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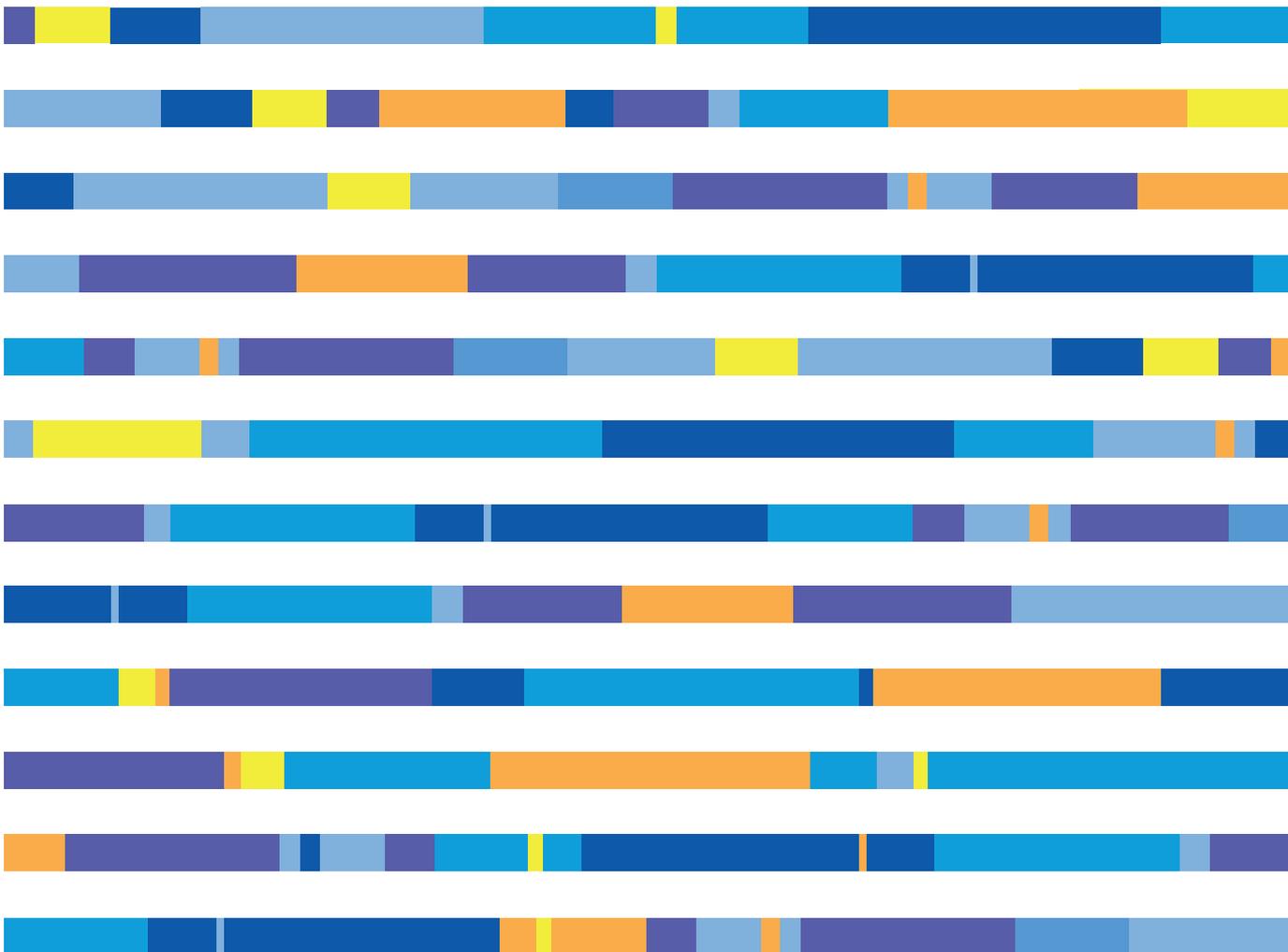
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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update

COUNTRY REPORT: **LATVIA**

Author: Diana Ieleja



Acknowledgements

This country update was produced by Diana Ieleja, as part of the 2018 update to the European Inventory on validation, a project managed by ICF (lead consultants: Manuel Souto-Otero, Ilona Murphy, Gabor Endrodi, David Scott and Andreea Hrimiuc) under the supervision of a steering committee formed by the European Commission (Koen Nomden, Godelieve Van-Den Brande; Martina Ni Cheallaigh and Corinna Liersch), Cedefop (Ernesto Villalba and Jens Bjornavold), and the ETF (Michael Graham and Kersti Raudsepp).

The report has benefitted from feedback from the European qualifications framework advisory group (EQF AG) members for Latvia as well as other national-level quality assurance (QA) contacts with expertise in validation.

Work was carried out under DG EMPL Implementing Framework Contract EAC/47/2014-3: VC 2017/0692

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The publication has neither been edited nor proof-read by Cedefop's editing service.

Please cite this publication as:

Ieleja, D. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Latvia*.

http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Latvia.pdf

1 Introduction

Since 2016, the main developments in validation in Latvia are as follows:

- New regulation for validation in higher education was adopted in 2018. It provides more detailed criteria for validation and allows for a wider range of skills, knowledge and competences to be recognised.
- Validation has begun to play a central role in upskilling measures for employed persons, especially those with low skills.

Overall progress in relation to the Council Recommendation of 2012 since the 2016 Inventory has been moderate. The legal basis for identification, documentation, assessment and certification has existed since before 2016 and has changed relatively little in the last two years, except in higher education, where a new regulation was adopted. The standards used for awarding qualifications are the same standards for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes (also since before 2016). The range of methods used for validation, however, is still mostly limited to assessment by the same tests as used in the formal education system. The use of portfolio assessment and other methods that go beyond testing is relatively limited.

Provision for the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process is still very limited.

Validation has become a more central feature in actions targeting employability (e.g. ESF projects), which is likely to improve access for disadvantaged groups, especially low-skilled employees and NEETs. There is no viable system of validation for refugees and migrants.

