

# Recognition of Prior Learning within the education system

Danish Government policy paper presented to the Parliament

November 2004



The Danish Ministry of Education  
The Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation  
The Danish Ministry of Culture  
The Danish Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs



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# Table of contents

Preface	3
1: Better education – more people in work	5
2: Recognition of prior learning – for the benefit of all	6
3: Further development of competence assessment within education	7
4: From guidance to recognition of prior learning	10
5: New demands and challenges	13
6: The next steps	15
Appendix 1: Competence assessment within the education system	17
Appendix 2: Recognition of Prior Learning from a European perspective	19

## **Recognition of prior learning within the education system**

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# Preface

## REALkompetencer - det du kan



*REAL competences – what you are capable of*

Recognition of prior learning – or, in the Danish term: ‘Realkompetence’ (‘real competences’) – is about focusing on the individual’s overall competences. The individual must have the opportunity to use and build on his or her competence within the education system, irrespective of where and how the competences have been acquired. The Danish Government has already addressed the issue of furthering the recognition of prior learning within the education system, but there is a definite need to go much further.

The development of the labour market and the world we live in make new demands on our competences. Everybody needs to develop skills and competences in a lifelong learning perspective, if we are to be able to compete and maintain our high standard of living. This is a challenge for the individual, for companies and for our education and training system, requiring enhanced competence development on the labour market. In a wider

context, increased recognition of prior learning also plays an important role in the Government’s latest proposal to strengthen adult education and supplementary training.

This policy paper concludes that recognition of prior learning should be applied in all sections of the education system, and that within relevant areas of education and training – including not least adult education and vocational training – initiatives need to be taken to improve the access to and opportunities for recognition of prior learning. The intention is to improve opportunities for individuals to acquire qualifications and competences that are in demand on a changeable labour market.

As part of the implementation of ‘Better Education’, we will therefore take the initiative to strengthen the recognition of prior learning within the education system in the coming years.

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# 1 Better education – more people in work

The Danish society is facing major challenges in the coming years if we are to do well in the global competition and maintain high employment. The continuous readjustment to the knowledge society and the new trends in the world around us, such as increasing outsourcing of jobs, make new demands on our competences.

Therefore, it has never been so important as it is now that individuals keep acquiring new skills throughout their lives. This is a challenge for both individuals and companies, and requires an increased adult education and vocational training effort on the labour market, not least to support all the low skilled and those who are struggling to get a foothold on the labour market.

The education system plays an essential role in our society as a provider of qualifications and competences that are recognised and accepted within the labour market. A well-functioning education system characterised by high quality and flexibility is an essential precondition for promoting growth, wealth and welfare.

Not only education provides useful competences. We learn in many different settings in life. Recognition of prior learning builds on the basic notion that the individual should not learn the same thing twice but should have the opportunity to use and build on his or her competences, irrespective of where and how they were acquired. The Government has already taken steps to promote recognition of prior learning in, for instance, the vocational initial and adult education programmes, within mainstream tertiary education and the adult education system at tertiary level. But the work is far from done.

It is the Government's intention to strengthen individuals' opportunities for having recognised within the education system the competences that they have achieved

through education, work, liberal adult education and activities in civil society such as membership of NGOs, sports clubs etc. Good results have been achieved in other countries, such as France and Norway. It would raise the general competence level and benefit employment and readjustment within the labour market if individuals – based on their own qualifications and needs – can get a credit transfer of their prior learning and thereby further develop their competences within the education system in a flexible manner.

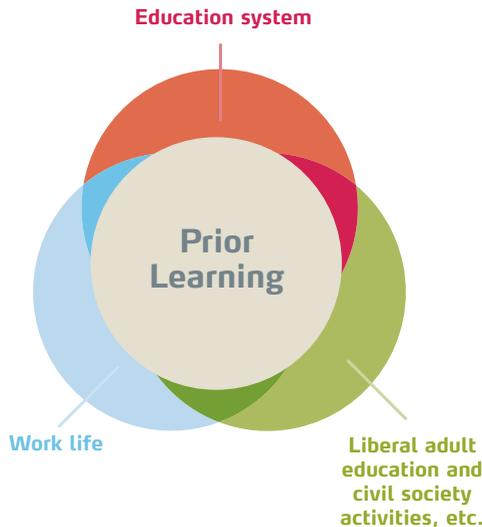
As part of the implementation of 'Better Education', the four ministers responsible for education will take the initiative, each within his or her own field, to strengthen the recognition of prior learning within the education system in the coming years. This applies specifically to adult education and vocational training, but also to qualifying mainstream and tertiary education.

Increased recognition of prior learning should be seen as an essential aspect of the Government's initiatives to further develop a user-friendly, flexible and well-functioning education system where quality is the absolute main priority. It also supports the Government initiatives 'More people in work' and 'Faster through the education system' as well as the Government's integration efforts.

