

The Competence Project in Norway

1. Background – The Competence Reform in Norway

In Norway there has been an increased recognition of the importance of lifelong learning for the last ten years. This has resulted in the Competence Reform (1997-1998). The Competence Reform aims to meet the need for new or changed competence in society, in the workplace and by the individual. It is both a workplace and an educational reform and it is targeted at all adults, both employed and unemployed. It has been designed and executed based on interaction between social partners, The Ministry of Education and Research, organisations and educational institutions. The enthusiasm in Norway for lifelong learning (OECD 2001) is not only based on cultural and social arguments, but on economic arguments as well. There is a belief – widely shared by the Government as well as by the social partners – that the high level of educational attainment of the Norwegian population is not enough to satisfy the shifts in the demand for labour in the coming years. It is argued that lifelong learning is a crucial strategy for upgrading the skills and qualifications requirements of poorly qualified adults and updating those of more highly qualified individuals to both accommodate and minimise the adverse social consequences of structural economic change.

Actual and anticipated labour market developments have had enormous influence in shaping current thinking in Norway about lifelong learning (OECD 2001). With unemployment in Norway averaging 3.3 % in 2000 (half the average for the OECD, and 1/3 the average for the European Union) and rising to 4 % in 2003, social partners and public authorities have been preoccupied for a number of years with the risk of labour and skills shortages and mismatches. Lifelong learning is supported as a remedy for enhancing the capacity of the current labour force to adapt to change, and for expanding labour supply. The OECD report (2001) concludes with that the questions in Norway about the extent and nature of skills mismatches, trends in qualifications requirements, and the appropriate economic role of lifelong learning all merit further investigation. It appears that the eventual economic goals of lifelong learning in Norway need not be confined to continuous *upgrading* of qualifications, but should be extended to *updating* of existing qualifications. The fact that the social partners have invested so much in competence development indicates that they attach importance to broader objectives. There is growing recognition that a competent workforce, whether such competence is received through an employer or through other educational providers, is critical to creating a knowledge society and ensuring competitiveness in a global economy.

In Norway the working life is increasingly seen as a key arena for learning. Employers acknowledge the value of training their employees and stimulating them to enhance

their competence. Employees and organisations that represent them acknowledge the importance of learning for advancement, career mobility, and achieving a fulfilling life in and out of the workplace. Yet, as mentioned in the OECD report (2001) employers believe that the present educational system does not yet provide appropriately qualified workers in a timely, flexible, and efficient manner. Adult education in the upper secondary school system is perceived as conservative and school centred. Part of the challenge is building more effective bridges between the labour system and the formal educational system.

The reform is based on recognition of the fact that a well-educated population is the most important resource a country can have for the creation of new jobs, ensuring quality of life and preventing new class distinctions. But also, the rapid technical, economic and social changes are bringing about significant alterations to people's lifestyles and the way the labour market works. In this changing society, the main objective of the reform has been to help meet the needs of individuals, society and the workplace in terms of skills and knowledge and give adults better opportunities to acquire education and training to improve their qualifications. The Competence Reform is both a workplace and an educational reform and it is targeted at all adults, both employed and unemployed. It has a broad, long-term perspective, and aims for broad, differentiated opportunities for adult education and continuing education and training provided by both public and private institutions and organisations.

The reform shall take into account several objectives (OECD 2001):

- *Competence related to working life:* The reform must have a pragmatic aim in the sense that it must make arrangements providing Norwegian industry with the necessary competence to secure progress. The needs defined by working life must be given priority. By putting working life and the individual in focus the competence reform shall bring the Norwegian society forward and hopefully also benefit the international society.
- *Co-operation working life and education system:* The competence of the working force in general should be developed. This competence includes knowledge, skills and attitudes. Important attitudes are flexibility and ability to adapt to new job situations. The needs of the small and medium-sized enterprises should be emphasised. The chosen measures must benefit and satisfy these enterprises' needs. It is therefore important to establish a closer collaboration between the educational system and the industry.
- *Maintaining social equality:* Education and competence have great importance for the distribution of income and influence, and for increased equality between the sexes, generations and social groups. It is important to avoid creating new class-divisions. The reform, therefore, can not only include people in the labour market. It must also take into account individuals seeking jobs and those who represent a labour force reserve. Priority should be given to groups who have problems entering the labour market, i. e. women in part-time jobs, handicapped and unemployed.

- *The individual as the ultimate aim:* The individual does not have value only as a highly competent wheel in a well-functioning working life. The government states that the person is not the means, but the ultimate aim of the reform. The concept of knowledge must be broad and in addition to mind and hands, it must also comprise emotions, values, spirit and social abilities. A continuous competence development must have a long-term developmental perspective for the whole human being. It is therefore an objective to enhance the population's knowledge about political, social and cultural affairs.

