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AGNESE RUSAKOVA

Promocijas darbs

Recognition of Prior Learning within Higher Education in the Context of Lifelong Learning
Iepriekšējās izglītības atzīšana augstākajā izglītībā mūžizglītības kontekstā

Vadībzinību doktora zinātniskā grāda iegūšanai vadībzinātnes nozarē
Apakšnozare: Izglītības vadība

Darba zinātniskais vadītājs
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Anotācija

Mūžizglītība tiek uzskatīta par būtisku priekšnoteikumu uz zināšanām balstītas sabiedrības veidošanai. Lai veicinātu virzību uz mūžizglītībā orientētu sabiedrību, ir nepieciešams uzsvērt atzīšanas prakses nozīmi mūžizglītības veicināšanā. Lai atbalstītu reformu procesu, ir tikuši izstrādāti vairāki instrumenti.

Savā darbā autore pielieto vairākus no reformu instrumentiem tiem piekritīgajās jomās un pēta pastāvošās atzīšanas un kvalitātes nodrošināšanas problēmas, kas varētu kavēt Eiropas Augstākās Izglītības Telpas attīstību.

Tomēr ne visos politikas praktiskās ieviešanas līmeņos (piem. attiecībā uz iepriekšējās izglītības atzīšanu nacionālā kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūrā) ir izstrādātas skaidras vadlīnijas. Autore pievēršas šai problemātikai, ierosinot metodoloģiju studiju rezultātu, kas būs par pamatu iepriekšējās izglītības atzīšanai, ieviešanai studiju programmā augstskolā.

Doktora darbs sastāv no ievada, divām galvenajām – teorētiskās un praktiskās daļas, 8 nodaļām, secinājumiem un rekomendācijām. Darbam pievienoti 8 pielikumi. Darba apjoms ir 208 lapaspuses (bez pielikumiem). Darbu ilustrē 13 tabulas, 14 ilustrācijas, 14 diagrammas. Darbā izmantoti 185 literatūras avoti.

ATSLĒGVĀRDI: *mūžizglītība, iepriekšējās izglītības atzīšana, kvalitātes nodrošināšana, studiju rezultāti, nacionālās kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūras*

Anotation

Lifelong learning is seen as crucial for the realization of the knowledge society. In order to foster the development towards lifelong learning oriented society the importance of recognition practice in promoting the lifelong learning is stressed. To support the reform process, several tools had been elaborated.

The author seeks to apply several of the recommended tools in the respective areas and research on the existing problems of recognition and quality assurance that might impede the development of European Higher Education Area. However not in all of the areas elaborated and clear guidelines for practical implementation of the policy are provided. This is the case with existing national qualifications frameworks and recognition of prior learning. The author addresses this problem by proposing a methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a program as basis for future recognition of prior learning, as well as elaborates recommendations for implementing the recognition of prior learning in a higher education institution.

Doctoral Thesis consists of introduction, two main – theoretical and practical parts, 8 chapters with 10 subchapters, conclusions and recommendations. There are 8 attachments annexed. The paper consists, excluding the attachments, of 208 pages. There are 13 tables, 14 illustrations, 14 charts. There are 185 sources displayed in the reference list.

KEYWORDS: *lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning, quality assurance, learning outcomes, national qualification frameworks*

Abbreviations

BFUG - Bologna Follow Up Group
CEDEFOP - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CEE – Central Eastern European countries
CLI - Composite Learning Index
EC - European Commission
EHEA - European Higher Education area
ELLI - European Lifelong Learning Indicators
ENIC - European Network of Information Centres in the European Region;
ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG - European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
ESIB [ESU] – European Students' Union
EU - European Union
EUA –European University Association
EURASHE - European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
EQAR - European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EQF - European Qualifications Framework
HE - higher education
HEI - higher education institutions;
HEQEC - Latvian Higher Education Quality Evaluation centre
ICT – information and communication technologies
ILO – International Labour Organization
KEI - Knowledge Economy Index
LLL – lifelong learning
LLP - Lifelong Learning Programme
LO – learning outcomes
MoES - Ministry of Education and Science
NAP - National Action Plan
NARIC -National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union;
NQF – National Qualifications Framework
UL – University of Latvia
UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMC - Open Method of Coordination
QA - Quality Assurance
WB – World Bank

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Introduction

Over the last three centuries, the main source of wealth in market economies has switched from natural assets (notably land and relatively unskilled labour), through tangible created assets (notably building, machinery and equipment, and finance), to intangible created assets (notably knowledge and information of all kinds) (Dunning,2000). This specificity of the new economy is referred to as the knowledge economy.

The Human Capital theory came up in late 50s and early 60s with the concept "economic value of education" (see one of the authors - Gary Becker, 1964, 1975, 1993). This theory demonstrates the interdependency of investments in education and the resulting economic growth, thus underlining the modern understanding of liaison between lifelong learning and the knowledge economy. "In the transition to a knowledge economy, an efficient, nationwide, lifelong learning system is an important building block for all countries at all levels of development"(World Bank Institute, 2007).

As stated by the World Bank, four features of the knowledge economy have far ranging implications for education and training:

- Knowledge is being developed and applied in new ways;
- Product cycles are shorter and the need for innovation is greater;
- Trade is increasing worldwide, increasing competitive demands on producers;
- Small and medium sized enterprises in the service sector have become increasingly important players, in terms of both economic growth and employment.

Lifelong learning is seen as crucial for the realization of the knowledge society (Kuhn, Sultana, 2006). In Europe this interrelation is strengthened by the Lisbon Strategy, which sets the aim for the EU "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion," by 2010, as well as by "giving higher priority to lifelong learning as a basic component of the European social model".

Definition of the Problem

In order to foster the aspired development towards lifelong learning oriented society it is necessary to introduce: "a comprehensive new European approach to valuing learning", "focusing on the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning as well as on the transfer and mutual recognition of formal certificates and diplomas" (EC,2001).This stresses the importance of recognition practice in promoting the

lifelong learning. In terms of political vision, mutual recognition is vulnerable to criticism by both advocates of diversity and unity. "Mutual recognition may hinder diversity, threatening local traditions as long-standing but fragile social constructs. At the other end of the spectrum, some will argue that an increasingly integrated economic space should aim towards common rules." (Nicolaodis, 1997).

To support the ongoing reform process, several tools had been elaborated by the most reputable stakeholders on the higher education arena - in the area of quality assurance such agreed upon standards are the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), in the area of recognition - Lisbon Recognition Convention and Recommendation on Criteria And Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, in the area of qualification frameworks – European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The author seeks to apply several of the recommended tools in the respective areas and research on the existing problems of recognition and quality assurance that might impede the development of EHEA.

However not in all of the areas elaborated and clear guidelines for practical implementation of the policy are provided. This is the case with existing national qualifications systems that are not necessarily adapted to a fast-changing knowledge economy. Recognition of prior learning is one of the most innovative features of the qualification framework and was originally based on the need to provide access to learning for workers who had informal skills and knowledge that could never be recognized formally, unless they went back to school. The qualification frameworks need to be changed with respect to validating learning forms such as non-formal and informal learning. The objective to be reached is understandable and so is the rationale to do so. However the translation of the theory into a working practice is not much researched. The author addresses this problem by proposing a methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program as basis for future RPL, as well as elaborates recommendations for implementing the recognition of prior learning in a higher education institution. However first it is necessary to research on the current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia, as the legal framework constitutes the basis for inter alia recognition of prior learning

Socio-Political Relevance of the Research

Lifelong learning crystallized as a concept in the 1970s as the result of initiatives from three international bodies – CofE, OECD and UNESCO, however, each of the institutions preferred a slightly different term to refer to.

Interest in lifelong learning, in its modern sense, revived in the early 1990s. A fresh round of studies and reports popularized the idea of lifelong learning, and it became part of national policy discussion, particularly as global competition and economic restructuring toward knowledge-based industries became more prevalent. The focus on learning shifted from personal growth to human resource development, mainly due to the involvement of large corporations in ensuring investments into their human capital.

In 1998 the Bologna Declaration set the ambitious goal to create the European Higher Education Area- apart from aspiring to increase the attractiveness of the area and to alleviate the mobility within the area the community envisioned, that "the European Higher Education Area provides Europe with a broad, high quality and advanced knowledge base, and ensures the further development of Europe as a stable, peaceful and tolerant community".

The framework and the reference point for the necessary reforms in higher education in order to establish the EHEA is the Bologna Process.

The quality assurance as reform area of Bologna Process is chosen deliberately to associate with the reform areas of qualifications frameworks and recognition areas not only because of its undeniable contribution to the common aims of the EHEA- mobility, attractiveness etc. Another important point of reference is the necessity to ensure the longevity of the ultimately established mutual recognition (Stenback, 1996).

However the Bologna process has been criticized for its rapidly evolving high level policy agendas set at two-year intervals that make a hard to follow pace for the lower units of policy implementers (Neave and Maassen, 2007).

Another major field of Bologna process critics is concerned with Open Method of Coordination (Schaefer 2006, Trubek and Trubek 2005, Copeland and ter Haar 2010) that allows for "an exercise in symbolic politics where national governments repackage existing policies to demonstrate their apparent compliance with EU objectives" (Zeitlin, 2005).

Latvia being among countries that have signed the Bologna Declaration and thus has committed to the common aims of the Europe in the field of education is directly involved in the Bologna process. Latvia will share both the advantages and disadvantages of being a member of EHEA.

Practical Relevance of the Research

The formal education experienced major critics in late 60' ties. The author of OECD report (Gass, 1973) remarks that the increased amount of knowledge that is needed for preparing the modern person for the adult life is being transformed in increased period of

uninterrupted learning (e.g. school and university), which results in late entry in labour market and "adult life" in general.

Another important point is the aging of the society. It has as a consequence an increased need for lifelong learning for the individuals to stay competitive in labour market. The nonformal and informal learning gains an additional importance with relation to transferring of market to the knowledge economy. It also becomes important to recognize the nonformal and informal learning and integrate it into the formal qualification framework easily, because many laws require the candidate for work placement or employee to be able to prove the competence. Within this respect the society runs the danger of insufficient human resource employment, as the lack of formal documents might automatically defer the suitable candidate from getting the position even though he has spent years by working in the field and is able to prove in case of existing legal framework the professional competence gained through nonformal learning.

The significance of recognition of prior learning also increases due to the augmenting geographic mobility of the labour force. Even such reasons as previous involvement of individual in unregistered employment may provide knowledge, skills and competences that are hard if not impossible to prove.

Recognising what people know or can do – regardless of where they have acquired these skills, knowledge and competences – is likely to be a strong incentive for them to resume learning formally as they will not have to start from the beginning. This also cuts the traditional costs (time, tuition fees, transportation costs, etc.) and opportunity costs (forgone earnings, etc.) of formal learning. Cost is often an issue, particularly for the low-skilled who are also generally the lower-paid. One relatively simple and low-cost way of improving the overall skills base of the workforce without having to create new qualifications is create new routes to access the qualifications.

The recognition of prior learning will not only decrease the costs, but also serve the improved self-assessment and personal development of an individual of the society.

Scientific Relevance of the Research

The knowledge economy requires change to lifelong learning approach in education. Lifelong learning allows an improved employment of human capital for ensuring a welfare growth in economy. The individual benefits are linked to (among others) better self-realization and personal development. An intrinsic part of lifelong learning system is the recognition of prior nonformal and informal learning.

There are countries (mainly Anglo-Saxon, but also f.ex. France) that seem to be quite advanced in both researching and implementing the recognition of prior learning. However in Latvia, the problem of recognizing prior nonformal and informal learning has not been sufficiently researched. An important aspect that the author will consider in her paper is the implementation of the learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning in higher education institution.

Previously Conducted Researches on the Subject

Certain difficulties when exploring the conducted researches in Latvia on the related subjects are connected with the lack of common usage of terms in Latvian for describing the keywords, e.g., some of the versions of term's "informal learning" translations are "informālā", "ikdienējā", "ikdienas", "ikdienas neformālā", and even "interešu izglītība", "neoficiālā".

The terms "education" and "learning" are used as synonyms, e.g. "nonformal learning" and "neformālā izglītība", in outspoken majority of legislative documents the term lifelong learning is translated as "mūžizglītība" (e.g.lifelong education). The term "nonformal" is sometimes applied as antonym of the term "formal", without any reference to the term "informal". The term "informal" is sometimes translated as "neformālā".

The study "Investment in Human Capital in the Field of Higher Education" (Simonova, 2010) concludes that Latvia moves towards knowledge-based society, and the role of the human capital increases; this is proved by the increasing number of students and institutions of tertiary education in Latvia. However, Simanova has to admit that in Latvia there is no such a system of lifelong education established that would allow the inhabitants to adjust to the changing conditions of the labour market.

The study "Lifelong Education and its role in Development of Society" (Jēkabsone, 2009) finds that in Latvia in many cases the education does not correspond with demands of the fast changing market. Employers of small and middle sized enterprises, which are dominant in Latvia, are looking forward to hiring employees who are able to perform different tasks, not only one, specific task. According to the statistics provided by State Employment Agency (SEA) more than 52% of Latvian employees do not work in the profession once acquired. It means that another profession should be learned. However the study "Aspects of Higher Education Market in Latvia" (Liepa and Krustozoliņa, 2010) underlines, that the development of economy of Latvia to a great extent depends on private capital and that it is hard to make any forecasts at a governmental level of future developments of national economy. Therefore it is quite risky for the higher education

institutions to make any conclusions on the conformity of study programs to the needs of labour market. This emphasizes both the necessity of tertiary institutions to work on providing learners with a study process which would favour the development of professional competence, taking into consideration learner's individuality, experience, needs, and the role of nonformal and informal learning in filling in the gaps in education on a smooth and timely base.

However the study "Youth Non-Formal Education in Latvia" (Kravale, 2006) reveals that even though one of important aspects of lifelong learning is the non-formal learning, the youth in Latvia does not have a sufficient comprehension on its role. Also the study "Evaluation of Active Labour Market Policy Measures for Promoting Employment in Latvia (Brence, 2010)" shows that nonformal education is among governmental measures that are regarded as possibly obsolete. Thus the results of experts' (representatives of different ministries, State Employment Agency, Labour Union etc.) survey conclude that during the economic slowdown state institutions could stop realizing the measures such as informal [apparently meant – nonformal] education, as well as e-training for disabled persons. At the same time the implementation of these measures is essential for concrete target groups, thus the measures most likely could be optimized, but not excluded totally from financing. Even though the educational activities (even non-formal education) are supported by the government, very often additional private funding is necessary to follow them, e.g. study "The Impact of Costs on the Number of Early School Leavers in Elementary School" (Zepa and Bebriša 2007) . It reveals that Latvia is amongst the European Countries, where the number of early school leavers is the highest. The number of inhabitants in Latvia having only elementary education is increasing steadily. At the same time, according to State Employment Agency data, the higher the level of education of the person, the less is the probability to become unemployed. The study" Access to Lifelong Learning and Opportunity to Follow Educational Activities in Latvia" (Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2006) shows another danger that less educated people, apart from less income that could be directed towards covering the costs of education– face an especially limited supply of vocational further education courses offered. These developments emphasize both the necessity of different flexible learning paths and possibility of recognition of prior learning in the future. There are also other developments in Latvia on the way that require establishing an accessible system of lifelong learning. Thus the „Study on access to education of asylum seekers,refugees and persons with alternative status in Latvia" (Latvian Centre for Human Rights 2011) reveals that the numbers of the target groups have been increasing in Latvia.

Even though the 2010 Education Law amendments have significantly broadened the target groups' right to education, including non-discrimination clause for all the groups, the study also uncovers several legal gaps. Persons with alternative status must comply with the requirements provided by the Law on Higher Educational Establishements (the correspondence of certificate on secondary education to the Latvian standards, correspondence of knowledge to the requirements of the concrete university or college). However the target groups are very often unable to show any documents of evidence on previous education.

All of the abovementioned studies suggest the significance of creating a possibility to access the national qualifications framework in Latvia through recognition of prior learning schemes.

Research object -recognition in lifelong learning

Aim of the research – analyse the recognition of prior learning in higher education in the aspect of lifelong learning, and elaborate recommendations for RPL implementation in higher education.

Tasks of the research :

1. research the scientific literature in management, pedagogy and related fields of science on lifelong learning and recognition;
2. analyse international, national, regional strategic policy documents and the legal framework in the context of lifelong learning and recognition;
3. analyse quality assurance as one of the cornerstones of mutual recognition in EHEA;
4. explore the constituents of recognition process, both in formal, non-formal and informal education;
5. propose a methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program as basis for future RPL;
6. elaborate recommendations for implementation of RPL in a higher education institution.

Research Questions:
- ✓ What international policy documents promote introduction of lifelong learning approach?
- ✓ How does recognition support the implementation of lifelong learning?

- ✓ What is the progress of improving fair recognition of qualifications in EHEA?
- ✓ What is the role of common European standards in supporting the progress of mutual recognition?
- ✓ How to implement learning outcomes in a study program (improving the transparency and recognition thereof)?
- ✓ What is the legal framework for validating non-formal and informal learning in Latvia?
- ✓ How to implement RPL in a higher education institution?

Research Methods

Desk research, analysis of literature, content analysis, analysis of policy documents, expert interviews, focus group discussions, SWOT, Perellon' s Framework, Accountability triangle, benchmarking, case studies, questionnaire, survey (questionnaire), elaboration of methodology.

