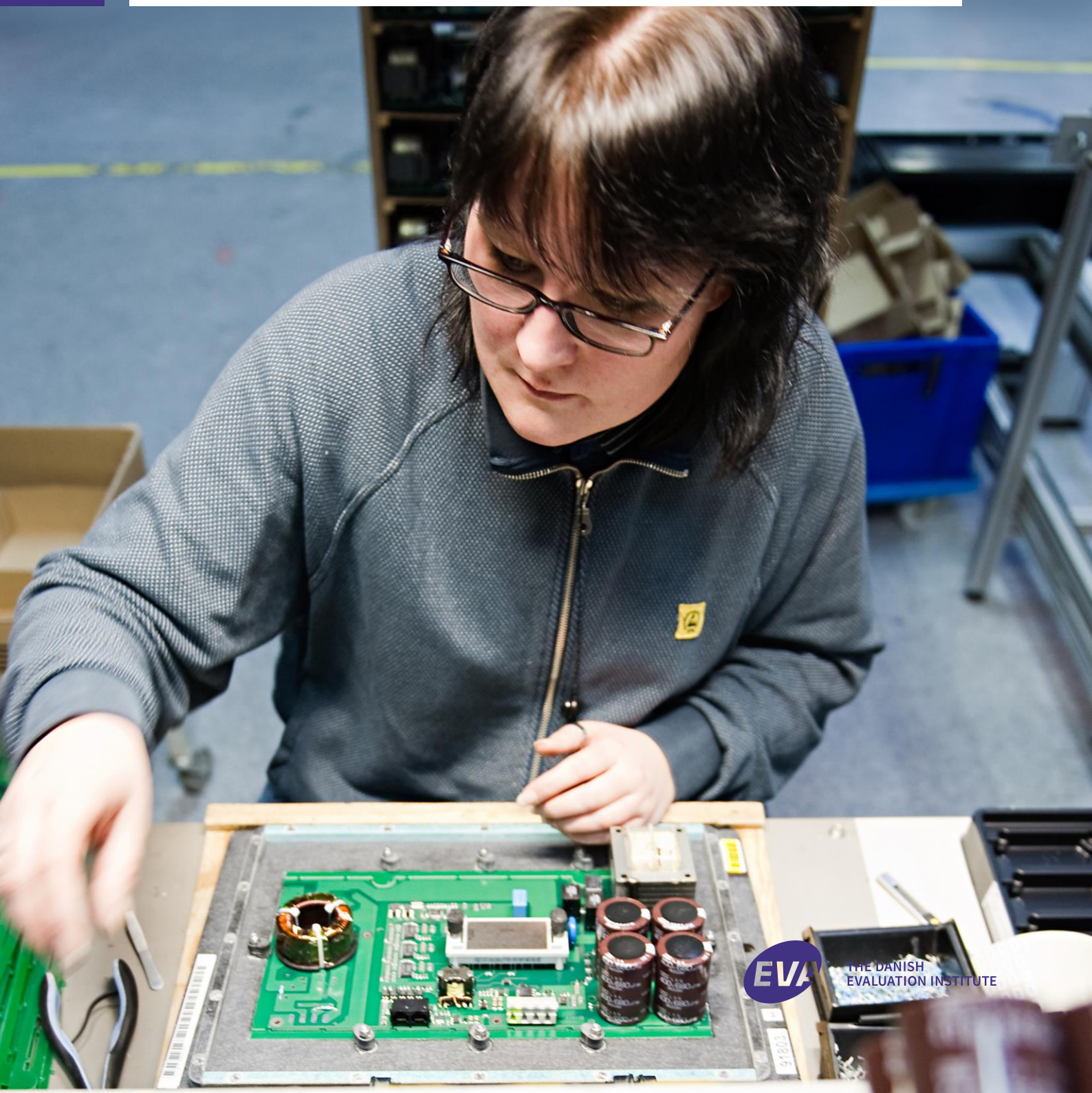


Evaluation of prior learning assessment in the adult education area in Denmark

- The development from 2010 to 2018. Summary



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Evaluation of prior learning assessment in the adult education area in Denmark

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1 Summary

This summary presents the main results of the evaluation of prior learning assessment (PLA) in the adult education (VEU) area in Denmark, with special focus on describing developments from 2010 to 2018 with regard to deployment of PLA, use of PLA, quality of work on PLA, organisation of PLA work as well as barriers to more widespread use of PLA. The evaluation is based on a questionnaire survey that as far as possible resembled the questionnaire survey conducted by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) in 2010 in order to enable comparison of results and describe the developments.

