

European Inventory

on validation of informal and
non-formal learning



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

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In order to develop a society of knowledge and lifelong learning and thus a knowledge economy, Lithuania is moving towards a coherent national system of assessment of knowledge and competencies, which aims to build bridges between formal, non-formal and informal education and thus create an “open” structure which is accessible to all. In principle, the legal basis for this system is in place already. Good progress has been made in embedding and encapsulating many aspects of lifelong learning into many strategic documents, guidelines and action plans, including the evaluation and validation of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education. At the same time, good progress has been made in the development of national VET standards and the system of VET standards, which play a crucial role in the validation process.

Today, scattered initiatives relating to validation of informal and non-formal learning can be found across the country, such as the initiative by Vytautas Magnus University to bridge formal higher education and non-formal and informal learning.

However, methodologies and tools used to evaluate knowledge and skills acquired outside of the formal education system need some further development. Among the main obstacles to greater take-up of the assessment and validation initiatives is the lack of tradition and culture towards lifelong learning. Analysis of existing research and the results of interviews reveal poor awareness among the general public, training providers and even key stakeholders on procedures adopted for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Nevertheless, it appears that a growing number of individuals are interested in issues related to the validation of non-formal education. The successful implementation of recently developed policies and measures should ensure increased visibility and value of non-formal and informal learning experiences and would also strengthen the basis for lifelong learning.

2.0 PUBLIC SECTOR

2.1 Legislation and National policies

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is not a new concept in Lithuania. An early impetus was provided by the White Paper on VET (**1998**) through the principle *'of formal recognition of the acquired qualification, irrespective of how it has been acquired'*. The law on Non-formal Adult Education (**1998**) established the right of non-formal education participants *'after passing examinations in formal education, science or studies institutions, to receive an assessment of the knowledge acquired in the system of non-formal adult education as well as a state recognised document testifying to the acquisition of a certain level of formal education, stage thereof or a separate regulated part of the programme (module)'*. In **2001-2002**, legal acts defining the procedures for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal vocational education and training and prior-learning in higher non-university studies were adopted. Later, a new edition of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania passed in **2003** set out key elements to formally certify competencies acquired through non-formal (including children's and adult education) or informal learning. This law is an umbrella law establishing the goals and principles of the educational system, the framework of institutions, activities and civil relationships as well as the obligations of the State in the area of formal, non-formal and self (informal) education including validation issues. Finally, the New Procedure of IVET Final Qualification Exams, passed in **2005** describes the procedure for examination of external students who are studying independently and wish to acquire a vocational qualification.

In addition, several strategic documents, namely the Strategy on Vocational Guidance, Strategy Paper on Lifelong Learning and action plans of its implementation, Strategic Guidelines for the Development of Education for 2003-2012 and Single Programming Documents for 2004-2006 and 2007-2013 (embedded the need to develop Knowledge and Skills Assessment System, including those acquired in a non-formal way), aim to build bridges between formal, non-formal and informal education. The strategies foresee concrete measures for the further development of a national knowledge and competence assessment system, including official validation of non-formal learning experiences. The Implementation Programme for the Provisions of National Education Strategy 2003–2012 and the Measure Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy for Overcoming the Consequences of Population Ageing 2005-2013 (approved by the Government in January of 2005) envisioned the creation of a validation procedure for both formal and non-formal educational programmes and modules and obligated The Ministry of Education and

Science and the Ministry and Social Security and Labour to implement respective measures.

In line with the priorities of many strategic documents, new developments to boost vocational education, including the validation of non-formal and informal learning, are expected to take place after the full implementation of the new Law adopted in April 2007 (Amending Law of the Law of Vocational Education, No.X-1065), amending the Law of Vocational Education (1997), and its leading documents. The law is due to come into force on the 1st of January 2008 and the whole legal framework supplementing its enforcement in practice is due to be developed by 2009. It eliminates the earlier divide between formal and non-formal or informal learning and embeds the view of the vocational education as a seamless lifelong process.

The new edition of the Law on VET introduces a system of qualifications that should facilitate the implementation of validation of prior learning. It also foresees procedures for the recognition of competences as a qualification or a part-qualification.

