

# European Inventory

on validation of informal and  
non-formal learning



# **European inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning**

Czech Republic (draft)

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# Foreword

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## **Purpose of this report**

This draft chapter has been written in 2007 by using a variety of national and international sources. Interviews with representatives of public agencies, voluntary organisations and social partners were also carried out both in 2004 and 2007.

The aim of the chapter is to provide a **brief overview** of the initiatives to assess and validate informal & non-formal learning in the country by building on to the work carried out for the Inventory in 2004. Thus, this version focuses on reporting developments from the past couple of years, and should be read in conjunction with the 2005 country report on the Czech Republic (can be accessed from [www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory](http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory))

## **Comments and Feedback**

We welcome any feedback and comments on the chapter. If you feel we have misrepresented some facts or in case you hold additional information/reports that we have not included, please contact us by e-mail: [jo.hawley@ecotec.com](mailto:jo.hawley@ecotec.com).

## 1.0 Introduction

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Since 2005, legislation has been put in place step-by-step in order to create a framework for recognising non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic. The New School Act which took effect on 1 January 2005 enables individuals (above 15 years of age) to acquire a partial qualification (a certificate on having completed a part of an initial formal educational programme) by passing a single examination as a part of the respective final examination, regardless of how they acquired the relevant knowledge and skills. The new Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results which came into force in August 2007 foresees a possibility for adults to acquire partial vocational qualifications, through an examination (practical, or, if appropriate, oral or written as well) to compare an individual's prior learning achievements (his or her knowledge, skills and competences, regardless of how they were attained) with qualification and assessment standards of respective partial vocational qualifications. However, it is not possible to gain full qualifications through these procedures of validation and a comprehensive national system for validation of competences gained through informal and non-formal learning still does not yet exist in the Czech Republic, it has only been in the development and piloting stage to date.

The value of competences and knowledge acquired in a non-traditional way (e.g. on-the-job, through self-study) does serve as a benefit in gaining an employment position, but this depends very much on the judgement of an individual potential employer.

At the moment, several factors are preventing the creation of opportunities for recognition of informal and non-formal learning. First, training programmes offered by schools mostly focus on initial education and training. Consequently, they are too long for adults (several years) and not adjusted to their educational needs and learning possibilities. Secondly, although the supply of continuing training by enterprises and private training organisations is abundant, the certificates, if issued, are not generally recognised socially (de facto) and mostly have no national-level formal validity (de jure). Thirdly, there is a shortage of short modular programmes which makes it difficult to complement and enhance qualifications according to specific individual needs<sup>1</sup>.

New legislation is gradually paving the way to a solution to the above problems, especially by increasing the flexibility of initial VET and its interconnecting with the highly deregulated system of continuing VET; the lack of these desired features is currently stifling the development of a system of validation of informal and non-formal learning in the Czech Republic..

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV), *Managing diversity in LLL, Czech national report*

## 2.0 Public Sector

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### 2.1 Legal framework

#### 2.1.1 New School Act (2005)

The new School Act (*Školský zákon*) (Act no. 561/2004), effective from 1 January 2005, has been a first step towards the creation of comprehensive legislation governing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic. Before this Act, adult learners, in order to acquire the relevant certificate of education, had to undergo the same comprehensive programmes as in initial education. No account was taken of the diversity of prior formal or non-formal learning and the competences of the individual.

The new School Act makes it possible for adults (who have attained at least compulsory education of 9 years) to acquire a partial qualification by passing single examination(s) – part(s) of a full qualification – i.e. parts of:

- “*Final examination*” (completing upper secondary level vocational programmes of the type ISCED 3C leading to a certificate of apprenticeship) at secondary vocational schools (*střední odborné učiliště* - SOU)

- “*Maturita examination*” (completing all upper secondary level programmes of the type ISCED 3A, general, technical or vocational) at grammar schools (*gymnasium* – G) or secondary technical schools (*střední odborná škola* – SOŠ) or secondary vocational schools (*střední odborné učiliště* – SOU),

- “*Absolutorium examination*” (completing non-university tertiary programmes of the type ISCED 5B leading to an Absolutorium certificate) at tertiary technical schools (*vyšší odborná škola* – VOŠ).

An individual can obtain a certificate of the single examination(s), regardless of how he/she has acquired the relevant knowledge and skills<sup>1</sup>.

A participant can pass the single exams pertaining to the common part of the *Maturita* exam, which is managed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, by applying to the Centre for Evaluation of Educational Results (CERMAT).<sup>2</sup> An applicant can pass the single exams pertaining as parts to the *Final examination* to the profile part of the *Maturita*

<sup>1</sup> Refernet, 08 Validation of learning – recognition and mobility, [http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to\\_2006\\_english.pdf](http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to_2006_english.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> CERMAT was set up on 1 January 2004 as one of the divisions of the Institute for Information on Education by transforming the Centre for the Maturita Examination Reform. CERMAT plays an important role in the development of evaluation methodologies and procedures in the Czech Republic. Its main task is to develop instruments for external evaluation and interpretation of its results.

exam or to the *Absolutorium*, which are managed by schools, by applying to the head teacher<sup>1</sup>.

