European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Country Report: Sweden

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## 1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

### 1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

The historical description provided in the 2007 European Inventory regarding the development of the policy on validation in Sweden is still valid\(^1\). As the 2007 report explains, the first initiative in the field of validating informal and non-formal learning was the Adult Education Initiative (Kunskapslyftet) (1997-2002), which included a number of pilot projects focusing on developing new forms of accreditation of prior learning and validation. Soon after, the Bill on Adult Learning and the Future Development of Adult Education (Vuxnas lärande och utvecklingen av vuxenutbildningen) (2000/2001:72) emphasised the fact that any resident in Sweden should be able to have his or her knowledge and competences validated within the framework of municipal adult education, and this validation should be documented. In 2003, the Bill on Validation (Ds 2003:23) (Validering m.m. - fortsatt utveckling av vuxnas lärande) stated that more time should be given to pilot projects and to further discussion before deciding on regulations and passing acts. As a result, in December 2003, the Swedish government appointed the "Swedish National Commission on Validation" (Valideringsdelegationen) for the period 2004-2007 to promote and further develop validation methods and enhance (regional) cooperation. The legal context or framework regarding different the validation of prior learning is on the whole consistent with the 2007 update\(^2\).

Validation can be used as a way to gain entry to different educational pathways, usually following upper secondary education. A couple of examples are given below.

1) **Särskild prövning** is a validation process in which an individual’s real competence is examined in order to receive credits and qualifications used within the elementary and secondary level of the education system. This type of validation is primarily used to meet general or specific entry requirements to further/higher education.

2) Folk high schools which provide non-formal education determine their own entrance requirements and often use validation to determine the individual’s ability to fully complete their education.

3) In the 2007 update the so called 25:4 rule was presented. This rule automatically gave adults aged 25 or more who had a minimum of four years of work experience and a knowledge of Swedish and English, corresponding to that acquired in upper secondary school education, general eligibility to higher education. Universities and university colleges could decide themselves their selection criteria to be used for up to one third of their places. This rule has now been replaced by a change in the Högskoleförordning (presented below) that gives applicants the possibility to apply to higher education on the basis of real competence.

A Commission on Validation was set up in 2003 for the period 2003-2007. Its final report\(^3\) summarises the work of the commission and provides a number of recommendations regarding further development of validation in Sweden. For example, the Commission suggested changing formulations in the Swedish ordinance on Adult Education in order to establish validation as a key ingredient in adult education. None of the suggestions have yet been incorporated into Swedish law.

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\(^2\) Ibid., p. 8

Thus, no overall national legal framework regulates individuals’ rights to validation in Sweden. There are however examples of situations in which individuals are granted the right to have their knowledge, skills and competences recognised and valued. The situations in which an individual is granted the right to validation are, however, restricted to the formal education and training system.

One such example where the individual is granted the right to validation, which was identified in the 2007 update, relates to higher education. The decree on Higher Education (Högskoleförordningen) states that all higher education institutions are obliged to assess prior and experiential learning of applicants who demand such an assessment and who lack the formal qualifications. However the definition applicable in this context would be “professional or academic recognition” rather than “validation of informal and non-formal learning”.

The Education Act also states that immigrants could be offered validation during their course Swedish for immigrants (Sfi), as one of many activities aimed at learning Swedish more efficiently. The municipality responsible for the Sfi course is required to cooperate with the Swedish Public Employment Service in determining and offering relevant activities to the Sfi-student.

The other type of regulation in the validation area is organisational, and states which national agencies are in charge of validating foreign education and experience in relation to the different types and levels of education in Sweden. This is however strictly an organisational regulation regarding the responsibility for validation within different levels of the educational system.

Sweden does not have a fully developed system for the validation of informal and non-formal learning with roles, organisational structures and financial responsibilities clearly stated and established. The work, initiated by the Swedish National Commission on Validation, to establish common processes and methods for validation is now being continued, coordinated and supported by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education. The work is still, to a large extent, based on project-based government validation initiatives where the agency and the Swedish Public Employment Service are the main coordinators. Cooperation with education and training providers, sector organisations, the social partners, universities and municipalities is an essential part of this work.

