European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Country Report: Lithuania

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1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is not a new concept in Lithuania as such, although practical implementation has been rather slow and so far based on ad-hoc initiatives. However, taking into account the complexity of the process and the preparatory work that needs to be done (the development of occupational standards, for instance), the overall pace of progress in the field can be considered satisfactory.

As noted in the previous European Inventory report for Lithuania, an early impetus was provided by the White Paper on VET (1998) through the principle of 'formal recognition of the acquired qualification, irrespective of how it has been acquired'. The Law on Non-formal Adult Education (1998) established the right of participants in non-formal education (Article 11): “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 separately 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 for the recognition of prior learning in higher non-university studies were adopted. A new edition of the Law on Education passed in 2003 (last amended 21 January 2010) set out key elements to formally certify competences acquired through non-formal (including children’s and adult education) or informal learning. This law is an umbrella law establishing the goals and principles of the educational system, the framework of institutions, activities and public relationships as well as the obligations of the State in the area of formal, non-formal and self (informal) education including aspects of validation. For instance, Article 16 ‘Non-formal Children’s Education’ states that “a competence acquired in the course of non-formal learning may be recognised as a part of a formal education programme or a qualification, according to a procedure established by the Government or its authorised institution, or according to a procedure established by educational institutions. A long-term arts curriculum completed at a children’s music, art, sports or other school may be recognised as a module of vocational training.” Article 17 ‘Non-formal Adult Education’ states that a person’s competence acquired by way of non-formal education may be recognised as being a part of a formal education programme or a qualification as prescribed by the Government or its authorised institution, or by educational institutions. Article 18 ‘Self-Education’ states that “A person’s competence acquired by way of self-education may be recognised as being a part of a formal education programme or a qualification as prescribed by the Government or its authorised institution.”

A new addition to the Law on Vocational Education (1997) was adopted in 2007 (last amended 21 July 2009). Article 7 ‘Continuous vocational education’ includes inter alia confirmation that the assessment of competences acquired via non-formal vocational education and training can be recognised as a full or partial qualification. The Law also eliminated the earlier divide between formal and non-formal or informal learning, embedded

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the view of vocational education as a seamless lifelong process and created favourable legal environment to establish a system of qualifications – a foundation for facilitating validation of prior learning. For instance, the Law provided a basis to reform and optimise the management of the systems of vocational education and training and labour market training, to create a national system of qualifications and to define principles of qualification formation, assessment and recognition. The Law also opened legal possibilities to introduce module-based system of vocational education and training and the application of various forms of acquisition of professional competence and qualification, thus providing a possibility for increasing the accessibility of lifelong learning.

In addition, several strategic documents, namely the Strategy on Vocational Guidance, Strategy Paper on Lifelong Learning and their action plans, Strategic Guidelines for the Development of Education for 2003-2012 and Single Programming Documents for 2004-2006 and 2007-2013 (which embedded the need to develop a Knowledge and Skills Assessment System, including those acquired in a non-formal way), aim to build further bridges between formal, non-formal and informal education. These strategic documents have set out concrete measures for the further development of a national knowledge and competence assessment system, including the validation of non-formal learning experiences.

Several recently implemented national projects were undertaken as follow up actions of the strategic documents:

- The national system of qualifications, mentioned above, has been developed under the European Social Fund (ESF) national level project “The Creation of the National System of Qualifications in Lithuania” (Nacionalinės kvalifikacijų sistemos sukūrimas). Being developed in accordance with the European Qualifications Framework, it provides the substance against which competences and knowledge acquired in non-formal and informal ways can be assessed and ultimately validated. Further details of this project are provided below, under section 2.2

- “The Development of the System of VET Standards” (Nacionalinės profesinio rengimo standartų sistemos plėtra) was another national-level project implemented by the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (Kvalifikacijų ir profesinio mokymo plėtros centras) between March 2005 and December 2008. The aim of the project was to contribute to the development of a National Qualifications’ System through nationally established VET standards that correspond to current labour market needs. As above, this provides the basis for assessing skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings.

Two other national projects implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science between June 2005 and December 2008 were expected to contribute to the gradual building of a favourable environment for inter alia the development of the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning:

- “The Designing and Development of VET Knowledge and Competences’ Assessment System” (Profesinio mokymo žinių ir kompetencijos vertinimo sistemos sukūrimas ir plėtra) – this project aimed to re-design the way final qualification exams at VET educational establishments are organised, by transferring the majority of responsibilities and roles to external actors, namely the networks of Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts (Lietuvos prekybos, pramonės ir amatų rūmai) and the Chamber of

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8 Formerly known as The Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training (Profesinio mokymo metodikos centras).
Agriculture (Lietuvos Respublikos Žemės ūkio rūmai). The project also included the development of methodological and training material for the assessors and providers of training; the development of standardised assessment methodologies and software for managing testing material; the development of a model of a regional testing centre; and the preparation of testing material for 32 vocational occupations. In relation to validation of skills and competences acquired through non-formal and in-formal ways, a new procedure was added to the process of final qualification exams in IVET allowing people studying independently to acquire a vocational qualification.

- “The Designing and Development of an Open Information, Consultation and Guidance System (AIKOS)”\(^{10}\) (Atviros informavimo, konsultavimo, orientavimo sistemos (AIKOS) sukūrimas ir plėtinas) – the project has developed an integrated, open and non-commercial information system providing up-to-date information about learning opportunities in Lithuania. It is designed for 14 groups of users, including pupils, early school leavers, parents, persons wanting to study at vocational schools and universities, interested in re-training and / or improving their level of qualifications, people providing professional counselling services, politicians, employers, people with disabilities, immigrants, and others. The system provides information regarding the validation of skills and competences acquired though non-formal and in-formal learning\(^{11}\). The System is managed by the Centre of Information Technologies in Education founded by the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science.

1.2 Relationship with the existing/ developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation

The conceptual model of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of Lithuania was designed under a three-year (March 2005 to February 2008) nationally implemented ESF project “The Creation of the National System of Qualifications in Lithuania”\(^{12}\), led by the Lithuanian Labour Market Training Authority under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, in cooperation with the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre. The aim of this project was to establish a uniform and transparent qualifications system which would cover all levels of qualifications and the transition between them, ensure the variety of ways of acquiring a qualification, and provide the possibility to flexibly respond to the requirements of the changing environment.

