

European Inventory

on validation of informal and
non-formal learning



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

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1.0 Introduction

Slovenia faces similar development changes and challenges to those which confront a majority of EU member states - an ageing population, constant changes at the workplace and in everyday life due to the rapid development of technology, scientific revolution and the globalisation process. The country is also characterised by increasing social stratification. Moreover, the fact that for a long time, Slovenia had a relatively high drop-out rate from education makes validation of prior learning a potentially important factor in the national policy for a higher skilled labour force.

The Slovenian education system has gone through many changes in the last 15 years, in particular following the 1996 White Paper on Education. This was a comprehensive and radical reform, which affected all the sectors and levels in formal education.

Transformation and upgrading of the system of non-formal learning in many fields also took root

A new National Vocational Qualification Act introducing a certification system was passed in 2000. The Act enables the assessment and verification of vocation-related knowledge, skills and experiences acquired out of school - it makes it possible for individuals to obtain a vocational qualification in ways other than through formal education. Vocational qualifications obtained in this way can be used to find a job or move into further training.

National Vocational Qualifications and the validation of non-formal knowledge in Slovenia are based on professional standards, made on the assessed needs of the economy for new knowledge and competences. This strengthens the link between education and the labour market and improves the relevance of programmes.

Slovenia is thus one of the new member states with a clear policy for validation of prior learning. The benefits of non-formal forms of learning (contribution to a rise in participation of the population in lifelong learning, access to the labour market, inclusion of disadvantaged groups in learning and transnational mobility) are recognised in the national strategy for lifelong learning. As a new member of the European Union, the country aims to fully implement the Lisbon strategy, namely the objective of Life Long Learning. Therefore, in the framework of the European Social Fund, it will continue to develop the certification of non-formal and informal knowledge as a strategic tool for improved employability and better adaptability to labour market trends.

2.0 Public Sector

2.1 Policy Background

The **National Vocational Qualification Act** adopted in **2000**¹ and the accompanying regulations² provide a legislative basis and framework for links between formal and informal education, one of the pre-conditions for implementing the concept of life-long learning. The Act introduced a certification system, which provides access to nationally recognised certificates for specific National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), enabling recognition of prior learning and experiences of adults. The text itself generally regulates the procedure, bodies and organisations competent for approving standards for selected qualifications as the basis for assessing and recognising prior and non-formal learning.

The act was amended in 2006 in order to link formal and informal education and work experience, to ensure partnership and cooperation in the development of NVQs and in their promotion, in order to enable transfer between different fields and levels of education and training and to ensure transparency of implementation of the certification procedures. It already largely respects the European principles on identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2004, and a comprehensive system of quality assurance will be set up in the coming years.³

2.2 Validation in practice

2.2.1 The National Vocational Qualification

The National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) is a working vocational or professional qualification, required for an occupation or an individual set of tasks within an occupation.

It can be obtained by achieving:

- vocational or professional education, or
- completing parts of educational programmes, or
- completing vocational training and advanced training programmes,
- completing parts of programmes of higher education or

¹ *Official Journal of RS, No. 81/3708/2000*. It was amended in 2006 (No. 118/20/2006).

² such as *The Regulation on Method and Procedure of Assessment and Certification of NVQ* (Official Journal of RS, No. 97-4339/2003) and *The Regulation on Procedure on Acquiring NVQ* (Official Journal of RS, No. 017-01-015/99-005), some of them currently revised

³ Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007, National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

- meeting the standards of professional knowledge and skills.

The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (MoLFSA) is responsible for the assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning and work experiences, in order to provide a nationally recognised certificate. The validation procedure takes place as follows;

- 1) The first step is the submission of a personal application to an authorised and registered organisation by the National Examination Centre.
- 2) On the job assessment and certification of the individual is then carried out by a nominated commission (whose members must obtain a special licence from the National Examination Centre)
- 3) The NVQ may be obtained a) by certification - direct assessment of professional knowledge, skills and abilities determined in the catalogue or by recognition of a person's skills and knowledge on the basis of the individual's portfolio or b) in school - on the basis of documents acquired in educational programmes.

The forms, duration of assessment and the composition of the commission may be adapted for persons with special needs.