Theoretical Basis of the Research

The author has based the research on the following main concepts/authors:

Research methods in education –Geske, Grīnfelds, 2006;Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007

Human Capital theory - Becker, 1964, 1975, 1993; World Bank Institute, 2001, 2007; Kuhn, Sultana, 200)

Lifelong learning, lifelong education **-** Cropley 1977, 1978, 1980, 2000; Dave 1973, 1976; Giere 1974, 1994; Husén 1968, 1974; Knoll 1974; Suchodolski 1972, 1976; Field, 2003; Deleon, 1996; Faure, 1972; Edwards 1997; UNESCO, 1972, 1996; EC, 2000; Longworth, 2003

Formal, nonformal and informal learning – OECD, 2006; EC, 2000; CEDEFOP, 2004; UNESCO, 2005; Coombs, 1968, 1974; Rogers 2004; Werquin, 2007; Simkins, 1977; Coles, Werquin, 2007; Race, 1998; Brennen, 1997; Ward and Dettoni, 1974; Harbison, 1973; Paulston, 1972

Recognition of prior learning - Stuart, 2010

Outcome-based learning - Killen, 2002; Hargreaves, 2000; Woolston, 2008; Simons, 1999; Schlafly, 1993; Spady, 1994; Spady , Marshall, 1991; McKernan, 1993

Learning outcomes - e.g. Donnelly, Fitzmaurice, 2005; Gosling and Moon, 2001; Bingham, 1999; Moon, 2002; Adam, 2004, 2006; Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2009; Jenkins,Unwin, 2001; Kennedy, 2007; Frye, 1999

Competence - Adam, 2006;Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2009; Winterton, Delamare- Le Deist, Stringfellow, 2006

Taxonomies - Bloom, 1975; Bloom, Masia, Krathwohl, 1964; Dave, 1970; Simpson, 1972; ; Anderson and Krathwohl, 2000 ; Merill, 2002

Formative and summative assessment - Black and Williams, 1998; Brown and Knight, 1994

Permanent education - Council of Europe, 1973

Recurrent education - OECD, 1973

Adult education - Edwards, 1997

Higher education in Eastern European countries - Schwarz, Westerheijden, 2004; Scott, 2007)

Recognition - Nicolaodis, 1997;Tissot, 2004), (Stenback, 1996), (Rauhvargers, 2002, 2006)

Bologna process - Neave, Maassen, 2007; Rauhvargers, Deane, Pauwels, 2009

Open Method of Coordination - Schaefer 2006; Trubek, Trubek 2005; Copeland ,ter Haar 2010; Gornitzka, 2005, 2006; Zeitlin, 2005; Chalmers, Lodge 2003

Accountability - Astin, 1993, 2002; Burke, 1983, 2005; Scott, 2007

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) - Vinther-Jørgensen, Hansen, 2006; Newton, Harvey 2007; Dzelme, 2007, 2009

European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) - Pyykkö, 2010; Malan 2010; Szanto, 2010

Qualification framework - Stuart, 2010; Coles, Werquin 2007

Role of formal education in knowledge economy and in lifelong learning - Gass, 1973;Illich, 1971; OECD, 1996; Oosterlinck/OECD, 2003; Bramwell, Wolfe, 2008; Bergan, 2006; EC, 2006, 2010; OECD, 1973

Novelty of the Research

1. An analysis of National Action Plans on Recognition submitted by 37 countries in 2007 has been conducted - this analysis has been taken as one of the documents that formed the basis for the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications[125], which were adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its fifth meeting, Sèvres, 23 June 2010.

2. The practice of external quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes in Latvia was checked against European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in 2009, the conclusions on conformity of the external quality assurance to the respective standard have been drawn. This research was done

as part of larger research on Implementation of ESG in Higher Education of Central and East-European Countries.

3. An analysis of legal framework for validating nonformal and informal learning in Latvia in 2010 has been conducted, best practice in RPL described – this analysis has been taken as basis for elaboration of country comparison for CEDEFOP [66]. The best practice in RPL in Latvia has been published on the website of European Recognition of Prior Learning Network [67].

4. A methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program has been proposed - on basis of the discussion initiated during the respective research there have been changes introduced in the organization of study process at the analysed program.

5. SWOT analysis of RPL implementation at a higher education institution has been conducted.

Structure of the Doctoral Thesis

Doctoral Thesis consists of introduction, two main – theoretical and practical parts, 8 chapters with 10 subchapters, conclusions and recommendations. There are 8 attachments annexed. The paper consists, excluding the attachments, of 208 pages. There are 13 tables, 14 illustrations, 14 charts. There are 185 sources displayed in the reference list.

Research Basis

1. As research basis for analysis conducted in Chapter 5 have been used National Action Plans on Recognition submitted by 37 countries (members of Bologna process) in 2007.

2. As research basis for analysis conducted in Chapter 7 have been used the results of surveying 18 lecturers and 5 graduate students of the Bachelor program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy", the Faculty of Economics and Management, The University of Latvia.

Theoretical Part

The **first** chapter: *Role of the Higher Education in Ensuring Lifelong Learning and Knowledge Based Economy*

In the first chapter of the paper the author considers the recent evolution of the concept "lifelong learning" as reflected in international policy documents, starting with Faure report and ending with major OECD, UNESCO, EC documents. The author bases this approach on the consideration (Field, 2003) that the term lifelong learning in its modern application did not originate as a scientific concept, but rather as an idealistic slogan that is strongly marked by its provenance in policy circles, and secondarily by its use as a description of practice. This approach is also important because the political and the resulting legal framework is one of the major reference points to the practical part of the paper. Taking into account the focus of the research on the tertiary level of education the author outlines the role of the higher education in providing the lifelong learning. The author takes stock of the main indexes used to measure the progress of countries in attaining the goal of becoming knowledge based economy on the basis of implementing lifelong learning policy, as initially the orientation to lifelong learning in building up the human capital is an answer to the changing global economy from industrial to knowledge based.

The **second** chapter: *Mutual Recognition of Qualifications - a Prerequisite for a genuine EHEA*

The second chapter is started by outline of a major tool for implementing the lifelong learning in higher education – the Bologna process. The author conducts a content analysis of Declarations and Communiqués (8 documents in total, 1998-2010) that earmark the Bologna Process, on selected keywords: Qualification Framework, Quality Assurance, Recognition,: Recognition of Prior Learning and Learning Outcomes. Based on the dynamics of appearance frequency of the selected keywords in the Declarations and Communiqués, the author discusses the contribution of major Bologna process reform areas - qualification frameworks, quality assurance and recognition - in promoting the lifelong learning. The author defines the main tools that support the creation of common EHEA in the abovementioned reform areas – such as Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), Lisbon Recognition Convention and Recommendation on Criteria And Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, and European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The **third** chapter: *Fostering Inclusion of Outcomes obtained through Different Learning Forms in National Qualifications Framework*

In the third chapter the author considers different learning forms that are integral parts of lifelong learning. The author compares definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning as taken from recent documents of major international education policy players – OECD, EC, UNESCO. In order to gain a better understanding of the different concepts the author analyses these definitions against four aspects – whether the learning is intentional or unintentional, extent to which the learning is organized and structured, whether the learning is leading to learning outcomes and last but not least –its recognition. Another important point that the author discusses in the third chapter is the learning outcomes based approach and its practical implementation for the purpose of subsequent recognition of prior learning.

Practical Part

The **fourth** chapter: *Analysis of External Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions and Programmes in Latvia with regard to ESG*

The Bologna process is a part of broader effort in the drive for a Europe of knowledge, and includes measures aimed at promoting lifelong learning. The quality assurance is one of the main reform areas of Bologna process. The quality assurance activities allow the maintenance of credibility and trust, which are necessary for mutual diploma recognition between EHEA countries. The nonformal and informal learning outcomes become recognized through recognition of prior learning schemes in EHEA countries, and eventually lead to a diploma. The diploma, that is based on recognition of lifelong learning outcomes has to be recognized by all EHEA countries. This increases the importance of coherent approach to the quality assurance issue. For promoting the quality assurance in EHEA a tool has been elaborated and has been adopted at the Bergen Ministerial Conference in 2005: The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Taking into account both the importance of compliance with ESG for the higher education in Latvia and the drawback of Open Method of Coordination - that the countries might want to "windowdress" for the iterative benchmarking procedures - the author conducts an analysis of external quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes in Latvia with regard to ESG. For researching the subject the author applies research tools such as SWOT, Perellon' s Framework and Accountability triangle.

The **fifth** chapter: *Research on Problems of Recognition with Regard to Information Provision and Supportive Structure in the EHEA*

The fifth chapter is related to the following aspect of the theoretical basis reflected in the second chapter – the main principles of recognition in EHEA. While the main legal framework for recognition is in place through the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts, the most important challenge was to find out how the legal texts are implemented in practice. The fourth chapter displays the analysis of the National Action Plans for Recognition (submitted by 37 countries in 2007) with regard to two perspectives - information provision and structure that supports the recognition. The research on these two elements is supported by the following reference documents: Code of good practice in the provision of information on recognition (ENIC/NARIC, 2004); Lisbon Recognition Convention (Council of Europe, 1997), the Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services (UNESCO/Council of Europe, 2004), Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2005).

The **sixth chapter**: *Current National Legal Framework on Validation of Nonformal and Informal Learning in Latvia*

The sixth chapter relates to the third chapter as it deals with the agents of change that allow strengthening the link between qualification systems and lifelong learning – especially with the mechanism of recognising non-formal and informal learning. Validation of non formal and informal learning has been identified as a European priority on repeated occasions and a set of 'Common European Principles' for the validation of non-formal and informal learning have been developed by the Commission in collaboration with a range of partners. In order to monitor the implementation of the European Common Principles, the European Commission and Cedefop, have produced a European Inventory of validation of non-formal and informal learning. In the seventh chapter the author has used European Inventory to research on the current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia, as the legal framework constitutes the basis for inter alia recognition of prior learning.

The **seventh** chapter: *Methodology for Implementing Learning Outcomes in a Study Program as Basis for Future Recognition of Prior Learning*

In the seventh chapter the author reminds as discussed in the third chapter that in order to ensure that the formal system of education becomes a fully fledged constituent of lifelong learning system it is necessary to provide means of recognizing the non-formal and informal learning. One of the means for incorporating those outcomes is through translating

the competencies and skills obtained through different forms of learning into common currency – credits, with learning outcomes being the central element for the recognition of prior learning. The objective to be reached as declared by the policy makers is understandable and so is the rationale to do so. However unclear is the way how to translate the theory into a working practice. In the sixth chapter the author addresses this problem by proposing and examining a methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program as basis for future RPL.

The **eighth** chapter: *Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education Institution in Latvia*

On basis of SWOT analysis, that allows developing effective strategies that exploit the operational advantages over competitors, while minimizing the disadvantages, the author explores the status quo of a higher education institution in the outlook of RPL procedure's implementation. Through contrasting and considering the internal organizational strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats the author elaborates the recommendations for implementing the recognition of prior learning procedure at the University of Latvia.

Theses for Defence

1. The absence of legal basis delays the implementation of RPL and thus the involvement of HEIs in LLL

2. At least in one study program at the University of Latvia the implementation of learning outcomes is formal; the transfer to learning outcomes based education is not used as tool for improving the quality of programs and courses.

Approbation of Research Results:

a) Publications of the research results

1. *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans,* book, prof. A. Rauhvargers and A. Rusakova, Strasbourg, Council of Europe December 2009, 177. pgs, „Council of Europe Higher Education Series No 12", ISBN 978-92-871-6648-7 : the research results were presented at the 15th Joint Meeting of the ENIC/NARIC Networks (Malta, June 2008) and on the basis of the conducted analysis the ENICs / NARICs were encouraged to continue working to implement and improve the National Action Plans in their respective countries, taking into account the institutional role of each centre; research results presented and approved in Bologna Follow-Up Group Meeting in Paris in October 2008, The results on the Analysis of the 2007 National Action Plans for Recognition were reported in April 2009 at the Ministerial conference of Bologna Process in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve and recorded in the Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009. On the basis of the results of the report a Recognition working group has been established that will follow up on the recommendations of analysis of the national action plans on recognition with a view to make recognition of qualifications and credits more coherent across the EHEA and improve recognition with other parts of the world till 2012. Including in particular the work undertaken by the ENIC/NARIC Working Group on Substantial Differences and the Report to the Bologna Follow-up Group on the Analysis of the 2007 National Actions Plans for Recognition (2008) UNESCO and Council of Europe have elaborated the *Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications,* which were adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its fifth meeting, Sèvres, 23 June 2010.

2. *Review of Legislation and Recognition Practice in 'Bologna' Countries: National Action Plans 2007, ,* prof.A. Rauhvargers and A.Rusakova, Latvijas Universitātes Rakstu krājumā 2009, 749. sējums, 16.-23. lpp, ISSN 1407-2157.

3. *Implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines in External Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions and Programmes in Latvia,* prof.A. Rauhvargers and A.Rusakova, in "Implementation of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of Central and East-European Countries– Agenda Ahead", Bucharest 2009, 93.- 119. pgs.: *ESG in Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Latvia,* prof.A. Rauhvargers and A. Rusakova, in Workshop, Centre for Higher Education Studies, Prague, September 15, 2008, ISBN 92-9069-189-2.

4. *Report, to the Bologna Follow Up Group on the Analysis of the 2007 National Actions Plans for Recognition,* prof.A. Rauhvargers and A.Rusakova, Strasbourg/Rīga, September 12, 2008, 74 pgs.

5. *Methodology for Implementing Learning Outcomes in a Study Program as Basis for Future Recognition of Prior Learning*, prof.A. Rauhvargers and A.Rusakova,"Problems of Education in the 21st Century" Volume 26, 2010, ISSN 1822-7864, SCIENTIFIC METHODICAL CENTRE „SCIENTIA EDUCOLOGICA", /The associated member of Lithuanian Scientific Society and International Council of Association for Science Education /ICASE/, 8 pgs.

6. *Recognition of Prior Learning on the verge of EHEA: an Analysis of the National Reports 2009,* prof.A. Rauhvargers and A.Rusakova, 53rd International Scientific

Daugavpils University Conference, Daugavpils University, Latvia, 13-15 April, 2011, abstracts, pg. 130.

7. *European inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning 2010 : country report: Latvia*, A. Rusakova and Prof. A. Rauhvargers, VET Bib (CEDEFOP's bibliographic database: the largest collection of vocational education and training literature in Europe), http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77471.pdf , 2010, 21pgs.

Publications related to the subject

1. *Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe 2011: Funding and the Social Dimension,* (A. Rusakova, in team of experts) EACEA P9 Eurydice 2011, ISBN 978-92-9201-205-2,
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/

2. *Actual Recognition of Prior Learning practice in Latvia: Case Study*, QAA Scotland/European RPL Network project on recognition of prior learning, University of Latvia, A. Rusakova, 2010,
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/DEG/documents/UniversityLatvia_RPL.pdf

3. *Accessible Multimedia Interaction Techniques for a Collaborative Editor: Recommendations for Making E-conferencer Software Jaws Accessible* //Актуальные Проблемы Информатики и Информационных Технологий, Материалы 2 Международной (9 Тамбовской межвузовской) научно-практической конференции, 8-9 сентября 2005 г., Тамбов 2005, Тамбовский государственный университет им. Г.Р. Державина, 2005, с. 195-197

4. *E-university Project and the Role of E-learning at the University of Latvia,* A. Lauze, in EIF 2005:European eLearning Activities to Support the Bologna Roadmap, Dresden 2005, 82.-87.lpp, ISBN 3-86005-496-1

(Project publications, with participation of the author)

1. *Darbaspēka profesionālā mobilitāte* : Nr. VPD1/ESF/NVA/04/NP/3.1.5.1./0001/0003 / Latvijas Universitāte ; projekta vadītāja: Ērika Šumilo ... [u.c.]., Rīga : Latvijas Universitāte, 2007, xi, 219 lpp, ISBN 9789984993027

2. *Nereģistrētās nodarbinātības novērtējums* : Nr. VPD1/ESF/NVA/04/NP/3.1.5.1./0001/0003 / [projekta vadītāja-Ērika Šumilo], Rīga : Latvijas Universitāte, 2007, xi, 212 lpp, ISBN 9789984993003

b) Other dissemination and approbation of the research results: presentation in conferences, seminars etc.