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education has, since it was established on 1 July 2009, been given the responsibility to support a national structure for validation and in cooperation with relevant authorities promote the involvement of educational institutions and business sector organisations (e.g. the Swedish Trade Federation (Svensk Handel), the Swedish Construction Industry Training Board (Byggnadsinstruins Yrkesnämnd), the Vocational Training and Working Environment Council - Transport Trades, TYA), when strategies, methods and information regarding validation are being developed. The work of the agency is intended to result in overall policies for validation. No other kind of overall policy or strategy for validation is planned.

1.2 Relationship with the existing and developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation

A national qualifications framework (NQF) is currently being developed in Sweden. The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education is the national coordination point for Sweden’s work on the NQF and European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

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4 Högskoleförordningen (1993:199) 6-8 §§.
5 Skollagen (1985:1100) 13 kap. 4§.
6 It is planned to post information on the different organisations involved (in English) on the website: www.valideringinfo.se.
A suggestion for a qualification framework consisting of eight levels has been put forward and is now being reviewed by different stakeholders. The manner through which validation will be linked to the NQF has not yet been decided. Validation is, however, a key element in planning and developing the NQF with the anticipation that the framework will help in structuring and clarifying the standards against which validation could be made. More information is to be found at http://www.eqfinfo.se.

Standards developed by different business sector organisations are used as trade specific frameworks for the validation of vocational knowledge, skills and competences. These are mainly occupational standards focusing on an outcome-based evaluation of the extent to which an individual knows a certain occupation or trade.

Validation performed within the education system is not always oriented towards a certain occupation but rather towards a certain subject or field. The goals set in curricula (which can be said to be the standards that support the delivery of validation within the formal education system) are outcome-oriented, focusing on what the person must achieve within different subjects or courses, rather than how that knowledge has been developed.

Since the standards used for much of the industry-oriented validation have been developed by different stakeholders such as business sector organisations, they have a “market value” equivalent to, if not greater than, the curricula based framework used in formal education and training.

Standards relating directly to the validation process do not exist at a national level but have been developed for validation within some occupations and trades. These standards could, for example, state how the assessment should be carried out, what questions should be asked and how the certification should be structured.

1.3 National institutional framework

Sweden has chosen to give the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education the overall responsibility to coordinate and support a national structure for validation in the country7. Other official agencies, such as the Public Employment Service, the Swedish National Agency for Education, the National Agency for Higher Education, the National Council of Adult Education (third sector education covering liberal adult education including folk high schools, study circles, etc.) and the Agency for Higher Education Services all have separate minor responsibilities or governmental commissions to work on validation within their areas of responsibilities.

1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

As stated in the 2007 update, the responsibility for validation in Sweden is still heavily decentralised at the local and regional level and strongly embedded in the municipal adult education system. Cooperation between educational authorities, business sector organisations, universities and municipalities in setting up structures for validation methods and the delivery of validation is also still emphasised.

Validation performed within adult education by municipalities or official regional associations, or validation within higher education institutions, is handled and monitored within that local or regional setting. The responsibilities presented below are valid for the validation of non-formal and informal learning performed outside, but in close cooperation with, the formal education and training system and mainly aim to enhance the individual’s possibilities to access employment.

Design of the procedure/approach

7 Regleringsbrev för budgetåret 2010 avseende Myndigheten för Yrkeshögskolan.
The overall steps of a validation approach, as described in of the 2007 Sweden report are:

1) General competence mapping;
2) In-depth competence mapping;
3) Competence assessment – statement of attainment; and
4) Competence assessment by formal means – certificate, authorisation, examination, etc.

These steps were developed by the Commission on Validation in close cooperation with business sector organisations. This generic approach or procedure for validation has been established and generally accepted at national level. The responsibility for adapting the validation methods to the specific needs of a certain industry has been allocated to the business sector organisations themselves. The development of the methods has been funded partly by the government, but many business sector organisations have also contributed resources to develop methods and procedures for validation.