The system of assessment and certification of NVQs is based on learning outcomes, irrespective of how the knowledge, skills and competencies were obtained. It is targeted at adults and takes place on the basis of direct demonstration of knowledge, skills and capacities or on the basis of documents and other evidence collected in the individual's portfolio. They thus become visible results of non-formal and informal learning.¹

2.2.2 Occupational Standards

The knowledge and skills required to acquire an NVQ are determined by a catalogue of standards for professional knowledge and skills. These catalogues are developed on the basis of the relevant occupational standard.

Occupational standards define the code and the name of occupation, level of difficulty of work, competence, and field of work, main tasks, knowledge and skills.

Occupational standards are prepared for the following levels: Lower vocational qualification/education (ISCED level 3C) / Middle vocational qualification/education

¹ Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007, National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

(ISCED level 3C) / Middle technical qualification/education (ISCED level 3B) / Higher non-university technical qualification/education (ISCED level 5B).

The initiative for the new occupational standard may be given by anybody to the CPI¹, starting the preparation of the proposal. They must meet the following requirements: stability, long-lasting, widespread, appearance in different work situations, employability of significant number of people, comparability with occupations on foreign labour markets.

Development and modernisation of occupational standards in respective fields is the main task of the nominated “sectoral committee”, composed of the representatives of chambers, ministries and trade unions. The sectoral committees may also propose modification or development of a new job profile, occupational standard or catalogue to the responsible chamber or ministry.

After the positive opinion on the proposal by the expert board, the SSPIU² submits it to the MoLFSA for approval.

The initiative for the adaptation of either an occupational standard or a catalogue of professional knowledge and skills may be proposed by anyone to the CPI, which decides on the relevance of initiative. Proposals for a catalogue are developed by the responsible chamber (or ministry for activities for which the chambers are not organised) or by CPI in close cooperation with the professional and vocational associations and trade unions.

Expert boards, nominated by SSPIU, are responsible for coordination of the proposed catalogue in line with the established needs for vocational qualification, international comparability and compliance with the Slovene legal system and EU regulations. The proposed catalogue is then determined and published by the MoLFSA.

2.2.3 Progress to date³

By 2007, 15,271 NVQ certificates had been awarded, of which 3,961 certificates in 2005 and 8,158 in 2006.

279 occupational standards and 69 catalogues of standards of professional knowledge and skills had been published in the Official Gazette by 2007. Of these, 210 professional standards were prepared and adopted by the Expert Council in 2005 and 2006 (source: Department for Professional standards, National Institute for VET) and 25 catalogues of

¹ Centre for Vocational Education (Center RS za poklicno izobraževanje - CPI)

² National Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training ((Strokovni svet RS za poklicno izobraževanje – SSPIU).

³ All data taken from the annex of the 2007 National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

standards of professional knowledge and skills. Thirty catalogues of standards were in preparation.

Seventy five providers were entered in the register of providers of procedures for assessment and recognition of NVQs, of which 35 new providers were entered in 2005 and 2006. 594 members of committees for assessment and recognition of NVQs have been appointed, 146 of which in 2005 and 109 in 2006. There are 80 candidates in the process of obtaining a license as a member of a committee.

Training for counsellors in the procedure of assessment and recognition of NVQ's had been attended by 166 counsellors, of which 91 in 2005 and 2006.

2.2.4 Higher Education (HE)

The Council for Higher Education determines the criteria for recognition of knowledge and skills acquired prior to enrolment, which are part of the new Criteria on accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes.¹

The amended National Vocational Qualification Act introduced the possibility for higher education institutions to implement the system of assessment and recognition of NVQs as well. However, there have not been any initiatives carried out by higher education institutions to date.

2.2.5 Further developments

The introduction of a **credit system** is an important transversal activity. For credit evaluation of learning outcomes in secondary VET and in higher vocational education programmes, the legal bases have been provided, a model has been prepared and preparation of educational programmes that will have a credit evaluation is under way. A credit system has already been functioning in practice for some years in the field of higher education. The credit system relates primarily to assessing formal educational programmes and subjects/modules, but the same credit system is expected also to apply in the certificate system and with *non-formal* knowledge. In relation to VET, harmonisation with the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) is envisaged.²

Extensive **curricular changes** in all branches of education have been co-financed by ESF funds. New framework national curricula have a module structure, are based on *competences* and evaluated in terms of credit points. Learning outcomes are specified in

¹ Towards the European Higher Education Area, Bologna Process, National Reports 2004-2005

² Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007, National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

terms of obtaining professional competences (connecting theory and practice, training in companies) and building on key competences and general knowledge. New programmes facilitate easier vertical and horizontal transition for students, and enable adults to obtain certificates on non-formal knowledge that are recognised in further education.