1) „*Implementation of European quality standards in Higher Education*", A. Prikulis, A. Rauhvargers and A. Rusakova, submitted for International conference in Didactics of Chemistry, University of Latvia, Spring 2012

2) „*Survey of Internal Quality Assurance Systems*", A. Prikulis, A. Rauhvargers and A. Rusakova, in project „Identifying barriers in promoting the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance at institutional level and making recommendation as to how there might be addressed", Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES), Prague, Czech Republic, October 5, 2011, http://www.ibar-llp.eu/assets/files/public/WP5_comparative_study_final.pdf

3) "*Recognition of Prior Learning on the verge of EHEA: an Analysis of the National Reports 2009",* prof.A. Rauhvargers and A.Rusakova, 53rd International Scientific Daugavpils University Conference, Daugavpils University, Latvia, 13-15 April, 2011

4) "*Studiju rezultātu formulēšana un iepriekš iegūtas izglītības atzīšana*" VIAA un AIC rīkotā starptautiskā konferencē „Boloņas process – augstākās izglītības internacionalizācija un iepriekš iegūtas formālās izglītības atzīšana", viesnīcā "Islande Hotel", Rīgā, 2010.gada 8. novembrī

5) „*Studiju rezultātu formulēšanas starptautiskā pieredze*" LU mācību prorektora un Akadēmiskā departamenta semināru ciklā par kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūrām un to saistību ar studiju rezultātiem- Latvijas Universitātē, Rīgā, 2009. gada 16. decembrī

6) „*Formulation of Learning Outcomes: Case of University of Latvia*" starptautiskā konferencē „Learning Outcomes and Qualification Frameworks – Tools for Mobility?", St. Augustin-Bonn, Vācija 2009. gada 26. novembrī

7) „*Starptautiskās ekonomikas un komercdiplomātijas bakalaura studiju programma (LU EVF).Studiju rezultātu formulēšana*" starptautiskā konferencē „Jaunas tendences diplomatzīšanā: Kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūru un neformālās izglītības atzīšanas izmantošana", Maritim Park Hotel, Rīgā, 2009. gada 22. oktobrī

8) LU pētniecības projekta *"Studiju rezultātā iegūto prasmju un kompetenču formulēšanas principi un starptautiskā pieredze"* rezultātu prezentācija Latvijas Universitātes 67. zinātniskās konferences Izglītības vadības sekcija 2009.gada janvāris -februāris, Agnese Rusakova, Agnese Briška, Kristīne Zaksa

9) *ESG in Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Latvia,* prof.A. Rauhvargers and A.Rusakova, in Workshop, Centre for Higher Education Studies, Prague, September 15, 2008

10) *Studiju rezultātu ieviešanas pieredze Norvēģijā un Īrijā,* Seminārs, Latvijas Mākslas Akadēmija, Rīgā, 2008. gada 22. novembrī

11) *Studiju rezultātu ieviešanas pieredze - Bergenas Universitāte (Norvēģija)*, Boloņas procesa seminārs „Par Latvijas nacionālo ziņojumu par 2007.-2008. gada posmu, starptautiskie vērtēšanas kritēriji un tālāk darāmais" Rīga, Latvijas universitātes Mazā Aula, 2008. gada 30. oktobrī

12) *Assisstive technologies and the Competitiveness of Disabled Persons on Labour Market*, Jauno ekonomistu konference „Darba tirgus un konkurētspēja", Ščecina, Polija, 12.-14.04.2007

13) *E-university Project and the Role of E-learning at the University of Latvia,* A. Lauze, in EIF 2005:European eLearning Activities to Support the Bologna Roadmap, Dresden 2005, 82.-87.lpp, ISBN 3-86005-496-1

THEORETICAL PART

1. Role of the Higher Education in Ensuring Lifelong Learning and Knowledge Based Economy

Arthur Cropley states in his introduction to Towards a System of Lifelong Education: "Lifelong learning existed before the emergence of current interest in it and would continue to occur even if educators ignored it" [22].

Arthur Cropley (1977, 1978, 1980), Ravindra H. Dave (1973, 1976), Ursula Giere (1974, 1994), Torsten Husén (1968, 1974), Joachim Knoll (1974), and Bogdan Suchodolski (1972, 1976), were among the theorists who actively shaped the UNESCO' s work on lifelong education from the late 1960s [86].

Also, "it is important to emphasise that the term [lifelong learning] did not originate as a scientific concept, which had been designed and refined as an analytical tool for researchers, but as an idealistic slogan for policy makers which has been taken up by professionals and managers in the field. In its current dominant usages, it is strongly marked by its provenance in policy circles, and secondarily by its use as a description of practice" (Field, 2003:66) [30].

It means that there are at least three types of ideological contents for the concept "lifelong learning" – one that is suggested by the scientists, one that is advanced by the policy makers and one that is formed by the policy implementers.

It also implies that many of the concepts should not be considered without examining the documents and definitions created by international organizations - the major players on the educational policy forming arena.

Lifelong learning crystallized as a concept in the 1970s as the result of initiatives from three international bodies – Council of Europe, OECD and UNESCO, however, each of the institutions preferred a slightly different term.

The Council of Europe advocated "permanent education", a plan to reshape European education for the whole life span. Education, according to it, must be "learner centered" and integrate both formal and informal education. (Council of Europe, 1973) [95]. The emphasis is still on the formal and informal "education", not "learning", however it is already learner-centered education - it concentrates on two perspectives – the individual learners and the art of learning. In learner centered education the focus is on metacognition skills of an individual learner. Approximately at the same time the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) called for "recurrent education", an alternation of full-time work with full-time study. . Recurrent education was defined as: ". . . a comprehensive educational strategy for all post-compulsory or post-basic education, the essential characteristic of which is the distribution of education over the total life-span of the individual in a recurring way, i.e. in alternation with other activities, principally with work, but also with leisure and retirement" (Kallen D.; Bengtsson J.[OECD], 1973:24) [42].

In the third of these initiatives, a UNESCO report, Learning to Be (UNESCO, 1972) [25], commonly known as the Faure Report, there was the term "lifelong education" used, requiring that school and out-of-school activities (formal, non-formal and informal education) are treated without hierarchical distinction, and the importance of basic education for all and of adult education is taken as a basic principle. The permanency and continuity of the learning is thus underlined similarly like in the "permanent education". In contrast to the term "lifelong education" , the term "recurrent education" emphasizes distinctively the need to limit the further expansion of the formal educational system and the need to promote the "alternation and effective interaction between education as a structured learning situation, and other social activities during which incidental learning occurs." (Kallen D.; Bengtsson J.[OECD], 1973:24) [42]. However, the initial visionary approach channeled itself later into the research on diverse forms of adult education. Thus, for example, "many British universities, have adopted the term [lifelong learning] as a way of promoting their existing adult education activities; the courses for adults are unchanged, but they are offered under a new and modern brand label" (Field, 2003:64) [30]. At the same time Edwards (Edwards, 1997:67) stresses that adult education is marked by a clear purpose, well defined borders, a single point of entry and exit, and an owner, whereas borders of lifelong learning are open or concealed, it has many purposes, and its ownership is often multiple and even ill-defined [29].

This shows the contradiction between the ideological content of the two concepts (labels for ideas) that are used as synonyms. With that many persons involved in forming of the concepts, it is easily to run into misperceptions of concepts on basis of different discourses.

For a time period the terms lifelong education and lifelong learning coexisted, lifelong education emphasizing intentional learning and lifelong learning stressing the aspect of unintended learning.

Nevertheless nowadays the both terms "lifelong education" and "lifelong learning" are sometimes used as synonyms, especially among the two groups – policy makers and policy implementers.

The Illustration 1 depicts the characteristics of the terms "education" and "learning".

EDUCATION   **LEARNING**
organized   ⟷   not organized
involvement of instructor   ⟷   no instructor involved
involvement of institution   ⟷   no institution involved
of longer duration   ⟷   of shorter duration
communicated set of knowledge,   ⟷   smaller blocks of knowledge,
  skills and competences   skills and competences
public   ⟷   individual
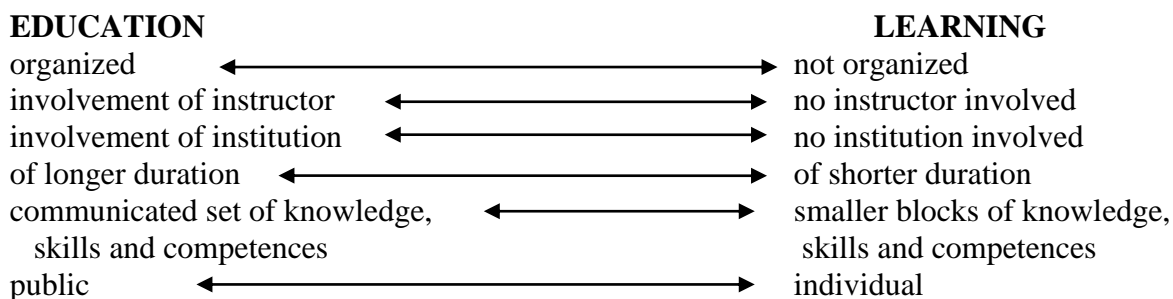
Illustration 1. Comparison of concepts "Education" and "Learning" (made by Rusakova based on definitions (Tight, 2002:17 [83], Jarvis, 2001:185 [40])

It is important to note, that to some extent the terms "education" and "learning" may be used interchangeably as there are instances of both terms that can be described by the same characteristics (see Illustration 1). However it is not correct to use the both terms as synonyms. Using "education" instead of "learning" would underestimate the role of individuals in lifelong learning. This results in a too superficial understanding on how learning might best be promoted and supported, inter alia, through governmental measures. Other circumstances in which learning occurs, such as e.g. informal learning, will be ignored or marginalized, especially, as learning occurring through formal and nonformal learning activities is easier to prove, at least by such graspable objects, in post-structural sense, as an achieved certificate in the result. Such misinformed and inaccurate interpretation of the concept lifelong learning may lead to an opportunity loss, and hinder the human and social development. It will set inappropriate boundaries to the recognizable contexts where learning can occur. Keeping this in mind it is more appropriate to use the term "learning" instead of the term "education".

Lifelong learning became the key topic of educational policy at the turn of previous century. At the meeting of the Education Committee at Ministerial Level in 1996, OECD prepared a report "Lifelong Learning for all", which stated that :"the new concept of lifelong learning has several features that give it an operational significance for education and training [Rusakova's note: education and training as two opposite dimensions of knowledge, skills and competences acquisition, see Illustration 2] policy in distinction from other approaches:

• the centrality of the learner and learner needs: that is, an orientation towards the "demand side" of education and training rather than just the supply of places;

• an emphasis on self-directed learning, and the associated requirement of "learning to learn" as an essential foundation for learning that continues throughout life;

• a recognition that learning takes place in many settings, both formal and informal; and

• a long-term view, that takes the whole course of an individual's life into consideration."[121].

EDUCATION		TRAINING
increasing breadth and depth	←→	increasing specificity
no practice required	←→	practice required
emphasis on rationale	←→	emphasis on action
takes place in a classroom	←→	takes place in environment similar to worksite
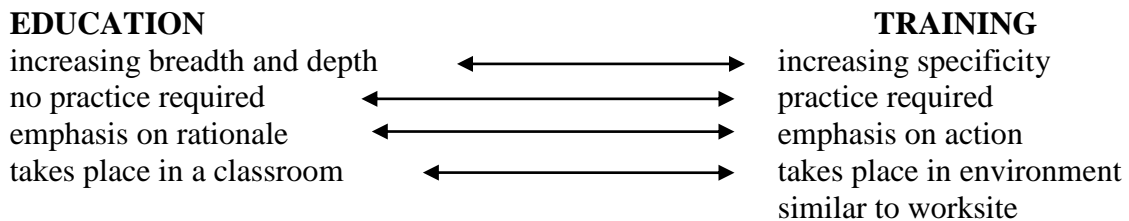
Illustration 2. Comparison of concepts "Education" and "Training" (made by Rusakova based on definitions (Tight, 2002:17) [83])

The report prepared in the same year by UNESCO extends the previous notion of "learning to be" with other three pillars of modern foundation of education-learning to live together, learning to know and learning to do (UNESCO, 1996) [26].

The authors of the Memorandum on Lifelong learning (EC, 2000:7) [119] have defined lifelong learning as "all learning as a seamless continuum 'from cradle to grave.'", where formal, non-formal and informal learning are the three basic categories of purposeful learning activity.

The authors of the abovementioned memorandum state (EC, 2000:10) [119]: "The continuum of lifelong and lifewide learning also means that the different levels and sectors of education and training systems, including non-formal domains, must work in close concertation with each other", thus denoting last but not least the current detachment of tertiary education from the nonformal and informal learning, the term "lifelong learning" drawing attention to time, the term "lifewide learning" drawing attention to the spread of learning, accentuating the complementarity of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

This detachment resulted from the major critics that the formal education experienced in late 60' ties. In 1973 J. R. Gass in the introductory part of the paper OECD (Gass, 1973:6) [42]criticizes the monopoly of higher education institutions and the resulting mass education:

"As long as university entry continues to be the only road to occupational and societal success, the headlong rush into higher education will continue, and the secondary schools will continue to be the anterooms of the universities". J.R.Gassis discerned that the increased amount of knowledge that is needed for preparing the modern person for the adult life is being transformed in increased period of uninterrupted learning (e.g. school and university), which results in late entry on labour market and "adult life" in general.

Already two years earlier, Ivan Illich, in his "Deschooling Society"(Illich, 1971) [180] criticizes "schools for discouraging "…other institutions from assuming educational tasks" (e.g. formal institutions are holding a monopoly), as well as reprimands the enormous increase in funding to education system that leads to less impressive results over years. He calls formal education ""the reproductive organ of a consumer society" and challenges the assumption that "valuable knowledge is a commodity". It is concluded that according to I. Illich :"The institutionalization of education is considered to institutionalize society and conversely that ideas for de-institutionalizing education may be a starting point for a de-institutionalized society."

However, even though the initial harsh critic of the higher education institutions, Kallen and Bengtsson in the OECD report (Kallen D.; Bengtsson J.[OECD], 1973:24) [42] outline the role of higher education in the "recurrent learning" and require changes in higher education, that would " …make it an educational service available to all, at every age, wherever and whenever required." Kallen and Bengtsson state that there is a need for ".. a more flexible post secondary system (that) " keeps open recurrent opportunities for adults,… enables necessary movement between education, work and leisure." Kallen and Bengtsson further discuss the high level of students' expectations regarding their future professional level and its remuneration and that the discrepancy between supply and demand of highly qualified manpower can lead to a spontaneous decrease of enrolment in higher education or a more severe selection in higher education. Kallen and Bengtsson question(Kallen D.; Bengtsson J.[OECD], 1973:10) [42] whether:" a continuous process of schooling, from pre-primary through primary, secondary and higher education (is) the best way to prepare all individuals for their future role in society and to provide optimal opportunities for self-development"." These discussions shifted attention from higher education institutions to alternative education providers and strengthened their position on the education arena. As follows, for example, in Latvia, nowadays often both the nonformal and informal learning is mentioned in relation to the adult education specifically [168], the term adult education even sometimes seems to be treated as a synonym to lifelong learning [176].

Whereas the term adult education as already suggested by its name is characterized by a broad array of educational activities engaged in specifically by adults, whose needs are often different from those of the younger persons as the educational background of both age groups, in this rapidly developing knowledge society, differs substantially.

Not surprisingly that approximately 2-3 decades later, it is necessary to underscore in Europe the role of the higher education institutions in creating the knowledge economy and in providing lifelong learning. The universities are being referred to as "having central role" (EC, 2003:I) [100], "playing major role" (Oosterlinck, [OECD], 2003:1) [56], "central actors" (Bramwell, Wolfe, 2008:1) [13]. Lifelong learning has not had a prominent place on the practical agendas of many higher education institutions. Remedying this lack will be one of the most important challenges to higher education in the years to come (Bergan, 2006:17) [7].

Also on its homepage, lastly updated in March 2010, the European Commission stresses the function of higher education in creating a knowledge-based society:"Higher education plays an essential role in society, creating new knowledge, transferring it to students and fostering innovation". It also states that:"Europe has around 4,000 higher education institutions, with over 19 million students and 1.5 million staff. Some European universities are amongst the best in the world, but overall potential is not used to the full. Curricula are not always up-to-date, not enough young people go to university after finishing school and not enough adults have ever attended university. European universities often lack the management tools and funding to match their ambitions" [115]. Based on this the European Commission concludes, that:"Given the closely connected roles of universities in education, research and innovation, the modernisation of higher education in Europe is crucial in an increasingly global and knowledge-based economy".

As follows from the abovementioned, unless there are reforms conducted the potential of the higher education institutions with regard to their contribution to creating the knowledge-based society remains untapped.
The Higher Education Modernisation Agenda (EC, 2006:5) [105], communicated in 2006, declares, that: "A major effort should be made to achieve the core Bologna reforms by 2010 in all EU countries: comparable qualifications; flexible, modernised curricula at all levels which correspond to the needs of the labour market; and trustworthy quality assurance systems" and that (EC, 2006:8) [105]:" a much clearer commitment by universities to lifelong learning opportunities is required", drawing a conclusion, that (EC, 2006:9) [105] "It will help universities … to convince society, governments and the private sector that they are

worth investing in". "This increasing focus on assessment and accountability (accountability measures are an attempt to assert more direct public control over higher education) has powered a shift away from prestige-based concepts of institutional excellence, in which size of endowments, accomplishments or credentials of faculty, or types of programs, for example, were assumed to be indicators of institutional quality or effectiveness, and also away from curriculum-based models that emphasize what is presented, toward learning-based models which emphasize what students know and can actually do. The emerging measureof institutional excellence is how well institutions develop student talents and abilities, i.e., student learning outcomes" (Astin, 1993, 2002 [5]).

There are many stakeholders such as higher education providers that are still able to improve their contribution to progressing the society towards lifelong learning. However their involvement may be impeded also by the unwishful interpretation of the ideological content of the term lifelong learning by both the policy makers and policy implementers, such as in abovementioned cases when the term lifelong learning is limited to e.g. concept of adult education.

There are also different visions and models of lifelong learning, just as there are many different visions of the knowledge economy. The Human Capital theory that came up with the concept "economic value of education" in late 50s and early 60s is the unifying element (Becker, 1964, 1975, 1993 [6]). This theory demonstrates the interdependency of investments in education and the resulting economic growth, thus underlining the modern understanding of liaison between lifelong learning and the knowledge economy. "In the transition to a knowledge economy, an efficient, nationwide, lifelong learning system is an important building block for all countries at all levels of development" (World Bank Institute, 2007) [143].

