliver data to the technical team, but it is gradually replaced by a platform with a user-friendly interface. The interaction between the pilots and the technical team has been crucial in developing a method to safely document, share and export micro-credentials.

The project partner team have regular meetings to analyse the process and progress of the project. One major concern of the analyses is whether there will be commonalities between the pilots to synthesise micro-

credentials in Sweden into one national model, and if so, how the model will relate to the Swedish Qualifications Framework, SeQF. Most of the pilots are in the process of developing one or several micro-credentials in areas where a skills gap is identified. These micro-credentials share some common characteristics with qualifications as defined in the ordinance of the SeQF, like being described as learning outcomes defined by knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

There is a range of groups and actors benefitting from the project. Two of the pilots are exploring entry level job opportunities. One is exploring practical Swedish adapted to professional tasks for nursing aids in care of the elderly. There is a huge shortage of staff in nursing homes for the elderly and in many cases, it is a first job for newly arrived immigrants whose skills in Swedish are insufficient to understand the specifics of the individual care plan of each resident. Another example of micro-credentials developed for entry jobs, is in repairing clothing and textile work for seamstresses and sewers.

Microcredentials are also explored for operators in hydropower plants to speed up the process of acquiring skills for surveillance and repair maintenance. Another example are micro-credentials to top up skills for electricians in emergency repair work of fibre nets as part of a national plan to rapidly create a pool of reserve staff for infrastructure repairs.

In addition, the Public Employment Services are exploring possibilities to document and issue micro-credentials for individuals participating in labour market training programmes. Today the PES procures training for unemployed individuals in areas where there is a skills shortage, but since the PES is not an education provider, the outcome of the training is, in most cases, not generating a document of skills that is portable or stackable, such as a diploma or certificate, to the individual.

All micro-credentials explored and developed need to be awarded through training or validation. One common understanding is that micro-credentials may be beneficial in recognition of prior learning: the lesser the volume of learning that needs to be documented is, the more likely it has a potential for being validated.

The challenges of the project are to mainstream the process and establish sustainable structures for documentation, portability, and interoperability of micro-credentials. Since formal education in Sweden largely is modularised, and that non-formal qualifications – regardless of size – can be levelled to the SeQF, one can argue that micro-credentials, without being a separate entity, already are available in Sweden. Therefore, the most likely outcomes of the project are:

- a method to develop learning outcomes for smaller volumes of learning,
- a format to document learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning outside of what today is offered in the formal education system,
- and a data model that is compatible with the ELM standards to transfer documented learning outcomes to Europass.

The sustainability is enhanced through an inclusion of qualitative progression, *i.e.*, a mechanism that documents if the learning is achieved from attendance in a non-regulated setting without external assessment, or from the assessment of achieved learning through examination which *e.g.*, could generate sector recognised certificates. As such the format and method of the project could be open to all credentials following a small volume of learning and ‘micro-credentials’ would serve as an umbrella term for learning which is documented according to the format and method. Thus, the key for the project to succeed has been the method of iterative collaboration to formulate intended learning outcomes through involvement of stakeholders from the sector in which the micro-credential is supposed to close a skills gap.

One major challenge is to gain acceptance for the format and model of developing and documenting micro-credentials. There are questions if it will be accepted by stakeholders like social partners, or if it will be seen as the means to undermine the collective agreements which often include standards of educational level for non-regulated professions.

The learning outcomes of a smaller volume of learning can be levelled to the Swedish NQF. Since there is no minimum limit to a non-formal qualification, there is no clear-cut distinction between a qualification and a micro-credential – if it is levelled to the SeQF. As such, there is a second challenge in determining if micro-credentials that are levelled to the SeQF becomes qualifications, or if all micro-credentials potentially are qualifications. It is also a challenge to define the starting level for a micro-credential, *i.e.*, the difference between a micro-credential that is intended to top up a qualification and a micro-credential for which the learning is widening or reskilling the individual.

To summarise, the challenges of a national model for micro-credentials point to a formalisation of non-formal learning. The governance and the levelling process are challenged by blurred distinctions between non-formal and formal learning, and difficulties to define the relationship between micro-credentials and qualifications.

Possibilities further development of the process

A Swedish [qualification database](#) has been developed during 2022-2023. So far, more than 3000 formal qualifications from higher vocational education and the 62 non-formal qualifications that have been levelled to the SeQF, are made visible through the database and through the Europass platform. Since there is not one single database of all opportunities of smaller volumes of learning, it would be beneficial if the qualification database also could handle the micro-credentials available in Sweden.

Links to more information

[Kompetenspasset](#) (in English)

10. Continuous learning reform in Finland

Continuous learning for re- and upskilling

In 2019 the Government Programme laid the foundation for a continuous learning reform in Finland. Continuous learning refers to reskilling and upskilling of the working-age adult population, including support measures such as guidance and validation services. As a result of the reform a Parliamentary working group defined guidelines and tasks to drive the reform forward.

To develop methods and platforms where competences are made visible, a working group for validation of non-formal and informal learning started its work in September 2021. The working group's tasks are based on the Government Programme, the Lifelong Guidance Strategy, Finland's Recovery and Resilience Plan and the Continuous Learning Reform. The working group operates between different administrative branches of Ministries and a wide range of representatives of working life organisations (employee and employer unions), umbrella organisations for different educational sectors, etc. The working group has started awareness raising and information gathering through holding open hearings online.

In June 2022 the working group produced indicative development proposals for three areas:

1. Proposal on widening the FiNQF (e.g., micro-credentials and quality assurance)
2. Proposal on further developing Open Badges (common principles and quality indicators for badges, principles of transparency, stackability and portability)
3. Proposal on further developing ways of better making competences visible of the working-age people at workplaces.

The term of the working group ends at the end of 2024, by which time the recommendations will be nationally approved and pilot projects finished their experimentations. The working group is co-chaired by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Results so far

So far, the working group has made a proposal for national principles for validating competences in informal and non-formal contexts, with a special emphasis on workplaces. The proposed six principles are:

1. **All skills and competences are valuable. Skills and competences are gained and can be identified in different contexts and environments.**

Making skills and competences visible highlights the versatility of learning. In addition, different educations, competences are gained (or can even be consciously acquired) at work, in hobbies, in everyday life, voluntary work or job seeking.

2. **The individual's own initiative bears a great importance in identifying one's own competences.**

The process of identifying one's own skills and competences consists of detection, wording and making the skills and competences visible. Identifying skills and competences is a career management skill, that can be learned and practiced throughout one's life. This civic competence should be paid special attention at workplaces, educational institutions as well as hobbies and other leisure activities.