Furthermore, this Government initiative will also be an important Danish contribution to European cooperation on promoting the recognition of competences within the labour market and facilitating access to lifelong learning.

## 2 Recognition of prior learning – for the benefit of all

Prior learning comprises an individual's overall knowledge, skills and competences. This applies whether they are acquired within the formal education system, through on-the-job training or through an in-house employee training course. Other learning settings include liberal adult education activities, such as a stay at a folk high school, through which participants gain many personal and social skills, an evening class computer course, and participation in civil society activities, e.g. as a volunteer for a charity.



Our education system currently provides the opportunity to get credit transfer for previously completed education in accordance with the credit transfer provisions of all educational programmes. This is a significant contribution towards securing flexible and coherent pathways through the education system that allows the individual to build on previous education. However, credit transfer for formal education forms only part of an individual's overall competence.

Recognition of prior learning is about focusing on individuals' overall skills and competences – and not just those for which they may have certificates. This makes new demands on the education system and presupposes that relevant methods are developed to ensure a reliable assessment of an individual's prior learning, including the competences gained at work, through participation in liberal adult education and civil society activities, etc. Another precondition of enhanced recognition of prior learning is that the individual, companies, the social partners and the stakeholders within liberal adult education and civil society take on a co-responsibility for rendering competences visible and documenting them.

Better interplay between the different learning arenas will provide excellent prospects for the individual, companies and society in general:

- It is motivating for the individual when the focus is on what the individual is capable of.
- It will make the individuals' competences more visible and contribute towards giving everybody – and perhaps particularly those with a practical turn of mind – the chance to utilise their potential to a much greater extent.
- It can provide better opportunities for the unemployed and refugees/immigrants to get started in the education system and qualify to join the labour market.
- It will support a more targeted demand for and provision of education.
- Financial resources are utilised better when unnecessary education is avoided and when students move more quickly through the education system.
- It will contribute to increasing the overall level of educational attainment within our society.

Recognition of prior learning within the education system will create a new and better basis for a competence boost and for increased mobility on the Danish labour market.

### 3 Further development of competence assessment within education

To a certain extent, competence assessment and recognition of prior learning within the education system already exists.

Within adult vocational education and training, access has now been provided within adult vocational training programmes (AMU) and basic adult education (GVU) for individual competence assessment, of which the objective is to recognise the individual's prior learning. Within initial vocational education and training programmes, competence assessment is used as a tool to prepare the students' individual study plans.

Experience with competence assessment in AMU and GVU shows, among other things, that students get a much more targeted education and training, and companies find that it qualifies their demand and strengthens education and training initiatives when a study plan is based on a specific assessment of the individual student's competences. The concrete outcome of a competence assessment in relation to AMU is that on the basis of an identification of a student's competence vis-à-vis the job requirements, a study plan can be put together that describes the educational path that the particular student should take in order to achieve the relevant competence requirements.

Recognition of prior learning also plays an important role within the adult education system at advanced levels, in which assessment of relevant work experience forms part of the admission requirements for e.g. an adult further education programme (VVU) or a Master's degree.

Within the arts education programmes, emphasis is placed on the applicants' talent and relevant qualifications by conducting, for instance, entrance examinations. Likewise, recognition of prior learning is utilised within the admission procedure for the maritime educational institutions, and the same principle is also used for the selection of candidates

for research programmes where employment with a company serves as qualification for admission to the Industrial PhD course. Moreover, with its latest improvements of the admission system for tertiary education programmes, the Government has emphasised that the educational institutions may continue to admit students on the basis of an assessment of the individual applicant's prior learning.

However, the opportunities we provide for assessment and recognition of competences that have been gained at work or from taking part in a liberal adult education course or association activities etc. remain limited. As a consequence, the Government wishes to expand access to individual competence assessment within the education system.

The various areas of education and training, not least the area of adult education and vocational training, are to provide adults with the opportunity of having an individual assessment of their prior learning. In this assessment, importance is attached to all types of previous learning and competences acquired.

This development is to build on existing opportunities and is intended to be further developed within the individual areas of education. In the areas of education, within which it is currently not possible to get an assessment of prior learning, it must be considered how such a system could be implemented gradually and in the most appropriate manner.

Assessment and recognition of prior learning is to provide the individual with more flexible conditions for meeting the admission requirements of an education programme of his or her choice or to complete a shortened, individually organised education programme. This does not have any impact on the admission requirements or the admission level of any education programme; it merely changes the way in which applicants may meet

