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

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## **1.0 VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN CZECH REPUBLIC**

*By Olga Strietska-Ilina (Independent Consultant)*

### **1.1 Introduction**

Validation of informal and non-formal learning is a new issue on the Czech policy agenda. At present there are no systemic provisions for identification, assessment and recognition of skills and competencies acquired through informal and non-formal learning or through work experience. Implementation of the system of validation is constrained at the policy and legislation level. The system of formal initial education and certification is not linked to continuing training and informal learning. There is a general lack of legislation on continuing training of the adult population. The absence of a comprehensive qualifications framework and the so far limited legal provision for modular training create further obstacles in implementation of the validation system.

At the same time many examples of good practice in both summative, and especially, formative validation of informal and non-formal learning exist at the level of individual initiatives supported by social partners, branch organisations, regional authorities and by the European Union on a project basis. The process therefore has so far been supply-driven. The public authorities, however, have started to place the issue of validation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning on the policy agenda as a response to numerous private initiatives and projects, and to the policy pressure from the European Union.

Validation of informal and non-formal learning was brought onto the national policy agenda in 2001 in the framework of the consultation process on the *Memorandum of lifelong learning*. The discussion on Key Message 4 - *Valuing learning* came to the conclusion that the non-existence of a comprehensive legal framework in the field of continuing training is the most serious weakness of the system. The report which resulted from the consultation process recommended 'development and implementation of an open, continuously updated system of qualifications' as 'a major tool for the coherent, open and accessible system of lifelong learning'. It further advocated 'mechanisms for certification of the relevant qualification on the basis of recognition of competencies which may have been acquired even outside the formal system (informal learning) and to create a participative mechanism (involvement of social partners) for accreditation and evaluation of output qualifications'<sup>1</sup>.

Although no genuine progress has been achieved in this area since 2001, a number of important activities are under way. The period has been marked by acceptance of a number of important political documents in the field of employment and education.

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<sup>1</sup> Konzultační proces k Memorandu o celoživotním učení, Česká republika. Závěrečná zpráva (Consultation process on Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, Czech Republic. Final report), Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports / National Observatory, National Training Fund, Prague 2001, p.5

In the sector of education *The national programme for the development of education in the Czech Republic (White paper, MoEYS 2001)* noted that the lack of mechanisms for systematic development of adult education and training hampers recognition of education outcomes, and so reduces access to adult education. Therefore, it suggests improvements to the certification of adult learning outcomes by means of obliging all training providers or certification bodies to add information expressing the scope and level of the completed education and to introduce a transparent comparison between Czech and foreign qualifications and certificates.

*The long-term development plan for education (MoEYS, 2002)* also noted the insufficient motivation to undertake/offer training from both the employer and individual perspective, and among other measures laid down:

- the development of the complex and flexible information and counselling system,
- a unified system of certification which would allow for partial certification and recognition of different forms of prior learning and work experience,
- a complex system of accreditation, certification and quality assurance in cooperation with the regional level,
- the development of modular training programmes in the IVET aimed at granting partial qualifications, improving permeability and integration of the IVET and CVT.

In the field of legislation, acceptance of the new School Act (more details in 2.1), did not introduce a major change with regard to validation of informal and non-formal learning, but has been a big step forward in the creation of a more flexible framework for education and training in the lifelong perspective. In order to progress further it is, however, very important to adopt a law on lifelong learning and continuing training, a law which is currently in preparation under the responsibility of MoEYS and in collaboration with other stakeholders (the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), the Government HRD Council, regions and social partners). It will address, in detail, the issue of recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal ways, and assure conditions for attaining formal qualifications by different forms of learning outside the system of formal education. The adoption of the law is planned for 2005<sup>2</sup>.

In the field of employment there are a number of useful documents and recommendations. *The national employment action plan for 2004-2006* stipulates broadening the offer in the framework of active employment policies of such training programmes which are linked to individual career diagnostics, counselling and guidance for change of occupation and career development (formative assessment). *The joint memorandum on social inclusion (2003)* includes plans for the creation of a system of validation of informal and non-formal learning, so that the adult population has a possibility to attain higher qualification levels. It proposes to develop, in cooperation with social partners, a system of recognition of work experience in certain economic sectors.

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<sup>2</sup> Učitel'ské noviny, 37/2002, 01/2004

A new *Employment Act*<sup>3</sup> introduced on 1 October 2004 enriches methods and activities in the framework of employment services, provides more space for individual action plans which result from diagnostics, counselling and guidance and are linked to (re)training and employment. This should provide conditions for further development of the formative aspects of assessment of individual knowledge and competences within employment services departments and their partner organisations.

On the request of MoLSA the National Training Fund (NTF) elaborated a *National strategy for HRD*. Although the document did not touch upon the issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning, it brought important questions onto the political agenda. It states that the systems, mechanisms and specific incentives and conditions for non-formal and informal learning that are needed to encourage the continuous development of competences of individuals and businesses, are missing.<sup>4</sup> The strategy urges that a clear legal framework in the field of CVT has to be developed, and the responsibilities of various stakeholders need to be clarified<sup>5</sup>.

The strategy was endorsed by the Czech government in 2003<sup>6</sup>. The draft *Programme for the implementation of the strategy of human resources development for the Czech Republic* was first discussed at the meeting of the Government Council for HRD<sup>7</sup> in May 2004. It is to be further developed on the basis of comments and inputs from various stakeholders, and then to be resubmitted for approval. The draft version suggested the following measures and responsibilities with regard to validation of informal and non-formal learning:

To create a system of qualification recognition of informal and non-formal learning, in particular:

- develop a national system of qualifications,
- develop a national system for qualification recognition of competences attained through non-formal and informal learning (transparent with European systems such as APEL and others),
- introduce European tools for validation and recognition of training (ECDL, ECTS, Europass, etc.),
- determine in juridical terms the national system of qualifications and the system of recognition of competences;
- To create the national agency for standardisation of qualifications, evaluations and study programmes for ensuring quality of CVT<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> No. [435/2004 Sb.](#)

<sup>4</sup> Strategy of human resources development for the Czech Republic, NTF, 2003, p.57. [www.vlada.cz/](http://www.vlada.cz/)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.28

<sup>6</sup> Government resolution No. 210/2003

<sup>7</sup> The Government Council for Human Resources Development (hereinafter "Council") has been established by the Government Resolution No. 210/2003 as a standing advisory, initiative and co-ordinating body of the Government of the Czech Republic for the strategic management of human resources development. The Council's main task is to initiate, co-ordinate and secure co-operation between and among central state administration authorities, local government bodies active in the area of human resources development, employers' organisations, trade unions and other legal entities and natural persons operating in the field of human resources development. Government Council for Human Resources Development became a part of the Human Resources Development Department of the Czech Government by the Czech Government Decision No. 772 from 17th August 2004. <http://wtd.vlada.cz/vrk/vrk.htm>

The draft material suggests that these tasks should be assigned to MoLSA in cooperation with MoEYS, social partners and professional associations<sup>8</sup>. This is the first document, as far as can be established, which attempts, although in a rather vague manner, to bring the question of the national system of validation of non-formal and informal learning to the point of implementation in policy and practice. It is still, however, dependent on the further development of the document and achievement of consensus on its provisions.