Information promotion and raising awareness

The overall responsibility for information and promoting and raising awareness is allocated to the Agency for Higher Vocational Education. The agency has been given the responsibility to develop a national digital Internet Portal (www.valideringsinfo.se), where information regarding validation will be presented. The site is now up and running but still contains a limited amount of information. At the time of writing, there were plans to add more information and functionality in the autumn of 2010.

Providing counselling and guidance

The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education also has an overall responsibility to provide guidance to municipalities, other regional and local actors and providers of validation. Each of the levels also has a separate responsibility to provide individuals with direct guidance on validation.

Undertaking assessment

Assessment is undertaken by providers of validation. These are both local and regional public actors (e.g. teachers and student counsellors at municipalities and universities), as well as private education companies and business sector organisations.

Quality assurance, evaluation and review

Quality assurance, evaluation and review are areas that have been somewhat neglected regarding validation thus far. One of the reasons is the lack of data to enable follow-up of individuals going through validation.

Another reason is that there is still a focus on developing methods and setting up structures for validation. Sweden has still not reached the point where validation of informal and non-formal learning takes place continuously across the whole country. Validation delivery still depends very much on funding and recruiting within special initiatives, projects or active municipalities or other stakeholders within the validation area.

1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

At the beginning of the decade (i.e. from 2000) much validation was project-funded through EU-initiatives such as the Lifelong Learning Programme and the European Social Fund. Over the last couple of years, however, more focus has been placed on making validation a common and integrated part of both formal and non-formal education and training and activities for the unemployed.

An example of a regional project can be found in the municipality of Botkyrka, as described in the box below.
Botkyrka municipality, Sweden

The municipality of Botkyrka has been working on a validation programme since 2001. The programme is for people within the municipality and surrounding municipalities. The programme is funded by the state and the municipality and is free of charge to the individual.

This validation programme has been permanent since 2006. Before that (2001-2005) validation was performed on a project basis. The validation models used today are based on the national guidelines for validation.

Some of the positive outcomes of the validation process are:

- The individual gets an up-to-date documentation of his or her real competences;
- The individual has a point of contact to refer to concerning issues of employment;
- The individual acquires new ideas regarding further study possibilities in order to increase his or her chances of employment;
- Validation facilitates new career paths; and
- Validation allows for the possibility of shortening the length of the study path.

The validation performed is based on the national validation model (e.g. according to the model presented at: www.valideringsinfo.se/motorbranschmodellen) regarding process, documentation, feedback and final results. The quality of the work is monitored and quality assured in cooperation with industry associations, through regular reports. The work is structured according to a well defined model including follow-ups and evaluations. The actual validation is carried out by teams to ensure objective judgements.

Validations are performed by different local enterprises or municipality organisations with specially trained staff. Validations are requested by the regional office of the Swedish employment service, the neighbouring municipalities, the local adult education and other municipal units.

The positive results of Botkyrka’s work are evidenced by the fact that the National Swedish Employment Service has prolonged the contract with the municipality for validation delivery within a number of trades.

Further information can be found at: www.botkyrka.se/validering

1.6 Link between validation and the existing and developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications

Swedish curricula are on the whole outcomes-based. Each formal education level has its own unit-based credit system which can be used when validating an individual’s knowledge, skills and competences. The assessor must decide which credit system could be applicable to that specific individual. The decision must rest upon which kind and level of knowledge should be assessed.

Within upper secondary education subjects are divided into courses, each of which may comprise of 50, 100, 150 or 200 points. Validation can result in both partial and complete qualifications. Courses are usually the smallest “module” validated against the formal education system. This validation will result in gained credits or points. The possibility to validate and document competences that are only a part of a course exists, for example, within adult education at the upper secondary level. This validation will not result in credits but rather in statements of achievement. This validation possibility is rarely used, however, for example due to challenges in adapting the organisation of courses to meet each individual’s educational needs.
1.7 Funding framework
Since the national commission on validation was appointed in 2003, much of the development of validation of non-formal and informal learning has been funded by the national government through the Ministries of Education and Research, and Employment.

