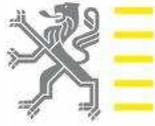


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**Lifelong Learning:
Impediments
&
Examples of good practice**

The results of a EURASHE study

By Adina Timofei

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PROLOGUE

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires have been sent to 10 stakeholder or partner organizations of EURASHE, and to a respondent in the Ministry of Education and Training, with a focus on four main issues of interest: the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Employability and the Lifelong Learning Strategy. The answers to these questionnaires reflect exclusively the position of our respondents and are not meant in any way to fully cover the existing situation in a particular national context. The 11 participating organizations are:

- ❖ The Association for Cooperation between Higher Education and the Economy (CHEE) – Hungary (Istvan Billik)
- ❖ Institutes of Technology Ireland – Ireland (Dermot Douglas)
- ❖ DASHE – The Netherlands (Hans Daale)
- ❖ RENASUP/SPACE – France (Sylvie Bonichon)
- ❖ Association of University Institutes of Technology Directors (ADIUT) – France (Ronald Guillen)
- ❖ Lithuanian Colleges’ Directors’ Conference – Lithuania (Ana Aleknaviciene)
- ❖ Association of Vocational Colleges of Slovenia – Slovenia (Zdenka Steblovnik Zupan)
- ❖ West of Scotland Colleges’ Partnership – Scotland (Dugald Craig)
- ❖ European Schools for Higher Education in Administration and Management (ESA) – Austria/Germany (Christoph Veigel)
- ❖ Czech Association of Schools of Professional Higher Education - Czech Republic (Michal Karpisek)

Ministry of Education and Training, Department of Education and Training, Higher Education Policy Unit – Belgium (Liesbeth Hens - Flemish Community)

The majority of the participants in the survey (in this publication referred to as 'respondents to the survey') are partners in a in a future project on lifelong learning that EURASHE is preparing for 2009. The current publication represents an initial research result, meant to be developed in a further, more complete study, on the various aspects of lifelong learning.

Apart from the answers to the survey, this publication is also based on the outcome of the seminar organized by EURASHE in Prague this year (16-17 October 2008), on the subject of "Lifelong Learning at Institutes of Professional Higher Education".¹ Focusing on the 'daily practice' of lifelong learning at institutes of professional higher education, the seminar provided valuable input for our study.

Other sources and materials (websites, publications) used for finding information on a particular national context are referenced in the order in which they appear in the text.

¹ For a link to the seminar page, go to <http://www.ssvs.cz/reg/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The degree of implementation of both the **European Qualifications Framework** and the **National Qualifications Framework** varies from one country to another, ranging from total lack of implementation to partial or full implementation. According to our respondents, while level 6 EQF has been implemented in all participating countries and generally has a similar meaning in all of them, level 5 EQF, apart from the fact that it is still non-existent in some national contexts, has slightly different meanings in the others, thus making its equivalence difficult, if not, sometimes, impossible. Following the same pattern as the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework, the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework varies from one country to the other, as well as the degree to which it is or is not yet aligned to the European Qualifications Framework.

The new levels of transparency created by the implementation of the qualifications frameworks and the expression of the education levels in terms of learning outcomes means that a larger degree of precision will be possible when recognition judgements are made. It must, however, be remembered that for most countries the task of implementing qualifications frameworks and learning outcomes is still at the beginning of its development and the **recognition of prior learning** has to face major difficulties in its implementation, due mainly to the lack of sufficient knowledge or trust in this system within various national contexts. This is the main reason for which European institutional and national progress in developing and using the recognition of prior learning has often taken place at a slow pace, as it often is relatively ineffectual. In the countries where it is used on a wide scale, the recognition of prior learning benefits from the support of the national government, which tries to promote its use through various campaigns and/or financial support. An aspect that is related to the use of the RPL, is the students' possibility to upgrade from level 5 to level 6 EQF in the course of their studies, which largely depends on each higher education institution in particular. Usually, this process is visibly facilitated in a context where the recognition of prior learning is trusted and employed.

In order to secure the **employability** of graduates, contact between the higher education institutions and the labour market is generally maintained, either through regular or occasional contacts. Most of the training courses offered to employees are recognized/validated through an official certificate and the answers are divided in what concerns the existence of an accreditation system for formal and informal learning.

While all respondents have invoked as the main motivations behind the development of a **lifelong learning strategy** the widening of participation in higher education and the need to stimulate creativity and innovation through the update of the population's skills, each of these strategies is confronted with different challenges, according to the national context in which it has developed. The main difficulties in its implementation are related to the lack of coordination at national level, concerning the lifelong learning activities performed by various higher education institutions, the lack of adequate funding or the lack of academic staff with the appropriate qualifications. Examples of good practice include the establishment of departments for continuing education within higher education institutions, the promotion of a wider use of the learning technology and e-learning, the development of work-based learning and certification or the flexibility of learning.

I. LIFELONG LEARNING – GENERAL CONTEXT

Lifelong Learning has now been the focus of attention in Europe for more than a decade. The process was initiated in the middle of the 1990s, by the European Commission, with the publication of the White Paper entitled "Teaching and Learning, towards a cognitive society." The paper mostly focused on the social benefits an awareness of the importance of Lifelong Learning and its development could bring to Europe: "Education and training will increasingly become the main vehicles for self-awareness, belonging, advancement and self-fulfilment. Education and training, whether acquired in the formal education system, on the job or in a more informal way, is the key for everyone to controlling their future and their personal development."

This goal has undergone a major transformation in March 2000 when, during what has now come to be known as the Lisbon Process, European heads of state and government decided to make Europe "the most competitive and most dynamic knowledge economy in the world"² and made Lifelong Learning the key element of the strategy. We assist, therefore, to an approach aiming at accompanying more closely economic needs (from the focus on the citizen to the focus on employability and individual contribution to the growth of the economy). These goals found their expression in the Bologna Declaration and the successive communiqués that followed. While the Bologna Declaration did not include particular references to Lifelong Learning and focused, to a large extent, on the formal aspect of higher education and its need for reform, what followed (i.e. the successive communiqués designed by ministers of education from the Bologna participating countries) focused on the importance of LLL as a main instrument that could lead to the successful implementation of the Bologna Process.