3. **The identification of an individual's skills and competences should be advanced by offering support services and guidance in different situations, equitably and accessibly.**

The need for support and guidance, and the ways in which they are offered, varies according to the needs of the individual. Support and guidance should be offered at workplaces, employment services, through

studies and free time activities. The support can, for example, be career guidance, other expert services or digital services. At workplaces support can also entail goal-oriented competence discussions, peer learning and mentoring. In terms of leisure activities, the support could mean offering open badges or awarding competence certificates.

- 4. To make competences visible, it must be ensured that there are various tools available for different circumstances, that are cohesive and easily used.**

In addition to personal services, digital tools are central in validation. Digital tools should be developed as a public service, available to all individuals as well as communities. The public digital validation tools should be accessible to all, and their goal should be promoting continuous learning and employment.

- 5. The identification processes of competences should improve the individual's experience of inclusion, well-being, and opportunities for development.**

The procedures and tools used in the identification process should be empowering and positive of nature.

- 6. The stakeholders involved in the identification of competences should be supported.**

The organisations and individuals working with identification of competences should have opportunities to develop their own skills and competences. Validation is everybody's business: In addition to individuals, workplaces, educational institutions, employment services as well as IGA-services of different sectors, have a special responsibility. Good practices among stakeholders should be disseminated and further developed.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

The process is a core part of a national strategy for continuous learning and the sustainability of the process is guaranteed by extending the operational work over the government term of office. The strategy as such has been designed and drafted in a multi-party cooperation and the operationalization is carried out by several ministries and a wide stakeholder network. There is also public funding available to carry out pilots and development projects.

The main challenges may be the lack of experience and competence of the practitioners in such a wide scale and the usability of the tools that are being developed. Another challenging aspect is quality assurance of the processes – how trustworthy will the result be and can they be used as widely as hoped.

Possible further development of the process

Developing quality assurance mechanisms to ensure the reliability of the results and opening the NQF further to be able to level e.g., non-formal qualifications or non-formal learning results relatively easily on the NQF levels.

More information

[General information on the continuous learning reform \(EN\)](#)

Publications of the Finnish Government (EN):

[Competence secures the future. Parliamentary policy approaches for reforming continuous learning. \(2:2022\)](#)

11. Occupational map in the retail sector in Sweden (Yrkeskartan)

Making skills visible – occupational map in the retail sector in Sweden

Handelsrådet (Swedish Retail and Wholesale Council) was founded by employer associations (Fremia and Svensk Handel) and national labour unions (Akademikerförbunden, Handelsanställdas förbund and Unionen) in 2015. The overall purpose of the organisation is to strengthen the competitiveness of the Swedish retail and wholesale business and to create good conditions for employees.

One of the working committees within Handelsrådet is devoted to “Occupations, Competence, Restructuring and Job Transition”. The committee works to support and develop trade-oriented educational efforts, raise and secure professional status, skill development and skill supply in trade, monitor and quality-assure relevant training, improve the availability of qualified labour, and collaborate with, among other things, educational institutions such as polytechnics and upper secondary schools and decision makers in the education system. The overall goal is “to encourage and enable more people to establish themselves and develop within the fields of retail and wholesale”.

What are the core elements and procedure in the occupational map in the retail sector in Sweden?

For this purpose, Handelsrådet has developed Yrkeskartan (the occupational map), which is an interactive map where users can explore a selection of occupations and potential career paths within retailing and wholesaling. Each occupation has a short description and is presented with a short movie, a competence profile, and some interviews with practitioners. The occupation profiles are matched with education and training from a separate database (“Hitta utbildning”).



The first step in the process was for representatives for the founding partners of Handelsrådet to identify the first ten occupations to be featured. These were chosen to show the wide variety of occupations that can be found within retailing and wholesaling.

As a second step recruitment specialists were engaged to make a description of each occupation and the competences it requires. Based on these descriptions, each occupation was presented in a short movie and through some interviews with practitioners.

After the first version of the map was launched additional occupations have been added. To increase the transferability between occupations and sectors, Handelsrådet has started to align the competency descriptions with the concepts used within Swedish National Qualifications Framework (SeQF). As one of the pilots in the project “Kompetenspasset” we are also exploring the potential of micro-credentials within this concept.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

There is a wide range of groups and actors with a potential to benefit from yrkeskartan. This far, the public system and organisations working with education, training, restructuring and job transition have shown more interest than employers and employees within the retail and wholesale sector.

The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) has been using descriptions of competencies in the curricula of formal upper secondary education. Yrkeskartan is used at Swedish upper secondary schools to illustrate career paths in retailing and wholesaling. Handelsrådet has used Yrkeskartan to illustrate the need for advanced vocational training in communication with the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan - MYH) and the Swedish Public Employment Services (Arbetsförmedlingen - AF).

As the aim of Yrkeskartan is to create a common ground for the understanding of occupations and competencies for the retail and wholesale sector there is a need to mainstream the process and establish sustainable structures. By aligning descriptions of competencies with the Swedish National Qualifications Framework (SeQF) they will become more mainstreamed, and the procedures will become more sustainable.

The main challenge is to create a common ground for understanding occupations and competences for a very diverse target group. The content needs to be accessible for employers and employees, as well as policy makers, education providers, career coaches and others who are involved in providing competence for the retail and wholesale sector. It's however not only a matter of creating consensus within the sector, but also with other sectors related to sales and services (hotels, restaurants, transports, etc.). The development of standards for nation-wide recognition of skills and qualifications will help to promote labour mobility both within our sector and with neighbouring sectors.

Possibilities further development of the process

The occupational map has a diverse target group and to become the common ground for recruitment and career planning, we need to:

- increase the number of occupations represented on the map,
- develop the precision of the competence descriptions and connect to existing national frameworks, and
- increase our dissemination efforts.

Links to more information

[Yrkeskartan.se](https://yrkeskartan.se) (partly in English)

12. Levelling procedures for non-formal qualifications in Sweden

Levelling non-formal qualifications to the SeQF

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan – MYH) is the National Coordination Point (NCP) for EQF. MYH is responsible for both levelling non-formal qualifications to the SeQF and giving support to different actors who are developing qualifications. Connected to the Agency there is an Advisory Council for the SeQF with representatives from relevant national educational actors and the social partners. The council supports MYH with recommendations before levelling decisions. MYH is also responsible for information regarding the SeQF and the newly developed qualifications database and reports back to the government.