Today funding is channelled through the Agency for Higher Vocational Education and the Public Employment Service. The vast majority of temporary funding is used for procurement of providers of validation. One validation is estimated to cost on average SEK 15 000 (EUR 1 550).

Part of the funding channelled through the Agency for Higher Vocational Education is sustainable and aims to support the coordination and development of a national structure for validation. Approximately SEK seven to ten million (EUR 7254 000 to 1 0354 000) will be allocated each year specifically to support the coordination and development of a national structure (i.e. standardised methods and approaches, standardised quality assurance methods and also clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved) for validation.

It should however be noted that much of the validation taking place in Sweden today is performed within the funding framework of the formal education and training system. This makes it difficult to assess the total amount of resources used for validation.

1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries
The collection of national data regarding validation in Sweden has not yet been prioritised although many providers of validation hold their own registers on their validation activities. However, a national database for individuals going through validation is currently being developed. The aim is to begin gathering data during the autumn of 2010.

Estimates of the number of applicants or persons actually going through validation are hard to obtain, since the term validation is used for many different kinds of activities and end results. Validation is also performed in many different institutional settings. The Agency for Higher Vocational Education does not have authority to monitor and follow up these validations. The number of validations performed are today only available at project level. The Public Employment Service has, during 2009 and 2010, undertaken initiatives to increase the use of validation as a tool to enhance individuals’ employability. Funding was earmarked to support approximately 3800 validation processes and about one third of the funding had been used at the time of writing this report.

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers
The formal education and training sector is a key provider of validation in Sweden. Formal education institutions such as universities and adult education providers also have an important role in adapting validation to their needs and contexts and implementing validation accordingly.

The choices of providers of validation in Sweden typically reflect the specific context of validation. In 2009 and 2010 many providers of industry-specific validations have been chosen by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and the Public Employment Service, either through a procurement process, or through approval by different business sector organisations. The providers should be approved by the business sector organisations in order to make sure that the industry specific validation models are properly used and the validation ends with a legitimate result.
Both industry-specific (in the sense of sector specific) validation and other types of validation are performed by other actors (as presented above). Not all of the actors performing validation in Sweden are formally approved, e.g. by business sector organisations (many actors within the education system do not need approval from the business sector to be regarded as legitimate actors for validation). Validation of areas or skills and knowledge described within the official education system curricula is often performed by teachers at educational institutions at different levels. This is the case for example with *särskild prövning*.

The providers of validation chosen by the national agencies usually have the role of assessing the individual’s knowledge, skills and competences once it has been stated in what area or industry validation is necessary.

The role of recruiting individuals to validation has primarily been given to the Public Employment Service.

Validation within Higher Education (formally referred to as professional or academic recognition) is still a possibility, although its use is limited.

### 2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks and institutions

Individuals are normally informed about validation through student or work counsellors in municipalities (adult education at upper secondary level) and the national employment service. The national Agency for Higher Vocational Education is also about to develop an online tool (on [www.valideringsinfo.se](http://www.valideringsinfo.se)) where individuals can be guided to different actors and answers depending on their current situation and the reason why validation might be of interest to them.

There is a national network consisting of approximately 25 business sector organisations and 130 trades, representing both social partners and business sector organisations. The Public Employment Service also participates in this network of organisations which provide information, advice and guidance (although this is not their main, or only activity). The participants of the network meet two to four times a year but have regular contact in between meetings. The Agency for Higher Vocational Education organises the network meetings. The purpose of the network is to spread information about validation initiatives, projects and ongoing validation. The network also discusses the development of methods, models for validation and future needs in the validation area.

Some business sectors have dedicated pages relating to validation on their websites and some are even developing their own web portals with information about education, validation, skills and competences required within their industry (e.g. [www.transportkompetens.se](http://www.transportkompetens.se)).

The Agency for Higher Vocational Education is also about to establish a more formal national advisory board on validation, to which national key stakeholders such as other national governmental agencies within the education and employment sector and industry representatives will be invited. The advisory forum will act as a policy forum for validation-related questions in Sweden.

