



Implementation of validation arrangements in Sweden

Preface

Efforts to put in place structures for the validation of prior learning have been in progress in Sweden since the 1990s. The Government has sought to encourage development in this area in a variety of ways, including through statutory regulation, funding of initiatives, assignments to public authorities and the setting up of inquiries.

In its Budget Bills, the Government has stressed the importance of effective validation. In the Budget Bill for 2018 it was noted that, in many cases, education and training for adults are dependent on individuals being offered validation of their prior learning, so that the education provided can be geared to their needs and abilities. Properly functioning validation in the fields of both education and employment is important in facilitating access, transition and mobility on the labour market.

To develop a system of validation, the Government set up a second national delegation in November 2015, the National Delegation for Validation 2015–2019, with a remit to follow, support and drive forward coordinated development work in the area of validation at the national and regional levels. The earlier Delegation for Validation operated from 2004 to 2007.

This report is, on the one hand, a summary of the work undertaken since the 1990s and, on the other, an overall description of the current situation. It has been prepared by the Ministry of Education and Research, on the basis of draft material provided by the National Delegation for Validation.

Contents

<i>1. General features of the validation arrangements in Sweden</i>	4
1.1 Background	4
1.2 Validation in compulsory and upper secondary education	6
1.3 Validation in municipal adult education and training	7
1.4 Validation in higher vocational education and in higher education	9
1.5 Recognition of competence for regulated professions	11
1.6 Validation in relation to sectoral qualifications (sectoral validation)	11
1.7 Validation for jobseekers registered with the Public Employment Service	12
1.8 Funding of validation	13
<i>2. Results of validation, including qualifications and/or partial qualifications</i>	13
2.1 Municipal adult education and training	14
2.2 Higher vocational education	15
2.3 Higher education	16
2.4 Sectoral validation	17
2.5 Validation by the Public Employment Service	18
2.6 Transferability between sectoral validation and municipal adult education and training	18
2.7 Transferability between higher education and knowledge and skills developed in other contexts	18
2.8 Access to supplementary education and training	19
<i>3. Coherence of validation arrangements with other transparency and recognition tools</i>	20
3.1 The SeQF	20
3.2 Credit systems	21

<i>4. Support to individuals</i>	22
4.1 Access to guidance linked to validation	22
4.2 Special measures for jobseekers	23
4.3 Coordination of validation activities	24
<i>5. Role of stakeholders in the validation of non-formal and informal learning</i>	24
<i>6. Capacity building and quality assurance</i>	26
6.1 Sectoral qualifications (sectoral validation)	26
6.2 Municipal adult education and training	27
6.3 Higher vocational education	28
6.4 Higher education	28
6.5 Competence development for different stakeholders	29
<i>7. Evaluation and monitoring</i>	29

1. General features of the validation arrangements in Sweden

1.1 Background

The concept of validation was introduced in Sweden in the mid 1990s by the Adult Education Initiative Committee (*Kunskapslyftskommittén*).¹ The Committee emphasised the possibility of shortening the time spent in education and training, and making better use of resources, by validating what people already knew and allowing them to move on to study at an appropriate level.

A few years later, validation was described by the Government as a natural part of lifelong learning, and it was stressed that responsibility for it was shared between the education system and working life.² For certificates issued on the basis of validation to have legitimacy both on the labour market and in education, the view was that there needed to be close cooperation between representatives of the education system, the social partners and the relevant economic sectors.

Since the beginning of the present century, the development of structures for validation has progressed. Increasingly, the focus of development efforts has been on validation in relation to the demands of working life in terms of competence and employability. The Government assumed responsibility for promoting and developing validation activities by setting up a National Delegation for Validation, which operated between 2004 and 2007.³

The Delegation was tasked, among other things, with promoting quality, legitimacy and equivalence in the validation of adults' knowledge, skills and competences. Its remit also included undertaking and supporting the development of methods and modes of operation, and presenting proposals on the measures that might be needed to place a system of validation on a secure footing. An overall framework for validation was drawn up, consisting of four sub-processes: general identification ("mapping") of knowledge and skills, in-depth identification of knowledge and skills, assessment of knowledge and skills as a basis for ungraded certification, and assessment of knowledge and skills as a basis, for example, for vocational qualifications. This framework has since been used both by education

¹ A Strategy for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning (SOU 1996:27, in Swedish).

² Validation etc. – Further Development of Adult Learning (Ds 2003:23, in Swedish).

³ Ordinance setting out Instructions for the National Delegation for Validation (2003:1096).

providers and within the labour market. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (*Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan, MYH*) took over validation activities from the Delegation for Validation, and in 2011 it was given responsibility, in its standing instructions, for coordinating and supporting a national structure for validation and, in collaboration with the relevant authorities, promoting the involvement of the education system and economic sectors in developing strategies, methods and information in the area of validation.⁴ As part of this responsibility, the Agency has taken the initiative to establish networks involving both public authorities and stakeholder organisations in employment and education.

In November 2015 the Government set up a new delegation, the National Delegation for Validation 2015–2019 (ToR 2015:120), transferring some of the responsibilities of the Agency for Higher Vocational Education to this new body. The Delegation’s remit includes issues concerning validation activities both in the formal education system and in the labour market and working life. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is intended to be a natural element in education and working life, and to be undertaken as part of regular activities in those sectors. The Delegation has presented two interim reports, entitled “A National Strategy for Validation” (SOU 2017:18) and “Validation in Higher Education – For Credit Award and Lifelong Learning” (SOU 2018:29). The proposals in those reports are being considered within the Government Offices.

The Delegation’s terms of reference entail a responsibility for coordinated development efforts to ensure that structures for validation are transparent, effective and sustainable. Establishing structures that are sustainable in the long term has also been the focus of the initiatives taken by the Government in the sectors concerned. The Delegation is to present its final report in December 2019.

Validation is currently undertaken within the education system, i.e. in municipal adult education and training, higher vocational education and higher education, and in the form of sectoral validation in relation to sector-led qualifications.

Validation is regulated in the framework of each form of education within the formal education system, and in the framework of labour market policy.