The system of qualifications is being developed through the ESF national level project "Development of a national qualification system". The aim of this project is to create a uniform and transparent qualifications system which would cover all levels of qualifications, secure transition between the levels, ensure the variety of ways of acquiring a qualification, and provide a possibility to flexibly respond to the requirements of the changing environment. Another national level project "Further Development of the VET Standards System" contributes to the development of qualifications through the national VET standards and labour market needs analysis. Results of these projects will create favourable conditions for the further development of VPL systems.

2.2 Basis for validation

National VET standards play a crucial role in the curriculum development and validation process. They bring together occupational, educational and assessment elements. The VET standard is comprised of the following parts: general occupational description, occupational purpose, areas of activity, competencies, training objectives, assessment of competencies and final assessment of qualification. In the beginning the progress in the implementation of a comprehensive national qualifications framework based on competency based standards was slow, mainly due to lack of financial resources. Building on the contribution delivered by the "Framework of Qualifications Standards" Project under the Phare 2001 Economic and Social Cohesion Programme, the Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training will develop 100 VET standards under the

successive project – "Development of the System of VET Standards" (2004-2008; No. BPD2004-ESF-2.4.0-01-04/0156) by the end of 2007.

A competence-based approach has been introduced in the initial VET system, in order to accelerate the standardisation process.¹ Higher non-university studies were built on the basis of vocational studies and as a consequence they are also competence based.

Though modularisation of curricula in vocational education and in labour market training is on-going, the modules are not yet well harmonised and do not allow flexible attendance at initial vocational education and labour market training. There is not yet mobility between labour market training and vocational education either. Except several single initiatives, the same situation is observed through all levels of education.

Seeking to ensure a unified assessment of vocational attainments, the function of qualification evaluation has been delegated to social partners (Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Craft, Chamber of Agriculture). Separating assessment from education creates strong conditions to formalise the knowledge acquired in a non-formal context.

The recent Law of Vocational Education establishes a qualifications' system of which the main purpose is to ensure qualifications correspond with the constantly changing needs of the economy, to ensure their transparency, benchmarking and lifelong learning and the professional and territorial mobility of people. The system covers the defining and handling of qualifications, assessment and validation of competences and award of qualifications. The new amendments emphasise close cooperation between social partners, state and the educational institutions too. According to the Law, a Qualifications' Agency (Kvalifikacijų tarnyba) under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania will be established in order to monitor and ensure the whole functioning of the system. Among its other responsibilities, it will be responsible for setting the structure of professional standards and the order of their preparation, replacement and amendment will accredit, confirm and register them on the Register of Professional Standards and Qualifications as well as accredit institutions validating individual competences.

Under Article eleven of the Law of Vocational Education, the Government sets requirements for institutions wanting to carry assessment and validation of competences. The process of validation of occupational competences is organised by the institution accredited to do so and in line with the orders approved by the Minister for Social Security and Labour and agreed by the Minister for Education and Science. A certain qualification for a person is awarded when he or she proves they have all necessary competences defined in a respective professional standard. Qualification is granted by the Qualifications'

¹ The reform of vocational studies was finished in 1999 and initial VET programs in 2002.

Agency regarding the results of their assessment. The whole process is monitored by the Ministry for Social Security and Labour and by the Ministry for Education and Science.

2.3 Activities in the field of validation

Currently, students' competences acquired in the course of non-formal learning can be recognised as part of a formal education programme or a qualification according to a procedure established by schools or higher education. In practice, this means that individuals may gain access to formal education at different levels, even if they do not meet the standard entry requirements. For example, children who have completed children's music school and apply to the Lithuanian Music Academy can take a practical test while others are obliged to take a complex musicology exam. Statistics on the results of these initiatives have not been collected.

The equivalency examination is the main method leading to the acceptance of non-formal or informal learning achievements for adults. According to the Temporal Procedure,¹ a person over the age of 18 years, with at least one year of work experience can apply to have their competences acquired outside of formal education recognised. In September of each year he or she should register in a licensed vocational school which provides the programme chosen by the individual. The procedure starts with the identification of non-formal or informal learning achievements. This is done through the analysis of certificates on non-formal education and other related documents provided by the individual. Then the external students and schools agree on the timetable of appointed course credit tests and consultations if they are needed. If the results are positive, external students are allowed to take final qualification exams together with those from formal education. The Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Crafts and the Chamber of Agriculture have taken over full organisation of final exams. Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded with qualification certificates or the qualified worker diploma. Assessment and recognition services are paid by the external student themselves, by the employer in the case that they initiate the procedure and by the Labour Exchange in the case that they referred the job-seeker to take the examination.