In April 2006, the Slovenian government adopted a decree on the introduction and use of a classification system of education and training (Klasius), which is one of the formal bases for building a Slovenian **qualification framework**. It is based on eight levels, in which are placed all qualifications, from primary school to doctoral, in relation to learning outcomes. Conceptual bases are in preparation and a working group has been appointed for the construction of the national qualifications framework. Preparation of the national qualifications framework will require fresh consideration of the placing of individual fields and levels of education, e.g., vocational and technical education and training (VET).¹

2.2.6 Other validation initiatives

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education trains accredited assessors and vocational advisors for the validation of prior learning.² It is also currently carrying out a project entitled “Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning, APL”.

Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning, APL

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education is the national institution for development, research and counselling in the field of adult education. The Institute's basic mission is to foster the culture of lifelong learning and education in Slovenia.

The Institute is currently managing a development project entitled “Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning, APL”. The project was established in order to set up a network for the accreditation of non-formal (prior) learning.

It is recognized that, owing to the fact that the drop-out rate from the Slovenian formal education system is fairly high, the APL system could bring significant benefits. Until now, certificates issued in a particular work organisation have not been transferable to new working environments - not even in the case of college degrees in higher education.

APL project tasks:

- evaluation of prior (non-formal) learning,
- preparation of standards of knowledge,

¹ Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007, National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

² Freitag, Dr. W.K., 2007, Permeability in education, vocational training and further education – the key to lifelong learning

Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning, APL

- non-formal knowledge/qualification,
- criteria for accreditation of evidence,
- training of advisors and assessors/evaluators.

The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) is a public institution which was founded in 1995 by the Government and co-founded by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia and the Chamber of Craft of Slovenia. In accordance with the legal basis passed by the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Official Gazette No. 12/96), the Centre performs research, developmental and advisory activities and is the focal point where interests of the state and social partners in vocational and technical education converge, coordinate and connect.

The Centre is also the National Reference Point for national vocational qualifications which includes databases on vocational standards, catalogues of standards of subjects of specialisation for assessment as well as providers of procedures for the assessment of national vocational qualifications.

The Centre is a partner in the transnational project which is funded by the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme, entitled “New Hospitality”. This project which falls under the programme priority “Promotion of the transparency of professional qualifications”, aims to identify a methodology and instruments for the description, comparison and promotion of qualifications and competences in the hotel/hospitality sector, in support of their transparency, recognition and transferability, in order to foster employment opportunities and the competitiveness of the sector in the European reference area. More detail is given in the box below.

New Hospitality Project¹

The New Hospitality project began on 1 October 2006 and will terminate on 30 September 2008. The lead partner for the project is the Centro Italiano di Studi Superiori sul Turismo e sulla Promozione Turistica in Italy. Other partner countries are Bulgaria, Malta, Romania and Slovenia (represented by the CPI and the Trade Union for Workers in Hospitality and Tourism).

The project proposes:

- o to indicate the evolution of typical professional figures, identifying their competences and picking up variances in contents and in professional dynamics;
- o to compare the professional competences found in the individual Partnership nations to reach common,

¹ Information taken from the project website: www.newhospitalityproject.com

New Hospitality Project¹

homogeneous definitions;

- o to develop a common reference framework to adapt the portfolio of the competences and knowledge of workers to the ever renewing needs of the businesses operating in the sector;
- o to promote transparency of the competences, which can be acquired in formal, non-formal and informal ways, through the creation of a concrete device for the description and cataloguing of competences integrated with the Europass instrument.

Direct target groups and potential users of the final products include:

- o Hospitality industry workers, for whom the formal recognition and transparency of competencies and knowledge, acquired in various ways, are guaranteed to permit European mobility of professional qualifications
- o European educators and trainers, because the instruments proposed for the analysis of competencies are of interest in planning training interventions and for the dissemination of instruments for the transparency of qualifications.

Indirect targets, which can be identified in the public and private entities operating in the hotel sector: businesses, unions and category associations, political decision-makers who regulate orientation, training and the labour market.