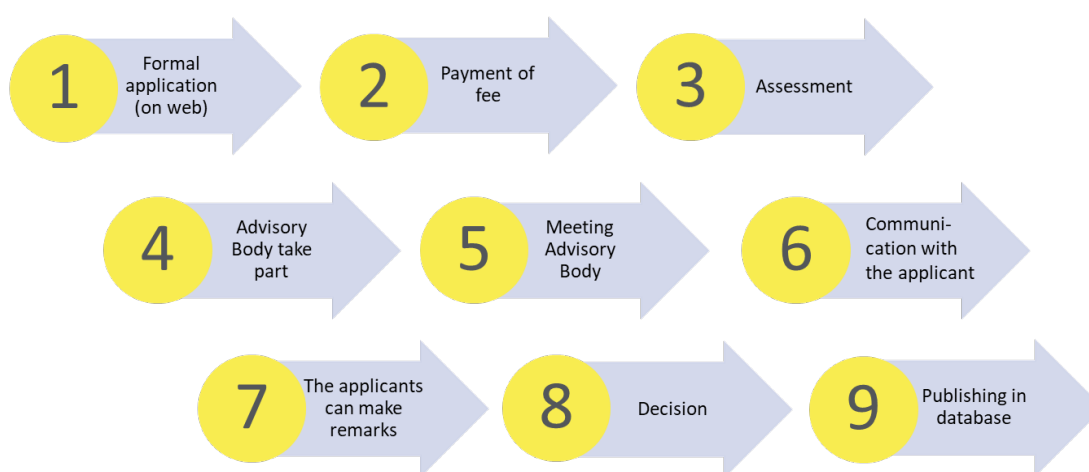
Since Sweden has few regulated professions in combination with a broad upper secondary vocational education that for most learners gives access to higher education, the need for complimentary education and training and validation of prior learning (VPL) has much focus.

Since “occupational standards” and qualifications are the foundation for VPL, the industry sectors with the support of social partners have taken great interest in the SeQF right from its formal implementation in 2016. Up to this day almost 70 non-formal qualifications have been levelled and more are preparing for the levelling application.

MYH gives support to those working with developing non-formal qualifications in the form of seminars, workshops, and guidelines. The purpose of the support is to help responsible actors (“owners” of non-formal qualifications) to comply with the ordinance⁴ for the levelling procedure, including the quality assurance system encompassing the qualification. The support includes the process from defining core tasks for a professional role to writing learning outcomes for qualifications and part-qualifications together with assessment methods.

With the financial support of the European Social Fund and Erasmus+, industry sector organisations and educational providers have increased their capacity and ability to write applications of high quality, which in turn has shortened the time for the levelling process.

The levelling process



The procedure of levelling non-formal qualifications is regulated in the ordinance for the national qualifications framework for lifelong learning. The application is made by filling in a form on the MYH web-page: Ansökan om

⁴ [Förordning \(2015:545\) om referensram för kvalifikationer för livslångt lärande | Sveriges riksdag \(riksdagen.se\)](#)

beslut om nivå enligt SeQF - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan (myh.se) . The next step is to pay a fee of SEK 15.900 to process the application and for external audit of the qualification during its life cycle.

The applicant body must be the one responsible for determining the content of the qualification in terms of learning outcomes and for the quality assurance system that encompasses the quality assurance of the qualification.

When applying, the applicant body must state in what professional or educational area the qualification is intended to be used. The applicant states which stakeholders contribute to the content and the relevance of the qualification, and how the qualification is quality assured regarding the level of the content (learning outcomes) and the awarding process.

The content of the qualification (the learning outcomes) should be described in three categories: knowledge; skills; and responsibility and autonomy. This enables a comparison to the level descriptors in the SeQF to be able to determine the best fit level. If it's a compound qualification the part-qualifications should also be described, including their learning outcomes and what methods will be used for assessing learners.

In the process of assessing the application, the focus is on which level is the best fit according to the content of the qualification. The SeQF consists of eight levels as do the EQF. A level decision will therefore be the same for both the SeQF and the EQF. A proposal of the level is then presented to the Advisory Council of the SeQF, and they will give their recommendation for the levelling decision. The proposed decision will then be presented to the applicant body with an opportunity to comment on the levelling before the final decision is made by MYH.

The levelling decision is valid for ten years, during which time at least one external audit will take place. The audit is carried out by MYH and will start with a request for information about the number of awarded qualifications, how the level of the content is kept accurate according to the levelling decision, and if the requirements for a quality system that encompasses the quality assurance of the qualification is maintained. Interviews with the responsible body is carried out before making an audit report that is published.

According to the ordinance for the SeQF, MYH can revise a levelling decision if the content of the qualification no longer complies to the level in the SeQF or if the requirements for a quality system and quality assurance are no longer fulfilled. There is also a possibility for the applicant body to appeal a decision to the Higher Education Appeals Board: <https://www.onh.se/higher-education-appeals-board>.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

The interest in levelling non-formal qualification to the SeQF has increased among stakeholders since the implementation of the application processes in 2016. SeQF is more publicly known today, and the levelling decisions give an advantage to the qualifications concerned compared to other qualifications in terms of comparability, transparency, and skills supply. Capacity building and support for stakeholders and bodies responsible for non-formal qualifications has been crucial for the number and quality of applications and the possibility to apply for national funding is a good starting point for the sector organisations within the social partnerships.

In the beginning of 2023, a new ordinance for validation of prior learning was introduced. The ordinance states that the purpose of validation is to achieve a full or part of qualification that is levelled in the SeQF (both formal and non-formal). This will probably accelerate the interest in applying for levelling decisions. Another trend is the European work on micro-credentials which is gaining more and more interest among stakeholders, and it addresses a lot of the same challenges and needs. In theory the SeQF is open to level micro-credentials, as there is no lower limit regarding the "size" of qualifications that can be levelled.

The application and assessment process have been mainstreamed since its introduction and the time to process applications has been reduced significantly. Together with the developed support and the possibility to apply for national funding for developing new working life qualifications and sector specific VPL models, there are good prospects of further implementation.

The funding of the system in terms of application fees sets a limit to how much resources MYH can allocate for assessing applications and the auditing of levelled qualifications. That's why the focus in assessing applications is how the content of qualifications compares to the level descriptors in the SeQF and the focus for audit is on maintaining the decided level and the quality assurance system. An increase in applications for levelling decisions poses a risk of prolonged assessments and delayed decisions. This could erode interest as well as

trust in the SeQF as a tool for skills supply and lifelong learning. Application handling is funded by fees, dictating MYH's resource allocation. If applications surge, the lack of in-house assessment expertise will likely extend processing times, forming a catch-22. Securing essential assessment competency requires basic funding to reduce reliance on application volume as well as increased redundancy.

As of today, there is not a common quality framework for the SeQF and the connection to formal education/formal qualifications, VPL and strategic skills supply. One of the critical points is the legitimacy and relevance of qualifications in the context of the free European market for labour and lifelong learning.

Since neither the quality assurance nor the relevance are being assessed in the application process, though the issue of quality assurance has to be addressed and properly described, the SeQF will encompass qualifications of very different status. This will make it difficult for individuals and employers to distinguish the value of specific qualifications which long-term could threaten the legitimacy of and trust in the SeQF if not addressed. The assumption that these assessments are being made before a levelling decision by MYH is predominant.