## ***1.2 Review of existing initiatives: Public sector***

### *1.2.1 Systemic and legal provisions at the national level*

The phenomenon of Czech vocational education and training (VET) is the high degree of systematisation and regularity in the initial system of VET on the one hand and an entirely open, liberal and deregulated system of continuing vocational training (CVT) on the other hand. This characteristic has many important implications for the development of the system of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Systematic validation of competences gained through informal and non-formal learning per se and of the competences acquired through work experience so far is non-existent in the Czech Republic. The value of competences and knowledge acquired in a ‘non-traditional’ manner (e.g. on-the-job, self-study, unintentional learning, through work experience, participation in conferences and trade fairs) can only serve as a certain benefit – subject to the judgement by a potential employer. The informal validation of such competences therefore often takes place in the labour market but with no record which can be used for our analysis.

The current system of recognition of qualifications and their certification may provide certain grounds on which validation of non-formal and informal learning can be built in the future, and therefore deserves a closer look.

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<sup>8</sup> Programme for the implementation of the strategy of human resources development for the Czech Republic, Draft version of 25.5.2004. Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council 31 May 2004 published at <http://wtd.vlada.cz/vrk/vrk.htm>.

### *1.2.2 Recognition of learning in the framework of initial vocational education and training*

The Czech system of vocational education and training (VET) and the related system of qualifications and their certification are very well developed for the initial VET (IVET)<sup>9</sup>. Initial VET (upper secondary level) enjoys prestige and high participation in the country. Over 80% of young people undergo a vocational training path as compared to general education (less than 20% correspondingly). IVET is a long-standing system and has recognition among the public and in the labour market.

At the same time the organisation and evaluation of learning give only limited flexibility for recognition of prior learning in IVET. Linear study programmes provide a limited opportunity for changing educational path or transferring to a different course during studies. The modular approach was developed and tested as part of the Phare programme VET Reform at the end of 1990s but its large-scale implementation was hindered by legislation, which defined a number of classes per week and determined subject-focused assessment of students in the interval of one year or a semester. Another drawback was lack of provision for certification of partial completion of study programmes. The new Education Act (approved by the Parliament in June 2004 coming into force in 2005) stipulates that modular and subject-based organisation of studies at schools should be placed on equal footing.

The new school act defines conditions for recognition of the applicant's prior education in case of enrolment during the course of studies (e.g. transferring from one programme or school to another). School headteachers in both upper-secondary and higher vocational schools can recognise, using a relevant document or in an alternative way, completed studies; partial completion of studies can be recognised, if no more than 10 years have passed since the completion or if the relevant knowledge is proved on the basis of an examination specified by the headteacher. If the prior education is acknowledged, the headteacher frees the student from (part of) studies and assessment in the framework of the recognised studies. The new education act does not mention recognition of prior 'learning', 'competences' or 'knowledge' and uses recognition of 'education' as a primary concept. Therefore it can hardly serve as a tool for validation of informal or non-formal learning, although the decision is still at the discretion of the relevant school headteacher.

It is, however, important to note that the new School Act stipulates conditions for passing individual exams in the framework of continuing training of the adult population provided by secondary or higher vocational schools. Everybody who has attained at least compulsory education level (9 years), can pass individual exams of the final examination if the exam reflects the content and the scope of the relevant subject normally taught or corresponds to the exam normally performed in the school. The exam can be passed on the basis of application

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<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) is in charge of IVET at the national level providing general policy, coordination, guidance and regulation. The administration of IVET schools, including their establishment/abolition and overall development of the school network at regional level, is the responsibility of regional governments. The Czech IVET system is school based, and the role of social partners in IVET is weak.

either to the Centre for Evaluation of Educational Results (CERMAT)<sup>10</sup> – in case of the application for passing an exam as part of Maturita examination managed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) – or on the basis of application to the school headteacher – where the application for passing an exam as part of final examination (leading to the certificate of apprenticeship), Maturita examination or absolutorium (a final certificate of higher vocational schools), managed by the school<sup>11</sup>.

In the case of a practical exam from vocational training or vocational aspects of the final examination, it is normally necessary to undergo a certain number of hours of practical training.<sup>12</sup> For continuing training of adults the headteacher may, however, permit omitting part or all of the practical training, if the applicant can prove having the relevant practical experience (again no precise procedure is stipulated leaving the decision at the discretion of the headteacher).

Passing individual exams does not grant the full qualification but only a certificate of the individual exam. Theoretically the full qualification is possible to obtain avoiding actual studies in the secondary or higher vocational school this can be achieved by successfully passing individual exams in all subjects or other parts of study programmes (e.g. modules) in all school years along with passing the final examination, Maturita examination or absolutorium. Such legislative provision, although rather complex and thus far to be put into operation, creates real preconditions for validation of informal and non-formal learning.

The weak point in the IVET assessment system remains the fact that the decision on the recognition of prior learning mostly remains in hands of the school headteacher, whose choice depends on many factors. Also the final examination is not fully standardised and the outcomes of education often vary from one school type, or even school, to another. This is largely the result of the absence of an independent assessment system by an external examination and certification body. Social partners, although often involved in the final examination, have no rights whatsoever in the final decision when it comes to validation and recognition of prior learning.

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<sup>10</sup> CERMAT was set up on 1.1. 2004 as one of the divisions of the Institute for Information on Education by transforming the Centre for the Maturita Examination Reform. CERMAT plays an important role in the development of evaluation methodologies and procedures in the Czech Republic. Its main task is to develop instruments for external evaluation and interpretation of its results.

<sup>11</sup> The reform of Maturita examination (still under way) aims to provide for more objective assessment and for standardisation of requirements concerning general education, regardless of a vocational specialisation of the school. Maturita consists of two parts. The common part of the Maturita examination ensures uniformity of requirements. Its content, form and assessment criteria are set by the CERMAT. The profile part of Maturita tests the knowledge and skills in the subjects the school considers to be the most important in view of its specialisation. Its content and form are determined by the school headteacher.

<sup>12</sup> as determined by the framework curricula

### *1.2.3 Recognition of learning in the framework of higher education*

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was established in the majority of higher education institutions, namely public universities, as an instrument for international mobility of students. Although there is no legal provision obliging higher educational establishments to use the ECTS, all of them use this or some kind of ECTS-compatible credit systems<sup>13</sup>. The international transfer of credits was thus relatively widely accepted, even if there are still some problems with recognition. The national transfer of credits is also evident between higher education institutions/faculties/higher education study programmes of similar type. However, problems occur if there is a transfer of credits from different types of institutions/faculties/study programmes. Transfer (i.e. recognition of part of gained credits) is also more than exceptional between a higher vocational school (at least three years post-secondary) and a higher education institution even in the same field.