⁴ Validation in Adult Education, National Agency for Education (2013, in Swedish).

As validation in relation to the qualifications awarded in different economic sectors, sectoral validation, is owned by the sectors themselves, there is no central government regulation in that field.

Validation is practised and defined in different ways, both within the different forms of education and in the area of employment. Views of what validation is and what elements it should include may thus vary. The links between the validation carried out in different fields remain weak. In August 2018, therefore, the National Delegation for Validation 2015–2019 was given additional terms of reference, tasking it with proposing an overall definition of validation, based on the European Union’s Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (ToR 2018:101). At the same time, it was asked to analyse and reach a position on how the national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (SeQF) could be used to strengthen the interaction between validation and the education and training efforts of different stakeholders. The final report on these additional terms of reference is also to be presented in December 2019.

Validation of prior non-formal and informal learning should be available for different target groups and for different purposes: for people in transition, for those with knowledge and skills from other countries, for people wishing to progress further in their education and training, and for skills and career development for people in employment.

Validation can be used to adapt an educational programme to the individual, to award credit for knowledge, thereby shortening study times for the individual, or to provide access to a programme if the applicant lacks grades from the courses required for eligibility.

For many individuals, validation is one link in a chain that also has to include other measures. Access to guidance and to supplementary education and training is particularly important.

1.2 Validation in compulsory and upper secondary education

A student at compulsory school who, before the spring term of year 9, wishes to be graded in relation to the knowledge requirements at the end of that year has the right to undergo formal assessment (*prövning*). There are no limits on the number of times a student can be assessed in the same subject.

A student who has received a grade in a completed subject or final grades from compulsory education also has the right to be formally assessed. In addition, all education providers are obliged to offer holiday schools to students who have completed year 9 without meeting the requirements for admission to a national vocational programme at upper secondary school. Subsequently, the students concerned can undergo formal assessment for grades in subjects covered by the holiday school.

Formal assessment at the upper secondary level is governed by different rules, depending on whether the person in question is or is not a student at upper secondary school. A person attending upper secondary school has the right to be formally assessed at the school on all courses that are part of their individual study plan, if they have not previously been graded on the course or if they have received a fail grade. A person who is not a student at upper secondary school has the right to undergo formal assessment on all courses that can be included in a national programme. They can only be assessed, however, if the school provides the course in question. In such cases, individuals can undergo formal assessment even if they have previously received a pass grade on the course.

The academic knowledge and language skills of newly arrived immigrants are assessed at both compulsory and upper secondary school. At upper secondary school, this may also include assessing vocational skills and experience. The results of such assessments should be used to determine the best educational trajectory for the student.

1.3 Validation in municipal adult education and training

A definition of validation was introduced in the 2010 Education Act (2010:800), worded as follows:

“a process that involves a structured assessment, evaluation and documentation and a recognition of knowledge and competences which a person possesses, regardless of how they have been acquired”.

This definition refers to validation in connection with municipal adult education and training (*Komvux*), including adult education in Swedish for immigrants, and special education for adults (*Särvux*). A student in municipal adult education and training can have his or her knowledge, skills and competences validated and should have the possibility of having them

documented in writing. Validation can be undertaken in the framework of all courses, and is to be guided by the student's abilities and needs. A student who has undergone validation for part of a course does not need to participate in teaching on that part of the course.

Within municipal adult education and training, a principal can decide to establish what are known as orientation courses. Such courses are not included as part of a final diploma and do not have a syllabus, and on completing one the student receives an ungraded certificate and not a grade. Orientation courses are arranged on the basis of the individual student's needs, abilities and wishes.

An orientation course can have a wide variety of aims, including supporting students in their study and career choices, helping them to improve their study skills, introducing them to courses in different fields of knowledge, and providing basic digital skills or a basic understanding of working life. One specific aim is to provide an opportunity for validation, and an orientation course can serve to identify, assess, evaluate and document experiences, knowledge and skills. If it emerges that the student has knowledge and skills relevant to different subjects or courses, this could influence their individual study plan and shorten the time they need to spend studying. To receive a grade following validation, the student has to undergo formal assessment.

The documents regulating municipal adult education and training distinguish between the concepts of validation and formal assessment. Whereas validation is a process of structured assessment, evaluation and documentation, formal assessment on a course involves an assessment of knowledge, skills and competences in relation to the knowledge requirements set out in course and subject syllabuses. Its purpose is to permit students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and competences in all the areas covered by the knowledge requirements for the subject or course. Formal assessment can involve written or oral examinations, marked coursework, laboratory assignments, practical presentations or group assignments undertaken with others being assessed or with students on the course in question. It results in a grade and must be designed in such a way that the student can attain all of the grade levels available. Grades are set by the teacher or teachers carrying out the assessment. The education provider designs the formal assessment procedure in detail and determines how and

when it is to be carried out. A student cannot insist on being assessed at a specific time. The provider is allowed to charge the person wishing to be assessed a fee of no more than SEK 500.

A person who is resident in Sweden has the possibility of undergoing formal assessment within municipal adult education and training on all the courses for which grades are awarded. This also applies to a person who has previously been graded on the course in question. It is only possible to undergo formal assessment in a municipality that provides the course.

Regarding municipal adult education and training in general, providers are under no statutory obligation to offer validation. But despite there being neither a right for individuals to have their prior learning validated nor an obligation on providers to offer validation in municipal adult education and training, validation is in fact undertaken.

On 1 January 2017, the Regional Vocational Adult Education initiative was launched, introducing arrangements for upper-secondary-level vocational education within municipal adult education and special education for adults, planned and provided by several municipalities working in collaboration. Under the Ordinance on State Grants for Regional Vocational Adult Education (2016:937), municipalities wishing to receive such grants are required to offer opportunities for validation.

