



Some competence pass initiatives in Norway

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Benefits of documenting learning outcomes

By documenting non-formal and informal learning we dispose the individual to empowerment and increased portability of outcome between different sectors of learning.

The evaluation of the national Validation Project (*Realkompetanseprosjektet*) included a national survey in 2001 and a county survey in 2003 to employees and employers that had participated in pilot projects on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The validation was considered useful for local wage negotiations by 50 % (2001) and 65 % (2003) of the employees. The validation was considered useful for job seeking by 65 % (2001) and 85 % (2003) of the employees. Almost 10 % of the employees had got a new position in the enterprise/organisation in connection with the validation. Among employers, only 10 % considered validation useful for local wage negotiations¹. Employees seem optimistic as to the future economic gains of their validated non-formal and informal learning.

An evaluation of one of the tools developed in technological enterprises had views from employers and employees on possible important areas of application. Individual wage stipulation was considered important by 40 % of both employers and employees. Job seeking outside the enterprise was considered important by 60 % of employers and 80 % of employees². Both the stayers and the movers are likely to profit economically from having their non-formal and informal learning validated.

In 2005 Vox staff interviewed employers and employees in small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas on the advantages of Competence Passport and validation of non-formal and informal learning, for two brochures targeted towards such enterprises.

The interviewees are presented with name and photo. One example is a small cleaning enterprise that had the usual high turnover and much absence through illness, both are now reduced. The key is that all employees get work tasks that they are good at. The formal, non-formal and informal competence of all employees was charted in 2001, resulting in surprises. Some employees had trade certificate in dress-making; their competence was used when the dry-cleaner's introduced less environmental harmful new methods. An employee had competence as gardener, so the enterprise took on maintenance of greenery as a task. The different social skills of employees are used to put together well-functioning teams.

Also productivity improvement was mentioned by two employers:

¹ Agenda (2003): *Evaluering av Realkompetanseprosjektet. Sluttrapport*. Sandvika: Agenda Utredning & Utvikling AS (pp. 126-128).

² Skule, S. & Andersen, B. (2000): *Dokumentasjon av realkompetanse i teknologiindustrien. Evaluering av TBL og Fellesforbundets dokumentasjonsordning for arbeidslivet*. Oslo: Fafo. Fafo-rapport 363 (pp. 42-44).

A meat processing enterprise had during the five last years increasing and conflicting demands from various sources: demands for high quality (customers), low price (retailers), good hygiene (government) and higher profit (owners). To meet the demands, managers and employees cooperated first to survey the working processes as well as the formal, non-formal and informal competences of all employees, then to make individual training plans connected to assigned work tasks. As an ongoing process, all future changes in work tasks will involve training and documentation of employee competence. Productivity and quality is improved.

A furniture producer had invested heavily in new automated machinery some years ago, but only a few employees had competence to operate the machinery. "Two sick employees could have stopped the whole production." The employees' were asked to chart their competence, what they could do. This was compared with managerial needs and plans, resulting in training. Now all machines can be operated by several employees. The enterprise has had a more than 30 % increase in the production in three years, mostly due to automation.

A pilot project 2004-2006 on voluntary documentation in agriculture is supported by the State Agricultural Administration. Farmers are self-employed, but even so their economic situation may be improved by having their non-formal and informal learning validated. The national associations of farmers and small farmers cooperate with partners in Nordland County (the County Governor, the county agricultural administration, the Agricultural Guidance Service). For farmers, to document their non-formal and informal learning may be useful for further development as a farmer, planning future new production (i.e. in niche markets), demands for quality assurance and documentation in relation to the markets. The global changes in agriculture production and markets (EU, WTO etc) are important. Some small-scale farmers may need supplementary income from other kind of work. The national associations have developed a course in how to document their total competence, to be used in study groups of 6-8 farmers. Schemes for CV and Competence Passport (professional competence including economy and ICT, personal/social competence, managerial competence) are part of the course material. The farmers can in four meetings discuss their varied work tasks and learn how to assess their competence and document it, how to find partners that can validate and sign the Competence Passport (i.e. Agriculture Guidance Service staff) and discuss possible needs for more education.