The number of institutions which have started using ECTS for accumulation of credits has been growing. Universities, especially technical ones, have introduced flexible pathways enabling students to modify their study plans within given limits but closer to their individual interests. The study programmes of non-university type higher education institutions are strict and leave only limited space for their students to adapt the study plans<sup>14</sup>.

Higher education institutions are thus in the forefront of adopting a credit approach to their study provision. But in the lifelong learning programmes (CVT) in this sector application of the credit approach is still at the very beginning.

The 1998 Higher Education Act allows higher education institutions to provide lifelong learning programmes within the framework of their educational activity. The detailed conditions to which it is subject are stipulated in internal regulations of individual higher education institutions. Higher education institutions issue certificates to all those who graduate from lifelong learning programmes. Those who receive lifelong learning forms of provision are not students under the 1998 Act which means that they cannot be awarded any academic degree. However, Amendment No. 147/2001 to the Act enables lifelong learning programmes to be provided in accredited study programmes. If those who graduate from lifelong learning programmes of this kind become students under the Act, a higher education institution may recognise up to 60 % of the credits they have already obtained as a result of such provision.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Realising the European Higher Education Area. National Report, Berlin summit 2003, p. 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.10.

#### *1.2.4 Recognition of learning in the framework of continuing vocational education and training of the adult population*

Continuing training (including both formal and informal) has long suffered from a lack of legal provision and clearly defined institutional responsibilities. The only segments of adult learning which are covered by relevant legislation are ones of a formal type, i.e. completion of initial education by adults ('second chance' education), retraining courses organised through labour offices, and training for professions covered by specific acts or regulations. Assessment of competences and knowledge depends on the respective form of CVT.

CVT leading to formal qualification provided by institutions of initial education ('second chance' education) is considered to be equal to initial education and student assessment is identical (see 2.1). If the individual wishes to receive a formally recognised full qualification, normally he/she is expected to complete the full education course required by this level. Such courses are not adjusted to the requirements of the adult population, who are often engaged in other activities (employment, family) and thus lack free time and wish to receive/change/upgrade their qualification in order to immediately apply their acquired competences in their work.

If CVT is required by law for execution of specific professions, the relevant law also lays down specific qualification requirements, courses and the form of assessment for the sectoral state body and its agencies maintaining courses and examinations<sup>16</sup>.

From the point of accreditation of non-formal competences it is important both for businesses and individuals wishing to start up a business in certain trades and technical crafts that are regulated by special legislation<sup>17</sup> to fulfil certain qualification requirements<sup>18</sup>. Such requirements stipulate the level of education in the given – normally rather broadly defined – field of studies, and sometimes certain years of practical experience, where the higher the level of education, the less experience is required. It is however possible to satisfy the qualification requirements by providing proof of years of work experience alone (e.g. 6 years of experience in the given trade in case of businesses in the crafts sector requiring vocational competence, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, cosmetic services, photographers etc.<sup>19</sup>). Also the candidates, who do not have specific education in the field, have the possibility of passing a qualification exam for vocational competence in front of the exam commission in one of the educational institutions which are part of the network of education providers of the MoEYS and which normally run education in the relevant vocational field in the daytime courses<sup>20</sup>.

Retraining courses are provided on the basis of agreements between labour offices and job seekers and sometimes between labour offices and employers (and subsequently between employers and their employees) at a county level as one of measures of the State active

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<sup>16</sup> Kadlec, Miroslav et al. Accreditation of competences in the Czech Republic, 2002, p.8.

<sup>17</sup> e.g. Law No. 455/1991 as last amended Law No. 167/2004, sectoral regulations, etc.

<sup>18</sup> The regulation of businesses (legal entities – both companies and individuals) is under jurisdiction of the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

<sup>19</sup> Law No. 455/1991

<sup>20</sup> Government notice 154/1996 as amended 235/2000.

employment policy<sup>21</sup>. All courses lead to nationally recognised certificates which can be issued only by those providers whose training is accredited by the Ministry of Education. Such accreditation is not required from secondary VET schools and universities in their capacity as State retraining centres, or in cases covered by special norms and regulations. Qualification and other admission requirements from applicants (e.g. length of practice) are defined by the training provider<sup>22</sup>. Here it is important that labour offices can secure an agreement with a job seeker who has started but not completed retraining in the preceding employment about completion of such retraining. The school headteacher can recognise the study courses completed by the applicant before retraining<sup>23</sup>. Retraining provided by vocational schools normally leads to the same qualifications and certificates as offered in initial VET.

Training provided by enterprises and training providers may, but does not have to, provide certificates at the end of the course. Nevertheless, many studies demonstrate that most training providers use some kind of certification and assessment mechanisms but these are not organised and recognised at the national level. Such certificates have no formal validity, although some have international, sectoral or corporate validity, and are often very well received by employers (e.g. ECDL, Microsoft training certificates).

Certification in the school system is not linked to the post-initial learning. The problem of inadequate recognition of certificates attained in CVT issued by enterprises or training providers remains. Such certificates do not have the same weight, and are therefore not seen as equivalent to certificates issued by the schools in the formal system of education.

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<sup>21</sup> Government notice No. 21/1991 as amended 324/1992 Coll., MoLSA

<sup>22</sup> Rules for preparation of the application for entitlement to carry out retraining courses, MoEYS, 2000

<sup>23</sup> Directive No. 17 050/98-20, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA).

### *1.2.5 Recognition of vocational qualifications/prior learning in the Czech Republic from a perspective of mobility in Europe*

In the Czech Republic recognition of qualifications was based exclusively on 'academic' recognition, i.e. by the comparison of study programmes with the view of eventual examination to make up for the difference in the education system (see above). The professional recognition of qualifications by assessment of competences and knowledge of the candidate so far did not exist in the Czech Republic. This appeared as a barrier to the free movement of labour in the EU. Thus, a new law on recognition of vocational qualifications of EU citizens (No. 18/2004) was recently adopted in the Czech Republic in the framework of harmonisation of the Czech legislation with *acquis communautaire*. The law concerns recognition of qualifications of EU citizens who wish to work in regulated professions or trades on the territory of the Czech Republic<sup>24</sup>.

The law assigns the coordination function to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS). The recognition body is defined as the part of central administration which is concerned with the specific professions or trade (e.g. MoEYS for pedagogical professions, Ministry of Health for medical professions, Ministry of Industry and Trade in case of all business permissions for regulated trades, etc.).