This framework is compatible with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) both in its structure (eight levels) and in its definition of the contents of qualifications levels. The Lithuanian NQF is also compatible with the European Higher Education Qualifications Framework (Dublin descriptors): the last three levels of the NQF correspond to the three education cycles in HE. A visual presentation of the NQF is provided in Figure 1.

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\(^{10}\) More information about the project “The Designing and Development of an Open Information, Consultation and Guidance System (AIKOS)” (viewed 3 April 2010): http://www.esparama.lt/lt/bpd/zemelapis/?id=2026.

\(^{11}\) Internet (viewed 3 September 2010): http://www.aikos.smm.lt/aikos/persik_neform_kval_pripaz.htm.

Figure 1: Concept of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in Lithuania


The chosen model of NQF plays an important regulatory role: referencing of qualifications to NQF levels ensures the coherence between the main processes of the national system of qualifications:

- Designing of qualifications - here the NQF is a crucial instrument for the positioning of the designed qualifications (occupational standards) to the levels and prescribing of the ways and requirements of their acquisition according to the criteria of NQF levels.

- Provision/acquisition of qualifications – here the NQF is an important reference for the curriculum design and provision of education and training leading to the different qualifications and degrees. Referencing to the NQF will be used as a tool for quality assurance in VET and higher education, as well as a regulative measure permitting to avoid the overlap in the provision of education and training programmes by different providers.

- Assessment of competences and awarding of qualifications – here the NQF will structure the processes of assessment of competences, ensuring their coherence with the criteria of qualification descriptors and will provide clear reference and criteria for assessment of learning outcomes and competences acquired in formal, non-formal and informal ways.

The most important features of the NQF of Lithuania are the following:

Competence-based framework:

The NQF has a logical structure of descriptors and levels with two types of levelling parameters – characteristics of activities and types of competences, where types of competences in each level are described referring to the requirements of the characteristics of activities. The main distinguished characteristics of activities are complexity, autonomy and changeability. The descriptors of the qualification levels make distinctions between
specific typical functional, cognitive, and general competences, and reflect the evolution of competences on the route from a lower to a higher qualification.

The level reference structure captures qualifications acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities at all levels from the lowest (level 1) to the highest (level 8).

The Lithuanian Qualifications’ Structure describing the content of eight levels of national qualifications was approved by the Government decree on the 4th of May 2010. A National Framework of Higher Education Degrees and Qualifications has been developed.

Assessment / recognition (validation) of qualifications is an integral part of the NQF and consists of three main elements: assessment regulations, assessment methods and assessment and recognition institutions. A national project is currently being planned to focus on the development of the content of these elements.

Meanwhile the system of standards is still incomplete and only vocational education and training standards are in place. VET standards are used for validation purposes but mostly in the case of validation of competences for the unemployed (as a labour market policy measure). Occupational standards are being developed further and it is the responsibility of the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre to manage this process within the ESF programme for the Development of a National Qualification System.

1.3 National institutional framework

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) shapes and implements State education policy. The Ministry organises matura examinations and confirms the Procedure for final qualification examinations, including the validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences.

As foreseen in the amendments of the Law on Vocational Education in 2006, the Qualifications’ Agency under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (Kvalifikacijų tarnyba prie Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės) was established in March 2008 with the aim of functional facilitation of the National Qualifications’ System. However, the Agency was abolished in October 2009. Institutional functions and responsibilities of the Qualifications Agency were transferred to the Ministry of Education and Science and partly to the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre.

The Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre was established by the MES in 1996 as the Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training (Profesinio mokymo metodikos centras). In January 2010 the institution was re-organised as the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre. An overall objective of the Centre is to ensure a development of the Lithuanian qualifications system which corresponds to the needs of the national economy within the global context. Among its core activities is the development of occupational and VET standards, organisation of the development of modular programmes, the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework, development of the VET system of credits; quality assurance, and to act as the National Coordination Point for the European Qualifications Framework.

Until July 2009 the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL) had an overall national responsibility for managing vocational training in the labour market. With the implementation of the Law on the Amendment of the Law of Vocational Education and Training passed in 2007 the labour market training system is being integrated with the initial VET system and now all VET governance functions (both initial VET and labour market training) are

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delegated to the Ministry of Education and Science. The Ministry appoints vocational training providers which among other activities deal with validation of knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning experiences.

Responsibility for organisation and implementation of vocational training falls under the remit of the Lithuanian Labour Market Training Authority (LLMTA).

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

In relation to the validation of knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal vocational training, vocational schools and labour market vocational training providers (regional labour market training centres) have an overall responsibility to offer all necessary support leading towards final qualification exams to an applicant seeking to validate knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education.

By the order of the minister for education universities are legally obliged to take into account subject credits previously gained from other HEIs (in Lithuania and abroad) and accept them (if possible content-wise) as part of a student’s currently pursued qualification. However there is no clear stipulation in the legal acts in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning at universities. If such possibilities are created, they are usually developed by the universities as their own initiative. Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas (The Centre of Career and Competences) and Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius, for instance, provide possibilities to validate applicants’ competences and knowledge gained through non-formal and informal learning.

Amendments to the Law on Vocational Education have broadened the powers of stakeholders (employers and trade unions) in VET and now they are more closely involved within the entire VET organisation and delivery process. Stakeholders are legally obliged to participate in shaping VET policy, initiate the development of new qualifications, occupational standards, VET curricula, provide content contributions and support for the development of VET standards and training programmes. In addition, since 2006 the responsibility for running final qualification exams at VET schools was also fully transferred to the network of Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Crafts and the Chamber of Agriculture and includes the entire cycle of tasks from designing examination material and providing assessors to award qualifications. Validation of non-formal and informal learning achievements at vocational schools is also assigned to the remit of their responsibilities.

### 1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

An overall institutional model of validation of non-formal and informal learning achievements is not established as yet. The process mainly relies on scattered ad-hoc initiatives.