Some tools developed:

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

The national approach recommends taking the following procedure into use³:

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

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

- Paper-based scheme for documentation of individual competence;

³ McHenry, Mohn (2003): *Transfere- national study Norway*, Oslo:Vox

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

In the national validation project different tools were developed. Most digital tools start with self-assessment of the kind of work tasks the employee has performed and responsibilities he/she has held in the enterprise. This self-assessment is then subject to discussion, evaluation and ultimately validation and signed by the employer as a passport, to be combined with a CV. Some tools were jointly developed by employer association and union, with the objective “So simple that it is in demand- So precise that it is sufficient.” While some of the tools developed in working life received favourable evaluations from human resource managers as well as from employees who took part in these projects⁴, the diffusion of documentation tools throughout working life has so far been limited. One reason is that the employees may be sceptical about how the documentation might be used by the employers in times of downsizing⁵.

The existing commercial tools for charting competence in work tasks are for use within an enterprise. The documentation tools have this use too, but aim also to be useful for the employee when applying for a new job in the labour market or when applying for admission to an educational institution on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning.

1 Realdok: an all- in -one tool

Realdok is a tool used both by the administration, the advisors and the assessors at upper secondary school level in 15 counties in Norway. The tool is used for registration, mapping, assessing, documentation and to find training needs for individuals.

For the users of the tool it is possible to build a competence profile and to develop an individual training schedule. The course administration can build the course catalogue into the tool and help individuals to develop a personal training plan.

A model of the tool can be seen at <http://www.jaertek.no/kos/realdok.htm> but the full version is not for free. The owner of the tool, Jærtek, is in constant dialogue with the users (the county councils) to adapt the tool for their needs.

2 The Vox tool: the Competence Card

The different tools developed during the Validation Project were free for enterprises to use, unlike existing commercial tools for charting which work tasks an employee can do. Vox (National Institute for Adult Learning) has made available a Competence Card on their website www.vox.no. Together with the tool is also a guide for how to succeed with the process, some good examples and a database tool for the HRM.

It is important here to mention that the tool Competence Card is only a part of the process of promoting competencies. Before starting to use the tool it is of great importance that everybody involved has got

⁴ Skule, S. & Andersen, B. (2000): *Dokumentasjon av realkompetanse i teknologiindustrien. Evaluering av TBL og Fellesforbundets dokumentasjonsordning for arbeidslivet*. Oslo: Fafo. Fafo-rapport 363.

⁵ Skule, S. & Ure, O. (2004): *Lifelong learning – Norwegian experiences. Identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning*. Oslo: Fafo. Fafo-paper 2004:21

good information about “why” and “how”, and that there is an agreement about what should be the outcome of the process. Vox has developed guidance for the process.

The tool is flexible, it is possible to use terms of key competence adapted to the company. The competences which are exemplified in the tool are a result of a development process.

The tool is not developed for a day-to-day routine, it is meant to be used once or twice a year

The language of the module is the language of working life. Competence Card from different persons with different experiences has been presented for assessors in the education system, and the assessors find the content/language used very informative.

Some key words about the tool related to the common European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning:

- Purpose of validation; according to the common European principles the purpose shall be both formative and summative. This tool and procedure is meant to be both.
- Individual entitlements; the result of the procedure is the individual's property and it is voluntary for the individual to participate
- Obligation of stakeholders; all levels in the company is supposed to be involved in the planning and in the whole process
- Confidence and trust; it is only the individual who has the possibility to change anything in his/hers Competence Card, if needed both the employee and the employer shall sign the end document
- Credibility and Legitimacy; the end document is a result of a process and is therefore credible by the individual who owns it. It is the receiver of the document who shall give it legitimacy.

3 E-portfolio as a tool to record learning outcomes

The Program for Digital Competence 2004-2008 lists the use of e-portfolio as a preferred tool for recording learning outcomes in the information society. The Program is being implemented in cooperation between the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Trade and Industry as part of the governmental *eNorway-plan* on digital competence. In their program they maintain that ICT-based competencies require ICT-based assessments, and that e-portfolios seems a timely approach to this matter. A digital portfolio may include digital sound, video, graphics and hypertext, documenting learning processes and learning outcome. In the final and summative evaluation, a combination of portfolios and more traditional examinations are being recommended.⁶

Norgesuniversitetet (Norway Opening Universities) has developed programs and projects addressing the use of portfolios.⁷ Key activities and experiences include developments and use of digital portfolios in the professional qualification systems of teachers. The project referred to, the PLUTO-project (Project Alternative Assessment Methods in Teacher Training), included experiences with both individual and collective portfolios. The aim of the project was to strengthen links between instruction and assessment,

⁶ UFD (2004): *Program for Digital Competence 2004-2008*.