The law stipulates compensation mechanisms for recognition of vocational qualifications attained in other EU states for the professions regulated in the Czech Republic allowing for one of the following options: proof of practical experience in the trade/profession, examination or adaptation period.<sup>25</sup>

When considering institutions that are significant in the provision of services in the field of recognition of diplomas gained abroad, the Czech National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) has to be mentioned. It has functioned as a regular member of the NARIC network since 1996, as a part of the Centre for Higher Education Studies. NARIC evaluates diplomas and other documentation on education gained abroad to enable, where possible, recognition of the education attained and provision of access to higher education in the Czech Republic, at the request of competent recognition authorities in the Czech Republic (e.g. Regional Education Authorities, MoYES, public universities<sup>26</sup>).

Czech NARIC is a member of informal networks of experts involved in development and linking of methods of the International Credential Evaluation (ICE) and Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR)<sup>27</sup>. The NARIC network has been responsible for the realisation of an enormous increase in types of available higher education programmes as well as of the necessity to facilitate mobility in lifelong learning. It has become clear that NARICs can no longer restrict themselves to dealing only with formal full-time study programmes and

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<sup>24</sup> These are approximately 470 professions and trades according to the Czech legislation.  
<http://www.ipravnik.cz/clanky/spravni/uznavani030423.html>

<sup>25</sup> [http://portal.gov.cz/wps/portal/\\_s.155/701?kam=zakon&id=2175](http://portal.gov.cz/wps/portal/_s.155/701?kam=zakon&id=2175)

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.csvs.cz/\\_en/databases/naric/](http://www.csvs.cz/_en/databases/naric/)

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.nuffic.nl/ice-plar/>

now have to take into account all kinds of prior learning in their validation and recognition activities. ICE and PLAR have attempted to contribute to discussions within the NARIC (and ENIC) networks on the future role of the NARICs with regard to the recognition of non-formal learning and to gather information on national developments and initiatives on assessment and recognition of non-formal learning<sup>28</sup>. The Czech NARIC has become an important actor in gathering information and expertise on approaches, methods, and legislative and procedural issues regarding the validation and recognition of learning in the Czech Republic. Its expertise and experience could be used in the development of the future system of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

#### *1.2.6 Other initiatives: National level*

The Czech Republic lacks a comprehensive qualifications framework that would include all levels of education and qualifications. The debate and some activities towards the creation of a coherent qualifications framework and a system of recognised qualifications are underway. The MoLSA supports the project *Development of a national system of qualifications*<sup>29</sup>. Its objective is to promote communication about qualifications between all players involved, and to link partial initiatives aimed at various aspects of qualifications (description, definition, development or acquisition).

The component of occupations is covered by the recently developed Integrated System of Type Positions (ISTP)<sup>30</sup>, which describes working activities performed in a specific job position, the required work experience, competences, personal characteristics and qualifications. It is expected that the system will form a foundation for the development of a national system of qualifications, which should create links between the requirements concerning training in various fields of IVET and CVT and labour market needs all the way to the requirements for specific occupations.

Following on from the Integrated System a new system of study fields has been proposed for the initial education sector. Each field is characterised by means of professional profile and, in the case of IVET, by means of framework curricula<sup>31</sup>.

So called professional profiles are being developed for IVET in co-operation with social partners. They describe qualifications which are seen as a recognised outcome of training. They serve as a basis for identification of professional competencies necessary for the performance of various occupations, and allow for their projection into VET programmes<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> See for instance the recent report *Recognition of formal and non-formal qualifications Present situation in the Czech Republic* by Skuhrová, Š.

<sup>29</sup> *Rozvoj národní soustavy kvalifikací (Development of a national qualifications system)*. Prague: NITVE, 2003

<sup>30</sup> ISTP creation was funded by MoLSA and involved a wide spectrum of partner institutions, including the sector of education, and close collaboration with social partners. See more at [www.istp.cz](http://www.istp.cz)

<sup>31</sup> Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.). *Achieving the Lisbon Goals: The contribution of VET. Country Report: Czech Republic*, QCA Consortium, 2004, p. 35. [http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country\\_Report\\_Czech\\_Rep.pdf](http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country_Report_Czech_Rep.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* See also Kadlec, Miroslav. *Development of Professional Profiles*. NITVE, 2003

The three above mentioned components (ISTP, study fields and professional profiles) should be interlinked and further developed with the subsequent development of a comprehensive national system of qualifications which should cover both IVET and CVT. This could create preconditions for validation and recognition of outcomes of prior learning (formal, informal, non-formal) as well as make a major contribution towards the conceptualisation and standardisation of CVT by taking into account both requirements of the labour market and specific needs of adult population (e.g. adjusted shortened courses leading to recognised qualifications).

#### *1.2.7 Other initiatives: Sub-national level*

The State Employment Services have a network of labour offices at regional and sub-regional (county) level. Labour offices at sub-regional level have 77 Information and Guidance Centres (IGCs). Their aim is to provide information and guidance services to a wide-range of clientele (individuals and groups, young people and the adult population) assisting them in changing occupation, choice of educational or professional path. The centres represent a valuable foundation for the provision of formative validation of competences if all components of available information and methods are used in an integrated manner: individual career diagnostics tools, information on the local labour market; education, training and retraining offers; profiles and requirements of occupations and so on. IGCs' human resource capacity is however limited. Furthermore, some recent surveys among IGCs demonstrated that counsellors lack skills in the application of certain guidance tools and methods in their individual work with clients, in particular when it comes to 'balance diagnostics'<sup>33</sup>. Under these conditions the individual career diagnostics in IGCs become of secondary importance.

In response to the need for more comprehensive and efficient approaches in assessment of individual potential in the labour market, the MoLSA introduced Balance Diagnostic Centres (BDCs). Following a pilot stage, the network of BDCs was created in 2000<sup>34</sup>, which by 2003 comprised 2 methodical and 10 executive centres established at labour offices in the regions and 23 external sites endorsed by the State Employment Services of the MoLSA<sup>35</sup>. The network is open and may include new centres depending on the need. Their task is to assess the overall potential of an individual with the help of complex modern diagnostic methods with a view to recommending an optimal professional orientation and placement (*bilan de compétence*). The assessment takes into account opportunities in the regional labour market, the individual's interests, motivation, psychological characteristics and competences and comes up with an appropriate career development plan for the individual in the form of a final report. The BDCs do not provide a mere matching between job offers and job seekers but try to solve the individual situation of the client, which often includes the process of motivation for training, return to education or employment suggested in the final report. The report can

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<sup>33</sup> Výzkum služeb kariérového poradenství a potřeb jeho klientů na základních a středních školách v ČR. Souhrnná zpráva (Analysis of career guidance services and needs of the clients at compulsory and secondary schools in the CR. Synthetic report), NITVE, 2003. [http://www.nuov.cz/casopisy/kapr/souhrnna\\_zprava](http://www.nuov.cz/casopisy/kapr/souhrnna_zprava)

<sup>34</sup> The system is implemented on the basis of the Government Decision No. 418/1999 and the subsequent Notification by the Director General of State Employment Services No. 3/2000.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

also be used by the client in the labour market, for example, as part of an application for employment. Being part of the network of labour offices and therefore naturally linked to retraining opportunities offered in the framework of active employment policy, these centres could become important instruments in the provision of formative validation of informal and non-formal learning. The potential of balance diagnostics however, may go far beyond its utilisation by the State Employment Services to a much wider use in the world of work<sup>36</sup>.