1.4 Validation in higher vocational education and in higher education

The term “validation” does not appear in relevant legislation on post-secondary education. There are provisions, however, stating that individuals applying for programmes of higher vocational education and higher education have the right to have their “real”, i.e. actual, knowledge and skills (*reell kompetens*) assessed for the purposes of admission.⁵ Actual knowledge and skills are thus a separate ground for eligibility for admission, alongside formal qualifications from previous education. In both these forms of education, individuals admitted to a programme also have the right to have some of their actual knowledge and skills assessed for the award of credit.⁶ This should make it possible to shorten and adapt programmes to take

⁵ Chapter 3, Higher Vocational Education Ordinance (2009:130), and Chapter 7, Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100).

⁶ Chapter 2, Higher Vocational Education Ordinance, and Chapter 6, Higher Education Ordinance.

account of the knowledge and skills students have acquired through previous education or professional experience.

Higher vocational education

In higher vocational education, overall support for the assessment of actual knowledge and skills for admission purposes is available in the form of a manual.⁷ This publication also touches briefly on the assessment of actual knowledge and skills for the purposes of awarding credit. Another type of support available consists of forms that can be used to identify knowledge and skills prior to possible assessment for both admission and award of credit. These forms are available on the website of the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and are aimed at education providers.

Higher education

Provisions stating that individuals applying for programmes at higher education institutions (HEIs) have the right to have their actual knowledge and skills assessed for the purposes of admission, and that students have the right to receive credit for knowledge and skills acquired in the course of professional experience, are set out in Chapters 6 and 7 of the Higher Education Ordinance. Since 2003, moreover, the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (*Sveriges universitets- och högskoleförbund*) has issued recommendations on HEIs' procedures for validation of actual knowledge and skills. These mainly relate to validation for admission purposes. In addition to this long-established work, a special project to develop methods, assessment criteria and procedures for HEIs' assessment of actual knowledge and skills was carried out from 2016 to 2018. Thirty HEIs were involved in the pilot project, which was coordinated and supported by the Swedish Council for Higher Education (*Universitets- och högskolerådet, UHR*). This development effort primarily related to the assessment of actual knowledge and skills for the purposes of eligibility for and access to programmes. In SOU 2018:29, the National Delegation for Validation presented several proposals to further promote validation in higher education.

As part of the Council for Higher Education's remit to coordinate the validation of vocational competence for the purposes of admission to

⁷ Manual on Admission to Higher Vocational Education, Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (2017, in Swedish).

vocational teacher education, peer review and special training are being provided to ensure the quality and equivalence of assessments.

The responsibilities of the Swedish Higher Education Authority (*Universitetskanslersämbetet, UKÄ*) include quality assurance, monitoring and supervision of the work of higher education institutions. Assessment of actual knowledge and skills for the purposes of admission or award of credit is regulated in the Higher Education Ordinance and therefore also falls within the Authority's responsibility for supervising regulatory compliance by state HEIs. The award of credit by HEIs is a new area to be covered by the Authority's supervision of institutions over the period 2018–2022.⁸ The Higher Education Authority also hosts the Higher Education Appeals Board (*Överklagandenämnden för högskolan, ÖNH*), to which credit award decisions can be appealed.

1.5 Recognition of competence for regulated professions

For individuals with education and training abroad, validation is an important step on the way to being licensed to practise a profession that is regulated in Sweden. For a person to be considered qualified in Sweden, it is usually required both that their education is judged to correspond to Swedish education for the profession, and that they can provide evidence of their competence through a test of knowledge and skills and/or complete certain supplementary education or training. Various authorities are responsible for assessing whether individuals are qualified and issuing licences to practise regulated professions, including the National Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*, for health care professions) and the National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*, for school and preschool teachers).

1.6 Validation in relation to sectoral qualifications (sectoral validation)

Sectoral organisations or sectoral councils, often with representatives from employer and employee organisations, own and are responsible for their own qualifications and validation models for employability in the economic sectors concerned. Sectors are also responsible for funding, quality assurance and monitoring of their validation models. Further development, and development of new sectoral models, are guided by interests and demand within sectors. Central government has contributed in various ways to

⁸ Guidance on the Supervision of Higher Education Institutions' Regulatory Compliance, Swedish Higher Education Authority (2018, in Swedish).

sectors' development efforts, including through co-funding for the development of models and methodological support.

At the beginning of 2018 there were 21 models, covering 56 vocational roles, that were operational or in the process of being introduced.⁹ Eight of these had been developed in the last three years. By February 2019, according to information on the Agency for Higher Vocational Education's website, 25 models were in place.¹⁰

Sectoral representatives argue that validation offers the greatest actual and potential benefits when it is used by employers as part of their strategic provision of skills, in conjunction with recruitment and skills development of employees. Sectoral validation can also provide added value and serve important functions, from the points of view of enterprise and industry, labour market and educational policy.¹¹

1.7 Validation for jobseekers registered with the Public Employment Service

In its work in this area, the Swedish Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*) mainly commissions validation from external providers. The target group consists of jobseekers considered to be in need of such a measure to improve their chances of finding work. The Service primarily purchases validation based on sectoral models, but some is also commissioned from education providers, involving validation in relation to the goals of course and subject syllabuses for vocational education at the upper secondary level.

In February 2016, provision was made for validation as a separate programme in the ordinance regulating the programmes and measures for which the Public Employment Service is responsible, the Ordinance on Labour Market Policy Programmes (2000:634). The aim of this programme is to confirm an individual's previously acquired knowledge and competences and to provide the person with formal recognition that will be

⁹ Annual Report, National Delegation for Validation – May 2018, p. 9 (in Swedish).

¹⁰ www.myh.se, accessed 25 Feb. 2019.

¹¹ The Use and Benefits of Sectoral Validation (ref. Komm 2017/01316/U 2015:10), p. 17 (in Swedish).

accepted on the labour market or as a basis for further studies or supplementary measures.¹²

1.8 Funding of validation

The costs of validation are borne by the organisation initiating it. Validation for jobseekers, for example, is funded by the Public Employment Service. For students in formal education, the cost is met by providers of municipal adult education and training, higher vocational education or higher education. Funding of validation in conjunction with recruitment and skills development of employees is the responsibility of employers.

