

NOKUT's reports and analyses

NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees

Pilot project February–May 2016

May 2016



NOKUT 

NOKUT's work should contribute to society's trust in the quality of Norwegian higher education and higher vocational education, as well as recognized foreign higher education. Through a series of reports, "NOKUT's reports and analyses", we seek to contribute to increased knowledge about conditions within higher education and higher vocational education that are of importance to the quality of studies, and to provide increased knowledge about conditions concerning recognition of foreign education in Norway. Data for the reports are obtained through NOKUT's activities within evaluation, accreditation and recognition, or as a result of specific projects.

We hope our analyses and results may be of use in the work on recognition of foreign education, and that it can provide ideas and stimulus for the educational institutions' work on quality assurance and further development of the offered studies.

Title:	NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees
Author(s):	Marina Malgina and Stig Arne Skjerven
Date:	2016.05.31
Reportnumber:	2016-1
ISSN-nbr	1892-1604

Preface

In this report, NOKUT will summarize experiences from a pilot project for evaluation of foreign qualifications for refugees, persons in refugee-like situations and persons without verifiable documentation, carried out in the time-period February–May 2016.

Several international stakeholders focus on Norway as a pioneer in the work on recognition of refugees' qualifications. NOKUT has extensive experience in this field, especially through the UVD-procedure, NOKUT's recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation, which is specifically adapted for refugees.

NOKUT is presenting a proposal for a new type of evaluation procedure, as a supplement to the existing recognition procedures. The new procedure is based on the method developed and tested in the pilot project. The method, on which the pilot project is based, corresponds to the proposal from NOKUT and UK NARIC on a *European Qualifications Passport for Refugees*.

We have gained many positive experiences through this project. These experiences will be adapted into further work with this group of applicants.

NOKUT hopes that this report will be a useful input into the further work of national and international agents on the development of better and more including offers of recognition services for refugees, persons in a refugee-like situation and persons without verifiable documentation.

Oslo, 31. May 2016



Terje Mørland
Director General, NOKUT

Synopsis

The need for a new recognition scheme

In 2015, Norway, as well as many other countries in Europe, experienced a significant increase in the number of refugees. As a result, the number of refugees with qualifications who will apply for NOKUT's General Recognition is expected to increase significantly in 2016, as well as in 2017. From Syria alone, close to 1,000 applicants can be expected in the coming year. Simultaneously, NOKUT is seeing an increase in the number of applicants from other refugee countries, such as Eritrea. Many of the refugees who apply for NOKUT's recognition are unable to document their qualifications, and must therefore be referred to the UVD-procedure, NOKUT's recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation, which is specifically adapted for refugees. The UVD-procedure, which includes the use of expert evaluations and extensive testing, is very time- and resource demanding. The UVD-procedure also presupposes the following three requirements:

- The applicant must possess sufficient language proficiency in English, Norwegian or another Scandinavian language.
- The applicant must have permanent residency in Norway.
- The applicant must possess a completed qualification within higher education.

NOKUT is now seeing that an expanding group of refugees are facing challenges in fulfilling the three requirements. In order to be prepared for a situation in which large groups of refugees are left without a possibility for recognition, NOKUT has completed a pilot project in order to test a new methodology for evaluation of refugees' qualifications.

The content of NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees

The pilot project was carried out in the period February–May 2016. During this period, a total of 20 qualifications passports were issued. Participants were chosen from active applications pending with NOKUT, for whom the application for General Recognition through the UVD-procedure could not be completed with a legally binding decision.

NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees is a standardized statement from NOKUT containing information about the applicant's highest completed qualification, work experience and language proficiency, in addition to advice and guidance about the road ahead. The document contains information on the documentation that formed the basis for the individual assessment.

NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees is valid for a limited time, and has a validity of three years from the date of issue. The goal is that within this timeframe, applicants will have the opportunity to find employment or continue with further studies, improve their language proficiency or, if they still need to, apply for formal recognition or authorization.

Method

The methodology used for the evaluation of this group of applicants is based on elements developed through NOKUT's UVD-procedure, as well as the proposal on European Qualifications Passport for

Refugees developed by NOKUT and our British sister office, UK NARIC. The method is a combination of the evaluation of available documentation, and a structured interview with the applicant carried out by experienced case officers.

The aim of the Pilot project was to assess whether the qualifications passport could be established as a possible supplement in the increasing number of cases in which the existing recognition procedures resulting in a legally binding decision from NOKUT cannot be utilized.

Experiences and feedback from users

The end users of NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees will primarily be the following three groups: employers, the integration sector and higher education institutions. With this in mind, NOKUT conducted interviews in focus groups with representatives from each of these three groups. The feedback from the focus groups was positive and constructive. The members of the focus groups stated that the qualifications passport has the potential to be an effective tool. The feedback and input from each of the focus groups have been actively utilized in further development of the final document, which we have called NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees.


Simultaneously, a short survey on how the candidates themselves perceived the process of obtaining the qualifications passport was conducted. The feedback from the candidates indicates that the qualifications passport is seen as a valuable offer, and that the evaluation process had made them more aware of their qualifications, and of which competences they should use as a basis for further activities.

NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees is suggested as a new permanent scheme to supplement existing recognition procedures

Based on the experiences gained from the pilot project, it has been concluded that the model of recognition tested can be made into a permanent scheme to supplement NOKUT's existing recognition procedures. The establishment of NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees as a permanent scheme will benefit both the refugees affected, and society as a whole. Refugees with higher education who fall short of the requirements for NOKUT's other recognition procedures will be given a real option from NOKUT to have their qualifications evaluated, in addition to advice about the road ahead. This may prove positive for further integration. Furthermore, the document has the potential to give the integration sector, employers and higher education institutions standardized and quality assured assistance in their assessments of adapted measures.

Compared to the UVD-procedure, the costs of issuing a qualifications passport will be significantly lower. While a UVD-evaluation has an average requirement for resources of about 50,000 NOK, the experiences from the pilot project indicate that the average cost of issuing a qualifications passport will be around 5.000 NOK.