⁷ norgesuniversitetet.no/seksjoner/skg-Digitale-mapper/;

and to find methods simultaneously functioning as tools of learning and evaluation. Achievements from the project include all three participating institutions implementing e-portfolios as part of learning and evaluations in the programmes for teacher training since 2003. Challenges to such solutions within the formal educational system has been to develop standard criteria for formative assessments, procedures for including external assessors, as well as standards for selection of content in e-portfolios and scope of use and integration of digital media.⁸

The development of Competence Passports may serve as evidence on the use of e-portfolios to facilitate transfer between formal, non-formal and informal learning, as they are intended for credit transfer outside the context of origin.⁹

4 AKS tool - Accumulated knowledge and skills¹⁰

Both the employers (NELFO) and the employees (EL og IT forbundet) organisations agree that documentation and tailored training is necessary for the electro-technical industry. So when the Norwegian national validation project started up in 1999 ELBUS get funding for starting up a VPL-project. AKS-project was a follow up of that pilot project. The tool was developed by ELBUS, Norwegian Electro-technical Research and Development Centre, cooperation between employers and employees organisation. ELBUS main tasks were knowledge development in electro-technical professions.

The AKS tool is a pan-European methodology or procedure that will enable electro-technical or other enterprises to document and assess accumulated knowledge and skills for an employee or potential employee. This methodology is explained in a handbook, and is supported by a web/electronic-based tool to aid the process. The tool will help the individual to record his/her own experience and skills. By 'record' means that the individual will, in a systematic manner, register his/her personalia, qualifications social skills (family life, social activities, interests), milieu and local community (commissions, voluntary duties, affiliations to any societies, sports club, choir), professional skills (work, hobby, interests, etc.) and any wishes or future intentions related to their interests or work. A three part CV will be used for this (1. personalia, 2 professional skills, and 3. general skills).

During the development period it was clear that the tool have to meet these demands:

- Adaptable to large and small companies
- Transferable between companies- domestic
- Transportable between countries – pan-European
- Easy to use both for company and employee
- Standardised documentation
- Identify all skills
- Common system

⁸ munin.hsh.no/lu/pluto/Mappevurdering/sluttrapport291003.doc

⁹ Eldring, Line & Skule, Sveinung (1999): *Kompetansedokumentasjon for ingeniører. Praksis, behov og utfordringer*. Fafo-notat 1999:16. Oslo: Fafo.;

¹⁰ www.aks-international.com

A main goal of using the AKS tool is to increase awareness of non-formal and informal learning and its mutual benefits to the individual employee and the enterprise. The individual will be valued for their accumulated knowledge and skills; the enterprise will be more competitive by better knowing the resources in its workforce at the same time showing their adaptability. The enterprise will be able to evaluate foreign workers more accurately and swiftly. Similarly, it will be easier for the enterprise to establish itself abroad.

5 The DoC tool - Documentation of Competence (DRA)

Documentation of Competence, a model/ format for competence recognition at the enterprise level, is based on close cooperation between the social partners Federation of Norwegian Manufacturing Industries and Norwegian United Federation of Trades Unions (employee org). The development of DoC was partly funded by the Norwegian validation project. The system is supported by CEEMET (Council of European Employers of the Metal, Engineering and Technology-based Industries)

DoC is also part of a sector dialogue addressing the challenges agreed to by the Lisbon and Copenhagen declarations and works in harmony with the EU CV format. This system has been developed in close communication with The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and their representatives in Vox, the national institute for adult learning.

The format covers the sum of all overall skills individuals have acquired through the education system, paid and unpaid work, organisational activities and life in society.

- Formal learning
- Non-formal and informal learning
- Skills and competences

Objectives:

- A well recognised documentation of competence acquired in the workplace and social life.
- Facilitate job-transition within one company and between companies
- Provide useful and relevant information to the company strategic development plan
- Facilitate individual development and access to continuing education
- The responsibility rests mostly with the individual employee, shared with the employer.