Draft proposals and discussions include general features of the design of validation of knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal leaning contexts:

- At VET institutions the process will be organised by external stakeholders (Chamber of Industry, Commerce and Crafts and the Chamber of Agriculture) and managed (supervised) by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Centre for Development of Qualifications and Vocational Education;

- Processes at HE establishments are monitored by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras) - an independent public agency implementing external quality assurance at HE in Lithuania. However, processes of
organising and implementation of validation of non-formal and in-formal learning will purely depend on the HEIs themselves;

- General labour market needs and qualification requirements are addressed by the Lithuanian Labour Market Training Authority (Lietuvos darbo rinkos mokymo tarnyba) and its seven regional offices. Founded in 1992, the Authority is one of the largest state organisations in the country with responsibility to develop adult vocational training, guidance and counselling services to support active labour market policy measures and as a consequence increase employment, combat social exclusions and develop workforce skills enabling to compete in a dynamic labour market. It is expected that this organisation will be responsible for the validation of non-formal and in-formal learning of adults when the system is fully developed in the future.

1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

Besides the number of large nationally implemented initiatives presented in Section 1.1, the most recent example in the field is the project “Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning at University Studies”\(^1\), funded by ESF and the Lithuanian government and implemented by Mykolas Romeris University in cooperation with Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University, Klaipeda University and Siauliai University.

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**Validation of non-formal and informal learning at University Studies**

The project “Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning as part of University Studies” was implemented between May 2006 and April 2008. The overall aim of the project was to develop a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning within university studies.

The project objectives included:

- To analyse the practices of European universities in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning within university studies;
- To undertake an analysis of adult needs in four largest country regions;
- To develop a validation system of non-formal and informal learning within university studies;
- To test one of the main validation methods of this system- an electronic file for documenting non-formal and informal learning achievements;
- To publish a guidance booklet.

Based on the results of the project, Mykolas Romeris University has offered possibilities for individuals to have their knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning validated, since the academic year 2009/2010. Applicants must have completed general education, possess at least five years work experience in the field concerned and must provide evidence of their non-formal and informal learning achievements corresponding to academic credits.

Potential applicants include: adults without a HE qualification in the field they have worked in for at least five years; adults with HE but working in an area different to their qualification for at least five years; adults who dropped out of HE studies but want to return; and unemployed adults. Achievements that can be validated are those gained through paid work experience, unpaid and voluntary work, individual learning, visits abroad (traineeships, various courses), and leisure activities.

The most common assessment methods used are collection of evidence from work experience and formal examinations (both knowledge and practical skills).

Validation of non-formal and informal learning offered by the education and training providers require a financial contribution by the individual. At Mykolas Romeris University one common basic fee is applied for every application submitted; then a second fee is based on the volume and level of certificates applied for. The actual overall fee is not high and is always much lower than a fee for study programme credits / modules offered by education providers as part of formal education.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning at University Studies

study programmes.

It is too early to make observations on the benefits to individuals but anecdotal evidence suggests that further career development and improved self-esteem are among the main benefits for individuals in terms of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

So far, quality assurance systems / procedures have been developed and applied individually by the institutions providing validation of non-formal and informal learning opportunities. One of the quality assurance tools is professional counselling of the applicant throughout the entire validation process.

This is a new initiative and an evaluation has not yet been carried out.

Further information can be found at the following link: http://www.mruni.eu/lt/padaliniai/direkcijos/studiju_direkcija/nefor_ir_savaim/

Several initiatives were undertaken by Kaunas Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts (Kauno prekybos, pramonės ir amatų rūmai), the Centre of Career and Competence of Vytautas Magnus University (Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas Karjeros ir kompetencijų centras), Kaunas University of Applied Sciences (Kauno Kolegija) and Kaunas Trade and Business School (Kauno prekybos ir verslo mokykla). These are described in turn below.

Innovative Tools and Procedures for Non-formal and Informal Learning Validation in the Tourism Sector

A pilot project “Innovative Tools and Procedures for Non-Formal and Informal Learning Validation in the Tourism Sector (Etap for Tourism)”\(^{15}\) was implemented under the Lifelong Learning Programme by eight partner institutions from five European countries. Kaunas Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts was the project coordinator.

The aim of the project was to assess available tools and practices for validating non-formal and informal learning achievements used in five European countries (Spain, UK, Denmark and Norway) and to offer the most suitable tools, methods and procedures for the tourism sector.

Project tasks and expected results included:
- Analysis of available tools, methods and procedures used in five European countries with a particular focus on a set of instruments used in the tourism sector;
- The development of modular programmes in the tourism (hotel) sector both at IVET and college educational levels;
- The development of an electronic competences testing tool for the tourism sector;
- Training of a group of potential assessors in VET schools, private companies and colleges;
- Piloting the tool with a group of volunteers wanting to validate their competencies.

The project duration is three years, from November 2007 to October 2010.

Facilitating Access to Lifelong Learning through the Development of a Recognition Procedure of Non-formal and Informal Learning

This project, funded through the Leonardo da Vinci programme\(^{16}\) is a two-year project which is being implemented in the retail sector by a number of project partners: Vytautas Magnus University Centre for Vocational Education and Research (project co-ordinator and contractor), Kaunas Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts, Kaunas Trade and Business School, Landesinstitut Sozialforschungsstelle (Germany), Centre for Vocational Education and Training (Slovenia) and Odense Technical College (Denmark).

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Facilitating Access to Lifelong Learning through the Development of a Recognition Procedure of Non-formal and Informal Learning

An overall project aim is to facilitate access to lifelong learning for adults of different age groups. The project objective is to develop a package of tools, which would ensure an independent assessment and validation procedure of non-formal and informal learning in the retail sector for people with a long period of work experience.

The project tasks and expected results include:
- Modification of the retail curriculum into a modular programme, taking into consideration the newly prepared occupational standard and best practice of foreign partner countries.
- The development of a methodology tool for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the field concerned: methods for recognition of professional competences and qualifications; a guide book for assessors (assessor’s portfolio, validation tasks, etc);
- To train a group of high quality assessors;
- Piloting the tool with a group of volunteers wanting to validate their competences;
- Preparation of a set of practical recommendations.

It is expected that the newly developed methodology (as well as a guide for assessors) could be adjusted to the needs of other sectors in the future.