² <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c10241.htm>

Thus, the Prague Communiqué, in 2001, stressed the importance of LLL as “*an essential element of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In the future Europe, built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, LLL strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life.*” (Prague Communiqué, 2001). This awareness of the important role LLL has to play in making the Bologna Process a reality was followed, two years later, in 2003 in Berlin, by an account of which of the previously agreed measures have already been implemented in the countries taking part in Bologna, as well as by an important mention of the recognition of prior learning (RPL), a major element in the implementation of LLL:

Ministers underline the important contribution of Higher Education in making LLL a reality. They are taking steps to align their national policies to realise this goal and urge Higher Education Institutions and all concerned to enhance the possibilities for LLL at HE level, including the recognition of prior learning. They emphasise that such action must be an integral part of higher education activity. Ministers call those working on qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area to encompass the wide range of flexible learning paths, opportunities and techniques and to make appropriate use of the ECTS credits. They stress the need to improve opportunities for all citizens, in accordance with their aspirations and abilities, to follow the LLL paths into and within higher education. (Berlin Communiqué, 2003)

The concept of lifelong learning as set out in these two Communiqués clearly indicates the view according to which lifelong learning is an inclusive way to define all learning activity and that, within this, higher education has a vital role. This was followed by the creation of the national qualifications frameworks and the overarching European framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The ministers present in Bergen in May 2005 indicated in their Communiqué:

We adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. We commit ourselves to elaborating national frameworks for qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA by 2010, and to having started work on this by 2007. We ask the Follow-up Group to report on the implementation and further development of the overarching framework.

We underline the importance of ensuring complementarity between the overarching framework for the EHEA and the proposed broader framework for qualifications for lifelong learning encompassing general education as well as vocational education and training as now being developed within the European Union as well as among participating countries. We ask the European Commission fully to consult all parties to the Bologna Process as work progresses. (Bergen Communiqué, 2005).

Unlike the preceding documents, the London Communiqué is very explicit as to the overall importance of LLL in choosing the action lines which are considered necessary to meet the overall objective of the Bologna Process, which is to create a transparent European Higher Education Area. It refers not only to the issue of Lifelong Learning seen as a whole, but brings into discussion its main components, without which LLL strategies could not function properly at any national level: Employability, the need for the Qualifications Framework, the Social dimension and Stocktaking. The primary action lines are, thus, the following:

- ❖ Create transparency in the qualifications
- ❖ Stimulate mobility
- ❖ Improve the employability of graduates
- ❖ Secure fair access and participation in Higher Education.

In relation to these priorities, the London Communiqué puts forward the opinion according to which the employment demands of the labour market can only be met with qualifications that are attuned to the expectations of the labour market: “We underline the importance of curricula reform leading to qualifications better suited for the labour market and to further study. Efforts should concentrate in future on removing barriers to access and progression between cycles...” (London Communiqué, 2007). Similarly, for those who want to make progress in their individual career, the curriculum in a great many higher education institutions needs to be adapted and a great flexibility is needed into recognizing the multiple instruments that lead to a better qualification: “For recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components of the EHEA...” (Ibid.).

In relation to the Qualifications Framework, the London Communiqué states that the national Qualifications Framework must allow for flexible arrangements that will stimulate higher education institutions to do the same, namely create a flexible influx and progression through higher education: “(QF) should also help HEIs to develop modules and study programmes based on learning outcomes and credits, and improve the recognition of qualifications as well as all forms of prior learning” (Ibid.). This recommendation has a direct link to promoting the fact that access and participation rates are dependent on the LLL opportunities created for students by both governments and HE institutions: “We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible pathways into and within higher education and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity.” (Ibid.)

The Communiqué recognises, however, that higher education institutions in most countries have been slow in implementing flexible learning paths: “The stocktaking report shows that some elements of flexible learning exist in most countries, but a more systematic development of flexible learning paths to support lifelong learning is at an early stage. We therefore ask BFUG to increase the sharing of good practice and to work towards a common understanding of the role of higher education in lifelong learning.” (Ibid.)

The issue of lifelong learning is not, however, to be tackled in an isolated way, but fully integrated with the other priority areas in the Bologna Process: "With a view to the development of more student-centred, outcome-based learning, the next exercise should also address in an integrated way national qualifications frameworks, learning outcomes and credits, lifelong learning and the recognition of prior learning" (Ibid.).

II. EURASHE'S LIFELONG LEARNING POLICY

If there is one sector of higher education that has always stood behind the concept of lifelong learning, sometimes out of policy reasons, but mainly because of its strong connection with the stakeholders, it is clearly professional higher education. EURASHE's position on lifelong learning reflects, in a detailed manner, the major issues to be dealt with in our sector, focusing on employability, accreditation/recognition of prior learning, the European Qualifications Framework and, in particular, the short cycle higher education, which represents one of the original preoccupations of EURASHE and which sums up most of the issues facing lifelong learning that we have mentioned above.

As EURASHE membership is composed of higher education institutions that are specialized exclusively in the provision of professional higher education or that have developed professional study tracks among their academic programmes, therefore institutions where practical and applied learning occupies a central place, their attention is highly focused on the employability of their graduates, on the reciprocal relationship between higher education and industry and the relevance of their institutions' programmes to the labour market. This preoccupation with the link between the field of education and that of the labour market constitutes a major characteristic of lifelong learning, relevant for EURASHE because of its clear link with the world of employment. This feature, characteristic to professional higher education, of institutions being interwoven with the professional and vocational segments of society, is what distinguishes EURASHE's members from the purely research universities. Our conviction is that the world of labour can only benefit from a labour force that has gone through additional training, which increases their suitability for the labour market. What matters is that learning outcomes required for a job are attained, rather than yet another qualification. In order to attain this goal, an active and entrepreneurial approach is required from the institutions wanting to retrain employees, taking into account the earlier acquired competencies, the possibility to offer non-formal trainings and an unbiased judgement on whether a formal diploma would increase the employability of the employee in question. Also, a transparent and accessible labour market requires that learners can follow a learning path that is suitable to them.

The education system (formal and non-formal education) therefore needs to provide tailor-made solutions that match the possibilities of both the student-employee and those of the provider of higher education. This recommendation is directly related to the importance and the need for the use of the RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning), since proper assessments, RPL procedures, leading to flexible access and open discussions between providers of formal and non-formal learning are essential conditions for creating opportunities for people in employment.

Moreover, EURASHE believes that, throughout their lives, individuals should be able to take, according to their professional and personal needs, short-period courses or programmes which, reflected by ECTS and accumulated through time, would produce first-cycle or second-cycle qualifications. In relation to this, EURASHE supports the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) related to Lifelong Learning proposed by the European Commission and suggests that it is taken into account in developing the Qualifications Framework within the Bologna Process. This will ensure that those who are out of work or in danger of losing their job are offered the possibility to find a flexible learning pathway that will enable them to get a degree in formal higher education.

This brings us to the issue of short cycle higher education, a matter of concern for EURASHE, the more so that many of the EURASHE members, in addition to offering first cycle and/or second cycle degrees, also offer short cycle programmes. It is important to situate the concept of short cycle higher education into the wider context of lifelong learning, as the individual student who wants to make a bridge between short cycle higher education and the degree cycles must retain this possibility, legally and in practice. A transfer should be possible from level 4 to levels 5&6 (in the EQF), which is in effect the transfer from secondary to higher education, irrespective of the way the competencies for level 4 have been acquired. The position of the intermediate level (level 5 in the EQF) should enable those attaining this level via the "dual system" pathway (study in combination with work) to have access to level 6 (bachelor), on the basis of recognition of prior learning.