The main strength of the approach to validation (at least at the theoretical and legal level) is the clear link to the national qualification framework at all levels. Also, the emphasis on validation of vocational qualifications in recent years has enabled some progress in validation in the VET sector and has increased the interest of the sector in validation processes. At the same time, in many parts of the private sector, official qualifications become increasingly irrelevant as employers pay more attention to practical skills demonstrated on the job (e.g. in IT) and often choose to train the employees on the job rather than require that they validate their skills to obtain official qualifications.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

The national system of validation was set up during the period between 2007-2016, through the specific creation of a supportive legislative framework. The validation process in Latvia relies on a system of multiple frameworks covering different sectors and levels of education.

The basic principles of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Latvia are based on the European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning.

The Law on Institutions of Higher Education and Vocational Education Law states that any person can validate their informal and non-formal learning by passing tests or examinations run by any of the educational institutions providing a relevant study programme.

Legal basis for validation

In Latvia there is no one overarching law on the recognition of competences gained outside the formal education system. Instead there are regulations stipulating the levels of education qualifications corresponding to different levels of the Latvian

Qualification Framework (LQF),¹ and separate regulations for validation in higher education and in vocational education and training (VET).

In higher education, the main regulation passed in 2012 has been in force until recently. According to the Cabinet of Minister Regulation on Recognising the Results of Studies from Previous Learning or Professional Experience² a university or college can award credit points for competences gained through previous professional experience if a study programme in a corresponding field was accredited in that university or college. The way to gain validation has been through passing the tests foreseen in the corresponding course or module. The person who had their learning validated in this way, can subsequently join the corresponding study programme to gain other credits necessary for completing it.

In August 2018, a new regulation for validation in higher education was passed.³ It provides more detailed criteria for validation and allows for a wider range of skills, knowledge and competences to be recognised. According to the new regulation, practical skills and competences gained through professional experience can be validated in lieu of practice components in higher education study programmes, and theoretical knowledge gained through self-study can be recognised in lieu of theoretical courses. The path to validation still lies through passing corresponding tests from the relevant study programme.

The regulation for HE does not allow obtaining a diploma or certificate of studies based on validation of informal or non-formal learning – it only allows an applicant to gain credit points that contribute towards achieving such a diploma or degree.

In VET, the validation of learning is still regulated by the Cabinet of Ministers regulation from 2011⁴: accredited education establishments and centres (the list is regularly renewed at the website of State Education Quality Service (IKVD⁵)) from commissions which are authorized to run professional qualification validation exams (assessment). The cost of the exams is determined by the Cabinet of Ministers regulation 2013⁶. Under specific ESF actions, the cost of assessment can be covered or partly covered by the state.

Upskilling

Existing validation arrangements support low-skilled adults in the spirit of the Upskilling Pathways recommendation within the framework of specific actions financed mainly by the ESF.

¹ Cabinet of Ministers (2017) Regulation Nr.322 Noteikumi par Latvijas izglītības klasifikāciju (Regulations on the Latvian Education Classification) <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=291524>

² Cabinet of Ministers (2012) Regulation Nr 36 Iepriekšējā izglītībā vai profesionālajā pieredzē sasniegtu studiju rezultātu atzīšanas noteikumi (Regulation on Recognising the Results of Studies from Previous Learning or Professional Experience) <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=242653>

³ Cabinet of Ministers (2018) Regulation Nr 505 Ārpus formālās izglītības apgūto vai profesionālajā pieredzē iegūto kompetenču un iepriekšējā izglītībā sasniegtu studiju rezultātu atzīšanas noteikumi <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/301013-arpus-formalas-izglitiba-apguto-vai-profesionalaja-pieredze-ieguto-kompetencu-un-iepriekseja-izglitiba-sasniegtu>

⁴ Cabinet of Ministers (2011) Regulation Nr 146 Kārtība, kādā novērtē ārpus formālās izglītības sistēmas apgūto profesionālo kompetenci (Procedures for assessing professional competences acquired outside the formal education system) <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=226788>

⁵ IKVD (State Education Quality Service), Ārpus formālās izglītības profesionālās kompetences novērtēšanas institūcijas (Outside formal education professional competence assessment bodies), <https://ikvd.gov.lv/arpus-formala-izglitiba/profesionalas-kompetences-novertesana/>

⁶ Cabinet of Ministers (2013) Regulation Nr 791 Profesionālās izglītības iestāžu un eksaminācijas centru maksas pakalpojumu cenrādis (Price list for paid services of vocational education institutions and examination centres) <https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=259780>

To support low-skilled adults as recommended by the EU Council⁷ a number of support activities are offered on top by the National Employment Agency (NVA, Latvian PES): orientation sessions, career consultations, a list of available courses, on-line skill audit, a list of available vacancies, short-term forecasts for the labour market⁸.

2.2 Validation in education and training

There is a national system for validation in education and training, but it does not consist of a single validation framework document – rather, there are separate documents for each level of education.

All four stages of validation – identification, documentation, assessment, certification – are covered for general, vocational and higher education and for some forms of adult education.

Regarding **general education**, the Cabinet of Ministers issued in November 2015 a regulation regarding the 'Procedures for Enrolment of Students in and Discharge from General Educational Institutions'⁹. This regulation states that a school is allowed to accept a student as an external student (a person who develops the knowledge and skills as required by the state general educational standard and who passes the examinations for assessment to acquire the educational certificate). There have been no major new developments in this area since 2016.

Regarding **VET**, as of 2010, the Vocational Education Law¹⁰ provides that '(1)The assessment of vocational competence shall take into account the requirements of the respective Occupational Standard; (2)The accredited educational institutions and accredited examination centres can be delegated to perform the validation process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning; (3)The regulation on the validation of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is defined by the Cabinet of 'Ministers'.

Professional competence in VET is assessed according to the regulation issued by Cabinet of Ministers on the Procedure of Vocational Qualification Examination in Accredited Vocational Education Programmes (2011). The regulation prescribes the procedure for the validation of the professional competence acquired outside the formal education system, which conforms to the professional competence of the first, second or third level vocational qualification. This procedure does not apply to regulated professions. According to the regulation, the professional competence shall be validated by an accredited educational institution or an examination centre, to which the State Education Quality Service has delegated the validation function.