Possibilities further development of the process

MYH has developed a new definition for quality assurance system that includes the quality assurance of the qualification. The definition will be implemented and used for the external audit.

As mentioned above, a common quality framework for SeQF that addresses legitimacy and relevance is a natural further development.

There is also a need for an integrated credit system, to move towards a credit and qualifications framework, which will enhance the possibility for the inclusion of micro-credentials as well. Adding regulation on how to specify size of non-formal qualifications will also increase transparency, comparability, and portability of qualification which in the long run will enhance the impact of the SeQF. As labour markets moves towards more skill-based matching, the need for smaller flexible and yet standardised modules of learning will increase more and more.

Links to more information

You will find more information on SeQF following these links:

[SeQF – Sveriges referensram för kvalifikationer - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan \(myh.se\)](https://myh.se)

[Sök kvalifikationer i vår databas - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan \(myh.se\)](https://myh.se)

[Qualification frameworks for Swedish qualifications and degrees - Swedish Council for Higher Education \(uhr.se\)](https://uhr.se)

13. Levelling procedures for non-formal qualifications in Denmark

Levelling assessment procedure for non-formal qualifications coordinated by the Danish Accreditation Institution

The process of referencing non-formal qualifications to the Danish NQF was implemented in summer 2019. The concept is called level assessment. The Danish Accreditation institution (AI) has composed the rules and requirements the applicants need to fulfil in order to be level assessed in cooperation with the committee of coordination for the Qualifications Framework with representatives from the Danish Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Higher Education and Science and Ministry of Children and Education. During the process of developing the principles and procedures (in 2018), all relevant stakeholders were invited to give their feedback in a consultation process with amongst others the social partners, higher educational institutions, and trade committees for VET programs.

Private and public education programmes that is not regulated by the Danish Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, or the Ministry of Children and Education (i.e., private education programmes) can apply for a level assessment of the programme in question. A level assessment is not a quality assessment and does not provide public recognition of the programme. Placement on the Danish NQF does not mean, that the programme grants a degree, legal entitlement to admission, or automatic merit at publicly recognized educational programmes. One of the main purposes behind inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the Danish NQF was to strengthen coherence and transparency in the Danish education system. Level assessment helps strengthen the opportunities for students alternating private and public educational programmes, for instance by credit rating or competence assessment/VPL.

As of June 2023, 67 applications for level assessment from providers of non-formal qualifications have been received, of which 52 have been evaluated and assessed according to the Danish NQF (thereof, 13 on level 4; 19 on level 5; 14 on level 6). See the results here: <https://akkr.dk/en/about-us/level-assessment/>

Description of the process

Providers of an education programme apply for level assessment, for the education's overall objectives for learning outcome to be classified on a specific level in the Danish NQF.

The level assessment is made up of two phases: In phase 1, AI performs an administrative assessment of whether the programme fulfils the six requirements, they need to fulfil in order for an educational programme to be level assessed.

The applicant declares which level in the Qualifications Framework they wish to be assessed according to. AI, supported by one or more professional experts, makes an overall assessment of whether the level assessment applied for matches the corresponding level in the Danish NQF.

If the educational programme fulfils the requirements, the application proceeds to phase 2 in which AI, complimented by one or more professional experts, assess, whether the programme's overall objectives for intended learning outcome can be placed on the level applied for in the QF. The applicant is consulted with the result of the level assessment in phase 1 and phase 2.

Process steps in an application for level assessments

Phase 1

1. Payment of the first installment
2. Written application about level assessment is uploaded to AI
3. AI makes an administrative assessment of, whether the applicant educational programme meets the requirements in order to be level assessed
4. Approved or rejected for proceeding to phase 2

Phase 2

1. Payment of the second installment
2. AI recruits one more professional experts
3. The professional expert(s) is sent for consultation at the applicant
4. AI and one or more professional experts assess, whether a placement can be made on the level applied for in the Qualifications Framework
5. A reasoned result of the level assessment is sent for consultation at the applicant
6. The result of a positive level assessment is published on AI's web page and the reasoned assessment and a certificate of the result is sent to the applicant

Whether the educational programme's overall objectives for learning outcome can be placed on the level applied for (criteria 1 – Learning Outcome) is determined through the 'best fit' term. 'Best fit' means that the educational programme's overall objectives for learning outcome is placed on the level on which the description of the overall objectives for learning outcome are most in accordance with the description of the level in the QF. This is done based on an overall assessment. Therefore, it is not necessary to make a level placement on a level in the QF to have all of knowledge, skills and competencies assessed to be on the level, for which is applied. If an educational programme e.g., has a knowledge level, that stretches through level 3 and 4, a skill level that stretches through level 4 and 5 and a competencies level that is on level 4, then the learning outcome would be placed on level 4.

A level assessment is valid for four years if the programme does not undergo major changes during that time. After four years, the programme can apply for renewal of a level assessment.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

The main purpose behind inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the Danish NQF is to strengthen coherence and transparency in the Danish education system. Level assessment helps strengthen the opportunities for students alternating private and public educational programmes, for instance by credit rating or competence assessment/VPL. It creates a common understanding of learning outcomes and NQF levels across public and private education.

AI provides assessments as a revenue-covered business and according to criteria determined by the National Coordination Committee. The amount covers all expenses that AI has when assessing the program, including cost of the fee for the external expert.

The overall price for a level assessment is 33,000 DKK excl. VAT. The price is paid in two instalments. The first instalment of 13,000 DKK + VAT covers the expenses associated with assessing phase 1. If the applicant meets the requirements for level assessment in phase 1, the application will proceed to phase 2. If the applicant is

rejected in phase 1, they do not pay for phase 2. The second instalment of 20,000 DKK + VAT covers the expenses of the actual level assessment in phase 2. During the development (in 2018), it was made clear that a wish by many stakeholders was to keep the cost of a level assessment to a minimum.

Communication with stakeholders is essential, considering the fact that the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the Danish NQF is only successful when it has been proven useful and valuable by the market and public education providers. This should also be seen in the light that there are no formal rights connected to a level assessment.

Possibilities for further developments

An evaluation of the level assessment concept was conducted in 2022 by Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut. The aim of the evaluation was to explore how the providers of private and public non-formal qualifications have experienced the process and impact of having their program(s) assessed and referenced to the Danish NQF. Overall, the informants were positive about the level assessment and were satisfied with the process and the communication with AI. In general, many informants described that the level assessment process has had a positive influence on the quality development of their program.

1. There seems to be a general experience by the informants that the public higher education institutions do not know the importance of the level assessment, including the importance of the qualification framework in general. Several informants were demanding clearer communication from ministries and AI about the qualification framework and the level assessments.
2. During the application process, several informants expressed a desire for a clarification of the requirements for the various levels in the Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, so that they are sure that they are applying for an assessment at the right level. Therefore, AI can clarify information on this.
3. Some of the informants mentioned that the assessment is costly and would like the renewal to be cheaper. This was especially true for smaller applicants.