The regulations for recognition of competences acquired through non-formal learning set up in the Order of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour² are similar to those

¹ The Temporal Procedure for Recognition of Knowledge Gained through the Non-formal Adult Education or Informal Education and for Receiving of Formal Documentation for Evidence of Graduation of Higher Level Education, Vocational Training, some Level or Module of Vocational Training and Acquisition of Qualification, 2001, Ministry of Education and Science

² Procedure for Organisation and Implementation of Labour Market Vocational Training and Regulations on Digest of Non-formal Labour Market Programmes, 2002, Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

described above. The only difference concerns the choice of institutions having the right to organise recognition procedures.

The current Leonardo da Vinci programme project “Managing European Diversity in Lifelong Learning” revealed that the equivalency exam as a method of validation is gaining popularity among teachers working in vocational schools. However, during interviews conducted for our research, a lack of knowledge of issues related to validation of non-formal education was identified among training providers, individuals, employers and even stakeholders.. In 2001, the majority of employers¹ did not see any need to formally certify employees’ competencies acquired in non-formal or informal ways. In their opinion, only the individual could benefit from this validation. However some differences in sectoral approaches could be observed. For example, interest in formalising competencies is higher in the Mechanics and Electronics sector than in the Information Technologies sector. Presented assumptions are being endorsed by the preliminary results of the exploratory research conducted in the framework of Leonardo da Vinci programme project “Facilitating Access to Lifelong Learning through the Recognition Procedure of Non-formal and Informal Learning”. According to interviews with both training providers and Chambers of Commerce, cases where employers refer employees to take qualification exams are rare.

Based on interview results, it appears the motivation of individuals to gain recognition for non-formal experiences is rather low. However respondents reported an increased interest to certify certain qualifications, especially in the fields of construction and agriculture. This is mainly due to special regulations adopted by some sectoral stakeholders. As an example, according to the Law on Farmer’s Farm, a person wishing to register a farm must provide a copy of document evidencing his professional readiness to engage in agricultural activity (a relevant diploma or a certificate). The same requirement exists for farmers applying for loans to banks, support from EU funds or those who are purchasing the land intended for agriculture.

Graduates from *professional colleges*² who are continuing studies at colleges³ have a legal possibility⁴ to transfer credits either for subject or for overall study programme. In the latter case students go on with studies according to the individual programme drawn on the basis of the results obtained through comparison of two curricula. Statistics show that the

¹ 24 market leaders in sectors of Information Technologies, Hotels and Restaurants and Mechanics and Electronics were interviewed in the framework of ongoing PHARE project “Framework of Qualifications Standards”.

² Professional colleges provide 3 years duration post-secondary education vocational studies

³ Colleges provide higher non-university education

⁴ Principles for organization of non-university studies for those who studied according vocational studies programme, 2002, Ministry of Education and Science

number of graduates from professional colleges and continuing studies in colleges is constantly increasing.

Other validation initiatives in Lithuania cover validation of non-formal and informal learning practices according to international norms. Tests of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or European Computer Driving License (ECDL) are the most popular.

Despite the fact that Lithuania already has a relatively sufficient legal framework, the practical (de facto) process of building the recognition system and methods for non-formal and informal education has hardly begun. The system of standards is still incomplete and only vocational education and training standards (a description of which can be found on page 4) are in place. Occupational standards are currently being developed within an ESF programme for the Development of a National Qualification System. Adults without basic education but with vocational competencies, acquired at work or through an individual learning, are assessed in accordance with formal rules for young people; therefore their experience is not formally assessed or recognised¹. Because the country does not yet have a formal recognition system for non-formal and informal education, the prestige of learning gained outside the formal system is reduced, relations between employees and employers are complicated, and the competitiveness of people in the labour market is weakened, especially of those of older age. Among the main obstacles is the lack of traditions and culture towards lifelong learning.