1.6 Link between validation and the existing/ developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications

A credit-based system for higher education was established by The Law on Higher Education adopted in March 2000 (last amended 26 June 2008) and The Law on Higher Education and Research adopted on 30 April 2009.

Lithuania has to date used its own national credit system. These national credits are based on student workload (contact hours, independent study, exercises, research and/or other assignments) and refer to a notional 40 work hours by a student per week. One Lithuanian credit is equal to one study week and is the equivalent of 1.5 ECTS credits (i.e. one academic year equals 40 national credits, i.e. 1600 student work hours).

The Law on Higher Education foresees and allows for internal and external credit accumulation. Credit accumulation in the sphere of formal education has already existed in Lithuania for some time. Students may choose courses at other faculties or study programmes within their own institution or even at other establishments of higher education. The credits earned are recognised in accordance with the regulations adopted by each institution. Credits earned from non-formal learning may be recognised as well, however the decision (which is firstly related to the university’s ability to assess / validate non-formal and in-formal learning) rests with each particular home institution of the student. As has been mentioned already, only two HEIs offer such possibilities so far, i.e. Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas (The Centre of Career and Competences) (based on their extensive research in the field for a number of years) and Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius.

Based on the outcomes of a project run by Vilnius University, the Law on Research and Education has adopted ECTS credits and a 2-3 year transitional period has been allowed for the renewal of study programmes. All HEIs in Lithuania still use ECTS as a transfer system only. The multiplying factor 1.5 is used to count correlation between national and ECTS credits. For accumulation purposes national credits are still in use. However a new

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19 Vilnius University information at (viewed 3 September 2010): http://www.vu.lt/en/international/bologna_implementation/ects/.
generation of programmes based on ECTS credits only are starting to appear from September 2010.

In relation to IVET, the legal establishment of a modularised structure of qualifications was embedded in The Law on Vocational Education (1997) in 2007, whereas the content is regulated by individual Guidelines for higher education study fields and Professional standards. According to the Law, “a module in vocational training is a teaching and learning unit concluded in itself, leading from a defined input level of the learner to a competence increase which is planned in advance”. Being among the main focus of a recent VET reform, a modularised structure of qualifications in VET is considered to give more flexibility to vocational studies, provide more opportunities for life-long learning, open new possibilities in VET (such as validation of non-formal and in-formal learning) and improve overall VET quality by allowing specialists to upgrade their professional qualifications in a much easier way and with better correspondence to the labour market needs; creating better conditions for a persons’ mobility and an overall internationalisation of studies etc. A modularised structure of qualifications allows the learner to choose whether to complete the whole study programme at once or by acquiring a certain set of competences start working and continue their studies later (the learner is enabled to use in practice competences from one module independently from the other modules), a learner would be able to choose modules from other VET schools; and VET schools or companies would be able to offer VET students a complete vocational education study programme or a certain module only.

An example of the process of implementation of the modularised structure of qualifications in VET is the Leonardo da Vinci-funded project: “The development of European Modular Training Programmes for Decorator / Painter and their Adjustment in Lithuanian and European VET Institutions’ (DEMOP). The Project was implemented between October 2008 and September 2010.

Although the development of validation of non-formal and inform-al learning in VET is still at a very initial stage, the main added value of a modularised structure of qualifications in respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning is the way it allows a better assessment of individual competences. In a modularised structure of qualifications modules are certifiable units of the outcome or competence level, which can be used either on their own or as part of the entire qualification; an individual module has defined objectives and is focused on acquiring a set of defined competences by integrating theory and practical work; competences then are assessed using pre-defined criteria; and successful completion of a vocational study programme leads to the acquisition of a vocational qualification whereas completion of an individual module allows the individual to acquire partial vocational qualification.

It therefore seems that there exists more or less sufficient legal basis for the development and implementation of the credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications in Lithuania. However this development and implementation process is only at the initial stage: first of all it is necessary to implement the NQF, to design and implement occupational standards, to design the methodology of the national modular curricula in VET (these projects are under preparation), to design and to implement national system of credits in higher education and ECTS (as mentioned above, this project is currently executed and coordinated by Vilnius University).

1.7 Funding framework

Most of the national level initiatives are funded by the ESF with co-financing from the state budget. International projects and various EU funding streams in the field of education and training are now included under the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme (Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig etc.). Existing possibilities of validation of non-formal and informal learning usually require applicants to contribute with a small fee to cover administrative costs.

1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries

Numbers of beneficiaries are so far relatively low but are gradually increasing. For instance, in 2008 the Centre of Career and Competences of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas (Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto Karjeros ir kompetencijų centras) processed 25 applications for validation of non-formal and in-formal learning and in 2009 processed 40 applications, 20 of which were successful. The total number is still too small to make any statistical generalisations.

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

There are two main approaches to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Lithuania. The first, non-formal and informal learning can be recognised as an added value (for instance, for entry exams) in relation to a formal education programme / qualification requirements. In this case learning that is usually evidenced by a certificate from non-formal education providers is accepted by presenting an appropriate certificate. The second approach is as a type of qualification recognised and certified after going through a pre-defined, more complex procedure, which culminates in the issuing of a certificate (when an applicant seeks to have competences recognised as part of requirements towards a complete qualification, a procedure of consultations, validation etc. might take up to a year).

The first type of practice (i.e. recognising non-formal learning in admission processes) has been implemented by most education providers and study programmes for years. An example of this, for instance, is applicants for the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. Young people who have previously attended music schools (i.e. non-formal education) are only required to undertake practical entry exams, while others are obliged to take the full set of musicology exams.

The second type of practice (i.e. the award of qualifications through validation of competences) is currently in development. Here the role of the formal education and training sector is essential, especially HE Institutions (HEIs). The practical implementation of validation of skills and knowledge gained through non-formal and informal learning is a very new activity within the Lithuanian context in general. HEIs were the stakeholders that, through their participation in international (EU) projects, individual research interests, thematic expert groups at the EU level and other activities have accumulated the required experience and knowledge to undertake the first initiatives in the field. At the moment these opportunities are being developed even further with their contribution to awareness raising, dissemination; guidance and support, input to policy development and ultimately boosting innovation in the education area in general. The Centre of Career and Competences of Vytautas Magnus University is a very good example of this (see below). Newly established possibilities at Mykolas Romeris University have the potential to provide even further possibilities in the field (see good practice case description).