Image of NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees




NOKUTs kvalifikasjonspass for flyktninger – UVDxxx/KPXX

Vurderingen av nedenstående kvalifikasjon er **ikke et juridisk bindende vedtak**, men en uttalelse som skal være til hjelp i forbindelse med søknad om jobb og studier. Vurderingen er basert på tilgjengelig dokumentasjon og intervju og er ikke verifisert ved lærestedet.

Utstedt: **XX.XX.XXXX**
Gyldig til: **XX.XX.XXXX**

Navn: **XX XX**



Født: **XX.XX.XXXX**

Fødested: **XX,XX**

Høyeste oppnådde kvalifikasjon: **År: navn på kvalifikasjon, lærested, land**

Nivåplassering: En utdanning på dette nivået har normalt en godkjenningssamme på **X** år, og kan innplasseres på nivå **X** i Kvalifikasjonsrammeverket¹

Fagområde: **XX**
Relevant arbeidserfaring: **År-År: XXXX²**

Språk:

- Morsmål: **XX**
- Undervisningsspråk: **XX**
- Arbeidsspråk: **XX**
- Norsk: **XX**
- Engelsk: **XX**
- Annet: **XX**

Råd om veien videre: **XX**
XX

Vurderingen gjennomført av: **MHL/MDE/MJE** **SEI**
rådgiver **konsulent**

Dato: **XX.XX.XXXX** Sted: Lysaker

¹ Mer informasjon om nivåer i Kvalifikasjonsrammeverket finner du på baksiden av dette dokumentet og på nettsidene til NOKUT <http://www.nokut.no/no/Fakta/Det-norske-utdanningssystemet/Nasjonalt-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk-for-livslang-laring/Nivaer/>

² **Arbeidserfaringen dokumentert ved... Arbeidserfaringen er ikke dokumentert**

Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen
Postboks 578, 1327 Lysaker | Drammensveien 288
postmottak@nokut.no | tlf: 21 02 18 00 | faks: 21 02 18 01

Table of contents

1	Implementation of the pilot project.....	1
1.1	Project organization and process	1
1.2	Choosing the candidates	1
1.3	Practical implementation of evaluations.....	2
2	Results	3
2.1	The candidates' experiences	3
2.2	Presentation of and discussion about the scheme in focus groups	3
2.3	Experiences from case officers at NOKUT	5
2.4	Collective assessment	6
3	The need for a new kind of national evaluation of refugees' qualifications	6
3.1	International commitments	6
3.2	NOKUT's recognition procedures.....	7
3.2.1	NOKUT's General Recognition – document based method	7
3.2.2	NOKUT's General Recognition – The UVD procedure – interview based method	8
3.3	European Qualifications Passport for Refugees	9
3.4	The need for a new kind of evaluation service to a constantly increasing group of refugees who will not be eligible for NOKUT's already established recognition procedures	10
4	NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees – content and evaluation process .	11
4.1	Basic premises for the scheme.....	11
4.2	Information in NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees	11
4.3	Limitations.....	13
4.4	Evaluation methods	14
4.5	Target group	15
4.6	Possible risk factors	15
4.7	Advantages	16
5	Suggestion for a new scheme as a supplement to existing recognition procedures.....	17
5.1	Suggestion for a model for a permanent scheme.....	17
5.2	Design of the final document.....	18
5.3	Resource requirements in connection with implementation of a potentially permanent scheme	18

1 Implementation of the pilot project

1.1 Project organization and process

Between February and May 2016, NOKUT conducted a pilot project in order to test a methodology for a new type of evaluation of refugees' qualifications – NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees. The pilot project was rooted in NOKUT's plan for 2016, passed by NOKUT's board.

Six NOKUT case officers were involved in the implementation of structured interviews and issuing of Qualifications Passports. The case officers' experiences are summarized in section 2.3 of this report. The project manager was Head of Section of the Section for Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications, Marina Malgina. The project owner was Director of Foreign Education, Stig Arne Skjerven.

The pilot project included candidates who have applied for NOKUT's General Recognition, but who could not be granted a legally binding decision through the UVD-procedure, due to either non-verifiable documentation for incomplete studies, insufficient language proficiency, or non-permanent residency.

In the final stage of the project, a short survey was conducted regarding the candidates' experience with the process around the Qualifications Passport. The candidates' experiences are summarized in section 2.1 of this report.

In the final phase of the pilot project, issued documents were presented to and discussed in focus groups with representatives from three groups of target users. The representatives came from higher education institutions, the labour market and the integration sector, respectively. The feedback and input were considered in connection with further development of the final document – NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees. The results are summarized in chapter 2 of this report.

1.2 Choosing the candidates

In connection with the implementation of the project, we chose to contact a total of 25 candidates who had applied for NOKUT's General Recognition, but who at the time were not eligible for receiving a legally binding decision through the UVD-procedure, due to partially completed studies, insufficient language proficiency or lack of a permanent residency in Norway.

Of the 25 invited candidates, three declined participation, and two did not respond to the invitation. Candidates for the pilot project were chosen after an initial evaluation in which it was established that NOKUT could place a high degree of trust in the presented educational documentation and/or descriptions of the course of the education.

20 candidates were issued NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees as a result of participation in this project. In everyday operations it is not considered plausible for all candidates to be issued a Qualifications Passport, as in all likelihood it will not be possible to place sufficient trust in educational documents and/or descriptions of the course of education for all candidates.

1.3 Practical implementation of evaluations

Invitation to the interview – All 20 candidates who accepted participation in the pilot project received an invitation to structured interviews, and written information about the new procedure. Of the 20 interviews, 11 were conducted face-to-face, and nine were conducted through Skype.

Case preparation and document evaluation – The head of section distributed the candidates to the case officers, who then conducted a document evaluation for each case. The evaluation of available documentation consisted of the following steps:

- Scrutinizing information in available educational documentation, coinciding with information in the survey form completed by the applicant.
- Checking and comparing information through available documents and case reports from NOKUT's archives.
- Checking information through available sources (books, databases, various kinds of reference books, contact with international colleagues).
- Reconstruction of missing documentation by means of previously treated cases and survey forms (when necessary).

The document evaluation was documented by completing the template for NOKUT's level placement, copies of documentation from similar cases (when necessary) and written notes with reference to sources of information.

Conducting the interview – Based on information collected in the document evaluation phase, the case was prepared for the interview phase, and the information was transcribed into standardized templates to conduct the interviews according to a set layout.