**The Government finds that the development should be based on the following principles:**

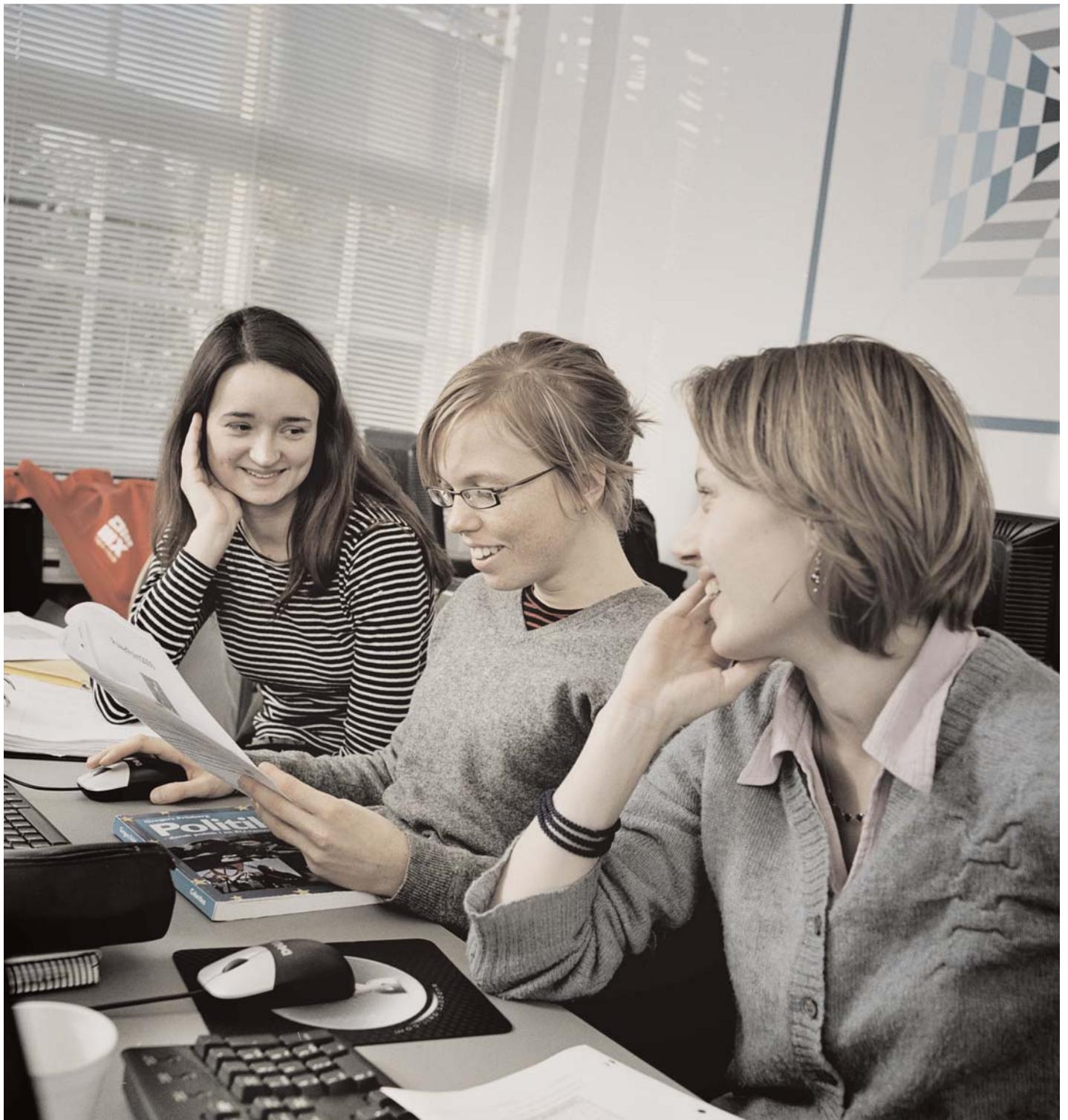
- The individual citizen should be able to request an assessment of his or her prior learning based on the framework and regulations applicable within the individual areas of education.
- The individual also has a responsibility for contributing to the documentation of his or her prior learning.
- A user fee may be charged for a competence assessment, excepting the low skilled.
- A competence assessment should always be based on the objectives and admission requirements of the education programme in question.
- The individual's competences should be recognised, irrespective of where and how they were acquired, but without compromising the quality/standard of the education and training programmes.
- The methods used must ensure a reliable assessment, inspiring confidence in the outcome.
- The result of the assessment should be documented by issuing a certificate.

the requirements, viz. by getting recognition of competences that are specifically assessed as corresponding to the specific requirements. In addition, the individual should also have the opportunity to request a formal certificate of education for a part of an education programme purely on the basis of recognition of the particular individual's prior learning.

Objectives and access requirements etc. for an individual competence assessment must always be set in accordance with the objectives and requirements of the particular education and training programme. Within relevant areas of education, we might consider stipulating minimum requirements as regards age and number of years of relevant work experience or similar as a condition for access to a competence assessment. Likewise, there may be a need for specific requirements in respect of courses providing access to licensed occupations.

In other words, recognition of prior learning focuses on documenting that an individual has qualifications and competences that – from the point of view of equivalence – are assessed as corresponding to a certain goal and level of the education programme in question. It does not focus on what the individual may be missing in relation to a (higher) level or degree.

