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

Lithuania - By Giedre Beleckiene
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1.0 VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN LITHUANIA

By Giedre Beleckiene (Methodological Centre for VET, National Observatory in Lithuania)

1.1 Introduction

Lithuania is constantly moving towards a coherent national system of knowledge and competencies assessment aiming to build bridges between formal, non-formal and informal education and thus creating an “open” structure accessible to everyone. In principal legal basis is in place already. However methodologies and forms used to evaluate knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education needs further development. Lack of information does not allow any estimation regards the extent to which established procedures are being implemented. Analysis of research conducted and the results of interviews reveal the poor awareness of the population, training providers and even stakeholders on procedures adopted for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Though individuals presently lack motivation to formally certify possessed knowledge and skills interviews show the growing interest of the population on the validation of non-formal education issues. The successful implementation of recently developed strategic documents and foreseen measures should ensure the visibility and value of non-formal and informal learning experiences and would also strengthen the basis for lifelong learning.

1.2 Review of existing initiatives: Public Sector

1.2.1 Legislation and National policies

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is not a new idea in Lithuania. Early impetus was provided by the White Paper on VET (1998) through the principle ‘*of formal recognition of the acquired qualification, irrespective of how it has been acquired*’. Law on Non-formal Adult Education (1998) establishes the right of non-formal education participants ‘*after passing examinations in formal education, science or studies institutions, to receive an assessment of the knowledge acquired in the system of non-formal adult education as well as a state recognised document testifying to the acquisition of a certain level of formal education, stage thereof or a separate regulated part of the programme (module)*’. In 2001-2002 legal acts defining the procedures for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal vocational education and training and prior-learning in higher non-university studies were adopted. Finally, new edition of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania passed in 2003 sets out key elements to formally certify competencies acquired through non-formal (including children’s and adult education) or informal learning. This law is an umbrella law establishing goals and principles of the educational system, the framework of institutions, activities and civil relationships as well as obligations of the State in the area of formal, non-formal and self (informal) education including validation issues. In addition, recently developed and approved strategic documents, namely Strategy on Vocational Guidance, Strategy Paper on Lifelong Learning, Strategic Guidelines for the Development of Education for 2003-2012 and Single Programming Document, aim to build bridges between formal, non-formal and informal education and foresee concrete measures for the further

development of national knowledge and competence assessment system including official validation of non-formal learning experiences.

1.2.2 Basis for validation

National VET standards play a crucial role in the curriculum development and validation process. They join occupation, education and assessment elements. The VET standard is comprised of 9 parts: general occupation description, occupation purpose, areas of activity, competencies, training objectives, assessment of competencies and final assessment of qualification. The development of national VET standards started in 1997. However, the progress in the implementation of a comprehensive national qualifications framework based on competency based standards has been slow and mainly because of financial problems. The process is yet to be finished. Seeking to accelerate the standardisation process a competence approach has been introduced into all three years post-secondary education vocational studies¹ (further - vocational studies) and initial VET programs². Higher non-university studies were built on the basis of vocational studies and in consequence they are competence based.

Though modularisation of curricula in vocational education and in labour market training is ongoing, the modules are not harmonized and do not allow for a flexible attendance at initial vocational education and labour market training. There is no mobility between labour market training and vocational education. The same situation is observed through all levels of education.

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

1.2.3 Links to formal learning

Presently children's competence acquired in the course of non-formal learning could be recognised as a part of a formal education program or a qualification according to a procedure established by schools or higher education. Practically it shows itself as simplification of entrance requirements to a certain educational institution. For example, those children having completed children's music school and applying to Lithuanian Music Academy are taking a musicology test while others should take a complex musicology exam. Statistics on the results of these initiatives have not been collected.

¹ Provided in professional colleges

² Reform of vocational studies was finished in 1999 and initial VET programs in 2002

Equivalency examination is the main method leading to legitimating of non-formal or informal learning achievements for adults. Following the Temporal Procedure³ only a person over the age 18 years with at least one years work experience can apply for the recognition of competence acquired outside formal education. In September of each year he or she should register in a vocational school having license to provide and providing the programme chosen by the individual. The procedure starts with the identification of non-formal or informal learning achievements. This is done through analysis of certificates on non-formal education and other related documents provided by the individual. Then the external students and schools agree on the timetable of appointed course credit tests and consultations if they are needed. In case the results are positive, external student are allowed to take final qualification exams together with those from formal education. The Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Crafts and the Chamber of Agriculture took over full organisation of final exams. Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded with qualification certificates or the qualified worker diploma. Assessment and recognition services are paid by the external student themselves, by the employer in case they initiate the procedure and by the Labour Exchange in case they referred the job seeker to take examination.