A structured interview with each candidate was conducted by two of NOKUT's experienced case officers. The duration of each of the interviews was up to one hour. Fifteen interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and five in English. There was no need for an interpreter in these cases.

Issuing NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees – Based on the report/minutes from the structured interview, NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees was issued. The processing time from the interview was conducted to the Qualifications Passport was issued was an average of three business days. The document is signed by both case officers who were present at the structured interview, and is quality assured by the Head of Section.

NOKUT's use of resources – Time and use of resources were measured in the cases of the last five of the 20 candidates who were issued the Qualifications Passport. At this time, NOKUT had consolidated the routines. It was only at this time NOKUT was realistically able to measure the use of time in both the preparatory phase (contacting the applicant, preparing the case, and document evaluation), structured interview conducted by two case officers, and residual work (development of a short summary of the interview and issuing of the Qualifications Passport).

On the basis of this, the time spent is estimated to maximum two business days per candidate. On average, the cost is consequently estimated to approx. 5.000 NOK per candidate, in some cases more if they consist of especially complicated and/or complex qualifications. In comparison, the resource requirement for a UVD-evaluation is on average about 50,000 NOK per candidate.

2 Results

2.1 *The candidates' experiences*

Twenty of NOKUT's Qualifications Passports for Refugees have been issued in the pilot project. The first 15 candidates were asked to participate in a short survey, with the aim to examine how the candidates perceived the process around the Qualifications Passport. Twelve of the 15 candidates accepted participation in this survey. Originally, the survey was also intended to collect information about how the candidates had utilized the Qualifications Passport, and tentatively how employers and educational institutions had received this. However, as only few weeks had passed since the candidates had received their Qualifications Passports, this part of the survey could not provide relevant answers.

Those candidates who were offered NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees because they do not yet fulfill the requirements to go through full evaluation in the UVD-procedure were asked if they understood why they initially had been referred to the UVD-procedure. All affected candidates answered that they understood the reasons for this, although some expressed a need for more information about the details.

The candidates were then asked how they perceived the structured interview for the Qualifications Passport, and about how they have perceived their contact with NOKUT as a whole. In this, all the candidates were exclusively positive in their response. Several commented on the fact that it was a positive experience to have interviews conducted, and several emphasized that this contributed to their feeling of being taken seriously. At the same time, they were very positive in their response to receiving a document from an authority like NOKUT, even though the evaluation was not a legally binding decision.

All the candidates also stated that they found it easy to understand the purpose of the document. Several commented that the document appeared structured and comprehensible. Several of the candidates clearly stated that they would be using the Qualifications Passport when looking for work and in connection with admission to studies in Norway.

Of the 12 interviewed candidates, three had incomplete education. These three will not be offered the possibility of proceeding to the UVD-procedure. The remaining nine confirmed that they are interested in returning and attempting to obtain complete recognition through the UVD-procedure once they fulfill all requirements for participation.

The conclusion drawn from the candidate survey is that the Qualifications Passport is perceived as a valuable service. Even if the survey sample is small, the responses show that they are consistently positive with regards to all stages of the process, even before they have had the time and opportunity to use the document.

2.2 *Presentation of and discussion about the scheme in focus groups*

In the final phase of the pilot project, issued documents were presented and discussed in focus groups with representatives from three groups of target users. The representatives came from higher education institutions, the labour market and the integration sector. The Qualifications Passport was presented to each group, and the participants were able to give their immediate response to the document. Later in

the group session, the target users were given information about the basis for, and the methodology prior to, the issuing of the Qualifications Passport.

Higher education institutions – The participants of this focus group were employees working with recognition, admission and specific recognition at the following educational institutions: University of Oslo, University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway, Norwegian Business School – BI, and University College of Southeast Norway. The representatives viewed the Qualifications Passport as a potentially useful tool. They emphasized the importance of thoroughly explaining the significance and purpose of the Qualifications Passport, so that candidates understand that this document does not give access to admission. Several participants emphasized that a person with insufficient documentation will, in any case, be expected to go through a positive UVD-evaluation in order to gain access to studies.

Representatives from higher education institutions felt it was very useful that the Qualifications Passport gives the candidates adapted guidance on e.g. language, as the information from the institutions is generally generic. They also deemed that the Qualifications Passport contains a realistic assessment that shows the refugee what he or she should focus on specifically in further qualifying activities.

Furthermore, representatives from the higher education institutions remarked that partially completed education can serve as grounds for admission to Bachelor degree studies. In such cases, more information about the details of the education such as grade point average, credit hours and exactly what documents form the basis for NOKUT's evaluation is desirable. One solution may be that NOKUT allows higher education institutions to contact NOKUT for more details on what formed the basis for the information presented in the Qualifications Passport in each individual assessment.

The integration sector – The public support services, in this case consisting of representatives from Oslo VO Service center, and Nordland County Council, felt that the Qualifications Passport may be of great value to the candidates when they are in contact with different agencies dealing with mapping of skills and competences. They believed this could facilitate the work of the integration and labour market sector. The representatives pointed out that it is essential for the Qualifications Passport to be perceived as trustworthy in order for it to be used, and that they perceive documents from NOKUT as having a high degree of legitimacy.

Furthermore, they emphasized that the Qualifications Passport can improve the self-esteem of the individual who receives the document. Many refugees face great challenges in understanding what qualifications they actually possess, especially compared to Norwegian qualifications, and what they should do in order to use their qualifications in a better way directed at employment, education and other qualifying activities. A Qualifications Passport may be a document that shows what one's competence is, and which can provide further motivation to undertake further action. Thus, according to the representatives, a Qualifications Passport may save time both now and in the future by ensuring that the refugees do not repeatedly get the feeling that they have to start over every time they face new people in the integration sector.

It was mentioned that it is important for the refugees to be conscious of their qualifications and their competence, and a Qualifications Passport may contribute to that. The Qualifications Passport may also be useful for refugees who are new to the country and do not have a network, in order to shorten their way into the labour market. Additionally it was emphasized that the Qualifications Passport

could be helpful for refugees who are going to participate in qualifying activities such as work practice, introduction courses and language courses.

The public support services subsequently suggested that the Qualifications Passport also be issued to those who do not have higher education, as they regarded the need for this document as equally useful for refugees with e.g. qualifications equivalent to Norwegian upper secondary school.