Validation of non-formal and in-formal learning is being stimulated by the National Programme for Higher Education Development which sets out the main aims and objectives of the ESF in education in Lithuania for 2007-2013 and includes the objective to “increase
accessibility through the implementation of innovative forms of studies”. Actions include inter alia “introducing innovative methods and flexible learning paths” … and “developing and implementation of the system for recognition of non-formal and prior learning”.

**The Centre of Career and Competences of Vytautas Magnus University (formerly known as The Centre of Competences of Vytautas Magnus University)**

The Centre of Competences of Vytautas Magnus University was established in 2007 as part of the ESF project “Centre of Competences: Preparation for the Process of the Assessment and Validation of Competences Acquired through Non-formal and Informal Learning. The Centre of Validation of Competences Acquired through Non-formal and Informal Learning at Vytautas Magnus University”.

One of the main purposes of the Centre was to make the University attractive to new types of students and create conditions for lifelong learning.

Initially the initiative derived from the Centre for Vocational Education and Research of the Department of Education of the University and was based on the scientific research and the experience acquired through the participation in a variety of different EU projects (for example, the project “Facilitating Access to Lifelong Learning Through the Recognition Procedure of Non-Formal and Informal Learning” ; and – “Recognition and Accreditation of Experiential Learning – a Way for Better Accessibility of Adult Education (REACTION)” –(a Grundtvig project).

Within several years the Centre accumulated a variety of expertise in the field and became a competent expert body at the national level: it provides individual consultations for applicants and leads throughout the entire validation procedure, develops methodological material for the assessors, consultants and participants, provides initial and further training to the assessors and facilitates the sharing of good practice with other institutions; organises special seminars and conferences in the field; participates in national and international projects and provides policy development contributions and methodological support for other educational institutions.

Starting with a pilot group of 25 people in September 2007, there were 40 applications in 2009, 20 of which were successfully completed. From initial opportunities for individuals wanting to enter / undertaking part-time Bachelor or Masters’ studies in Management and Economics only, the portfolio of subjects where competences and knowledge can be assessed has been expanded too, including new methods of validation, such as testing of practical knowledge. In addition, the Centre was re-organised into a Centre for Career and Competences in April 2010 with the aim to take a more systematic approach towards the subject and integrate validation of non-formal and informal learning into the overall career development path. Yet being available for University students only, there are plans to make the possibilities available for adults outside formal education.

A procedure of assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning was approved by the Rector’s Order in July 2008. However, the **equivalency examination** remains the main method leading to the acceptance of non-formal or informal learning achievements for adults so far. As described in the previous European Inventory report for Lithuania, according to the Temporal Procedure, a person over the age of 18 years with at least one year of work experience can apply to have their competences recognised. In September of each year he or she shall register in a licensed vocational school which provides a study programme of interest. The procedure starts with the identification of non-formal or informal learning achievements through the analysis of certificates of non-formal learning and other related documents provided by the individual. Then the person and the school jointly agree on a timetable of assigned course credit tests and consultations if they are needed. If qualified for the procedure, external students are allowed to take final qualification exams together with learners from formal education. The Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Crafts and the Chamber of Agriculture have taken over full organisation of final qualifications exams.


Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded qualification certificates or the qualified specialist diploma - of the same value as a qualification earned through formal training. Assessment and recognition services are paid for either by the external student themselves (when they have applied individually), by the employer (if the employer refers the candidate), or by the Labour Exchange (state employment agency) – if the Labour Exchange refers the candidate.

Regulations for recognition of competences acquired through non-formal learning set up in the Order of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour\textsuperscript{25} are similar to those described above. The only difference concerns the choice of institutions having the right to organise recognition procedures.

As noted in the previous European Inventory report for Lithuania\textsuperscript{26}, 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.

Interviews with various subject experts revealed that legal framework, the practical (de facto) process of building the recognition system and methods for non-formal and informal learning has hardly begun. The system of standards is still incomplete. Only vocational education and training standards are in place. Occupational standards continue to be developed within an ESF project for the Development of a National Qualification System. Adults without basic education but with vocational competences, acquired at work or through informal learning, in most cases are still assessed in accordance with formal rules for young people; therefore their experience is not formally assessed or recognised. Because the country has not yet adopted a formal recognition system for non-formal and informal education, the prestige of learning gained outside the formal system is low, both employees and employers do not see benefits of this route, and the competitiveness of people in the labour market is weakened, especially of those of older age. Among the main obstacles is the lack of traditions and culture of lifelong learning.

2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

A systematic approach towards the issue has not been developed yet. Stakeholder interviews have revealed that the lack of existing information, advice and guidance networks / dedicated institutions or their availability to provide information, advice and guidance are among the main issues why validation of non-formal and informal learning is still based on rather scattered initiatives but is not approached systematically.

Universities have an ultimate role to play in this respect given their accumulated expert knowledge in the field and their ability to draw in funding and international experience. On the other hand, professional organisations, trade unions and employers’ organisations are an underused resource in this respect and should play a considerably more active role in this area.

2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors

As noted in the 2007 Inventory update for Lithuania, individual companies often apply validation instruments (in the form of interviews, observation, personal portfolios etc.) for the selection of new employees, monitoring the performance of staff and the identification of training needs. Validation is used for the following purposes:

- Mandatory certification in the case of special national or EU regulations adopted for particular sectors of the economy (transport, agriculture);

\textsuperscript{25} 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.

• Optional certification, when certificates are awarded after particular assessment of competences;
• Recruitment of new personnel;
• Identification of training needs with regard to the implementation of new technologies.\textsuperscript{27}

There are only a few formal initiatives within the private sector to assess and validate employees’ competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

Case studies collected in the metal, telecommunications, restaurants and retail sectors have nevertheless revealed that a number of private companies use validation of prior learning instruments in order to assess competences as well as to monitor the development of individual qualifications. In some economic sectors, the assessment of results in a certificate award is recognised across the sector (e.g. FESTO certificates for metal sector)\textsuperscript{28}.