The regulations for recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal learning set up in the Order of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour⁴ are similar to those described above. The only difference concerns choice of institutions having the right to organise recognition procedures.

Quantitative information on the above described initiative is not available. Interviews have brought to light insufficient knowledge of training providers, individuals, employers and even stakeholders on issues related to validation of non-formal education. The majority of employers⁵ presently see no need to formally certify employees' competencies acquired in non-formal or informal ways. To their opinion only the individual could benefit from this validation. However some differences in sectoral approaches could be observed. For example, interest to formalise competencies is higher in the Mechanics and Electronics sector as compared with Information Technologies. Presented assumptions are being endorsed by the preliminary results of the exploratory research conducted in the framework of Leonardo da Vinci programme project "Facilitating Access to Lifelong Learning through the Recognition Procedure of Non-formal and Informal Learning". According to interviews with both training providers and Chambers the cases when employers refer employees to take qualification exams are rare.

³ The Temporal Procedure for Recognition of Knowledge Gained through the Non-formal Adult Education or Informal Education and for Receiving of Formal Documentation for Evidence of Graduation of Higher Level Education, Vocational Training, some Level or Module of Vocational Training and Acquisition of Qualification, 2001, Ministry of Education and Science

⁴ Procedure for Organisation and Implementation of Labour Market Vocational Training and Regulations on Digest of Non-formal Labour Market Programmes, 2002, Ministry of Social Security and Labour

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

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

Graduates from *professional colleges*⁶ who are continuing studies at colleges⁷ have a legal possibility⁸ to transfer credits either for subject or for overall study programme. In the latter case students go on with studies according to the individual programme drawn on the basis of the results obtained through comparison of two curricula. Statistics available show that the number of graduates from professional colleges and continuing studies in colleges is constantly increasing.

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

1.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private sector

The courses widely recognised among employers on national level and having no link to formal validation compose a second group of validation initiatives. Based on analysis of the information available, formative assessment is the main tool for validation of learning achievements in this category and the cost of training depends on service provider. Employers most usually refer their staff to management and financial courses and pay for employees' education and training.

The third group includes training recognised only on an institutional level. In this case employees are usually trained in the work place or in training centre owned by their employer. Training provided is free of charge. Mainly observational methods are used to assess the learning of a trainee. No certificate evidencing the acquired knowledge and skills is issued.

The research conducted and the information available are insufficient to provide a detailed description of validation initiatives ongoing in the working sector.

⁶ provide 3 years duration post-secondary education vocational studies

⁷ provide higher non-university education

⁸ Principles for organization of non-university studies for those who studied according vocational studies programme, 2002, Ministry of Education and Science

1.4 Review of existing initiatives: The Third Sector

As it can be seen from interview results, validation initiatives are in the development stage in the voluntary sector. Presently a Social Worker's training project has been started. A number of various organisations, so called methodological centres, were selected to implement different training programmes. The type of institutions varies from NGOs to public institutions. It is foreseen after successfully completing the training course the participant will be awarded with a certificate that will be recognised by Ministry of Social Security and Labour when certifying social workers.

One example of a training programme is the Madsinga project. The Lithuanian youth organisation Kitokie Projektai was a key member of the international Madzinga project that also involved youth organizations from Belgium, Iceland and Slovakia. This project developed and ran a number of training courses for a total of 24 youth workers from 13 different countries on developing intercultural understanding via experiential learning. The training course consisted of three phases:

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

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

1.5 Stakeholders' responsibilities

1.5.1 Government

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

1.5.2 Ministry of Education and Science

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

1.5.3 Ministry of Social Security and Labour

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

1.5.4 Other Ministries

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

1.5.5 Vocational schools and Labour Market Vocational Training Institutions

Vocational schools and labour market vocational training institutions (in case of validation of knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal labour market training) have a responsibility to provide for an applicant seeking to validate knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education necessary support which leads to final qualification exams.

1.5.6 Higher Education Institutions

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

1.5.7 Social Partners

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

1.6 Conclusions

Analysis of the information available reveals the increasing motivation of individuals to legitimate competencies acquired outside formal education. Main factors for that are special sectoral regulations, integration into European Union and expansion of work opportunities in other countries.

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

It is expected that national and international (ESF) funds should ensure the successful implementation of recently developed strategies. This will allow the formation of a flexible structure of comprehensive education bringing together the systems of all levels of education and creating favorable conditions for lifelong learning.