Passing single exams does not however grant the full qualification but only a certificate of the single exam(s). Theoretically, it is possible to obtain the full qualification, avoiding actual studies in the secondary or tertiary technical school, by successfully passing single exams in all subjects or other parts (e.g. modules) of study programmes (e.g. modules) in all school years, along with passing the respective complex final examination (i.e. *Final examination*, *Maturita* examination or *Absolutorium* examination)..

In the case of a practical exam from vocational training or vocational aspects of the final examination, it is normally necessary to undergo a certain number of hours of practical training.<sup>2</sup> For continuing training of adults the head teacher may, however, permit omitting part or all of the practical training, if the applicant can prove he/she has the relevant practical experience (again no precise procedure is stipulated, leaving the decision at the discretion of the head teacher).

Currently, the weak point is the fact that the decision to recognise prior learning lies partially in the hands of an individual school teacher, whose choice depends on many factors. Also the final examination is not fully standardised and the outcomes of education often vary from one school type, or even school, to another. This is largely the result of the absence of an independent assessment system, by an external examination and certification body.

#### 2.1.2 Act No. 179/2006 (2007)

A more systemic step in terms of recognising non-formal and informal learning is the new Act No. 179/2006 of 30 March 2006 on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results and on the Amendment of Some Other Acts (Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results) which entered into force in August 2007. This Act creates a systemic framework for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning by offering the opportunity to acquire partial qualifications. The Act does not make it possible to acquire a full qualification other than through the formal education system.

<sup>1</sup> The reform of Maturita examination (still under way) aims to provide for more objective assessment and for standardisation of requirements concerning general education, regardless of vocational/technical fields (branches) of study and/or priorities of schools. Maturita shall consist of two parts. The common part of the Maturita examination shall ensure uniformity of requirements. Its content, form and assessment criteria are being set by the CERMAT. The profile part of Maturita shall test the knowledge and skills in the subjects the school considers to be the most important in view of the respective vocational/technical fields (branches) of study and/or the given school's priorities. Its content and form shall be determined by the school head teacher.

<sup>2</sup> As determined by the framework curricula

Verification of partial qualifications is done by means of contrasting the actual competences with the relevant qualification and assessment standards, to be undertaken by an authorised "person" (individual or organisation) appointed by an authorising body (relevant ministry). The validation should be carried out by means of an examination (practical and, if appropriate, oral or written as well) the content of which is in line with the respective job requirements. The acquisition and demonstration of the competences are then confirmed through a certificate, which corresponds with the relevant partial qualification and is recognised both in the system of initial education and in the labour market<sup>1</sup>.

Recognition of results of non-formal education and informal learning is only based on the skills and knowledge proved within the examination, regardless of the way the applicant gained them. The system of recognition in the Czech Republic is neither tied to completion of any form of education nor to recognition (seeking the evidence) of competences (for instance by means of individual skills portfolio).

Until the Act came into force, thus, it was not possible to act in accordance with it. Since the Act came into effect, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has approved the first set of qualification and assessment standards for partial qualifications. Further sets of the standards are currently at the final stage of approval process. In this respect, the first authorisations have been granted by the Ministry for Regional Development and the Ministry of Agriculture. In the immediate future, the first examinations will take place leading towards certificate issuance confirming that an examination was passed successfully and that the relevant partial qualification was attained.<sup>2</sup>

The above approach has been piloted through ESF-funded projects with the objective to develop a relevant scheme and to gradually launch this on a national basis<sup>3</sup>. An important ESF project in this respect is the UNIV project ("Recognition of the results of non-formal education and informal learning in networks of schools providing education services for adults") (August 2005 – July 2008) which is carried out by NÚOV<sup>4</sup>. One of its sub-aims was to prepare schools for the implementation of the Act No. 179/2006 by offering them the chance to gain experience with the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This offered them the unique opportunity to become authorised to perform validation activities once the Act came into force. During the piloting stage, 20 partial qualifications were

<sup>1</sup> Refernet, 08 Validation of learning – recognition and mobility, [http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to\\_2006\\_english.pdf](http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to_2006_english.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of technical and vocational education (NUOV), *Managing diversity in LLL, Czech national report*; Čiháková, H, Stretti, M, 2007, *VPL2 casestudies- in-case analysis*, National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education

<sup>4</sup> National Institute of technical and vocational education run by the Ministry of Education, youth and sport to develop vocational education.

chosen for piloting and six regions were covered for the development of the network of schools (*Karlovy Vary, Ústí nad Labem, Pardubice, Jižní Čechy, Zlín, Olomouc*).