As stated by the World Bank experts, four features of the knowledge economy have far ranging implications for education and training [144]:

- Knowledge is being developed and applied in new ways;

- Product cycles are shorter and the need for innovation is greater;

- Trade is increasing worldwide, increasing competitive demands on producers;

- Small and medium sized enterprises in the service sector have become increasingly important players, in terms of both economic growth and employment.

In Europe this interrelation is strengthened by the Lisbon Strategy, which sets the aim for the EU "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion," by 2010, as well as by "giving higher priority to lifelong learning as a basic component of the European social model" [132].

Also the successor strategy for Europe's development – Europe 2020 [133] – continues the earlier set development path, emphasizing as the priority smart, sustainable and inclusive economy.

Knowing the set development direction the question arises on how to measure the performance of a country in these two dimensions – knowledge-based economy and lifelong learning.

According to the World Bank Institute the knowledge economy rests on four pillars of knowledge (World Bank Institute, 2001)[145]:

- Economic and institutional regime: the country' s economic and institutional regime must provide incentives for the efficient use of existing and new knowledge and the flourishing of entrepreneurship;

- Education and skills: the country' s people need education and skills that enable them to create and share, and to use it well;

- Information and communication infrastructure: a dynamic information infrastructure to facilitate the effective communication, dissemination, and processing of information;

- Innovation system: the country' s innovation system - firms, research centers, universities, consultants, and other organizations must be capable of tapping the growing stock of global knowledge, assimilate and adapt it to local needs, and create new technology.

These pillars of knowledge are part of the Knowledge Assessment Methodology that allows the World Bank to create several indexes for measuring how a country compares with other countries on various aspects of the knowledge economy.

The most commonly cited of the KAM's several indexes is the Knowledge Economy Index (KEI)—a broad measure of the overall level of preparedness of a country or region for the knowledge economy (World Bank Institute, 2001) [145]. There are three knowledge indicators for the pillar "Education and skill of population", that are used to compile the KEI: adult literacy rate, gross secondary enrollment rate, gross tertiary enrollment rate. It is

obvious that formal education indicators prevail in this index. On the homepage of the World Bank [146] it is possible to compile own scorecards, including additional knowledge indicators. Stressing the importance of ICT in the knowledge economy, one can compile own scorecard by applying the Variables of ICT, such as Internet bandwidth, Internet users etc. Also here, among the variables of education the formal education indicators prevail – average years of schooling, Internet access in schools, TIMSS, PISA. Such traditional measures of educational progress do not capture important dimensions of lifelong learning. However, according to OECD – "school failure is a major deterrent to achieving lifelong learning for all" (OECD, 1996) [121]. As one of the indicators, that might include data on non-formal and informal education might be the "public spending on education as % of GDP", but only in the case that there is public funding available for supporting such " untraditional" and rather "hard to measure the profit" learning activities. An important indicator of lifelong accumulated knowledge (including the non-formal and informal education) could be another indicator included in the list - "life expectancy at birth". However this indicator includes the lifelong and not that much of the lifewide learning dimension..Also other sets of variables consider the formal education only – thus the "Gender" set considers 2 (formal) education variables out of 5 – secondary and tertiary enrollment of females.

Rusakova concludes that according to the World Bank methodology at the moment the knowledge economy is measured mainly by indicators derived from data on formal education (mainly secondary level). Apparently, the reason is not the case that the measuring methodology of nonformal and informal learning is still somewhat lagging behind, as there are several Lifelong Learning Indexes, containing elaborated and refined indicators, already available, but none of them is internationally applied Thus since 2006 Canadian Council on Learning annually measures Canada' s lifelong learning progress across its communities through Composite Learning Index (CLI) [182]. The index is based on the four pillars of lifelong learning identified by UNESCO:

- learning to be (involves activities that foster personal development (body, mind and spirit) and contribute to creativity, personal discovery and an appreciation of the inherent value provided by these pursuits);

- learning to live together (involves the development of social skills and values such as respect and concern for others, social and inter-personal skills and an appreciation of the diversity);

- learning to know (involves the development of knowledge and skills that are needed to function in the world. These skills include literacy, numeracy and critical thinking);

- learning to do (involves the acquisition of skills that are often linked to occupational success, such as computer training, managerial training and apprenticeships).

The 17 indicators and 26 specific measures that constitute the CLI are derived from these four pillars.

Ireland is another country that aspires to create its own Lifelong Learning Index. In 2006 and 2007 the Learning Ireland (the leading provider of information about classes and courses in Ireland in every area of education [183]-including the nonformal) has prepared and published report on conducted survey named "Learning Ireland's Lifelong Learning Index". The data collection is organized in a form of survey, where 40 questions are classified in four blocks: Previous Education Experience, Future Education Plans, Paying for Further Learning, Personal Information.

Allegedly, the deficiency of common international Lifelong Learning Index is based on the fact that not that many countries are involved in collecting and compiling data aimed at detecting the level of involvement of society in non-formal and informal learning, but appearance of such index on the global arena is just a matter of time.

The impact of knowledge on the social conditions of the contemporary society will provide stimulus for a wider acceptance of the idea of promoting the lifelong learning and gathering respective data for the progress monitoring.

Thus recently an initiative emerged to create a Europe-wide Lifelong Learning Index. In 2008 ELLI (European Lifelong Learning Indicators) Development Team - a group of international institutes and researchers, including the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission in Ispra (Italy), the Centre for Survey Research and Methodology (GESIS-ZUMA) in Mannheim (Germany), the Canadian Council on Learning in Ottawa (Canada), the Interuniversity Research Centre for Public Services (CRISP) in Milan (Italy) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung have compiled a conceptual framework on how to build the operational model for measuring lifelong learning in the EU Member States [112]. The Development Team has extended the UNESCO's four pillars of lifelong learning by more indicators than the Canadian Council on Learning applies in its CLI. The expanded list of indicators, that includes such indicators as e.g. "reading (books)", "Participation in online social networks/communities", has been assessed by international experts in the scientific field of Lifelong Learning through online survey. As a result the weighted importance of each indicator has been identified. Now it is up to the Development Team to decide, which of the indicators shall be included in the final list of indicators.

Of course, the detection of adequate indicators requires further research and more or less common understanding of not only the constituents of the alternative learning forms, but – above all – a joint understanding of the respective terms.

The policy makers across the developed world share a lot of mutually similar rhetorics, however this is where it typically ends. Under closer inspection the visions of lifelong learning and knowledge society differ considerably. In some versions the main ambition is the focus on ICT infrastructure and improved institutional regime, the others stress the importance and responsibility of individual development- "..in their White papers[38] on lifelong learning Ireland suggests 'a critical spirit', Spain supports 'values and attitudes associated with citizenship', and Denmark advances 'sustainable development' as the major skills and competences to develop in young people" (Longworth, 2003:113) [48].

From the abovementioned Rusakova deduces that at present due to the missing joint understanding and respectively unavailable agreement on common measuring methodology it is rather hard to benchmark the development of each country towards achieving knowledge economy by means of LLL-advancements in respect to non-formal and informal learning. This impedes the success monitoring and supervised development of knowledge society.

However the EHEA has the advantage of common policy papers, therefore the initiative of creating a common European Lifelong Learning Index in the future is a rather feasible task.

The creation of the EHEA by 2010 was set as a goal in the Bologna Declaration, which was signed in 1999 at a meeting of the ministers responsible for higher education of 29 European countries. This launched the Bologna Process [184].

In order to foster the aspired development towards lifelong learning oriented society it is necessary to introduce: "a comprehensive new European approach to valuing learning", "focusing on the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning as well as on the transfer and mutual recognition of formal certificates and diplomas" (EC,2001) [99].This stresses the importance of recognition practice in promoting the lifelong learning. Incorporating both terms – 'valuing learning' and 'recognition' one comes up to the mission of the recognition (with regard to an individual) to ensure that a person' s knowledge, skills, and wider competences are visible so that they can combine and

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[38] documents containing proposals for Community action in a specific area. They sometimes follow a green paper published to launch a consultation process at European level

build on learning achieved and person can be rewarded for it, which is an essential prerequisite for individual's commitment to lifelong learning.

The next chapter discusses the contribution of recognition in promoting the lifelong learning, introduces the reader to the main common standards and guidelines that enable mutual trust among parties and thus increases the sustainability of recognition. The chapter also lists the main principles of mutual recognition of qualifications in EHEA.

2. Recognition of Qualifications - a Prerequisite for a genuine EHEA

In May 1998 ministers of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom adopted the Sorbonne Declaration [128], anticipating the creation of "Europe of knowledge", where "education and training throughout life becomes a clear obligation".

Sorbonne Declaration provided the necessary push towards the Bologna Declaration and indicated already in 1998 the main goals of the European Higher Education Area - increasing the attractiveness of the area and alleviating the mobility within the area.

CEDEFOP glossary [192], defines the key terms used in the field of education and training policy in Europe. According to it (Tissot, 2004) recognition is categorised as either

(a) formal recognition: the process of granting official status to skills and competences either through the:

 award of qualifications (certificates, diploma or titles); or

 grant of equivalence, credit units or waivers, validation of gained skills and/or competences; and/or

(b) social recognition: the acknowledgement of the value of skills and/or competences by economic and social stakeholders.

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The formal recognition can be categorized according to its purpose. (see Illustration 3).
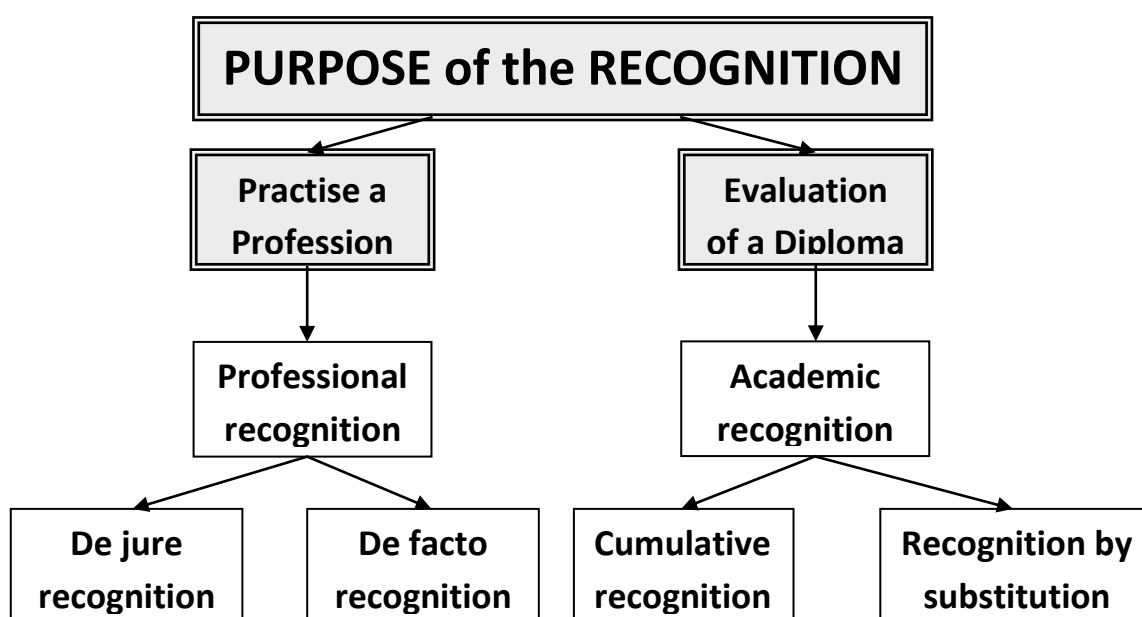
Illustration 3. Formal Recognition according to its purpose (made by Rusakova based on definitions (Rauhvargers, 2002:5) [62])

As it is to be seen from the Illustration 3- there are two main cases (Rauhvargers, 2002:5) [62] of recognition depending upon the purpose for which recognition is sought. Due to the principal difference in purpose, academic and professional recognition are dealt with by different legal acts (national and international), carried out by different bodies and different bodies take the final decision.

1. *Academic* recognition is the recognition of a foreign qualification for the purpose of further studies. In academic recognition evaluators' main task is to assess whether the applicant is capable of continuing studies in the chosen direction and at the chosen level. There are two sub-cases of academic recognition − cumulative academic recognition and academic recognition by substitution. *Cumulative* academic recognition - the applicant has completed studies for a full qualification (degree, diploma) in one country, and applies for studies for the next subsequent qualification in another country. Academic recognition *by substitution* i.e. recognition of applicant's studies abroad (e.g. within the framework of EU education programmes in order to substitute a part of the programme of studies in the host country.

2. *Professional* recognition is the recognition of a foreign qualification for the purpose of employment in a certain profession. In professional recognition it should be found out whether the knowledge and professional skills of the applicant are sufficient to pursue a particular profession in the receiving country. There are two sub-cases of professional recognition - de jure and de facto professional recognition. *De jure* professional recognition − recognition for professional purposes in *regulated professions* i.e. in those cases in which either the education leading to a profession or the pursuit of the particular professional activity are regulated by legal acts. *De facto* professional recognition − recognition of a foreign qualification for professional purposes in those cases where the professional activity or the appropriate education is not regulated by legal acts.

It is important to avoid misunderstanding, as the terms de jure and de facto recognition can be applied in a more general context. De facto recognition of diplomas is the recognition in practice, but not necessarily ordained by law, de jure recognition is recognition according to what is ordained. When common standards exist, as in the case of diploma recognition, it is necessary to make sure that the common standards are obeyed, e.g. that the results of the de jure recognition are identical to the results of the de facto recognition. Therefore even more important it is to work towards transparency of recognition system in EHEA. EHEA is a set of different countries, having different education systems and having

initially diverse recognition practices due to the political and legal system' s peculiarities, the common standards are there to ensure that mutual recognition is possible.

In terms of political vision, mutual recognition is vulnerable to criticism by both advocates of diversity and unity. "Mutual recognition may hinder diversity, threatening local traditions as long-standing but fragile social constructs. At the other end of the spectrum, some will argue that an increasingly integrated economic space should aim towards common rules." (Nicolaodis, 1997) [55].

The transparency of recognition system adds on to the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA, and indeed, academic recognition of degrees, diplomas, exams, courses and other qualifications is a prerequisite for increased mobility. The reciprocal recognition after all has formed the cornerstone of major EU mobility programs such as Erasmus and promotes the free labour movement. The mutual recognition eliminates the impact of differences in national regulatory systems and promotes fair competition among at least EHEA nationals.

A transparency tool has been elaborated by a joint EU, Council of Europe and UNESCO working party to aid both in academic and in professional recognition – the Joint European Diploma Supplement. In 2007 Bologna Process Stocktaking demonstrated, that more than half of the 46 European countries involved in Bologna Process provided graduates with Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in widely spoken language. If those countries that issue Diploma Supplement upon request are added to the count, graduates receive the Diploma Supplement in two-thirds of the Bologna countries (Rauhvargers, 2008) [63]. The Diploma Supplement is in fact a standardized format for provision of relevant information, which should be issued together with the qualification (degree, diploma, certificate, etc.). The main features of the DS standardized format are the following:

- information regarding the level of the qualification, the type and status of the awarding institution and the programme followed by the applicant is described;

- the information regarding workload, contents and results, is provided together with important additional information, e.g. grading scale applied, thus easing the work of recognition authorities. Where ECTS is used, ECTS transcript can replace this part of the Diploma Supplement;

- the function of the qualification within the national framework is clearly stated, both as to admission to further studies and to the professional status of the holder;

- the information is organized in such a way that it is possible to locate the qualification in question within the framework of the national education system of the country where the qualification has been issued. For this reason a short description of the education system of that country is included.

The second standard in the area of recognition, the Recommendation on Criteria And Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee in 2001), states also that in case that the qualifications of approximately equal level show considerable differences in terms of recognition criteria, such as content, profile and learning outcomes, it may lead to the partial recognition or non-recognition of the foreign qualifications (see Illustration 4)[116].

The recognition practice has often been focused to evaluating such input characteristics as curriculum contents, course programmes, duration, textbooks covered, etc., all of which are strongly influenced by local traditions.

Shifting the focus from input characteristics to learning outcomes, the recognition of lifelong learning or other non-traditional qualifications may be facilitated and partial recognition granted. "As the national frameworks will be based upon learning outcomes, it will be much easier to focus credential evaluation of those particular learning outcomes which are relevant to the purpose for which recognition is sought rather than comparing more formal aspects of the qualification (Rauhvargers, 2006:36) " [65].
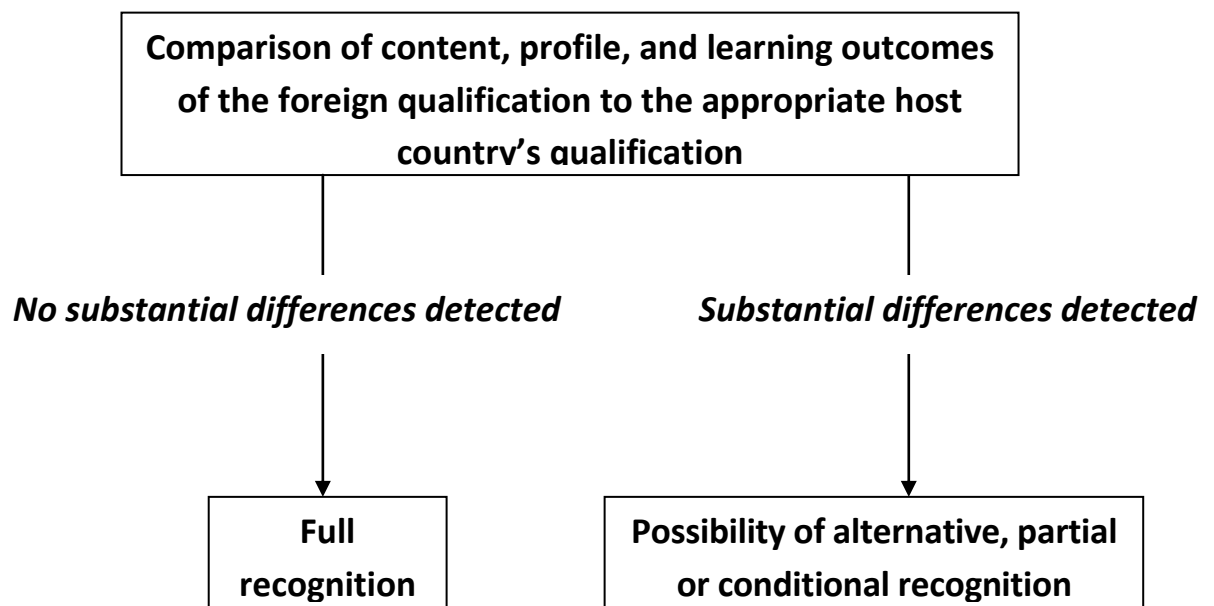
Illustration 4. Types of Recognition (made by Rusakova based on Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, 2001 [116])

The *alternative* recognition might include both full, partial and *conditional* (e.g. full or partial recognition of the foreign qualification subject to the applicant successfully taking additional examinations or aptitude tests) recognition practices, but also it could be recognition of the foreign qualification as comparable to a qualification of the host country, but not to that indicated by the applicant (Rauhvargers, 2006:9) [65].

