

European Inventory

on validation of informal and non-formal learning



European inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning Latvia

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1.0 Introduction

Since 1991, when Latvia gained independence, there have been challenging situations during the transition from the planned system to a market economy; this has caused a change in the paradigm of the whole educational system. In view of the unstable economic situation and the lack of experience and traditions both in informal and non-formal education, the Ministry of Education and Sciences has had some difficulties in organising and financing informal and non-formal education.

In general, education development policy in Latvia has been designed according to the education development guidelines set by the European and Latvian policy planning documents, such as the Lisbon Strategy, the Bologna Process, the European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, the UNESCO programme “Education for All”, the European Commission work programme “Education and Training 2010”, the European initiative “2010 – European Information Society for Growth and Employment”, the EU Basic Strategy regarding gender equality, the long-term conceptual document “The growth model of Latvia: People First”, “Long-term Economic Development Strategy”, “Joint Economic Strategy”, Development Guidelines of Sustainable Development of Latvia”, Guidelines for Policy Planning”, Latvian National Action Plan for Employment”, “Guidelines of Sport Policy for years 2004–2009” and “Regional Development Guidelines”¹.

However, the legislative framework in Latvia does not provide sound lifelong learning policy, administration and funding and, as a result, the existing resources (national, municipal, international, possibly also private) are not managed purposefully in the interindustry context; neither have the criteria been determined for using them efficiently². Consequently, there is no equality in the availability of qualitative lifelong education³.

Thus, for certain groups of people, formal as well as informal lifelong education, including second-opportunity education, is not yet available in Latvia⁴. The current legislation framework in Latvia does not define a responsibility for the state to provide opportunities for lifelong learning for the population regardless of age, gender, previous education, ethnic origin, level of income and functional disabilities⁵. As a result the social stratification and the number of the unemployed increase as there are limited learning opportunities for various groups of society such as families with low incomes, people lacking basic skills,

¹ National report on the progress of the implementation of the European Commission programme “Education and Training 2010” in Latvia. Riga, June 2007.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

young people - particularly in the rural areas and people over 50 years of age (among others)¹. Adults are so far not recognised as the largest education target group and the system does not offer sufficient opportunities to provide for a long-term productive participation of individuals in the labour market and in civic society. As a result, general, vocational and further education of all degrees insufficiently provide for the knowledge, skills and experience required by employers, which hampers the creation of a highly skilled democratic society for the competitive knowledge-based economy².

With regards to non-formal and informal education and learning, there remains an absence of a legislative base and a national concept in Latvia. On the other hand, by the end of the 1990s, within the framework of the concept of lifelong learning more attention has been paid to informal and non-formal learning. As regards the question of validation (it is necessary to note that in Latvia the term “validation” or its equivalents have not been used until recently) Latvia remains at the stage of experimentation and uncertainty (across Europe, countries at a similar experimental stage (to a varying extent) accept the need for initiatives but are still uncertain whether and how this could influence existing structures and systems on a more permanent basis). At present it is possible to point to the fact that the inclusion of Latvia into the common European area promotes the rapid understanding of the wide range of problems connected with validation, and it prompts possible solutions to them. The experience of other countries should be taken into account in Latvia - this will enable the development of a Latvian system be informed by developments in other Member States

In general the current situation concerning the validation of informal and non-formal education in Latvia can be viewed with optimism as there are already concrete further developments at the planning and design stage. In fact, the operational strategy of the Ministry of Education and Science for the period 2007 – 2009 stresses the importance of validation of non-formal and informal qualifications. Moreover, despite the passive position of the state structures and objective impossibility of full financing, the number of initiatives at a decentralised level is growing slowly, but steadily. The initiatives indicate the necessity to change the present situation and demonstrate that the educational system needs to meet the requirements of the market and open society.

¹ National report on the progress of the implementation of the European Commission programme “Education and Training 2010” in Latvia. Riga, June 2007.

² *Ibid.*

2.0 Review of existing initiatives: Public Sector

Provisions for lifelong learning, and especially the validation of skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, are not yet very widely integrated into the laws, strategic documents and action plans in Latvia. The main area of attention has been the regulation and standardisation of formal education and its development.