The assessment of the client's current competences will be based on the so-called 'assessment standard' which, together with the qualification standard, will form the description of each qualification. While the qualification standard will define the necessary competences (knowledge and skills) of each person who wants to obtain the respective qualification, the assessment standard is a set of criteria and procedures for assessment of persons' meeting the required competences (knowledge and skills)<sup>1</sup>.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is then based on seeking the "evidence" and/or proving the individual competences required by the assessment standard. A tailored training programme focusing on the competences, completion of which will be considered necessary for the individual client, will be offered, and the client will have the opportunity to undergo such training at one of the schools involved in the network of schools providing the training for adults.

The recognition of prior learning in this way will extend the availability of further vocational training. People who would normally be discouraged by the length of study or hindered by lack of self-confidence will be offered the chance to obtain a full or partial qualification, or to receive additional training.

The UNIV project uses the experiences acquired in the Leonardo da Vinci project entitled EPANIL "European Common Principles for the Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in Lifelong Learning" (2005-2006). This project was concerned with developing methods and procedures of identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning in the chosen branch of "cook" (ISCED 3C) with the aim to improve the access of adults to further education. Pilot testing of the methods and procedures for the qualification of cook at ISCED 3C level had been carried out in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia<sup>2</sup>.

### 2.1.3 Development of a National Qualifications Framework (2007)

The Act No. 179/2006 is closely related to the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The project "The development of the National qualifications framework supporting links between initial and further education", was initiated in April 2005 by the Czech Ministry of Education in cooperation with the National

<sup>1</sup> Čiháková, H, Stretti, M, 2007, *VPL2 casestudies- in-case analysis*, National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education; National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV), *Managing diversity in LLL, Czech national report*; UNIV. Retrieved 2007: <http://www.univ.nuov.cz/index.php?r=237>

<sup>2</sup> EPANIL. Retrieved 2007: <http://www.epanil.net/aoprojektu.html>

Institute of Technical and Vocational Education and the private company Trexima. The project is co-financed by the state budget and by the ESF<sup>1</sup>. The NQF shall include a register of all complete and partial qualifications acknowledged, distinguished and recognised in the Czech Republic which should lead to more transparency<sup>2</sup>. It is based on the "Integrated System of Standard Working Positions" (ISTP) operated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. This system describes working activities performed in a specific job position, the required working experience, competences, personal characteristics and qualifications. It links jobs in the labour market to requirements for education and necessary qualifications<sup>3</sup>.

The NQF architecture is created by<sup>4</sup>:

- **NQF units** – these units are qualifications of two types:
  - a complete qualification – the ability to perform a certain occupation (possibly several occupations);
  - a partial qualification – the ability to perform a certain work activity or a coherent set of work activities enabling to perform a profession.
- **NQF standards** – describe qualifications in a standardised way. There are two types:
  - qualification standards – the structured description of requirements for a certain qualification;
  - assessment standards – a set of criteria and procedures for the verification of qualification requirements
- **NQF levels** – (divide the NQF in the vertical direction) taking into account the levels which are defined by the Czech educational system; they are related to the levels which are defined by the European Qualification Framework;
- **Qualification fields** (groups of fields)– divide the NQF in the horizontal direction (i.e. from the vocational viewpoint) taking into account the division into educational fields used in the Czech educational system;
  - Links within the NQF – links between the aforementioned units and standards;

<sup>1</sup> NSK. Retrieved 2007: <http://www.nsk.nuov.cz/index.php?r=63>

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV), 2007, *OECD activity on recognition of non-formal and informal learning, country background report Czech Republic*.

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV), *Managing diversity in LLL, Czech national report*

<sup>4</sup> *A proposal for the concept, structure and processes of the national qualification framework*, April 2007, NQF team, NSK

- Links between the NQF and its environment – links between the NQF and the world of work and the NQF and the sphere of education.

#### 2.1.4 Statutory training

The lack - until recently - of a generally valid legal regulation fostering the recognition of non-formal education has resulted in the development of a number of specific sub-regulations within decrees issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other ministries (agriculture, industry and trade, health, the interior, and defence) which govern various specific types of CVET or qualification testing. These partial regulations are abundant and they concern, for example, the recognition of the professional competence of individuals working in electrical engineering (Act on professional competence in electrical engineering), crews of ships (Act on maritime transport), railways and railway transport operators (Act on railways), healthcare workers, etc. In line with the relevant regulations they are required either to have obtained the respective certificate, or to have passed the relevant examinations. What is most important in this respect is that it is impossible to perform the respective activity unless the individual holds the relevant formal certificate<sup>1</sup>.