The Bologna Process is the framework and the reference point for the necessary reforms in higher education in order to establish the EHEA. Today, the Bologna Process encompasses 47 countries, all of which are party to the European Cultural Convention. In addition, the competent public authorities of all 47 countries have committed in writing to the goals and policies of the Bologna Process.

Ministerial conferences of the Bologna Process are held every two years, and each successive conference has set important new policies. Starting from Berlin Ministerial Conference in September 2003 [131], it is possible to notice that two main areas of policy focus emerge. The both areas that call for a structural reform are so exquisite for reaching the common goals, that further every ministerial meeting deals either directly or indirectly with these areas.

It is not hard to guess, that, taking into account the crucial role of recognition in ensuring transfer to lifelong learning society, the first one is connected to degree structures, qualifications frameworks and recognition thereof. The second area of importance is the quality assurance.

To verify this impression Rusakova has conducted a content analysis of Declarations and Communiqués (8 documents in total [184]) that earmark the Bologna Process (see Table 1). To conduct the content analysis the author has selected the keywords: Qualification Framework, Quality Assurance, Recognition and more specifically - Recognition of Prior Learning and Learning Outcomes. The terms nonformal and informal learning were not included, as it is assumed, that "recognition of prior learning" is an umbrella term and includes not only the recognition of formal learning, but also recognition of nonformal and informal learning, even though the formal learning recognition practice is well described, as opposite to the recognition of nonformal and informal learning, which is even almost nonexistent in some of the EHEA countries.

It is possible to observe that an evolution of terms has happened throughout years 1998-2010. This has somewhat impeded the task of content analysis. The author has decided to tackle this issue by not including neither predecessor terms nor the ideological "twins" of

the terms. Also in the case when it is understandable, that the idea expressed in a sentence corresponds to the ideological content of the term , even though still rather far from the final idea, e.g. "qualification framework"[51], it is not added to the appearance frequency.

In case of the denomination "quality assurance" the author counted both the term "quality assurance" and its derivatives: quality assurance agencies, quality assurance systems, quality assurance networks, European Quality Assurance Forum, European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, European Quality Assurance Register. The appearance of the term together with the derivatives is to be seen within the brackets on the right next to the explicit term appearance.

Taking into account the different objects the recognition can address, the frequency of the term has been counted rather freely. The term "Lisbon Recognition Convention" has been regarded as too specific and therefore has been placed in brackets as a derivative of the term. The evolution of ideological complexity of a term is especially easy to notice in the case of term "recognition". In Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 the term recognition is still mentioned in a rather abstract way. Within the declaration the ministers mention the term 4 times in total, twice they speak of international recognition, once – of mutual recognition and once – of external recognition. Just seven years later in Bergen a "specialization" of the term recognition is already very well observable – the ministers speak of recognition of accreditation, recognition of degrees and study periods, recognition of foreign qualifications, recognition of prior learning and recognition of joint degrees. Two years later, in London Communique even more concepts appear: recognition tools and procedures, fair recognition, recognition of non-formal and informal learning, recognition of qualifications and recognition authorities, in ministerial conference in Leuven – full recognition (as opposite to partial recognition, which is granted by the recognition authorities more readily).

The denomination "Recognition" includes the concept "recognition of prior learning". The denomination "Recognition of Prior Learning" has also been illustrated separately.

Abbreviations such as e.g. ESG (European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance) have not anywhere been included as derivatives of the term.

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[51] In Bologna Declaration: "*objective, which we consider to be of primary relevance in order to establish the EHEA …: Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate.*"

Table 1. Dynamics of Appearance Frequency of Selected Keywords in Declarations and Communiqués of Bologna Process, 1998-2010

	Qualification Framework	Quality Assurance	Recognition	Recognition of Prior Learning	Learning Outcomes
Sorbonne Declaration (1998)	0	0	4	0	0
Bologna Declaration (1999)	0	1	1	0	0
Prague Communiqué (2001)	1	4 (9)	4	0	0
Berlin Communiqué (2003)	5	8 (11)	6 (8)	1	2
Bergen Communiqué (2005)	10	8 (13)	11 (13)	2	1 (2)
London Communiqué (2007)	14	10 (16)	21 (23)	5	4 (5)
Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009)	5	2 (7)	6	1	4
Budapest-Vienna Declaration (2010)	1	1 (2)	2	0	0

It is indeed apparent that all of the terms selected by the author have been lately of an interest among high level decision makers. The appearance frequency dynamics of the chosen keywords show a clear augmenting tendency from year 2001 till 2009. It seems that there is an impressive drop of interest in 2009, however it is only technically so. Firstly, the ministerial conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve took place shortly before EHEA was established oficially in 2010) and taking stock of previous developments was one of the main tasks on the agenda. Also it was the point for setting the priorities and goals for the EHEA beyond 2010. Apparently it is also assumed that the community is finally well educated on the commonly used concepts in Bologna Process.

It is also quite understandable that the Budapest - Vienna Declaration is moderate in mentioning the keywords – the ministers met intrinsically to launch the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as envisaged in the Bologna Declaration of 1999.

Even though a major progress has been made in recognition and quality assurance since the ministerial conference in Berlin, and the content analysis might indicate "a drop of interest" -the issues are still up-to-date. In 2010 the previously mentioned areas - qualifications frameworks, recognition and quality assurance are still regarded as priority areas [184]-as part of the 2009-2012 work plan, the Bologna Follow-up Group set up

working groups on both Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition, with Quality Assurance being one of the two continued actions from before.

The quality assurance as reform area is chosen deliberately to associate with the qualifications frameworks and recognition areas not only because of its undeniable contribution to the common aims of the EHEA- mobility, attractiveness etc. Another important point of reference is the necessity to ensure the longevity of the ultimately established mutual recognition: "Confidence and trust cannot be taken for granted. Once achieved, recognition or confidence must be nurtured and maintained. Achieving and maintaining confidence and trust can be perceived as a perpetual process. At the political level there must be willingness to promote and support this process, by ensuring that the requisite legal instruments are in place and by willingness to provide the necessary economic resources up to a reasonable limit" (Stenback, 1996:148) [80].

There is willingness to promote and support Bologna process at a political level. However the Bologna process has been criticized for its rapidly evolving high level policy agendas set at two-year intervals that make a hard to follow pace for the lower units of policy implementers (Neave and Maassen, 2007:137) [49]: "... Bologna process advances at various speeds . . . There is a "high speed track," represented by the statements of intent and the continuous adding of new items by each succeeding Ministerial Conference. However, one gets a less complacent vision of progress achieved when attention turns to implementation, which moves at a very different pace, as most of the progress reports admit, albeit reluctantly." Therefore – to make but one example, the Bologna stocktaking report from April 2009, four years after introducing ESG in Bergen, states: "the requirement to have carried out an assessment of the QA agency or at least to have fixed the date for such assessment shifted some countries from the "green" zone in 2007 to "yellow" in 2009. The fact that just 15 countries have organised assessment of their QA agency suggests that while the scheme of external QA has been widely implemented, in some countries it may not yet operate entirely in accordance with the ESG" (Rauhvargers, Deane, Pauwels, 2009:8) [66].

The overarching approach used within the EU for coordination in "sensitive" areas which fall within the full responsibility and competence of each Member State, such as employment, social protection, social inclusion, and last but not least – education, is the Open Method of Coordination [177]. This is coherently the coordination method applied for implementing Bologna Process that falls under category "education". Compared to the Community Method, which creates uniform rules that Member States must adopt, provides sanctions if they fail to do so, and involves court in case of disobedience, the Open Method of

Coordination is regarded as "soft law" (Schaefer 2006 [72], Trubek and Trubek 2005 [85], Copeland and ter Haar 2010 [20]) and produces conflicting accounts of its effectiveness within the member states.

The Open Method of Coordination is based principally on three action promoters:

- jointly identifying and defining objectives to be achieved (in Bologna Process adopted by the e.g. Ministers of Education);

- jointly established measuring instruments (statistics, indicators, guidelines, in Bologna Process e.g. ESG, Stocktaking indicators);

- benchmarking, i.e. comparison of the Member States' performance and exchange of best practices (in Bologna Process monitored by e.g. BFUG).

The main critics of "soft law" approach concerns the enactment of the policy- a specific task is imposed on the national policy-makers, and deadlines are set at which point national governments are expected to produce reports that can be fed back into European level OMC processes (Gornitzka, 2006) [33], which allow for "an exercise in symbolic politics where national governments repackage existing policies to demonstrate their apparent compliance with EU objectives"(Zeitlin, 2005:227) [92], stage for appearance of "naked emperor" (Chalmers and Lodge 2003:19) [137]. " The normative pressure stemming from a desire to look good or fear of being embarrassed may be a strong mechanism for converging with the European definition of good policies and striving for performing well on the indicators in cases where it is considered important to keep up with the "European Jones's". OMC processes would represent, in addition to a site of learning, a podium where badges of honour and shame are awarded through the presentation of national performance data in league tables and scoreboards" (Gornitzka, 2005:46) [34].

The EHEA with its many participating countries is characterised by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations, which often are fully known only to the locals.

Having in mind fair recognition of learners' qualification, at the Bergen Ministerial Conference in May 2005, Ministers responsible for higher education committed to elaborating national action plans for recognition, that should identify what is needed to improve the recognition of qualifications in their countries.

The part of the Bergen Communiqué related to recognition reads [136]:

"We will draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. These plans will form part of each country's national report for the next Ministerial Conference. We express

support for the subsidiary texts to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and call upon all national authorities and other stakeholders to recognise joint degrees awarded in two or more countries in the EHEA.

We see the development of national and European frameworks for qualifications as an opportunity to further embed lifelong learning in higher education. We will work with higher education institutions and others to improve recognition of prior learning including, where possible, non-formal and informal learning for access to, and as elements in, higher education programmes".

In order to support the ongoing reform process, several tools had been elaborated by the most reputable stakeholders on the higher education arena. Herewith also followed at the Bergen Ministerial Conference the shift from future plans to practical implementation - two standards had been adopted [185]:

- guidelines and standards for quality assurance and the request that ENQA, the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB elaborate further proposals concerning the suggested register of quality assurance agencies;

- an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area , with a commitment to elaborating national qualifications frameworks by 2010 – as well as to having launched work by 2007.

The standards allow for a common reference point to all participating countries and serve as guidelines in reaching the common aims.

The overreaching framework of qualifications for the EHEA, the so called European Qualifications Framework (EQF) "..acts as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning.

The EQF aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework. Individuals and employers will be able to use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems.

Agreed upon by the European institutions in 2008, the EQF is being put in practice across Europe. It encourages countries to relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF (recommended first target date - year 2010 [124]) so that all new qualifications issued from 2012 (second target date) carry a reference to an appropriate EQF level" [135].

In the area of quality assurance such agreed upon standards are the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) [129],

through which the consistency of quality assurance across the EHEA is planned to be improved "while respecting the diversity of national contexts and subject areas" [114].

Ever since this tool has been introduced, it has been subject to a wide range of discussions producing an equally wide range of viewpoints on clarity (e.g. Vinther-Jørgensen and Hansen, 2006:8) [87]. of the ESG purpose, content, terminology -" ... in discussions of quality and standards there is often confusion over the use of the terms. Quality is not the same as quality assurance, nor are standards and quality the same. Furthermore, quality and standards are both distinct from quality standards (Newton and Harvey 2007:229) [37]. etc.

At the time of ministerial conference in Bergen, specifically in the area of recognizing the qualifications a standard already existed and had been ratified– the Lisbon Recognition Convention (in full name - The Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the Europe Region. It was adopted at a diplomatic conference in April 1997 and Section III thereof explains the principles of fair recognition of qualifications. The Berlin Communiqe (in 2003) [179] underlines the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and it is agreed by the participating ministers, that it should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process.

Within 7 years after Berlin Communique, it has been ratified by 50 states, except for Greece, Monaco, and San Marino. It has been signed, but not ratified yet, by Italy. On the other hand, the Lisbon Recognition Convention has been ratified or signed by a number of countries outside of the EHEA. By August 2010, ratifications included those of Australia, Belarus, Holy Sea, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and New Zealand, while Canada and the United States have signed but not yet ratified the convention [103].

As already mentioned, recognition is important in promoting the lifelong learning. It ensures that person' s knowledge, skills, and wider competences are visible. The knowledge, skills, and competences can be attained through different forms of learning. Depending on the specific characteristics of different learning forms, such as e.g. formal, informal and nonformal learning, the ease of recognition of learning outcomes of different learning forms differs.

In order to be able to recognize learning outcomes such as knowledge, skills, and competences irrespectively to the learning form through which they have been attained, the knowledge, skills, and competences have to be translated to a 'common currency' (credits). that links them to qualifications.

In such a way the prior learning is translated into building blocks that can be combined for more purposeful lifelong learning.

However before that, it is necessary to prepare the educational infrastructure, e.g. transfer to learning outcomes based approach in teaching.The next chapter considers different learning forms in relation to their recognition, learning paths, as well as learning outcomes based approach and its practical implementation for the purpose of recognizing the prior learning.

3. Fostering Inclusion of Outcomes obtained through Different Learning Forms in National Qualifications Framework

As already discussed in the first chapter indexes such as Lifelong Learning Index are used for measuring whether society is making progress in achieving lifelong learning for all.

Society consists of individuals and the individual progress in learning is traditionally measured and proven by qualifications of various types.

Existing national qualifications systems are not necessarily adapted to a fast-changing knowledge economy. They need to be changed with respect to validating learning forms such as non-formal and informal learning. In the Table 2 the author has compiled at a glance definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning taken from recent documents of major international education policy players – OECD, EC, UNESCO. Acknowledging the fact that the basic policy forming document in European area within this respect – the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning is from year 2000, the author has added a more recent definition from CEDEFOP glossary. It is observable that later definitions have been expanded and contain expressions, concerning aspects such as presence or absence of organized and structured programs, learning objectives and recognition. The author will include those in criteria list when checking why these forms of learning are to be allocated in separate categories.

Table 2. Definitions of formal, nonformal and informal learning by OECD (2006), EC (2000), CEDEFOP (2004) and UNESCO (2005)

	OECD (2006) [122]	EC (2000) [119]	CEDEFOP (2004) [192]	UNESCO (2005) [140]
Formal learning	refers to learning through a programme of instruction in an educational institution, adult training centre or in the workplace, which is generally recognised in a qualification or a certificate. It is always organised and structured, and has learning objectives. From the learner's standpoint, it is always intentional.	takes place in education and training institutions, leading to recognized diplomas and qualifications.	learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (e.g. in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to validation and certification.	normally acquired through organised and structured programmes delivered via schools and other providers and is recognised (certificate and diplomas) by means of qualifications or part of qualifications.
Non-formal	refers to learning through a programme	does not typically lead to formalised	learning which is embedded in planned	acquired through organised

learning	but is not usually evaluated and does not lead to a certification. It is rather organised and can have learning objectives.	certificates. Non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups (such as in youth organisations, trades unions and political parties). It can also be provided through organisations or services that have been set up to complement formal systems (such as arts, music and sports classes or private tutoring to prepare for examinations).	activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). It is intentional from the learner's point of view and can be sometimes described as semi-structured learning. The learning outcomes may be validated and lead to certification.	programmes or courses but it is not typically recognised by means of qualifications nor does it lead to certification.
Informal learning	refers to learning resulting from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is never organised, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint. Often it is referred to as learning by experience or just as experience.	not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills.	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. It is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective and is also referred to as experiential or incidental/random learning. Its learning outcomes do not usually lead to certification but may be validated and certified in the framework of recognition of prior learning schemes.	acquired outside of organised programmes and courses and is picked up through daily activities relating to work, family, community, gender relations, village life, or leisure, sport and recreation. Informal learning is often referred to as experiential learning and can to a certain degree be understood as non-intentional and incidental. Terms like prior learning or prior experiential learning are also used pointing to validation of already acquired learning outcomes.

It is possible to notice in Table 3 that there is quite a lot of solidarity in defining the term formal learning. This demonstrates common understanding of the concept by major international education policy makers.