Another improvement seen as necessary by the public support services is to make the method that forms the basis for issuing the Qualifications Passport more visible. The representatives emphasized that what makes the Qualifications Passport useful to them is knowing that it is based on an interview with case officers at NOKUT together with a document evaluation. According to the representatives, an interview gives the candidate the possibility to provide better explanations and to correct any misunderstandings. By including information about the method in the Qualifications Passport, the status of the document will be additionally enhanced. They also emphasized that status and legitimacy are important for the Qualifications Passport to be used, thus it must be clearly stated in the Qualifications Passport what it is and what it is not.

Employers' organizations – Representatives from KS, Virke and Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise expressed that the first impression of the Qualifications Passport was very positive. They stated very clearly that many employers would consider the Qualifications Passport sufficient to offer an internship or employment to a refugee.

The following comments were made at the meeting:

- It is desirable for reference to be made to relevant work experience, regardless of whether or not the candidate has any.
- The level placement should be clarified, as this was perceived to be somewhat noncommittally formulated. A comment was made that the National Qualifications Framework is not necessarily widely known.
- The disclaimer at the bottom of the document should be moved to the top and be clarified.
- It should be stated even more clearly what kind of advice was given to the candidate.
- It was expressed that employers in general have a high level of confidence in documents issued by NOKUT.
- A clear request for a similar service for both foreign vocational educations and foreign higher vocational educations was presented, as the need for this within the group of refugees with this type of qualifications is likely to be equally great.

The conclusion after the meeting is that the employers' organizations are very positive to the document. They emphasized the fact that given minor changes, the Qualifications Passport could be a very useful document for employers when it comes to assessing refugees' competence for internships and employment.

2.3 Experiences from case officers at NOKUT

All of the participating case officers in the pilot project were asked about their experiences with the new scheme. What follows is a short summary of their feedback:

Methods and tools – In the pilot project, NOKUT utilized methods and tools that are already known from the UVD-procedure. This made the case officers' work easier to implement, and the work methodology was perceived as predictable. The structured interviews worked well as a tool for providing the candidates with advice about the road ahead. The use of Skype in interviews was successful in those cases where a face-to-face interview was not considered expedient due to geographical distance.

The procedure NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees compared to other recognition procedures at NOKUT – It is an advantage that the processing of a case is much less time consuming than in the UVD-procedure, which enables an applicant to make use of a document from NOKUT at an earlier stage than if they go through the UVD-procedure. Additionally, the Qualifications Passport has the advantage of offering a group of refugees with non-completed qualifications within higher education, a document from NOKUT, even though it is not a legally binding decision.

2.4 Collective assessment

The feedback and input from focus groups, candidates and case officers have been taken into consideration in connection with further development of the final document – NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees.

The conclusion from information gathered from the involved parties is that the Qualifications Passport appears to be a valuable service, both to the individual who receives the document, and to society represented by employers, higher education institutions and the integration sector.

NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees provides a service to a constantly increasing group of refugees who will not be eligible for NOKUT's already established recognition procedures. Additionally, it is positive that the process of issuing a Qualifications Passport takes less time, and is considerably less resource demanding than the UVD-procedure. Thus, the procedure has the potential to help this group of refugees enter the labour market more quickly, and as a result become economically independent at an earlier stage.

3 The need for a new kind of national evaluation of refugees' qualifications

3.1 International commitments

Through the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region¹, better known as the Lisbon Convention, Norway has, in accordance with Article VII, committed to having a system for recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation.

A report from the Convention Committee for the Lisbon Convention from December 2015 shows that only a small number of the convention partners have attempted to develop recognition procedures for

¹ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utdanning/hoyere-utdanning/slette/lisboakonvensjonen/id614766/>

refugees and persons in a refugee-like situation.² Furthermore, developments so far have shown varying results. As of today, very few countries can demonstrate experience in using this kind of recognition procedure. Several international stakeholders point to Norway as best practice for functional procedures and recognition procedure for refugees, through the current UVD-procedure.³

NOKUT's experiences show that the group of refugees who apply to NOKUT for General Recognition is a complex group. Thus, there is a need for adapting our existing services in order to cater to different needs. The projected increase in applications and the complexity of the evaluation of refugees' competences creates an increasingly challenging situation, which establishes a need for further innovation.

3.2 NOKUT's recognition procedures

3.2.1 NOKUT's General Recognition – document based method

NOKUT's General Recognition is a legally binding decision with the same status as a diploma, which compares a foreign education with the Norwegian degree and credit system. It will state whether the education is equivalent to a Norwegian degree in scope and level. As an example, a General Recognition of the education may state that NOKUT has assessed the education to be equivalent to a Norwegian Bachelor's or Master's degree. A positive decision can be attached to applications for employment, and it can make it easier and safer for an employer to hire persons with foreign education.

NOKUT's General Recognition is primarily directed at persons with foreign qualifications in those parts of the labour market that are not regulated by other recognition and authorization procedures. In 2015, NOKUT received more than 7,500 individual applications for General Recognition of foreign higher education, and NOKUT expects a significant increase in the number of applications in 2016 as well. The increase is expected to come primarily as a result of the refugee crisis. As an example, we expect up to 1,000 applications from persons with qualifications from Syria.

In order to obtain General Recognition from NOKUT, there is a requirement for the educational institution to be accredited or officially recognized as a higher education institution in the country of origin, cf. the Regulation on quality assurance and quality development in higher education and tertiary vocational education § 6-1(3)2.⁴

The Lisbon Convention recommended practices for administrative procedures, revised in 2010⁵, states that verification of documents' authenticity, ref. §§ 25–28, must be an integrated part of the administrative procedure.