Basic requirements to the tool:

- Simple and transparent
- Usable for all companies - SMEs and large
- Well recognised and transferable between companies
- Little bureaucracy
- Low cost

6 The PCD tool- Personal Competence Document¹¹

The Personal Competence Document (PCD) is a system for mapping and documenting competencies based on self-evaluation. Development of the PCD was the result of the national validation project initiated by the Ministry of Education and Vox. The Norwegian Association for Adult Education (NAAL)

¹¹ www.vofo.no

has the overall responsibility for maintaining the PCD. NAAL is a national umbrella organisation for 19 study associations with around 600 000 participants per year.

The PCD is accessible on the NAAL web site. NAAL offer presentations, information and guidance regarding the PCD to organisations and institutions.

The main objective of the PCD system is to stimulate users to map, describe and document the activities they are or have been involved in and the competencies they have developed. Non-formal learning activities and voluntary activities are in focus. The secondary objective is to raise awareness of the multitude of competencies developed in the voluntary sector so that these can be taken into account in the education system and in work life. The PCD system helps the user to document the “totality” of her/his competencies as well as the competencies related to a single activity. The main PCD form will be signed only by the user. The forms for single activities can be signed also by another person responsible for the activities.

In the first part of the main PCD form competencies are described indirectly by focusing on activities. In the second part competencies developed in these activities are described directly. Documentation such as diplomas, certificates, attestations etc. and physical products such as art work, CD etc. are to be listed in order to support the description of competencies. The user decides if and how much of the PCD system to use. It can be used to get an overview of one’s own competencies, in relation to a validation process to enter the formal education system or when applying for a job or preparing for a job interview etc.

The PCD focuses on the competence development aspect of all learning activities in the member organisations. It reminds and underlines member organisations about the fact that all learning activities may form important parts of an individual’s competences that may be relevant for work or further education. Individuals using the PCD will market the learning arena and increase awareness of the study associations as well as the NAAL. The PCD and competencies as a topic is in itself a possible study circle/course topic. Study circles are being tested.

Improved overview of one’s own competence generating activities, increased motivation and self-esteem is likely, increased ability to put one’s competences into words. Getting an overview may make it easier to see what competencies are missing. The use of the PCD may make it easier to decide “where to go”-what learning activities to start with/continue with, what kind of work to look for etc.

When the PCD is used, other parts of society get to know about the activities and value of the voluntary sector including the study associations. This may be the point of departure for cooperation. The PCD is available online¹², and this site offers forms, guidance, examples and information.

The situation today

The mandate of the national Validation Project (*Realkompetanseprosjektet*) was first geared towards the validation of non-formal and informal learning for persons wanting to enter the education system. The social partners moved to extend the mandate to the development of validation tools for working life as well. Nine experimental projects targeting the labour market or working life were carried out during 1999-2002. The projects were carried out by the social partners in different sectors, study associations

¹² <http://193.212.214.18/pkd/>

and county administrations which cooperated with enterprises. Some projects were directed at specific sectors or industries, other projects were focused on a geographical area.

The Basic Agreement is an agreement between the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry (NHO) including all its national and local associations and individual enterprises, and the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) including all its unions and associations (divisions). The Basic Agreement for 2006 - 2009 Chapter VI on Development of competence has a new part, § 16-4 Documentation of formal, non-formal and informal competence: *“The enterprise is requested to have a system for documentation of the individual employees’ experience, courses and practice related to the conditions of work.”*

After the 2008 bargaining between the Norwegian Association of Local and regional Authorities (KS) and the municipalities and counties it is stated that the competence, skills and knowledge of the employees in the local and regional authorities should be mapped. The employer has the overall responsibility. The results of the mapping is supposed to make a platform for further salary/position bargaining.

1 The need

Both the Learning Conditions Monitor¹³ (an annual survey about adult learning, mostly focused on learning at work) and the Vox barometer¹⁴ (nationwide, biannual, quantitative survey monitoring on-the-job-learning) states that routines and schemes for facilitation of learning through working life are moderately dispersed through Norwegian working life. Twenty-three per cent of the employed have participated in organized colleague guidance and 22% in practical experience and job rotation schemes over the last year. The learning that takes place in day-to-day work is experienced by 77% of the employed as useful also for work in other enterprises. When looking at effects of participation in education and training, 78% of the employees experience that further education and longer courses has helped them to do a better job after one year¹⁵.