The State Education Quality Service is an institution subordinate to the MoES. Until 2018, the State Education Quality Service has delegated responsibility for validation to more than 40 accredited educational institutions and examination centres, with around 3 000 persons having undergone the validation procedure. There are no limitations for accessing this validation other than a minimum age of 18. This regulation does not relate to the professional qualification examinations in the higher

⁷ EU Council (2016) Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224\(01\)&rid=4](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&rid=4)

⁸ National Employment Agency (NVA) <https://cvvp.nva.gov.lv/#/pub/>

⁹ Cabinet of Ministers (2012, end of validity 2015) Regulation no. 591 Noteikumi par kārtību, kādā izglītojamie tiek uzņemti vispārējās izglītības iestādēs un atskaitīti no tām, un obligātajām prasībām pārcelšanai uz nākamo klasi (Regarding the Procedures for Enrolment of Students in and Discharge from General Educational Institutions and Special Pre-School Education Groups and the Mandatory Requirements for Moving Them up into the Next Grade) <http://likumi.lv/ta/id/277597-kartibakada-izglitojamie-tiek-uznemi-visparejas-izglitibas-iestades-un-specialajas-pirmsskolasizglitibas-grupas>

¹⁰ Amendments in the Vocational Education Law adopted by Parliament on 10.06.2010 (Latvian: Grozījumi Profesionālās izglītības likumā) <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=212500>

education sector, as well as several education programmes in regulated fields of study such as military defence, internal affairs, border guards.

The validation of qualification in tertiary levels is regulated by 'Procedure of Validating the Learning Outcomes Achieved through Learning Outcomes Acquired in Non-Formal Education or Professional Experience'¹¹. Validation at tertiary levels is achieved by using declarative methods and evidenced with documentation.

To improve accessibility and flexibility in the **higher education sector**, in 2011 the MoES drafted, and the Parliament adopted, amendments to the Law on Institutions of Higher Education. The amendments allowed higher education institutions to assess the learning outcomes achieved in an individual's previous education or professional experience and, if they meet the programme requirements - to recognise them and to give appropriate credit points for it. Regulations from the Cabinet of Ministers define the procedure of validating the learning outcomes in higher education. In 2012, the regulation on 'Procedure of Validating the Learning Outcomes Achieved through Prior Education or Professional Experience'¹² was issued by the Cabinet of Ministers, which was later replaced in 2018 by a new regulation¹³. This regulation defines both criteria and procedure. The decision regarding the recognition of learning outcomes is taken by the Commission of Learning Outcomes Recognition established in the relevant higher education institution or college. The basis for the assessment of professional competence are the professional competences as defined by the Occupational Standards¹⁴. The procedures foresee that the candidate for validation undergoes four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, certification) for establishing the extent to which his/her competence gained in a non-/informal way conforms to the professional competences as defined by the respective Occupational Standards.

Thus, the validation system of non-formal and informal learning can be divided into the following levels:

1. assessment with the aim of awarding an elementary or general secondary education attesting document – a certificate that sets out the education level attained;
2. assessment with the aim of awarding a vocational qualification that is identical to the qualification that can be obtained by studying through any vocational education programme;
3. assessment within higher education with the aim of awarding credit points/ credit for specific modules in order to make the education process more flexible and accessible.

¹¹ Cabinet of Ministers (2018) Regulation Nr 505 Ārpus formālās izglītības apgūto vai profesionālajā pieredzē iegūto kompetenču un iepriekšējā izglītībā sasniegtu studiju rezultātu atzīšanas noteikumi <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/301013-arpus-formalas-izglitibas-apguto-vai-profesionalaja-pieredze-ieguto-kompetencu-un-iepriekseja-izglitiba-sasniegtu>

¹² Cabinet of Ministers (2012) Regulation Nr 36 Iepriekšējā izglītībā vai profesionālajā pieredzē sasniegtu studiju rezultātu atzīšanas noteikumi (Regulation on Recognising the Results of Studies from Previous Learning or Professional Experience) <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=242653>

¹³ Cabinet of Ministers (2018) Regulation Nr 505 Ārpus formālās izglītības apgūto vai profesionālajā pieredzē iegūto kompetenču un iepriekšējā izglītībā sasniegtu studiju rezultātu atzīšanas noteikumi <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/301013-arpus-formalas-izglitibas-apguto-vai-profesionalaja-pieredze-ieguto-kompetencu-un-iepriekseja-izglitiba-sasniegtu>

¹⁴ Regulation Cabinet of Ministers (2017) Regulation No. 264 Noteikumi par Profesiju klasifikatoru, profesijai atbilstošiem pamatuzdevumiem un kvalifikācijas pamatprasībām (Regulations on Classifier of Occupations, Basic Tasks Corresponding to the Occupation and Basic Requirements of the Qualification) <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=291004>

Priority areas

The policy of validation in Latvia was formed during the period of economic downturn and therefore the validation of vocational qualifications became the policy focus. The creation of the validation system was financially supported in order to achieve this objective. EU funding was predominantly used.

Groups such as unemployed people (including low-skilled unemployed people), NEETs, as well as people currently in employment have been targeted by upskilling and validation initiatives within actions related to employability (see section 2.3).

Validation of learning through Open Education Resources

There is no specific policy in place that considers Open Educational Resources (OER). Since in Latvia the validation procedure works through examinations, the procedure for validating learning acquired through open educational resources is the same as for the other types of informal and formal learnings. Most probably there is still insufficient validation provision for candidates who are aiming to validate the OER results, and it is too early to say that validators have strategies or practices in place or that the existing framework in its current form can accommodate these candidates for validation. It is anticipated that the validation of learning undertaken by means of OER will be approached on an individual basis, within the existing legislative framework.

2.3 Validation and the labour market

Government initiatives

To help people to access the labour market and support their career development, measures related to employability have been developed by the Latvian government with extensive support from EU funds. These measures have a rather heavy emphasis on validation as part of upskilling initiatives.