² The Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education: Monitoring the Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Preliminary Report, 18.12.2015, s. 47-51 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002347/234743E.pdf>

³ Providing Pathways for Refugees: Practical Tips for Credential Assessment (2016). WENR – World Education News and Reviews <http://wennr.wes.org/2016/04/providing-pathways-for-refugees-practical-tips-for-credential-assessment/>

Making Integration Work, Refugees and others in need of protection (2016). OECD http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/making-integration-work-humanitarian-migrants_9789264251236-en

⁴ <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2010-02-01-96>

⁵ https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/KD/Vedlegg/UH/Lisboakonvensjonen/F-4260_web.pdf

In all applications for General Recognition, NOKUT assesses the authenticity of the qualification that is being evaluated.⁶ In any case where there is doubt, NOKUT will verify the educational documents. For education from certain countries, it is not possible to obtain correct and/or credible information. In other words, it is not possible to verify the documentation in a sufficiently reliable manner. There can be many reasons why such a conclusion is reached:

- Archives no longer exist
- Archives are not available
- Management systems do not function properly
- The quality of the exchange of information is uncertain
- It is difficult to connect identity documents and educational documents

Applicants with non-verifiable documentation will be offered an evaluation through NOKUT's UVD-procedure, which is, among other elements, based on various forms of testing and interviews.

3.2.2 NOKUT's General Recognition – The UVD procedure – interview based method

In 2005, Norway established a specific recognition procedure for refugees – the Refugee Procedure, where Norwegian higher education institutions were responsible for evaluating qualifications for persons who were unable to document their education. The final evaluation was a so-called background paper containing a description of the applicant's educational background. The procedure did not work according to intentions, specifically concerning equal treatment of applicants due to confusion about methods, implementation and content of the final document. In 2010 the Ministry of Education and Research consequently gave NOKUT the task of developing an improved procedure for recognition of foreign higher education for persons who apply for General Recognition, but whose applications are rejected due to their inability to document their higher education, or to have this verified in a satisfactory manner.

NOKUT's UVD-procedure, the Recognition Procedure for Persons Without Verifiable Documentation, was established in 2013, as a replacement for the Refugee Procedure. The UVD-procedure is developed in accordance with Article VII in the Lisbon Convention. The procedure is based on extensive oral and written testing with an expert committee, and thus requires the applicant to have proficiency in English, Norwegian or another Scandinavian language in order to communicate directly with the experts. The final document in the UVD-procedure is a legally binding decision on General Recognition, which in content and design is close to identical to the decisions issued by NOKUT in ordinary document-based cases. The decision is issued in Norwegian, and is intended for use in the Norwegian labour market and in connection with admission to Norwegian higher educational institutions. For this reason, it is a requirement that all candidates for the procedure should have permanent residency in Norway. In order to make the expert evaluation possible, it is also a requirement that the qualification is completed. The process surrounding the UVD-procedure is described on NOKUT's website.⁷

⁶ <http://www.nokut.no/no/Utdanning-fra-utlandet/NOKUTs-generelle-godkjenning/NOKUTs-kriterier/>

⁷ <http://www.nokut.no/no/Utdanning-fra-utlandet/Andre-godkjenningsordninger/Godkjenningsordning-for-personer-uten-verifiserbar-dokumentasjon/>

The majority of people who avail themselves of the UVD-procedure are applicants with qualifications from Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. The number of applicants with qualifications from Syria and Eritrea has increased markedly in 2015 and 2016. Since the procedure was established in 2013, NOKUT has made over 350 decisions on General Recognition based on this method. The annual need up until 2016 has been estimated to 200 – 250 applicants. However, this can be expected to increase rapidly in line with the number of refugees with higher education who apply to NOKUT for recognition.

The white paper 16 (2015–2016), *From outsider to a new chance*⁸, describes the UVD-procedure as functional. In the paper it is emphasized that “The Government will strengthen the Recognition Procedure for Persons Without Verifiable Documentation (the UVD-procedure)”.

3.3 European Qualifications Passport for Refugees

The flow of refugees to Europe creates challenges related to the recognition of foreign education in many countries. As revealed by the Convention Committee for the Lisbon Convention, only a small number of countries in Europe today have functioning recognition procedures for refugees and persons in a refugee-like situation.⁹

On this background, NOKUT has suggested, in cooperation with our British sister office UK-NARIC, that a multinational fast-track recognition procedure for refugees’ competences be established in order to enable as many refugees as possible to have their qualifications assessed in a cost-effective manner. In this way, refugees can be assisted in gaining a faster entry into the labour market, gaining access to further studies and participating in qualifying activities in the various countries. Furthermore, the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees can contribute to the movement of refugees between European countries without forcing them to go through additional recognition procedures. The proposal is based on the legacy of the Nansen Passport for refugees from 1922. Its aim is to establish a multinational, quality assured framework in Europe for recognition of refugees’ competence. Issuing a qualifications passport may ensure the refugees a document that can be utilized across European national borders.¹⁰ The document is admissible in several countries, which will also save resources for the national recognizing authorities. The main features of the proposal for *European Qualifications Passport for refugees* are as follows:

- The appointment of a coordinating authority and information centre in charge of establishing and coordinating a multinational recognition scheme for refugees, displaced persons and persons in refugee-like situations.
- The implementation of an effective fast-track procedure for a centralised recognition model to evaluate the qualifications of refugees, displaced persons and persons in refugee-like situations, irrespective of which country the refugees first arrived in. It would have one methodology for refugees with a full portfolio of educational documents and another for refugees with insufficient documentation.

⁸ <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/daaabc96b3c44c4bbce21a1ee9d3c206/no/pdfs/stm201520160016000dddpdfs.pdf>

⁹ The Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education: Monitoring the Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Preliminary Report, 18.12.2015, s. 47-51 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002347/234743E.pdf>

¹⁰ http://www.nokut.no/no/Nyheter/Nyheter-2015/NOKUT-fremmer-forslag-om-europeisk-kvalifikasjonspass-for-flyktninger/#.Vyzq_2df3IU Mørland, Terje; Skjerven, Stig Arne (2016) A European qualifications passport for refugees. University World News, 01 April 2016 Issue No:407 <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20160401150619862>

- Assessment: The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees would contain necessary information concerning refugees' educational background. The document would provide universities, national authorities and employers with relevant information on refugees' educational background subject to proper assessment and review. The assessment would take place at the national level and would be carried out by relevant stakeholders with experience of credential evaluation. In some countries, assessments could be assigned to the national ENIC-NARIC office; in others the task might be assigned to one or more universities.¹¹

3.4 The need for a new kind of evaluation service to a constantly increasing group of refugees who will not be eligible for NOKUT's already established recognition procedures