In agreement with their point of view the formal learning is being provided by education institutions that are often incorporated in clearly understandable, hierarchically constructed national qualification system. The system aims at building knowledge on basis of previously acquired knowledge, thus making the formal learning organized and structured. The clear structure and the coherent qualifications, as well as the recognized learning

outcomes make it easy for formal learning to become intentional from the learner's point of view.

Table 3. Definition of formal learning against selected aspects

FORMAL LEARNING	OECD (2006)	EC (2000)	CEDEFOP (2004)	UNESCO (2005)
Intentional vs. unintentional	always intentional	n/a	intentional	n/a
Organized & structured	yes	yes	yes	yes
Learning outcomes	qualification or a certificate	diplomas and qualifications	validation and certification	qualifications or part of qualifications
Recognition	yes	yes	typically yes	yes

There is less common ground with respect to defining the non-formal learning (see Table 4). As already mentioned in Chapter 1, the original version (Coombs, 1968) of non-formal education definition emerged in 1968 (Rogers 2004)[70]. It arose in the context of the widespread feeling that education was failing (e.g. Illich, 1973) and initially meant all education other than formal, including thus in the 'non-formal learning' concept the 'informal learning' as well. Therefore the limits of these both concepts are still rather blurry.

As stipulated in the definition by the EC (EC 2000) the non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace, organizations and services that are complementary to the formal education, but also through the activities of civil society organisations and groups. Many of the policy makers do not convey whether they believe it to be intentional or not, except for the (Cedefop 2004), which states, that non-formal learning is intentional as it is embedded in planned activities, even if not explicitly designated as learning activities. The opinion regarding the learning outcomes leads up to a one that can have learning objectives, but they are not typically recognized, however could be by means of qualifications or part of qualifications.

NON-FORMAL LEARNING	OECD (2006)	EC (2000)	CEDEFOP (2004)	UNESCO (2005)
Intentional vs. unintentional	n/a	n/a	intentional	n/a
Organized & structured	rather organised	partly yes	planned activities / semi-structured learning	organised programmes or courses
Learning outcomes	can have learning objectives	does not typically lead to formalised certificates	may be validated and lead to certification	could be recognised by means of qualifications or part of qualifications
Recognition	not usually evaluated and does not lead to a certification	not typically	partly yes	not typically recognised

The majority of policy makers agree that the informal learning is neither organized nor structured (see Table 5). Apparently the environment where the informal learning is picked up is through daily activities relating to work, family, community, gender relations, village life, or leisure, sport and recreation- basically everywhere.

Similarly like the non-formal learning the informal learning definitions are vaguer and there is less agreement upon basic features of it.

Table 5. Definition of informal learning against selected aspects

INFORMAL LEARNING	OECD (2006)	EC (2000)	CEDEFOP (2004)	UNESCO (2005)
Intentional vs. unintentional	never intentional	not necessarily intentional	in most cases unintentional	to a certain degree is understood as non-intentional and incidental
Organized & structured	never organised	n/a	not organised or structured	outside of organised programmes and courses
Learning outcomes	no set objective in terms of learning outcomes	n/a	do not usually lead to certification	possible
Recognition	n/a	may well not be recognised	may be validated and certified in the framework of recognition of prior learning schemes	through prior learning or prior experiential learning

Thus it seems that the policy makers have no real common agreement with respect to the intentional vs. unintentional aspect of the informal learning - there are different degrees observable in the definitions up to which informal learning is believed to be intentional. OECD (2006) is most harsh in their declaration – according to OECD the informal learning is

never intentional.EC and UNESCO allow for more playground within this respect. However also in this case it is possible to notice some grading – informal learning is ' in most cases unintentional' (EC 2000, CEDEFOP 2004) vs. informal learning is 'to a certain degree understood as non-intentional and incidental' (UNESCO 2005).

What concerns the learning outcomes and the recognition– there are no set objectives in terms of learning outcomes, however they are possible. The learning outcomes do not usually lead to certification, however they may be validated and certified in the framework of recognition of prior learning schemes.

Making the synopsis (see Table 6), the formal learning is intentional, structured, leads to recognized qualifications. The non-formal learning is also intentional, however only partly structured and does not typically lead to formalized certificates. The informal learning is only partly intentional, not structured; usually does not lead to certificates.

Table 6. Definitions of formal, nonformal and informal learning - summary

Formal learning	intentional	structured	leads to recognized qualifications
Non-formal learning	intentional	partly structured	does not typically lead to formalized certificates
Informal learning	partly intentional	not structured	usually does not lead to certificates

The common viewpoint is that the non-formal and informal learning takes place outside formal education institutions. However understanding the limitations of each learning form can be a bit more complex than it might seem in first place. This is also one of the reasons, why author did not include in the criteria list the 'place of learning', even though the policy makers do like to express themselves on it (e.g. EC 2000). Consider for example the question -is all learning that takes place during formal learning (e.g. in formal educational institutions) to be defined as formal learning? What about distance learning? However not everything is clear to the bottom also in the case of the criteria 'intended vs. unintended' learning that is recently included in the definitions of leading international education policy makers.

Hence (Werquin, 2007:146) [89], the necessity is suggested to create "a fourth type of learning . semi-formal learning." He further explains:" that seems to be happening quite often and the recognition processes have identified: individuals often learn way beyond any given initial learning objectives. They learn about themselves, about team working about behaving

in groups, whether heterogeneous or homogenous. It is close to the concept of informal learning but it is happening in the context of a formal learning activity, as it were, and this is the value of it". However the creation of such fourth type becomes absolute, if the learning is considered as metacognitive process.

Already in 1977 Simkins [70] pointed out that the similarity between both formal and non-formal learning is that they both are structured.

There seems to be a consensus that also outside the formal education and training system (formal learning) the individuals acquire skills, knowledge and competences. However, there is little or no consensus about value that should be given to this learning, about who should decide what is valued, and about the best ways to define the standards for the assessment of the outcomes of this learning. According to the definitions outcomes of all forms of learning may become recognized. Ideally they can become integrated in the existing qualification system. The link between lifelong learning and qualifications systems is evident from two features of lifelong learning: its systemic nature and its emphasis on all forms of learning, formal, non-formal and informal.

In 2001 [18] the OECD launched an activity to explore the links between the qualifications system and lifelong learning. The purpose of the activity was to investigate how different national qualifications systems influence the overall volume of lifelong learning, its quality and distribution among different classes of learners. Based on this investigation, the activity aimed to identify what actions countries can take in designing and managing their qualifications system to promote lifelong learning. In 2007 OECD in cooperation with CEDEFOP, EC, ILO, WB etc. had evaluated the drivers of change that allow strengthening the link between qualification systems and lifelong learning. The results of the research suggest 20 mechanisms that can be used to optimise the impact of lifelong learning policies.

1. Communicating returns to learning for qualification.

2. Recognising skills for employability.

3. Establishing qualifications frameworks.

4. Increasing learner choice in qualifications.

5. Clarifying learning pathways.

6. Providing credit transfer.

7. Increasing flexibility in learning programmes leading to qualifications.

8. Creating new routes to qualifications.

9. Lowering cost of qualification.

10. Recognising non-formal and informal learning.

11. Monitoring the qualifications system.

12. Optimising stakeholder involvement in the qualifications system.

13. Improving needs analysis methods so that qualifications are up-to-date.

14. Improving qualification use in recruitment.

15. Ensuring qualifications are portable.

16. Investing in pedagogical innovation.

17. Expressing qualifications as learning outcomes.

18. Improving co-ordination in the qualifications system.

19. Optimising quality assurance.

20. Improving information and guidance about qualifications systems.

Combining the different ways of analysing the effect of mechanisms leads to identify some particularly powerful, highly ranked strong mechanisms, playing not just supporting role but being able to induce major changes [18]: Providing credit transfer; Optimising stakeholder involvement in the qualifications system; Recognising non-formal and informal learning; Establishing a qualifications framework; and Creating new routes to qualifications.

Majority of these selected mechanisms can be used to optimise the impact of lifelong learning policies - Recognising non-formal and informal learning; Establishing a qualifications framework; Providing credit transfer; Creating new routes to qualifications – are included in the focus of this thesis.

The first two mechanisms have already been discussed in previous chapters in short. As already pointed out in the first chapter currently the qualification frameworks are rather robust, serving mainly the needs of formal education. The non-formal and informal learning has to be recognized and its outcomes have to become integrated in qualification frameworks.

One of the means is through translating the competencies and skills obtained through alternate forms of learning into common currency – credits. Credit transfer can become a particularly useful means of achieving lifelong learning in an efficient way. It enables people to gain credit for existing skills so as not to repeat work, and to use one qualification as a stepping stone to another, thus avoiding the trap of "dead end" qualifications. For credit transfer to work, policy makers need to put a value on a specific amount of learning or a specific skill, so that it can be transferred to another qualification.

Recognising what people know or can do – regardless of where they have acquired these skills, knowledge and competences – is indeed likely to be a strong incentive for them to resume learning formally as they will not have to start from scratch. This also cuts the

traditional costs (time, tuition fees, transportation costs, etc.) and opportunity costs (forgone earnings, etc.) of formal learning. Cost is often an issue, particularly for the low-skilled who are also generally the lower-paid.

One relatively simple and low-cost way of improving the overall skills base of the workforce without having to create new qualifications is create new routes to access existing qualifications. For example, if a particular type of technical education is only open to school-leavers with a specific high-school diploma, it could also be opened up to adults already working if they can demonstrate sufficient basic technical knowledge (Coles, Werquin, 2007) [19].

In order to be able to create new routes to qualifications, it is necessary to know the existing pathways.

At this point it is necessary to specify what is meant by 'flexible learning pathways' or an alternative term 'flexible learning routes' in relation to recognition of prior learning.

It is necessary to point that by "learning pathways" is not meant the chosen route, taken by a learner through a range of (commonly) e-learning activities, which allows them to build knowledge progressively.

Often the term 'flexible learning pathways' is confused with or limited to another concept- "flexible learning", which: ".. includes the sorts of learning involved in open and distance learning provision, but additionally relates to learning pathways in traditional schools, colleges and universities, where learners have some control of the time, place, pace and processes of their study of particular parts of their curriculum" (Race, 1998:10) [61]- referring to such forms of organized learning as modules, part time, open, distance learning programs and similar. One has to mention, that the CEDEFOP glossary does not contain an explanation of the term too.

In short Rusakova would define the term 'flexible learning pathways' as comprising horizontal and vertical pathways and linkages within and between the general educational system and the adult system, between the academic educational system and the vocational system. It also comprises linkages and pathways between formal and informal learning through a scheme for recognition of prior learning.

Recognition of prior learning is one of the most innovative features of the qualification frameworks and was originally based on the need to provide access to learning for workers who had informal skills and knowledge that could never be recognized formally, unless they went back to school. Recognition of prior learning is the recognition of this prior learning and the awarding of qualification framework unit standards, skills programme or

qualifications as a result (Stuart, 2010) [81]. In order to allow the recognition of prior learning, the qualification framework, a single unified framework for all national academic and vocational qualifications, should be outcomes based, contain level descriptors and define credit points needed to reach the respective level (credit value is assigned to a level). Each level assumes learning at a lower level and each new higher level introduces a new level of difficulty. Through previously well described RPL procedure everybody is able to evidence own prior learning outcomes and assess them according to the qualification framework descriptors irrespectively on the form, place and time the learning in question has been taking.

According to "Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF" [104] the learning outcomes approach is fundamental to the EQF and the national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications should be demonstrably based on learning outcomes. At the same time strong links with the use of learning outcomes are a central element for the recognition of prior learning. The thorough implementation of learning outcomes is thus to be further advanced. In the meanwhile the insufficient implementation of learning outcomes is not to be seen as hindrance for the recognition of prior learning [93].

Several authors have recently contributed to the definition of learning outcomes. Some of them came up with almost identical definitions (Donnelly and Fitzmaurice, 2005:104) [27]: "A learning outcome is a statement of what the learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning.", (Gosling and Moon, 2001:17) [35]: "A learning outcome is a statement of what the learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning").

Jennifer Moon (Moon, 2002:47) [54] adds to the definition the mode of demonstrating the outcomes : "A learning outcome is a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do at the end of a period of learning and of how that learning is to be demonstrated" Similar definition has been adopted by both the EQF and the ECTS Users' Guide [107]:" Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning".

Another author (Adam, 2006:5) [1] chooses to emphasize, that learning outcomes have to be documented in a written form and that learning outcomes can be defined for completed learning periods of different durations:" A learning outcome is a written statement of what the successful student/learner is expected to be able to do at the end of the

module/course unit or qualification." This definition stresses the importance of learning outcomes as reference and information point to the stakeholders.

Different institutions have adopted own definition of learning outcomes. Thus for example, American Association of Law Libraries defines learning outcomes as: "..statements that specify what learners will know or be able to do as a result of a learning activity. Outcomes are usually expressed as knowledge, skills or attitudes". In this case the definition is to be regarded as somewhat daring, as it is safer to use the terminology "is expected to be able" rather than "will be able". This is because learning is something the student can control at a greater extent than the teacher.

It is noticeable that these definitions of learning outcomes do not differ significantly from each other. It is clear that (Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2009:5) [43]:

• Learning outcomes focus on what the learner has achieved rather than the intentions of the teacher;

• Learning outcomes focus on what the learner can demonstrate at the end of a learning activity.

There is a difference between aims, objectives and learning outcomes.

The aim of a module or programme is a broad general statement of teaching intention, i.e. it indicates what the teacher intends to cover in a block of learning. For example, the aim of a module could be "to introduce students to the basic principles of atomic structure"- teacher orientation is easily guessed from the statement.

One of the problems caused by the use of objectives is that sometimes they are written in terms of teaching intention and other times they are written in terms of expected learning, i.e. there is confusion in the literature in terms of whether objectives belong to the teacher-centred approach or the outcome-based approach [43].

Therefore the abandonment of the term "objectives" and usage of the term "learning outcomes" in the description of courses and programs instead, denotes a clear orientation towards outcome-based approach.

According to EQF the learning outcomes are specified in three categories – as knowledge, skills and competence [134]:

✓ "knowledge" means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;

✓ "skills" means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);

✓ "competence" means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/ or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

According to many authors (Adam, 2006 [1]; Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan, 2009 [43]; Winterton, Delamare- Le Deist, Stringfellow, 2006 [90]) that have recently and profoundly researched the definitions of the three terms – the term "competence" is shown to be particularly ambiguous and applicable to various situations with different meanings. This term needs careful specification and interpretation if it is to be properly understood. Countries or regions have their own definition of competence and each sector or occupational family has its own interpretation.

This thesis refers to a competence following the definition of Weinert (Weinert, 2001) [88] in which it is described as the sum of available or learnable abilities and skills as well as the willingness of a student to solve upcoming problems and to act responsible and critical concerning the provided solution.

The most common sub-divisions of outcomes in relation to the subject discipline are: subject specific outcomes that relate to the subject discipline and the knowledge and/or skills particular to it; and generic (sometimes called transferable or transversal skills) outcomes that relate to any and all disciplines e.g. written, oral, problem- solving, information technology, and team working skills, etc [1].

The experts of the Tuning Educational Structures project [138] run by the University of Deusto define these outcomes as competences: "Competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities. Fostering competences is the object of educational programmes. Competences will be formed in various course units and assessed at different stages".

The identification of generic skills is seen as important in enhancing the employability of graduates whatever their discipline.

Tuning distinguishes three types of generic competences [138]:

- Instrumental competences: cognitive abilities, methodological abilities, technological abilities and linguistic abilities;

- Interpersonal competences: individual abilities like social skills (social interaction and co-operation);
- Systemic competences: abilities and skills concerning whole systems (combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge; prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal competences required).

Domains of learning are commonly used as a guide to writing learning outcomes as they encompass the various levels of learning; the Cognitive (Bloom, 1975 [11]; Anderson and Krathwohl, 2000 [4]; Merill, 2002) domain involving thought processes, the Affective (Bloom, Masia, Krathwohl, 1964 [12]; Anderson and Krathwohl, 2000) domain involving attitudes and values, and the Psychomotor (Dave, 1970 [23]; Simpson, 1972 [77]; Anderson and Krathwohl, 2000) domain involving physical skills. Each taxonomy proposes hierarchy and examples of action verbs useful for writing learning outcomes.

Also other taxonomies been developed, defining own learning domains, e.g. three systems - Self-System, the Metacognitive System, and the Cognitive System – and the Knowledge domain by Marzano (Marzano, 2000).

When writing learning outcomes, it is important to write them in such a way that they are capable of being assessed. There are two types of assessment: formative assessment and summative assessment.

- Formative assessment is assessment that "refers to all those activities undertaken by teachers, and by the students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged" (Black and Williams, 1998) [10].
- Summative assessment is an "end-of-course assessment and essentially means that this is assessment which produces a measure which sums up someone's achievement and which has no other real use except as a description of what has been achieved" (Brown and Knight, 1994) [14].

Outcome-based learning has been interpreted and outlined in many different ways (Killen, 2002) [45] and this has led to some misunderstandings, confusion and criticism (Hargreaves, 2000) [36]. Many criticize the danger of overfocusing on the individual learner, since :"Students come to us with different skills, abilities, and values, and they should leave the same way", because of the uniform learning outcomes (Woolston, 2008 [91]; Simons, 1999 [76]) however the causal relationship between the inputs of curriculum and the observable outputs in the form of student behavior is not that easy to ensure, just by making it clear to the teacher himself, what he wants the student to do with the knowledge at the end.