The evaluation covers adult education (VEU) under Act no. 556 of 2007 on expanding recognition of prior learning in the VEU area, i.e. general adult education (avu) and higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) within general VEU, adult vocational training (AMU) and adult vocational education (euv) (basic adult education (GVU) before 2015 and euv after 2015) as well as academy programmes (previously adult academy profession degree programmes (WU)) and diploma degrees within higher VEU¹.

Prior learning assessment (PLA) entails assessing and recognising adults' knowledge, skills and competences often acquired outside the formal education system, e.g. at workplaces, through participation in informal learning activities, etc. PLA can be used by the individual in many different ways, including in connection with access to education programmes, shortening and replacing programmes, job seeking etc. Danish legislation on PLA varies in relation to the different adult education areas, even though PLA for the adult education (VEU) area in Denmark is generally about assessment and recognition in relation to the specific learning objectives that apply for the relevant education programmes.

The evaluation builds on two surveys completed in 2010 and 2018, respectively, of representatives from Danish institutions in the adult education (VEU) area about the prevalence of PLA, barriers to more widespread use of PLA, use of PLA, the quality of PLA and the organisation of work on PLA. A comparison of the two surveys, with eight years between them, illustrates developments in the use of PLA and in assessments of challenges in relation to PLA in an institutional perspective.

The evaluation was prepared by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) and commissioned by the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education. The evaluation is based on perspectives from the educational institutions regarding their work on PLA.

1 Professional master's programmes were not part of the legal basis.

Main results of the evaluation

PLA has today been implemented at a larger percentage of institutions than in 2010, and there is very strong support across education areas for the concept of recognising adults' prior learning. Slightly fewer institutions, but still very high percentages, assess that the possibilities for recognising prior learning in practice are also good. Although there has been a positive development from 2010 to 2018 in other areas as well, e.g. an increase in the use of various quality assurance tools, there is also a number of areas with negative results.

In 2010, PLA was still somewhat new for most adult education areas. This is no longer the case, and therefore it is unfortunate that there are still a number of areas with significant challenges, particularly with regard to the quality of PLA and barriers to more widespread use of PLA.

For example, interviews in connection with PLA are not always held, and in a number of education areas there has even been a decline in the use of this tool. Similarly, it is problematic that so relatively many providers in the vocational area do not use practical exercises in connection with PLA, given that prior learning is precisely what is to be assessed.

Another negative result relates to competence development for staff working with PLA, where the overall picture is that a relatively large percentage of providers do not offer competence development for their staff. When competence development is in place, it is primarily as internal competence development the institutions. Furthermore, a relatively large percentage of respondents within all education areas fully or mainly agree that there is a lack of courses for staff working with PLA.

A number of the barriers indicated in 2010 are still assessed to be important barriers to more widespread use of PLA in 2018. Ignoring adult higher education (higher VEU), there are indications that it is still hard to see how PLA can be a financially viable activity for the institutions. The only barrier that more than half of the respondents in all six education areas fully or mainly agree on is a general lack of knowledge about PLA among the population. In light of this, it is surprising that many institutions do not have publicly available information about PLA, e.g. on their websites.

The following presents the main results of the evaluation in a cross-cutting perspective with focus on similarities and differences between the six education areas. In this connection, a number of recommendations are presented to address the problems identified by the evaluation.

Strong support for the concept of PLA

There is strong support for the concept of PLA and recognition in all the education areas, while slightly fewer, but still a large percentage, assess that there are good possibilities for recognising prior learning in practice at their institutions. From 2010 to 2018, support for the concept has been increasing in all six areas of education, whereas the assessment of the possibilities in practice has been increasing in the four education areas within adult higher education (higher VEU).

The percentage who fully or mainly agree that the concept is good varied between the education areas in 2018 from 94% to 100%, while the percentage who assess that the possibilities in practice at their institutions are good varied in 2018 from 71% for general adult education (avu) and 73% for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) to 88% for academy programmes and 89% for diploma programmes.