The OECD emphasizes that the evaluation of qualifications is an important element in the integration of refugees. An efficient evaluation of refugees' qualifications will show whether there is a need for supplementary education, authorization to practice a certain profession or specific facilitation for language training, and it will assist refugees in gaining faster access to the labour market. The OECD makes a general claim that today's complex immigration situation creates a need for more tailored and comprehensive measures in integration policies. The OECD clearly states that early labour market integration is viewed as key in ensuring that the refugees become both economically independent and a resource to their recipient countries.¹²

NOKUT is currently noting tendencies that will result in increasingly large groups of refugees being left without an offer for recognition from NOKUT:

- The credibility of documentation from applicants from the major refugee countries, amongst them Syria, is weakened, which results in more applicants being referred to the UVD-procedure.
- An expanding group of newly arrived refugees lacks the required language proficiency in Norwegian, Scandinavian languages or English to sit the expert evaluation. This is very relevant for the large group of Syrian applicants, among whom many have higher education qualifications without competency in the English language.
- Many refugees have fled their home countries before they were able to complete their qualifications.
- Many refugees spend a long time in refugee reception centers before their application for asylum is completed. At the same time, it appears that it will become more common to grant temporary residence permits in cases of asylum applications.

Without the possibility of offering a solution to all refugees, Norway will not be fully fulfilling Article VII of the Lisbon Convention. The Article states that the convention partners should also offer recognition to persons in different refugee-like situations, in other words not only provide solutions for refugees who have been granted permanent residency in the country.

¹¹ Mørland, Terje; Skjerven, Stig Arne (2016) A European qualifications passport for refugees. University World News, 01 April 2016 Issue No:407 <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20160401150619862>

¹² OECD (2015). *Is this humanitarian immigration crisis different?* Immigration Policy Debates, NO. 7, September 2015, s. 13-14. www.oecd.org/migration/Is-this-refugee-crisis-different.pdf

In order to be able to provide a solution for this expanding group of applicants who cannot be offered regular recognition, NOKUT has tested a new assessment methodology for evaluation of refugees' qualifications.

4 NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees – content and evaluation process

This chapter describes the content of the Qualifications Passport and the evaluation process tested in the pilot project.

4.1 Basic premises for the scheme

The scheme that was tested is based on analyses of needs and the methods that formed the basis for NOKUT's proposals on the European Qualifications Passport¹³ and fast track competence surveying for refugees in the exposition presented by IMDI in the fall of 2015 respectively¹⁴.

Basic premises for the tested concept can be summarized as follows:

- The procedure should be available for all groups of applicants.
- The evaluation should be possible to carry out quickly and cost effectively.
- The evaluation should be quality assured, in order to establish trust in the labour market.
- The evaluation should contain relevant information about refugees' qualifications and guidance about the road ahead.

NOKUT's case officers possess unique expertise concerning the educational systems, qualifications and educational documentation at and above upper secondary school level in each individual refugee producing country, in addition to necessary language proficiency and experience in the use of interview based evaluation methods. Thus, NOKUT is able to carry out the process quickly and in a quality assured manner.

4.2 Information in NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees

NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees, which was tested in the pilot project, is a standardized document, and contains the following information:

- The person's name and date of birth (tentatively comments if credible documentation is not present)
- Picture
- Name of the highest qualification achieved/completed
- Subject field
- Relevant work experience
- Language experience/proficiency

¹³ Mørland, Terje; Skjerven, Stig Arne (2016) A European qualifications passport for refugees. University World News, 01 April 2016 Issue No:407 <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20160401150619862>

¹⁴Letter from IMDi to Ministry of Children and Equality from 18.12.2015

- Advice about the road ahead (authorization, NOKUT's General Recognition, evaluation through the UVD-procedure, possibility for admission to further studies, supplementary studies)

The Qualifications Passport for Refugees includes information about the documentation that has formed the basis for the evaluation.

NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees is valid for a limited time, with a validity of three years from the date of issue. The aim is that within this timeframe, applicants will have the opportunity to find employment or continue with further studies, improve their language proficiency or, if they still need to, apply for formal recognition or authorization. The validity date cannot be renewed. A limited time frame of validity will also contribute to this procedure not undermining NOKUT's regular recognition procedures.

The following design of the Qualifications Passport formed the basis for the testing¹⁵

¹⁵ Based on feedback from agents in the focus groups, among other things, some elements have been adjusted in the proposal presented on page iv in the report.

NOKUTs kvalifikasjonspass for flyktninger

UVD 423/KP 1¹

Utstedt: 24.02.2016
 Gyldig til: 24.02.2019



Navn:

Født: 13.12.1985

Country of origin, place of birth: Irak, Erbil

Høyeste oppnådde kvalifikasjon: 2008: Bachelor of Science, Salahaddin University, Erbil

Nivåplassering i Norge:

Nivå 6 i
 Kvalifikasjonsrammeverket,
 Bachelor²

Fagområde: Matematikk

Språk:

Morsmål: Kurdisk
 Undervisningsspråk: Arabisk, engelsk
 Norsk: B1 (muntlig)

Råd om veien videre: Fortsette med språkkurs, oppnå nødvendig språkkompetanse i norsk (B1 skriftlig) og søke om vurdering i NOKUTs UVD-ordning

Vurderingen gjennomført av: Marina Malgina
 seksjonssjef

Sara Eitungjerde
 konsulent

Dato: 24.02.2016 Sted: Lysaker



¹ Det er viktig at mottakere av passet og myndigheter er klare over at dette er ikke erstatning for formell godkjenning eller autorisasjon, men fungerer som en supplement til eksisterende godkjennings- og autorisasjonsordninger.

² Vurderingen av kvalifikasjon er **ikke et juridisk bindende vedtak**, men en uttalelse som skal være til hjelp i forbindelse med søknad om jobb og studier. Vurderingen er basert på tilgjengelig dokumentasjon og intervju og er ikke verifisert ved lærestedet. NOKUT kan kontaktes for mer informasjon. Mer om nivåer i Kvalifikasjonsrammeverket <http://www.nokut.no/no/Fakta/Det-norske-utdanningssystemet/Nasjonalt->

4.3 Limitations

Compared to NOKUT's UVD-procedure, which is based on a very comprehensive and time-consuming assessment, NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees has the following limitations:

- The document is not a legally binding decision about General Recognition, but a statement intended to be of help in connection with applications for employment/internship and studies. The evaluation is based on available documentation and a structured interview with experienced case officers.