The qualification requirement can in some cases also be satisfied by providing proof of years of work experience (e.g. 6 years of work experience in the given trade in case of businesses in the crafts sectors requiring vocational competence, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, cosmetic services, photographers, etc.)<sup>2</sup>.

EU citizens who wish to work in a regulated profession or trade<sup>3</sup> in the Czech Republic can gain recognition of their qualifications through the Act No. 18/2004. This Act assigns the coordination function to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The recognition body depends on the specific profession or trade (e.g. Ministry of Health for medical professions, etc.). The law stipulates compensation mechanisms for the recognition of vocational qualifications attained in other EU states allowing for one of the following options: proof of practical experience in the trade or profession; an examination or an adaptation period<sup>4</sup>.

#### 2.1.5 Retraining

In 1991, the "Chance" programme was developed. It assists clients of labour offices in their (re)integration into society and the labour market. The programme was initially

<sup>1</sup> Refernet, 08 Validation of learning – recognition and mobility, [http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to\\_2006\\_english.pdf](http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to_2006_english.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Act No.455/1991.

<sup>3</sup> These are approximately 470 professions and trades according to the Czech legislation. Retrieved: <http://www.ipravnik.cz/clanky/spravni/uznavani030423.html>

<sup>4</sup> Portal of the public administration. Retrieved: <http://portal.gov.cz/wps/portal/s.155/701?kam=zakon&id=2175>

implemented in one district but has been very successful and now is widely applied in many districts across the country. The programme is based on an individual and comprehensive approach to the client. The clients – people above 15 years of age, many of whom have dropped out of schooling – take part in the programme on the basis of their own decision and the recommendation of the relevant labour office. The process includes three stages. As the clients are mostly individuals who have not been very successful in school and employment, their awareness of the need for self-fulfilment must be encouraged. After this stage career diagnostic testing is carried out<sup>1</sup>, whereby the client's personality is mapped and his/her professional orientation is identified. Then a one-month motivational course follows, during which the client's suitability for the chosen profession is tested in a working environment in his/her place of residence. This stage is finalised by assessment of the overall suitability of the client for the profession. This is followed by a retraining course or search for an alternative solution. Retraining courses are modularised and consist of both theory and practical training. Theoretical training is provided by *Republikové vzdělávací centrum* (RVC) or other regional training centres. Practical training is organised in small and medium-sized companies in the client's place of residence, in line with the relevant curricula and agreements concluded between the company and RVC. Upon passing a final examination the participant obtains a certificate which is accredited by the Accreditation Commission of the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports. Approximately 600 clients of labour offices are trained in 40 professions within the Chance programme each year. The resulting rate of success<sup>2</sup> in the labour market is high at around 80%.<sup>3</sup>

Graduates of accredited retraining courses acquire formally recognised national certificates of qualification, which, however, are not equivalent to the certificates obtained in the formal education system. So far it has not been possible to ensure formal recognition of single skills that, when accumulated, could constitute an equivalent to the relevant certificate recognised in formal education (applying the principle of formal recognition of non-formal or informal learning outcomes). Whether or not these certificates are recognised in the labour market is therefore not clear, and depends on the specific provider and the quality of the course<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Career diagnostics is carried out with the support of COMDI computer diagnostics.

<sup>2</sup> Success rate is determined in terms of finding employment within one month of the course completion. Clients usually find employment in the enterprises where they underwent practical training.

<sup>3</sup> Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.). *Achieving the Lisbon Goals: The contribution of VET. Country Report: Czech Republic*, QCA Consortium, 2004. [http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country\\_Report\\_Czech\\_Rep.pdf](http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country_Report_Czech_Rep.pdf). See also Široký, Vladimír. *Profesní diagnostika při KD Junior Chotěboř* (Professional diagnostics at KD Junior Chotěboř) <http://www.quido.cz/diagnos.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Refernet, 08 Validation of learning – recognition and mobility, [http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to\\_2006\\_english.pdf](http://www.refernet.cz/dokumenty/to_2006_english.pdf)

## 2.2 Balance Diagnostic Centres (BDCs)

In response to the need for more comprehensive and efficient approaches in assessment of individual potential in the labour market, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs introduced Balance Diagnostic Centres (BDCs). Following a pilot stage, the network of BDCs was created in 2000<sup>1</sup>, which by 2003 comprised 2 methodical and 10 executive centres established at labour offices in the regions and 23 external sites endorsed by the State Employment Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs<sup>2</sup>.

The task of the Centres is to assess the overall potential of an individual with the help of complex modern diagnostic methods with a view to recommending an optimal professional orientation and placement (*bilan de compétence*). The assessment takes into account opportunities in the regional labour market; the individual's interests; the individual's prior learning and acquired competences; his or her motivation, psychological characteristics and subsequently comes up with an appropriate career development plan (possibly including a plan to acquire a formal qualification) for the individual in the form of a final report<sup>3</sup>.

