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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 LATVIA**

*By Vladimir Menshikov (Laboratory of sociological Researchers, Latvia)*

### **1.1 Introduction**

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

At present the system of education in Latvia has had an uncertain attitude towards informal and non-formal education. First of all, it applies to the absence of a legislative base and national conception. On the other hand, by the end of the 90s, within the framework of the concept of Lifelong learning more attention is paid to informal and non-formal. As regards the question of validation of informal and non-formal education (it is necessary to make a reservation that in Latvia the term “validation” or its equivalents have not been used until recently) we would risk placing Latvia in the category with countries who are at the stage of experimentation and uncertainties (Countries at an experimental stage (to a varying extent) accept the need for initiatives but are still uncertain whether and how this could influence existing structures and systems on a more permanent basis). At present it is possible to point to the fact that the inclusion of Latvia into common European space promotes the rapid understanding of the wide range of problems connected with validation, and it prompts possible solutions to them. The theoretical calculations and experience of other countries should be reconsidered. It will avoid “to run free” and to join in the creation of the own national “Comprehensive system”, and, subsequently, in the creation of “Common principles” regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning at the European level.

In general the current situation, concerning the validation of informal and non-formal education in Latvia, has some preconditions to face the future with optimism. Despite the passive position of the state structures and objective impossibility of full financing, the number of the initiatives at a decentralized level grows slowly, but steadily. The initiatives indicate the necessity of changes of the present situation; it specifies that the educational system should meet the requirements of the market and open society.

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

From the moment, Latvia became independent, a number of laws on education have been passed: Law on education (1991), (1998), Law on higher education (1995), Laws on Secondary and Vocational education (1999), Law on innovations fund in the field of education (2002); but Laws on the education of adults have not been carried and the national conception of lifelong education has not been created so far.

The Government of Latvia has taken a rather passive position in the respect to the validation of other kinds of education. Attention is mainly paid to the questions of formal education regulating and standardising. Some direct initiatives were undertaken at the level of Ministry of Education and Science. Thus, for example the Cabinet of Ministers passed “The Concept of the Development of Education for 2002 – 2005”. The chapter “The enlargement of educational possibilities for adults, providing professionally oriented lifelong learning supply” testifies that Latvia moves in the direction of so-called “Modular approach” in respect of the validation of informal and non-formal education. The conception declares the following basic regulation: “To promote the inclusion of different social groups into education, it is necessary to work out the modular educational programmes for all levels of education for full-time tuition and extra-mural one, and correspondence tuition.” To realise this regulation the following practical steps should be undertaken:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Table 18.1 Accordance of the results of the state language attestation and the ones of the central examination at school:**

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

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

In that way, if a person has not received official education in the Latvian language, then, having finished courses or learnt the language independently, s/he has a right to validate the

education received in an informal or non-formal way. In 2001 12460 men (6397 from them were unemployed) received the certificate, in 2002 this number was 10051 men (6142 from them were unemployed), in 2003 it was 10110 men (5321 from them were unemployed). Although, the basic reason of such initiative lies in political motives (the specificity of Latvia is that 21.64 % (data of the year 2003) of the inhabitants are non-citizens; the basic aim of the law is preservation and development of the Latvian language) the validation promotes social integration of the society, improvement of the situation in the labour market and stimulates the study of the state language.

Adult education is also regulated by the Law on Support for Unemployed and Job seekers, which aims to develop the support system for the unemployed and the job seekers, to help them to return to or enter the labour market.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the legislative base in the sphere of validation of informal and non-formal education has advanced poorly and the basic laws are lacking. Nevertheless, the problem has not been left to drift. For instance, the responsibility for the education of adults was assigned to local governments, in which the centres of continuing education were created. With the support of Ministry of Education and Science and the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association the NGO “Latvian Adult Education Association”, which is the basic coordinator (umbrella organization) and initiator in the questions of informal and non-formal education in Latvia, was created.

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

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

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

As surveys testify enterprises use various methods in relation to training their employees. At present the most popular forms are: scheduled training, instructing and self-education. The most claimed kinds of training are different courses and seminars. Employees are more often educated in such areas as: leadership, technical knowledge and skills, work with the client and art of selling, skills to work in a team, work protection, maintenance and quality surveillance. Bookkeepers and chiefs of various levels attend seminars and courses more actively. The questions connected to legislation, taxation and finance are of the greatest interest. The global

questions also are in the sphere of interests. For example, a possibility for the Latvian enterprises in connection with joining the EU.

As a rule, the enterprises which offer courses and seminars, are ready to work on the development of individual programmes, which would correspond to the concrete wishes and requirements of a customer as much as possible. Therefore, seminar organising in most cases begins with finding-out the existing situation. Questioning (large enterprises) or individual interviews (small enterprises) are carried out for this purpose. In the case of some language courses, the level of knowledge is investigated by means of a written test.

In order to find-out the situation of the national economy, in 2003 the Central statistical bureau of the Republic of Latvia carried out an investigation of 3500 Latvian enterprises concerning their employees training. The published data testifies that only 53 % of enterprises provide training. The highest percent of the course participants was fixed in the sphere “financial intermediary” - 46 %. In its turn, entrepreneurs interrogation, carried out by the newspaper “Dienas bizness”, showed that 68 % of the enterprises participate in seminars, and only 41 % seldom attend. In turn, in 2002 the company Mercuri International carried out the interrogation of more than 100 representatives of the leading Latvian firms: chiefs, experts in personnel selection and chiefs of an average link. The interrogation showed that more often - approximately in 40 % of cases - enterprises organise their own employee training and development. Distinctive feature of Latvia is that the greatest attention is paid to the development of personnel in the companies with a foreign capital and joint ventures. These enterprises introduce traditions, which are characteristic for their native country. At the same time long time ago in the West it became an axiom that it is cheaper to train and to develop their own employees than to employ new ones.