- The document is not a replacement for formal recognition or authorization, only a supplement to existing recognition procedures.
- The document is only issued in cases where NOKUT has sufficient confidence in educational documents and / or descriptions of the course of the education.

4.4 Evaluation methods

The goal of the qualification assessment is to map, summarize and present available information on the applicant's educational level, work experience and language proficiency in NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees. The document is intended to provide information that can be relevant in connection with applications for employment or internship, qualification courses and admission to studies. Based on collected information about the applicant's educational background, work experience and language proficiency, the applicant also receives individual advice and guidance about the road ahead.

The minimum requirements for the evaluation is a combination of assessment of available documentation and a structured interview with the applicant. To ensure equal treatment and quality, we set the following requirements for the implementation:

- The evaluation of available documentation should be extensive enough to allow NOKUT to use it as a basis for issuing NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees. Information in the available educational documentation should correspond to information in a survey form completed by the applicant¹⁶. Furthermore, the documentation can be compared to available documents and case information in NOKUT's archives, and the information can be checked through available sources. Missing documentation can be reconstructed through using previously processed cases and survey forms.
- The documentation evaluation should be sufficiently documented through completed form for NOKUT's level placement, copies of documentation from similar cases (where necessary), and written notes with reference to information sources.
- A structured interview is prepared by the case officer responsible for the case. Candidates living in the Oslo area and Akershus county were called in for a face-to-face interview. Skype-interviews were conducted for candidates living in other areas of the country. The interviews were conducted by two of NOKUT's case officers, both for security reasons and in order to ensure quality and continuity in the case management process. The purpose of the structured interview was to substantiate the connection between the applicant's identity, available identity documentation and educational documents, and thus form as complete an image as possible of the applicant's educational background, work experience and language proficiency, as well as to confirm information obtained through the initial documentation evaluation.
- Two specifically adapted templates were developed – a survey form and an interview template – as a necessary supplement to existing case management tools in the UVD-procedure.
- Information collected through the structured interview should be thoroughly documented through minutes from the interview, copies of documentation submitted in connection with the interview, among other things.
- Minutes from the structured interview and documentation evaluation form the basis for issuing the Qualifications Passport.

¹⁶ This is a simplified version of the survey form used in the UVD procedure.

- The Qualifications Passport is only issued in those cases where NOKUT has sufficient confidence in the educational documents and/or the description of the course of the education.
- The Qualifications Passport is signed by two of NOKUT's case officers, and is quality assured by the Head of Section.

4.5 Target group

Candidates who have applied for NOKUT's General Recognition, but who cannot be granted a legally binding decision through the UVD-procedure because of partially completed studies, insufficient language proficiency or lack of permanent residency, are in the target group. The current increase in applications to NOKUT from refugees with higher education, e.g. with Syrian qualifications, show that the target group is expanding, and it is highly likely that this trend will continue to be reinforced in the time to come.

4.6 Possible risk factors

Various risk factors tied to the choice of evaluation model were assessed, based on experiences from NOKUT's work with recognition of refugees' qualifications. The assessment of the most important risk factors and measures to reduce risk are listed below.

The value of the final document – The Qualifications Passport is not a legally binding document. This entails that the credibility of the information that forms the basis for the statement is not assessed as thoroughly as in ordinary decisions on General Recognition, for example through verification from the educational institution. Thus, it is important that both the recipients of the Qualifications Passport and the authorities are aware of the fact that the document is not a replacement for formal recognition or authorization, but that the Qualifications Passport functions as a supplement to existing recognition procedures at NOKUT. Information about this is clearly stated in NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees.

NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees in comparison with NOKUT's decision on General Recognition – It is important that NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees is not confused with NOKUT's decision on General Recognition, which is made on the basis of the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges of April 1st 2005 (§ 3-4).¹⁷ The Qualifications Passport therefore contains a clear and visible disclaimer concerning what this document is and what the differences between NOKUT's General Recognition and NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees are. The difference between the two documents were thoroughly explained to the participants of the pilot project.

Sufficient information about the procedure to participants, and choosing the type of evaluation – It is important that participants receive sufficient information about the status of the final document prior to starting the process, and during the course of the structured interview. Here it is important that the candidates receive unambiguous information stating that NOKUT has the authority to decide what type of evaluation should be utilized in each specific case, depending on the status of documentation, language proficiency and residency in Norway. Furthermore, it is important that the participants receive clear and concise information stating that the Qualifications Passport is only issued in those

¹⁷ <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2005-04-01-15>

cases where NOKUT places sufficient trust in educational documents and/or descriptions of the course of the education.

The use of an interpreter – The majority of the structured interviews can be carried out by those of NOKUT’s case officers who have the necessary language proficiency, which includes relevant languages such as Arabic, Dari/Farsi and English. In those cases where NOKUT cannot provide the necessary language proficiency to carry out an interview, the need for interpretation services will arise.

Vetting information – In the pilot project, it was important to utilize a method that contributed to ensuring a credible connection between the candidates’ identity, identity documentation, and the presented educational documentation. In connection with the face-to-face interviews, identity documentation for all the applicants was vetted, and the information in the identity documentation was compared to information in the presented educational documentation. In order to be able to vet information about identity and educational documentation for candidates who could not appear in person, we chose to use Skype interviews, where this documentation must be exhibited upon connection, as with the face-to-face interviews. The use of video conferences is considered a success.