The output which is expected to be produced over the two years of activity includes:

- o New hospitality research kit - Study and definition of the methodology and parameters of the research
- o New hospitality desk research – Study and analysis of the demand and supply in the hospitality sector, of the employment situation of the sector and of the skill and competence certification systems used.
- o New hospitality field research -Questionnaires exploring professional skill and competence needs will be distributed to entrepreneurs and workers in the sector. The results of the survey will be used to elaborate and test the research instruments.
- o New hospitality competence units database - Database of the minimum competence units with reference to the hospitality sector and with detailed descriptions, in correlation with the professional figures, by activities, by area of learning, by training credits, by ECTS credits.
- o New hospitality europass - Software and the related instructions manual which will guide workers in the sector through the preparation of a European curriculum vitae (for the part concerning individual skills/competences), in order to guarantee the legibility of the information contained therein, by following a common protocol which responds to the need for comprehension, a sharing of language and of a glossary and the focusing of information on the relevant aspects.

3.0 Private Sector

The positive impact of the 2000 National Vocational Qualification Act is recognised among employers and other private sector stakeholders. Benefits include: rapid response to changes in working processes; shorter and cheaper procedures of introducing knowledge and competences; and that candidates who must prove vocational capacities do so by direct testing and certification.¹

3.1 Social Partner involvement

Social partners cooperate in planning vocational and professional training at all levels, defining occupational standards, adopting and implementing training programmes. The partners' authority at the national level, the National Council of Experts of the RS for Vocational Education and Training, deals with the proposals regarding occupational standards.²

Social partners are following the strategic objectives within the national programme of lifelong learning and are developing the culture of lifelong learning through collective agreements. The social partners have helped to raise the educational level and lower the structural discrepancies on the labour market, through education. Trade union representatives in companies encourage and motivate workers to access education. They try to implement, on all levels of collective agreements, a duty for the employer and right for the employee to lifelong learning.³

Lifelong learning centres include the following social partners: employees, schools which provide adult education, regional development agencies and providers of counselling and independent learning.

3.2 Chamber activities in validation of informal and non-formal learning

In the last ten years a number of sectoral chambers have been established and many of these are very active in the system of recognition and assessment of NVQs. Among the chambers, it is important to mention the Chamber for Agriculture and Forestry, the Social

¹ Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Education and Sport, 2007, National Report of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme

² European Trade Union Confederation; Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe; European Centres of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competences and Qualifications, Third follow-up report, 2005

³ European Trade Union Confederation; Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe; European Centres of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competences and Qualifications, Evaluation Report 2006

Chamber, the Chamber for Health Care, Chamber for Private Security, Slovene Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chamber of Craft.

The Chamber for Agriculture and Forestry has initiated the development of a wide range of NVQs in the field of agriculture, aimed at those farmers who wish to broaden their business.

The Slovene Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GZS) has elaborated a system of “Chamber exams” for the certification of non-formal learning.

Standards for certification are prepared by the different professional associations that are organised within the GZS. However, there is only a control of the final knowledge, and not of the learning path.

These chamber exams are available for all qualifications / knowledge that cannot be included in the NVQ, for example:

- if the qualification is very limited/narrow and specific (e.g. safety in the work place)
- if the occupation is new for Slovenia and therefore only a limited number of people have acquired knowledge in that field through non-formal and informal learning (e.g. real estate, accountancy for small companies...)

However, at the end of the procedure, the individual receives a letter of reference (and not an official certificate). This letter (and the qualifications indicated inside) can be recognised by all the firms that are members of the GZS¹. There is no automatic recognition and no official regulation. This means that a firm can also refuse to recognise this validation.

The Chamber of Craft (OZS) has been a partner in the process of preparation of two occupational standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), i.e. certification of non-formal and informal learning valid at the national level:

- for truck drivers
- for people responsible for logistics in international freight / international truck traffic.

These 2 certificates were developed to certify the knowledge of people already working in that field for many years, but who didn't have any official recognition. In fact, to be in line with an EU directive in this field, Slovenia, as a new member state, needed to establish a system of certificates in the field of international truck drivers.

¹ Registration of firms in the Chamber was compulsory until 2006. Now the Chamber has voluntary membership.

Alongside their initiatives within the framework of NVQ, the two Chambers have developed another scheme for the recognition of non-formal and informal knowledge in the field of small-scale catering (cooking, service, food safety...). This certificate is needed if people wish to start an independent small catering business.

Even though it has existed for more than 15 years, it is not yet recognised officially at the national level (it is not a NVQ). However, the two Chambers are planning to have it included in the NVQ system in the near future.