For the time being, the possibilities of the balance diagnostic process are limited, due to the lack of a system of recognition of prior learning. However, since they are part of the network of labour offices and therefore naturally linked to retraining opportunities offered in the framework of active employment policy, these centres could become important instruments in the provision of formative validation of informal and non-formal learning<sup>4</sup>.

## 2.3 Regional centres for human resource development

A very promising project aimed at establishing multifunctional regional centres for human resource development and continuing vocational training targeted a wide range of the adult population (employees wishing to develop or upgrade their qualifications, the unemployed, inactive, disadvantaged, etc.). Two pilot regional centres in Vysočina and in Moravia-Silesia were established<sup>5</sup> and there are plans to establish such centres in other regions too, utilising existing training capacities. The centres offer training courses leading to nationally recognised qualifications in the fields most needed in the region (working

<sup>1</sup> The system is implemented on the basis of the Government Decision No. 418/1999 and the subsequent Notification by the Director General of State Employment Services No. 3/2000.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Leonardo project VPL-2- analysis grid for the case studies. Grid for the description of SYSTEM case studies, Leonardo project VPL-2, Partner: NUOV, Czech Republic, source: National Training Fund, NÚOV

<sup>4</sup> This was also one of the conclusions in Král, Jiří et al. Využití bilanční diagnostiky v ekonomické praxi. Metodická příručka pro lektora. Kurs pro personalisty (Bilans de compétence in business practice. Methodological toolkit. Training course for personnel managers), DHV CR, 2003

<sup>5</sup> The project was prepared by the National Training Fund with the support of Phare programme.

closely with social partners), with the specific methods and tools adapted to the needs of adult training. The centres also provide counselling and guidance services, balance diagnostics and validation of competences attained from informal and non-formal learning<sup>1</sup>. Such centres could be a major step forward in the development of the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning, if the project implementation goes hand in hand with such changes in the legislation, which would allow for national credibility and recognition. It is unclear at the moment how counselling, training, validation and certification functions will be combined under one roof, avoiding conflict of interest and how and which stakeholders, important for the legitimacy of the validation outcomes, will be involved.

## 2.4 Higher education

### 2.4.1 Academic programmes

Currently, the discussion of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic in higher education is very much linked to the possibility to gain recognition of partially gained qualifications in order to change study programme/faculty or institute. However, it is not yet possible to gain full recognition and obtain a qualification by any other means than by achieving a completion of an accredited study programme or pre-graduate tertiary education in the respective education institutes (universities and colleges)<sup>2</sup>.

The recognition of partially gained qualifications is mainly organised in the Czech Republic through the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). ECTS serves to increase the mobility of students inside a particular study programme nationally and internationally. Even though as yet, no legal provision exists obliging higher education institutes to use the ECTS, all Czech higher education institutes apply ECTS or use some kind of ECTS-compatible credit systems<sup>3</sup>. Problems occur however with the transfer of credits when different types of institutes/faculties and/or study programmes are involved. In addition, transfer from a tertiary technical school (at least three years post-secondary) towards a higher education institution (even in the same study field) is highly unusual.

Technical universities have started to introduce flexible pathways (e.g. credit approach), enabling students to modify their study plans within given limits. Non-university tertiary

<sup>1</sup> Palán, Zdeněk. Uvažuje se o tvorbě krajských center rozvoje lidských zdrojů. [HN.IHNED.CZ](http://HN.IHNED.CZ) 25. 8. 2003

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of technical and vocational education (NUOV), 2007, *OECD activity on recognition of non-formal and informal learning, country background report Czech Republic*.

<sup>3</sup> Realising the European Higher Education Area. National Report Czech Republic, Berlin summit 2003. Retrieved 2007: [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH\\_REPUBLIC.PDF](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH_REPUBLIC.PDF)

education institutes have however much stricter study programmes which leave only limited space for their students to adapt their study plans<sup>1</sup>.

#### 2.4.2 Lifelong learning

The 1998 Higher Education Act states that higher education institutions may provide lifelong learning programmes within the framework of their educational activity. Lifelong learning may be either vocationally oriented or follow personal interests.

Higher education institutions issue certificates to all those who graduate from lifelong learning programmes. Those who receive lifelong learning forms of provision are not students under the 1998 Act, which means that they cannot be awarded any academic degree and that they do not have the same rights and advantages concerning social benefits (e.g. health insurance, tax deductibility) as students studying in academic study programmes.