To tackle the issues of employability, a range of five-year projects funded by the EU were started in 2017. The projects fall under Special Support Measures 'Improvement of Professional Competence of Employed Persons', 'Support for Longer Working Life'. The aim is to ensure that the qualification of employed persons meets the requirements of the fast-changing labour market, to promote the competitiveness of the workforce and increase labour productivity. The projects target the following groups at risk of unemployment:

- persons with unfinished education,
- persons with an education level at EQF 3 or less,
- disabled persons,
- young parents,
- people over 45 years working in occupations classified in 5, 7, 8 and 9 basic group professions as stated by the Occupational Classification (service and trade sector employees, qualified workers and craftsmen, machinery and machine operators as well as product assemblers, simple professions),
- persons older than 50 years,
- refugees and persons with alternative status,
- employees with low income or poor person's status,
- NEET youth,
- persons in prison,
- long-term unemployed people.

Project activities include the assessment of human resource potential and provision of support measures like career consultations, skills audit, and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Government initiatives for the employed

In 2017 a five-year ESF project “Development of professional competence of employed persons” was launched¹⁵. The initiative is aimed at “improving adult professional competence in order to increase the competitiveness of employees and promote the productivity growth”¹⁶

Project funding is EUR 25 353 413 (ESF EUR 21 550 401, national co-financing EUR 3 803 012), and the implementation period is 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2022. The project is a part of the European Union funds operational programme “Growth and Employment” specific support target 8.4.1. “To improve the professional competence of employed persons”¹⁷.

Under this initiative, employed persons aged 25 and above have the opportunity, among other things, to participate in non-formal education programmes and validate their knowledge, skills and professional competence acquired outside formal education. In addition, the project aims to lay foundation for a common and sustainable adult education support system in cooperation with local authorities¹⁸.

The VET qualifications obtained through validation supported by this initiative can be used in the same way as VET qualifications obtained through formal education.

According to project data¹⁹, 22 979 persons are expected to improve their qualifications as a result of the project, which also includes training. By May 2018 7 208 employed persons applied for learning, using the project, in 63 vocational education institutions²⁰.

Use of validation in the labour market outside government initiatives

Outcomes of validation in the private sector can be recognised if the candidate passes through the official procedure of validation in a Vocational Education Competence Centre.

Employers may choose to ensure the upgrading of qualifications and assessment of competences of the employees in the official way (through a VECC) or informally within the company. In the first case validation will be recognised in formal education, in the second further validation will be needed. A new tendency is to disregard official diplomas should the candidate be able to prove needed competences (e.g. through company tests during the recruitment procedure). Such an approach is increasingly popular e.g. in the IT area.

During the years 2011-2017, in 47% of the cases, the acquisition of the certificate of professional qualification (LQF levels 3-4) obtained through the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, was due to requirements in the work field.

In the rest of the cases, it was the initiative of motivated individuals themselves or of the employers.²¹

¹⁵ VIAA (State Education Development Agency), Nodarbināto personu profesionālās kompetences pilnveide (Development of professional competence of employed persons), http://viaa.gov.lv/lat/pieauguso_izglitiba/par_projektu/

¹⁶ CEDEFOP ReferNet Latvia (2017) <http://www.refernet.lv/?p=2377&lang=en>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ VIAA (State Education Development Agency), Nodarbināto personu profesionālās kompetences pilnveide (Development of professional competence of employed persons), http://viaa.gov.lv/lat/pieauguso_izglitiba/par_projektu/

²⁰ CEDEFOP ReferNet Latvia (2017) <http://www.refernet.lv/?p=2561&lang=en#more-2561>

²¹ Academic Information Centre (2018), Implementation of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning Outcomes in Latvia http://www.nki-latvija.lv/content/files/VNIL_report_LV_2018.pdf p.22

Should the employer see the need of the official recognition of a new profession, they may follow the example of the National Library of Latvia which initiated introduction and validation of the qualification “Librarian” (LQF level 4) in librarianship. In 2016, the NLL introduced the accredited vocational continuing education programme “Library Science”, which allows for the acquisition of the qualification “Librarian”. In 2017, the NLL initiated the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes regarding a librarian’s qualification. So far, 12 persons have already used this opportunity²².

Participation of social partners in validation

There are different schemes to ensure the participation of social partners as stakeholders in the process of awarding qualifications including qualifications awarded through prior learning outcomes validation. Social partners as stakeholders (e.g. representatives from ministries and subsidiary agencies, representatives from employers’ unions, chambers of trade and commerce) are involved in working groups designing the standards, and also participating in examinations awarding the qualification. Thus, for example, the regulation on ‘Examination Procedure of Professional Qualification in Accredited Professional Education Programmes’²³ stipulates that the qualification examinations are run by the accredited vocational education institutions in cooperation with the National Centre for Education or Latvian National Centre for Culture and sectoral representatives. This regulation requires the participation of social and sectoral representatives in developing both the centralised examination programme and its contents. Moreover, according to the above-mentioned regulation, the examination commission should include people employed in the respective branch of the economy and have the necessary education level in consonance with the respective thematic field of the Latvian educational classification.

2.3.1 Skills audits

Skills audits in Latvia may be part of a three-step process (skills assessment or audit; validation; and recognition), as described in the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation²⁴. Skills audit is used for validation and upskilling especially by employment services and by vocational competence centres accredited for validation.

Within the framework of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (LQF levels 2-4) a free consultation is offered to the candidates to objectively assess their knowledge and skills against the occupational standard. In case additional education is required vocational institutions may offer additional paid consultations or advise on an adult non-formal education programme.

Consultations on documents attesting candidate’s previous work experience and education are based on the portfolio method and aim at helping the candidate to systemize the documents and objectively assess their compliance with the standards of the corresponding programme. Often, a Europass document is used as evidence of candidate’s non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

There are no special regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on skills audit.

The target groups of the skills audit include persons seeking to obtain vocational qualifications through validation and/ or training, including unemployed people.