We have addressed this issue throughout our study, linking it, at the same time, with the current situation, in various national contexts, concerning the implementation and/or use of the latest developments in the field of higher education.

III. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND OF THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

A. The implementation of the European Qualifications Framework

Adopted by the European Parliament and Council on 23 April 2008, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) acts as a “translation device”³ to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers’ and learners’ mobility between qualifications levels of different countries and different education systems and training systems. The EU encourages countries to relate their qualifications systems or frameworks to the EQF by 2010 and to ensure that all new qualifications issued from 2012 onwards carry a reference to the appropriate EQF level.

The core of the EQF is represented by the eight reference levels describing, in terms of learning outcomes, what a learner knows, understands and is able to do. In relation to this type of classification, the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) are going to be placed at one of the central reference levels, ranging from basic (Level 1) to advanced (Level 8)⁴. The EQF applies to all types of education, training and qualifications, from school education to academic, professional and vocational education. This system shifts the focus from the traditional approach which emphasises “learning inputs”⁵, such as the length of a learning experience, or type of institution. It also encourages lifelong learning by promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

In our survey addressed to the partner organizations, we have focused on two major issues:

- ❖ The main differences among the participating countries concerning the way in which levels of education at a national level relate to the EQF (the focus of the survey was exclusively on the 5th and 6th EQF levels. The reason for this is that these 2 levels that differ most in their meaning from one country to the other, requesting a lot of time and effort in order to be reconciled;
- ❖ The degree to which the NQF has been implemented in the various countries or, if not already implemented, its current status.

According to our respondents, while level 6 has been implemented in all the participating countries and generally has a similar meaning in all of them, level 5, apart from the fact that it is still non-existent in some national contexts, has slightly different meanings in the others, thus making its equivalence difficult, if not, sometimes, impossible.

Thus, in **Lithuania**, the EQF level 5 has not yet been implemented. It might, however, be possible in the future, when it could be obtained in vocational schools or in Colleges in higher education, during short cycle study programmes. Since not yet implemented, no particular name has been assigned to level 5 in Lithuania for the moment. Level 6 corresponds here to the professional and academic bachelor delivered in colleges and universities and takes the form of full-time, part-time and distance learning education.

In **Germany**, level 5 corresponds to short-cycle higher education delivered in Fachhochschulen/Berufsakademien. It can be studied full time and, gradually, the part time option has started to gain ground lately. What is more, Fachhochschulen are also beginning to offer professional master programmes. Level 6 is only met in universities (Universitäten) in Germany. Similarly to level 5, level 6 can be accessed full time, now gradually part time as well, universities gradually beginning to offer professional master programmes.

In **Slovenia**, level 5 EQF is the correspondent of vocational college education (“višje strokovno izobraževanje” in Slovenian) or what is also known at the national level as Klasius SLO level 6/1. Offered in HEIs, as well as Colleges (55% of Slovenian HEIs are offering education at level 5, 6.8% of which are public HEIs), it is delivered full time, part time, through work-based learning, e-learning and co-operative education). Level 6 corresponds here to professional higher education (“visoko strokovno izobraževanje” in Slovenian) or Klasius SLO level 6/2.

In **the Netherlands**, level 5 corresponds to the first level in professional higher education (non-existent in academic higher education) and is known under the name of Associate Degree. Generally aimed at employees and students having finished level 4 of VET (Vocational Education and Training) and only offered in HEIs, it may take the form of full time, part time, work-based learning or e-learning education. Level 6 corresponds to the second level in professional and academic higher education, delivered full-time, part-time, through work-based learning, e-learning and co-operative education. Accumulating 120 ECTS from the 240 ECTS necessary to a Bachelor level graduate, the Associate degree-programme has to be officially a part of the Bachelor programme. Thus, a student with a diploma on level 5, having studied for an Associate degree, has the legal right to go directly into further study and become a Bachelor graduate after another two years. According to our Dutch respondent, a student entering higher professional education in the Netherlands can choose to either enrol directly into the Bachelor programme (240 ECTS) or to begin with the first step, the Associate degree and then, after two years, decide whether he/she will go directly on the labour market or continue studying at Bachelor level. The decision for further study can be taken after the individual has been on the labour market for a couple of years but, according to the interval of time that passed between the end of the Associate degree and his/her decision to return to school, the number of years a HEI may impose for attaining the Bachelor level could vary. As this aspect is strictly related to RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning), we shall come back to it in the following section. Initiated in 2006, the general implementation of the Associate degree in the Netherlands is expected to take place in 2009.

In **Flanders**, the implementation of the EQF level 5 is still in progress; this level of education is going to be delivered in both higher education institutions and centres for adult education (“hoger beroepsonderwijs”). It is intended to function as a “bridge between secondary and higher education”, leading to an Associate’s degree that could allow students to enter the workforce straight after graduation, but which could be equally used as an instrument for transfer to a professional Bachelor programme ⁶. Level 6, associated with higher education, is delivered in various forms: full time, part time, work-based learning, e-learning, co-operative education, individual programmes...

In **Ireland**, level 5 corresponds to the national level 6 (“advanced certificate” or “higher certificate”). Offered in higher education institutions and Colleges (full time, part time, through work-based learning, e-learning and co-operative education), the bulk of higher education level 5 awards are provided through the Institutes of Technology and a small number of private higher education institutions. Level 6 corresponds to the national level 7 (ordinary bachelor degree) or level 8 (honours bachelor degree/higher diploma). It can be accessed full time, part time, through work-based learning and co-operative education.

In **France**, level 5 EQF is the equivalent of diplomas obtained after two years’ post-bacallaureate (level 4) study, equivalent to 120 ECTS credits and including the tertiary technical diploma (DUT) and the advanced technical diploma (BTS). These types of diplomas are designed as a direct preparation for entry to work. Students also have the choice, having completed a BTS or DUT course, to work towards a tertiary vocational diploma. The short-cycle programme takes the form of both full-time and part-time learning, as well as work-based learning or e-learning.⁷

At level 6, apart from the general academic bachelor programme (licence), the tertiary vocational diploma (licence professionnelle) was introduced in 1999 as part of the policy of creating a European Higher Education Area (in accordance with the Bologna Declaration). It offers students a rapid means of obtaining a vocational qualification, in response to specific needs. This university-level diploma’s special

⁶ <http://eaie08.augent.be/files/Flemish%20Higher%20Education.ppt#343,11>, Structure of Higher Education: starting a new level

⁷ *Vocational Education and Training in France*, CEDEFOP publication, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008

feature consists in its combining theory-based study with practical workplace experience (for 12 to 16 weeks) and the completion of a mentored project.