Resources for validation within formal education are usually embedded in general funding for the education concerned, which is frequently highlighted as a problem in terms of incentives to carry out validation. At present, special allocations of resources only exist within certain educational initiatives in higher education – for admission to vocational teacher education and for further education and training of teachers who are not formally qualified – and within the Regional Vocational Adult Education initiative mentioned earlier, where validation is a prerequisite for receiving state grants.

In certain cases, individuals undergoing validation in the regular education system can receive student aid during the time the validation is taking place. Jobseekers who are referred for validation receive payments in the same way as those participating in other labour market policy programmes.

2. Results of validation, including qualifications and/or partial qualifications

For the parts of a qualification that are recognised following validation in the education system, grades and/or credits are awarded which are of the same value as if the person undergoing validation had completed and passed the educational programme in question. Sectoral validation can result in either a full qualification or recognition of parts of a qualification.

¹² Swedish Public Employment Service (2018), Labour Market Programmes – Annual Report 2017, p. 21 (in Swedish).

2.1 Municipal adult education and training

The number of course participants in municipal adult education and training at upper secondary level who underwent formal assessment after validation or in-course validation (without subsequent formal assessment) varied over the period 2012–2016. Between 2012 and 2013, the number undergoing validation decreased by almost 60 per cent.¹³ The reason for this sharp reduction is unclear. Changes arising from a new curriculum and new syllabuses, combined with changes in the collection of statistics, may be part of the explanation. 2016 saw increases in the numbers of course participants undergoing validation with subsequent formal assessment (a rise of 200 participants, or 12 per cent) and in-course validation (a rise of 350 participants, or 38 per cent), compared with the previous year. Both formal assessment following validation and in-course validation mainly occurred on courses in the area of health and social care. Validation was often also carried out in the form of an orientation course.

With the help of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (*Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting*), the National Delegation for Validation conducted a questionnaire survey of all the country's municipalities that included questions on the extent of validation in adult education during the academic year 2016/17.¹⁴ In all, just over 3 800 individuals had had their knowledge and skills validated in some way during that academic year in municipalities which had access to data on, or made estimates of, the amount of validation undertaken. For 63 per cent of those who had undergone validation, it resulted in a shorter time spent studying. Compared with the academic year 2013/14, that was an increase of 18 percentage points. The most common form of validation in 2016/17 was identification of knowledge and skills, followed by validation in the form of assignment to a given level of study. In 2013/14, the reverse was true. Validation resulting in formal assessment and documentation in the form of grades was more common than validation resulting in ungraded certification. The proportion of validation resulting in formal assessment and grades also increased between the two periods surveyed, from 28 per cent in 2013/14 to 41 per cent in 2016/17. The proportion of individuals having the outcome of validation documented in the form of an ungraded certificate was small (4 per cent), and had decreased since the previous survey. Validation based on a

¹³ Annual Report, National Delegation for Validation – May 2018, p. 38 (in Swedish).

¹⁴ Annual Report, National Delegation for Validation – May 2018, p. 39 (in Swedish).

sectoral model was undertaken to a limited extent in connection with municipal adult education and training; in the academic year 2016/17, 44 municipalities reported that it had occurred. Sectoral-model validation had been carried out in the vocational fields in which operational sectoral models existed, that is to say, construction, electricity and energy, business and administration, industrial engineering, restaurants and food, and heating, ventilation and sanitation and property maintenance. It was on a small scale, however, involving only a few individuals.

Validation is considerably more common in academic subjects (Swedish/Swedish as a second language, English, mathematics) and Swedish for immigrants than in vocational subjects. For academic subjects and Swedish for immigrants, validation in the form of assignment to a level of study was most common in the academic year 2016/17, with roughly two-thirds of municipalities selecting that response. For Swedish for immigrants, validation in the form of identification of knowledge and skills was also common, this option being chosen by half the local authorities. Four out of ten municipalities stated that validation had resulted in shorter study times for students.

As regards vocational subjects, health and social care predominated, with 96 per cent of municipalities who stated that they had undertaken validation having done so in that area in the academic year 2016/17, roughly the same proportion as in the survey for 2013/14. In 2016/17, validation in the field of health and social care had resulted in formal assessment and grades in 65 per cent of municipalities, and in shorter study times in just over 80 per cent of them. In other vocational fields, validation was considerably less common.

2.2 Higher vocational education

Since 2015, the appropriation directions of the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education have included a requirement to report how many of the total number of applicants to higher vocational education each year were considered eligible for admission on the basis of actual knowledge and skills, and how many of these were admitted to the programmes they had applied for.¹⁵ These reports are also required to include an assessment and analysis

¹⁵ Chapter 3, Section 1, first paragraph, point 4, and Section 4, Higher Vocational Education Ordinance.

of the results. Not until its annual report for 2017 was the Agency able to present this information.

The annual report for 2018 shows that, of the just over 40 100 applicants eligible for higher vocational education in 2017, 5 200 (13 per cent) had been deemed eligible on the basis of their actual knowledge and skills. Roughly half of these, just under 2 600 people, were admitted to a programme. This corresponds to the proportion of all eligible applicants who were admitted.

The proportion of applicants deemed eligible on the basis of their actual knowledge and skills varied between different areas of education, with an average of 13 per cent in both 2016 and 2017. According to the Agency, there is a tendency for an underrepresented gender to be assessed as eligible to a greater extent on that basis, but the pattern is not clear-cut. Among applicants in 2017, 12 per cent of the women and 15 per cent of the men were deemed eligible based on their actual knowledge and skills.

According to the Agency's annual report for 2017, one in ten eligible applicants had been judged eligible on the basis of actual knowledge and skills in areas of education where pressure for places was high (more than 2.5 eligible applicants per place). In this group, roughly four out of ten applicants were admitted. Among eligible applicants for programmes where pressure for places was low (fewer than 1.7 eligible applicants per place), two out of ten had been assessed as eligible on the same basis. In this group, almost six out of ten applicants were admitted. This suggests a greater tendency to grant eligibility on the basis of actual knowledge and skills in the case of programmes with low numbers of eligible applicants. The possibility of having one's actual knowledge and skills assessed for admission purposes should not be dependent on the pressure for places on a programme. The scope to be admitted on the basis of actual knowledge and skills is also affected by the design of the selection process.