However, Amendment No. 147/2001 to the Act enables lifelong learning programmes to be provided in accredited study programmes. If those who graduate from lifelong learning programmes of this kind become students under the Act, a higher education institution may recognise up to 60% of the credits they have already obtained as a result of such provision.<sup>2</sup>

#### 2.4.3 Research Projects

Several universities are involved in research projects with respect to recognising non-formal and informal learning. Several of these projects have been set up in the framework of the research programme "Modern society and its change" of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs which was launched in 2004.

For example, the research project of Prague University of Economics "Demand for education and employment of the Czech labour force linked to the integration to the economic and social structures of EU" was implemented within this framework. Part of this project dealt with recognition of qualifications and informal/non-formal learning and maps the situation and offers some solutions based on the best European practice.

Another project in the framework of the research programme "Modern society and its change" was implemented by the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA) in cooperation with the Masaryk University (School of Social Studies) and National Observatory of Employment and Training (part of NTF). The project also mapped the

<sup>1</sup> Realising the European Higher Education Area. National Report Czech Republic, Berlin summit 2003. Retrieved 2007: [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH\\_REPUBLIC.PDF](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH_REPUBLIC.PDF)

<sup>2</sup> Realising the European Higher Education Area. National Report Czech Republic, Berlin summit 2003. Retrieved 2007: [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH\\_REPUBLIC.PDF](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Czech/CZECH_REPUBLIC.PDF)

situation, criticised the lack of mechanisms for recognition of informal and non-formal learning in the Czech Republic and recommended a focus on elaboration of the national system of qualifications, standardised and independent systems of assessment and certification which would cover both IVET, CVT and competences attained informally, particularly stressing close cooperation with social partners.

## 3.0 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector

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The recognition of acquired non-formal and informal skills in the Czech labour market is important, but no formal validation or accreditation of these skills takes place. Formal qualifications are only required for professions and trades covered by specific laws and regulations, otherwise employers are free to accept any job candidate on the basis of their previous work experience and any other acquired non-formal and informal learning experience. Various surveys among Czech employers show that they actually prefer skills acquired informally (communication skills, leadership skills, team spirit, etc.) over formal qualifications.

### 3.1 Councils

#### 3.1.1 Sector councils in the NQF<sup>1</sup>

A new phenomenon in the Czech Republic is the establishment of Sector councils as part of the National Qualifications Framework. These councils are established after negotiations with the relevant representatives of employers and are supported by the NQF team, Integrated System of Type Positions (ISTP) administrator and a National Framework of Occupations (NSP) team.

The private company Trexima oversees the activities of the sector councils. In addition, an employee of Trexima usually holds the post of sector council secretary. Representatives from the sphere of education are also members of sector councils. Sector councils have a varying number of members, but the optimal number is considered to be up to 15 members. Extra members can be included when necessary, drawing from an external network of sector council experts.

The Sector councils serve as a platform of cooperation, focusing on the following activities:

- Assessment and creation of occupation descriptions and smaller segments of work which stipulate potential partial qualifications;
- Assessment and creation of qualification and assessment standards of complete and especially partial qualifications; and
- Cooperation in awarding authorisations and the supervision of authorised persons.

<sup>1</sup> A proposal for the concept, structure and processes of the national qualification framework, April 2007, NQF team, NSK

### 3.1.2 National HRD Council and regional HRD Councils

In spring 2003, the Czech government adopted a national strategy for human resource development to create a co-ordinated, transversal human resource platform which will interlink issues of employment, vocational education and training, skills and entrepreneurship.

The National Council (*Rada vlády pro rozvoj lidských zdrojů*) was be the coordinating body. The Council, chaired by a member of the government, had 27 members representing the state administration, the autonomous regional governments, employers' organisations and trade unions. Its task was to formulate national HRD policies and priorities and to co-ordinate the relevant policies of the different ministries, economic sectors and industries.

The National Council (Rada vlády pro rozvoj lidských zdrojů) was dissolved by the Government Resolution No. 1088 of September 20, 2006. In connection with the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., the National Board for Qualifications has been established, joining together leaders across different bodies. Members of the Board are, for instance, representatives of central administration bodies, stakeholders within industrial sectors, organisations of employers, trade union organisations, and associations of legal entities carrying out activities of schools.<sup>1</sup>

## 3.2 Sector-specific initiatives

Various specific sectors in the Czech Republic have developed elaborate systems of assessment, training and certification of qualifications. These sectors mostly concern sectors with professions covered by specific laws and regulations and sectors where international qualifications and certificates play an important role.