The Competence Reform is designed as a tripartite collaboration with a strong commitment from the social partners and the authorities. The main elements of the reform are:

- To give all adults a statutory right to primary and secondary education, and to impose an obligation on educational providers to design the education offered in accordance with the needs of adults
- To ensure the right for individual employees to obtain study leave of absence for further education
- To provide state grants and scholarships for adults on equal terms with younger students
- To establish a system for competence assessment for people without any formal certificates or degrees
- To acknowledge the workplace as an important learning arena and a place for innovation

One of the main results of the Competence Reform has been that the Parliament has declared that all adults have a statutory right to primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. The legal right to upper secondary education has been implemented from autumn 2000; while the legal right to primary and lower secondary education has been enforced from August 2002. Also considerable efforts have been made in recent years to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups through adult education. This particularly applies to adults with especially weak schooling, various groups of physically disabled persons, adults with reading and writing difficulties, and adult immigrants.

Other results are:

- All adults have a legal right to leave of absence from work for education purposes after having worked more than three years
- At the end of 2001 more than 15000 people have had their skills assessed with reference to upper secondary education
- A competence building program to promote innovation and development in the field of continuing education and training has been established. About 150 organisations and more than 6000 people have taken part in the development of documentation methods in the workplace
- More than 11000 people have applied for university or college education admittance based on their prior learning and ca. 50 % has been accepted. These stu-

- dents have achieved and made the same progress as students that have been admitted only on the basis of formal qualifications
- A system has been put in place to “translate” immigrant vocational competencies into formal Norwegian standards

2. Objectives and accomplishment

According to the Plan of Action for the Competence Reform, one of its principal objectives is “to establish a national system for documentation and evaluation of the non-formal learning of adults, with legitimacy both in the workplace and in the education system.” This includes learning attained through paid and unpaid employment, organisational involvement, and organised training. In order to accomplish this, the Competence Project (the Realkompetanse Project, see figure 1) was given the mandate to form the foundations for a national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning during 1999-2002. The Norwegian concept of “realkompetanse” refers to all formal, non-formal and informal learning acquired by adults. Non-formal learning is learning which is embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, but which contain an important learning element. Informal learning is learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional or non-intentional (or incidental/random) (source: Cedefop 2001).

In practice, this means the sum of all skills and knowledge individuals have acquired through the education system, paid and unpaid work, organisational activities and family life/life in society. Emphasis was placed on the validation of non-formal learning in relation to upper secondary education. The target group includes all adults who wish their non-formal learning to be documented and validated in relation to the education system, the workplace and organisational activities.

The project had a bottom-up approach. 50 local development projects have taken part in the development of procedures, methods and tools. These projects were initiated when calls for applications for project funds were issued or by direct contact with the relevant organisations/institutions. Over the project period, 24000 people took part in the testing of methods for the documentation and validation of non-formal learning in the workplace, the third sector and the education system. In the workplace, the trial was implemented over 150 companies from a variety of industries in both the private and the public sectors. 6000 people took part in the trial. In the third sector, 13 organisations at local and regional level took part in the development of methods for the documentation of non-formal learning. 500 people took part in the trial. In the field of upper secondary education, all local councils took part in the assessment and validation of non-formal learning. 17000 people had their non-formal learning charted, and of these 15000 have had their skills validated. Eight out of ten people (12000) have had

their non-formal learning validated within vocational trades. Of these, almost 8000 were in the health and social sector. 600 people have undergone training so as to be able to assess non-formal learning relating to upper secondary education. In the case of higher education, around 2600 students in 2001 were allocated places on courses at universities and colleges on the basis of non-formal learning.

Priority areas for development were as follows:

- Documentation of non-formal learning in the workplace
- Documentation of non-formal learning in the voluntary sector
- Methods for the assessment of non-formal learning, including vocational testing
- Validation of non-formal learning in respect of upper secondary education
- Adjustment and possible amendment of existing laws, regulations and agreements on the basis of experience from the project
- Admission of students to universities and colleges on the basis of non-formal learning

Legitimacy was assured by involving relevant players at various levels throughout the entire process. Representatives from the Ministry of Education and Research, social partners, the education system, voluntary organisations, associations for adult education and distance learning institutions took part in the planning, monitoring and implementation of the project. This applied to, among other things, the preparation of a commission, representation and work on the project board, the project Secretariat and local projects. These parties have also taken part in network and information meetings, as well as in the national contact group for the project.