Although there have to date been few initiatives in the development of validation of informal and non-formal learning, several examples can be identified from across the country. VšĮ Skudutiškis academy is developing and piloting a methodology for assessment of competences, using funding from the ESF Equal programme. This regional-level methodology should help older workers, women experiencing problems of integration to labour market and other persons with risk of exclusion from the labour market to self-assess competences, to gain recognition for their competences and to start a home-based business.

Another example of good practice in this field is the recent initiative by Vytautas Magnus University described below. The University has recently set up a Centre of Competences of which the main objective is to get engaged in methodologies which are able to identify, assess and recognise learning acquired in informal and non-formal contexts.

¹ *Implementing the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme: 2005 Progress Report. Lithuania.* European Commission. Education and Culture. Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies. Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies. Brussels, December 2005.

Example – The Centre of Competences of Vytautas Magnus University

Vytautas Magnus University has recently established the Centre of Competences, with the main objective is to validate informal and non-formal learning of adults wanting to study at the University under individualised study programmes. The Centre is strongly supported by the University and is a result of the current project – “Centre of Competences: Preparation for the Process of the Assessment and Validation of Competences Acquired through Non-formal and Informal Learning. For Establishing Centre of Validation of Competences Acquired through Non-formal and Informal Learning at Vytautas Magnus University” (ESF-2.4.-03-05/0160).

The initiative derived from the Centre for Vocational Education and Research of the Department of Education of the University and is based on the scientific research and the experience acquired through the participation in a variety of different EU projects (for example, past project: Facilitating Access to Lifelong Learning Through the Recognition Procedure of Non-Formal and Informal Learning Lt/03/B/F/Pp-171 013 and current project: Recognition and Accreditation of Experiential Learning – a Way for Better Accessibility of Adult Education (REACTION) 223855 - CP -1-2005-1- LT - Grundtvig).

The main objectives of the Centre of Competences are as follow below¹ :

Disseminate information to the public about possibilities to validate individual competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning and individualised studies,

Provide individual consultations,

Develop methodological material to the assessors, consultants and participants,

Develop validation procedure under which achievements of the candidates will be assessed and validated,

Provide initial and further training to the assessors and facilitate sharing of good practice,

Involve university lecturers and social partners in the facilitation of validation processes,

Organise special seminars for candidates on documenting acquired achievements and present them to the assessment commission,

Participate in the national and international project on strategic activities of the Centre as well as disseminate research results,

Cooperate with respective structural bodies within other national and international universities.

Among the main purposes to establish the Centre of Competences were the wish to contribute to the development of the University in order to make it attractive to new types of students and create conditions for lifelong learning; by developing a new system of assessment of acquired learning and validation of competences, work closer with social partners and develop better cooperation with other institutions of higher education.

At this initial stage, the Centre aims to provide assistance for individuals wanting to enter part-time Bachelor or Masters' studies in Management and Economics. A pilot group of individuals wanting to assess and validate their competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is going to take part in the piloting procedure in September 2007. The main competences to be validated are their previous learning and work experience. Among the main methods of validation (still under the development) are

¹ Regulation of Centre of Competences of Vytautas Magnus University.

Example – The Centre of Competences of Vytautas Magnus University

collection of evidence from work experience and formal examinations.

The initiative was designed in cooperation with other universities and social partners. In order to gather more information about the beneficiaries' needs and correspond to them, a pilot group of 25 people was created – the results of piloting validation process will inform further methodological developments. The assessment procedure will be carried out by the respectively trained university lecturers according to the subject and competences to be validated. Validation initiative leads to the certificate.

As an outcome, the university will provide more flexible forms of studies and therefore increase the number of students. For the students benefits can be three-fold. It can open learning possibilities for new groups of students, create more opportunities to combine work and studies, individualise learning and lower university fees. The later benefit for students is among the main barriers for greater take-up of the initiative by other universities.

According to its future plans the Centre aims to provide methodological support for other educational institutions in the field concerned.

In addition, Mykolas Riomeris University, together with Klaipeda, Siauliai and Vytautas Magnus universities are developing a project entitled "Recognition of Nonformal and Informal Learning in University Studies". Further information (in Lithuanian) can be found at http://www.mruni.lt/lt/bpd/bpd0086/apie_projekta/.

Activities such as these should help to stimulate an increase in demand for validation of competences. On the other hand, scope remains for future activities, such as improving the awareness of the population of validation and the elaboration of related methodologies and instruments.