### 2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors

No major initiatives or projects on validation in the private sector are presently known. Separate systems of validation are rare. Employers offering validation to their employees to support, for example, restructuring, use the same models and providers of validation as other official actors. The recruitment and costs are in these cases covered by the employer. Some business sector organisations are also using their validation models to certify already employed staff and identify competence development needs.
An example of a sector-specific validation project, in the metal cutting industry, is described below.

**CNC 2010 - validation and certifying of professional knowledge and skills in metal cutting**

CNC 2010 is a standard for validation and certification of knowledge and skills on three levels within the Swedish metal industry.

1. CNC Technology Green Certificate
2. CNC Technology Blue Certificate
3. CNC Technology Black Certificate

The development of the content of these certificates began in 1998. This initial pilot project, which was partly funded by the Swedish Agency for Employment and partly by the firm Lernia AB, was run in the region of Gävleborg, with support from companies and universities in the region. At the same time the company, Mapaz AB, had started to develop an internet infrastructure to support the Lifelong Learning process using an existing product for support of the production process according to ISO 9000, which they transferred to the internet service MZ for Lifelong Learning. The initial project to develop the content of the certificates then worked with Mapaz AB to use the internet service MZ to ensure a process of certification at an individual level.

The development process continued until 2003 and the process of validation and certification has now been on the Swedish market since 2004. In 2002 the content developed for the CNC certificates was sold by the Swedish Agency for Employment to private representatives within the metal sector and since 2005 the company Skärteknikcentrum AB, www.skarteknikcentrum.nu, has had the ownership and responsibility for revision, further content development and implementation of the content for the whole of the metal cutting sector. The MZ internet service has also been further developed and is run by the company Mapaz AB itself without any funding from the public sector. The MZ internet service has been a key success factor for the sustainability, dissemination, effectiveness and quality assurance of the whole process. It can be found at: www.startmz.com. Today the CNC certification process is no longer a project but runs as a new business model which was created to support the programme. The structure for the existing system is as follows:

- At sector level: Skärteknikcentrum Sverige AB owns the content and is responsible for content development, quality assurance of the content and accreditation of test centres.
- At local level: Universities, the general education system and companies build together the structure for implementation with test leaders and equipment. The test centres and test leaders are certified by Skärteknikcentrum Sverige AB.
- The method, process, infrastructure and web service supporting the whole process is owned and run by Mapaz AB.

Funding is now provided by private stakeholders from across the sector, such as Lernia AB, Skandia AB, Swedish Metal Union, ABB, Mapaz AB, Svenska Kunskapshusen AB, Skärteknikcentrum AB, Multitude AB, Sandvik AB, Volvo Cars Corp, SKF, Chalmers Technology University, University of Gävle, University of Stockholm, etc.

The definition of new skills and competences has been recognised and carried out by the employers but has also had an impact on the official education system at upper secondary school level, at Higher Vocational Education level and University level. The project is therefore considered to represent best practice in how a sector can cooperate with the formal education system.

The three levels used to recognise defined knowledge and skills correspond with EQF levels 4, 5 and 6. The results of the validation process are a certificate or an individual development plan only for complementary education to acquire the competences and knowledge which is missing. By gaining certification through the validation process and an awareness of their skills and competences, individuals benefit from increased individual mobility in the labour market. The cost per individual of the validation process is EUR 625 – 800.

The number being validated has risen sharply in recent years and is now at an annual rate of 500 people.
In terms of quality, the whole process began with stakeholders implementing processes such as ISO 9000. The organisation of the infrastructure for the validation process is considered to ensure its quality, since the system used has been developed by industry representatives and these are responsible for management and further development. The system is revised every three years by means of a council of representatives from the companies involved. The system is built on methods and structures for quality assurance which ensure fundamental quality indicators for validation practice such as:

- Reliability
- Validity
- Safety, security and confidentiality
- Standards/referential
- Sustainability
- Visibility/transparency
- Appropriateness
- Cost-efficiency.