Outside the university sector, there are public and private tertiary level colleges which offer higher education with a vocational aim. These colleges, offering long, high level courses, include political studies institutes, colleges of commerce and management and veterinary colleges.⁸

In **Scotland**, the main qualifications at level 5 EQF correspond to short cycle higher education. The actual terminology at national level is: Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (levels 3 and 4). These types of programmes are offered in both universities and colleges, though the percentage of short cycle courses offered by universities is only situated around 1% of the total. The programme is offered full-time, part-time, through work-based learning or e-learning. Level 6 in Scotland is the equivalent of ordinary and honours degrees, also being a part of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (level 4 in Scotland). Professional qualifications at level 6 can only be awarded by professional HEIs or colleges in partnership with universities.

In the **Czech Republic**, the EQF level 5 corresponds at the moment to the general secondary education and the secondary vocational/technical education, both concluded by the leaving examination ("maturita"). Short cycle tertiary education situates itself at level 6 EQF at the moment. This might, however, change and it is possible that further discussion on tertiary education levels will lead to adjustments of the current scheme, by keeping the level 5 purely for the short-cycle tertiary education and assigning secondary education to level 4. Should the Qualifications Framework alignment to the EQF change in the expected way, there will still be, however, a number of colleges/higher professional schools (140 of 170) offering the secondary education at level 5 of the EQF; there will be about 170 colleges/higher professional schools offering short-cycle tertiary education at level 5, some of them (about 20) providing bachelor degree programmes at level 6 under the franchise scheme, in cooperation with higher education institutions. The level 6 bachelor degree programmes (both professionally and academically focused) will be offered by 46 non-university higher education institutions/polytechnics plus all 28 universities.

⁸ Ibid.

In **Hungary**, the EQF level 5 corresponds to short cycle/vocational higher education and it may be offered to learners full time, part time, through work-based learning, e-learning or co-operative education and they can be accessed in both higher education institutions and colleges (also in vocational secondary schools, where they benefit from the help of higher education institutions). Level 6 EQF is offered through the same methods as level 5.

B. The implementation of the National Qualifications Framework

Following the same pattern as the implementation of the EQF, the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) varies from one country to the other, as well as the degree to which it is or is not yet directly related to the EQF. The full implementation of the NQF is under way in **Lithuania** (a project aimed at creating the NQF was finished in Spring 2008, so the system is to be implemented soon), **The Netherlands** (it has now been accepted to implement the NQF in 2010), **Ireland** (clear links between the NQF and the EQF are to be completed in Spring 2009, formally related to the Bologna Framework) and **Scotland** (the NQF has been implemented under the name of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework). The full implementation and formal alignment to the EQF have already been realized in **France** and **Germany**.

In **Slovenia**, as well as in **Flanders**, **Hungary** and the **Czech Republic**, the NQF has not yet been implemented. In Flanders, this is currently dealt with in Parliament, so measures are expected to follow soon. In Hungary, according to our respondent, it will be implemented next year and then linked to the EQF. In the Czech Republic, the NQF has been designed at the levels corresponding to 1-4/5 EQF. The tertiary (higher) education sector is still, at the moment, under discussion (rather at the beginning than in its final stage). There is, however, an expectation to progress substantially further on during the 2009-2012 interval, within the "system-oriented" project co-funded by ESF. It is also worth noticing that, in the draft of the Czech NQF and its links to the EQF, level 5 is occupied by secondary comprehensive education and secondary vocational education. It is very likely that this decision is going to be reviewed, as it is seen as unacceptable by a number of experts, who argue that the decision was rather 'political', and therefore enforced by the Ministry representation, rather than based on arguments.

IV. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

The EQF and the NQF, already implemented in some of the countries participating in our survey and on their way to development in the others, have as a main goal the facilitation of the process of study recognition, in particular in the case of learners who, at a given moment, would like to study or live in another EU country. Our focus, however, in this study, was not limited to this type of study recognition. Widening access to learning does not only imply the facilitation of mobility, but also, more particularly, the recognition of prior learning (RPL).

The new levels of transparency created by the implementation of the qualifications frameworks and the expression of the education levels in terms of learning outcomes means that a larger degree of precision will be possible when recognition judgements are made. It must, however, be remembered that for most countries the task of implementing qualifications frameworks and learning outcomes is still at the beginning of its development and the recognition of prior learning has to face major difficulties in its implementation, due to the lack of sufficient knowledge or trust in various national contexts. RPL also benefits from a diversity of variations in meaning and terminology across Europe. It usually encompasses the recognition of formal, informal and non-formal learning. For a better understanding of these terms, a concise explanation of each is given below:

Formal learning is learning that occurs in an organized and structured environment (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time and resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification.

Informal learning is learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

Non formal learning is learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning

*support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It normally does not lead to certification.*⁹

According to S. Adam, RPL is based "on the simple notion that it is pointless to ask citizens to re-learn what they already know and that modern education systems need to remove such barriers. It is predicated on the notion that people learn throughout their lives in a variety of settings: in family life (home making, caring, domestic organisation); at work (paid or unpaid) undertaking community, voluntary or leisure activities; and through life experiences. The skills, knowledge and experience gained can be equal to those gained by students following traditional routes through formal education. This sort of learning from experience is normally unstructured in comparison with formal learning, but this does not invalidate it."¹⁰

Therefore, there are some important distinctions to be made between the traditional and more familiar recognition of prior formal academic studies and the recognition of learning that has taken place outside the formal academic environment. In this publication, the term RPL refers to the recognition of certificated learning (formally assessed) for the purposes of access (credit recognition) to a superior study programme, or credit exemption from part of a study programme within the national and/or international context and its challenges and implications in the context of lifelong learning. This issue and the success of its implementation in various national contexts could be illustrated in the possibility given to students pursuing vocational short-cycle degrees to transfer to a higher level of education (i.e. to academic or professional bachelor level) through recognition of their previous learning experience. These two issues will, therefore, be analysed together, in order to see whether and at what level they are made possible nationally within the countries that participated in our study.

Unfortunately, European institutional and national progress in developing and using RPL has often taken place at a slow pace, being, more often than not, relatively ineffectual. The greatest progress has been made in France, Ireland, Scotland, the Netherlands and Flanders, where a majority, if not all of the higher education

⁹ Stephen Adam, *Why is the recognition of prior experiential learning important and what are the national and institutional implications of this for lifelong learning*, at www.aic.lv/bologna2007/docs/S_Adam_background_report.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid.

institutions are using RPL as a means to establish the competences and skills acquired by post-school age/working students prior to enrolment in higher education. In both **Flanders** and **the Netherlands**, this leads also to automatically recognizing the student's possibility to transfer from level 5 to level 6 of education. As a matter of fact, in both these countries level 5 is incorporated into level 6 of education, so that students' transfer from one level to the other appears as a logically taken step. Although RPL is not yet used as a mechanism for the accreditation of higher education institutions, it receives full support from both the Flemish and Dutch governments. Among the measures used by the governments to stimulate the use of RPL, our respondents mentioned:

- ❖ Subsidies: for learning and working; to stimulate arrangements for work-based learning (regional cooperation between companies and higher education institutions); to stimulate recognition of prior learning and tailor-made programmes at universities of applied sciences;
- ❖ National publicity campaigns (through radio, television, internet, flyers, brochures etc.);
- ❖ Fiscal arrangements and facilities (for employers, employees and unemployed people);
- ❖ The development of a National Knowledge Center for the recognition of prior learning;
- ❖ The organisation of meetings and seminars between representatives of higher education institutions and regional project managers involved in the recognition of prior learning;
- ❖ Information, independent and transparent, about the supply of RPL facilities and education programmes – using an Internet portal, a website for “work-based learning” and a register including all the recognised RPL-offices and centers in the Netherlands;
- ❖ Awards for the most successful RPL activities and projects;
- ❖ Active participation in meetings (solving problems regarding legislation contribution to national policy development, stimulating social partners to incorporate the recognition of prior learning in the collective labour agreement etc.).