More information

[Level Assessment - Danmarks Akkrediteringsinstitution](#)

Guide to level assessment (to applicants): [Guide-to-level-assessment-5.-Edition-1.pdf \(akkr.dk\)](#)

14. Validation in the retail sector in Ireland

A work-based learning programme in Irish retail

Retail Ireland Skillnet (RIS) have been developing and delivering work-based learning programme for the Irish retail sector for over 20 years. All our programmes are designed and delivered in collaboration with employers ensuring the training provided meets the needs of industry.

Description of the process

Training is delivered in an accelerated fashion to minimise disruption to the shopfloor. This is an important consideration for employers who cannot afford to have staff absent from the for extended periods of time. To accommodate this, the workplace needs to become a site for learning – contributing to overall learning objectives. This workplace learning needs to be recognised and accredited.

Picture 1: Aligning learning in classroom, with workplace, online, and independent learning.

Example below is for the Retail Technology module in the apprenticeship

LO 1: Review the latest technologies supporting retail selling	
Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss the Technologies• Share ideas
Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workplace Mentor introduces technologies to Apprentice• Apprentice uses technology and gets feedback• Workplace Mentor and Apprentice discuss current and emerging technologies and impact of these• Apprentice shares with Workplace Mentor/Employer any new learning
Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review case study about new technology• Technology enhanced software (e.g. Quizzes and Polls)• Video
Independent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apprentice research new technologies in the market• Completes the Assignment Question relevant to this Learning Outcome
Assignment Question	Present one new retail selling technology that your organisation should consider embracing. Describe the benefits it would provide and discuss with employer.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

This mode of learning is significantly different from the traditional model of VPL where the emphasis is on PRIOR learning. In our programmes rather than prior learning, learning can happen alongside or even in the future. The key is to ensure that learning in the classroom is aligned to learning in the workplace. See Appendix 1 for an example. The workplace becomes the most important location for learning. To facilitate this, employers need support in ensuring their workplace offers a viable location for learning. This involves appointing trained workplace mentors, providing opportunities to employees (learners) to test, share and implement learning. Mentors and employers receive training to ensure they are equipped with the skills to

provide learning. Employers need to be provided with tasks they expose their employees to that support learning delivered in the classroom.

In order to satisfy the skills of the future workplace, colleges and universities will need to evolve and put more emphasis on collaborating with employers in developing and delivering courses where learning from all sources contributes to the overall learning. Overcoming the reliance on traditional forms of education will perhaps be the biggest barrier.

When VPL is incorporated into work-based learning programmes effectively, there are benefits for learners, employers, and education providers. Learners benefit as learning in the workplace is recognised and contributes to overall learning thus reducing time to complete a programme. Employers benefit as they have more input into programme design and delivery. Employers also benefit as the assessments completed should lead to improvements in the workplace. Colleges / universities benefit as they are not seen as the only site for learning thus reducing their responsibility and workload. Linkages with industry also better informs colleges/universities of what is important to industry.

When we consider the skills of the future workplace (mainly human skills), we quickly realise, that many of these skills are best acquired outside the traditional classroom. They are best suited to the workplace, sports environment, and the community. Therefore VPL will become increasingly important. However it will be a different version of VPL than is currently adopted by most education and training providers.

- Ensuring the workplace is a viable location for learning and ensuring there is an integration across all modes of learning.
- Coming up with VPL assessment tools.

Possibilities for further developments

Usage of VPL will become more mainstream in coming years. Much of the focus in higher/further education will be targeting those in employment as opposed to relying on traditional full-time students. As mentioned above- VPL needs to evolve further in the focus is not on prior learning – but learning happening alongside / concurrent or even planned learning.

More information

[Apprenticeship In Retail Supervision Employers - Retail Ireland Skillnet](#)

15. Listed awarding body scheme in Ireland

Including non-formal qualifications in the Irish NFQ

The process of including non-formal qualifications, or those qualifications offered by professional, technical, sectoral, and international awarding bodies, in the Irish NFQ is currently being finalised and scheduled to launch in 2024. The process is called the Listed Awarding Body scheme and is developed and implemented by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). QQI has established the policy and criteria that applicants need to fulfil in order to be established as a Listed Awarding Body and have awards included in the Framework. The scheme was enabled by amending legislation in 2019 and was subject to significant stakeholder consultation during 2021-2023. Though the scheme will only be formally approved at the end of 2023, the overall policy approach is clear. QQI has issued the following documents that underpin the scheme:

- a. Quality Assurance Guidelines for Listed Awarding Bodies
- b. Policy and Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies
- c. Policy and Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards in the Framework.

In Ireland, the universities, technological universities, and institutes of technology, known as Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs), have autonomous awarding powers to make awards in the NFQ. This autonomous awarding power is supported by the Joint Sectoral Protocol between DABs and QQI. The Department of Education and Skills is the awarding body for schools qualifications. QQI is the only other statutory awarding body in the State and mandatorily validates programmes of the publicly funded further education and training sector. Private, independent further and higher education providers can voluntarily seek validation of their programmes by QQI which ensures these programmes leads to Irish NFQ awards. This already represents an avenue for the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the NFQ.

The Listed Awarding Body scheme allows for the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in the NFQ by those awarding bodies that have authority to make awards which may be derived from other sources such as awarding powers in another jurisdiction, as a professional body or with clear representation of a sector or technical area.

Awards of these Listed Awarding Bodies (LAB) included in the Framework will be articulated in terms of the existing architecture and infrastructure of the NFQ including a level, award type, credits, award standard and learning outcomes. It will be possible for a LAB to include an award at any level from 1-10 and to use existing, recognisable award titles such as Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree and Postgraduate Diploma. LABs will also be able to include micro-credentials within the existing infrastructure for smaller award types such as minor, special purpose and supplemental awards. These awards will be published in the Irish Register of Qualifications and will enjoy parity with all other awards included in the Framework.

The Listed Awarding Body scheme includes an assessment of capability, capacity, and reputation of the prospective LAB to make awards in the Framework, and to deliver programmes leading to these awards. This will include an assessment of the organisation's own quality assurance procedures. There will also be an assessment of the suitability of and need for the award with consideration of learners, stakeholders and the wider education and training landscape.

Developing procedures to open up the NFQ

Though the scheme has yet to open, we have received expressions of interest from several potential applicants. This includes eight professional bodies, two specialised higher education institutions, and four vocational education bodies. It is expected that there will be no more than 20 potential Listed Awarding Bodies in the initial phases of the scheme.