The overfocusing on the individual learner may result in increased education costs, because such approach requires many well-trained and experienced teachers but also manageable student-teacher ratios. Some critics also argue outcomes "concern values, attitudes, opinions and relationships rather than objective information" and that the goals of outcomes-based learning are "affective (concerned with emotions and feelings) rather than academic" (Schlafly, 1993) [73]. Finally, a practical concern for critics is the cost and time of shifting entire school systems to an outcomes-based learning model (Schlafly, 1993) [73].

Many of the benefits (Adam, 2006; Jenkins and Unwin, 2001) [41] said to arise from implementing learning outcomes can serve as quality instrument:

➢ Aid curriculum design by clarifying areas of overlap between modules and programmes;

➢ Help course designers to determine precisely the key purposes of a course and to see how components of the syllabus fit and how learning progression is incorporated;

➢ Highlight the relationship between teaching, learning and assessment and help improve course design and the student experience;

➢ Promote reflection on assessment and the development of assessment criteria and more effective and varied assessment;

➢ Clear information to help students with their choice of module and programme. This can lead to more effective learning;

➢ Clear information to stakeholders on the achievements and characteristics associated with particular qualifications.

By synthesizing both the simple and widespread definition of the essence of the learning outcomes with the result to be achieved through transfer to learning based education, Rusakova comes up with own definition of learning outcomes: "Learning outcomes serve as quality instrument, and clearly state what the learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning". Such reformulation of the definition is necessary, as often learning outcomes are confused with "just another way of saying" aims and objectives of course, module or program. The definition thus denotes the benefits arising from implementing learning outcomes and the simply reformulated aims and objectives, drawing attention to and inviting to think about how and whether "a simple reformulation" will be improving the quality.

It is important to note that while there are clearly significant advantages to the learning outcomes approach, reservations have been expressed from philosophical/conceptual

and practical/technical perspectives about the dangers of a narrow interpretation and application of this approach to education (Adam, 2004) [3].

Educators considering adopting an outcome-based model need to be aware of the controversy and challenges inherent in the model as well as its potential usefulness (McKernan, 1993) [52].

PRACTICAL PART

4. Analysis of external quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes in Latvia with regard to ESG

4.1. Organization and Methodology of Research

Research issue

As already mentioned in Chapter 2 one of the main reform areas of Bologna process is the quality assurance, for which a tool has been elaborated and had been adopted at the Bergen Ministerial Conference in 2005 [179]: The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Although implementation of the ESG is not mandatory[125], failing to do so may have unwanted consequences especially for national quality assurance agencies in terms of not eventually being listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). This register, launched in March 2008, was envisaged already at the Bergen Ministerial Conference and aims to provide clear and objective information about trustworthy quality assurance agencies that are working in Europe. Thus, in case the quality assurance agency in Latvia does not comply to a substantial degree with the ESG principles (following the results of assessment by independent experts), it runs the danger of being left out of the list. This in its turn would mean that the quality culture of Latvian higher education is to be regarded as ambiguous and in the best case will be just hard to attest in the eyes of European community. However the critics point out that the difference between ENQA membership and EQAR is not that clearly drawn and that the individual quality agencies are still very diverse as to their e.g. resource basis, roles and functions, which may hamper the "meta-evaluation" (Pyykkö, 2010 [60]; Malan 2010 [113]). The critics also wonder whether EQAR will be the last quality assurance level for the higher education or whether it is just a question of time until the quality of EQAR will have to be ascertained and a new supra quality assurance institution will be founded on top of it (Szanto, 2010) [82].

Bologna Process Stocktaking 2007 shows [64] that Latvia with regard to Stocktaking indicator "National implementation of Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA" is among those 26 (56%) of 46 Bologna signatories that have been assessed as the

"light green countries" – meaning, that the process has started of implementing a national quality assurance system in line with the ESG. At the same time the Stocktaking indicator "Stage of development of external quality assurance system" has been assessed as "green" for Latvia (here Latvia is among 18 (39%) of 46 Bologna signatories) – meaning that there is a fully functioning quality assurance system in operation at national level and applies to all higher education.

Taking into account both the importance of compliance with ESG for the higher education in Latvia and the drawback of Open Method of Coordination - that the countries might want to "windowdress" (see Chapter 2) for the iterative benchmarking procedures, Rusakova conducted an analysis of external quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes in Latvia with regard to ESG.

The analysis was part of a larger study, that concentrated on five Central-Eastern European countries – Latvia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic [116]:

Subtasks of the research

- to analyse the international, national, regional strategic policy documents and the legal framework in the context of quality assurance as supportive element of recognition; to analyse quality assurance as one of the cornerstones of mutual recognition in EHEA; to consider the role of common European standards in supporting the progress of mutual recognition; to discuss whether Latvia is progressing towards becoming a part of EHEA; to clarify whether the external quality assurance system in Latvia complies with the ESG;

- as part of a larger research Rusakova had to answer the following research questions [116]: what have been the developments in the policy domain of higher education quality assurance in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in terms of the accountability[126]-improvement continuum, in the last five years,[127] what are the major challenges of the ESG implementation that CEE quality assurance agencies and institutions of higher education face, and to what extent is implementation of the ESG likely to shift the balance on the accountability-improvement continuum at system and institutional level?

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[126] Accountability is the requirement, when undertaking an activity, to expressly address the concerns, requirements or perspectives of others

[127] As the developments up to 2003 were analysed by Schwarz and Westerheijden (Schwarz, S., Westerheijden, D.F. (eds.). Accreditation and Evaluation in the European Higher Education Area. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004).

Type of the research

classification [32] of the conducted research according to the -

- application mode: applied research, since it is planned that it will be possible to apply the results of the research for improving the existing policy and practice;

- applied research method: qualitative research, as it will be based on qualitative rather than quantitative data;

- research issue: evaluation research- the aim is to evaluate the external quality assurance system of higher education in Latvia; check it against European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG);

- data collection procedure: secondary (desk) research; primary research: content analysis of documents; expert interviewing the stakeholders.

Tools of the research

Desk research, expert interviews, SWOT, ESG, Perellon's Framework, Accountability triangle (for more information, please see "Research structure and tools", "Research team and timeline").

Target group and the sample size [17]

The target for the research is an instance –body coordinating and organizing the accreditation process in the higher education of Latvia - quality assurance agency - Latvian Higher Education Quality Evaluation centre (HEQEC) as one of the main actors in quality assurance development in last five years (2004-present) and its role in external quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes in Latvia.

At a more abstract level, this single intrinsic case study is part of a collective case study of quality assurance developments in following Central Eastern European countries - Latvia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic[130].

Research structure and tools in details

The layout that the research team agreed upon for structuring the research of each national case was the following:

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[130] The research was conducted within Research Plan Tertiary Education in the Knowledge Society (identification code MSM0023775201) of the Centre for Higher Education Studies, Prague, Czech Republic and dealt with quality assurance developments in following Central Eastern European countries - Latvia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic.

Overview of national policy of quality assurance in higher education in terms of (based on Perellon's Framework[131]):

- Objectives (aims & objectives of quality assurance policy);
- Control (who is in control of quality assurance process);
- Areas (domains covered by quality assurance procedures);
- Procedures (how quality assurance procedures are set up);
- Uses (how information on quality assurance is being used).

Brief summary of:

- Quality assurance agency' s mission incl. composition (e.g. purely academic, market oriented);
- Quality assurance agency' s scope of activities (accreditation/evaluation/assessment/audit), whereby the accreditation is regarded as an accountability instrument, evaluation is considered as an improvement-oriented instrument, assessment is inspected as a compliance-oriented instrument and audit is considered as a control-oriented instrument;
- Quality assurance agency's operational practices (e.g. how often accreditation/evaluation/assessment/, composition of peer-reviews etc.).

Summary of agency activities in 2004-08 with the use of empirical data.

Agency strengths and weaknesses based on previous three chapters. This chapter should include examples of agency good practice if applicable.

The researchers have to analyse the national policy of quality assurance in higher education with special regard to parts 2.6 (follow-up procedures), 2.7 (periodic reviews), 2.8 (system-wide analyses), 3.7 (external quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies) and 3.8 (accountability procedures) of ESG.

Synthesis of all previous chapters and taking into account the outlook on the future agenda, the chapter contains a short perspective on agency's opportunities and threats (with regard to planned EHEA completion in 2010).

Terminology

The author already referred in Chapter 2 to the problem of common understanding of the terminology in the field of quality assurance. Since the research team includes representatives from different countries it was essential to agree upon basic terms and definitions. Taking into account the domain of the research – quality assurance, the research

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[131] see below

team decided to refer to the terms and definitions available from Analytic Quality Glossary [38], a comprehensive, dynamic glossary of terms that are related to quality in higher education. Originally this glossary was prepared by Harvey (Harvey, L. 2004).

ESG

One of the main tools for quality assurance is the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) and the research in general has the special focus on implementation of ESG as a new accountability agenda. The chapter 5 of each country' s national case study deals with implementation of ESG and checks the national policy of quality assurance in higher education against part 2 (ESG for the external quality assurance of higher education) and part 3 (ESG for external quality assurance agencies) of ESG. Due to the overall orientation of the research towards external quality assurance problems, the part 1 (ESG for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions) of ESG is not applied.

Perellon' s Framework

To discuss the developments in the policy domain of higher education quality assurance in Central and Eastern Europe the research team (Rusakova being part of it) decided to employ the Perellon's (2005 [58], 2007 [59]) framework:

"Starting from the axiom that national policies for quality assurance are temporal and spatial actualisations of the fundamental policy choices, Perellon argues that these choices have to reflect essential elements of the quality assurance policy domain, encompassing two dimensions (see Illustration 5): an ideational dimension (policy beliefs) and a material dimension (policy instruments). In these two dimensions, fundamental policy choices on quality assurance are made in terms of objectives (reflecting policy beliefs) and control, areas, procedures, uses (all corresponding to policy instruments)".

By employing the Perellon's framework containing five central variables (objectives, control, areas, procedures, uses) for the analysis of the national country cases, the research team agreed upon an array of comparative criteria for the subsequent inter-agency comparison.

Rusakova has contributed by applying the Perellon's framework for analysing the case of Latvia. The summary of the Perellon's framework is part of the inter-agency comparison.

Quality Assurance Policy Domain		
Ideational dimension (policy beliefs)	Objectives	What should be the aims and objectives of quality assurance policy?
Material dimension (policy instruments)	Control	Who should control the process of quality assurance?
	Areas	What are the areas covered by the quality assurance procedures?
	Procedures	How are the quality assurance procedures set up?
	Uses	How is the information collected used?

Illustration 5. Perellon' s Framework

Accountability Triangle

In order to ensure a harmonised comparison of recent developments in CEE countries in the quality assurance domain the Accountability triangle was applied: "Given the centrality of the accountability rationale to higher education quality assurance, further investigation of its role can be made with the employment of the Accountability Triangle (Burke, 2005 [15]). Developed by Burke and associates on the basis of Clark's triangle (Clark, 1983 [16]) for assessing accountability of the US programmes, the Accountability Triangle makes use of state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces (three corners), with the central argument running as follows: "Higher education and its colleges and universities, both public and private, are inevitably accountable to state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces. They should serve all while submitting to none of these imperatives. Being accountable to each of the three corners of the Accountability Triangle means balancing the response to ensure service without subservience to public priorities, academic concerns, and market forces. The ideal accountability mechanism is thus positioned at the very centre of the accountability triangle" (Burke, 2005 [15]).

The Accountability Triangle is envisaged as part of the inter-agency comparison.

Research team and timeline

Rusakova was part of international research team, which consisted from scholars from the following Central Eastern European countries: Latvia, the Czech Republic, Hungary,

Poland and the Slovak Republic; the country representatives were conducting research on national cases.

From May 2008 till the first milestone in August Rusakova conducted desk research and analysed the international and national documents. In August 2008 the results of the study were checked and/or supplemented through expert[140] interviewing the stakeholders representing University of Latvia and HEQEC.

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[140] The choice of the experts is based on the three forces of the Accountability Triangle (see above)

4.2. Research

Analysis of external quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes in Latvia with regard to ESG

Introduction

The higher education system in Latvia experienced major alternations in the early 1990s, after Latvia regained the independence based on entrance of private capital in financing of higher education, increase of student numbers without significant increase in public financing, change from former unitary one-tier higher education system to a binary higher education system with academic and professional programmes and two-tier degree structure in the academic part of it. These trends and reforms resulted in a distinct need of establishing a quality assurance system, because of the following reasoning:

i. Firstly, there was a need felt to review the whole system after switch from one-tier (mostly five-year) programmes to the bachelor/master/doctoral structure.

ii. Secondly, there was a need to evaluate programmes in the private higher education sector that started developing after adoption of the Education law of 1991 in order to establish which of them are of a sufficient quality to be granted the right to issue state-recognized diplomas/degree certificates. Also the public universities experienced an increase in their own autonomy e.g. liberation in terms of programmes taught at higher education institutions.

iii. Thirdly, as regards state sector, under tight state budget conditions both state and society were willing to assure themselves that the budget allocated to public higher education institutions was used for programmes of a sufficient quality.

iv. Finally, a very important factor was the opinion shared by all stakeholders i.e. that at Latvia's re-integration into European and wider international cooperation and with the prospective to join the European Union, Latvia had to work towards ensuring that Latvian degrees/diplomas are recognized and accepted in other European countries both for academic and professional purposes.

4.2.1 Overview of National Policy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Latvia

Objectives of National Policy on Higher Education Quality Assurance

The experienced development trends in the early 1990s i.e. switch to the three-cycle structure, emergence of the private higher education sector and increase in the public universities' autonomy, tight state budget conditions and Latvia's re-integration into the world required an establishment of a system that would inspect the quality of the higher education in Latvia. To answer this need, an international seminar on higher education quality assurance was organized in Riga, October 24-25, 1994 by the Council of Europe with the aim to create a higher education quality assurance system in Latvia. This seminar resulted in signed protocol on Baltic cooperation in higher education quality assurance by the Ministers of all the three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia).

For further coordination of actions in the establishing of quality assurance systems and recognition of foreign qualifications, the ministers also decided to establish *Baltic Higher Education Coordination Committee* (BHECC). Cooperation through the BHECC helped establishing comparable higher education quality assurance systems in the Baltic States. As well, BHECC drafted a Baltic recognition agreement to complement the Lisbon Convention.

The current quality assurance scheme in Latvia started functioning already in 1996. It defines that accreditation is a part of the higher education quality assurance system, which, together with self-assessment and assessment by external experts, forms the main stages of a continuous quality assurance process. The accreditation, according to the Law On Higher Education Institutions (as of 1995) is the quality assessment of the activities and resources of the higher education institution, as a result of which the state provides the accreditation subject with the status of state recognized higher education institution.

As to the organisation of the accreditation scheme, the higher education institution first has to become registered. This decision is carried out by the civil servants of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) in consideration of formally rather similar criteria to those assessed during the accreditation process (such as available funding, facilities, staff), and is partly policy driven. Once the higher education institution has been registered, it may apply for the accreditation of the institution and programmes. Only those higher educational establishments who have been accredited and which offer accredited programmes have the right to issue state recognized higher education certificates.

Accreditation of higher education institutions takes place according to the Law on Higher Education Establishments (LHE), adopted by Parliament (Saeima) on November 2,

1995; article 9 of which stipulates the general accreditation principles of higher education institutions, which contain university type higher education institutions and non-university type higher education institutions, including colleges. Colleges are higher education institutions that offer first level higher professional education. The procedure and sequence of the measures relevant to the accreditation and external assessment are defined by the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers as of October 3, 2006 Nr. 821: "Accreditation Regulation of the higher education institution, Colleges and Programmes in Higher Education". This Regulation also concerns the institutional internal assessment. The regulation lists the necessary content of the self-assessment report of the higher education institution. The paragraph 2.1. of this regulation states that the following information, among others, should be provided within the self-assessment: "long term development concept that includes information on the planned changes of the higher education institution's structure, development possibilities, amount of funding, reasoning and the sources, as well as the impact analysis of the internal and external factors of its activities" and immediately concretises this paragraph by adding an explanation[141] "(a quality assurance system of the whole higher education institution's activities has to be created)". The paragraph 3.3 requests adding the information on the internal quality mechanisms and their information systems, as well as the information on the possible information exchange in local and international information networks, with the paragraph 6.1 adding documents on the administration structure and on the internal control of the study quality, and immatriculation criteria of the students. The accreditation scheme was aimed to be a threshold one–it was designed to evaluate whether the institution or programme meets the minimum quality standards so that recognized diplomas/degree certificates could be issued. The work done at higher education institutions at the self-assessment stage also gave institutions a much better understanding of how to improve their own quality, and thus initiated the emerging of internal quality culture in the institutions.

Control over National Quality Assurance Processes

Making an overview of major Latvian actors in higher education quality assurance, the HEQEC is not a decision-maker, as it supports by its activities the process of assessment decision-making. The Expert Team is an ad-hoc team appointed for assessment of a higher education institution or a programme, the AC takes decision upon the accreditation of programmes, while HEC, among other responsibilities in higher education, has the mandate

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[141] Enclosed in brackets.

to take decisions upon institutional accreditation. The MoES in the person of the Minister of Education and Science, signs the Accreditation papers for programmes and institutions upon a successful accreditation.