In **Ireland** and **Scotland**, transfer from level 5 to level 6 is realised as an automatic process, at both the level of the professional, as well as academic higher education. In Ireland, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) committed, in its Strategic Plan 2003-2006, to publish a policy on recognition of prior learning in 2005 and to facilitate the recognition of prior learning from 2006. The Council agreed its Policy on RPL in April 2005, through which education providers are required to facilitate the learners' access to programmes by taking the recognition of prior learning into account, grant exemptions for requirements and access to full awards "in so far as they can, subject to the availability of the Guidelines".¹¹

In **France**, there is a highly developed system in place for the recognition of prior learning, based on the evaluation of competences. France has two legal frameworks: *Validation des Acquis Professionnels* (VAP), established in 1985 for admission to higher education based on previously accumulated experience, and *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE), established in 2002, for the partial or complete award of all qualifications¹². These two instruments acknowledge that people gain valuable learning from non-formal and informal learning and that this learning is capable of being officially recognized as equivalent to knowledge gained in the classroom. The French approach, thus, places greater emphasis on the learner's ability to engage in problem solving and critical thinking than establishing equivalence with the outcomes of the academic programmes. French universities employ a system for the recognition of prior learning based on a recourse to an assessing panel, mentors and portfolios. The same system applies in the case of students who wish to transfer from level 5 to level 6; the process can be accomplished, in both professional and academic higher education institutions, under some clearly specified conditions (a document attesting the outcomes of previous learning should be present and a commission should decide whether the student detains enough knowledge in order to pursue a superior kind of studies). This system of recognition is equally promoted at the government level, which, following the law adopting VAE in 2002, ran a widespread national campaign to promote the program. VAE processes also involve a constant partnership between the higher education institutions and social partners, in the form of employers and/or representatives of the unions. This makes for an

¹¹ <http://www.fetac.ie/rpl/Default.htm>

¹² *Vocational Education and Training in France*, CEDEFOP publication, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2008

innovative French approach, consistent with the lifelong learning aspirations of the Bologna Process.

In the other European countries participating in the study there is, however, little advancement. This seems to still confirm the findings of the EUA Trends IV report which, as early as 2005, indicated that “prior learning is still not perceived as an important topic in many institutions...Only in a minority of countries and HEIs do explicit strategies for the recognition of non-formal or non-academic learning exist, notably in Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK and Switzerland (Trends IV, p. 23).” Also, “the recognition of non-formal/non-academic qualifications needs to be put on the agenda of more HEIs, as it will be an increasingly important topic in the future national and European discussions on higher education and vocational training” (Trends IV, p. 25). This is still true today, the findings of our study showing that the main impediment to the use of RPL in higher education institutions nationally remains the lack of interest of institutions and/or policy makers in this type of system, combined with, most often, a lack of substantial information concerning the way it should be applied and dealt with.

In the **Czech Republic**, according to our respondent, while RPL is, to some extent, possible within the credit systems, there is no exact notification of this mechanism at the level of the national law. The law focuses rather on the possibility of an easier transfer from the college level to the level of a higher education institution. While there is a law on the recognition of results of further education, which includes the RPL system, yet this has been applied only to the apprenticeship type of education (level 4 in the Czech Republic). Formally, the law also concerns higher/tertiary education, although no particular tools for this have been developed yet, the instrument not being, for the moment, a priority of higher education policy. The RPL system is also not a part of the accreditation of higher education institutions in the Czech Republic. According to the respondent institution, the principle of RPL still seems to be rather difficult to accept for a number of academics (or rather it is seen as something which is not of current concern and could be dealt with later, on a very careful basis).

In relation to this situation, the possibility for students to upgrade their education level from level 5 to level 6 (the correspondents, for the moment, of levels 4 and 5 in the Czech Republic) mostly depends on each higher education institution in particular. In the Czech Republic, there are 170 colleges/higher professional schools offering about 29000 places. There is a possibility to progress to the Bachelor degree level by law – and especially private HEIs accept the college graduates and provide them with the degree within 1,5 years. In general, however, the recognition of previous education is within the authority of the higher education institutions; the university/higher education institution could enrol the graduates of a higher professional school under different (published) conditions in comparison with secondary school graduates and it could also recognize some parts of their previous education. The conclusion, therefore, concerning the issue of recognition of previous learning in the Czech Republic seems to be that, at the level of the government, as well as at the level of particular institutions, this system still constitutes a problem to which not much attention has been given and which remains, for the time being, in an incipient stage.

In the case of **Lithuania** and **Slovenia**, as both these countries are at the moment in the process of introducing the RPL, few of the institutions recognize and use this system already. The main reason for this is, in this case, the lack of familiarity with the recognition system, its methods and purposes. In Slovenia, however, this situation does not impede upon the students' possibility to transfer from level 5 to level 6. According to our respondent, the transfer is realised automatically (in the case of professional higher education) or after the student having passed additional exams (in the case of academic higher education).

The same situation is present in **Hungary**, where only few of the higher education institutions recognize and use the RPL, the main reason being lack of familiarity with the system. Similar to the situation in Slovenia, this does not impede upon the students' possibility to transfer from level 5 to level 6. The government itself supports the RPL, through the establishment of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, who takes this instrument into account. Also, in the vocational education and training field, the recognition of prior learning is going to be involved in the licensing process.

In **Germany**, the situation is similar. Few of the higher education institutions recognize and use this system, the main reason for this being the lack of trust in this type of recognition instrument. According to the respondent institution, "checking it is very time consuming and if it's not documented through a transcript from another higher education institution, it starts getting complicated. If it is not from an academic institution, it is seldom recognized."

V. Employability

As our study was exclusively directed towards professional higher education, the concern with the employability of graduates constitutes a natural matter of focus. As it was already expected, all of our respondents claimed to maintain close contacts with employers, either on a regular or occasional basis. Similarly, with the singular exception of Germany, they all mention the existence of training offered to employees by higher education institutions in their respective countries, under several forms (short or evening courses, seminars, e-learning, distance learning, conferences, personalized tutoring).