One such a sector is electrical engineering, which has a detailed system of training and assessment of workers, including modular training leading to specific competences related to specific requirements for certain professions. The Czech Association of Energy Sector Employers (ČSZE) managed the Leonardo da Vinci project "European Certification in Vocational Training for Electricity Generation and Distribution" (approved in 2000) which aimed to set up a unified system of qualification examination with international certification<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by a representative of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

<sup>2</sup> ČSZE webpage. Retrieved 2007: <http://www.csze.cz/english.php>; National Training Fund, Czech National Agency Leonardo da Vinci webpage. Retrieved 2007: <http://www.nvf.cz/archiv/leonardo/about.htm>

Another sector is accounting, for which the Union of Accountants<sup>1</sup> has set up a system of certification, designed for the accountancy profession at large, i.e. it offers examination and certification as well as education and training from the lowest-skilled to the top tier of accountancy professions. The system of certification was created on the basis of a Phare project ("Harmonisation of Accounting in the Czech Republic with E.U. Directives") of the Union of Accountants, prepared in consultation with leading European experts in accountancy and professional education of accountants (particularly the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants - ACCA). The system consists of three levels of qualification - Accounting Assistant - technician, Balance Accountant - executive accountants and Accounting Expert. Participants need to have a general upper secondary diploma in order to be admitted to courses and/or examination. But if they lack this, they can apply for a procedure of validation and recognition of previous education, training and experience to the Council for Recognition of Education<sup>2</sup> to gain admission. The implementation of the system started in autumn 1997 and by 2002 it recorded 5,900 applicants, of which 2,136 obtained certificates.<sup>3</sup>

Within the field of marketing, a system of training of certification has been developed since 1993 by the Czech Institute of Marketing<sup>4</sup> (CIMA) in cooperation with the Dutch Institute of Marketing (NIMA) under the Phare programme, National Training Fund and Ministry of Industry and Trade in 1996. Emphasis is put on competences required to practically execute the marketing profession in the labour market. CIMA has been accredited by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports with the rights to issue a certificate of qualification after the completion of training courses in marketing at three levels; A, B and C. The A and B level marketing educational system, which is compatible with other similar European educational systems was introduced in 1993 at 11 educational institutes. More than 5000 marketing professionals passed the first level educational programme CIMA-A (about 120 training hours), and about 1000 students passed the second level of CIMA-B (about 120 training hours). The implementation of CIMA-C is under preparation. Participants who do not wish to undertake the courses, can apply to CIMA and the

<sup>1</sup> The Union of Accountants is a voluntary and independent special-purpose national organisation established in keeping with the Civic Association Act no. 83/1990 Coll., as amended, which, since 1990, has been associating under its present name accountants, auditors, tax advisors, and other interested people who agree with its programme defined in the statutes of the Union and in other documents. Retrieved 2007: [http://www.svaz-ucetnich.cz/predstaveni\\_en.htm](http://www.svaz-ucetnich.cz/predstaveni_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> The Council for Recognition of Education is an independent body represented by experts from the world of work, and from upper secondary and higher education. The body evaluates applications for recognition of previous learning and practical experience and decides about satisfaction of qualification requirements on the basis of the evaluation. The decision always derives from the requirements of the system of certification for accountancy professions, documents confirming education and experience of the applicant, school curricula and other materials. Additional documents for attestation, an interview or sitting a test can be requested from the applicant in case of uncertainty.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.svaz-ucetnich.cz/predstaveni\\_en.htm](http://www.svaz-ucetnich.cz/predstaveni_en.htm); <http://www.komora-ucetnich.cz/>; <http://www.i-servis.cz/isu/>

<sup>4</sup> CIMA was created in 1992 as a non-profit organisation by the decision of the Minister of Industry.

examination commission and participate directly in the exams if his or her expertise gained through non-formal and informal learning is valued to be sufficient<sup>1</sup>

### **3.3 Individual companies**

Over 60% of Czech companies offer some sort of training (formal or non-formal) to their employees (on the top of legally binding courses). This is not only training leading to specific knowledge and skills (foreign languages, accounting, laws and regulations, IT) but often also training focusing on non-formal competences (managerial and marketing skills, interpersonal communication, presentation skills). Currently, training provided by enterprises might but does not always lead to a certificate at the end of a course. Such certificates have no formal validity, although some have international, sectoral or corporate validity and are often very well received by employers (e.g. ECDL, Microsoft training providers).

One third of the companies undertaking training however often do not assess training outcomes. Some 43% of companies ask training providers to submit assessment of the training results of participants. Approximately 15% of companies assess training results informally, e.g. based on work performance. Only a minor share of employers have an established system for assessment of training results (less than 2%), or use some specific assessment schemes (e.g. interviewing, examining or testing the training participant, assessment by the immediate supervisor etc.)<sup>2</sup>.

Over 80% of employers assess regularly (51%) or in special circumstances (33%) the competences of their employees. According to an employers survey of 2003<sup>3</sup> the majority of Czech employers (44% for all job positions and 46.3% for selected positions) tend to have built up for these assessments an elaborate categorisation for each employment position explaining necessary competences and qualifications. Particularly Czech employers with more than 500 employees (often with foreign capital or ownership) tend to have such a system, mostly in the sectors of finance and insurance, state and public administration, transportation, storage, post and telecommunication.