More widespread use of PLA

Today, PLA takes place at a higher percentage of institutions than in 2010, although the percentage for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) and adult vocational training (AMU) is more or less at the same level as in 2010, when it was 73% and 71%, respectively. More widespread use of PLA is particularly relevant within adult higher education (higher VEU), where in 2010 just 29% of providers of academy programmes had completed at least one PLA and in 2018 this had risen to 88%. The percentage for diploma programmes rose from 50% to 85%. As PLA was made mandatory for adult vocational education (euv) for adults of 25 or older in 2015, it is not surprising that almost all providers of euv conduct PLAs. The only area that now stands out with regard to more widespread use of PLA is general adult education (avu), where the percentage that has conducted PLA only grew from 42% to 53%.

Use of PLA

The regulations on the use of PLA vary from area to area. Therefore, the table below takes each education area separately.

On general adult education (avu) and higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), PLA can be used to issue certificates of competence for complete subjects or for part subjects. There is a trend to increasingly issue certificates of competence for both general adult education (avu) and higher preparatory single subject courses (hf). In 2018, half of those who had completed PLA for general adult education (avu) had also issued certificates of competence, while all the providers of higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) which had completed PLA had also issued certificates of competence.

PLA for adult vocational training (AMU) can be used for personal education plans, to shorten programmes, and to issue certificates of competence for parts of programmes or certificates of education for entire programmes. However, both in 2010 and in 2018, PLA was primarily used for personal education plans and to shorten programmes. PLA for adult vocational training (AMU) is increasingly being used for certificates of education (23% in 2018) and much less for certificates of competence (3% in 2018).

TABLE 1.1

Overview of how PLA is used within the education areas

	avu	hf	AMU	euv	Academy progs.	Diploma progs.
Certificates of competence for parts of programmes	X	X	X	X	X	X
Certificates of education for full programmes			X	X	X	X
Personal education plans			X	X	*	*
Shorten programmes			X	X	*	*
Admission to programmes					X	X

*These categories of use are not stated explicitly in Consolidating Act no. 1038 of 30 August 2017, but as the data shows, PLA is used in practice for these purposes.

The types of use we distinguish between for other education areas do not make so much sense for adult vocational education (euv), because the use of PLA in this context is in a more fixed framework in order to form the basis for personal education plans with shortened programmes which aim at issuing certificates of education when the programmes have been completed. Therefore, PLA for adult vocational education (euv) is generally always used for personal education plans, shortened programmes and ultimately certificates of education.

The same regulations apply for academy programmes and diploma programmes with regard to the use of PLA. In this context, PLA can be used with a view to admission to programmes, to issue certificates of competence for parts of programmes, or to issue certificates of education for full education programmes.

PLA is primarily to give admission for both academy programmes and diploma programmes. For the academy programmes, 74% of the PLAs carried out in the 2017/2018 academic year were used for admissions to programmes. The corresponding figure for diploma programmes was 82%. In contrast, only 9% of the PLAs completed by academy programmes were used to issue certificates of education, and none of the PLAs completed for diploma programmes led to a certificate of education. This trend has become stronger over the period from 2010 to 2018.

Recommendation no.1

The Danish Evaluation Institute recommends that the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education and providers of diploma programmes enter a dialogue about how PLA can be used more to issue certificates of competence and certificates of education that replace teaching.

This recommendation aims at diploma programmes.

Quality of PLA

The quality of PLA is described in the two surveys in relation to the tools used in the assessments, how the quality of PLA is assured more generally (quality assurance), evaluation of PLA processes, and the number of complaints. The four subthemes are described separately below.

Use of tools for PLA can be improved

In order to ensure valid assessments of adults' prior learning, it is vital that good and relevant tools are used in the assessment process.

Almost all providers within the six education areas use interviews and documentation for PLA, but slightly closer examination reveals a more nuanced picture. The percentage of respondents who replied that they always use interviews in connection with the assessment process varied in 2018 from 29% of academy programmes and 31% of diploma programmes to 62% of higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) and 67% of general adult education (avu) and 74% of adult vocational training (AMU) and adult vocational education (euv). The percentage has fallen compared to 2010

for general adult education (avu), higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) and academy programmes, while it has increased for adult vocational training (AMU) and remained more or less stable for adult vocational education (euv) and diploma programmes.

In connection with the Danish Evaluation Institute's evaluation of adult vocational education (euv) (EVA, 2017), one of the recommendations was to make interviews with focus on prior learning compulsory for euv. The new results from this evaluation show that this recommendation is just as relevant for the other areas of adult education.

Recommendation no. 2

The Danish Evaluation Institute recommends that in general an individual interview should always be carried out with a view to a specific assessment of a person's prior learning in connection with PLA².