Things become more complicated once the respondents begin to address the question "Is this training recognized by an official certificate?". Most of our respondents mentioned that only some of their training courses are officially recognized (it is the case of Lithuania, Slovenia, The Netherlands, Flanders and Hungary). Only Ireland and Scotland claimed all of their training courses to be officially recognized.

Concerning the existence of an accreditation system for formal and informal learning, Lithuania, Scotland, Hungary, The Netherlands, Ireland and France answered positively, while Germany, Slovenia and Flanders denied the existence of such a system.

At this point in our study, we would like to address a case study, which seems commendable for the issue of employability. We are going to focus on a Danish example of special partnership between higher education and the labour market.

The Danish Insurance Academy (DIA) was founded in 1953 in Copenhagen. Since the late sixties, DIA has been situated at Rungstedgaard, 30 kilometers outside Copenhagen. Beside an academy, the DIA is also used as a conference centre of excellence, a new expansion being planned for 2009, with new conference halls and more rooms. DIA is a public limited company, with more than 130 shareholders, a workplace for 100 people and approximately 250 external trainers and examiners, governed by a board of directors and an education council. The Academy is by far the main provider of education for the insurance companies in Denmark, a meeting point for the sector, a training institution for 17000 insurance employees, with a focus on developing the competencies, resources and abilities of the employees and the only publisher specialized in insurance books.

In the 1960s education for all insurance agents became compulsory; in the 1970s the Academy got its own faculty; in the 1980s, the modular system of education was introduced, together with the situated learning methods; in the 1990s the insurance brokers were admitted to the academy, the specialization in education for agents became possible and internationalization and e-learning were introduced. At the beginning of this century, education for insurance brokers became compulsory and all educations were changed to blended learning with a close connection between theory and praxis and well tested problem based learning methods.

The Danish Insurance Academy is an organization with two directors and eleven heads, one director covering the economy, ICT, administration, service, sale and hotel, the other educational director covering life, non-life, personal competence development, quality and development. "The academy is growing these years and finds itself in a good position to fulfil its mission to be an enterprise with attractive educators and courses securing the highest level for professional, social and personal competence development for managers and employees in life and non-life insurance and pursue its vision of being internationally known as one of the leading providers of competence development in insurance in Europe".

The strategic plan for the future consists in developing the educational environment according to the international nomenclature used in the Bologna Process (EQF, ECTS and ECVET), together with expanding its activities in company specific courses and learning.

This description of the academy's activities is especially relevant for the example of mixture between higher education and the labour market that it suggests. While there are other organizations which offer training courses to employees, the one described above stands out through its desire to acquire accreditation for the education it provides. As can be seen from the results of our study, courses offered to employees are usually not accredited.

VI. LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGY

The last section of our survey focused on the lifelong learning strategy developed within the participating countries, seen from the perspective of our partner institution. Inevitably, all the issues that have been analyzed so far (European Qualifications Framework, National Qualifications Framework, Recognition of Prior Learning, employability) are part of this lifelong learning strategy and represent good testimonies for its degree of success. They cannot, however, offer a complete picture of lifelong learning on a particular national level and of its ups and downs as clearly as a purely descriptive account of the national strategy would do.

In dealing with this issue, our study has focused on three main aspects: the existence and main features of a lifelong learning strategy, its good practices and most recurring problems. Some of our respondents chose to give a detailed account of only one of these aspects, but even so the picture which can be drawn after careful analysis of the answers is as rich and varied as the national contexts which produced them.

While all the respondents have invoked as the main motivations behind the development of a lifelong learning strategy the widening of participation in higher education and the need to stimulate creativity and innovation through the update of the population's skills, each of these strategies is confronted with different challenges, according to the national context in which it has developed.

Lithuania

In the case of **Lithuania**, a national lifelong learning strategy for both higher education and vocational education and training (VET) have been developed. According to our respondent, the strategy aims to generalize and to ensure the implementation of various documents and laws in which are foreseen various lifelong learning goals and measures for their implementation (12 various/different documents, including the National Education Strategy for 2003-2012 and the Law on Higher Education).

The main goals of this lifelong learning strategies are to:

- ❖ Create the possibilities for the inhabitants with different needs and abilities to acquire, develop and change qualification and competencies which would help them to integrate into a labour market.
- ❖ Develop compatible educational pathways to ensure professional and territorial mobility and the transparency and compatibility of the qualifications, by creating a common qualifications framework, including all levels of qualifications;
- ❖ Improve the quality of life and integration into modern society by gradually developing informal non-professional adult learning and self-learning in the different institutions of education;
- ❖ Ensure 'second chance' possibilities for adults to acquire primary, basic, secondary education, while developing key competencies and increasing accessibility of lifelong learning for various groups of society;
- ❖ Promote the development of qualifications of staff working with adults, in order to ensure the quality of learning;
- ❖ Modernize the material facilities (buildings, equipment etc.) for lifelong learning, by using the European Union Structural Funds;
- ❖ Balance the funding of various fields of adult learning and continuing education in pursuance of reacting to different needs of inhabitants;
- ❖ Improve the information and consultation of inhabitants about the possibilities of lifelong learning on national and regional levels, in order to strengthen their motivation for learning; develop their career management competencies.

In accordance to the above mentioned measures, the following 3 good lifelong learning practices have been developed on a national level in Lithuania:

1. In higher education institutions departments for continuing education and adult learning and distance learning centres have been established. According to the trends of lifelong learning, these departments and centres organize and develop flexible and modern professional and continuing learning (in case of distance learning, based on IT), thus creating study possibilities for those who need further learning.
2. The National Qualifications Framework has clear links with the European Qualifications Framework. Instruments have been implemented for the management of the qualification systems, which are related to learning programmes and study programmes accreditation. In the evaluation of qualifications, employers and social partners are involved, which ensures a better quality and a stronger link with the requirements of the labour market.
3. New public databases have been created, in order to provide information about lifelong learning possibilities to the society. The national database AIKOS has links to the Ploteus database, which results into available information about learning possibilities on national and European Union levels.

In the case of statement no. 2, the affirmation is contradictory with one of the previous findings of our study, namely that the National Qualifications Framework has not been implemented yet in Lithuania and clear links with the European Qualifications Framework have, for the moment, only been foreseen, without having been put into practice yet. However, as a significant project aimed particularly at creating this link was finished in the Spring of 2008, this constitutes a major reason to think of the situation of lifelong learning in Lithuania in optimistic terms.

This does not, however, exclude the emergence of difficult issues to be dealt with in relation to lifelong learning. Again, our approach to this aspect was to ask participants to provide 3 major problems they are confronted with when dealing with the implementation of lifelong learning. The ones mentioned by Lithuania were:

1. The still problematic use of the Recognition of Prior Learning in higher education institutions, mainly because there is no methodology for it. Although during the interval between the years 2004 and 2008 a couple of projects were implemented in higher education institutions which aimed at creating and piloting informal learning recognition methodologies, the system for the recognition of prior learning in Lithuania is, for the moment, not implemented at a national level within higher education institutions.
2. There is a lack of coordination at national level concerning the lifelong learning activities performed by various higher education institutions. Because of this, synergy and budget allocation are decreasing. Another problem is also the lack of policy at the national level for informal non-professional education. Learning needs related to entrepreneurship, healthy lifestyle, civil competence, self-learning and others are covered fragmentarily, as adequate funding for these activities is still lacking.
3. Lack of academic staff with the appropriate qualifications.