However, several specific validation initiatives have been implemented in practice for a while already, such as the development of a teachers' qualification and a certification of knowledge of the state language. These are mainly based on or have a very strong integral part of assessment and validation of knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

According to statistical data¹, in 2002 8.2% of the population of Latvia aged 25-64 participated in education and training; about 1% of people older than 45 were involved in formal education. The age groups 25-34 and 35-44 were the main age groups participating in non-formal learning and informal learning, which also attracted more than one third of people aged 45-64 and one fifth of people of retirement-age. Therefore the possibilities for wider assessment and validation of knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning would be very relevant in Latvia. Actions already taken by large private companies individually show that such a need is evident in the private sector too and this will be explored in greater depth in the relevant section of this chapter.

In terms of the general legal framework, a number of laws on education have been passed since Latvia gained independence: the Law on education (1991), (1998), the Law on higher education (1995), Laws on Secondary and Vocational education (1999), the Law on innovations fund in the field of education (2002), and one of the most recent – the Guidelines for the Development of Education for the period of 2007-2013” (approved by order No. 742 as of 27 September, 2006).

2.1 The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning

One of the first strategic documents concerning lifelong learning - a National Strategy for Lifelong Learning - was adopted in December 2004 along with the document “Developing and Implementing a Lifelong Learning Strategy” which set the action plan for its implementation. A more recent document is the National Development Plan for 2007-2013,

¹ *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems. Country Report: Latvia.* European Training foundation. Contributing to the report: Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the contribution of VET, prepared by the Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium for the European Commission. 2005.

which also contains general provisions for lifelong learning. The very recent and most comprehensive document to date was adopted on 23 February, 2007 by the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia - "Guidelines for Lifelong Learning for the years 2007–2013" with the long-term aim of providing for lifelong learning according to the population's interests, their abilities and the social and economic development needs of the regions. The document defined actions to create a learning society in Latvia and with the help of education to improve democracy as well as the welfare of the society and international economic competitiveness. The Guidelines define the main target groups and their needs; directions for lifelong learning policy actions; policy results and their indicators; responsible institutions and the necessary resources for the implementation of the guidelines. Although the implementation of the guidelines of the lifelong learning policy is attributed to the Ministry of Education and Science and institutions subordinated to it, a wide range of stakeholders have contributed to the development of the document: policy experts from all ministries, regions and non-government organisations as well as social partners¹. It is envisaged that implementation of the lifelong learning policy will be conducted annually, according to the quantitative indicators defined in the Action Programme, due to be adopted by 1 June 2007.

The establishment of a lifelong learning structure, with the help of purposefully organised formal and informal systems of further education, including the introduction of a system for the recognition of learning acquired through non-formal and informal education are among the main measures for the implementation of the lifelong learning policy defined in the Guidelines.

The guidelines also foresee the improvement of non-formal and informal education for pupils as well as adults. According to the latest data, the number of pupils involved in interest education programmes increases every year; in the school year 2007, 240,273 pupils were involved in programmes of interest education² – this figure accounts for 62% of the total number of pupils in general, special and vocational education institutions³.

¹ *National report on the progress of the implementation of the European Commission programme "Education and Training 2010" in Latvia*. Riga, June 2007.

² Opportunities for children to develop their special talents in sports, art, music and other areas

³ *National report on the progress of the implementation of the European Commission programme "Education and Training 2010" in Latvia*. Riga, June 2007.

2.2 Validation developments prior to the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning

The process currently in place for the certification of non-formal learning is for each non-formal educational institution to determine the conditions for the issue of certifying documents. These documents are issued only on behalf of the educational institution¹. It is then for employers to determine whether this document of non-formal education is sufficient in order to occupy a certain position. Professional associations organising the continuing education of employees and employers themselves choose which non-formal educational programmes are recognised. Larger enterprises have staff training plans in which it is stated which non-formal educational programmes the particular specialist has to master.

Some initiatives have been undertaken at the level of the Ministry of Education and Science. For example, in the document passed by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2001 “The Concept of the Development of Education for 2002 – 2005”, the chapter “The development of educational possibilities for adults, providing professionally oriented lifelong learning supply” proved that Latvia had started to move in the direction of a so-called “Modular approach” in respect of the validation of informal and non-formal education. The concept declares the following basic regulation: “To promote the inclusion of different social groups into education, it is necessary to work out the modular educational programmes for all levels of education for full-time tuition, extra-mural, and correspondence tuition”. The following actions were foreseen in order to implement this regulation in practice:

- to create a credit point system and to introduce it into the programmes mentioned, promoting its compatibility with the academic system of credits transfer;
- to work out the basic directives for the evaluation of the work of evening schools.