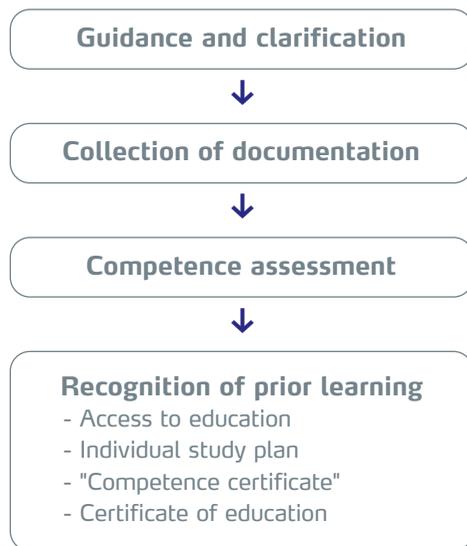
These principles are in line with the Lisbon objectives as well as the Bologna and Copenhagen declarations, which also lay down principles for the task of developing common European references for transparency, comparability, transferability and quality assurance. Recognition of prior learning will also be a key theme during the Danish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2005.



## 4 From guidance to recognition of prior learning

The success or otherwise of assessment and recognition of prior learning depends entirely on whether the methods used ensure a reliable assessment of an individual's prior learning. This is a prerequisite for people having faith in the assessments and for their acceptance within the education system and on the labour market. The competence assessment in the education system also requires qualified guidance and support for the documentation of the individual's prior learning.

The figure illustrates the process of making a competence assessment:



From the individual's point of view, access to guidance, documentation, assessment and recognition should be presented as a coherent offer.

### Guidance

There must be good opportunities to obtain guidance about assessment and recognition of prior learning within the education system. Educational institutions should guide students/applicants about their options and about the regulations, giving the individual the chance to clarify ambitions and goals, including establishing the relevant level of education and the course-specific orientation of the assessment.

Information and guidance should also be on offer within the guidance system and in cooperation with other relevant guidance providers. There must be a system in place to refer the individual to a relevant educational institution, and access should be provided to electronically based information on the opportunities of getting a competence assessment.

### Personal documentation of prior learning

The individual is responsible for collecting the relevant documentation of his or her prior learning, which is to be included in the competence assessment. This may include documentation from employers, from participation in seminars, training activities or liberal adult education activities, etc. It could also be the individual's own assessment of relevant experience gained from, for instance, working as a volunteer for a charity. The guidance provided is to facilitate access to the tools that support the documentation.

### Competence assessment

Typically, it is an educational institution that carries out a competence assessment, based on the individual's documentation of prior learning. The assessment has to be produced on the basis of a variety of methods and tools with a view to the individual's prior learning being demonstrated and assessed in a reliable way vis-à-vis the specific requirements of the education programme. If required, there must be the option of a competence clarifying course of up to a few days' duration. Other forms of evaluation, other than traditional tests, must also be included,

and if relevant, such evaluations could take place in e.g. the workplace.

The methods that can be used for assessment of prior learning include:

- Written documentation of competences in the form of a CV or a personal document file etc. that can form part of the basis for the assessment.
- Structured interviews during the different phases of the assessment process, including for instance use of forms for assessing the individual's competence against the objectives and course-specific content of the education programme aimed for.
- Observation and assessment of the applicant's skills and competences. For example, the applicant may be asked to solve a practical task, which is relevant in relation to the competences that the education and training programme aims for.
- Tests and examinations to assess the individual's theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

A competence assessment is likely to include a combination of different methods, adjusted in accordance with the individual's qualifications and choice of education. We provide below two examples of the process from guidance to recognition of prior learning.

After completion of the assessment, the educational institution will normally, on request, issue a 'competence certificate', which is a certificate documenting the result of the assessment.

## Example

For many years, Tove Hansen (TH) has worked as an unskilled clerk in a major export company, and now she would like her skills documented to be able to prove her competence. Having discussed the issue with the management, she contacts the local business college to obtain a competence assessment within office work. This was the beginning of the following process:

### **Guidance interview at the college:**

- Information on the administrative/secretarial course at the college and clarification of TH's preferences as regards specialisation
- Appointment fixed for competence assessment
- TH receives a competence documentation form

### **Collection of documentation of prior learning:**

- TH's certificates from previous school education
- TH's own description of job experience and competences
- References from employers and from staff of the association that TH has been working for
- Documentation of in-house supplementary training, adult vocational courses and an evening class in English

### **Competence assessment – 3 days:**

- Review of TH's personal portfolio
- Testing of practical and theoretical knowledge and skills, including tests in computer literacy test and English
- Concluding interview and overall assessment of prior learning vis-à-vis the administrative/secretarial course at the college

### **Recognition of Tove Hansen's prior learning:**

- First year of the basic vocational education and training (former version), adult vocational training (AMU) courses and in-house IT courses
- Employment in accounts and HR administration
- Evening class in English
- Treasurer in a major sports club

### **Education plan for a basic adult education programme within secretarial/administrative skills lasting 14 weeks:**

1. Computer literacy level 3 and spreadsheets level 1 (AMU courses)
2. Specialist subjects: sales and marketing, quality and service as well as planning tools (VET single subjects at college)
3. Concluding examination

## Recognition of prior learning

The recognition of a given individual's competence assessment depends on the objective as well as the result of the assessment of the individual's prior learning vis-à-vis a given education and training programme. The recognition may give admission to an education programme of the individual's choice or a reduction in the length of an education programme, or it may result in the issue of formal documentation in the form of certificates of education.