1. Description of the **process of developing** non-formal learning and qualifications and the **procedures for linking** it to the NQF (step by step, quality support, role of actors):

The process of developing non-formal qualifications is the responsibility of the relevant prospective Listed Awarding Bodies. They are required to develop qualifications in line with their own governance procedures and informed by the relevant NFQ policy and criteria with specific reference to Grid Level Indicators, Award Type Descriptors, and other documents. Each qualification must be supported by a specific award standard developed by the LAB which is in keeping with the proposed NFQ level, award type and credit volume. Each qualification must also be expressed in terms of learning outcomes.

The procedures for including non-formal qualifications in the NFQ are heavily informed by the legislative provisions.

- Firstly, an applicant will have to demonstrate achievement of the minimum requirements for either an established awarding body, or emergent awarding body. These are as follows:

Minimum requirements for established awarding bodies

- a) Endorsement by a relevant public authority with an informed position on the awarding body, such as the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, another government minister, the Higher Education Authority, SOLAS, a professional recognition body or DAB. Endorsements from other public authorities may be deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis⁵.
- b) A history of making awards in Ireland.
- c) Evidence of meeting an identified market/learning/skills/employment/societal need.
- d) Evidence of good standing as an awarding body, and specifically with reference to the proposed awards and subject areas.
- e) Where an awarding body is primarily established outside the State, it must be subject to regulation/oversight by the relevant qualification and/or quality assurance authority in that jurisdiction(s) and must provide written testimony from the relevant authority or authorities confirming that the applicant is in good standing, has no investigations pending and the regulatory body has no founded concerns.⁶
- f) Confirmation and evidence of proposed LAB type (i.e.) provider, non-provider or combination.

Or

Minimum requirements for emergent awarding bodies

- a) Sufficient evidence of an emerging learning/market/societal need.
- b) Sufficient evidence that the emergent awarding body has the requisite knowledge and experience to meet the emerging, unmet learning/market/societal need.
- c) Endorsement by a relevant public authority with an informed position on the awarding body, such as the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, another government minister, the Higher Education Authority, SOLAS, a professional recognition body or a DAB. Endorsements from other public authorities may be deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis.
- d) Additional support and endorsement needed from at least one further relevant public authority which must either be a funding body, or a government department/public sector agency with specific expertise and/or responsibility related to the proposed awards/subject area.
- e) There must be evidence of sufficient public funding for such an awarding body.
- f) Where an awarding body is primarily established outside the State, it must be subject to regulation/oversight by the relevant qualification authority in that jurisdiction and must provide

⁵ Guidance will be provided by QQI to individual LABs regarding the suitability of proposed public authorities

⁶ QQI intends to establish agreements with relevant regulators for the provision of this information.

written testimony from that authority confirming that the applicant is in good standing has no investigations pending and the regulatory body has no founded concerns ⁷.

- g) Confirmation and evidence of LAB type (i.e.) provider, non-provider or combination.
- An applicant LAB will then submit an application outlining how it meets the Policy and Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies. This application outlines how the awarding body is organised and managed and demonstrates its capacity and capability to make awards in the Framework, to assume shared responsibility for the implementation of the NFQ and protect the integrity of the qualifications system. This application will be supported, at minimum, by Quality Assurance (QA) procedures which are informed by the QA guidelines and Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) procedures informed by ATP guidelines issued by QQI. LABs will also undergo a due diligence assessment at this point, unless otherwise exempt.
 - Although an applicant must be approved to be established as a LAB before awards can be included in the Framework, the decisions will be taken together in practice.
 - An applicant LAB will also submit an application outlining the qualifications it proposes to include in the NFQ. This includes the award title, award standard, award type, level, credit volume and learning outcomes. The LAB will submit an application outlining how it meets the Policy and Criteria for the inclusion of the award in the Framework. This application outlines the suitability of and need for the award with reference to learners, employers, other stakeholders and the wider education and training system. The LAB will propose a level and award type for the award which will be considered as part of the review.
 - The review of the application for establishment and inclusion of awards in the Framework will be conducted by a team of independent experts. The review team will make a recommendation to QQI regarding both establishment and inclusion of awards which will be considered and formally approved through internal QQI governance structures.
 - Successful LABs will be published on the Irish Register of Qualifications with information about their awards in the Framework.

Following establishment as a LAB and inclusion of awards in the Framework, LABs will be required to comply with monitoring and review. Monitoring will include an annual data return and submission of annual quality and qualifications reports and may include periodic dialogue meetings. Each LAB is required to be reviewed at least once every 7 years.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

Though the scheme has yet to launch, the anticipated benefits of the process are as follows:

- To continue to deliver on the original **vision** and intention of the NFQ as a mechanism for the development of qualifications and the recognition of learning achievements.
- To enable learners and graduates of professional, sectoral, and international awarding bodies in Ireland to participate in and benefit more easily from **access, transfer and progression** policies and procedures already in place across the sector.
- To ensure awards of these bodies can be **articulated** as part of the wider education and training system and make visible the possibilities and opportunities for access, transfer and progression and recognition of prior learning.
- To provide learners with a greater **choice** of quality assured awards.
- To provide assurance and **confidence** to learners about awards being undertaken and the awarding bodies delivering them.

⁷ QQI intends to establish agreements with relevant regulators for the provision of this information.

- To **recognise** the learning already being undertaken by learners by providing a mechanism to include such awards within the Framework.
- To ensure the National Framework of Qualifications remains **relevant and responsive** to a changing education and training landscape.
- To **preserve** alignment with international qualifications frameworks, namely the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the QF EHEA ('Bologna')

We are in the process of establishing MOUs with other regulators to ensure collaboration in the approval, monitoring, and review of awarding bodies where possible.

The initial phase of the scheme is intentionally narrow to ensure that the process is manageable. Ongoing monitoring and review of LABs providing their own programmes leading to awards in the Framework will be mainstreamed into our existing tertiary monitoring and review unit. Furthermore, we will work collaboratively with other regulators to monitor and review international awarding bodies which ensures to minimise the burden of regulation on both the awarding body and QQI.

It is expected that the initial phase will see less than 15 applicants across a 3–5-year period.

There are several challenges related to this practice.

- The prospective LABs are diverse with a wide range of existing regulatory oversight. It is challenging to design a process that meets the needs of each LAB.
- These awarding bodies have existed without the benefit of inclusion of the NFQ since its inception in 2003 and some awarding bodies are centuries old. It is a challenge to ensure that the scheme is sufficiently attractive and beneficial to them, while also balancing the regulatory role of QQI.
- The burden of being involved in a quality assured qualifications system is unknown to many and reality may not meet expectation.

Possibilities further development of the process

The scheme is currently aimed at established awarding bodies with a history of making awards in Ireland. Though there is a mechanism for an emergent awarding body to apply, the bar is quite high, and this option is unlikely to be utilised unless there is significant demand for a new, specialised qualification that cannot be accommodated by the existing awarding bodies. As such, the scheme could be widened to new entrants.