One of the companies that has developed its own system to validate non-formal and informal learning of its employees is Achema, the biggest nitrogen fertilisers company in the country –see the 2007 Inventory report for Lithuania. Another company JSC "Kauno energetikos remontas" provides a good example of how a highly regulated profession also takes into account non-formal and informal learning where assessment results are recognised across the sector. The box below provides more detailed case study into the validation practices at the latest company.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{JSC ”Kauno energetikos remontas” Welding Centre}\textsuperscript{29} & \\
\hline
JSC "Kauno energetikos remontas" was founded in 1945. It specializes in power equipment repairs, assembling, modernization and diagnostics, as well as the production of spare parts and steel structures. The company is among the oldest companies of a similar profile in Lithuania. It has a boiler repair department, an electric equipment repair department, a turbine repair department and a number of laboratories. The company’s main clients are thermal, hydro and nuclear power plants, electrical and heating networks and pipelines, sea craft, large industrial enterprises and construction companies in Lithuania, the Baltic region, and other European countries. Currently it has around 300 highly qualified employees. The company’s welding centre trains and certifies both the company’s and external welders according to LST EN 287-1,2 standard and issues accredited welders’ qualification certificates. \\

Because of the type of work the company is engaged in, among other highly qualified specialists they require highly qualified welders able to work with various metals and using different welding techniques, but also to comply with various national and international standards that regulate welding manufacturing. At the same time the level of welders’ qualification highly depends on practical skills, competences and tacit knowledge that a specialist gains through practical work experience.

The company’s welding centre undertakes training and certification functions that informally include the recognition of non-formal learning (usually gained through the work experience), which opened its services to other companies in the sector in 2003. The main reason for offering services for other companies was to generate an additional income but also to capitalise on the experience that the welding centre had accumulated over time.

The main issue faced by employers in this sector is related to the IVET training costs of welders and an overall lack of a qualifications’ system. Due to very high costs of materials which are required to develop the practical skills of the specialists and the wide range of specialisation that is available in this sector, formal education providers (e.g. VET schools, labour market training authorities) are only able to provide basic skills and knowledge in the field, with further investments into the development of a young specialist required by the companies which employ them. Another aspect which is very important here is that the earlier system of qualification of welding specialists, which was valid before 1990, has become redundant over time without offering any appropriate substitute to replace it. This resulted in a situation where the content of a certain qualification level varies in almost every
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Company’s website (viewed 3\textsuperscript{rd} September 2010): http://www.ker.lt/index.php?show_content_id=43.
company.

When a company employs a welding specialist, first of all it has to be sure that the person has the necessary certificates, knowledge and skills to do the specific welding jobs in the company. For this reason the company does an initial review of the specialist’s vocational qualifications, certificates achieved and the list of projects and type of work the person was previously involved in. In cases when a company requires very high quality welding skills, the specialist then is sent to one of the two National Welding Centres (Welding Centre of JSC “Kauno energetikos remontas” is one of these) to assess the specialist’s qualification and / or train for specific jobs and / or an additional certificate, if required. The welding centre itself part first of all looks at the formal qualifications that a person has gained, already acquired professional certificates and the personal file from the company which contains the detailed description of work and projects that the specialist was involved in as well as reviewing individual feedback forms from the quality assurance laboratories on the quality of the specialist’s welding accumulated over time. Then the centre organises theory and practical examinations. In addition, an individual training plan is designed according to the requests of the employer company and individual assessment outcomes. After completing the theory part and initial practical training, the person is sent back to the company to work alongside an experienced specialist to acquire more practical knowledge and skills. Then the person returns for another certification procedure. Based on formal theory and practical exams, the procedure also takes into account the feedback from a specialist-supervisor, the type of work that the person was involved in and the feedback on the specialist’s welding work from the quality assurance laboratories. This evidence forms an ‘individual case’ which is the subject of a formal examination procedure in order to acquire a higher qualification certificate. The certification procedure is undertaken by internal and external assessors, including representatives from the Lithuanian Welders Association. Certificates are recognised then across the sector and beyond. As regards the NQF and occupational standards for the sector, these follow, rather than lead the process. Moreover, European standards regulating this sector are not always incorporated in time within the national qualification system, which results in additional efforts and burden for sectoral associations and individual companies. At this stage the assessment procedure and outcomes are basically designed to respond to the needs of the companies, rather than the individuals, but there are already some ideas to make the assessment and certification procedure better correspond to the individual needs of the specialists.

2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

As in the private sector, matured validation initiatives in the third sector are rare to date. However interviews with practitioners have confirmed that there is a need in this sector for validation initiatives and that organisations in the third sector are addressing the issues relating to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in one way or another by their own means and understanding.

In the Lithuanian not-for-profit sector, validation techniques of prior learning are applied in recruitment, assessing and planning of qualification development at organisational level as well as in licensing and certification procedures. In the voluntary sector, validation procedures are mainly used for the selection of new volunteers, monitoring of their competences and the development of their motivation and self-confidence.30

The Law on Non-formal Adult Education (1998)31 identifies the main forms of such learning, including courses, distance learning, e-learning materials and self-instruction. Participation in voluntary activities is not included in the list of examples. In addition, interviews suggest that methodologies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the third sector are still at the development stage and usually taken forward by individual organisations rather than their associations or at the national level. Available examples show that there are different approaches towards the assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning, usually reflecting tailor-made needs of individual organisations

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rather than the people they are applied to, but also lack of guidance and methodological support for the organisations concerned. In other organisations there is recognition of the possibilities offered by validation but no initiatives have been introduced to date. Two examples are presented below.

**Child Line**

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

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

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

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

A new method was introduced recently in order to assess individual competences in consultation over the internet – responses by email are reviewed on a regular basis and feedback provided to the consultant.

The main responsibility for the assessment and learning lies with internal experts and well-experienced voluntary staff. The main benefit for the organisation is better matching between individuals and skills and contribution towards learning organisation. Lack of occupational standards especially for the occupations more often met in the third sector is among the main barriers to greater take-up of the initiative.