When an individual is seeking admission to an education and training programme or a reduction in the length of an education programme, the particular institution of education will continue to have academic responsibility in its decision on any given assessment and recognition.

If a competence assessment provides the basis for the issue of certificates of education purely on the basis of recognition of prior learning, the recognition of the assessment must be effected by independent bodies within the individual areas of education, e.g. external examiners, trade committees or other special evaluation boards.

In the long term, it may be considered whether there is a general need to establish institution-independent access to recognition of prior learning assessments that can be implemented within the individual areas of education and training.

## Example

Thomas Berg is a skilled plumber and wants to start his own business as a certified engineer. He has contacted the student guidance office at the nearest academy of professional higher education and has received information on the two-year programme leading to certified plumber, and the possibilities of having the course shortened. This was the beginning of the following process:

### Collection of documentation of prior learning:

- TB's certificates of education from previous schooling, education and courses
- Description of and documentation for job experience and competences within the plumber (gas) sector
- Documentation for coach training in a sports association

### Application for admission to the HVAC course:

- Application for a reduction in the length of the course
- A completed assessment form
- TB's documentation for relevant qualifications and competences

### Guidance interview and competence assessment – 1 day:

- Review of assessment form and documentation material
- Test in quality management and costing
- Concluding interview and overall assessment of credit

### Recognition of Thomas Berg's prior learning:

- The PC driving license, A-certificate and a course in organisational structure taken in conjunction with the Danish *Teknonom* course (specialised technical study)
- Job experience and competences within the provision of quotations, quality management and accounts
- Coach training from Danish Gymnastics and Sports Associations

### The HVAC course is reduced by 20 weeks:

1. Reduction in information technology, corporate techniques/costing
2. Reduction in the subject quality
3. Reduction in the subject organisational structure
4. Concluding long essay in specialist subject

## 5 New demands and challenges

The development of access to competence assessment within the education system gives rise to new demands and challenges for the educational institutions and the many different users (students, employers, educational institutions) of the competences provided by the education system. This applies particularly to the following areas:

### **Quality assurance of education programmes**

It is crucial that the quality and standard of education programmes are maintained. The users on the labour market and within the education system must not legitimately question the value of the competences that any given individual has achieved, including any credit for prior learning, within the education system.

Working with competence assessments makes new demands on the guidance provided by the educational institutions, on their teaching staff's competences and on their organisational structure. With the competence assessments comes the requirement for education programmes that are flexibly organised in accordance with the needs and potential of the individual student, without this having a detrimental effect on the quality, leading to higher drop-out rates or increasing the average completion time. It will pose a challenge to the educational institutions in their planning and in the pedagogical development of the teaching.

Assessment and recognition of prior learning within the education system must therefore be supported by tools, contributing towards ensuring quality. These tools include the following:

- Guidance for the educational institutions regarding objective, scope and terms for carrying out competence assessments.
- The educational institutions render visible the requirements and procedures for assessing prior learning, for instance on their Web sites.

- Development of relevant methods and tools for competence assessment within the individual areas of education and training and at the educational institutions.
- Support for the development of guidance and teaching competences at the educational institutions.
- Quality checks carried out at the educational institutions as part of the general monitoring and evaluations of the different areas of education as and when required.

In addition, more work is needed on deciding how education programme objectives and standards can be described as competence objectives in future education orders, competence descriptions and study plans, etc. This will provide a better basis for the assessment and recognition of the prior learning that an individual has acquired, and will therefore also contribute towards ensuring quality.

### **Better utilisation of the resources of the education system**

Recognition of prior learning can contribute to a more targeted provision of education and training, and better utilisation of available financial resources. For many people on the labour market – not least the low skilled – an offer of competence assessment could be the first step towards a more targeted upgrading of skills and thereby also, from society's point of view, a better utilisation of resources.

It is attractive to everybody that we economise with time and money spent on education and competence development. In this way, we avoid waste and unnecessary education, as nobody needs to learn the same thing twice. This also means that a greater number of people can participate in education and training for the same money if individuals get their courses reduced or are given the option of acquiring formal qualifications on the basis of recognition of prior learning.

As a consequence, there may be a need to use manage-

ment tools that can help regulate the activity in connection with prior learning assessments, ensuring that within the budget available, priority continues to be awarded to those with the lowest level of education and training. In fact, the Government will seek the introduction of a graduated user fee, which means that an individual competence assessment remains free of charge for the low skilled.