This recommendation aims at all six education areas.

Although interviews and written documentation are important tools in connection with PLA, it is often relevant to supplement these with practical exercises or cases. Therefore, it is interesting that relatively many respondents replied that they do not use these tools.

The percentages replying in 2018 that they used exercises/tests with observation were 24% for general adult education (avu), 33% for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), 50% for adult vocational training (AMU) and 31% for adult vocational education (euv), while none used these tools for academy programmes and diploma programmes. Moreover, in five out of six of areas, this percentage was less than in 2010. Only higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) was unchanged. It is surprising that only one in two providers of adult vocational training (AMU); one in three providers of adult vocational education (euv), and none at higher level use practical tasks, given that they are to shed light on prior learning.

An alternative to practical exercises could be cases with reflection based on own experience. This is used in particular for academy programmes and diploma programmes, where 71% and 69%, respectively of the respondents in 2018 replied that they made use of this tool. In 2018, 27% used the tool for adult vocational training (AMU), while only one out of ten used it for adult vocational education (euv) and higher preparatory examination single subject courses (hf) and the tool was not used at all for general adult education (avu). On academy programmes and diploma programmes, the tool is increasingly being used, while from 2010 to 2018 the percentage for the other four areas fell.

2 In the Danish Evaluation Institute's evaluation of adult vocational education (euv) in 2017, one of the recommendations was the same (EVA 2017a).

Quality assurance of PLA is moving in the right direction

Developments in quality assurance of PLA have been described through the six questions asked both in 2010 and again in 2018 about which of a number of tools, procedures, etc. are used at the institutions to ensure the quality of PLA. The general picture is that the various quality assurance tools were used much more in 2018 than in 2010. However, there are great variations between the education areas, and far from all areas make use of the various tools. The following four tools are used by more than half of the providers in at least four out of the six areas:

Firstly, publicly available information about the institution's procedures and standards for PLA, e.g. on the institution's website. This applies for all providers of general adult education (avu), 71% of the providers of higher preparatory examination single subject courses (hf), 23% of providers of adult vocational training (AMU), 26% of providers of adult vocational education (euv), 64% of providers of academy programmes, and 63% of providers of diploma programmes. With the exception of adult vocational education (euv) and diploma programmes, this percentage increased for all education areas from 2010 to 2018. Even though the percentage has increased, it is still very low within adult vocational education (vocational VEU).

Recommendation no. 3

The Danish Evaluation Institute recommends that all providers have pages on their websites about PLA, including about the procedures, etc. they use in connection with PLA, in order to spread awareness of PLA and increase transparency of PLA.

This recommendation aims at adult vocational training (AMU) and adult vocational education (euv) in particular.

Secondly, descriptions of procedures for the institution's work with PLA. This applies for 89% of providers of general adult education (avu), 95% of the providers of higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), 59% of providers of adult vocational training (AMU), 64% of providers of adult vocational education (euv), 86% of providers of academy programmes, and 88% of providers of diploma programmes. With the exception of diploma programmes, which was very high in 2010, this percentage increased for all education areas from 2010 to 2018.

Thirdly, criteria or standards for PLA. This applies for 89% of providers of general adult education (avu), 76% of the providers of higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), 73% of providers of adult vocational training (AMU), 91% of providers of adult vocational education (euv), 71% of providers of academy programmes, and 75% of providers of diploma programmes. With the exception of diploma programmes, this percentage increased for all education areas from 2010 to 2018.

Fourthly, documentation which ensures that decisions can be tested. This applies for 89% of providers of general adult education (avu), 81% of the providers of higher preparatory examination single subject courses (hf), 64% of providers of adult vocational training (AMU), 85% of providers of adult vocational education (euv), 86% of providers of academy programmes, and 94% of providers of diploma programmes. This percentage increased for all education areas from 2010 to 2018.

PLA processes are often not evaluated

The quality of PLA can be developed and assured by evaluating PLA processes. However, far from all places evaluate PLA procedures: 22% of providers of general adult education (avu), 43% of the providers of higher preparatory examination single subject courses (hf), 32% of providers of adult vocational training (AMU), 28% of providers of adult vocational education (euv), 36% of providers of academy programmes, and 31% of providers of diploma programmes replied that they do not evaluate their PLA processes. If PLA processes are evaluated, they are primarily evaluated by staff, and it is exceptional for participants to evaluate the process in which they have participated.