¹ Thematic Overview. *The vocational education and training (VET) system of Latvia*. ReferNet. Europe Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. 2005.

2.3 The validation of informal and non-formal learning in the context of the Strategy for Lifelong Learning

Some general developments have been made in order to set the foundations for lifelong learning and herewith the validation of non-formal and informal learning. For example, as part of the national programme “Developing and Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategy”, there were 6 simultaneous projects elaborated at the regional level with the aim to establish regional support systems and capacity-building for implementing and enhancing the lifelong learning strategy.¹ Also, the Vocational Education Administration, which is supervised by the Ministry of Education and Science, has set up a working group which is developing a methodology for non-formal education recognition and skill evaluation.²

The responsibility for the education of adults has been assigned to local governments, in which the centres of continuing education were created. With the support of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, the NGO “Latvian Adult Education Association” was created. It is the basic coordinator (umbrella organisation) and initiator for questions of informal and non-formal education in Latvia.

The latest report from the Ministry of Education regarding progress towards the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme describes developments in the area of the development of professionally-oriented and informal education for adults. Most of these do not relate to actual validation activities and are more focused on the provision of professional and informal education, although the report does state that a methodology has been developed for the assessment of the knowledge and professional skills acquired informally and for the possible awarding of credits.³

The operational strategy of the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science for the period 2007 – 2009 was issued in July 2007. One of the sub-priorities of this strategy is dealing with the supply, accessibility and quality of Lifelong Learning in the country. The document also stresses the importance of validation of non-formal and informal qualifications.

¹ *Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems. Country Report: Latvia.* European Training foundation. Contributing to the report: Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the contribution of VET, prepared by the Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium for the European Commission. 2005.

² Information provided by Baiba Ramina, Head of the National Observatory

³ *Ibid.*

2.4 Further professional development of teaching staff

In accordance with the “Law on Education” (point 14, paragraph 15), adopted in September 2003, the Ministry of Education and Science accepted an instruction on “The receiving of professional pedagogical education and the order of professional perfection”. According to the document, workers in the educational sector (except for higher educational institutions) can receive pedagogical education by further education or self-education. The instruction precisely defined an amount of time (contact hours) an applicant should spend for the acquisition of the course.

This is a one-year process consisting of different training modules. The process however starts off with a procedure to validate participants’ prior experience, skills and relevant activities in the field. This is done by candidates stating information about their relevant work experience as a teacher. The candidates have to prove the length of their work experience and also have to send their teaching material, teaching methodologies and any other information about relevant courses or activities in the field. Then the Special Certificate Commission (which is made up of representatives of the Ministry, vocational institutes and social partners) assesses which modular exemptions participants may get.

Participants are not likely to be exempt from all modules and they may have to do some projects or attend courses. Participants are then assessed by written exam and presentation. The Commission and the Ministry of Education have made an agreement with specific training institution to carry out relevant courses.

Those who pass the final examinations then receive a nationally recognised certificate which is signed by the Ministry of Education. This however does not replace the official teacher qualification which can only be obtained by attending higher education institutes. But the certificate provides exemptions for those wanting to continue studying to become an officially qualified teacher.

The main reason for such an initiative is a lack of qualified staff engaged in the educational sector. Validation is used to stimulate the inflow of a new staff, to expand career opportunities and to raise the qualifications of working teachers. The certificate does not mean a salary increase for those who obtain it but provides them with an official certificate and thus the ‘right’ to work in schools. They also gain the opportunity to study further, to have some of their previous experience recognised and at the same time obtain exemptions for their further studies.

2.5 Validation of knowledge of the state language

In September 2000, under the patronage of the Ministry of Justice “The Law on the State Language” was accepted. This law rigidly regulates all spheres where the use of the state language is obligatory. In its turn, the resolution No. 296 of the Cabinet of Ministers (Regulations of the necessary extent of the state language knowledge for the performance of professional and official duties and the order of the state language skills examination) rigidly regulates the necessary level of the Latvian language knowledge, which is necessary for the performance of one or another professional and official duties, and also determines the procedure of the language knowledge examination. All the procedures concerning the estimations of the level of the state language knowledge are assigned to the State Language Centre (Valsts valodas centrs). The examination of the state language knowledge is divided into three parts:

- An interview – a commission evaluates conversational skills of a person discussing the topics related to his/her work, profession or position (time period 6-7 minutes);
- Examination of reading skills: a person does reading tasks;
- Examination of writing skills: a person does writing tasks.