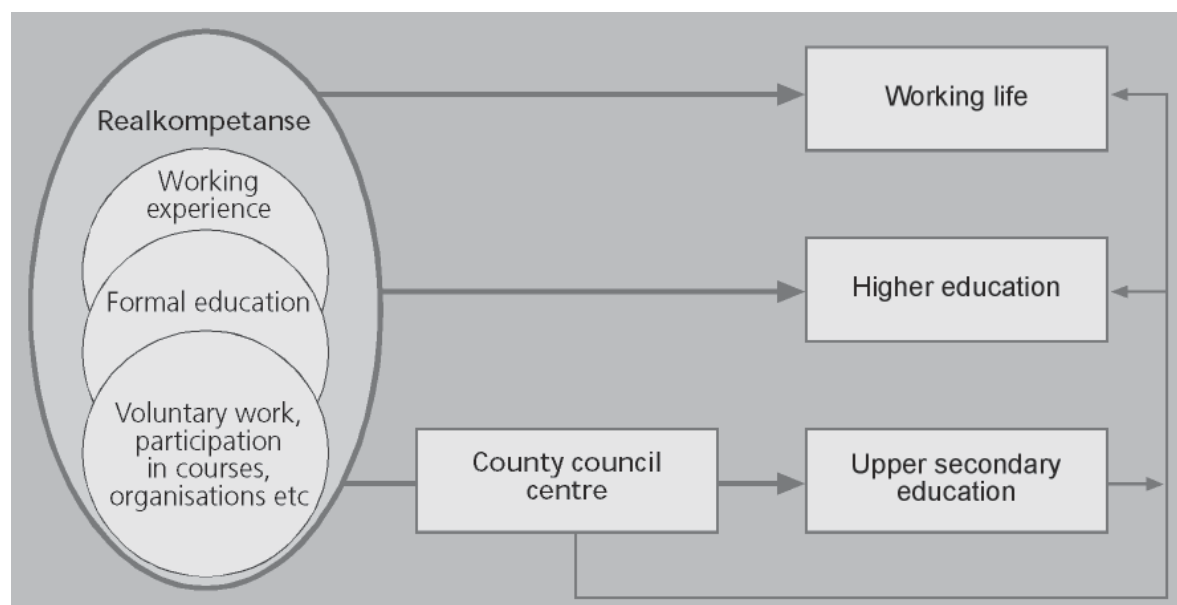
Various types of network were set up in order to ensure mutual information, professional top-ups, the exchange of ideas and experiences, and – not least – to create acceptance and confidence across arenas. Meetings between the local project managers and members of the Secretariat were one type of network. Advisory groups with representatives from the Norwegian Public Employment Service, the upper secondary and higher educational system, associations for adult education, social partners and local projects were another type of network. Such groups were established in respect of:

- Vocational testing as a method for the assessment of non-formal learning for immigrants;
- Adults with reading and writing difficulties;
- Methods and tools for the assessment of non-formal learning in respect of upper secondary education

At a central level, various parties have worked on their own initiative to implement meetings on the topic of non-formal learning. The social partners held a number of meetings in which representatives of selected workplace projects took part. The same is true of the umbrella organisations in the third sector. As far as upper secondary education is concerned, the executive committee of county education chiefs has had the subject of non-formal learning on the agenda on a number of occasions. At a local

level, the projects have gone in for cross-arena co-operation to varying degrees. The project has used a number of information channels to create interest in its work. These information channels included conferences, courses, meetings, written information, websites and newsletters.

Figure 1: The “Realkompetanse” Project



3. Resulting procedures

A circular from the Ministry of Education and Research with information on the implementation and further development of a national system for documentation and recognition of competence is one of the results of the development projects. Based on the conclusions from the Competence Project it is proposed that the national system should include a shared set of principles anchored in custom-made legislation as well as a varied set of methods and tools for documentation and validation of competence.

The principles are based on the understanding that the recognition of competence is voluntary and has to be perceived by the individual as beneficial. It has to be easy in use, transparent and in line with European developments. The principles are anchored in legislation that comprises the Education Act, the Working Environment Act and the University and College Act.

Figure 2 summarises the four steps in the procedure for recognising competence in relation to the working life requirements, the third sector and the curriculum. Please note that the steps for recognising competence in relation to the working life and the third sector are recommended, while the steps in relation to the curriculum are required. A critical issue is the recognition that the assessment methods have to be adapted to the individual's needs and use of the documentation.