The Vox Barometer autumn 2006¹⁶ looked at attitudes and experiences related to different topics: Mapping of skills and competences, need for skills, training provided, knowledge of individual rights and responsibilities. The survey included interviews with employers in 1008 companies.

43% of the respondents claim to do mapping of the employee’s competences and skills, and the size of the company is crucial when it comes to whether they do map or not.

When it comes to the methods used for mapping 23% are using informal interviews, 44% are using annual interview/performance appraisal and 32% register systematically the employer’s skills and competences in a database. The different methods used is among others influenced by size of the company, the systematically register method is used by 47% of the companies with more than 50 employees.

¹³ <http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/501/index.htm>

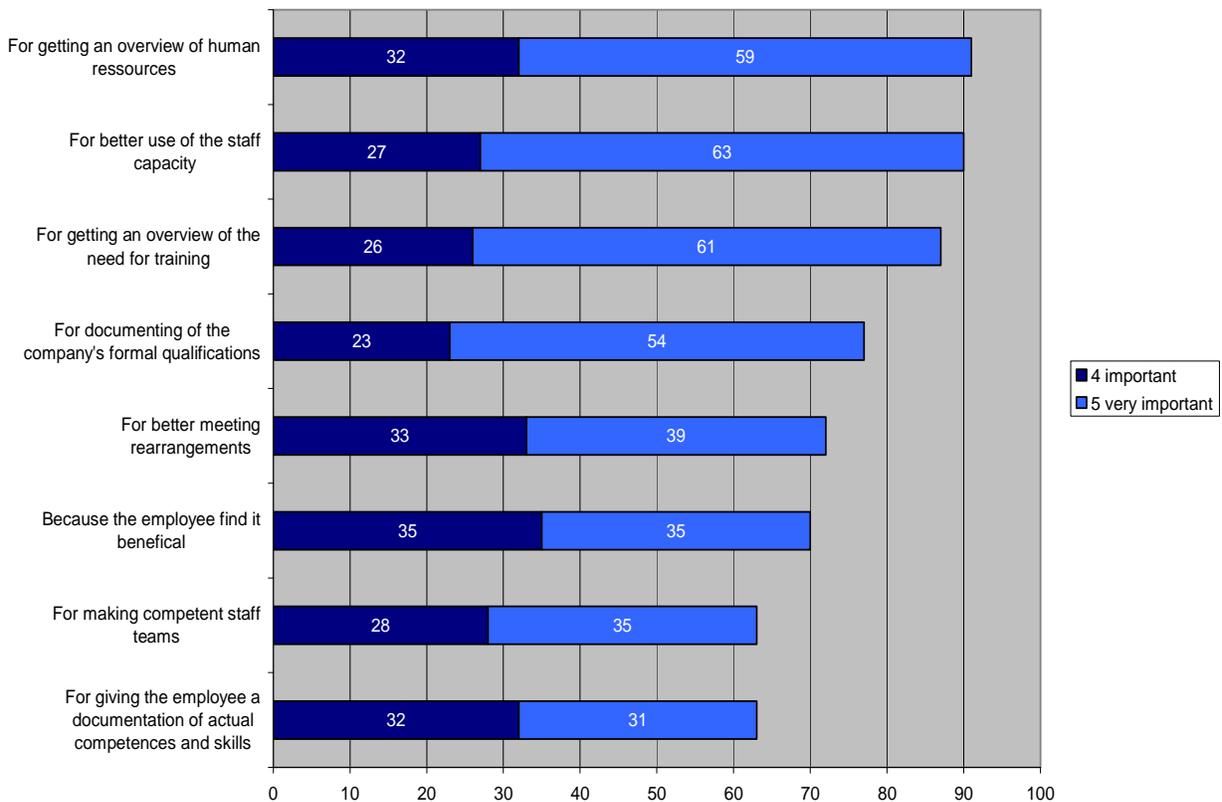
¹⁴ <http://www.vox.no/templates/NewsOverview.aspx?id=317>

¹⁵ Learning Conditions Monitor 2005

¹⁶ Bekkevold, Karl & Hilleren, Irene & Guthu, Lene (2007) *Vox Barometeret 2006*, Oslo:Vox

When asked the question “All-in-all, how important do you think it is to map the employee’s skills?” 93% of those who actually do the mapping responded that this was important (34%) or very important (59%).