The first part of the examination is essential, because during the interview it is possible to define a possible level of the language knowledge. Reading and writing tasks are given according to the defined level. In addition, during the interview listening skills are examined.

Table 2.1 Accordance of the results of the state language attestation and the ones of the central examination at school:

	Language attestation	School
The lowest level (I)	I A	F
	I B	E
The middle level (II)	II A	D
	II B	C
The highest level (III)	III A	B
	III B	A

According to the results of the examination process, a person receives a certificate of knowledge of the state language, where the level of the language knowledge is designated. In accordance with one's desire this level can be improved.

In that way, if a person has not received official education in the Latvian language, then, having finished courses or learnt the language independently, s/he has a right to validate the education received in an informal or non-formal way. In 2001 12,460 people (6397 of whom were unemployed) received the certificate. In 2002 this number was 10,051 (6,142 of whom were unemployed) and in 2003 it was 10,110 (5,321 unemployed).

Although the basic reason for such an initiative lies in political motives (in Latvia 20.4 % (data of the year 2005) of the inhabitants are non-citizens - the basic aim of the law is preservation and development of the Latvian language) the validation promotes social integration, an improvement of the situation of the labour market and stimulates learning of the state language.

2.6 Public Initiatives - Conclusion

Despite the most recent developments, which still are at the planning and design stage, in the development of the Latvian education system, the most attention has been paid to formal education and learning. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the legislative base in the sphere of validation of informal and non-formal education is still insufficient and basic laws are lacking. The actions already being taken and implemented in practice show the relevance and the demand for such initiatives to become more widespread in the future.

3.0 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector

Latvia aims to increase the role of social partners in order to promote their involvement in defining the state infrastructure for lifelong education and learning. It is expected that their involvement for example in the redesigning of vocational education would bring tacit and explicit knowledge, informed by practice and result in a better match with the needs of the national economy and regional demands. To promote co-operation with social partners, regional vocational education and employment councils (RVEEC) have been created in Kurzeme, Southern Latgale, Vidzeme and Zemgale. Agendas for the RVEEC have been designed and approved in the Trilateral Co-operation sub-council of Vocational Education and Employment.

Private sector employers have not traditionally been engaged in training issues but now, they have already been involved in the design of vocational standards and the assessment of the quality of vocational education, in the accreditation commissions of education programmes and institutions and examination commissions of vocational qualifications.

The recently adopted National Strategy for Lifelong Learning contains provisions that are assigned to the private sector as being among the main contributors in order to promote lifelong learning. It defines several measures to encourage employers to increase the number of employees studying with their support¹.

International experience testifies that some sectors need regular investment into employees' education and development more than others. Primarily the sectors are finance, insurance, real estate, transport, services and high technologies. In the sphere of manufacture, public health services, agriculture and construction these investments are traditionally less. The situation in Latvia develops in a similar way. Although several individual companies have set up validation procedures for employees, a systematic and comprehensive overview of industry sectors on a national level is not available yet.

Although the progress of informal and non-formal education validation on the part of public authorities has been slow, the situation in the national economy has developed more dynamically. First, due to the introduction of the market mechanisms under the conditions of the free market, the intensity of the services offered in the sphere of education regulate supply and demand.

¹ *National report on the progress of the implementation of the European Commission programme "Education and Training 2010" in Latvia*. Riga, June 2007.

Surveys show that enterprises use various methods in relation to training their employees. At present the most popular forms are scheduled training, instructing and self-education.

In 2003 the Central statistical bureau of the Republic of Latvia carried out an investigation of 3500 Latvian enterprises concerning their employees' training. The published data testifies that only 53 % of enterprises provide training. The highest percent of the course participants was fixed in the sphere "financial intermediary" - 46 %. In its turn, a survey of entrepreneurs, carried out by the newspaper "Dienas bizness", showed that 68 % of the enterprises participate in seminars, and only 41 % seldom attend. In turn, in 2002 the company Mercuri International carried out a survey of more than 100 representatives of the leading Latvian firms which showed that in approximately 40 % of cases enterprises organise their own employee training and development. A distinctive feature of Latvia is that the greatest attention is paid to the development of personnel in the companies with foreign capital and joint ventures. These enterprises introduce traditions which are characteristic for their native country.