The scheme is also currently limited to those awarding bodies responsible for the quality assurance of provision of programmes leading to awards in the Framework and explicitly excludes certification and/or assessment only bodies. It may be possible to include such types of qualifications through this scheme in the longer term.

Links to more information

[Core Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of Listed Awarding Bodies.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#)

[Core Policies and Criteria for the Inclusion of Awards within the Framework.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#)

[Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Listed Awarding Bodies engaging with QQI.pdf](#)

[Including awards on the NFQ | Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(qqi.ie\)](#)

[National Framework of Qualifications | Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(qqi.ie\)](#)

[Irish Register of Qualification \(irq.ie\)](#)

16. HVE-flex: VPL process in Higher Vocational Education in Sweden

Validation in Higher Vocational Education in Sweden

In June 2020, partly as a response to mitigate the labour market effects of the pandemic, the Swedish government decided to allocate SEK 29 million (about EUR 2.85 million) per year for 2020, 2021 and 2022 to be channelled to HVE providers through MYH to pilot the idea of a faster, more flexible pathway towards an HVE-qualification (degree), based on the right to exemption of prior learning.

The main aim of the HVE-flex pilot was to develop models using VPL as a tool to give extensive exemptions for students in HVE-programmes and with the exemption as a starting point, create individualised study plans for the remaining learning outcomes for the student to achieve the full degree/qualification in a faster, more flexible way. The pilot also aimed at developing and testing a financing model that supports balance between exemption/VPL and complementary training.

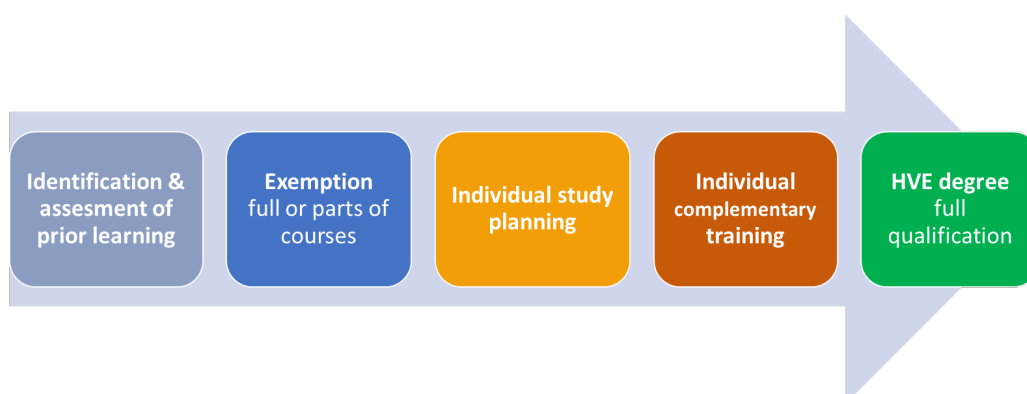
What are the core elements and procedure in the YH-flex?

The right to exemptions based on prior learning for students enrolled in an HVE-programme has been regulated since the start of this form of VET in 2009. An internal review conducted in 2019 concluded that the uptake has been low (only 2-3 % of students getting exemption for a minimum of 1 course within the full programme). When discussing the somewhat disheartening results of the internal review the idea of YH-flex was born.

With the ever-faster changes in the labour market and growing needs of re- and upskill the need to use exemptions to facilitate a more efficient way for people to transition on the labour market became evident. VPL (for exemptions) can help with not training people for skills they already have and help create targeted training to fill in identified skill gaps. YH-flex aims at making HVE more efficient both for individuals, for employers and for society as a whole (e.g. through more efficient use of governmental funding).

Training for students enrolled in HVE-flex (for the additional study places) is carried out in two steps, according to the model pictured below:

1. validation (identification and assessment) of prior learning for exemptions of what the skills the student already developed, and
2. individualised complementary training for the remaining learning outcomes to enable the student to achieve the full degree/qualification.



The results of validation and exemption serve as the basis for planning the individual complementary training. Based on the exemption, an individual study plan is developed and established. The individual study plan specifies the content, scope (credits), and how the complementary training will be carried out. The plan should also indicate how the student can achieve the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and competences) that

remain after the exemption so that the individual can meet the requirements for the degree. The intention of this approach is to enable as much flexibility as possible for the learner. Both validation and individual complementary training can be carried out using various methods and training approaches. For example, studies can be conducted at a faster pace during one period and at a slower pace during another period. The HVE-provider determines the approaches it can offer, and within those boundaries, the provider and the student can agree on an individual study plan. This means that HVE-flex study places are linked with a specific programme – the same what (learning outcomes) but that YH-flex has a flexible how, when, and where (agreed in individual study plan).

Normally HVE programmes are funded by a standard grant per yearly study place. The standard sum varies depending on programme specificities and should cover the actual cost of delivering the programme. To facilitate a more strategic and efficient use of exemptions, the project did also test an adapted funding model for the HVE-flex study places. The funding model is based on the same two parts of the HVE-flex model described above:

1. For VPL and exemption: fixed grant of SEK 10 000 per student
2. For the individual complementary training: variable grant based on the number of credits to be provided, based on the decided standard grant for the specific programme, increased by 15 percent (to compensate for a higher degree of individualisation). There is also a ceiling of 75% of the standard grant per yearly study place.

The purpose of this funding model is to create the right compensation regardless of the how, when, and where of the training.

In addition to the targeted funding for YH-flex study places the project also supported the HVE-providers in their work with both validation and individualised complementary training through e.g. a handbook, support documents, digital workshops, "open house" seminars.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

The main outcome of HVE-flex is that learning taking place in non-formal and in-formal settings serve as the basis for an individual enrolled in HVE-flex to obtain a formal qualification levelled to the Swedish qualifications framework (at EQF level 5 or 6) in a faster and more flexible way. The results of the pilot have overall been positive, in summary:

- On average 44 % of programme credits have been exempted
- 47 % of the students have had half or more than half of the programme exempted.
- Out of the 217 students who graduated until April 2023, 80 % of them graduated faster than they would following the standard programme pathway.
- Work-life experience (both non-formal and informal learning) is the most common basis for exemptions – 78 % (of the graduated students)
- Total cost for HVE-flex students is 57 % of "normal" cost → "saving" is 43 %

Based on these results HVE-flex is from 2023 implemented as a permanent pathway within the HVE-system. In conclusion:

- HVE-flex reaches a different target group than the normal programme pathway, students enrolled in HVE-flex tend to be a bit older and have to a larger extent skills developed through non-formal and informal learning.
- As most VPL processes identifies a skills gap for the individual, the fact that HVE-flex as a model encompasses both the validation and the complementary training, makes it an important model for validation also in other contexts.
- The pilot has shown that VPL used for exemptions contributes to faster and more flexible training pathways within HVE, and that students enrolled in YH-flex graduates faster and because of that better can utilise their skills in the labour market.
- HVE-flex and the use of VPL for exemptions make more efficient use of the state grant provided for HVE. The cost of HVE study places can be reduced with up to 50 %. The project also clearly

shows the importance of funding models that supports the use of VPL for the uptake of VPL to increase.