Few complaints about PLA

According to the respondents, complaints about PLA are very rare. This applied in 2010 and in 2018. In 2018, only ten respondents stated that the programme they represented had experienced a complaint about PLA. Given that many thousands of PLAs are completed every year, especially on (euv), the number of complaints is surprisingly low. The data does not make it possible to explain whether this reflects great satisfaction with PLA, a lack of information about complaints procedures or something completely different.

Organisation of work on PLA

The average number of employees per institution working on PLA varies from three at academy programmes to five-six for adult vocational education (euv), adult vocational training (AMU) and diploma programmes, and eight-nine for general adult education (avu) and higher preparatory single subject courses (hf). These figures say very little about the resources used on work on PLA, as there may be differences in how much the individual employee works on PLA. But nevertheless, they do indicate how many employees in the adult education (VEU) area work with PLA to some degree or other.

By far the majority of adult education (VEU) institutions currently have one or more separate units working on PLA. The percentage has fallen slightly, however, within adult higher education (higher VEU). And the majority have anchored PLA with one or more managers. The relevant figures are 89% for general adult education (avu), 95% for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), 65% for adult vocational training (AMU), 74% for adult vocational education (euv), 71% for academy programmes and 63% for diploma programmes. The survey does not make it possible to describe the relationship between the separate PLA units and management in the relatively large group of providers of vocational training (AMU) and diploma programmes at which PLA is not anchored in the management.

The percentages with a strategy for PLA vary considerably between the education areas. In 2018, 56% had a strategy for PLA at general adult education (avu), whereas 81% of higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) had a strategy. The corresponding percentage was 30% for adult vocational training (AMU), 38% for adult vocational education (euv), 21% for academy programmes and 19% for diploma programmes. This indicates that PLA is only a minor strategic priority focus area for adult vocational and higher education (vocational and higher VEU).

Communication about PLA internally and externally

Internal communication is important for employees' knowledge about PLA, and together, internal and external communication about PLA are important for knowledge about PLA in a broader context, including among potential participants and businesses.

In general, a high percentage communicated about PLA internally for all education areas. In 2018, 89% communicated internally about PLA at general adult education (avu), and the same applied

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for 76% of higher preparatory single subject courses (hf). The figure for adult vocational training (AMU) was 74% and for adult vocational education (euv) 85% communicated internally about PLA, while the corresponding percentages were 100% for academy programmes and 94% for diploma programmes. This was an increase from 2010 to 2018 for adult vocational education (euv), academy programmes and diploma programmes, while it remained at the same level for general adult education (avu) and adult vocational training (AMU). The percentage fell from 96% to 76% for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf).

In both years, internal communication was primarily at meetings and through the intranet etc. as well as through direct enquires to relevant employees. Apart from adult vocational training (AMU), the intranet etc. was being used as an information channel on PLA by a smaller percentage in 2018 compared with 2010. Meetings are used less for general adult education (avu), higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) and academy programmes, but by a larger percentage for adult vocational education (euv) and adult vocational training (AMU).

A high percentage communicated externally about PLA for all education areas too. In 2018, 100% communicated externally about PLA at general adult education (avu), and the same applied for 81% of higher preparatory single subject courses (hf). The figure for adult vocational training (AMU) was 74% and at adult vocational education (euv) 81% communicated externally about PLA, while the corresponding percentages were 84% for academy programmes and 81% for diploma programmes. With the exception of adult vocational education (euv), where the percentage fell from 87% to 81%, there was an increase in all the other education areas. Note that, although the majority communicated externally about PLA, the respondents still assessed that the lack of knowledge about PLA in the population is one of the most important barriers to more widespread use of PLA.

It is interesting that, in a period in which the scope of PLA on adult vocational education increased dramatically, because PLA was made mandatory for all adults aged 25 years or more, the percentage of respondents who replied that they communicated externally about PLA through outreach work by consultants fell from 89% in 2010 to 70% in 2018.

External communication for both years was primarily through student guidance, via the institutions' websites as well as through outreach work by consultants. There is a general trend that course catalogues, leaflets and brochures were being used less in 2018 than in 2010.