It is also important that the educational institutions have the proper financial incentives to recognise the prior learning of any given applicant. There is a delicate balance between offering financial incentives that encourage the institutions to recognise applicants' prior learning and ensuring that recognition is only given when due so as to avoid a detrimental effect on quality. We must make sure that the financial incentives support the educational institutions in developing a sure and well-balanced method of recognising the individual's prior learning.

### **Access to clear information and guidance**

Access to clear information and guidance is essential for both the individual applicant and companies. Thus, the guidance system must be in a position to provide its users with clear information on the possibilities of competence assessment in relation to the education system. Staff must be able to refer to relevant educational institutions and organisations etc. and every effort must be made to foster a good working relationship with the information/guidance services with the various employment and integration initiatives both locally and regionally.

The guidance portal, which was developed in connection with the Government's youth guidance reform, will also come to include information and guidance on competence assessment in addition to the tools that users can avail themselves of in order to clarify and document prior learning in connection with an individual competence assessment.

### **Interaction between work and leisure pursuits**

Recognition of prior learning also places a particular focus on the ways in which an individual's competences can be made visible and documented. Thus, the methods and tools that the individual can use to describe and document his or her prior learning are of great importance for the assessment and recognition vis-à-vis the education system, and they will also be of benefit to the individual on the labour market, for instance in connection with changing jobs.

The individual should also hold part of the responsibility for documenting his or her competences acquired at work or during leisure pursuits, though it must remain on a voluntary basis. Moreover, it is essential that a competence documentation relating to an individual's working life is based on a close and trusting relationship between the individual and the management at his or her place of work. In fact, there are already a variety of tools, developed by companies, organisations related to the labour market and others, and there are also a number of tools available for job seeking (CV tools) that can be used as part of a competence assessment.

However, there is also the need for developing documentation tools in the form of a portfolio in order to ensure the best possible interaction between people's work and leisure pursuits – and the competence assessment within the education system. The experience gained in other countries, particularly in connection with development work in Norway both in companies and within the liberal adult education and voluntary sectors, shows that it contributes towards good results. Such documentation tools should be developed in close cooperation with the social partners, the liberal adult education and voluntary sectors and other relevant stakeholders in order to achieve the greatest possible use and effect. Documentation of prior learning is also included in the work undertaken by the Folk High School Committee.

## 6 The next steps

Increased recognition of prior learning within the education system will support the Government's initiatives to maintain high employment and our standard of living in Denmark. It will give the individual better opportunities to flexibly improve their qualifications and acquire the competences that are required on the labour market.

New opportunities for having one's prior learning recognised will be an important contribution to furthering the individual's participation in lifelong learning and will there-

fore play an important role in the renewal of the Danish education system.

Enhanced recognition of prior learning will also support the mobility within the labour market and constitute an important Danish contribution to realising the joint objectives of the European cooperation regarding increased mobility and access to lifelong learning. It will bring Denmark to the fore in these efforts.

### **The Government will take the initiative to provide better access to having all forms of prior learning assessed and recognised within the education system.**

This Government initiative will be implemented by:

- Introducing better opportunities for recognising prior learning within the education system, where such provisions do not already exist. The improvement is to be implemented gradually, starting in the adult education and vocational training area taking effect from 1 August 2006. Legal amendments are not generally required, only within a few areas, such as the introduction of a joint concept for individual competence assessment across the areas of adult vocational training (AMU) and Basic Adult Education (GVU).
- Preparing action plans for the improvement within the individual areas of education before 1 January 2006.
- Initiating development work at educational institutions with a view to developing methods and principles etc. ensuring reliability and quality.

- Developing tools that support documentation of prior learning. The Ministry of Education will take this initiative in cooperation with the social partners and stakeholders from the liberal adult education sector, voluntary organisations etc.

At the same time, the Government will take the initiative to:

- Ensure that information and guidance on the recognition of prior learning will form part of the guidance system and be included in the work undertaken by the tripartite committee on lifelong skills enhancement and education and training for all on the labour market, which the Government has appointed.
- Provide information and advice initiatives for citizens and companies and access to IT supported information on the new guidance portal 'The Education Guide'.



## APPENDIX 1:

### COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

To a certain extent, prior learning is already recognised within the education system. All education and training programmes at all levels have provisions regarding credit transfer, whereby individuals are credited for having completed part of their current course on account of previously completed studies (though typically not competences acquired outside the education system). However, in some areas, particularly within adult education and training, individual competence assessment has become part of legislation, the objective being to recognise prior learning acquired also outside the education system.

#### Upper secondary education

Within general upper secondary education, a new A Level reform has introduced a credit transfer system for A Level students based on an assessment of the individual student's prior learning. The objective is to give the students the opportunity to get credit transfers for previously completed studies, stays abroad, etc. and therefore be granted admission to subjects at a higher level or extra optional subjects or – if the particular credit transfer is very substantial – a reduced A Level course.