2.3 Higher education

No national statistics are available on the extent to which validation is carried out in higher education. The Eurostudent VI survey shows that, in the spring term 2016, the absolute majority (92 per cent) of students in higher education had qualified for admission on the basis of their upper secondary education. Only 1.9 per cent of students reported that they had

become eligible for admission based on an assessment of their actual knowledge and skills.

Since 2017, the remit of the Swedish Higher Education Authority has included working with the Swedish Council for Higher Education to develop monitoring of the assessment by HEIs of actual knowledge and skills. In an initial report in October 2017, the Higher Education Authority pointed out, among other things, that the existing central systems required further development to enable reliable statistics to be compiled. The Authority states that its long-term aim is for monitoring in this area to have the status of official statistics.

Since 2016, universities and other HEIs have been tasked by the Government with further developing their procedures for assessing actual knowledge and skills. All HEIs report annually on how their work on this is progressing. In their annual reports for 2018, several HEIs also presented information on the extent to which such assessments were carried out, among them the University of Gothenburg, Örebro University, Kristianstad University, Karlstad University, Malmö University and Chalmers University of Technology. In these cases, the data reported related to the assessment of actual knowledge and skills for the purposes of eligibility and access to programmes. In some cases, information was also provided on how many of those applying for an assessment were judged eligible for admission.

2.4 Sectoral validation

Opportunities for sectoral validation have grown in recent years. The number of individuals who had their learning validated according to a sectoral model rose each year from 2015 to 2017, totalling around 11 900 over the period studied.¹⁶ The overall scale of sectoral validation is greater than that, however, as no data are available on validation in the construction and health and social care sectors. These two areas usually account for a significant share of sectoral validation.

¹⁶ Annual Report, National Delegation for Validation – May 2018, p. 36 (in Swedish).

2.5 Validation by the Public Employment Service

In all, the prior learning of 4 468 jobseekers was validated on behalf of the Public Employment Service over the period 2014–2017. The number of individuals referred for validation increased over time, with the exception of 2017. The decrease that year was due, among other things, to the Service changing its procedures for the procurement of validation providers during 2017. One aim of the change was to offer greater and more flexible access to sectoral validation.

2.6 Transferability between sectoral validation and municipal adult education and training

The links between sectoral validation and the formal education system – primarily municipal adult education and training courses – vary. The sector with the greatest transferability to municipal adult education and training is health and social care. There, validation is consistently linked to the vocational courses of the upper secondary health and social care programme, and is to be carried out according to the guidelines drawn up by the organisation Vård- och Omsorgscollege.¹⁷

To make clear the differences and similarities between validation in relation to educational goals and sectoral validation, and to enhance transferability between formal education and certification based on validation according to a sectoral model, the National Agency for Education is providing training in the form of an online training resource in validation, regional workshops and conferences.

2.7 Transferability between higher education and knowledge and skills developed in other contexts

In the case of higher vocational education, the qualifications system is based on level-related learning outcomes, and for each programme expected learning outcomes, course content and course goals have to be defined. A higher vocational education diploma (*yrkeshögskoleexamen*) is assigned to level 5 and an advanced higher vocational education diploma (*kvalificerad yrkeshögskoleexamen*) to level 6 of the SeQF.

All higher education diplomas and degrees have been assigned SeQF levels. First-cycle qualifications are placed at level 6, second-cycle qualifications at

¹⁷ Vård- och Omsorgscollege is a voluntary association promoting collaboration between the social partners and education providers in the health and social care sector.

level 7 and third-cycle qualifications at level 8. Both course goals and degree/diploma goals have to be expressed in terms of expected learning outcomes.

In its interim report “Validation in Higher Education” (SOU 2018:29), the National Delegation for Validation has proposed that knowledge and skills that have been documented in a qualification assigned an SeQF level should form a separate basis for the award of credit.¹⁸ This proposal is intended to increase transferability between higher education, higher vocational education and qualifications from other contexts.

2.8 Access to supplementary education and training

The major investments in education made as part of the Government’s Adult Education Initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*) have created greater opportunities for supplementary education and training within regional vocational adult education (in the framework of municipal adult education and training), in higher vocational education, at folk high schools and in higher education.

Municipal adult education and training is organised in the form of courses at basic and upper secondary levels. Students study one or more courses, based on their specific needs and abilities. An individual study plan is drawn up together with the student. This study plan should also include information about the student’s educational goals and the planned scope of their studies.

Opportunities for supplementary education following validation, with a view to gaining a higher vocational education diploma, have been enhanced by the introduction in March 2017 of the possibility of taking single-subject courses in higher vocational education.¹⁹ As yet, such courses can only be provided on programmes with unfilled places, and the range available is limited. In 2017, 10 single-subject courses were organised on 9 higher vocational education programmes. In 2018, the corresponding figures were 79 courses on 39 programmes. In its Budget Bill for 2020, the Government makes the assessment that the education and training provided in higher vocational education needs to become more flexible, and proposes funding to increase the range of single-subject courses available.

¹⁸ SOU 2018:29, Validation in Higher Education – For Credit Award and Lifelong Learning, p. 198 (in Swedish).

¹⁹ Chapter 2, Section 6, Higher Vocational Education Ordinance (2009:130).

In higher education, a substantial expansion of supplementary courses for individuals who have completed an educational programme abroad began in 2016. Designed to ease the transition into employment in certain relevant fields, these courses give people who have completed programmes abroad the opportunity to supplement them with the knowledge they need to practise a profession in Sweden. They may also be a route to qualifying to practise a profession that is regulated in Sweden. Supplementary education already existed for foreign-trained doctors, dentists, nurses, teachers and lawyers. The recent expansion means that more HEIs are now arranging courses of this kind. It also means that supplementary education has been introduced for other professions, including pharmacists, midwives, engineers and psychologists.

3. Coherence of validation arrangements with other transparency and recognition tools

Documentation of the qualifications (or parts of qualifications) received following validation of non-formal and informal learning is designed so that it can be incorporated in EU mobility tools. Responsibility for the various Europass documents is divided between different authorities and coordinated by the Swedish Council for Higher Education. The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (*Myndigheten för ungdoms- och civilsamhällesfrågor*) provides information about Youthpass.