Figure 2: Steps in the national procedure for recognition of informal and non-formal learning

Steps National procedure	Documentation in relation to the requirements of the working life	Documentation in the third sector	Documentation in relation to requirements of secondary education	Documentation in relation to requirements of higher education
1: Information and guidance	Information by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers • Trade associations • Branch org. • Unemployment offices 	Information by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary umbrella organisations, local org. inform their members 	Information and guidance by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County council centres, and upper secondary schools 	Information by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education institutions • NOKUT • UCAS
2: Identification and systemising of prior learning	Creation of CV by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals 	Creation of CV by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals 	Creation of portfolio by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals + • Counsellor in skill centre 	Creation of portfolio by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals
3: Assessment	Self-assessment of actual work activities Verified by current employer/client	Self-assessment of experiences / voluntary activities Self-declaration	Assessment in relation to national curriculum Certified by secondary / vocational schools in co-operation with counsellors in county council centre	Assessment in relation to requirements of each higher education institution. Certified by higher education institution / NOKUT
4: Documentary proof	Verified document "kompetans-eattest"	Self-declared document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National certificate of competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition document • Right of admission

3.1 Procedure in higher education

Since the 1st of January 2001, individuals have been statutory entitled to seek admission to individual courses at universities or colleges on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning. To do this, applicants must be at least 25 years old and possess

no general study skills. Students have also been given the right to exemption from certain elements of their studies on the basis of documented non-formal and informal learning. Applicants accepted for courses on the basis of assessed non-formal learning and who have completed the course will be allocated general study skills. This will give them the opportunity to seek admission to other courses with no special admission requirements. To do this, they must have completed one course lasting at least one year, or two courses each lasting six months.

The qualifications of applicants have to be assessed in relation to the subjects or the programmes they wish to study. Individual institutions have the power to assess what qualifications they consider to be necessary and to decide on the appropriate course of action for carrying out this assessment.

If the applicant seeks admission to individual courses on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning, their application form will be sent to the current university or college. It is the committee at each university/college who decides if the applicant papers on non-formal and informal learning fulfil the demands for course entrance requirements. Applicants seeking admission on the basis of their non-formal and informal learning must be ranked in relation to applicants with general admission requirements on the basis of a rough appraisal. This means that they are to compete on equal terms with other applicants and are not just be taken on to fill any empty slots.

Applicants will be assessed on the basis of the skills they will need to complete the courses for which they are seeking admission. The assessment emphasises both the specialist content of the course and the teaching arrangements offered to students. Non-formal learning will be assessed either through self-declarations and portfolios, or by means of tests. Information on criteria and assessment methods can be acquired from individual universities or colleges. Assessments for admission will vary from institution to institution because discretion will be exercised to a greater extent than in the case of regular admissions. Also the complaint procedure will be specific to each individual. Adults who are seeking admission on the basis of non-formal learning will not have their study points calculated. The ranking of students in relation to applicants who have had study points calculated will be discretionary.

3.2 Procedure in Upper secondary education

Adults who need primary and lower secondary education have a statutory right to such education from August 2002. This education must be adapted to the individual's need and life situation – as regards both when and where the education is to be provided and the rate of progression. The municipal authorities are responsible for providing this education. Adults born prior to 1978 have statutory right to be accepted for upper secondary education on the basis of assessed non-formal and informal learning. The new Act on Vocational Assessment (6 December 2002) gives immi-

grants who have recently arrived in Norway and registered jobseekers who are not entitled to upper secondary education the opportunity for an assessment of their non-formal and informal learning, including vocational testing.

The purpose of validating non-formal and informal learning in upper secondary education is to match the learning to formal qualification and shorten the study period, as well as increasing the possibilities for a more streamlined and tailor-made study programme for each individual. Another purpose is to provide the individual with an accredited certificate (Kompetansebevis – Competence Certificate) to gain promotion or career improvement, find a new job or increase mobility in the working life. Regional authorities decide how the work on the validation of non-formal learning is to be organised. Most regional authorities organise this work by means of one or more “centre”. Adults can acquire information, guidance and help with the validation process from supervisors at these centres.

The following elements are recommended in the national procedure for validation of competence:

- Information and guidance
- Identification and systemising of all competences
- Assessment
- Public documentation

The following methods and tools have been developed for validation of non-formal learning in respect to the requirements stipulated in national curricula.