²² Academic Information Centre (2018), Implementation of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning Outcomes in Latvia http://www.nki-latvija.lv/content/files/VNIL_report_LV_2018.pdf pp 37-38

²³Cabinet of Ministers (2011) Regulation Nr 662 Profesionālās kvalifikācijas eksāmenu norises kārtība akreditētās profesionālās izglītības programmās (Procedure of Vocational Qualifications Examination in Accredited Vocational Education Programmes) <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=235206>

²⁴ See footnote 2

The State Employment Agency is the main public provider of career consultation and employment services. The services are free of charge. The agency can assist with the following: the choice of profession, organisations which provide training for the relevant profession, key characteristics and skills required, how to audit professional skills on return to the job market, how to take account of any individual health problems, methods of exploring professional interests, skills and qualities, and planning professional development.

There are several kinds of services available. One is individual career consultation to assess professional suitability and give advice on how to search for an alternative profession whilst taking into account such factors as education and health, assessment of a client's personality as well as features of the profession. The consultation may also cover preparation for job interview and the requirements of the job market, and assistance in the writing of a CV and covering letter. The consultation includes advice about the educational system of Latvia and study opportunities, and information about professional descriptions and professional standards.

Other services are as follows:

- Individual career diagnosis consultation which covers assessment of the dispositions and competencies in specific professions in comparison to client attributes.
- Individual self-determination career consultation such as self-assessment to determine professional suitability.
- Group career consultation through a lecture on educational and career opportunities or alternatively a diagnostic lecture on the assessment of an individual's skills and motivation before taking part in active employment measures.
- Electronic support including website information about careers, choice of a profession and job seeking.

2.4 Validation and the third sector

Validation in the third sector is not very common since more traditional ways of validation prevail. The major player dealing with validation in the youth sector is the Agency for International Programmes for Youth (subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia). In 2016, the agency ran a national forum “Non-Formal and Validated” (“Neformāls un atzīts”). The purpose was to facilitate the discussion on the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the field of youth in Latvia. Participants, field experts and young people, proposed the establishment of a system of validation of non-formal learning in the field of youth at national level. They developed recommendations on how such a system could function.²⁵

3 Links to national qualification systems

The Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) was established in 2010. The level descriptors are based on learning outcomes, and formal education qualifications are linked to these levels. The level descriptors were developed with reference to national education and occupational standards, as well as the EQF level descriptors. These level descriptors are included in the regulation and are based on learning outcomes that are expressed in three dimensions:

²⁵ Recommendation of the forum's working group: <https://jaunatne.gov.lv/lv/raksti/latvija-tiks-ieviesta-neformalas-izglitiba-jaunatnes-darba-atzisanas-sistema-papildinats-ar>

REKOMENDĀCIJAS. Foruma “Neformāls un atzīts” darba grupu rekomendācijas Jaunatnes starptautisko programmu aģentūras piedāvātajai atzīšanas sistēmai.

- Knowledge (knowledge and comprehension)
- Skills (ability to apply knowledge, skills of communication and general skills)
- Competence (analysis, synthesis and assessment)

The LQF²⁶, similarly to the EQF, consists of eight reference levels and includes all stages (basic, secondary and higher education) and types (general, vocational, academic and professional) of education. A higher education Diploma Supplement is required for higher education diplomas, corresponding to the results of referencing the national education system in Latvia to the EQF. The Diploma Supplement has to indicate the level of qualification according to the vocational qualification level of Latvia, EQF/LQF level or the EHEA Qualifications Framework level.

The Law on Education defines the LQF, characterises levels and highlights learning outcomes. The Law on VET states the correspondence of the levels of professional qualifications. All state recognised professional education documents include an appropriate level of the LQF. The learning outcomes that are to be related to level descriptors are basically fulfilling the role of exchange currency for validating prior learning and experience. There is no overarching validation institution that can validate experience in all the LQF levels at once. Educational institutions in the respective sector of education are delegated the role of validator and the ministry acts as the supreme and final supervisor of the process in the country. The national strategy for validation does not relate to basic levels of education, but only levels 3 and up of the EQF.

The LQF and its qualifications are based on learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit point systems (Summary of the self-assessment report on the Referencing of the Latvian Education System to the EQF and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area, 2012). One credit point in Latvia is defined as one-week of full time study. The scheduled amount of full-time study for one academic year is worth 40 credits. Recalculating in European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) points, the amount of Latvian credit points has to be multiplied by 1.5.

The main points regarding the award of qualifications through validation can be summed up as follows:

- Award of full formal qualification through validation is possible in general education and VET.
- Award of credit and modules as well as exemptions from part of a course through validation is possible in higher education and also in higher education, and validation may provide access to formal programmes.
- In general education and VET, it is not possible, by looking at the certificates generally issued in this sector, to know whether they have been obtained through validation.

4 Standards

The standards that are used for validation and for assessment in general education, VET and higher education are the same. In VET, the so-called Occupational Standards are used. Regulations on 'Procedure for the Evaluation of the Professional Competence Acquired Outside Formal Education System'²⁷, stipulates the procedure on how the professional competence that corresponds to the Latvian professional

²⁶ More information on the Website of the National Coordination Point for referencing the Latvian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework (Latvian: Nacionālais Kontaktpunkts): www.nki-latvija.lv.

²⁷ Cabinet of Ministers (2011) Regulation Nr 146 Kārtība, kādā novērtē ārpus formālās izglītības sistēmas apgūto profesionālo kompetenci (Procedures for assessing professional competences acquired outside the formal education system) <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=226788>

qualification levels 1-3, i.e. the LQF level 3-4 obtained outside formal education is assessed according to Occupational Standards.

For higher education (LQF levels 5-8), the Cabinet of Ministers regulation on 'Procedure of Validating the Learning Outcomes Achieved through Learning Outcomes Acquired in Non-Formal Education or Professional Experience'²⁸ is in force. This regulation determines the procedure for the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes (for higher education level) obtained during the previous education (meaning non-formal and informal learning) or professional experience, as well as criteria for recognition.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the overall education policy framework, including validation. According to the statutes of the Ministry of Education and Science (Regulation No. 528)²⁹, it develops the state education standards, organises the development of Occupational Standards, and maintains and updates the register of Occupational Standards. The Ministry of Education and Science coordinates the activities of institutions involved in implementing the vocational education and awarding professional qualification, as well as promoting the development of adult non-formal education. It also coordinates the recognition of professional qualification in regulated professions and accredits the higher education programmes.