**Lithuania Sea Scouting**

Lithuanian Sea Scouts is non-profit apolitical volunteering youth organisation aiming to contribute to the upbringing of young people by fostering their physical, spiritual, social and intellectual development and active and responsible citizenship at the local, national and international levels, mainly through various outdoor activities. The organisation is a member of the international Scouting movement, with a particular emphasis on water-based activities, such as kayaking, canoeing, sailing and rowing in lakes, rivers and the sea. Sea Scouting in Lithuania is a programme for young people between 6 and 17 years of age. Activities include: hiking, going on trips, camping, implementation of programmes for children, young people and adults, international camps, workshops and international qualification seminars for youth leaders, participation in various projects and active citizenship activities.

The organisation provides wide non-formal and informal learning opportunities for young people and volunteers working with them, however it does not provide any certificates or other evidence of non-

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Lithuania Sea Scouting

formal and informal learning as yet. There are several reasons for this including the legal uncertainty of non-formal (not budgetary organisations) education providers, the unclear legal status of NGOs in general, lack of culture and traditions towards life-long learning in all sectors, lack of professional standards (especially in the third sector), lack of resources that an individual organisation could dedicate for this work and lack of knowledge and experience in the field.

Nevertheless identifying and recognising of competences and knowledge gained through non-formal and informal learning would offer great potential and added value to the individual, the organisation and the volunteering sector in general, if not beyond.

Taking youth that is engaged in the organisation's activities (about 1000 at the moment with the majority of them under 14 years of age): each of the five age groups have their own Programme of Experience, for instance:

- Children of the age group between 6 and 8 years have a programme of three levels of experience. Each level contains five areas, such as scouting, religion, knowledge of nature, self-expression, creativity and health. Each of the areas contains a list of knowledge and practical skills to be developed;

- the next two age groups (9-10 and 11-12 years of age) have a programme each of another four levels of experience: scouting, the sea experience, practice and religion. Each of the areas again contains a list of knowledge and practical skills to be developed;

- a similar approach is developed for the next two age groups (13-14 and 15-17 years of age).

Manuals for each of the levels are provided in a summary form. The main assessment methods that are used in the organisation to assess the knowledge, skills and competences gained by young people are observation, individual and team exercises, competitions and peer reflection and several others. There is a general trend that most of the evidence prepared by youth about their experience and skills gained through the activities at the Lithuanian Sea Scouting is actually used not in Lithuania, but in applying for jobs abroad. This is because there is general lack of appreciation of non-formal and informal learning in all sectors in Lithuania including, formal education system, public and private sectors.

In relation to volunteers that work with young people at Lithuanian Sea Scouting, it is thought that recognition of non-formal and informal learning would boost their motivation, contribute to the development of their future careers, raise the profile of the third sector and most likely attract more volunteers to it. However this potential has not been used to date.

People working with young people as guides do require certain competences and personal qualities as well as develop them over time working for the organisation. Due to its specifics, the organisation tries to attract students from pedagogical universities, young teachers and others that would be able and interested in working with children and the youth. After the initial recruitment procedure all new volunteers participate in up to four days of initial training. Further development is based on self-assessment of their own competences, identifying needs and learning gaps. A set of competences for each level is provided as well as competence handbooks for individual preparation. In addition, all volunteers receive training in several areas such as preparation for work with children of various age groups, team work, healthy nutrition, children in critical life situations, educational games, and various methods used in work with children, child’s psychology, talented and problematic children, responsibilities within the organisation, and introduction to religion etc. Assessment is based on indirect methods such as children’s achievements, but also peer review and self-assessment.

Interviews with third sector practitioners have revealed that, according to the present legal regulatory framework, only “budgetary” non-formal education providers are allowed to issue certificates, but not NGOs. On the other hand, there is no motivation for third sector organisations and volunteers themselves to develop any kind of certification of their

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36 Lithuanian Sea Scouting website (accessed 8th September 2010): http://www.lietuvosjuruskautija.lt/skautamokslis/
competences gained through non-formal and informal learning because there is no interest at national level in such certification, only Lithuanian young people who are applying for jobs abroad request references because employers in other countries consider competences and knowledge gained through the non-formal and informal learning as an integral part of personal development and professional readiness. There is hope that the situation may begin to change with the adoption of the Framework on the Development of Non-governmental Organisations which is now proposed to the Lithuanian Government and expected to be adopted by the end of 2010.

Among other obstacles for the development of validation of non-formal and informal learning mentioned by practitioners were a lack of professional standards (especially in the third sector), a lack of resources that an individual organisation could dedicate to this work and a lack of knowledge and experience in the field. Associative structures such as associations of youth organisations have started to recognise the need for validation, but have not implemented any initiatives in the field so far. In addition, there is an overall lack of tradition and culture towards lifelong learning and this is among the main obstacles to innovative initiatives.

2.5 Costs to organisations

The absence of a national approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning, standardised procedures, and an institutional framework drives the costs up for individual stakeholders, for instance companies / NGOs and others using certain competence assessment methods and procedures for their individual operational needs. High costs to organisations are among the main obstacles to greater take up and the development of validation initiatives among the potential providers of these opportunities. Only larger entities (companies, NGOs, trade unions, employers’ associations, sectoral organisations etc.) can afford the investment required in terms of time, expertise and sustainability of the process.

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

In general, there is a lack of awareness about the benefits involved in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is typical for all parties (potentially) involved: education and training providers, individuals, employers and social partners. For instance, the majority of employers do not see any need to formally certify employees’ competencies acquired in non-formal or informal ways. In their opinion, this is only beneficial for the individuals but not for businesses.

According to interviews conducted for the 2007 and 2010 updates with both training providers and Chambers of Commerce, cases where employers refer employees to take exams towards a qualification are rare. On the other hand, the motivation of individuals to gain recognition for non-formal experiences is rather low as well.

Overall there are bigger issues involved in awareness raising and recruitment area, such as lack of national guidance and ultimately low prestige of learning gained outside the formal education system as well as lack of traditions and a culture of lifelong learning.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

This is well organised by existing initiatives, for instance, the opportunities to validate non-formal and informal learning at The Centre of Career and Competence of Vytautas Magnus University and at Mykolas Romeris University, which provides a good example of how ICT tools are used in this process (for more information see above). Guidance and support starts from the provision of initial information, helping with the development of a personal file and assistance throughout the entire validation procedure. Guidance and individual assistance is provided by validation professionals.
3.3 Costs to individuals
Validation of non-formal and informal learning offered by education and training providers requires a financial contribution by the individual. One common basic fee is applied for every application submitted; then a second fee is based on the volume and level of certificates applied for. Overall, the actual fee is not high (just to cover administrative costs) and it is always much lower than a fee for study programme credits / modules offered by education providers as part of formal education study programmes.