The method used is occupational and based on an iterative process for lifelong learning, in line with the validation method set up by the Swedish Agency for Higher Vocational Education:

- Self assessments of personal competence development – soft skills
- Validation of theoretical competences - generic hard skills
- Validation of practical skills – specific hard skills
- Checklists for judgement of, for example, behaviour through a coach – soft skills
- Grades/Certificates
- Individual development plan for lifelong learning
- Content for individual education of the missing parts from the validation
- Portal of content for validation and competence development to share and transfer in and between sectors
- Individual archive
- Evaluations
- Reports
- Statistics
- Method for defining new skills
- Method for implementation
- Method of building content
- Interface for different languages and translations
- Interface for technical and competence support.

2000 CNC Technicians have been validated to date and 1500 have been certified. Today the whole metal sector including the Metal Union support this process for validation and certification of CNC Technology 2010 which easily can be adopted by other sectors in Sweden or in the whole EU.

The challenge faced today is a lack of a standard method and tools that can be used and shared by different sectors. Work started during 2009 to build further cooperation between sectors using best practice from the Swedish metal sector.
2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

Validation performed by or within voluntary organisations is rare. Validation is however performed and supported through Swedish “folkbildning” (liberal adult education) which is considered to be part of the third sector. It has largely been focused on the validation of generic skills and competences.

'Folkbildning' is the Swedish term referring to the folk high schools and study associations. It is the liberal non formal and voluntary educational system for adults in Sweden. It is a parallel educational pathway to the formal system, with strong connections to various NGOs covering most of civil society.

Folkbildningsrådet, the National Council of Adult Education, is one of the partners that the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education will consult in its Government appointed role regarding validation.

In 2007 the National Commission on Validation published a report based on validation projects within folk high schools and study associations, entitled "A Concept for validation of generic skills", that is competences acquired in non formal and informal learning in 'folkbildning'.

In the youth sector, the Swedish Centre for International Youth Exchange (CIU) has developed a new method for the recognition of informal learning, with support from state funding. The method is entitled ELD (Experience, Learning, Description) and recognises learning acquired by young people through international voluntary work. The method may be applied to wider contexts, if the results of the pilot project are positive. It is described in more detail in the box below.

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**Experience, Learning, Development (ELD)**

The ELD project was developed by the Swedish Centre for International Youth Exchange (CIU), a national third sector organisation in Sweden. The project was carried out between 2005 and 2010.

The project has resulted in the development of an instrument for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning.

An organisation that wants to use ELD must train ELD-facilitators and CIU offers one-day training courses for this purpose. The ELD-facilitators carry out the ELD process with the participants. The portfolio method is used to assess the participants: the ELD (experience, learning, description) is a portfolio process that is used for the recognition of competence. ELD is used during a set timeframe, for example during a specific project.

The basis of ELD is the participant's description of situations that occurred during a project. Therefore, the participant records their experiences by keeping a journal, a blog, photos, a scrapbook or in any other way. The documentation always contains suggestions on skills, knowledge and/or attitudes that were demonstrated during the situation. The participant regularly meets up with an ELD-trained facilitator to discuss the documented situations. For these sessions CIU has created a Template of Conversation with a number of questions.

Other practices of self-assessment and feedback may also be added to the ELD-process. CIU also offers a List of Competences in order to inspire the ELD-users. A standardised "Letter of Competence" completes the ELD. The participant chooses up to five situations that occurred during the project (and discussed in ELD-sessions with facilitator). Those five situations are specified examples of when the participant used certain competences.

In the past twelve months over 50 participants have undergone the validation process. The project is aimed at young people (aged up to 25), the unemployed, the low-qualified, volunteers and employees. Participants receive one-to-one or group support from a teacher or trainer, mentor or

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In addition, a report has been prepared by the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU), outlining its work on validation and recognition of experience for people active in youth organisations. The aim of the report is to inspire and support youth organisations in Sweden that are interested in further developing their work with these issues. The report focuses mainly on validation with reference to the labour market.