Scotland

A complete and revelatory analysis of the situation of lifelong learning at a national level was provided by our Scottish respondent. According to this, the vision of the Scottish government's "Skills for Scotland" strategy is that of a smarter **Scotland** with a globally competitive economy based on high value jobs, with a progressive and innovative business leadership. Within such a strategy, the following aspects are essential:

- People can work in teams, are creative and enterprising and hungry to continually learn new skills. They expect to realise their aspirations and are equipped to achieve their potential in a constantly changing world. People are motivated to contribute to Scotland's future and are confident that they can do so.

- People are entrepreneurial and innovative; small businesses are encouraged to grow and there is strong, coherent support for businesses of all sizes. Migrant workers and overseas students play a valuable role in an expanded workforce and economy.
- Employers improve productivity by investing in their own staff and are able to access a skilled workforce that is increasingly literate and numerate, with good ICT and problem solving skills.
- Learning and training providers work as one system and, thanks to wider use of technology and e-learning, barriers of geography and rurality have been reduced.

In order to achieve these goals, the focus in Scotland should be on the following aspects:

1. Individual Development

- ❖ Developing a distinctively Scottish approach to skills acquisition, balancing the needs of employers and individuals, aligning employment and skills and placing the individual at the centre of learning and skills development.
- ❖ Developing a coherent funding support system for individuals of all ages and in all forms of education and training, that encourages participation in learning and work. This will include support for individuals to increase control and choice over their learning and skills development.
- ❖ Ensuring that this strategy will promote equal access to and participation in skills and learning for everyone. This strategy aims to promote equality of opportunity to those trapped by persistent disadvantage and to improve numbers of people economically active, including those from groups such as race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, age and religion/faith and educational starting points.

2. Economic Pull

- ❖ Stimulating increasing demand for skills from employers, both public and private.
- ❖ Improving the utilisation of skills in the workplace.
- ❖ Understanding current and projected demands for skills to help prepare for future skills needs.
- ❖ Challenging employers, learning providers, awarding bodies and others to use Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) as a tool to support learning, specifically to facilitate the recognition of learning and for enabling individuals to move smoothly through learning environments, getting credit for learning they have already achieved.

3. Cohesive structures

- ❖ Simplifying structures to make it easier for people to access the learning, training and development they need, including formal and informal learning by merging a number of bodies into one, focussed on skills.
- ❖ Ensuring that a Curriculum for Excellence provides vocational learning and the employability skills needed for the world of work and that it is the foundation for skills development throughout life.
- ❖ Achieving parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning, recognising that vocational learning is a valuable alternative to the academic pathway and important to all.
- ❖ Challenging our funding bodies to use their budgets to help achieve a stepchange in skills development and use.
- ❖ Encouraging providers to see themselves as part of a continuum of provision – links in chain – which helps individuals to see the relevance of learning to them, progress in their learning and make full and effective use of the skills they have acquired. Judging that system by how well it serves those who need the most support.

Within this type of strategy, the major achievements that have been developed are related to:

- The existence of an integrated National Qualifications Framework that has been developed by stakeholders and not by the government.
- The development of work-based learning and certification.
- The flexibility of the learning delivery and qualifications system, based on learning outcomes and competences that permit learners to update skills and qualifications and to acquire new skills and acquire qualifications throughout their life.

All these improvements, however, require funding and this is one of the major problems Scotland is facing in the implementation of its lifelong learning strategy. Our respondent cited the following major lifelong learning impediments, in which funding occupies the first place:

- Adequate funding for learners and learning.
- Maintaining the characteristic differences between the Scottish and other UK systems.
- Reducing the drop-out of learners at all stages, but particularly from compulsory schooling, as the latter impacts significantly on types of provision in higher education institutions.

The detailed answer we have received in the Scottish case helps to underline the fact that lifelong learning is perceived as a major component of the Scottish education system. Also, the multitude of details we have received constitutes a proof of the fact that the lifelong learning strategy has been implemented to an extended degree in Scotland.

Ireland

Lifelong learning is also seen as having to become a major principle of education in **Ireland**. The goal of the Irish educational policy is to allow the continuous movement of learners between second level, further education and higher education and to encourage greater coherence in policy initiatives across these levels. Moreover, the lifelong learning policy is directly related to the issue of widening participation to higher education, following the realization of the fact that there are certain groups in society that are underrepresented in higher education, e.g. students from lower socio-economic groups, students with disabilities etc. While participation from these groups has increased in recent years, much remains to be done. Also, the need for the development of a meaningful lifelong learning strategy is supported by the claim that participation of mature students in higher education continues to register very low rates in Ireland. This takes place in a general economic environment where it has already been foreseen that the demand for third level qualifications and high skill levels will continue to be on the rise in the following years, while lower skilled jobs are thought to decline or experience only moderate growth¹³. Within this kind of context, it is essential that people already on the labour market are offered the opportunity to develop their skills, thus improving their chances of remaining employed: "Lifelong learning will ensure that all individuals are facilitated in up-skilling and maintain a relationship with education throughout their lives."¹⁴ The major advantages developed by this type of system are the following:

- ❖ A coherent national framework of qualifications, based on 10 levels of knowledge, skill and competence, underpinned by published standards and learning outcomes; it recognises and values intellectual development and higher level skills acquisition, irrespective of location of provision or mode of delivery and it does not distinguish between academic and professionally oriented programmes in the award, but values each of them equally;
- ❖ The existence of a ladder of awards in higher education, facilitating progression of students from one level to the next;
- ❖ The implementation of a system of minor awards, that can be accumulated towards major awards; it endorses learning and promotes continuous development.

¹³ <http://www.heai.ie/en/node/247>

¹⁴ Ibid.

In both Scotland and Ireland, although the existence of negative aspects cannot be avoided, the design and implementation of a lifelong learning strategy has been developed to a great extent, bringing forward examples of good practice and becoming an instrument for the attainment of ambitious goals.

France

A similar strategy (which covers both academic and professional higher education) has been implemented in **France**, although our French respondent did not provide a lot of details on this aspect. The main example of good practice mentioned is the successful use of the recognition of prior learning.

Czech Republic

In other countries, however, where the lifelong learning strategy has just recently been implemented, the situation is quite different. In the **Czech Republic**, where the strategy has recently been approved, it remains relatively vague in the field of tertiary education. The main issues in its structure correspond to the White Paper on Tertiary Education: reshaping the college sector, linking it to higher education under the tertiary education system, promoting diversity in higher education as regards the profile of institutions, programmes, values and modes of delivery, strengthening interaction between higher education institutions and employers and society...At the moment, however, the implementation plan of the strategy is still in course of development and many of its aspects continue to be under discussion.