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups
Validation possibilities designed by the Centre of Career and Competence of Vytautas Magnus University and the Mykolas Romeris University were both initially aimed at attracting new target groups of potential university students. This is now changing with plans to provide lifelong learning opportunities for a broader audience (for instance when a person needs certified competences in a certain area, but does not plan to proceed for full HE degree etc.) and other target groups, such as the elderly and people with disabilities.

3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals
It is an early stage for any generalisations, but available anecdotal evidence suggest that further career development and improved self-esteem are among the main benefits for individuals of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework
The conceptual model of the NQF includes a quality assurance framework but the actual content of this framework is still being developed. No national/ regional/ local quality assurance frameworks have been adopted so far. Existing validation initiatives (for instance, provided by the Centre of Career and Competences of Vytautas Magnus University and The Mykolas Romeris University) have developed and apply their own quality assurance measures.

4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures
So far quality assurance systems / procedures are developed and applied individually by the institutions providing validation of non-formal and informal learning opportunities. One of the quality assurance tools is professional counselling of the applicant throughout the entire validation process.

In addition, at Mykolas Romeris University, for instance, other quality assurance measures are applied, including:

- approval of the developed validation procedure by external national and international experts in the field,
- assessment of non-formal and informal learning is performed by a committee of experts,
- the regular validation procedure includes internal and external audit components providing quality checks on validation procedures: internal audit reviews appeal applications and assesses the qualifications of assessors, the assessment methods used and other procedural aspects and external audit looks at overall quality in HE
- guidance booklets are developed for assessors and also training sessions and workshops are organised

37 Validation of non-formal and informal learning at Mykolas Romeris University: http://www.mruni.eu/lit/padaliniai/direkcijos/studiju_direkcija/nefor_ir_savaim/
4.3 Evaluation framework

No evaluation framework or requirements for / standardised components are adopted at the national, regional or local levels.

Evaluation frameworks are developed by individual institutions providing validation of non-formal and informal leaning. At Mykolas Romeris University, for instance, the regular validation procedure includes internal and external audit components providing quality checks on validation procedures: where internal audit reviews appeal applications and assesses qualifications of assessors, assessment methods used and other procedural aspects and external audit looks at overall quality in HE.

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

5.1 Methods used

Identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning through or with the help of examinations in the formal system is the most common assessment method used in Lithuania so far. The use of this method is very similar to the description provided in the 2005 Inventory\(^{38}\): thus, an individual enters examinations of the formal education system and by passing them, his or her competencies gained through non-formal and informal learning are validated. The end-result is a formal and usually generally recognised diploma or a certificate.

A competence portfolio is another method for validation of non-formal and informal learning in Lithuania and is used by the new validation initiatives developed by the Centre of Career and Competences of Vytautas Magnus University and the Mykolas Romeris University. Competence portfolios tend to use a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents showing an individual’s skills in different ways (such as self-assessment based on a questionnaire or a set of given criteria collecting evidence from work experience or other practices, interview(s) with a third party and / or an assessment centre and competence exams in some cases).

Observation is less commonly used as a method for validating non-formal and informal learning in Lithuania. However good examples of its use are Child Line and Lithuania Sea Scouting – both from the third sector. The method involves extracting evidence of competences while individuals perform everyday tasks at work. Evidence extracted from work practices usually relies on observation by a third party (in these cases a line manager or a senior supervisor) for the judgement of the competence level acquired.

Simulation is another method used by Child Line when in addition to other methods and techniques, a person undergoing an assessment procedure is given a ‘real life’ example to solve. In addition a candidate also collects and documents physical or intellectual evidence of learning outcomes from their work. This evidence then forms the basis of the validation of competencies by a third party. Yet, competence assessment procedures in the third sector are often more an instrumental tool for the organisation concerned than for the individual and do not result in a certificate of any kind.

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VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

As an example, validation practitioners at the Centre of Career and Competence of Vytautas Magnus University and the Mykolas Romeris University are usually university teachers.

In terms of training, seminars, workshops and conferences are usually organised for validation practitioners. In addition, most individual validation initiatives have developed guidebooks for practitioners.

There are no particular qualification requirements for validation practitioners in Lithuania, however in the project “Developing the System of Evaluation of Knowledge and Competence in VET”, which was funded by the EU Structural Funds in 2005-2007, the competences of assessors dealing with validation of non-formal and informal learning were defined for the first time (Table below39).

Table No. Types of activities and required competences by the assessor’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of activity</th>
<th>Required competences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Preparation for the validation process</td>
<td>1. To understand qualitative and quantitative changes in the profession / professional qualifications concerned; 2. To understand key methodologies and methods of VET; 3. To understand key principles and structure of vocational standards and modularised structure of qualifications; 4. To understand the main principles of competence-based learning content; 5. To be aware of legal requirements and regulation in relation to competence assessment; 6. To understand the social value of validation of non-formal and informal learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Preparation of the validation process</td>
<td>1. Ability to apply assessment criteria for a specific validation case; 2. Ability to choose competence assessment methods; 3. Ability to prepare tasks for the competence assessment process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organisation and implementation of the assessment process</td>
<td>1. Ability to undertake competence assessment in line with defined standards and requirements; 2. To apply assessment criteria which are specified in a professional standard; 3. Ability to test / to verify competence assessment results; 4 Ability to document assessment results; 5. Ability to create positive psychological environment for the candidates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Improvement of validation process</td>
<td>1. Ability to analyse competences over the assessment process; 2. To provide recommendations in relation to competence assessment process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Assessor’s professional and individual development</td>
<td>1. To be self-critical and able to reflect and analyse your own work and search for development possibilities; 2. To design strategies and plans for self-development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Centre of Career and Competences, Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University.

NQF project expert.

Lithuanian Sea Scouting Council, Lithuanian Sea Scouting

Lithuanian Youth Council

Lithuanian Welders Association

Mykolas Romeris University

Welding Centre of JSC "Kauno energetikos remontas"