The State Education Quality Service is responsible for accrediting schools and VET institutions, as well as VET qualification study programmes and it delegates responsibility for validation to accredited VET institutions.

Validation of competences is conducted in practice by VECCs (Vocational Education Competence Centres). These are vocational education institutions, which also perform the function of examination centres, including the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes³⁰.

The status of VECC is delegated by the State Education Quality Service, is valid for up to three years and is regulated by internal regulations as adopted on 10 April 2012³¹. In 2012, the validation was provided by 34 education institutions, while in 2018 it was already 43. The update list of VECCs, as well as programmes available for validation can be found at SEQS homepage³². The status of VECC can also be delegated to private institutions. Should the candidate wish to validate competences which are not in the programme list offered by SEQS they may turn to the VECC of their choice and suggest that the programme of their choice should be submitted for validation.

²⁸ Cabinet of Ministers (2018) Regulation Nr 505 Ārpus formālās izglītības apgūto vai profesionālajā pieredzē iegūto kompetenču un iepriekšējā izglītībā sasniegtu studiju rezultātu atzīšanas noteikumi <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/301013-arpus-formalas-izglitiba-apguto-vai-profesionalaja-pieredze-ieguto-kompetencu-un-iepriekseja-izglitiba-sasniegtu>

²⁹ Cabinet of Ministers (2003) Regulation No. 528 Izglītības un zinātnes ministrijas nolikums (Statutes of the Ministry of Education and Science) <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=79100>

³⁰ AIC (Academic Information Centre), 2018, Latvian one-off report on Validation <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/latvian-one-report-validation>

³¹ State Education Quality Service (IKVD) https://ikvd.gov.lv/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/10.04.2012.leksejie_noteikumi_Nr.6.pdf

³² State Education Quality Service (IKVD) Ārpus formālās izglītības profesionālās kompetences novērtēšanas institūcijas (Bodies to validate outside formal education system acquired competences) <https://ikvd.gov.lv/arpus-formala-izglitiba/profesionalas-kompetences-novertesana/>

The Academic Information Centre is the Latvian ENIC-NARIC and is responsible for collecting and disseminating evidence gathered at international level actively in Latvia. The Academic Information Centre is the member of the vocational education information network ReferNet established by Cedefop.

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising

Many EU-funded projects, such as e.g. the ESF project “Development of professional competence of employed persons” (see Section 2.3) have substantial activities related to raising the awareness of target audiences about the possibilities of validation and upskilling.

There is no major research conducted on the recruitment channels in Latvia. The basic dissemination channels are the monitoring organisations such as MoES, State Education Quality Service, organisations involved internationally in associated activities such as Academic Information Centre.

On 26 October 2017, the Academic Information Centre organized a seminar³³ ‘Validation of non-formal learning outcomes in the context of the Latvian qualifications framework’. The aim of the seminar was to introduce higher education and VET institutions with experience and achievements in the evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning outcomes, in line with the guideline of the European Council 2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012 / C 398/01). The seminar was intended for representatives of Latvian higher education, vocational and secondary education, as well as vocational education and training institutions. During the seminar the following topics were discussed:

- Progress in the validation of learning outcomes acquired outside the formal education in Latvia;
- Trends in the assessment of professional competences acquired outside the formal education system;
- Experience in assessment and recognition of study outcomes achieved beyond formal education or professional experience;
- Involving the unemployed persons in non-formal education programmes;
- The development of non-formal learning through the introduction of an adult education management model;
- Employer support for evaluating the results of non-formal education of employees.

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

The main providers of information, advice and guidance (IAG) on validation include:

- Ministry of Education and Science;
- Academic Information Centre;
- State Education Development Agency;
- State Employment Agency and its branches.

³³ presentations available: <http://www.nki-latvija.lv/en/pasakumu-materiali/2017/validation-of-non-formal-learning-outcomes-in-the-context-of-the-Latvian-qualifications-framework>

These institutions are responsible for measures related to validation and also, within those measures (such as ESF projects described in Section 2.3), they provide information and guidance to target audiences.

The State Education Quality Service provides guidance before the validation process mainly for vocational education (see for example the Roadmap³⁴ on Assessment of Professional Competence Acquired through the Non-formal Education System that was prepared by the experts of the State Education Quality Service).

The State Employment Agency provides information and guidance before and after validation.

In 2011-2015, the State Education Development Agency (SEDA) ran the ESF project “Development of Sectoral Qualifications System and Increasing the Efficiency and Quality of Vocational Education”, one of the aims being to ensure the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (LQF levels 2-4) and raise public awareness. Within the framework of the project, the Sectoral Expert Councils (SEC) were established to ensure information dissemination activities among the sectoral enterprises.³⁵

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Practitioners carrying out the validation process are as a rule the staff of education institutions carrying out validation (e.g. schools, VET schools, universities). They can also be other stakeholders depending on the legal examination requirements for acquiring the specific vocational qualification (e.g. employers or ministry representatives required to participate in the examination commission).

Career advisors in PES and in other institutions are a separate group.

7.2 Qualification requirements

Since validation procedures are conducted mainly through testing by education institutions of corresponding profile/ level (e.g. by Vocational competence centres for VET), the persons responsible for assessment are qualified specialists in relevant fields.

Carer advisors have to be professionally qualified as career advisors and may also be responsible for validation. In 2007, the occupational standard for Career Counsellors was approved³⁶. It formed the basis for a master’s degree programme for training counsellors. The programme provides the skills, knowledge, professional values and personal awareness required to serve young people, adults and people with disabilities and learning difficulties in a wide range of work settings: education institutions, employment agencies, guidance centres and companies, as well as to pursue research. Graduates are awarded a degree of Master in Education and the professional qualification of Guidance Counsellor. Some universities offer an additional qualification of Youth Worker.