About 16 % of the interrogated enterprises use support and experience of the head company; in this way it possible to solve one more task – to improve communication and mutual understanding among subsidiaries and branches which are in different countries. About 37 % of the experts on personnel selection use services of professional advisers that testifies growing trust and high evaluation of the activities of such firms.

Large enterprises allow themselves to create their own educational centres and programmes. Up to April 2003 “Lattelekom” Ltd. (an enterprise which was a monopolist in telecommunication services for a long time) used to have the most powerful educational centre. After having lost the status of monopolist the reconsideration of the whole policy of the enterprise followed. This affected the educational centre, which was abolished and its functions were handed to two newly created commercial structures: “Spring Valley” Ltd. (training and expert opinions in the field of management and personnel management) and “Komunikāciju grupa” (courses, programmes and expert opinions in the field of telecommunications, computers and clients service).

Banks (Hansabanka is among them) have their own educational centers as well. In 2002 93.7 % of Hansabanka employees were involved in training; each of the employees devoted at least 8 days to the training.

The officials of “Kalnozols Celtniecība” Ltd, which is intending to become a civil engineering firm of international importance, understand that it is possible to achieve such results only by means of having qualified and educated employees. With this purpose the employees at all levels have training at the enterprise: beginning with the directors and finishing with an ordinary employee. Each employee has an individual plan of training. There are three kinds of training. The first one is internal, which is carried out by the employee who has finished qualitative educational courses (for example decorating, concreting etc.); the employee carries out a seminar for the other employees. Such seminars are carried out twice a month. The second one is external, which is planned according to the results of negotiation between a firm employee and its chief, during which the necessity and kind of further training is established. Personnel departments process and generalise the information on the offered courses and seminars, and carries out their selection following the identification of the needs of the employees. When selecting the courses for employees, the experience and education of the teacher, the content of the course and the results are all taken into consideration. Such training also is carried out twice a month. When the course is finished the employee fills in an evaluation document regarding the course, evaluating the content, the teacher and any materials provided for example. The Personnel department analyses the information once more making necessary conclusions. And, finally, the third kind of training is corporate. The leading experts and the chiefs of the company attend seminars devoted to personnel management and business strategy.

The leading Latvian pharmaceutical joint-stock company “Grindex” also pays great attention to their employees’ development and training: employees, experts, chiefs. The choice of the training theme depends on the employee’s position and on the influence of the results of his/her work on the general results of the enterprise activities. The further education proposed by “Grindex” can be divided into three blocks: 1) special training connected to the performance of the official duties, its necessity is determined by the normative acts of the Republic of Latvia, 2) addition of professional skills (courses, lectures, seminars), 3) training abroad (seminars, congresses, exhibitions, experience exchange). In 2002 “Grindex” spent on an average Ls 99 for one employee training, in 2003 – Ls 108, and in 2004 it plans the investments into employees’ education at the rate of Ls 60 thousand. They also organises various sports events: Sports Festivals in summer and bowling tournaments in winter.

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



#### **1.4 Review of existing initiatives: The Third Sector**

With legislative support on the part of the state (regulations No 321 passed by the Cabinet of Ministers on 31 October, 1995 “On the limitations of entrepreneurship” determine that beginning with 1 March, 1996, Latvian Chamber of Crafts gives the certificates, which allow to be engaged in crafts) the initiatives were undertaken by a public organisation “Latvian Chamber of Crafts”.

In crafts centres, craft education has been organised and there are possibilities to acquire several crafts. Bukulti Craft Centre made a great contribution into crafts acquisition: the centre functions both as a centre of education and one of production. In the centre it is possible to acquire Latvian ancient or disappearing crafts and to receive skills working on the newest equipment.

Having worked according to a corresponding specialty for 3 years and having listened to theoretical and practical educational courses, in the Bukulti Craft Centre it is possible to receive a diploma of an apprentice. After 5 years service and having attended the lectures on book-keeping, entrepreneurship, pedagogics, psychology and history of crafts it is possible to get a diploma of a craftsman. As well as craft education Bukulti Craft Centre is also engaged in working with disabled people, to assist them become apprentices. The centre is involved into the process of the training and the retraining the unemployed, helping them receive craft education and perfect their knowledge and skills.

As it has been already stated above a public organization “Latvian Adult Education Association” has the central place in the sphere of informal and non-formal education validation in Latvia. It was founded in 1993 with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia and the Institute of International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association. In cooperation with local governments and the Ministry of Education and Science a network of adult education centres has been established. In 2003 LAEA had 75 members: adult education centres, folk schools, folk high schools, commercial and in-service training centres, formal education institutions- universities, vocational schools and night schools.

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

## **1.5 Conclusions**

Presently, it is obvious that informal and non-formal education in Latvia should become an equal component of the whole system of education, which is determined by the needs of the socio-economic development of the state. Brief analysis of the situation shows that the development of processes, connected with validation of informal and non-formal education have entered a new phase. Although, the conception is rather new, the European experience is being comprehended, the number of enterprises and organisations is growing and personnel policies are oriented towards the introduction of validation processes.

At present the state policy regards the validation of informal and non-formal education seems to be rather passive and short-sighted. The basic initiatives are passed at the level of formal education. It seems that all these questions are not solved for several main reasons:

- 1) there are a lot of painful questions in the society, and consequently informal and non-formal education is not considered as the priority, since neither inhabitants, nor politicians do not worry about this problem;
- 2) the development of new areas in education, which lacks money for: teachers' salary, for programmes accreditation, for educational establishments repair and maintenance, being guided by the stereotype of money shortage is considered as necessary but utopian.
- 3) the conception is rather new; it is difficult to foresee its results and effect.