The programme Chance was developed in 1991. It assists clients of labour offices in their integration into society and the labour market. The programme was initially implemented in one district but has been very successful and now is widely applied in many districts across the country. The programme is based on an individual and comprehensive approach to the client. The clients – people above 15 years of age, many of whom have dropped out from schooling – take part in the programme on the basis of their own decision and the recommendation of the relevant labour office. The process includes three stages. As the clients are mostly individuals who have not been very successful in school and employment, their awareness of the need for self-fulfilment must be encouraged. After this stage career diagnostic testing is carried out<sup>37</sup>, whereby the client's personality is mapped and his/her professional orientation is identified. Then a one-month motivation course follows, during which the client's suitability for the chosen profession is tested in a working environment in his/her place of residence. This stage is finalised by assessment of the overall suitability of the client for the profession. This is followed by a retraining course or search for an alternative solution. Retraining courses are modularised and consist of both theory and practical training. Theoretical training is provided by *Republikove vzdělavaci centrum* (RVC) or other regional training centres. Practical training is organised in small and medium-sized companies in the client's place of residence, in line with the relevant curricula and agreements concluded between the company and RVC. Upon passing a final examination the participant obtains a certificate. Approximately 600 clients of labour offices are trained in 40 professions within the Chance programme each year. The resulting rate of success<sup>38</sup> in the labour market is high and hovers around 80%.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This was also one of the conclusions in Král, Jiří et al. Využití bilanční diagnostiky v ekonomické praxi. Metodická příručka pro lektora. Kurs pro personalisty (Bilans de competence in business practice. Methodological toolkit. Training course for personnel managers), DHV CR, 2003

<sup>37</sup> Career diagnostics is carried out with the support of COMDI computer diagnostics.

<sup>38</sup> Success rate is determined in terms of finding employment within one month of the course completion. Clients usually find employment in the enterprises where they underwent practical training.

<sup>39</sup> Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.). Achieving the Lisbon Goals: The contribution of VET. Country Report: Czech Republic, QCA Consortium, 2004. [http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country\\_Report\\_Czech\\_Rep.pdf](http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country_Report_Czech_Rep.pdf).

See also Šíroký, Vladimír. Profesní diagnostika při KD Junior Chotěboř (Professional diagnostics at KD Junior Chotěboř) <http://www.quido.cz/diagnos.htm>

A new and very promising project aimed at establishing multifunctional regional centres for human resource development and continuing vocational training targeted at a wide range of the adult population in the region (employees wishing to develop or upgrade their qualifications, the unemployed, inactive, disadvantaged, etc.). Two pilot regional centres in Vysočina and in Moravia-Silesia are being established<sup>40</sup>. There are plans to establish such centres in other regions too, utilizing existing training capacities. The centres will offer training courses leading to nationally recognized qualifications in the fields most needed in the region (working closely with social partners), with the specific methods and tools adapted to the needs of adult training. The centres will also provide counselling and guidance services, balance diagnostics and validation of competences attained from informal and non-formal learning<sup>41</sup>. Such centres could be a major step forward in the development of the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning, if the project implementation goes hand in hand with such changes in the legislation, which would allow for national credibility and recognition. It is unclear at the moment how counselling, training, validation and certification functions will be combined under one roof avoiding conflict of interest and how and which stakeholders, important for the legitimacy of the validation outcomes, will be involved.

The impetus for the development of validation of informal and non-formal learning at the regional level could be delivered by the recently created Regional HRD Councils as communal advisory bodies to the regional government. The councils aim at the maximisation of the human potential in regions for the promotion of competitiveness in line with the strategic objectives of the region. The councils are represented by all major stakeholders in employment and HRD in the region: regional government, employment services, social partners, training providers, schools, universities, counselling and guidance services. Such councils would be a natural partner for the definition of roles of stakeholders in identification, assessment and recognition of informal and non-formal learning.

### **1.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector**

Generally speaking the Czech labour market is rather liberal from the point of view of the required qualifications for the job performance. Except for the professions and trades which are covered by specific laws and regulations, the acceptance of a candidate for a job is a matter of their competences being recognised by the employer. Qualification requirements at the start-up of a new business are only a consideration for those activities and occupations which are covered by specific laws and regulations. According to various surveys among employers, the informal/key competences and skills (e.g. communication, leadership, team spirit) are often preferred over formal qualifications. Since the beginning of the transformation period, the Czech labour force has also demonstrated high levels of professional mobility, where about 38% have changed their occupation at least once<sup>42</sup>. This would not have been possible without recognition of informal and non-formal learning in the world of work. Therefore, prior learning and competences of the labour force in the Czech

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<sup>40</sup> The project was prepared by the National Training Fund with the support of Phare programme.

<sup>41</sup> Palán, Zdeněk. Uvažuje se o tvorbě krajských center rozvoje lidských zdrojů. [HN.IHNED.CZ](http://HN.IHNED.CZ) 25. 8. 2003

<sup>42</sup> Czesana, Vera, Matouskova, Zdenka eds. Human Resources in the Czech Republic, NTF, 2003, p.125.

Republic are far more recognised in an informal way, rather than via an established national system of validation.

Having said that, it is important to note that the legal requirement for many trades and professions to possess certain qualifications in practice creates many problems for businesses and often is satisfied by the nominal employment of a person whose qualification meets the requirements<sup>43</sup>. As long as there is no accessible and flexible system of validation of prior learning, such a solution is much easier for an entrepreneur than entering education for the full qualification cycle or passing the comprehensive set of exams for the qualification.

Assessment of competences in the workplace is subject to the employers will and internal rules and procedures of the company, unless specifically regulated by the sector. The same is true for the assessment of knowledge and skills acquired in CVT courses provided by employers or in courses undertaken at the participant's will, which are subject to the employer's wishes, or subject to the procedures used by the training organization.

The prerequisite for formative competence and knowledge assessment in the workplace is the presence of a system of defined qualifications and competence requirements for each job position. According to an employers survey of 2003<sup>44</sup> the majority of enterprises and organisations have such provision (44% for all job positions and 46.3% for selected positions). The companies that have an elaborated system of qualification and competence definitions for all positions tend to be those with over 500 employees, with foreign capital or ownership and with the growing labour productivity. These are mostly in the sectors of finance and insurance, state and public administration, and transportation, storage, post and telecommunication.