³⁴Roadmap for the Assessment of the Professional Competencies Acquired in Non-Formal Education (Latvian: Ceļvedis ārpus formālās izglītības sistēmas apgūtās profesionālās kompetences novērtēšanā), http://viaa.gov.lv/library/files/original/08_Celvedis_ArpusFormalasIzSistProfKompVertesana.pdf

³⁵ Academic Information Centre (2018) Implementation of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning Outcomes in Latvia http://www.nki-latvija.lv/content/files/VNIL_report_LV_2018.pdf, P.9

³⁶ Euroguidance information brochure, 2016, http://viaa.gov.lv/files/news/1808/guidance_system_en.pdf

There is no specific single mandatory training for validation practitioners.

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The State Education Quality Service organises regular workshops for the institutions carrying out validation in the VET sector. The training is not compulsory. Workshops are organised for organisations in the higher education sector by a variety of institutions, including most often MoES and the Academic Information Centre.

8 Quality assurance

There is no umbrella stand-alone quality assurance framework for validation as such available, but the evaluation of validation activities has been embedded within the regular quality assurance systems of each sector. The MoES is the responsible body for quality within the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The validation process in the country is stipulated by the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers, as well as internal normative acts of the respective accredited education institutions and accredited examination centres.

The act of validation is based upon passing the same type of examination procedure as the regular student would do, including the presence of external stakeholders in the examination commission as stipulated by the respective regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers. The State Education Quality Service deals with accreditation information on the programme, institution or the centre, qualifications of personnel and available resources, information about implementing the recommendations of the accreditation expert commission report.

The State Education Quality Service is also the EQAVET coordination point in Latvia and as such implements EQAVET and monitors the implementation of the common vocational education quality assessment indicators for ensuring the quality of vocational education in Latvia. The Quality Agency for Higher Education follows the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and as such also the Standard 1.4, which covers the recognition of prior learning.

The State Education Quality Service organises regular workshops in order to provide support and guidance to the accredited education institutions and accredited examination centres that have been delegated the task of validating competences. The accredited education institutions and accredited examination centres have to keep records and register cases of the provision of the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The external quality assurance procedures include written annual self-assessment reports. These reports are seen as part of quality checks of all institutional activities by external experts (as part of peer review) within the re-accreditation process of the education institutions (both general, vocational and higher) and examination centres and regular quality monitoring measures by supervising bodies (e.g. review on implementation activities of recommendations given by experts). The qualification requirements for validation practitioners are the same as for the standard examiners – a sufficient qualification that can be proven factually and which is often regulated.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

In general, the system anticipates that public funding is available for upholding the infrastructure necessary for the validation process and then the users cover the costs

of undergoing validation. There is no funding specifically allocated to validation as a policy programme other than funding allocated for maintaining the participating institutions, e.g. the State Education Quality Service or the public educational institutions, where the validation supporting activities are one of the many functions that the institution has to provide. The system anticipates that the individual user covers the fees associated with individual validation cases. However, target oriented funding streams or also private funds (e.g. employer, labour union) may be used to exempt some individuals or target groups (e.g. unemployed people) from covering costs.

Within the framework of the ESF project “Development of professional competence of employed persons” (see Section 2.3), between 90 and 100% of the individual validation fee is covered by the project, in order to make validation and upskilling more accessible.

9.2 Distribution of costs

In the vocational education sector, regulation No. 791 on ‘Price-list of Paid Services of Vocational Education Institutions and Examination Centres’ (10 September 2013, amendments in 2015) defines the price for conducting the validation. Price differs according to the thematic field of education and the group of programmes. In a similar way to defining the tuition fee for studies, fields of education like health care and engineering are more expensive to validate than others. The price requested for validation differs also depending on the number of individuals passing the qualification examination. The cheapest per capita price is for a group of 12 people (this is also the amount requested as a fee where the candidate for validation passes the qualification examination together with other students at the educational institution or examination centre). Thus the cheapest per capita price ranges from EUR 43 in ‘Commercial Sciences and Administration’ up to EUR 74.30 in ‘Health care – Nursing’, if the validation is conducted for at least 12 individuals, or from EUR 192.75 in ‘Civil and military defence – protection of persons and property’, to as much as EUR 404.37 in the most expensive validation of vocational education in ‘Civil and military defence – firemen’, if the validation is an individual.

The costs according to the pricelist remain the same in 2018.

In the higher education sector, regulations stipulate that a fee can be requested from the candidate for conducting the validation of prior learning outcomes. The fee is defined according to the regulations of the higher education institution or college.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

The evidence of benefits to individuals has been visible to society through the publication of success stories in different media. Some of the benefits to individuals are published in regional newspapers under the initiative of validation institutions as self-promoting activities. In this case there is information on the websites of validation institutions.

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

Due to extensive investments through allocated EU funds in supporting the validation procedure it is expected that the number of individuals will increase immensely in the upcoming years. However, since the respective projects were started just in 2017, it is still too early to say that the number has grown with a much steeper tendency than in the previous years.

9.4.2 Validation users

The first accumulated data on the statistical characteristics of individuals that have used the opportunity to validate their competences through EU funded projects will be available at the end of 2019.

9.4.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

The Special Support Measures 'Improvement of Professional Competence of Employed Persons' and 'Support for Longer Working Life' include disadvantaged persons as target groups. The projects provide advantages to or address the following at-risk groups, bearing in mind the diversity within each group:

- persons with unfinished education,
- persons with an education level at EQF 3 or less,
- disabled persons,
- young parents,
- people over 45 years working in occupations classified in 5, 7, 8 and 9 basic group professions as stated by the Occupational Classification (service and trade sector employees, qualified workers and craftsmen, machinery and machine operators as well as product assemblers, simple professions),
- persons older than 50 years,
- refugees and persons with alternative status,
- employees with low income or poor person's status,
- NEET youth,
- persons in prison,
- long-term unemployed people.

Project activities int.al. envisage the assessment of human resource potential and provision of support measures such as career consultations, skills audit, and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

10 Validation methods

No countrywide research has been conducted on the validation methods used by different institutions. Below is simply a summary of validation methods set out in legislation.