3.0 PRIVATE SECTOR

Social partners participate in the working groups ensuring the compliance of initial VET with the needs of economy and labour market (groups are formed as tripartite partnerships based on equitable participation of employers, trade unions and educational institutions) and the final qualification assessment is fully transferred to social partners too.

Individual companies often apply validation instruments (in the form of interviews, observation, personal portfolios etc.) for the selection of new employees, monitoring the performance of staff and for the identification of training needs. It is quite common for the services of private consulting and human resource management firms to be employed for these activities.

Validation is employed used for the following purposes:

- Mandatory certification in the case of special national or EU regulations adopted for particular sectors of the economy (transport, agriculture);
- Optional certification, when certificates are awarded after particular assessment of competences;
- Recruitment of new personnel;
- Identification of training needs with regard to the implementation of new technologies.¹

Based on the information currently available, it appears that at this stage there are few formal initiatives within the private sector to assess and validate employees' competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Instead, standard training is offered or provided.. However, there are several trends emerging:

- social partners representing employers are more aware of the issue than trade unions;
- large companies or sectors of the economy, according to the Chambers of Industry Commerce and Crafts and the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists consider the issue to be relevant for the sectors they are representing, and especially, for metalwork, working with machine-tools, the furniture industry, the food industry, electronics, chemical and construction industries, because even having the same formal education, employees differ by their competences and tacit knowledge usually acquired through working experience and therefore differ in work efficiency and quality;
- among the main **obstacles** to greater take-up of the assessment and validation initiatives in the private sector are still insufficient number of developed national VET standards and lack of standard methodology frameworks;

¹ Beleckiene, G. and Vaitkute, L., 2007, Lithuania VPL Country Report 2007. Available at: http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=358

- among the main methods used for informal assessment of the employees' competences they already have are observation, collection of traces of activity/evidence extracted from work situations and backwards observation.

Case studies collected in the metal, telecommunications, restaurants and retail sectors have revealed that a number of private companies use validation of prior learning instruments in order to assess competences as well as to monitor qualification development progress. The majority of such schemes are developed to assess competences and the suitability of newly recruited personnel. Generally, development of personnel competence is assessed on an annual basis in performance assessment meetings. Interview is the most typical instrument used but other tools include tests, questionnaires, the STAR method (to assess technical competence and individual needs of metal sector companies), the portfolio method (a case in one of the biggest shops chains, when shop assistants willing to receive qualification of retailer formed a portfolio of competences). It should be noted that in some economic sectors, the assessment of results in a certificate award is recognised across the sector (e.g. FESTO certificates for metal sector).¹

One of the companies that has developed its own system to validate competencies of its employees is Achema, the biggest nitrogen fertilisers company in the country. The box below provides a more detailed case study into the validation practices of this company.

Example - Achema

The stock company "Achema" is the biggest nitrogen fertilisers company in the country and the largest factory that is involved in this type of activity within the Baltic countries. It has over 1,500 employees.

The company is actively engaged in developing its own system for human resource development where assessment of competencies, skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning plays a very important role. According to the company's representative, the rationale for the development of such an initiative is the fact that human resources is one of the main components for building and maintaining its competitiveness.

At the moment, the company is developing a system of qualification requirements for every type of work activity performed within the company, which means that the specific qualification requirements will be assigned to each role within the company. In turn this will be later linked to the **occupational standards** currently being developed at the national level. It is expected that the system will clarify, facilitate and render transparent the present process of qualification assessment and encourage employees for lifelong learning.

The main competences the company is validating are those acquired through work experience. Special attention and encouragement is provided for the employees wanting to learn or validate their knowledge in foreign languages. By doing so, they are awarded pay increases. Among the main validation methods used are observation and collection of traces of activity/evidence extracted from work situations performed by

¹ Beleckiene, G. and Viaitkute, L., 2007, Lithuania VPL Country Report 2007. Available at: http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=358

the direct line manager or formal examinations. The latter is usually used as a part of formal training in the company's training centre. Indeed, many positions within the company require a certificate, which can be obtained for example by attending one of the training courses of the company – and validation of informal and non-formal learning is a part of this system. The assessment is usually performed by the experts of the company's training centre and successful assessment of relevant skills and competences can lead to a certain certificate.