- *Dialogue-based method*: The dialogue-based method is based on discussions between assessor/specialist and the adult. The specialist focuses on the knowledge and experience of each individual and attends to specific problems and queries. The assessor/specialist can use a computerised or manual tool based on the curriculum in question. This method requires individual preparation and a one-to-one meeting. The dialogue-based method can be combined with port-folio assessment, self assessment and testing. It has been tested out on a large number of candidates. The conclusion is that the method fits in with both vocational and general subjects. Yet, the degree of testing has to vary from person to person. A dialogue-based method covers tacit knowledge, and seems to be good for adults who have difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics.
- *Assessment of portfolio*: Assessment on the basis of a portfolio is a method based on written documentation, photos, etc. The candidate sends a “charting” form to a “service centre” together with certificates and reports. Modules and subjects are approved on the basis of the documentation submitted, and additional education is offered so that individuals can acquire the desired certificates. This method demands good written documentation of the individuals’ own skills and does not assume one-to-one meetings. Undocumented and tacit knowledge is difficult to reveal. After admission to upper secondary education, a discussion takes place in order to arrange the course according to the actual knowledge and skills.

- *Vocational “testing”* starts off with an interview, where the background, training, work experience, language skills and objective of the adult are charted. After the first general interview a professional specialist interviews the individual in the particular subject, after which the individual shows the abilities in practice, so that both the theoretical and the practical side of the trade is assessed. Working on the basis of this practice, the adult may be offered either additional education to bring him or her up to a journeyman/trade certificate level or public certificate useful for job seeking. This method complements other methods in that the assessment of non-formal learning is also possible, and where required, parts or all of the practical side of the vocational subjects can be approved. Vocational “testing” provides adults – irrespective of their ethnic origins – with every opportunity to show what they can actually do in their own fields. This method picks up knowledge and experiences which are not documented and works well irrespective of learning and language difficulties. Vocational testing, on the other hand, requires inter-departmental co-operation between the education system, the employment service and possibly also the insurance office and social security office.

Both manual and computerised tools have been developed and tested in vocational and general subjects. The tools are used in different ways in the different methods dependent on the needs of the individual. Sometimes the assessor supplements the existing tools with locally developed tools.

3.3 Procedure in the working life

Within the working life there are multiple purposes for recognising competences. The most common purposes are (Skule/Andersen 2000; McHenry 2002):

For the organisation:

- Getting an overview of the skills of the employees
- Reorganisation, job-rotation and down-sizing
- More effective training system
- To fulfil QA / international standard requirements
- Measurement of intellectual capital
- Strategic competence management

For the individual:

- New employment in the external market
- New internal career advancement / project participation
- Fulfilling employment requirement
- Increase of self awareness of capabilities, empowerment
- Facilitating entry into education and shorter training period
- Pro-active involvement in own learning

Many organisations have their own systems and procedures for documenting competences either as part of their HR management system or ISO requirements. Yet due to the competence reform more emphasis has been placed on the right of the individual to document non-formal learning that has been developed over time in the work context. Especially among the small and medium-sized organisations.

The national approach recommends taking the following procedure into use:

- Information and guidance
- Identification and systemising of all competences (CV)
- Self-assessment of work-related competences (Employee dialogue)
- Verified documentation

A number of tools exist with varying lay-out and user-friendliness:

- Paper-based scheme for documentation of individual competence
- Web-based scheme for documentation of competence freely available on the internet
- Web-based scheme for documentation of competence that has to be purchased by the organisation and can be used as a part in an integrated HR system
- Standardised CV format – similar to EuroCV

3.4 Procedure in third sector

The purpose of the documentation of non-formal learning from the third sector is to reinforce the self-confidence and inspire people to make it easier to gain access to formal educational courses as documented skills from non-formal courses or study activities can be useful in relation to the education system. It is also believed that documentation of non-formal learning in the third sector will lead to self-awareness that is useful and important for career development in their work, as well as for taking on additional duties in voluntary organisational life. In the long term, it is believed that this may lead to the revitalisation of voluntary work. In folk high schools, the documentation of comprehensive skills will be useful when applying for a job. In distance education the main purpose is for improving career opportunities in participants' own organisations and applications to other organisations.

Both the methods and the tools for charting and documenting non-formal learning in the sector are based to all intents and purposes on the individuals' own efforts. Electronic tools have been developed which can be used for this work. The idea is that individual organisations will provide *information* to students, course participants and voluntary participants within the organisation. Individual organisations are responsible for *guidance* for the people who want to make use of a documentation method, yet individuals draw up their own *CV* and *identify* and *describe* their own skills. It is also the individual who carries out a *self-assessment* of the skills identified and described.