2.5 Costs to organisations

Providers of validation are presently compensated for the staff time and administrative costs, etc., of delivering validation. The cost differs between industries and stages of the validation. In the structure set-up today, providers usually receive compensation for each day of a validation. The compensation per day differs from between approximately SEK 1 000 to SEK 3 000 (EUR 105 - 316). This should be sufficient to cover the actual validation process. The individual is, however, compensated by other funding (mainly through the municipality, state or employer). A validation process is expected to have an average cost of SEK 15 000 but the duration of the process can vary from a day up to about a month in total, depending on whether validation is combined with education and / or there are language barriers present which slow down the process.

Additional monies have been needed to develop the model for validation within different sectors and trades. Both the industry organisation as well as the state public (project) funding has been used to support initial model development. No estimates have been made of the indirect costs of validation.

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

Awareness-raising is something that all stakeholders and actors responsible for some sort of validation should be carrying out. The overall responsibility for raising awareness and assuring qualitative information about validation in Sweden lies with the Agency for Higher Vocational Education.

The channels for recruitment to validation depend on the purpose and context of the validation. For instance, when entering a formal education or training institution the initial contact with a guidance counsellor could very well be the recruitment point for validation. When validation is used as a tool to enhance an individual’s chances of obtaining employment, recruitment is carried out by the Public Employment Service, which has overall responsibility to get employers together with people who are looking for work. For a majority of individuals who need to have their skills, knowledge and competences within a certain industry or trade acknowledged, recruitment to validation is done through the Public Employment Service. Some initiatives also exist where employers offer validation, as a tool for readjustment, to staff being made redundant.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

The provision of guidance and support is also specific to each validation situation. Guidance counsellors in adult education and at the Public Employment Service are the

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9 Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality (Sweden), Division for Youth Policy (2007), The national report of Sweden concerning the implementation of the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people.
main providers of direct guidance and support to individuals before and in the initial stage of validation processes. Once the individual undergoes the validation, the provider of validation, such as a teacher or assessor, should continuously guide and support the individual through the process. A general lesson learned from previous validation projects is the importance of support and guidance after a validation. This has unfortunately been an area that needs further development, since there is a lack of structures and incentives supporting such a prolonged guidance process. For instance there are many different actors involved in a validation and often no single actor has the overall responsibility to follow the individual through the entire process. When the validation is completed the individual may not have enough real competence for the trade in question. Further education might be needed but funding and structures that enable such individualised forms of education are lacking. Thus, further guidance counsellors may not have sufficient options to offer to the individual who has undergone the validation. This structural challenge needs further attention in the future.

3.3 Costs to individuals

The individual is usually not required to pay a fee for going through a validation process. Särskilt prövning is, however, one exception where the individual pays a fee for his or her validation. The exception is when the individual has previously failed the course and wants another chance; it is then for free. Usually the cost is about 500 SEK per course or subject validated.

During a validation process the individual is either supported by unemployment insurance funding or by student financial assistance comprised of student grants and student loans. If the validation is paid for using a student loan the cost is usually paid back once the individual starts to work.

The indirect cost associated with undertaking a validation process is the time involved (which can vary considerably).

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

Recent validation initiatives in Sweden have been targeted towards newly arrived migrants. Both the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and the National Swedish Employment Service have been given government commissions to implement initiatives and increase the use of validation for this specific target group during 2009 and 2010. The plan is to make validation a central part of the initial integration activities for immigrants with an aim of shortening the time it takes to make the transition to the labour market.

3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Since Sweden lacks databases and general registers of individuals who have gone through a validation process, no solid evidence on benefits to individuals of validation has been established. There are however several “success stories” available, in which individuals who have gone through validation testify to the benefits they have experienced both on a private and professional level. Some of these stories will be published as articles on the information portal www.valideringsinfo.se.

Basic studies on societal economic effects of validation (national cost-benefit analysis) are also being performed by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education. Some of these basic analyses will also be published on the information portal during autumn 2010.
4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

There is no general, recognised framework for quality assurance at a national, regional or local level. Quality assurance is, however, an area that is given more and more attention in the development and refinement of methods and structures for validation, as well as the education and training system as a whole. The business sector organisations represented in the national validation network are involved in developing the quality assurance framework.