4.7 Advantages

- All refugees with higher education, even with insufficient or missing documentation, will have an actual and timely offer from NOKUT to have their competences evaluated, and to receive advice about the road ahead. This may contribute to a more targeted and effective integration process.
- Norwegian authorities (the integration sector, employers, and educational institutions) will be given quicker assistance in their work with necessary measures. The Qualifications Passport contains useful and very relevant information that is considered easily comprehensible by the aforementioned authorities, with the main focus placed on the refugees’ highest qualification achieved.
- Differentiation between regular recognition and the Qualifications Passport leads to more efficient use of society’s resources.
- The scheme can be implemented relatively quickly, as NOKUT has experienced and highly qualified case officers who can to some extent be released to perform these tasks through recruitment of other personnel to handle less complicated recognition cases.
- Many of the experienced case officers at NOKUT master important languages that are relevant considering the refugees’ background. This reduces the need for interpretation services.
- NOKUT has high credibility in society at large when it comes to evaluation of education. The labour market, the higher educational institutions and the integration sector are all familiar with NOKUT’s work with – and competence on – foreign education.
- NOKUT’s role as the contact point for the recognition of professional qualifications for professions regulated by Directive 2005/36/EC entails that NOKUT has the coordinating responsibility for the different recognition- and authorization procedures for regulated professions. Through this, NOKUT has obtained extensive experience in guiding people with foreign qualifications who are in need of authorization, recognition and capacitation.
- NOKUT’s role in supervising Norwegian educational institutions and its role as ENIC-NARIC office based on the Lisbon Convention entails that we are in close contact with Norwegian universities, university colleges and higher vocational institutions. Through this,

NOKUT possesses high competence on further studies, admissions, specific recognition and supplementary education.

5 Suggestion for a new scheme as a supplement to existing recognition procedures

5.1 Suggestion for a model for a permanent scheme

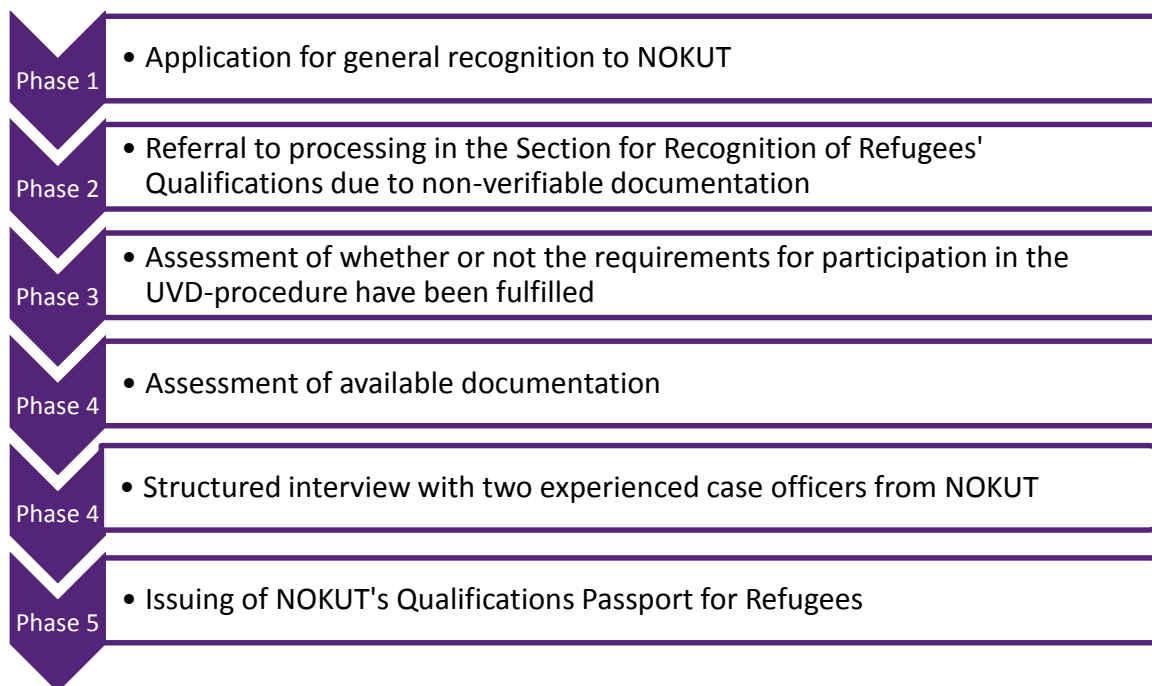
The conclusion after finalizing the project is that NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees should be continued to become a permanent scheme as a supplement to NOKUT's existing recognition procedures.

NOKUT's experiences show that an expanding group of refugees with higher education will be left on the margins of established recognition procedures in the future. These refugees with higher education, even with insufficient or missing documentation, will be offered a service from NOKUT to have their qualifications evaluated through the Qualifications Passport, in addition to receiving qualified advice about the road ahead. This could have a positive impact on integration of the individual.

Testing of the pilot project model was successful. Feedback from all affected parties was positive. Advantages of implementation of the Qualifications Passport include the following:

- The scheme is based on NOKUT's experience with recognition of refugees' qualifications over several years, and is adapted to all groups of refugees and persons in a refugee-like situation. It applies to the expanding group of persons who do not have the possibility of getting their education recognized, either through document-based methods or the UVD-procedure, due to lack of permanent residency in Norway, insufficient language proficiency or partially completed education.
- The scheme can be implemented relatively quickly. NOKUT has experienced and highly qualified personnel who can to some extent be released to perform these tasks, through the recruitment of other personnel to handle less complicated recognition cases.
- Many of the experienced case officers at NOKUT master important languages that are relevant considering the refugees' background. This reduces the need for interpretation services.
- The methods and tools suggested in the permanent scheme have been tested in the pilot period and further developed in accordance with input from employers, the higher education sector and the integration sector.

Based on the experiences gathered in the pilot project, NOKUT suggests the following model for a permanent scheme:



5.2 Design of the final document

Feedback and input that were considered in connection with further development of the final document – NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees:

- The disclaimer about the status of the document and the basis for the evaluation, which was originally placed at the bottom of the document, has now been moved to the top and clarified.
- The phrasing around the level placement has been clarified.
- The section concerning relevant work experience will be present regardless of whether or not the candidate has this.
- Information about the methodology has been made clearer.

5.3 Resource requirements in connection with implementation of a potentially permanent scheme

The group of refugees without a genuine possibility of obtaining recognition from NOKUT is expected to expand. NOKUT expects that the annual need for evaluations for the Qualifications Passport from and including 2017 could reach around 500. This is partly due to an accumulated need from previous years. A similar need is expected for the years 2018 and 2019, while the need in subsequent years will be tied to development in the number of new refugees to Norway this year and in the years to come.

Based on a cost of 5000 NOK per Qualifications Passport, the collective need for resources in 2017 and the years to come is assumed to be 2,500,000, assuming the scheme is established as a new permanent service.