The standardised proof of skills issued to participants in distance learning courses contains the following elements:

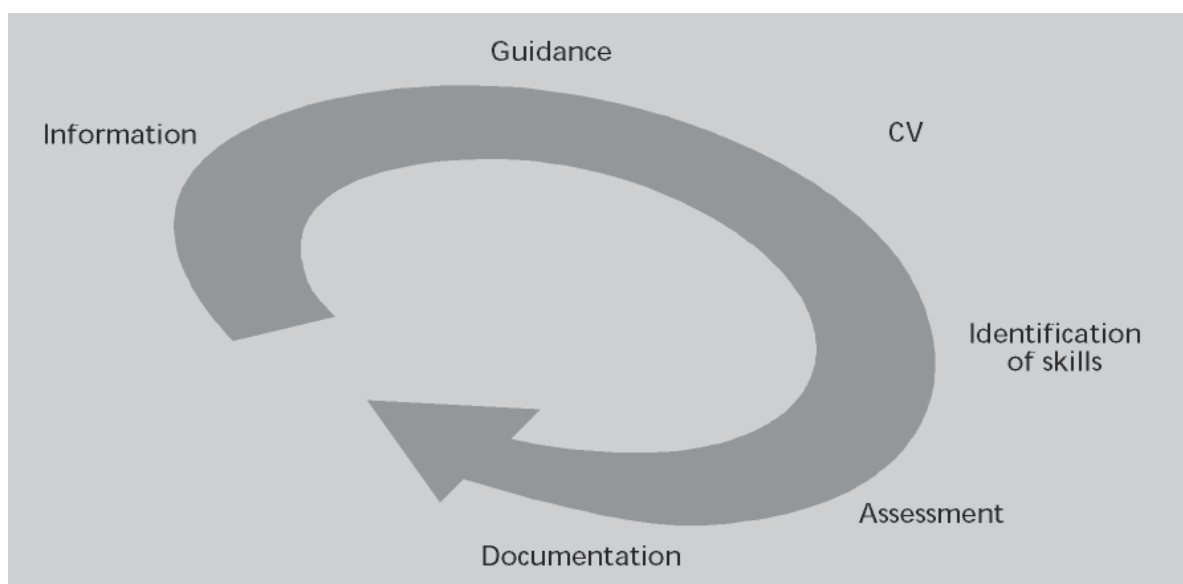
- A document including information on specialist content, scope, level and marks
- Confirmation I, a confirmation of the additional skills acquired on account of working with internet-based distance learning methods
- Confirmation II, a confirmation which describes specifically the ICT skills acquired by listing relevant skills areas

The tool, called 3CV is a “universally valid self-declaration for voluntary work”. This tool contains:

- 1) An introduction in which the methodology for completion is described,
- 2) An example of a completed form,
- 3) A form ready for completion, and
- 4) The option of creating one’s own reference.

The text is saved in Word format and can be adapted to suit the individual. A glossary has also been developed. In this glossary various voluntary organisations describe their specific activities and their skill profiles. This may help both the people completing the 3CV and the people who will be evaluating its content.

Figure 3: Procedure for documenting non-formal learning



4. The findings and results

It has to be emphasised that the Norwegian approach to recognition of non-formal and informal learning is based on extensive experimentation, conferences, interim evaluation and extensive use of tripartite network, relevant research literature and international experience. It is not a single system with one method that counts for everybody.

Neither is it a finished product as it is accepted that it will have to continuously adapt to new requirements and societal demands.

The Norwegian approach to recognition of informal learning has the following characteristics:

- It needs to be beneficial to the individual
- It is based on respect for diversity
- Competence is considered to be contextual

The first point is apparent in the many discussions about the issue of giving people that have fallen off the education wagon “a new chance” by giving credits for their learning in the workplace, the home or any other voluntary activities. The second point is emphasised in the recognition of the fact that one method will not suit everybody and that the assessor has to be sensitive to the needs of the individual. Respect for diversity is also demonstrated in the acknowledgement of many different learning areas with different requirements to the documentation and validation of competence. The third point comes through in the resistance to treat a person’s competence as objectively measurable. There has been a general understanding that competence is created in interaction with other people in a particular context and cannot be assessed in simple quantitative ways.

Based on the experimentation and the above mentioned key characteristics, the Norwegian framework for the documentation and validation of non-formal learning has reached a certain consensus. It contains:

- Shared laws, rules and agreements to ensure the rights of the individual.
The shared laws include The Education Act, the Working Environment Act and the University and College Act.
- Shared procedure for various forms of documentary proof and validation. This includes decisions on: who is responsible; what is the documentation based on and is there a possibility for complaints; the process of documentation and validation; and where the process takes place.
- The shared procedure comprises the following steps:
 1. Information and guidance
 2. Identification and systemisation of competences
 3. (Self) Assessment
- 4. Documentary proof
- Various assessment methods, tools and documentary proof, which are suitable in relation to the requirements of the educational sector, the workplace or the third sector.
 - Diverse assessment methods in relation to upper secondary level that give a national certificate: Certificate of Competence (Kompetansebevis)
 - Diverse tools for documenting competence in the workplace that give a company verified documentary proof: Verified testimony (Kompetanseattest)
 - Several CV / portfolios where educational certificates, work experience and learning from third sector activities are compiled

Another result is that an increasing degree of acceptance and confidence has been achieved between the workplace, education and the third sector while the project has been in progress.