Some business sector organisations have, when developing their specific validation models, chosen to set up rules regarding documentation, tests, procedures and competences needed to make an assessment within that specific trade or industry. This might be viewed as local or context specific quality assurance frameworks.

The quality of validation carried out within formal training and education institutions is reviewed within the quality assurance framework of that education framework.

In the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education’s work with coordinating and supporting a national structure for validation, much attention will be given to finding ways to promote and simplify quality assurance. This will, for example, be done by giving guidelines regarding documentation of validation and different possible outcomes for the individual going through a validation.

The responsibility for assuring the quality of validation will be highly decentralised, as will be the responsibility for providing the actual validation.

4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures

The overall validation process consisting of four main steps has gained a general recognition and acceptance among stakeholders in Sweden. There is also a high degree of consensus regarding the use of a common vocabulary and some common procedures for validation, i.e. the four sub-processes, or steps, of the validation presented in section 1.4. The vocabulary used to describe these different steps is, on the whole, fairly well accepted. In terms of vocabulary, in Sweden the term ‘real competence’ is generally used when discussing what is validated in a validation process.

One situation or area in which quality assurance has been under discussion and given some attention is when choosing providers of validation. How do we make sure that providers of trade- or industry-specific validations make assessments that are valid for and accepted by future employers? One way to assure quality has been for the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and the Public Employment Service to involve business sector organisations when designating (through public procurement) providers of validation.

4.3 Evaluation framework

No separate and formal evaluation network for validation exists. Since much validation of non-formal and informal learning has been, thus far, mainly project based, separate evaluations have been carried out for each project. These evaluations have been carried out by different kinds of actors such as universities or private consulting agencies.
5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

5.1 Methods used

All assessment methods presented in the European guidelines on Validation are present in the Swedish validation context. Generally an initial oral assessment is a key step in all validation processes. Self-evaluations as well as written tests identifying an individual’s area and level of knowledge and skills are used. Declarative methods are present in all validation situations and enable the assessor or guidance counsellor to decide whether validation should be undertaken. Observation and simulation is mainly used when assessing an individual’s knowledge, skills and competences within a certain trade. Observation and simulation is mainly used in situations where live settings or situations are hard or risky to use. Simulations and observations are incorporated in most validation models. Due to the fact that relatively few individuals have so far been recruited to, or have reached the third or fourth step of a validation process, these methods have so far been used less frequently. (While many people have had their competences documented, e.g. through Europass, or references, the assessment phases are not as frequently used as the first steps of validation.)

Portfolio methods such as Europass are also used and are becoming more common as validation is starting to be used more frequently for migrants.

5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the methods used

A general challenge in the Swedish context is the division of roles and responsibilities in a validation process. As the Public Employment Service is in charge of much of the recruitment to validation it is essential that their initial assessment of an individual’s area of competence enables further assessment by a person with more in depth knowledge of certain vocational standards or curricula. The assessment of whether an individual should gain from going through a validation or not requires special skills or tools. Both development of competence amongst the assessors as well as development of the skills and tools used to support this “stop-or-go” decision are needed.

6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Validation practitioners in Sweden include a range of actors, with different types of actor responsible for separate parts of a validation process. Career and guidance counsellors within adult education, or the employment service, are generally a key practitioner in the initial validation step or possibly during the first two steps. In order to be able to make assessments of an individual’s knowledge, skills or competences in a certain trade or subject, more in depth knowledge in that specific area is needed. In this part of a validation process teachers or professionals within that specific area are used.

6.2 Provision of training and support to practitioners

No specific official training in validation exists in Sweden today. Some key providers of validation have, however, developed their own training and support to their practitioners. A few courses within higher education, primarily targeting guidance counsellors, also exist.

6.3 Qualifications requirements

Validation practitioners do not have any specific qualifications requirements to perform validation. It is a decentralised responsibility to make sure that the person responsible for assessing an individual’s knowledge, skills and competences has the proper qualifications.
This is also an area for further development and an important part of a quality assurance framework within the national structure for validation.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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**Stakeholders consulted:**

National coordinators for Validation at the Swedish Agency for Higher Vocational Education