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved: <http://www.cima.cz>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Strietska-Ilina, Olga et al. Identification of skill shortages in the Czech labour market, NOET-NTF, 2003. See also the background report Survey of the labour force – Final report, Median 2003.

## 4.0 Review of existing initiatives: Third sector

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Activities in the third sector with respect to recognising non-formal and informal learning have been very scarce to date.

One promising example is the Centre for Quality and Standards in Social Services (CEKAS).<sup>1</sup> The centre developed the system of quality assurance for social service providers (who mostly belong to the third sector) and the methodology for evaluation, including self-assessment. Among other criteria, the system clearly lays down requirements for human resource management and development, including recruitment procedures and requirements, induction training, qualification and competence requirements for each job position, assessment of competences and validation of prior learning of employees, provision of training opportunities in various forms (formal and non-formal). The verification of qualification and competence requirements usually provides an option of recognising certain years of work experience for the specifically required qualification. The system was developed for several areas of provision of social services (e.g. guidance services, asylum seekers services, family and parental advice, counselling for drug addiction etc.). It can be used as an internal tool for quality assurance by service providers as well as for voluntary external assessment.

Another example is the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) which has been implemented in the Czech Republic since 1999. The guarantor for quality of testing, accreditation of the test centres and issuing ECDL certificates is the Czech Society for Cybernetics and Informatics (CSCI) – a non-profit organisation. In order to publicise and develop the usage of ECDL in the Czech Republic, CSCI established a working group for the development of information literacy ECDL-CZ. So far 12,128 holders of the European Computer Skills Card are registered in the Czech Republic and 8,913 ECDL certificates of different levels were awarded on the basis of tests results<sup>2</sup>.

The National Training Fund (NTF) is also important to mention. This non-governmental public benefit organisation has been founded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for the implementation of programmes and projects in the field of human resource development (HRD) and employment. The NTF has been involved in a variety of projects focusing on education and recognising non-formal and informal learning. For example, the NTF was responsible for a recent project supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs *Education, research and development as key factors of the development of*

<sup>1</sup> The Centre has the status of non-governmental public benefit organization. It was established under the initiative of the National Training Fund (NTF) in 2003. The activities prior to 2003 had been developed by a team within the framework of NTF. Retrieved: <http://www.cekas.cz>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ecdl.cz/aktualni\\_stav\\_testovani.php](http://www.ecdl.cz/aktualni_stav_testovani.php)

*contemporary society training.*<sup>1</sup> One part of the project, implemented in collaboration with the NUOV (National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education - NITVE), dealt with developing a system for continuing training and how to recognise it through a model for certification of competences in CVT.<sup>2</sup> In particular, it suggested that development of professional profiles based on competences required in the labour market (linked to occupational profiles in the ISTP and to the framework study programmes) can lay the basis for recognised qualifications not only in the initial but also in continuing, non-formal, training. They also emphasise direct involvement of social partners in the development of the profiles which will increase the credibility of qualifications. They recommend that qualifications in CVT should be constructed in accordance with job requirements and the usage of modular training should be gradually broadened<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Project 'Modern society and its change', 2003. The part on development of CVT system was prepared by the teams from NTF and NITVE.

<sup>2</sup> Palán, Zdeněk. Další vzdělávání v ČR před branami EU. (Continuing training in the Czech Republic at the entrance to the EU). Andragogika: selected papers, [http://www.daha.cz/andr\\_palán.html](http://www.daha.cz/andr_palán.html).

<sup>3</sup> Rozvoj národní soustavy kvalifikací, Strategicko-operační dokument. (Development of the national qualification system. Strategic/operational document.) NITVE, 2003

## 5.0 Conclusions

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Until very recently, no comprehensive system for validation of competences gained through informal and non-formal learning existed in the Czech Republic. However, slowly the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is increasingly taking its place on the policy agenda. One of the first changes has been the implementation of the New School Act in 2005, followed in 2006 by Act no. 179/2006 on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results and on the Amendment of Some Other Acts (Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results) which entered in force in August 2007. Both the School Act and Act no. 179/2006 focus on the possibility to acquire partial qualifications. Since 2005, these legislation initiatives have been accompanied by activities to develop a National Qualifications Framework and to provide its pilot implementation studies.

Besides legislative changes, many small-scale (pilot) projects are undertaken in the field of non-formal and informal learning, by a diverse set of organisations (non-profit, social partners, employers, public sector). However, in spite of this, the Czech Republic as yet has only put in place the “bones” for setting up a national system of validation of informal and non-formal learning - it lacks the “flesh” with clearly defined stakeholder responsibilities and other practicalities.