5. Evaluation of the project

The Competence Project has been evaluated by Agenda Utredning & Development AS. This section sums up a brief review of the evaluation of the project.

The evaluation has been designed as a combination of formative and summative evaluation, with three evaluation rounds focusing on slightly different things. The evaluation has provided feedback through the project period, with a view to providing the project with information from which it can learn and use for improvement. The evaluation was based on a combination of a number of methods. Four development projects were selected as case projects and monitored more intensively, and the evaluators have been present at meetings as participating observers. Five questionnaire surveys have been carried out involving the people responsible for the work on documentation in the education system and the workplace, along with a selection of people whose non-formal and informal learning have been documented. Implementation on a local level has gone well to a great extent, judging by the level of activity, the many parties which have been involved and the results achieved in individual projects. The co-operation between the parties in the workplace and the employment office, as well as the social security offices locally has been positive where efforts have been made to implement such co-operation. One of the conclusions is that the main result from the projects consists of a lot of systems, tools and methods, and that arrangements across the three arenas have been produced to a small extent. The work on developing a national system for the documentation of non-formal and informal learning brings to the fore the need to produce a shared language which is accepted in the education system, the workplace and the voluntary sector. The evaluation concludes that the Competence Project has helped pave the way for more large-scale documentation processes. The documentation of non-formal and informal learning has been placed on the agenda in parts of the workplace and the voluntary sector, and not least in the education system. The number of people who have undergone assessment of their non-formal and informal learning is now quite large.

The Agenda concludes that the project has produced results in relation to some important target groups. It spans large groups of women who want to enter the fields of health and social work, immigrants who want to qualify for the labour market and other groups which have traditionally found themselves in a weak position and which require upper secondary education, to staff at various kinds of workplace, from the municipal sector to specialised private companies. Viewed in this manner, the work will have both important consequences for society and, not least, important consequences for individuals.

One of the questionnaire surveys was carried out among the people in the education system, supervisors and assessors/specialist. Both supervisors and assessors/specialists are of the opinion that the documentation of non-formal and informal learning has positive effects on candidates; this gives candidates more self-respect.

Regarding different assessment methods, discussions have been held on how important it is for candidates to be called to attend a meeting or interview. Meetings or interviews are perceived as being very important by 96 % of the supervisors and 85 % of the assessors/specialists. Geographical closeness to the place of assessment is also perceived as being important, even though this is evidently a relative concept. The surveys revealed a major need for training: Around 96 % of the supervisors and 85 % of the assessors/specialists feel that they need training in future, particularly referring to a quality assurance arrangement which may lead to a national standard.

The questionnaire survey carried out among candidates confirms that the assessment of their non-formal and informal learning has been a positive experience. 80 % of the candidates taking part in the projects in the education system state that the identification, the systemising and the assessment of their non-formal and informal learning has been useful or very useful. According to the candidates themselves, the most important consequences are that the projects have made them believe that they can get the education they want, and that they have made it possible for them to take part in upper secondary education/higher education. Among the candidates who are studying for degrees, around 80 % say that they are doing as well as they expected, or better. The candidates have a good perception of the actual assessment of their non-formal or informal learning. Almost 70 % were of the opinion that the assessors were very accommodating as it regards their requirements, and almost 90 % said that the assessors were very good or quite good at finding out what candidates' skills were.

The development projects in the working life have strived a little to persuade enough employees and companies to take part in the development, and a number have had to set their sights lower in relation to the number of participants. The survey carried out among *employers* is limited in scope. 24 companies took part in this survey. Of the companies which participated, it appears that the greatest benefits have been experienced in respect of the identification and assessment of skills within the companies, the organisation of staff in-house, quality assurance work and the enhancement of staff motivation. 17 out of the 24 companies say that the documentation procedure has been useful. The questionnaire survey carried out among employees is also fairly limited (184 respondents). Of the *employees* in the projects who took part in the survey, 36 % thought that actually filling in the form was fairly difficult or very difficult. This emphasises the need for simplicity.

The most important positive effects for employees were perceived when they were looking for new jobs, or when they were aiming at possible development in their present jobs. A third of respondents feel that their motivation has been enhanced, while 20 % said that the documentation was used in staff appraisals.