The initiative was developed by the company's training centre with constantly reviewed and improved via indirect input of the beneficiaries – provision of feedback by those participated in the training as well as their managers is encouraged at the end of every training course as well as regular assessment in the longer term.

As the methodologies and the definition of the competences were developed by the company individually, the certificates obtained through validation and training are not formally recognised by other companies even of a similar kind. Therefore despite many benefits associated with the delivery and recognising informal/non-formal learning, for example, fairer rewards and better matching between individuals and skills needs as well as better structuring of job profiles, there are still quite a lot of obstacles for greater take-up, for example: the development of assessment and validation methodologies are only affordable by large companies; employees themselves lack motivation as certificates are only recognised within one company; lack of a systematic approach which results in rather scattered learning initiatives than a comprehensive and complete process.

4.0 THE THIRD SECTOR

In the Lithuanian non-profit sector, validation of prior learning is applied in recruitment, assessing and planning of upskilling processes at institutional level as well as in licensing and certification procedures. In the voluntary sector, validation procedures are mainly used for the selection of new volunteers and observation of their competences, as well as the development of their motivation and self-confidence.¹

Analysis of documents (certificates, diplomas etc.) assessment of portfolios and interviews are the main validation instruments used within the sector. The use of validation systems in NGOs can be illustrated using the following examples:

- Organisations assess the skills and knowledge of newly accepted volunteers and create qualification development plans. Qualification development is assessed annually at group meetings and interviews in order to identify further training needs.
- Lithuanian volunteers who have participated in voluntary activity projects abroad may gain recognition and certification for their experience. This opportunity was facilitated by the Association of the European Voluntary Service. Volunteers receive European Voluntary Service Certificates with an assessment of their technical, social/ intercultural, language competences / skills acquired during their project. The assessment is carried out by the host organisation and the Association of the European Voluntary Service.

Interviews suggest that methodologies for the validation of informal and non-formal learning are still at the development stage in the voluntary sector. However, a number of different initiatives are emerging. Another example is a project which has been started, concerning training for Social Workers. Various organisations, so-called methodological centres, were selected to implement different training programmes. The types of institutions vary from NGOs to public institutions. It is foreseen that after successful completion of the training course the participants will be awarded with a certificate that will be recognised by Ministry of Social Security and Labour workers.

One example of a training programme from a youth organisation is the Madsinga project. The Lithuanian youth organisation Kitokie Projektai was a key member of the international Madzinga project that also involved youth organisations from Belgium, Iceland and Slovakia. This project developed and ran a number of training courses for a total of 24

¹ Beleckiene, G. and Vaitkute, L., 2007, Lithuania VPL Country Report 2007. Available at: http://www.vpl4.eu/national/download_view.php?id=358

youth workers from 13 different countries on developing intercultural understanding via experiential learning. The training course consisted of three phases:

- Phase I - experiencing the method, deepening concepts, practical training
- Phase II - practice, coaching, networking
- Phase III - professional skills, training external clients, international project development.

The course combined a number of group-based outdoor experiences followed by reflection, sharing of experiences between groups, coaching as well as preparation and running of activities by course participants. In doing so, the course aimed to familiarise participants with the theory and practice of experiential learning in order to enable them to use the method in their work with young people. After completing the course, Lithuanian participants became pioneers in applying experiential learning in the youth sector.

Another good practice example from the third sector is the 'Child Line', a not-for-profit organisation providing assistance for children over the phone. See the example below.

Example – 'Child line'

The work of a non-profit organisation providing psychological assistance via phone, letters and emails to children and teenagers "Child Line" ("Vaikų linija") is based on voluntary work by people from a variety of different backgrounds. Because volunteers are not required to any specific degree in order to apply for this type of work, assessment of individual competences acquired in different settings (for example, family, community life, individual experience etc.) and through non-formal learning become very important.

After a potential candidate successfully goes through the initial selection procedure for the job, he or she receives a special training corresponding to the specific needs of the organisation followed by a certificate. The certificate is only recognised among the branches of the organisation, but not among other organisations providing similar services, for example, "Youth Line" etc. There are methods in place allowing further regular assessment of the competences of a volunteer which s/he mostly gains through the working experience within the organisation.