Competence development of staff about PLA – room for improvement

There was a significant drop in the percentage of adult education (VEU) providers that upgraded their employees' competences from 2010 to 2018 in four of the education areas. For general adult education (avu) there was a drop from 83% to 44%, for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) from 83% to 57%, for adult vocational training (AMU) from 66% to 52%, and for academy programmes from 83% to 64%. For adult vocational education (euv) the percentage remained at the same level (69%), whereas there was an increase for diploma programmes from 39% to 50%. The overall picture is that a relatively large percentage of providers do not offer competence development for their staff with regard to work on PLA.

Looking at how competence development takes place, the trend is that there has been a decline in external competence development in particular. Ignoring general adult education (avu), where only four providers have both completed PLA and upgraded the competences of their staff, for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) there was a drop from 60% to 25% of respondents who replied that they have upgraded the competences of their staff externally on courses, for adult vocational training (AMU) there was a fall from 64% to 17%, for adult vocational education (euv) from 63% to 24%, for academy programmes from 67% to 33% and for diploma programmes from 71% to 25%.

Further to this result, note that a relatively large percentage of respondents within all education areas fully or mainly agreed that there is a lack of courses for staff working with PLA. To the extent that competence development of staff does take place, it is primarily in the form of on-the-job-training, informal knowledge-sharing groups as well as by participation in seminars and conferences.

Recommendation no. 4

The Danish Evaluation Institute recommends that the Ministry of Education, the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education and the higher education institutions consider how the need for courses for employees working with PLA can be met.

This recommendation aims at all six education areas.

Barriers to more widespread use of PLA

To promote more widespread use of PLA in the future, there may be reason to examine the barriers standing in the way for institutions. The respondents were asked to decide whether they agreed with 32 different potential barriers in terms of finance, legislation, competences, quality and other aspects. For by far the majority of these, less than half of the respondents stated that they fully or mainly agreed that the barrier in question was relevant for more widespread use of PLA. However, for a minority of barriers that more than half of the respondents in 2018 from one or more education areas fully or mainly agreed were relevant. We look more closely at these barriers below.

Large knowledge barriers

There was only one barrier that more than half of the respondents in all six education areas fully or mainly agreed on, and that was a general lack of knowledge about PLA among the population. Percentages who fully or mainly agreed with this in 2018 were 64% for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), 69% for adult vocational education (euv), 75% for academy programmes, 76% for general adult education (avu) and adult vocational training (AMU) and 78% for diploma programmes. Compared to 2010, there was a drop for four out of the six education areas. Although the percentages that communicated externally about prior learning are high for all education areas, there is reason to believe that there is a need to intensify this work.

Recommendation no. 5

The Danish Evaluation Institute recommends that providers intensify their external communication about PLA³. This could be done in many ways, including via institution websites and during student guidance sessions and visits to businesses. Support from the social partners could help by having organisations tell their members about the opportunities for PLA.

This recommendation aims at all six education areas.

Another barrier related to knowledge is that it is difficult to communicate to applicants what prior learning actually is, and how it can be documented and evaluated. Where in 2010 more than half of the respondents from two areas, higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) (65%) and academy programmes (93%), fully or mainly agreed that this was a barrier, in 2018 this applied for respondents from only one, namely general adult education (avu) (53%). However, the trend has been very different between different areas: The percentages have increased for general adult education (avu) and diploma programmes, while they have fallen for the other four areas.

A third knowledge barrier that does not affect potential users of PLA, but rather it affects those responsible for conducting PLA, is competence development for staff. More than half of respondents from three education areas fully or mainly agree that there is a lack of courses for staff working with PLA. The three are general adult education (avu) (65%), higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) (55%) and adult vocational education (euv) (53%). The percentage is also high for the other three education areas: 39% for adult vocational training (AMU), and 44% for both academy programmes and diploma programmes. This percentage lacking courses for employees who work with PLA increased from 2010 to 2018 within general adult education (avu), adult vocational education (euv) and diploma programmes. Percentages remained almost at the same level for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), adult vocational training (AMU) and academy programmes. We will return to this barrier in the summary.

Financial barriers within adult general education and adult vocational education (general and vocational VEU)

Respondents from most of the education areas fully or mainly agree on financial barriers. For all three barriers, respondents from adult general education (general VEU) and vocational education (vocational VEU) fully or mainly agree that there are barriers to more widespread use of PLA. However, this does not apply for adult higher education (higher VEU). The three barriers are as follows.