The evaluation reveals that the actual trials of the methods have to be viewed as rather weak, particularly as far as the workplace is concerned. However, it is a fact that complying to a great extent with targets as regards developing systems and methods,

establishing methods and carrying out trials within the project period is a demanding task. These are tasks which may well have to be carried out over a number of years before one can be said to have achieved the targets to a satisfactory extent.

6. Prospects and perspectives

The Minister of Education and Research, Kristin Clemet, explains in a speech to the Ministerial Conference on Enhanced Cooperation in Vocational Training and Education in Copenhagen in November 2002 that there are several reasons why the Ministry of Education and Research has placed increased attention to valuing non-formal and informal learning:

“Firstly, it is acknowledged that the Norwegian human resources constitute more than 80 % of the national assets. Not taking advantage of these resources by recognising competencies achieved in informal and non-formal contexts will be a waste of the talents. Secondly, Norway faces an ageing population and all available resources have to be used in the most optimal way. Thirdly, due to changes in the economic and technological developments some professions disappear, while others are created. It will be very expensive if career change means that you have to start education and re-qualification from scratch. Fourthly, education in a lifelong perspective is a part of a personal fulfilment and also gives a contribution to social cohesion, ensuring democratic participation and values.”

A major challenge in the years to come will be the work involved in implementing the Competence Reform. The Competence Reform aims to meet the need for new or changed competences in society, in the workplace and by the individual and embraces all adults. It is based on the interaction between several actors, including social partners, Ministry of Education and Research, organisations and educational institutions. The three learning arenas; educational sector, working life and third sector, face different market requirements and therefore play different roles. Working life and third sector represent the demand side and are interested in documenting what the individual can achieve. The educational sector represents the supply side and is interested to document what people are *not* able to do and so fill the gap with further education.

- The assessment of non-formal learning is still a relatively new field in upper secondary education. There is a need to encourage a shared understanding and methodology in the field. Specialists who will be carrying out the assessment work need a common platform and skills which will give them security in their work. There will be a need for continual monitoring and updating of these specialists so that problem areas discovered can be discussed with a view to coming up with joint solutions at a national level. There is also a need for a national education system which emphasises communication and interview techniques just as much as pure information on the method. A training programme is being developed.

The training will cover both practice and theory, and among other things it will include elements such as laws, instructions and regulations, terminology, the selection and use of methods and tools and adults with difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics.

- Some county councils are more liberal in their interpretations of the legislations because of differences in political, economic and historical reasons. This has damaging consequences for obtaining a National similarity. The following questions have been treated differently:
 - Who has the legal right to have their competences assessed in relation to the curriculum?
 - Who has the right for further education?
 - What is done if the assessor and the individual do not have an agreement regarding the result of the assessment?
 - Are the methods known everywhere or are some only using one in particular?

There is still a need for networking between all persons in the county councils affected by assessment of non-formal learning; assessors/specialists, supervisors and persons in the administrative set-up. Vox will continue to arrange network meetings and have a close co-operation with the county councils.

- There is a need for good cooperation between county councils and employment agencies, Vox will take the initiative to start a project for better cooperation
- The right to decide on the procedure in each higher institution gives flexibility. However, it also gives room for major differences between the methods in higher education institutions and departments. The Norwegian contribution in Refine, a joint action project, will aim to construct a set of criteria to regulate exemptions based on accreditation of non-formal and informal learning in the university sector and college sector. The project will base itself on the work that has already been made, especially in the secondary school sector, but will also cooperate with other projects that have been initiated with similar objectives.
- In the working life the debate continues on legislation (who pays, what is the value of the verified document) as well as on how to document social competence. The Ministry of Education and Research and the social partners must find a solution.
- There is a lot of work yet to be done in order to give legitimacy to the different documentary proofs. More focus has to be placed on recognition of competences and how to document the continuous development in the working life.
- Parts of the third sector rely entirely on voluntary efforts. In these organisations, there is no tradition of documenting skills, participation in courses and other ac-

tivities. It is important to ensure that the responsibilities of the organisations do not become too extensive and time-consuming, that they do not create significant additional work or lead to financial expense. This may lead to the method not being used. There is a great need for information about the benefits of documentation of non-formal and informal learning in the third sector.

During the Competence Project from 1999-2002 numerous projects to document non-formal and informal learning have been initiated around the country at the county level as well as among several organisations and sector organisations. Despite the progress these projects have made to date, there is still a concern with the apparent piecemeal approach to the documentation and evaluation of informal learning, even though there has been an evaluation of the projects and a recommendation for the formation of national standards has been given. Yet, there is still a way to go and the focus is on further shaping the implementation of a National standard for recognition of informal and non-formal learning that is acceptable in the workplace and the education system.

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