In VET

In vocational education (EQF level 2-4) national legislation stipulates that a qualification examination serves as assessment of competences. If none of the institutions is eligible to perform the validation of the professional competence in the vocational qualification selected by the candidate, the candidate submits the application to the State Education Quality Service with a request to organise a validation of professional competence in this qualification. Within a month the State Education Quality Service has to take a decision on organising the validation process of the professional competence of the particular candidate. This has to be done in accordance with the procedure for the process of vocational qualification examinations in accredited vocational education programmes, specified in regulatory enactments, and the candidate then has to be informed.

Prior to submitting the documents, the institution for the validation of professional competence shall, free of charge, provide consultations to the candidate regarding the requirements of the relevant professional standard and the process of the vocational qualification examination. The institution for the validation of professional competence organises and implements a vocational qualification examination in accordance with the procedure for the course of vocational qualification examinations in accredited vocational education programmes, as specified in regulatory

enactments. The institution ensures, that the candidate can become assessed in the relevant educational programme at the nearest vocational qualification examination. Upon a written request of the candidate, the institution for the validation of professional competence has to organise and implement a vocational qualification examination in accordance with the procedure for the course of vocational qualification examinations in accredited vocational education programmes, specified in regulatory enactments within two months after receipt of the application.

To the candidate who, in the vocational qualification examination, has received a grade not lower than 5 (in 10 scale grading system), the institution for the validation of professional competence shall issue a document certifying the State recognised first, second or third level vocational qualification (EQF level 2-4).

The candidate may contest the validation received in the vocational qualification examination by making a submission to the head of the institution for the validation of professional competence within a month from the day when the decision of the examination commission entered into effect. A decision of the head of the institution for the validation of professional competence may be appealed to a court in accordance with the procedure prescribed by the Administrative Procedure Law.

There are no prescribed requirements on the prior level of education of the candidate for validation. The only requirement is that the person should be at least 18 years of age.

Information on accreditation of the institution and the programmes, as well as expert recommendations (made during peer review of external accreditation process) are taken into account when considering the application for delegation of conducting the validation.

In Higher Education

In Higher Education, an application for validation of prior learning (meaning non-formal and informal learning) and experience is submitted to the respective higher education institution or college. The application contains information on:

- acquired prior learning or experiential learning outcomes,
- the justification about how the prior learning outcomes conform to the requirements of the corresponding content of the programme or part of it,
- the objective of the validation application,
- name of the institution and educational programme (or part of it),
- the period during which prior learning outcomes were acquired and how it was acquired,
- the identification of the study programme within which the prior learning and prior experiential learning outcomes should be validated.

The person has to attach the documentation certifying the above-mentioned facts of acquiring prior learning and prior experiential learning outcomes. Within a month the commission makes a decision. According to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the individual may challenge the decision of the commission by submitting a claim to the rector of the higher education institution or the director of the college. A decision of the head of the institution may be the subject of appeal to a court in accordance with the procedure prescribed by the Administrative Procedure Law.

In case the commission lacks some information necessary for meeting an objective and decision, the commission may request additional information, correspondingly extending the deadline for decision making. In case of a positive decision, the person has to pass the examination necessary for recognising the prior learning outcomes within the study programme or the respective module. In order to validate the learning outcomes, the following requirements have to be met:

- at least one credit point can be awarded for the obtained learning outcomes,

- the prior education allows admitting the person for studies in the respective study programme (this means one cannot be granted access based on validation; Latvia is among the countries not granting access through RPL, but only credits towards the degree),
- the person shows corresponding knowledge, skills and competences necessary for awarding the respective credit points,
- the submitted documents contain clear, unambiguous and complete information on the obtained learning outcomes.

Prior experiential learning can be validated within the part of the programme that is intended for the internship, and the learning outcomes have to be achieved within the same professional sphere that corresponds to the educational thematic field of the study programme. The prior experiential learning can be validated also within the course or module that anticipates achieving professional knowledge, skills and competence.

According to the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, prior experiential learning can be validated in both academic and professional programmes, but only for 30% of total credit points. The validated learning outcomes are certified by certificates issued by the higher education institution or college that has conducted the validation procedure. The individuals may accumulate certified study and use it later towards the degree by awarding credit points for it. One credit point may be awarded for the prior learning or prior experiential learning outcomes if outcomes are obtained within the period of at least one week (40 academic hours). The prior learning or prior experiential learning outcomes cannot be listed as and replace the passing of the final examination, state examination, or winding-up examination (qualification examination or promotional work) of the respective study programme.

In higher education the 'Procedure of Validating the Learning Outcomes Achieved through Prior Education or Professional Experience' anticipates that the specific conditions of the procedure for recognising the study results achieved in previous education or professional experience shall be included in the by-law approved by the senate of the institution of higher education or the college council. The candidate, helped by an advisor (usually an interview method), conducts the identification step of the validation, during which the obtained professional skills/non-formal study results are identified and crosschecked with the qualification in question. The portfolio of documents (some of them are defined by the procedure of the Cabinet of Ministers and some may be additionally requested by the higher education institution) is submitted to the commission that may require additional proof, such as, for example, sitting an examination. The examination may include a variety of methods, depending on the qualification in question. In January 2016 the Ministry of Education and Science organised an HEI survey on their involvement in the validation process and methods used. Among the tools used for assessing candidates for recognition of prior learning, the HEIs mention (among other things) Europass, Youthpass, and Diploma Supplement.

11 The position of validation in society: visibility and trust

Due to extensive investments from allocated EU funds which began in 2017, the visibility of validation has increased through information dissemination activities of the abovementioned Special Support Measure projects.

Validation is a more or less visible part of national learning strategies and structures, however, not all employers see official qualifications as an important requirement for hiring, and many prefer to see skills demonstrated on the job. This in particular concerns some fast-developing sectors such as IT. On the other hand, in sectors where technological development is not quite as fast, official qualifications still matter

and qualifications obtained through validation have the same value as qualifications obtained through formal training, especially in VET.

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