3.1 The SeQF

The Swedish Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (SeQF) was introduced in 2015. It is divided into eight levels, for each of which there are descriptors of learning outcomes in the form of knowledge, skills and competences. Qualifications regulated by statute, that is, from programmes in the formal education system, are assigned appropriate levels in the framework, based on Government decisions.²⁰ Bodies issuing qualifications that are not allocated levels by the Government can apply for their qualifications to be assigned SeQF levels by the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, which is the authority responsible for the Swedish Qualifications Framework.

The fact that qualifications assigned a level in the national qualifications framework are to be described in terms of learning outcomes, rather than,

²⁰ Appendix 2 to the Ordinance on a Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (2015:545).

for example, the length of a programme, means that the content of programmes is made clear and visible in a way that can facilitate validation and the award of credit. The framework can thus help to make visible the individual's knowledge, skills and competences and thereby increase labour market mobility, make for more efficient skills provision, ease transitions between employment and education, and contribute to giving the outcomes of validation national legitimacy on the labour market.

The possibility of applying for a qualification to be assigned an SeQF level has existed since 2016. To date, six qualifications outside the formal education system have been allocated such a level.²¹ To ensure that more qualifications are assigned SeQF levels, the Agency for Higher Vocational Education is offering support in 2018 and 2019 for the writing of applications for level assignment.

In Sweden, validation is carried out by many different stakeholders, for example within the formal education system, and in workplaces in relation to different sectors' vocational qualifications and certificates of competence. Responsibility is decentralised, and there is little transparency at present between the different areas. As more education and training providers have their qualifications assigned SeQF levels, the number of qualifications described in terms of learning outcomes will increase, thereby facilitating validation.

The additional terms of reference given to the National Delegation for Validation in August 2018 included analysing and reaching a position on how the SeQF could be used to strengthen the interaction between validation and the education and training initiatives of different stakeholders (ToR 2018:101).

3.2 Credit systems

The design and regulation of upper secondary and higher vocational education closely reflect the intentions of the ECVET Recommendation. This means, for example, that it is possible to accumulate graded courses or modules, and to receive credit for prior knowledge and skills corresponding to the whole or parts of a course or module, with a view to gaining a qualification. In Sweden, however, no formal decisions have been taken on

²¹ www.myh.se/Nyhetsrum/Nyheter/2019/Kvalifikationer-inplacerade-i-SeQF--vad-hander-sen/, accessed 25 Feb. 2019 (in Swedish).

how ECVET is to be applied in the country's vocational education and training.

In 2006 the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) adopted the current programmes and qualifications structure for higher education, according to which all courses and qualifications are placed in the first, second or third cycle. The system of credits was changed, introducing higher education credits in line with ECTS. In addition, the principle of learning outcomes, or expected educational outcomes, was introduced, describing the knowledge and skills a student should have achieved, both on all component courses and in relation to overall degree or diploma goals.

4. Support to individuals

4.1 Access to guidance linked to validation

In its appropriation directions for 2018, the Swedish Public Employment Service was tasked with strengthening conditions for unemployed people to benefit from education and training, through guidance provided by or on behalf of the Service. In April 2018, the Service adopted a careers guidance strategy, underlining the importance of high-quality guidance services, stressing a holistic approach to collaboration, and viewing validation as a natural part of strategic skills provision. In 2017 the Public Employment Service launched Jobskills.se, a digital tool that enables individuals new to Sweden to write a CV in their native language by choosing from a range of options. As a first step, users enter their experience and any education or training. Next, they can have their profile translated into Swedish and receive guidance on the labour market based on the options chosen. In a recently launched new version of the tool, employers have the possibility of searching among the profiles created.

Under the Education Act, students in municipal adult education and training must have access to staff with sufficient competence to meet their need for guidance on future educational and career choices. A person intending to begin such education must also have access to guidance.

The National Agency for Education has produced support material aimed at guidance practitioners in municipal adult education and training, among others (see 6.2 for further information). A new tool for the identification of vocational knowledge was launched in April 2018. The Agency for

Education has also designed validation training to develop and support the role of guidance in the validation process (see 6.5 for further information).

In the Higher Vocational Education Ordinance it is stated that education providers must ensure that guidance on study options, admissions and access and vocational guidance are available. The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, in its supervisory role, monitors compliance with this Ordinance.

It is fairly common for higher education institutions to offer a central point of contact for applications for an assessment of actual knowledge and skills. Having such a point of contact creates a better basis for providing applicants with support and guidance on the validation process.

4.2 Special measures for jobseekers

Individuals with knowledge and skills from other countries are a priority target group for the validation of prior learning. Since 2016, agreements on “fast-track” arrangements for newly arrived immigrants have been entered into between the social partners and the Public Employment Service in a number of economic sectors. A fast track involves a chain of measures designed to supply skills in occupations in which there are shortages, and to make use of the relevant vocational skills and education of new arrivals. Fast-track arrangements are based mainly on existing measures provided by the Public Employment Service. In addition to validation of vocational competence, they may for example include labour market training, work placements, assessments of vocational competence and courses in Swedish for professional purposes. For certain fast-track arrangements, the Service has also purchased specific supplementary education at post-secondary level.

In addition, validation is used in transition situations where individuals who have acquired much of their competence at work need to have it made visible and recognised in order to be able to find new jobs. The employment transition organisation for blue-collar workers in the private sector, Trygghetsfonden TSL, has reorganised its work with a view to freeing up resources so as to provide better transitional support. Since November 2017, it has also been possible for individuals made redundant to be offered education and validation of vocational knowledge, alongside the earlier support in the form of coaching for a new job. Of the funds available, 20 per cent will be devoted to validation and short vocational training courses. TSL

is working to make sectoral-model validation available to individuals where identification of their knowledge and skills has highlighted a need for validation. Validation for individuals who are unemployed, or at risk of unemployment, can also be offered by the Public Employment Service.