- More than half of the respondents from four education areas fully or mainly agree that it is difficult to see how PLA can be a financially viable activity for the education institution: general adult education (avu) (76%), higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) (64%), adult vocational training (AMU) (82%), adult vocational education (euv) (67%). A larger percentage of respondents from general adult education (avu) and adult vocational training (AMU) pointed to this barrier in

3 In 2010, the Danish Evaluation Institute recommended that the Danish Ministry of Education and providers should make a special effort to increase awareness about, and use of, prior learning assessment, e.g. by storytelling about prior learning assessment (EVA 2010: 171).

2018 compared with 2010, while this was a smaller percentage for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) and adult vocational education (euv).

- More than half of respondents from four education areas fully or mainly agree that there are no taximeter subsidies for documentation and guidance work: general adult education (avu) (94%), higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) (68%), adult vocational training (AMU) (77%), and adult vocational education (euv) (74%). A smaller percentage of respondents pointed to this barrier in 2018 compared with 2010, except for respondents from general adult education (avu).
- More than half of respondents from four education areas fully or mainly agree that the taximeter subsidies are too low compared with the amount of work involved: general adult education (avu) (76%), higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) (59%), adult vocational training (AMU) (83%) and adult vocational education (euv) (71%). A larger percentage of respondents from general adult education (avu) pointed to this barrier in 2018 compared with 2010, while this was a smaller percentage for adult vocational education (euv). The percentage remained the same for the two other areas.

Providers of academy and diploma programmes experience less that it is hard to see how PLA can be a financially viable activity for the institution, and this may be related to the fees they charge participants for PLA in connection with their higher education programmes.

Recommendation no. 6

The Danish Evaluation Institute recommends that the relevant ministries reconsider the structure of financial incentives in relation to PLA⁴.

This recommendation aims at general adult education (avu), higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), adult vocational training (AMU) and adult vocational education (euv) in particular.

Large planning barriers within adult vocational education (vocational VEU)

There is great variation in relation to whether it is considered difficult to plan any subsequent individual courses. The figures vary from 12% for academy programmes and 16% for diploma programmes to 27% for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), 47% for general adult education (avu), 63% adult vocational education (euv) and 70% for adult vocational training (AMU). This may be related to the particular planning challenges for adult vocational education (vocational VEU) and the way PLA is used, particularly within adult higher education (higher VEU), where, as mentioned earlier, it is primarily used for admission to the programmes, while for adult vocational education (vocational VEU) it is mainly used as the basis for planning programmes.

4 This corresponds to the recommendation from the Danish Evaluation Institute in 2010 (EVA 2010: 171).

Legislative barriers within adult vocational education (euv)

The only education area where more than half of the respondents (53%) in 2018 fully or mainly agreed that there was a legislative barrier to PLA was adult vocational education (euv). This is that the legislation fails to secure sufficient standardisation in PLA work.

This is also interesting given that adult vocational education (euv) is the area with the most comprehensive regulatory foundation and the greatest volume in relation to PLA. However, relatively high percentages of respondents also pointed to this barrier in higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) (46%) and adult vocational training (AMU) (44%). The percentages grew from 2010 to 2018 for these three education areas too.

Recommendation no. 7

The Danish Evaluation Institute recommends that the Ministry of Education reconsider how the reliability of the estimates in connection with PLA can be improved.

This recommendation aims at adult vocational education (euv) in particular.

Increases in relation to quality barriers

There were none of the four statements on the quality barriers for which more than half of the respondents in all six education areas fully or mainly agreed that the statement presented a barrier to more widespread use of PLA. However, there is still reason to focus on this group of barriers, partly because relatively many respondents point to them, and partly because there was generally an increase in these percentages from 2010 to 2018.

From 2010 to 2018 there was an increase for all six education areas in the percentages who fully or mainly agree that PLA is too much based on random estimates. In 2018 these increases were 29% for general adult education (avu), 28% for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), 21% for adult vocational training (AMU), 28% for adult vocational education (euv), 25% for academy programmes and 28% for diploma programmes.

There were increases from 2010 for three out of the six education areas which fully or mainly agreed that it is difficult to choose methods that ensure credible results from PLA. These increases correspond to 29% for general adult education (avu), 32% for higher preparatory single subject courses (hf) and 34% for diploma programmes. Academy programmes were at more or less the same level (31%), whereas there was a decrease in adult vocational education (euv) to 25% and for adult vocational training (AMU) to 18%.

Furthermore, almost one in four respondents in 2018 for general adult education (avu), higher preparatory single subject courses (hf), adult vocational education (euv), and diploma programmes fully or mainly agreed that insufficient time is spent to ensure thorough PLA. The percentage for adult vocational training (AMU) was 18% and for academy programmes 12%.