Over 80% of employers assess competences of their personnel either regularly (51%) or in special circumstances (33%). Regular assessment is more typical for larger companies, those with foreign capital or ownership, and with the growing labour productivity. Again finance and insurance, and state and public administration are the sectors where regular assessment is more frequent.

Over 60% of Czech companies offer some sort of training (formal or non-formal) to their employees (on the top of legally binding courses). This is not only training leading to specific knowledge and skills (foreign languages, accounting, laws and regulations, IT) but often also training focused on non-formal competences (managerial and marketing skills, interpersonal communication, presentation skills). One third of these companies however do not assess training outcomes. Some 43% of companies ask training providers to submit assessment of the training results of participants. Approximately 15% of companies assess training results informally, e.g. based on work performance. Only a minor share of employers have an

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<sup>43</sup> There is little official record of such practices but sometimes such situations are revealed by mass media, e.g. Lidové noviny (7.06.2002) give an example of a family-run bistro where a university graduate philosopher and a grammar school graduate successfully run the company for years but still have to employ (nominally only) a lady who possesses the certificate of a cook.

<sup>44</sup> Strietska-Ilina, Olga et al. Identification of skill shortages in the Czech labour market, NOET-NTF, 2003. See also the background report Survey of the labour force – Final report, Median 2003.

established system for assessment of training results (less than 2%), or use some specific assessment schemes (e.g. interviewing, examining or testing the training participant, assessment by the immediate supervisor etc.)<sup>45</sup>.

Many sectors have very elaborate systems of assessment, training and certification of qualifications. These are mostly industries that involve professions covered by specific laws and regulations, or those sectors where international qualifications and certificates play an important role.

For example, electrical engineering has a detailed system for the training and assessment of workers, including modular training leading to specific competences defined as standard requirements for the knowledge and competences of related professional activities<sup>46</sup>. The industry's approach to attestation of vocational competences is that its validity should be accomplished by verifiable continuous training. The Association of Education and Training in Energy and Electrical Engineering also developed a unified system of qualification examination with an international certification in the framework of a Leonardo da Vinci programme. The system has been implemented in practice in the Czech Republic<sup>47</sup>.

The Union of Accountants in the Czech Republic, which has voluntary organization status, aims to contribute to the improvement of the profession of accountants achieving standards comparable to the European Union countries. This goal has mainly been implemented through the system of certification. The system has been designed for the accountancy profession at large, i.e. it offers examination and certification as well as education and training from the lowest-skilled to the top tier of accountancy professions. The system predefines only the general level of education (e.g. complete upper secondary) for candidates for admission to courses and/or examination. It is however possible to apply for the procedure of validation and recognition of previous education, training and experience to the Council for Recognition of Education<sup>48</sup>, which decides whether the candidate can obtain a certificate or should pass the necessary exam. The system predefines compulsory practical experience, which is also possible to validate and recognize from previous experience before registration in the system, and regular participation in training courses for maintaining the certificate. The system was created on the basis of a project of the Union of Accountants, in cooperation with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants. The implementation of the system started in autumn 1997 and by 2002 it recorded 5,900 applicants, of which 2,136 obtained certificates.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Information system for electrotechnicians <http://www.in-el.cz/odbzpus/default.asp>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www2.wepark.cz/aev>

<sup>48</sup> The Council for Recognition of Education is an independent body represented by experts from the world of work, and from upper secondary and higher education. The body evaluates applications for recognition of previous learning and practical experience and decides about satisfaction of qualification requirements on the basis of the evaluation. The decision always derives from the requirements of the system of certification for accountancy professions, documents confirming education and experience of the applicant, school curricula and other materials. Additional documents for attestation, an interview or sitting a test can be requested from the applicant in case of uncertainty.

<sup>49</sup> [http://www.svaz-ucetnich.cz/predstaveni\\_en.htm](http://www.svaz-ucetnich.cz/predstaveni_en.htm); <http://www.komora-ucetnich.cz/>; <http://www.i-servis.cz/isu/>

A system of training in marketing in the Czech Republic has been in development since 1993 by the Czech Institute of Marketing<sup>50</sup> (CIMA) in cooperation with the Netherlands Institute of Marketing (NIMA). CIMA has been accredited by the MoEYS with the rights to issue a certificate of qualification after the completion of the training courses in marketing at three levels; A, B and C. CIMA organises examinations for certifying qualifications and skills of marketing experts and develops and provides further education and training in marketing. Twice a year CIMA organises independent exams of knowledge and competences in marketing under special examination regulations. The exam for CIMA-A-Sales is an open-type exam, i.e. the permission to pass examination is not subject to any entrance qualification requirements. The knowledge and competences required for examination are publicly available and it is the responsibility of an applicant to prepare for the exam. The exam for qualification CIMA-A is open for graduates of the CIMA-A course. Those who wish to pass the exam without participating in the course have to apply to CIMA and the decision on recognition of alternative methods of learning is up to the examination commission. CIMA-B is a next qualification step after the completion of CIMA-A and CIMA-B courses or with the recognition of alternative qualification in a similar manner. CIMA-B certificates are granted national recognition as the state exam and are also comparable across Europe. The emphasis of training and examination requirements is on the competences demanded for practical execution of the profession in the labour market. More than 5000 marketing professionals passed the first level educational programme CIMA-A, and about 1000 students passed the second level of CIMA-B<sup>51</sup>.

The Economic Chamber of the Czech Republic<sup>52</sup> has been very active in promoting the validation of competences and learning. In 1997 they established the Academy of Crafts and Services. The courses for Master Craftsman were developed along with the examinations and certification competence-based systems with the support of the Leonardo da Vinci project. By 2002 Master Craftsman courses in the following professions were prepared: heating plumber, weak-current electrical engineering, heavy-current electrical engineering, electrical engineering, telecommunications, washing/dry-cleaning, and a number of other courses were under preparation (carpenter, jeweller, clockmaker, floorlayer, cook, baker, hairdresser etc.).

The Economic Chamber focused on training and certification of specifically small and medium-sized enterprises' (SME) personnel, where activity fields are interlinked and require multiskilling. The courses were developed in a modular structure, starting from the basic skills certification up to the Master Craftsmen certification. The modular structure provides for the possibility of attending only those modules that are new to the participant. It is also possible that the applicant does not need training in any of the modules and could immediately proceed to the certification examination. Conditions of the examination are

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<sup>50</sup> CIMA was created in 1992 as a non-profit organization by the decision of the Minister of Industry.