4.3 Coordination of validation activities

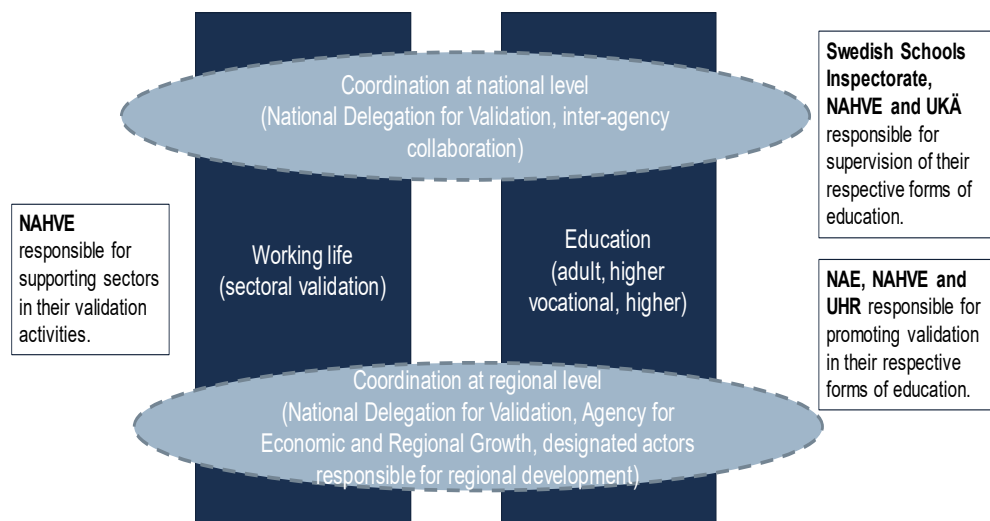
In its guidelines on regional efforts to promote the provision of skills, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (*Tillväxtverket*) has proposed that stakeholders responsible for regional development should support and drive initiatives to ensure effective cooperation on validation at the regional level. The regions have accepted this invitation to address validation issues on a regional basis, and such an approach is now being developed across the country.

5. Role of stakeholders in the validation of non-formal and informal learning

The social partners and sectoral organisations are actively involved in implementing validation arrangements in Sweden and in the design of policy proposals for a sustainable system of validation. Representatives of the social partners and economic sectors make up the majority of members of the National Delegation for Validation. Validation is seen as an important tool in the provision of skills, and there is considerable engagement in issues concerning the development and use of sectoral validation. The social partners are also pushing for the development of validation in formal education, to create greater opportunities for lifelong learning, continuing professional development and advanced education that can supplement the knowledge and skills individuals have already acquired through professional experience.

The existing structure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning clearly establishes long-term responsibilities, both within the formal education system and for validation in relation to sector-led qualifications (sectoral validation). Responsibility for coordination between the different parts of the system at the national and regional levels, however, is less clear and more short-term (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Existing sectoral and coordinating responsibilities for validation



Notes: NAE = National Agency for Education, NAHVE = National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, UKÄ = Swedish Higher Education Authority, UHR = Swedish Council for Higher Education.

Validation within the education system is undertaken by providers of municipal adult education and training and higher vocational education, and by universities and other HEIs. Economic sectors own their own validation models and are also responsible for appointing and approving providers of sectoral validation.

The National Agency for Education, National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and Swedish Council for Higher Education have been tasked with promoting validation in their respective sectors. For the Agency for Education and Agency for Higher Vocational Education, this is a long-term responsibility, incorporated in their standing instructions. Up to the end of 2018, the Council for Higher Education had a time-limited remit to establish a permanent structure for the assessment of actual knowledge and skills.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate, National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and Swedish Higher Education Authority are tasked with supervision and quality audit in their respective areas of responsibility. As municipal adult education and training providers are under no obligation to offer validation, however, the Schools Inspectorate has limited scope to audit their validation activities.

The various economic sectors own, develop, manage and quality-assure their own validation models. They are also responsible for marketing their

qualifications and validation models to employers in the sectors concerned. The role of the Agency for Higher Vocational Education, however, includes supporting sectors in their development and quality assurance of, and provision of information about, validation models.²² The Agency also has a responsibility to ensure that a provider of a sectoral qualification that is to be assigned an SeQF level undertakes systematic quality management activities, including quality assurance of the qualification concerned.

As indicated earlier, the National Delegation for Validation's remit to follow, support and drive forward coordinated development at the national and regional levels continues to the end of December 2019. The public authorities that are members of the Delegation have entered into closer collaboration on communication relating to validation.²³ Regarding the development of structures for validation at a regional level, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth is tasked over the period 2018–2020 with supporting the work of the regions in the area of skills provision, one of three focus areas being to promote regional collaboration on validation.

Proposals on the measures needed to ensure sustainable collaboration and coordination of validation activities at the national and regional levels will be presented in the Delegation's final report in December 2019.

6. Capacity building and quality assurance

The Public Employment Service, National Agency for Education, National Agency for Higher Vocational Education and Swedish Council for Higher Education have all been specifically tasked with developing support for the identification and assessment of knowledge and skills in their respective areas. Various forms of support are now in place, fully or in part, for stakeholders in both employment and education.

6.1 Sectoral qualifications (sectoral validation)

Detailed quality support, for example for identification and assessment, is incorporated in sectoral validation models. The progress made by different

²² Section 6, Ordinance setting out Instructions for the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (2011:1162).

²³ The agencies taking part in this closer inter-agency collaboration on communication relating to validation are the Swedish Public Employment Service, the National Agency for Education, the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, the Swedish Council for Higher Education, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and the Swedish ESF Council.

sectors in developing such support varies. The forms and extent of skills development for validation practitioners also vary between sectors. Most validation models, however, include some form of training for vocational assessors.

In February 2017, the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education presented the standard for sectoral validation of vocational competence which it had been tasked with developing in collaboration with different sectors.²⁴ This standard consists of overarching recommendations and guidelines, and provides support for both the development of validation models and the implementation of validation. It also includes a number of quality criteria that are to be taken into account. Among other things, the standard calls for standards of competence for vocational roles to be expressed in terms of learning outcomes and to be assigned SeQF levels.