Within initial Vocational Education and Training a general principle of individual competence assessments of applicants as a basis for preparation of individual study plans has been introduced. In connection with recent amendments of legislation, similar provisions now apply at the institutions of social and health education.

#### Tertiary education

Within tertiary education, the individual educational institutions may – as previously – grant admission to students on the basis of individual assessments of these applicants' qualifications when the applicants have actual qualifications that are comparable to the general admission requirements.

In June 2004, the Government decided to change the admissions system for tertiary education with effect from summer 2007. The quota system under restricted admission up to now has a number of weaknesses, as it has raised many false hopes about getting a quota II place through an often futile hunt for points. The objective of the new admissions system is, firstly, to encourage and assist young people to complete their studies faster and minimise the time between completing their A Levels and continuing their studies at tertiary level, and secondly, to strengthen the course-specific qualifications of the successful applicants in order to reduce the drop-out rate.

Quota I, which is based on the results from the qualifying examination, will – with minor adjustments – continue to be the absolute main admission route to the studies where admission is restricted.

Quota II has been changed. Quota II a applies to certain selected studies and provides a small group of applicants with a further chance of admission after a reduction in the quotient, including adjustment for any relevant course-specific skills enhancement. With respect to the other subgroup, quota II b, the educational institutions are still able to admit students following individual assessments and entrance examinations or similar. There must be room for exemptions, i.e. for applicants who do not meet the general admission requirements in the form of A levels etc. but who have actual qualifications that – following a competence assessment – are considered comparable with A Levels and who also meet specific admission requirements, if any, for the particular course in question. Thus, quota II b provides opportunities for prior learning assessment of the individual applicants.

In short, the new system clearly attaches importance to qualifications for studying but also provides opportunities

for prior learning assessment with the aid of examinations, interviews, etc.

### **Studies under the management of the Ministry of Culture**

The applicants for the studies under the management of the Ministry of Culture are admitted mainly on the basis of entrance examinations. Similarly, the documentation of the qualifications that the students acquire during their courses is based on final-year performances/exhibitions/projects together with auditions and portfolios. Thus, both admissions to and examinations from the studies within the field of the Ministry of Culture are based mainly on assessment of 'actual competence'. Only the schools of architecture and the library school admit students via quotas I and II, and therefore the Government's amendments to the quota system also apply here. Admissions via quota II at the schools of architecture are still based on entrance examinations.

### **Maritime training and education**

One of the characteristics of the maritime training and education programmes is that practically all of them provide access to licensed occupations, governed by international regulations, which stipulate set study programmes and in-service training.

A system of prior learning assessments has already been introduced in a general form in these training and education programmes. For all maritime training and education programmes, the individual institution of education has the option to recognise and award a credit transfer for qualifications acquired through work experience or previous studies following a separate individual assessment. On the basis of this assessment, the educational institution will provide an adjusted study programme for the individual. Particularly in respect of the engine training course, special guidelines have been drawn up to assess the prior

learning of ratings with a view to ensure these individuals fast and efficient access to the maritime trading certificates.

### **Vocational Adult education and training**

Applicants are offered individual competence clarification (IKA) within the adult vocational training programmes (AMU). The objective is to prepare individual study plans based on prior learning assessments within AMU and relevant Vocational Education and Training single subjects included in joint competence descriptions in accordance with the Act on AMU.

At the basic level of the Adult Education System, Basic Adult Education (GVU), the school carries out individual competence assessments (IKV) of applicants aged 25 and above with a minimum of two years' relevant work experience. The objective is to provide low skilled adults with the opportunity to acquire the competence of a VET qualification based on a competence assessment and an individual study plan, of which the contents and duration are adjusted to the individual student's competences. IKV and IKA are to be continued as a joint concept.

At the advanced levels of the Adult Education System, a minimum of two years' relevant work experience is one of the admission requirements for short further education programmes that must also be based on the individual applicant's practical experience.

## APPENDIX 2:

### RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING FROM A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

At EU level, recognition of prior learning, in particular non-formal and informal learning, has come to the fore over the last few years, and a number of European countries have demonstrated an increased interest in promoting a credit transfer system and recognising in particular non-formal and informal learning.

In the European Commission's communication of 21 November 2001 'Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality', it is emphasised that an extensive European initiative 'valuing learning' is regarded as a condition for creating a European area of lifelong learning. The Commission's initiative focuses heavily on identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning – in addition to transfer and mutual recognition of formal examination certificates etc. In connection with the Commission's consultation on a memorandum on lifelong learning in spring 2001, a majority of the member states, including Denmark, stated that valuing learning was given high priority in their national education strategies.

Also the social partners' European organisations published in 2002 a joint publication, which emphasises that recognition and validation of competences and qualifications form a joint priority at European level.

In December 2003, the Commission submitted a proposal for decision in the European Parliament and in the Council on a single framework on the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass). The principal idea is to collect documents that aim at creating transparency of qualifications and competences under one hat in the form of a document portfolio. Citizens have the choice whether to use a single Europass document or the entire Europass portfolio.