In summary, MYH concluded that a flexible fast track to an HVE-qualification within the HVE-system for those with significant professional experience or other prior learning offers advantages from many perspectives. HVE-flex contributes to a more efficient skills supply and supports individuals in their pursuit of lifelong learning. The agency believes that there is a significant need for HVE-flex in the future, especially in connection with workforce transitions and for efficient re-and upskill. Even though the pilot has been limited in scope, the agency sees positive results and believes that the model is worth continuing to develop.

HVE-flex is here to stay and is now implemented as a permanent learning pathway within the HVE-system. The aim is to let the use of this fast-track pathway grow organically based on the interest of providers and potential students. HVE-flex as a model has demonstrated its potential and effectiveness in higher vocational education and as a tool to recognise both non-formal and informal learning towards a formal qualification levelled in an NQF. YH-flex is seen by a variety of stakeholders, both labour market actors and social partners as well as education providers, as an important addition to vocational education in Sweden, and is foreseen to increase over the coming years. The HVE-flex model should continue to be used and developed and serves as a model for validation beyond higher vocational education and should be considered in broader contexts. Going forward it is important to ensure that the HVE-flex model remains adaptable to changing needs and volumes in different educational sectors.

There have been a few challenges identified carrying out the pilot. However, those challenges are largely linked with specificities within the HVE-system and might not be problematic in other contexts where the HVE-flex model is tested or implemented. The main challenges can be summarised in these points:

- Admission process: One key challenge is designing an effective admission process that facilitates the “right students” to be enrolled in HVE-flex
- Individualised study plans: creating and managing individualized study plans for each student can be time-consuming and challenging for education providers.
- Flexibility and adaptations: While HVE-flex offers flexibility, adapting education to shorten study times remains a challenge. Finding innovative ways to make education more adaptable is necessary.

Possibilities further development of the process

Going forward, HVE-flex could help facilitate better utilisation of all skills through the systematic approach of a learning pathway built on validation of prior learning. The integrated approach of conducting validation as the initial step in the process has demonstrated its effectiveness and should be highlighted. It will be crucial to continue building the capacity of providers to conduct validation and individualised complementary training efficiently and with good quality. Furthermore, recognising HVE-flex as a valuable tool for lifelong learning and skills supply, particularly in times of retraining and upskilling, is essential for its continued success and relevance.

And in the words of Katja Perälä, 47, from Eskilstuna, who has been employed for many years caring for the elderly. She enrolled in HVE-flex to become an assistant speciality nurse in geriatrics. Given her work experience and prior learning, the two-year programme was shortened to six months of part-time studies. A new, better-paid job awaits her after completion:

I recommend HVE-flex to all of my co-workers. Many of us see the difficulty in upskilling one’s qualifications, but we tend to underestimate the skills we have developed in our professional lives’.

(From news item 2021.06.07: [YH-flex förkortar studietiden och ökar flexibiliteten - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan \(myh.se\).](#))

Links to more information

Final report of the HVE-flex pilot (in Swedish): [Återrapportering: Regeringsuppdrag för en snabbare och mer flexibel väg till en yrkeshögskoleexamen, YH-flex - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan \(myh.se\)](#)

About HVE-flex (in Swedish): [YH-flex - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan \(myh.se\)](#)

17. Validation in liberal adult education in Finland

Making skills visible through “KOSKI” – a national learning database

Previously, students did not automatically get recognition of their studies in Liberal Adult Education in Finland. A massive amount of gained competences remained invisible and, for a large part unusable. In 2021 Liberal Adult Education gained access to a national learning database “KOSKI”, provided that the courses are ***described in learning outcomes, learning outcomes are assessed and courses are given a credit value (ECTS)***.

“KOSKI” database was previously accessible only for formal education. It now accumulates an individual’s learning outcomes from formal, and non-formal learning. The database enables individuals to showcase their accumulated learning via a personal account (studyinfo.fi).

The assessment process in liberal adult education is voluntary for both the provider organisation and the student. The providers may offer certain courses that appear to have more relevance, for example, in terms of working life or formal learning, for which they offer the possibility of assessment. The students can participate in courses, even if they do not opt for the assessment.

The transition towards learning outcomes made validation of prior learning feasible in Liberal Adult Education. Many of the learners have taken courses over the years and have achieved notable learning outcomes. Now, it is possible to have their competences validated and made visible through the national learning database and their personal learning account.

Individuals have a personal learning account at studyinfo.fi, where the KOSKI - database information is saved for all, individually. Citizens can manage their information in the personal account and via a link display all accumulated learning too, for example, prospective employers or education providers.

Many of the courses taken in Liberal Adult Education can provide the individuals exemptions, access, or extra credits in further studies in Vocational Education and Training or Higher Education. Using the ECTS credits and learning outcomes facilitates exemptions, access or gaining extra credits to a great extent.

Benefits, sustainability, and challenges

The prerequisites for the system are sustainable as the amended legislation concerning the national learning database KOSKI provides the opportunity to Liberal Adult Education providers to have the learning outcomes gained through their courses or programmes visible in the database. Many of the learning providers – especially the bigger ones – are already offering a multitude of courses for assessment and are valid for the KOSKI - database.

This development is widely seen positive, and the providers feel that this also gives a boost for their own visibility and to the quality of education and training. Some of the providers are using the new system for marketing purposes and are actively looking for new target groups for their courses.

There is little information from the individuals’ viewpoint of the benefits, but in general it can be said that making all competences visible can benefit the individuals in many ways in the labour market, formal studies or as a means for personal development.

The challenges mainly concern the provider organisations’ ability to maintain quality in terms of assessment and describing learning outcomes. Even if training and guidelines to improve the practitioner competences have been available, the support systems are not continuous. Furthermore, the current political view towards adult education is not very supportive and major financial cuts are foreseen soon. This may hamper the further development of the system, or the development will become more project based and thus weaken the sustainability.

Possible further development of the process

In general, courses provided by Liberal Adult Education are not linked to the Finnish National Qualifications Framework. However, it must be noted that the amended legislation concerning the KOSKI - database has given a foundation for levelling the courses in the NQF in the future in accordance with the EQF Recommendation.

Currently, in Finland, a cross-ministerial working group for validation of prior learning is looking at the possibilities of opening up the Finnish National Qualifications Framework. This also concerns micro-credentials and other smaller learning units, such as the courses provided by the Liberal Adult Education.

More information

[Studyinfo \(opintopolku.fi\)](https://opintopolku.fi)

[Liberal adult education - OKM - Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland](#)

[Koski service in liberal adult education - OKM - Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland](#)

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