The responses to the question of what is the reason for mapping of competences and skills are found in the following table:



2 Validation of competence pass in relation to criteria in education sector

In higher education applicants seeking admission to specific courses will be assessed if they on the basis of their prior learning hold the necessary qualifications for the courses. The assessment emphasis both the specialist content of the course and the teaching arrangements offered to students. Informal and non-formal learning will be assessed mostly through self-declarations and portfolios. Interviews and tests are seldom used.

As part of the European REFINE project, the Norwegian sub-project had two main objectives: achieve insight in the processes concerning assessment of candidates with non-formal and informal learning who

apply for exemption in higher education, and conduct case studies of a limited number of candidates using recently developed tools for documentation of prior learning.¹⁷ The report shows that the selected six institutions lack procedures for the assessment of exemption candidates, and consequently dealt with the candidates in an ad hoc manner. This does not necessarily mean that these institutions are negative to the idea of exemption. Some institutions have always practiced a form of validation of prior learning with regards to admission, as potential students have to document specific skills within the special field (i.e. music) they want to study. Other institutions made preliminary decisions and concluded that exemption might be granted, but that the documentation of skills was not sufficient and the candidates would have to produce documentation of actual competence rather than just a description of practice, however relevant it might seem. The suitability of documentation tools (i.e. Competence Card) was discussed in most institutions. Some of the institutions consider the tools inadequate since they do not specifically relate to the field of study the candidate wants exemption from. Due to lack of national or even local procedures, the institutions had different views and conclusions about the nature of exemption. When asked what the institutions maintain as the maximum number of credits a candidate may get exemption from in a Bachelor degree, the answers varied from a possible exemption of 10 % from each level – i.e. six credits yearly or 18 credits in total in a Bachelor degree – to a possible 30 credits in total in a Bachelor degree.

As a part of the national Validation Project, every county authority received funding for building up an organisation of a recognition system in each county. Most regional authorities organize this work by means of one or more “assessment centres”. Adults can acquire information, guidance and help with the validation process in relation to upper secondary education from supervisors at these centres. The centres are also responsible for quality assurance of the assessment procedure.

For upper secondary education, the following methods have been developed for validation of non-formal learning in respect to the requirements stipulated in the national curricula:

- Dialogue-based method: The dialogue-based method is based on discussions between assessor/specialist and the adult. The specialist focuses on the knowledge and experience of each individual and attends to specific problems and queries in the curriculum. The assessor/specialist can use a computerised or manual tool based on the curriculum in question.

This method requires individual preparation and a one-to-one meeting. The dialogue-based method can be combined with port-folio assessment, self assessment and testing. It has been tested out on a large number of candidates. The conclusion is that the method fits in with both vocational and general subjects. Yet, the degree of testing has to vary from person to person. A dialogue-based method covers tacit knowledge, and seems to be good for adults who have difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics.

- Assessment of portfolio: Assessment on the basis of a portfolio is a method based on written documentation, photos, etc. The candidate sends a “charting” form to a “service centre” together with certificates and reports. Modules and subjects are approved on the basis of the documentation submitted, and additional education is offered so that individuals can acquire the desired certificates. This method demands good written documentation of individuals’ own skills and does not require one-

¹⁷ Haugøy, Grethe & Moe, Frank (2005): *REFINE: Recognising Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education. Final report from the Norwegian sub-project*. Bergen: SEVU, University of Bergen.

to-one meetings. Undocumented and tacit knowledge is difficult to reveal. After admission to upper secondary education, a discussion takes place in order to arrange the course according to actual knowledge and skills.

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

A Vox case study¹⁸ done in five counties in 2005 concluded that the documents provided from the companies to the employees do not include relevant information for the assessors. Four out of five cases use the dialogue based method in the assessment procedure, and do not give much attention to documents. While in the fifth case the assessment of portfolio is the main method.

¹⁸ Røstad, Sigrun & Storli, Randi (2006): *Realkompetanse i praksis*, Oslo:Vox