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.cima.cz>

<sup>52</sup> The Economic Chamber of the Czech Republic (ECCR) is an autonomous public self-governing institution representing and protecting the interests of its members – small, medium and large companies associated in regional chambers and trade associations. The Chamber's main task is to take an active part in the formation and improvement of the business environment and to defend and promote the interests of the business community in the Czech Republic. [www.komora.cz](http://www.komora.cz)

defined by the Authorized Trade Community (AŽS) and the office of the Economic Chamber. Candidates must have a certificate of apprenticeship in a particular profession and at least three years of practical experience in the field. The system assures the certification examination under the supervision of an independent and impartial certification body. The examination is pursued by a certificate which is authorized by the Czech Institute of Accreditation<sup>53</sup> according to the Czech norm ČSN EN 45013 of professional certification. The certification body issues an authorization, which is a base for the Master Craftsman Certificate, issued by the Economic Chamber. The certificate is valid for a determined duration, after which re-examination must be taken. This reinforces repeated learning and its recognition throughout professional life<sup>54</sup>.

The last decade of experience of the Economic Chamber showed that due to the lack of legislation on validation of informal and non-formal learning and the state ‘monopoly’ on the nationally recognised certificates, the project results were often impaired. The Economic Chamber does not have legal competences for granting nationally valid and recognised certificates. The motivation for individuals to pass the Master Craftsmen examination, not being part of the national system of recognition and not linked to the career development was low. As the result the Chamber does not provide the Master Craftsmen courses any longer<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, the situation in the legislation can actually harm future development of innovative and extremely useful projects, some examples of which mentioned above.

#### **1.4 Review of existing initiatives: Third sector**

Activities of the third sector with regard to development of informal and non-formal learning can be understood in a twofold way. First, actual activities (or rather emerging examples) in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning in the sector. Second, development and conceptualisation activities in this field provided by institutions representing the sector.

The first type of activity is so far very scarce. One promising example is the newly established Centre for Quality and Standards in Social Services (CEKAS).<sup>56</sup> The centre developed the system of quality assurance for social service providers (who mostly belong to the third sector) and the methodology for evaluation, including self-assessment. Among other criteria the system clearly lays down requirements for human resource management and development, including recruitment procedures and requirements, induction training,

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<sup>53</sup>The Czech Accreditation Institute (CAI) is national accreditation body with a status of the public service organisation. It was established by the government of the Czech Republic. It provides services in conformity with legal regulations concerning accreditation. CAI accredits both state and private organisations in all fields of accreditation. The accreditation system is based on the position of the EC-defined Global Conception of Testing and Certification. CAI is to provide objective and independent proficiency testing, in conformity with the requirements of international standards and documents, in such areas as Certification bodies for certification of quality management systems and occupational health and safety management system (EN 45012) and Certification bodies for certification of personnel (EN ISO/IEC 17024). <http://www.cia.cz/>.

<sup>54</sup>Report on the situation in the field of training and certification in SMEs in partner countries: Synthetic report, Czech Republic. The Economic Chamber of the Czech Republic. <http://www.eurocertstaff.cz>

<sup>55</sup>Interview with Mrs Dana Moree, Chamber of Commerce of the Czech Republic

<sup>56</sup>The Centre has the status of non-governmental public benefit organization. It was established under the initiative of the National Training Fund (NTF) in 2003. The activities prior to 2003 had been developed by a team within the framework of NTF. <http://www.cekas.cz>

qualification and competence requirements for each job position, assessment of competences and validation of prior learning of employees, provision of training opportunities in various forms (formal and non-formal). The verification of qualification and competence requirements usually provides an option of recognising certain years of work experience for the specifically required qualification. The system was developed for several areas of provision of social services (e.g. guidance services, asylum seekers services, family and parental advice, counselling for drug addiction etc.). It can be used as an internal tool for quality assurance by service providers as well as for voluntary external assessment.

European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) has been implemented in the Czech Republic since 1999. The guarantor for quality of testing, accreditation of the test centres and issuing ECDL certificates is the Czech Society for Cybernetics and Informatics (CSCI) – a non-profit organisation. In order to publicise and develop the usage of ECDL in the Czech Republic, CSCI established a working group for the development of information literacy ECDL-CZ. So far 12,128 holders of the European Computer Skills Card are registered in the Czech Republic and 8,913 ECDL certificates of different levels were awarded on the basis of tests results<sup>57</sup>.

The second type of activities in the third sector should mention the work of the National Training Fund (NTF), some examples of which are already indicated above. NTF is a non-governmental public benefit organisation founded by the MoLSA for implementation of programmes and projects in the field of human resource development (HRD) and employment. NTF has been in charge of all major Phare programmes in this field, national support structures for Leonardo da Vinci, EQUAL and preparation for the European Social Fund. NTF was responsible for a recent project supported by the MoLSA *Education, research and development as key factors of the development of contemporary society training*.<sup>58</sup> One part of the project, implemented in collaboration with the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NITVE), dealt with the concrete steps in developing the system of CVT. Among others it came up with the number of proposals for recognition of CVT, including elaboration of a model for certification of competences in CVT.<sup>59</sup> In particular it suggests that development of professional profiles based on competences required in the labour market (linked to occupational profiles in the ISTP and to the framework study programmes) can lay the basis for recognised qualifications not only in the initial but also in continuing, non-formal, training. Direct involvement of social partners in the development of the profiles can increase credibility of qualifications. Qualifications in CVT are proposed to be constructed specifically in accordance with the job requirements. The objective here is understood as complementing, refreshing, upgrading, or changing initial vocational qualification. The document suggests the development of the system of validation of informal/non-formal learning and the credit transfer for vocational training, and gradually

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<sup>57</sup> [http://www.ecdl.cz/aktualni\\_stav\\_testovani.php](http://www.ecdl.cz/aktualni_stav_testovani.php)

<sup>58</sup> Project 'Modern society and its change', 2003. The part on development of CVT system was prepared by the teams from NTF and NITVE.

<sup>59</sup> Palán, Zdeněk. Další vzdělávání v ČR před branami EU. (Continuing training in the Czech Republic at the entrance to the EU). Andragogika: selected papers, [http://www.daha.cz/andr\\_palán.html](http://www.daha.cz/andr_palán.html).

broaden the usage of modular training. These measures should increase access to and participation in training<sup>60</sup>.

The study carried out by the Counselling Centre for Integration (PPI) in the framework of a Leonardo da Vinci project was managed by DHV CR on the Czech side. The aim of the study was to assess the situation in the area of integration of women immigrants living long term in the Czech Republic into work and society and to analyse whether the society is able to identify, assess and recognise women immigrant's competences<sup>61</sup>. The survey was organised among 20 respondents – immigrants from various countries. The findings demonstrated that there is no system or national measures aimed at assessment of competences of immigrants in a formative manner linked to counselling and training systems. The only exception are courses of the Ministry of Interior provided to 'recognised' refugees<sup>62</sup>, nevertheless, without any regard to the initial qualifications and skills of participants. The study also demonstrated that largely the area is not one of concern for the civil society or for education and training. The problem is certainly linked to the lack of a rigorous immigration policy in the Czech Republic and to the current laws regulating residence, which defines employment among the conditions for residence permit or financial security of the applicant<sup>63</sup>. Such a situation is not sustainable in the long run, given the aging population and shortage of skills in certain occupations and fields.