3.3 Private companies

A number of companies have now brought in validation for the certification of their employees. Most companies in the pharmaceutical sector have followed the example set by Krka, Slovenia's largest pharmaceutical company.

Along with in-house training, courses and workshops and training on the job, Krka was the first company to develop and start implementing six standards of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), i.e. certification of non-formal and informal learning valid at the national level:

- production of final products (in the pharmaceutical sector)
- production of raw products (in the pharmaceutical sector)
- logistics.

Partners in the process of developing the system were the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (which provided the basic documents and implemented the law regarding the NVQ), Novartis, the second pharmaceuticals company in Slovenia (who helped to prepare and agree the content of the standards, together with CPI), the trade union confederation (a national level partner), the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) and the Chamber of Commerce (a national-level partner).

These qualifications have been officially accepted by the Minister responsible for labour. As a result, NVQs at Krka can not only be obtained by completing in-house training (working on the job in production, storage etc) and attending in-house lectures (some 150-200) but crucially also by carrying out practical on the job training and then meeting the official standards in written and practical tests.

Having built a strong network with the other Slovene firms from the pharmaceutical sector, Krka has been designated as the only institution which can assess and certify the NVQ for

these six standards. To date, more than 350 workers have passed the certification on a national level by the Education and Training Centre, Krka.¹

The Ministry of Labour recorded, as from May 2004, 27 firms/institutions implementing this certification system in Slovenia. These institutions are prepared to compile the portfolio and assess the knowledge, skills and competences of the candidates. The firms are mostly located in the capital city, Ljubljana, but also in other large towns such as Maribor, Celje, Novo mesto, Nova Gorica (where the main actor is the Technical school centre) and Murska Sobota.

All fields of activity are represented. The two largest companies are Krka (pharmaceuticals) and Elektro Slovenija –Eles (the only electric power transmission company in Slovenia). Additionally, 30 more firms / institutions are waiting for accreditation (to have the necessary materials, financial conditions and human resources in place) to become certification centres.

¹ Information provided by a representative of Krka, October 2007

4.0 Third Sector

Several other initiatives have been developed by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education together with local actors in the field of non-formal and informal learning, but even though they receive financial support from the Slovene state (Ministry of Education, National employment Agency...), the knowledge acquired is not officially recognised nor validated:

- Centres for self-directed learning are active (*središča za samostojno učenje*).
- The Learning Exchange (*borza znanja*).
- Study Circles (*študijski krožki*).
- Folk universities
- Project Learning for Young Adults (*Projektno učenje za mlade*) who dropped out of school;
- A literacy programme Training for Life Efficiency (*Usposabljanje za življensko uspešnost*).
- Programmes developed within the University of the Third Age.

Our review of the literature has not identified further activity carried out within the third sector, relating to informal and non-formal learning.

5.0 Conclusions

Procedures for setting standards and for the assessment of prior learning have been in place since 2000 in Slovenia. The **National Vocational Qualification Act** adopted in 2000¹ and the accompanying regulations² introduced a certification system, which provides access to nationally recognised certificates for specific National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), enabling recognition of prior learning and experiences of adults. The knowledge and skills required to acquire a NVQ are determined by a catalogue of standards for professional knowledge and skills. These catalogues are developed on the basis of the relevant occupational standard.

By 2007, 354 occupational standards and 105 catalogues of standards of professional knowledge and skills had been published in the Official Gazette. Further, the legislation was amended in 2006, in order to link formal and informal education and work experience, to ensure partnership and cooperation in the development of NVQs and in their promotion. This should enable transfer between different fields and levels of education and training and ensure the transparency of implementation of the certification procedures.

The positive impact of the 2000 National Vocational Qualification Act is recognised among employers and other private sector stakeholders. Social partners cooperate in planning vocational and professional training at all levels, defining knowledge standards, adopting and implementing training programmes. There are notable validation initiatives which have been led by the Chambers and there is evidence of the involvement of private companies in the development of validation, most notably in the pharmaceuticals sector.

In contrast, there is little evidence of third sector involvement in the development validation of informal and non-formal learning in Slovenia.

¹ *Official Journal of RS, No. 81/3708/2000*. Amended in 2006.

² such as *The Regulation on Method and Procedure of Assessment and Certification of NVQ* (Official Journal of RS, No. 97-4339/2003) and *The Regulation on Procedure on Acquiring NVQ* (Official Journal of RS, No. 017-01-015/99-005), some of them currently revised