#### The European CV

The most important document in the Europass portfolio is the European CV, on to which other Europass documents will be linked. The European CV is a personal document that is completed by its owner. It has a common format that includes a number of categories, which it is up to the individual to complete with relevant information:

- Information on personal circumstances, on language qualifications, work experience and educational background
- Further personal competences, particularly technical, organisational, artistic and social skills etc.
- Further details, which may be attached to the CV in the form of one or several appendices
- Individuals who complete the electronic form – either downloaded or on-line – must be able to remove the fields that they do not wish to complete, so that the finished document does not appear with empty fields.

As part of the follow-up to the report on the future objectives of the education and training systems and with reference to the Copenhagen declaration, the Council met with government representatives in May 2004 and passed the conclusions on common principles for identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. It is emphasised that common principles are necessary to encourage and guide the development of trustworthy approaches and systems and ensure the comparability and wide acceptance. The principles are to be applied on a voluntary basis by the member states and stakeholders.

For many years, a number of member states have already been operating schemes for recognition or documentation of non-formal and informal competences, thus providing different solutions to the question of how to promote recognition of actual competence. France, Holland, Finland and Norway are among the countries that particularly in recent years

have introduced and developed new national schemes, which may be useful and serve as inspiration for a similar Danish initiative.

It is clear that generally the objective of developing systems for the assessment of prior learning is to render more effective overall education initiatives – within the education system and in respect of interaction between the education system and skills enhancement on the labour market. The education system needs to be geared towards admitting and testing candidates on the basis of their prior learning, thus avoiding unnecessary education and reducing study completion times. This idea is developed in Finland and Holland and fully implemented in France and Norway, where it is possible to be awarded an examination certificate or ‘competence certificate’ purely on the basis of an assessment of an individual’s prior learning.

Following a long tradition supported by legislation, France introduced in 2002 a new Act on recognition of experience, ensuring everybody access to having competences acquired through work experience etc. recognised with a view to not only allowing candidates to enter for examinations and be awarded diplomas, but also allowing candidates to be awarded diplomas purely on the basis of validation of their prior learning. In practical terms, the new Act means that where previously an individual could use his or her recognised prior learning as part of an official education, the same individual can now, in principle, be awarded a certificate of education purely on recognition of learning outside the formal education system. This is an extensive and very ambitious attempt to use prior learning i.e. an ‘actual competence’ system to reform an education system with a traditional focus on official education and titles. The objective of the 2002 Act is to strengthen the opportunities for employment, to improve the management of human resources and to promote the mobility of labour.

In Holland, the prevalence of recognising informally acquired skills and qualifications has no basis in legislation. However, in a cross-ministerial task force, the Dutch government has initiated the creation of such a system, relating primarily to

the standards in the 1996 Act on vocational education and training. The overall objective is to strengthen lifelong learning. The system is intended to motivate learning, emphasising that potential candidates do not start from scratch but are already well on the way. As a consequence, the actual competence assessment is marketed under the slogan ‘The glass is half full’. The three-part strategy has been: establishing an infrastructure, mobilising general support and developing new methods through pilot projects.

Norway has concentrated on the actual competence project *Realkompetanseprosjektet* via wide, decentralised research and development activities during 1999–2002. The objective has been to develop a new national system and new methods to document and assess actual competence, irrespective of where and how they were acquired. In the long term, the objective will also be to facilitate career development, mobility and flexibility at work. The Norwegian parliament and government have set the agenda, but the social partners have been involved from the beginning. Also the ‘third sector’, i.e. institutions of liberal adult education, associations and the voluntary sector have been involved in the development project. All three players have developed their own methods and tools. It has now become a legal right for the individual to receive an individual competence assessment on admission to a secondary education programme, including a vocational training course, and on admission to tertiary education. After the amendment of the Act on training, it has become possible for individuals to be awarded examination or ‘competence certificates’ purely on the basis of the assessment of their actual competences.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in February 2003 a working group on ‘Validation of prior learning’ under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers published a report, which on the basis of an assessment of the individual member states’ systems points to a framework for a joint initiative. The objective was to make a contribution towards qualifying the member states’ initiatives in respect of recognition of prior learning and, for instance, provide qualified opportunities for making contributions to the ongoing work within the EU.



Denmark has many and undreamt-of competences, when it comes to taking up the challenges that come with the development on the labour market and with the world as it is today. This is a potential that we must strive to become better at rendering visible, utilising and building on, by focusing on what the individual is really capable of.

The Government has submitted this report on the recognition of prior learning within the education system to Parliament as a contribution to an offensive competence strategy intended to prepare our country for global competition and the knowledge society.

The Government has already started promoting the recognition of prior learning within the education system. However, the main message of this policy paper is that in the light of Denmark's need to strengthen the knowledge and competence level, we need to go much further.