TABLE 1.2

Overview of the most important barriers broken down by education area

Barriers where at least 50% of respondents in 2018 state that to a great extent or to some extent there is a barrier to more widespread use of PLA	avu	hf	AMU	euv	Academy progs.	Diploma progs.
Knowledge barriers						
Lack of knowledge about PLA in the population	X	X	X	X	X	X
It is difficult to communicate to applicants what prior learning actually is, and how it can be documented and evaluated	X					
There is a lack of courses for staff working with PLA	X	X		X		
Financial barriers						
It is hard to see how PLA can be a financially viable activity for the education institution	X	X	X	X		
There are no taximeter subsidies for documentation and guidance work	X	X	X	X		
The taximeter subsidies are too low compared with the amount of work involved	X	X	X	X		
Other barriers						
It is difficult to plan possible subsequent individual courses			X	X		
The legislation fails to secure sufficient standardisation in PLA work				X		

Note that the table only includes the barriers which most respondents pointed to. Therefore, it is not exhaustive. Barriers can be very significant, even though fewer than 50% of respondents pointed to them.

Evaluation design

Method and data basis

The evaluation has been based on two surveys carried out in 2010 and 2018, respectively, and as far as possible they included the same questions to enable comparisons between results and to shed light on developments in the period. The survey in 2010 was part of a broader data collection, which also included an interview survey. However, only the questionnaire survey part was repeated in 2018.

In 2010, 156 forms were sent out and the Danish Evaluation Institute received 132 responses, corresponding to a response rate of 85%. In 2018, links were sent to 136 institutions. Data collection was carried out in the period from 13 August to 9 September 2018 using a web-based survey, and was based on responses from 101 out of the 136 institutions, corresponding to a response rate of 74%.

Many of the institutions who participated in the survey provide several types of programme (e.g. adult vocational education (euv) and adult vocational training (AMU)). Therefore, responses were collected from a total of 165 providers, broken down by programme type. Ignoring private providers of adult vocational training (AMU) and adult vocational education (euv)⁵, the response rate was 79%. Therefore, this was a full survey of all relevant parties with a certain non-response, which varies between education areas. See the report on the method in Appendix B for a more detailed description of the method used.

In 2018, the data collection was conducted by Epinion for the Danish Evaluation Institute. Prior to collection of the questionnaires, on the basis of contact information from the institution register, the institutions were contacted by email to identify the contact persons with relevant knowledge about work with PLA at the provider. The job descriptions of contact persons vary between different education areas. For adult higher education (higher VEU), primarily consultants and supervisors answered the questionnaire, while for the other four education areas, primarily managers and consultants/supervisors replied.

Staffing and timetable

The evaluation was carried out by a project group from the Danish Evaluation Institute consisting of chief consultant Michael Andersen (project manager) and consultant Yakup Bas in the period June to December 2018. Epinion was responsible for data collection, pilot testing and delivery of data to the Danish Evaluation Institute on the basis of a questionnaire prepared by the Danish Evaluation Institute.

5 Only two out of 11 private providers replied, corresponding to a response rate of 18% for this group of providers.

Overview of recommendations

TABLE 1.3

Overview of recommendations by education area

The Danish Evaluation Institute recommends that	avu	hf	AMU	euv	Academy progs.	Diploma progs.
1: the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education and providers of diploma programmes enter a dialogue about how prior learning assessment can be used more to issue certificates of competence and certificates of education that replace teaching.						X
2: in general an individual interview should always be carried out with a view to a specific assessment of a person's prior learning in connection with prior learning assessment.	X	X	X	X	X	X
3: all providers have pages on their websites about prior learning assessment, including about the procedures, etc. they use in connection with prior learning assessment, in order to spread awareness of prior learning assessment and increase transparency of prior learning assessment.			X	X		
4: the Ministry of Education and the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education consider how the need for courses for employees working with prior learning assessment can be met.	X	X	X	X	X	X
5: providers intensify their external communication about prior learning assessment. This could be done in many ways, including via institution websites and during student guidance sessions and visits to businesses.	X	X	X	X	X	X
6: the relevant ministries reconsider the structure of financial incentives in relation to prior learning assessment.	X	X	X	X		
7: the Ministry of Education reconsider how the reliability of the estimates in connection with prior learning assessment can be improved.				X		

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