Large enterprises create their own educational centres and programmes. Up to April 2003 "Lattelekom" Ltd. (an enterprise which was a monopolist in telecommunication services for a long time) had the most powerful educational centre. After losing monopoly status the centre was abolished and its functions were handed over to two newly-created commercial structures: "Spring Valley" Ltd. (training and expert opinions in the field of management and personnel management) and "Komunikāciju grupa" (courses, programmes and expert opinions in the field of telecommunications, computers and clients service).

Banks (Hansabanka is among them) have their own educational centres as well. In 2006 95.7 % of Hansabanka employees were involved in training; each of the employees devoted at least 8 days to the training.

Unfortunately, at present, more detailed and qualitative information on industries is not available. But on the whole it is possible to conclude that the number of courses, seminars and other kinds of employee training are growing and their quality is improving. Nevertheless, at present some enterprises are forced to use the services of foreign firms, as what local firms can offer is limited. Local businessmen have started to understand the importance of investment into their employees, because in the long run it is reflected in their well-being. However, the high price of the services firms offer to organise courses and seminars remains a serious problem.

There is clearly an awareness of the importance of enabling employees to develop their skills and competences but it remains to be seen how actors from the private sector will respond to this by developing initiatives for the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

4.0 Review of existing initiatives: The Third Sector

The Latvian Adult Education Association, LAEA¹, is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, which unites adult education providers in Latvia – both individuals and organisations. It was founded in 1993 with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia and the Institute of International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association. The highest decision making body of the LAEA is the General Assembly of its members. The General Assembly elects the Board, the Chairperson of the Association, who is also in charge of duties of chairing the Board, and the Audit Committee, for a two-year term. The Board manages activities of the Association in between general meetings.

LAEA has been a member organisation of the [European Association for the Education of Adults](#) (EAEA) since 1995, joining the European Prison Education Association and [European Adult Education Research Association](#) (ESREA) in 1997. The aim of LAEA is to promote development of non- formal adult education systems and to participate in life-long learning policy making, thereby promoting development of a civic, democratic and open society in Latvia.

Since its establishment LAEA has gained valuable experience in organising various activities on local and national levels. LAEA has created a co-operation network of adult education providers from all towns and districts of Latvia, prepared trainers, elaborated and approved training programmes, training and methodological materials.

In cooperation with local governments, different funds and European institutions LAEA fulfilled a great number of programmes and projects on informal and non-formal education in Latvia. Unfortunately, none of the projects has been devoted to the problem of validation yet. Nevertheless, LAEA is the organisation which actively adopts European experience and informs the society, forms public opinion and stands up for the creation of a legislative basis on the state level.

There is currently a lack of evidence of initiatives to promote the validation of informal and non-formal learning developed by actors from the third sector in Latvia.

¹ <http://www.laea.lv/65/view.aspx>

5.0 Conclusions

Presently, it is obvious that informal and non-formal education in Latvia should become an equal component of the whole system of education, which is determined by the needs of the socio-economic developments of the state. Brief analysis of the situation show that the development of processes, connected with the promotion of lifelong education and learning have entered a new phase with the adoption of National Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Latvia. The need to create and develop wider procedures and infrastructure for identification, assessment and validation of competences and knowledge acquired through informal and non-formal learning is included into the strategic document and expected to be addressed in the nearest future in more comprehensive approach. Although, the concept is rather new, the European experience is being taken into account, the number of enterprises and organisations is growing and personnel policies are oriented towards the introduction of validation processes.

At present the state policy regarding the validation of informal and non-formal education and learning seems to have made some initial progress, though the major work is still ahead. The basic initiatives are at the level of formal education. It seems that these questions are not resolved in full for several main reasons:

- there are still a lot of other issues to be addressed in the society, and consequently informal and non-formal education is not considered as the priority;
- the development of new areas in education is considered a necessity but optimistic – the sector is subject to financial and resource shortages and lacks financial resources for teachers' salaries, for programme accreditation, for educational establishments' repair and maintenance.
- the concept is rather new and it is difficult to foresee its results and effect.

It is therefore likely that the outputs and impact from any activities in the sphere of validation will not be visible until the long-term in Latvia.