Work has begun to adapt or update sectors' validation models and to implement the quality declaration described in the sectoral standard, *inter alia* as part of the BOSS project,²⁵ launched in January 2018. Sectors which apply for and receive a decision assigning an SeQF level to the qualification provided by their validation model will also have the qualification quality-audited by the Agency for Higher Vocational Education.

Self-rating tools may be used prior to validation and be part of the process of identifying a person's knowledge and skills. The Public Employment Service provides self-rating forms for 33 different vocational areas/roles. Several of them are also available in languages other than Swedish, such as Arabic. In most cases, self-rating tools have been developed together with the sectors concerned, and they then have a clear link to the sectoral validation model.

6.2 Municipal adult education and training

In 2016 and 2017, the National Agency for Education developed guidelines in support of municipalities' validation activities.²⁶ This support material focuses on validation undertaken in the education system and, in particular,

²⁴ Standard and Guidelines for Sectoral Validation of Vocational Competence (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education) (2017, in Swedish).

²⁵ The BOSS Project (Sectoral Validation – Operational and Strategic Cooperation) is an ESF-funded project running over the period 2018–2019, with the aim of increasing employers' and individuals' use of, and benefits from, sectoral validation.

²⁶ Guidelines in Support of Municipalities' Validation Activities, Appendix, National Agency for Education (2017, in Swedish).

within the adult education provided by municipalities. The guidelines are intended as recommendations, and are drawn in part from the Agency's support material "Validation in Adult Education". The Agency has also developed material relating to initial and in-depth identification and assessment. In addition, it has developed support tools for study and vocational guidance practitioners, the tool "Plan your Diploma from Upper Secondary Adult Education", tools to identify vocational knowledge and skills at the upper secondary level, and general advice on formal assessment.

6.3 Higher vocational education

In higher vocational education, overall support for education providers on the assessment of actual knowledge and skills for admission purposes is available in the form of a manual.²⁷ This publication also touches briefly on the assessment of actual knowledge and skills for the purposes of awarding credit. Another type of support available consists of forms that can be used to identify knowledge and skills prior to possible assessment for both admission and award of credit.

As part of its supervisory responsibilities, the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education ensures that education providers have handled programme admissions correctly. Among other things, it checks that the methods used to assess actual knowledge and skills are appropriate and correct. The quality audit which the Agency undertakes does not, however, include specific quality criteria for providers' assessments of actual knowledge and skills, either for admission or for the award of credit.

The Agency for Higher Vocational Education administers funding for certain interpreter education programmes provided in the liberal adult education (*folkbildning*) sector. A thematic review of assessments of actual knowledge and skills on these programmes is planned to be finalised in autumn 2019.

6.4 Higher education

The Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions first issued its recommendations on validation of actual knowledge and skills by HEIs in 2003. In its interim report "Validation in Higher Education" (SOU 2018:29),

²⁷ Manual on Admission to Higher Vocational Education, Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (2017, in Swedish).

the National Delegation for Validation has recommended that HEIs should work together to develop updated common guidelines for their activities in the area of recognition of prior learning.²⁸

6.5 Competence development for different stakeholders

In 2017, the National Agency for Education developed an online training resource in validation, “Validation in Theory and Practice – An Introduction”. This resource is aimed at individuals working with guidance, identification of knowledge and skills, admissions, or assessment of knowledge and skills in different organisations, and provides an overall picture of validation, with the option of more in-depth learning regarding identification and assessment. It also provides examples of contexts in which validation can be used and what assessment criteria are most appropriate in different contexts. Since autumn 2017, moreover, continuing professional development on validation has been offered at Linköping University and Linnaeus University. The course (worth 7.5 ECTS credits) is based on the Agency for Education’s online training resource and is delivered on behalf of the Agency, but is open to individuals involved in validation, regardless of their area of work.

In a Swedish Council for Higher Education’s pilot project on the assessment of actual knowledge and skills, workshops and conferences for skills development of staff in higher education are an important part of the development process.

In 2017, the public authorities represented on the National Delegation for Validation²⁹ developed a plan for closer inter-agency collaboration on validation. One priority that has been identified is broadening in-house expertise in validation within these agencies.

7. Evaluation and monitoring

Under the Education Act, municipal adult education and training providers are required to monitor the education they provide. This also applies to the validation carried out as part of municipal adult education and training.

²⁸ SOU 2018:29, Validation in Higher Education – For Credit Award and Lifelong Learning, p. 172 (in Swedish).

²⁹ The Swedish Public Employment Service, the National Agency for Education, the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, the Swedish Council for Higher Education, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and the Swedish ESF Council.

The special state grants available for regional vocational adult education are conditional on validation being offered, and the National Agency for Education therefore monitors validation in the context of that education. At present, however, validation is not monitored comprehensively across adult education as a whole. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate is responsible for supervision and quality audit of municipal adult education and training, while monitoring is the responsibility of the Agency for Education.

The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education is required to report on the numbers of applicants judged eligible for admission on the basis of actual knowledge and skills and, among these, the numbers admitted to the programmes they had applied for. Not until its annual report for 2017 was the Agency able to present this information. Data on the extent to which actual knowledge and skills are assessed for the purposes of awarding credit, on the other hand, are not available.

In the case of higher education, there is no overall monitoring at present of the assessment by HEIs of actual knowledge and skills for admission or credit award purposes. The Swedish Higher Education Authority is the agency responsible for monitoring of HEIs' activities, including official statistics in this area.

The Public Employment Service monitors validation procedures for jobseekers at the individual level. This monitoring covers validation contracted for according to sectoral models or within adult education. A basis thus exists for more advanced analyses of the impacts on participants' chances of finding work after undergoing validation.

The National Delegation for Validation 2015–2019 is tasked with following and analysing the scale and outcomes of validation in the education system and in employment. It presents the overall results of monitoring of the amount of validation undertaken in its annual report. Proposals on how coordinated reporting of the scale of validation should continue will be set out in the Delegation's final report in December 2019.