### **1.5 Stakeholders**

State and public institutions under MoEYS and MoLSA are so far more active in this field, given the character of the applied policy research. Even the university research in this field is mostly ordered by one of state departments. For instance the research project of Prague University of Economics *Demand for education and employment of the Czech labour force linked to the integration to the economic and social structures of EU* was implemented within MoLSA's research programme *Modern society and its change*, part of which dealt with recognition of qualifications and informal/non-formal learning. The project maps the situation and offers some solutions based on the best European practice.

Another project in the framework of the same programme (MoLSA, *Modern society and its change*) is *Problems of labour market and employment policy* implemented by the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA) in cooperation with the Masaryk University (School of Social Studies) and National Observatory of Employment and Training (part of NTF). The project also mapped the situation, criticised lack of mechanisms for recognition of informal and non-formal learning in the Czech Republic and recommended a focus on elaboration of the national system of qualifications, standardised and independent systems of

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<sup>60</sup> Rozvoj národní soustavy kvalifikací, Strategicko-operační dokument. (Development of the national qualification system. Strategic/operational document.) NITVE, 2003

<sup>61</sup> The study was not concerned with the recognition of formal qualification as a primary issue but rather with the recognition of informal knowledge and competences, prior learning and experience.

<sup>62</sup> These are mostly those after asylum seeking procedure, which represent a minor part of real immigration to the country.

<sup>63</sup> Counselling Centre for Integration (PPI), Study on immigrant women in the Czech Republic, DHV CR Ltd., Prague 2001

assessment and certification which would cover both IVET, CVT and competences attained informally, particularly stressing close cooperation with social partners. Among important research projects which contributed to the provision of insight into validation of informal and non-formal learning in the Czech Republic are activities of the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NITVE). The project *Self-evaluation* (Leonardo da Vinci programme) mapped the situation in the field of accreditation of competences in the Czech Republic (2002). The study *Evaluation and accreditation procedures of competencies analogical with the Starfish model* (2002) and subsequent empirical research analysed existing systemic and legal provisions as well as some activities aiming at the evaluation and accreditation of competences and tested the usefulness of the Star-fish self-evaluation model. The research demonstrated that the majority of respondents welcome self-evaluation tools along with consultation with specialists (formative evaluation), leading to some formal attestation (summative evaluation). The project contributed to the development of self-evaluation methods of informal competences with the view of their potential integration into formal and non-formal learning. It also identified main weaknesses of the current situation in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>64</sup>.

NITVE also works on the feasibility study of modularisation of existing courses with the system of credits in IVET linked to *bilan de competence* schemes and validation of informal and non-formal learning with the view of possible use of the results also in second-chance education and in CVT<sup>65</sup>. Furthermore, NITVE elaborated the first proposals for the comprehensive national qualification system<sup>66</sup>. In this respect the Czech Republic could benefit from the discussions and findings of the OECD project *The role of national qualification systems in promoting lifelong learning*.

NITVE also coordinated and/or participated in a number of European projects in the field of the role of social partners in definition of qualifications and professional profiles, transparency of vocational certificates and certificates supplement, standardisation of vocational examinations and many others. In the recent survey NITVE also attempted to monitor the participation in informal learning of the young population aged 20-29, which demonstrated that this type of learning is very important for this generation (and more important as compared to older people) for maintenance and upgrading of their qualifications directly linked to their professional life<sup>67</sup>.

Finally NITVE has submitted a project proposal aimed at the development of processes and pathways which are to increase the access of adults to further training through validation and recognition of their non-formal and informal learning. Among others the project should verify

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<sup>64</sup> Jezberova, Romana. Summary – the solution of the project Self-evaluation. Czech Republic. NITVE, 2003

<sup>65</sup> Jezberova, Romana et al. Development of self-evaluation methods and its integration to formal and non-formal education, NITVE, 2003

<sup>66</sup> Rozvoj národní soustavy kvalifikací (Development of National Qualification System), Project MS7, NITVE component, 2003

<sup>67</sup> Burda, Vladimír at al. Přístup mladých lidí ke vzdělávání a jejich profesní uplatnění. (Access of young people to education and training, and their work participation). Project in the framework of the research programme supported by the MoEYS, Prague, NITVE, 2003.

and develop appropriate methodologies by using the best European practice<sup>68</sup>. According to the Minister of Education, NITVE was assigned preparation of the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>69</sup>.

## **1.6 Conclusions**

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is a new subject on the Czech policy agenda. The system of validation of competences attained through informal/non-formal learning and through work experience does not exist yet. The value of such competences can only serve as a benefit if recognised by actors in the labour market. Such recognition does not have a systematic character. Nevertheless, there are many initiatives at various levels that support development of aspects of the potential system, especially in particular sectors and regions. Such initiatives are particularly promising in development of formative aspects of validation, including those linked to counselling and guidance. The major trend therefore has been so far supply-driven, rather than initiated from the centre.

Lack of systems and legislative preconditions for validation of informal and non-formal learning further complicates the situation. There is no national qualification framework which would embrace outcomes of initial and continuing education and training. The legislation which codifies validity of modular training had been delayed for many years and the system of training based on modules and credits transferable between various paths and levels of initial and continuing education and training is still to be developed and accepted.

Finally, the absence of a legal framework and clear divisions of responsibilities in the field of CVT creates many obstacles to the development of validation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning. It impedes the transfer of results of many innovative initiatives to the system level, their implementation to practice on a larger scale and damages the future initiative as such. Preparation and submission of new projects in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning might be therefore pending until the legislative framework is settled. It is an especially worrying fact given the release of ESF funds for the Czech Republic and the linked hope for large-scale project submissions that could push the system forward.

Certification in the school system is not linked to the post-initial learning. The state administration has a 'monopoly' on issuing nationally recognised certificates. The certificates attained in CVT issued by enterprises or training providers do not have the same weight, and therefore are not equivalent, to certificates issued by schools in the formal system of education. Participation in CVT itself is badly affected by the deficit in independent assessment and certification mechanisms for individuals.

In spite of the presence of many political and strategic documents that touch upon the issue of validation of informal and non-formal learning, which is a positive fact in itself, the overall national strategy on the issue is not very clear. The concrete steps for the implementation of

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<sup>68</sup> Cihakova, Hana, project proposal

<sup>69</sup> Učitel'ské noviny, 01/2004, interview with the Minister of Education Petra Buzkova.

the proposals have not been designed yet. Many documents are contradictory in their proposals with regard to share of responsibilities and the role of various actors in the system. The Czech Republic still lacks a strategy for establishing the system of validation of informal and non-formal learning with clearly defined stakeholder responsibilities and implementation steps. Such strategy should assign a major role and responsibility to social partners in identification, validation and recognition of competences attained through informal/non-formal learning and work experience in a systematic way at national, sectoral or regional level.