Two main objectives have great importance here: the first, this allows further professional development and the quality of provided services and the second - it enables to identify individual experiences which later can be used in work and knowledge sharing with less experienced volunteers.

The main methods for the assessment are special qualificatory seminars, where a volunteer is introduced to a special situation from his/hers working practice and she/he discusses it with a more experienced member of staff. The second method is conversation with an experienced supervisor (usually qualified and well-experienced psychologists). And the third method is a non-systemic observation of individual's work over the phone.

A new method was introduced recently in order to assess individual competences in consultation over the internet – responses by email are reviewed on a regular basis and feedback provided to the consultant. The main responsibility for the assessment and learning lies on internal experts and well-experienced voluntary staff.

The main benefit for the organisation is better matching between individuals and skills and contribution towards learning organisation. Lack of occupational standards especially for the occupations more often

met in the third sector is among the main barriers for greater take-up of the initiative.

5.0 STAKEHOLDERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 Government

According to the Law on Education “The Government implements the laws regulating the field, the decrees of the President and resolutions of the Seimas (Parliament), long-term State education programs as well as the education provisions in the Government Program, and confirms the implementation programs of the Government Program”.

5.2 Ministry of Education and Science

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) shapes and implements State education policy, submits proposals and drafts resolutions to the Government, organises and coordinates the accreditation of secondary education, vocational training, post-secondary and higher education studies curricula. The Ministry organises *matura* examinations and confirms the Procedure for final qualification examinations including validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences. Powers of the Ministry also include determination of the equivalency of education levels attained abroad with those attained in Lithuania, confirmation of State Standards of attained education and vocational training.

5.3 Ministry of Social Security and Labour

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL) is responsible for the management of labour market vocational training at a national level. The Ministry also appoints vocational training institutions that admit those willing to validate their knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal labour market training and implement the exams. Responsibility for organisation and implementation of labour market vocational training falls on *the Lithuanian Labour Market Training Authority (LLMTA) under MSSL*.

5.4 Other Ministries

Other ministries and departments, governors of counties and municipalities also may implement functions in the field of VET in the scope of their activity. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for the training of farmers at a national level and has issued related legal acts, appointed training institutions, implementing farmers training and assessment of knowledge.

5.5 Vocational schools and Labour Market Vocational Training Institutions

Vocational schools and labour market vocational training institutions (in the case of validation of knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal labour market training) have a responsibility to provide for an applicant seeking to validate knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education necessary support which leads to final qualification exams. Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training under the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for development of national VET standards. Qualifications' Agency (Kvalifikacijų tarnyba) under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania to be established by the 1 January 2008 will be responsible for monitoring and functional facilitation of the whole qualifications' system.

5.6 Higher Education Institutions

Higher non-university education institutions (colleges) are responsible for the creation of individual non-university study programmes for students coming after graduating from a professional college. These programmes equate differences of curricula of studies at professional college and college. Colleges also take decisions concerning the recognition of credits for subjects studied in professional colleges.

5.7 Social Partners

Social partners provide suggestions on VET standards and training programs. The responsibility for the assessment of acquired qualifications of vocational schools students is fully moved to social partners. The Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Crafts and the Chamber of Agriculture took over full organisation of final exams including the design of tasks, identification of relevant members of the commission and granting of qualification. Some regional Chambers approve requests of those willing to validate their knowledge in vocational schools.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis of the information available shows an increasing motivation of individuals to gain recognition for competencies acquired outside the formal education system. The main factors for this increased motivation are the special sectoral regulations, integration into the European Union, expansion of work opportunities in other countries and the need for lifelong learning.

Although legal and institutional frameworks are developed, further work is needed to create a coherent national system for the assessment of knowledge and competencies. The main issues to be addressed are related to a low variety of methodologies used for competence assessment; absence of competencies agreed at all levels of education; lack of mobility through all levels of education and training; and insufficient links between formal, non-formal and informal education. Additionally, poor awareness of population, training providers and stakeholders on validation as well as lack of appropriate qualitative and quantitative information and culture towards lifelong learning impede the implementation of related validation activities.

It is expected that the national and available funding and guidelines of the EU would ensure the successful practical implementation of the strategies and legal frameworks. This will allow the formation of a flexible structure of comprehensive education bringing together the systems of all levels of education and creating favourable conditions for lifelong learning.