Hungary

In **Hungary**, the Act of Adult Education was accepted in 2001, with the aim of increasing the number of marketable and re-marketable workforce. This was followed by the Act of Vocational Education (modified three times before being adopted in its current form); both the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, together with the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, were involved in the process. However, according to our respondent, "the results were less than expected". Another action that took place in Hungary in relation to lifelong learning is the merger of the National Institute of Vocational Education and the National Institute of Adult Education in 2007. More time is needed though before a concrete appreciation of the results can be formulated.

These measures in support of lifelong learning have been mainly due to the quite low level of employment in Hungary, which represents the main reason why lifelong learning is perceived as an extremely important issue within the Hungarian education system.

This motivation has ultimately resulted into the following good practices:

- Higher vocational education and training are going to be extended into the adult education system;
- Lifelong learning keeps in line with the significantly changing demands of the labour market;
- An autonomous Council is going to be established, with a mission to represent a bridge between the higher education and the world of the economy.

On the other hand, Hungary is not protected from lifelong learning impediments:

- The employment ratio is quite low in Hungary and only the inclusion of lifelong learning as part of the adult education could help solve the problem;
- Lifelong learning (content of study programmes, provision of work placement, output) , should meet the demands of the labour market;
- The labour market should also formulate its short-distance and long-term expectations for a minimum of 3 or 5 years in advance.

Slovenia

The situation is similar to that of the rest of Central or East European countries, where, although there is a strong will to design and implement a lifelong learning strategy, the means are often limited, as is full understanding of the necessary concepts. In **Slovenia**, a lifelong learning strategy has been designed to cover both academic and professional higher education, which produced the following examples of good practice:

- A very well-developed and good network of vocational colleges (short cycle higher education) with recently renovated module based and ECTS accredited educational programmes;
- Short cycle programmes have very strong links with industry (companies, businesses), well developed professional research practice and work-based learning. This is especially so in technical (engineering) programmes;

- In short cycle higher education programmes, the educational methods used are very efficient – there is a lot of project based learning, teachers are skilled and willing to use active methods of teaching.

In spite of this, however, the country still lacks some fundamental tools, essential for the success of lifelong learning. The procedures for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework are too slow, the professional higher education departments that operate as part of universities are still too academic, which creates problems with recognizing the short cycle graduate diplomas. Also, our respondent mentioned the need for more action focusing on increasing the mobility of students.

The above fairly detailed account of the state of affairs of lifelong learning in a number of pilot countries is not to prove that no progress has been made in other countries. Nor does it entail that in other countries, there are no major impediments to the implementation of lifelong learning. It is just that for the three remaining countries in our preliminary survey no certified accurate information is at hand.

This does not mean that the implementation of a lifelong learning strategy in the other countries which took part in our survey goes without problems.

Flanders

Flanders has no formally acknowledged lifelong learning strategy at the moment, while in **the Netherlands** the strategy is still subject to discussion (no consensus having been reached among the stakeholders and no official documents published). Among the advantages this strategy is supposed to bring once it is implemented, our respondent cited:

- ❖ Study rights – also usable later, at a more advanced age;
- ❖ More possibilities for the recognition of prior learning and advice based on the outcomes of an RPL assessment;
- ❖ Better cooperation between institutions for Vocational Education and Training (VET) and for Higher Education (HE).

Among the problems that the aimed strategy raises, the most important ones seem to be:

- ❖ Fewer possibilities for tailor made programmes;
- ❖ A reduction in the possibility to offer publicly financed formal programmes;
- ❖ Composing demand-driven programmes, based on the recognition of prior learning and on personal competences; a problem?)
- ❖ The lack of power of the management of higher education institutions.

Germany

Germany has only developed a lifelong learning strategy for Vocational Education and Training (VET). According to our respondent, the Bundesinstitut für Berufliche Bildung (BIBB) strongly supports the implementation of the ECVET system. This represents a strong tool for the development of lifelong learning within VET. On the other hand, within the traditional higher education system, there are only traditional academic degrees, without any individual educational offers for lifelong learning. It is mostly for this reason that, within academic higher education, the recognition of prior learning from VET meets considerable difficulties, people who would like to enter higher education having little chance of having prior learning recognised for substantially advanced entry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The chapters above underline the state of affairs concerning lifelong learning in a number of countries, as seen from the perspective of our respondents. The following represent a set of recommendations EURASHE and its member institutions have put together during the Lifelong Learning seminar in Prague (October 17th 2008). These are meant to express the EURASHE position on a number of 'burning issues' at the moment, while revealing the organization's view as to how they are to be responded to. The recommendations could be categorized in four groups:

1. Recognition of Prior Learning

- The introduction of approved systems for the Recognition of Prior Learning and for Work-Based Learning.
- Development of the Recognition of Prior Learning as a tool for Lifelong Learning.
- The development and use of the Recognition of Prior Learning not only as a tool for the vocational level of higher education, but also for the more general, academic level of higher education.

2. Labour Market/Regional Development

- The creation of a education system structure which would correspond to the expectations of the labour market.
- Clear involvement of employers in a design of courses for adult education.
- More links with the labour market and the society at large.
- Encouraging the networking of regional associations.
- Creating a platform for Lifelong Learning, including representation from the labour market, students etc.
- Non-profit sector trainings.
- Motivation of all stakeholders for Lifelong Learning.
- Creating Regional Centres of excellence for Lifelong Learning.

3. Curriculum Design/Flexibility

- More flexibility at the level of institutions.
- The establishment of flexible learning paths.
- The necessity for curriculum reforms in terms of flexibility.

4. Progression

- Full recognition of Vocational Education and Training for progression into Higher Education.
- The development of strategies for helping higher education institutions to create transfer opportunities for students who wish to transfer from EQF level 5 to EQF level 6.
- Breaking down barriers between different types of higher education.
- Adequate funding for part-time and flexible learning.
- More funding possibilities for people enrolled in flexible learning.

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- ❖ Institutes of Technology Ireland – Ireland (Dermot Douglas)
- ❖ DASHE – The Netherlands (Hans Daale)
- ❖ RENASUP/SPACE/La Providence – France (Sylvie Bonichon)
- ❖ Association of University Institutes of Technology Directors (ADIUT) – France (Ronald Guillen)
- ❖ Lithuanian Colleges' Directors' Conference – Lithuania (Ana Aleknaviciene)
- ❖ Association of Vocational Colleges of Slovenia – Slovenia (Zdenka Steblovnik Zupan)
- ❖ West of Scotland Colleges' Partnership – Scotland (Dugald Craig)
- ❖ European Schools for Higher Education in Administration and Management (ESA) – Austria/Germany (Christoph Veigel)
- ❖ Czech Association of Schools of Professional Higher Education - Czech Republic (Michal Karpisek)