Domains Covered by Quality Assurance Procedures

According to *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), the main domains covered by quality assurance procedures are the internal and the external quality assurance procedures of the higher education institution, and the external assessment of the quality assuring agencies. As mentioned before, the Latvian law requires the creation of the internal quality assurance system of the higher education institution. The main issues still to be considered in Latvia in this connection are the following: defining of the learning outcomes in competences and application of them in assessing the quality, the publishing of the higher education institution's internal quality statements, and the participation of the society. The new draft Law on Higher Education will contain many of the points referred to in the ESG, representing, in general, a more up-to-date piece of legislation than the Law on Higher Education Institutions currently in force.

Once the outline of the quality assurance system of given higher education institution is to be made, several terms have to be considered. When a new institution is being established, it has to become registered by the MoES (formerly obtaining of the licence) as a higher education institution. The registration process of higher education institution contains formal aspects such as teaching resources (number of persons with doctoral degree within academic staff), financial resources, and infrastructural resources (square meters of facilities per student) etc. The requirements of registering a university are higher than those for registering a higher education institution in general, e.g. 50% of elected academic personnel have to have a doctoral degree. Registration means "right to legally exist", while accreditation means recognition of degrees/qualifications within the national system and is more closely related to quality considerations. Therefore, this chapter will contain more references to the accreditation process than to the licensing/registering, which is to be considered as a formality check in combination with a political decision by the MoES. The overlapping of the both procedures has often been discussed within the academic community, as opening a new programme in an existing institution requires a license and a following accreditation.

In Latvia the higher education institutions are classified as state university type (6) and non-university type higher education institutions (56), including institutions founded by

both public and legal entities, colleges (26), and foreign higher education institutions' branches (2). The accreditation scheme applies to all these types of higher education institutions, geographically unlimited in Latvia. This means that all higher education institutions acting within borders of Latvia after being registered should go through institution's accreditation process in order to be able to issue a state recognized diploma. If they are just registered, they will be able only to use the coat of arms of the higher education institution on the diploma, but not the coat of arms of the Republic of Latvia. The main quality aspects[146] that have to be assessed by experts when assessing an institution include: aims and tasks, study content and organization, academic personnel, management and provisions, quality assurance, and warranty. The self-assessment documents of the higher education institution should include information about: aims and tasks, current activities and perspectives, conformity of study informative basis of the higher education institution for the conducted programmes and study relevant research activities within period of following 6 years, quantitative indicators on the last 3 years.

Another domain covered by the quality assurance procedures in Latvia is the accreditation of programmes. There is a single accreditation framework and similar procedures foreseen irrespective to the discipline and subject, professional or academic disposition of the programme. The subject of specifity is modified by the help of expert selection, and the criteria for application depends on the subject/discipline to be assessed. The main quality aspects[147] that have to be assessed by experts when evaluating a programme include: aims and tasks, study content and organization, teaching and student assessment, study environment and management, research by students and staff, quality assurance, and warranty. The self-assessment documents of the programmes should include information about: aims and tasks, expected learning outcomes, organization of the programme, description of the study courses and other planned activities, assessment system, practical teaching methods and research activities, evaluation of the programme's perspectives, students, academic personnel, and funding. Each of the criteria is explained in more detail in the corresponding documents [169].

In case of both self-assessment and expert assessment, programmes are assessed against the standard of academic higher education or the standard of professional higher education plus the standard of the profession in question. A comparison with at least two similar programmes in the EU member states is required. Currently, both programme and

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[146] Questionnaire with assessment criteria for experts of the Expert Team.
[147] Questionnaire with assessment criteria for experts of the Expert Team.

institution should be accredited in order to award state-recognized diplomas. If the higher education institution is only registered, it may conduct lectures, but cannot issue state-recognized diplomas. The stages of the assessment procedure are as follows:

1) Higher education institution prepares a <u>self-assessment report</u>. At this stage, a steering group at the higher education institution in question should be set up, in which the administration, academic staff, and students should be represented. Documents describing the premises and facilities of the institution, its long-term development plans, financial documents as well as those certifying the property relations and explaining the governance of the institution shall be appended to the self-assessment report. In case there are no such documents attached, it is recommended to attach at least a list with information where such documents can be found. The CVs of the academic staff and at least short description of all study courses must be appended.

2) The <u>Expert Team</u> is set up. Expert Team members are selected according to the specifics of the object of assessment, taking into account the geographical factor by choosing, as a rule, one expert from Latvia and at least two experts preferably from the EU, Estonia, Lithuania or another foreign country, for example, the USA. The foreign members of the Expert Team consider the self-assessment report and visit the higher education institution in question. Public discussion of the preliminary findings of the Expert Team's to appear in the final report must be organized at the end of the peer visit. The updated final report of the Expert Team, as well as all individual reports of experts are submitted to Higher Education Council or Accreditation Commission, depending on the object of assessment.

3) The <u>decision on accreditation</u> is made by the Council for Higher Education (in case of institutional accreditation) or the Accreditation Commission set up by the Ministry for Education and Science (in case of programme accreditation) after hearing the recommendations of the Expert Team. The decision is submitted to the MoES. Afterwards, Minister of Education and Science issues an accreditation paper.

4) <u>Publishing of the results</u>. The HEQEC itself does not participate in the decision-making, but it consults with higher education institutions at the stage of drafting the self-assessment report and it organizes the assessment process as such.

Uses of Information Concerning Higher Education Quality Assurance

The final assessment report is published in newspaper "Izglitiba un Kultura". Information on the quality assurance status of higher education institution and programmes in Latvia is available on the website of the HEQEC. Furthermore, all self-assessment reports and Expert Team's final reports are freely available for public consideration, and are thus

expected to increase the public awareness of the status quo and the current tendencies pertaining to higher education quality assurance in Latvia. The information data-basis compiled by the HEQEC is also used as the information source for recognition of individual credentials from Latvia by the stakeholders concerned (ENIC/NARIC, higher education institutions, employers, individuals).

For a summary of the national policy of quality assurance in higher education in Latvia based on Perellon's Frameworks criteria please see Illustration 6.

Quality Assurance Policy Domain: Latvia		
Ideational dimension (policy beliefs)	Objectives	Accreditation scheme evaluates against minimum standards assuring the quality of higher education and both internal and external recognition of Latvia's diplomas; alignment with European quality assurance system.
Material dimension (policy instruments)	Control	Main stakeholders of the accreditation scheme - the state and HEIs, Expert Teams conduct the assessment, process organized by HEQEC, HEI accreditation done by HEC, program accreditation done by AC.
	Areas	External QA of HEI and programs complies in general with ESG, internal QA is implemented in every HEI, but should be adopted to ESG, external assessment of quality assuring agency is on its way.
	Procedures	Current system applies the suggested model of review - self-assessment->site visit->draft report->published report->follow-up.
	Uses	Information source for recognition of individual credentials from Latvia, by all stakeholders; information source for improvement oriented activities.

Illustration 6. Summary of the national policy of quality assurance in higher education in Latvia based on Perellon's Frameworks criteria

4.2.2 Summary of Mission, Scope of Activities and Operational Practices of the HEQEC

Agency's Mission

Taking into account the central role of the Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (HEQEC) in supporting the system-level quality assurance procedures in Latvia, the following analysis will mainly center on this agency's activities. The HEQEC's mission in general sense is currently neither formulated nor published. The Statutes of the HEQEC state as the main aims of the HEQEC's foundation the following:

1. to promote the development of the higher education in the Republic of Latvia;

2. to organize the quality assessment and expert examination of higher education institutions and their programmes, by applying methodology approved by the EU states containing elf-assessment made by higher education institution, external assessment made by independent experts, publishing of the assessment results, continuous implementation of the quality improvement process;

3. to provide consultations on quality assessment issues;

4. to summarize, maintain, publish, and distribute information on quality, licensing, and accreditation of higher education institutions and their programmes.

In its everyday work, HEQEC holds to *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) and *the Framework for Qualification in the European Higher Education Area* (EQF

Scope of Activities of HEQEC

The HEQEC performs its activities in accordance to the Statutes and the decisions of the shareholders. The activities of the HEQEC are regulated by several laws and regulations[150]. The activities of the HEQEC in Latvia can be mainly regarded as including both the accountability and improvement-oriented elements, however the activities are predominantly accountability driven. In several cases, as suggested in the following sections, the activities lack a functioning mechanism to verify that the improvement has been real and not just formally declared.

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[150] By selection, these main laws and regulations are: Law on Associations and Foundations; HEQEC's Agreement with MoE as of April 7, 1998; Law on Higher Education Institutions as of November 17, 1995; Regulations by the Cabinet of Ministers as of October 3, 2006 Nr. 821: "Accreditation Regulation of the Higher Education Institutions, Colleges and Study Programs in Higher Education"; Regulations by the Cabinet of Ministers as of October 16, 2001 Nr. 442 "Accreditation Terms of the and Study Programs"; "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area"; "Framework for Qualification in the European Higher Education Area".

With respect to activities of the HEQEC, it must be pointed out that these are regulated. The agreement concluded in 1998 defines the cooperation of the HEQEC and the Ministry of Education and Science. Based on this agreement and the Statutes of the HEQEC, there is also cooperation going on between the AC and HEC. The AC and HEC confirm the experts and the observers recommended by the HEQEC for assessment of programmes and higher education institutions, and take decisions on accreditation and changes in programmes by using the results from assessment organized by the HEQEC. The HEQEC prepares the accreditation papers and submits them to the Ministry of Education and Science, and conducts the registration of authorized accreditation papers. Furthermore, the HEQEC provides statements on the study opportunities in Latvia in comparison with opportunities abroad to the Study Funds. These statements are necessary for students, in case that they are interested in allocation of a state guaranteed loan for their studies abroad.

Within the quality assessment activities, the HEQEC cooperates with different institutions and agencies, e.g. the Latvian Rectors' Council, Latvian Student Union, State Agency of General Education Quality Evaluation. The HEQEC participates in international organizations and networks that are involved in assuring higher education quality such as ENQA, INQAAHE, CEEN, and Eurasian Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN). Moreover, the HEQEC participates in dealing with quality issues in Latvia's organizations such as Quality Association of Latvia, or Latvian National Project Management Association. The HEQEC is a full member of all these organizations. However, the HEQEC's cooperation with ENQA is regarded as most significant, as ENQA has been accepted as the official organization at European level responsible for solving the issues of higher education quality assurance.

In performing their activities, the HEQEC's representatives participate in conferences and conduct relevant research. The HEQEC's representatives also provide information on quality assurance issues during information days organized by the MoES, participate in activities of HEC, Latvian Rectors' Council, engage themselves in cooperation with LSU, talk directly to prospective students at schools etc..

The HEQEC prevents exposure of wrong information on accreditation and licenses of higher education institution and programmes through the internet and other media.

In conformity with the requirements of the accountability procedures of the ESG (paragraph 3.8) and in order to gain feedback on the HEQEC's activities, there are anonymous questionnaires available on the agency homepage, designed to reflect the needs of the separate target groups being students, academic staff, employers, and experts. The data

obtained in this way are regularly analysed by the HEQEC's staff members. The analysis shows that the range of the problems and issues addressed in questionnaires is vast. The recommendations given range from the proposal to introduce a quality assurance system that would allow the observers to be trained as the future experts to discussions on the practical problems such as student involvement. These two proposals coming from anonymous questionnaires are currently considered by the HEQEC. With respect to institutionalisation of quality improvement schemes, the HEQEC would like to give support to the application of more individually tailored improvement oriented instruments, but currently it is often not possible.

Operational Practices of HEQEC

Accreditation is embedded into the legislation as a planned process–after the first accreditation round completed in 2002, each programme and institution has to be accredited anew every 6 years. It is likely that, in future, more emphasis will be made on internal quality culture in the institutions i.e. these institutions/programmes which have successfully gone through the first accreditation round and further submit yearly self-assessment reports will in future undergo a simplified accreditation procedure. The initiating of accreditation at other times is possible in cases when, for example, the programme or the institution does not perform according to standards and expectations. In these cases, according to Accreditation Regulation, Higher Education Council has the right to propose an extraordinary accreditation and the Minister of Education and Science decides whether to initiate an extraordinary accreditation.

Preparation of application and self-assessment report usually takes 3-6 months. It is recommended that a Steering Committee (and, if need be, sub-committees) be established for the self-assessment of higher education institution or programme. The following procedures are held after an application for accreditation is submitted:

- Within 30 days after receipt of an application, the HEQEC checks whether the information in the application complies with the requirements set in AR. Should some of the information listed in the Accreditation Regulation be missing, the HEQEC requests to supply this information and the higher education institution should supply it within 1 week. Once all the necessary information is supplied, the application is accepted for further stages of procedure and the higher education institution is informed about that.

- Expert team is formed and approved by HEC (institutional accreditation) or the AC (programme accreditation). The expert team includes no less than 3 experts – one from Latvia, and the rest from abroad[153]. Usually one of the foreign experts is chosen from an EU country or, more seldom, North America, and one from Estonia or Lithuania. Such a composition of the expert team allows pursuing the following goals:

   o assessment of Latvian programmes and institutions in a broader European context (particularly by the "Western" expert);

   o looking at Latvian programmes/institutions from outside but with a good knowledge of the Latvian system and having similar developments and problems at home (particularly the Baltic expert),

   o ensuring that assessment is made against Latvian standards and regulations (the Latvian expert)

- Expert team studies the self-assessment report and other information submitted.

- Two-day expert assessment visit is organized to the higher education institution/programme in question to give the experts possibility to assess the real situation at the higher education institution. In some cases the AC or HEC can decide to include additional participants to the team visiting the institution approving each of them individually.

- Experts submit their individual assessment reports and compile an overall assessment report in the name of the Expert Team.

- The overall assessment report is discussed at an open conference with representatives of the staff and students of the higher education institution in question, employers and representatives of the MoES[154], the AC, and HEC, as well as other parties concerned.

- After the conference, the expert team finalizes the assessment report and submits it to the AC or HEC as appropriate.

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[153] Except accreditation of first-level (short-cycle) professional higher education programmes and colleges entitled to provide these programmes only. In this case, participation of foreign experts is not mandatory.
[154] And line ministries, if necessary

- Upon considering the information submitted in the application and the report of the expert team and individual experts[155], HEC or the AC takes decision upon accreditation of the higher education institution or programme as appropriate and submits its decision to the MoES.

- Minister of Education and Science issues an accreditation paper to the institution as a whole and one to each accredited programme.

Checking the application for accreditation and whether all the necessary information is provided, takes no more than 30 days. This is done in parallel to checking whether the provided documentation complies with the data available at the State Enterprises Register and other state institutions, which takes no more than 2 weeks altogether. According to paragraph 20 of the Accreditation Regulation, decision upon accreditation should be taken within six months after the receipt of the application, but the period for checking the compliance of information to the requirements of Accreditation Regulation and for receiving the missing information from higher education institution *is not included* in this six-month period. In exceptional cases, Minister of Education and Science may issue a motivated ordinance to prolong the particular accreditation case, but not longer than for another six months.

4.2.3 Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses of HEQEC

Accountability procedures of the HEQEC. According to the Bologna Stocktaking results presented in the national seminar titled "Bologna Stocktaking 2005-2007. Perspectives of Latvia" in Latvia, the Latvia's external quality assurance system in general complies with *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area* (ESG).

In accordance with the ESG 3.8 Standard and responsibilities entrusted to Latvia by its official involvement in the Bologna Process, it is necessary to conduct external assessment of the HEQEC based on self-assessment. The external assessment shall be organized by Higher Education Council. Higher Education Council has already confirmed this decision by issuing a resolution, but currently the process has not yet been started. In order to reach the aim of proving its own accountability, the HEQEC plans to self-evaluate its procedures. Many of the elements of the self-assessment are already annually considered in the annual reports of the HEQEC. The reports are written in order to account for the activities done on

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[155] In principle, the decision making body–HEC or AC–can visit the higher education institution to clarify additional issues in situ.

the basis of the provided funding by the shareholders. In conformity with the ESG 3.8 Standard, the self-assessment will be published on the website of the HEQEC.

Legal status change. In 2004, the HEQEC has changed its legal status from the non-profit HEQEC Ltd, established jointly by the MoES and higher education institutions, to the HEQEC foundation. This was due to a formal change of law, which has annulled non-profit Ltd as the legal status type. Among the changes that had to be dealt with resulting from the new legal status was the decision upon the distribution of the power within the institution. By amending the statutes, it became possible to restore functionalities – e.g. under the former legal status, the director of the HEQEC had the executive power and the board was the decision maker. Under the present legal status, shareholders have to re-elect the board in case it does not follow the aims set by the shareholders. Another change introduced by the status alternation was that, at present, the seven board members are legal entities that are responsible with their own property for the activities conducted.

HEQEC board and stakeholders. The HEQEC's shareholders set aims and strategies of the quality assurance in Latvia. According to the statutes, the HEQEC's board consists of seven members, elected by the shareholders. It is of course a challenge to balance the representation of the shareholders in the board, as the representative does not need to be attached to the shareholder's institution, as long as the shareholder entrusts the person with the right to represent it. If we consider the higher education institutions as *the providers of education*, it would be necessary to represent all higher education stakeholders at the board, which is not the case, as the academics from higher education institutions are prevalent in the board. On the other hand, this ensures the compliance with one of the basic principles of the ESG–that the providers of higher education have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance. The society (tax payers) is currently represented in the HEQEC's board by the MoES. Employers, as another important stakeholder which has recently demonstrated more and more interest in assuring the quality of higher education, are not represented. Another problem is connected with the recent policy of the MoES, which, after reorganization of the Higher Education and Science Department into two separate departments, has delegated the representative from the MoES's Department of Law. The professional background of the MoES's representative impacts on the policy applied to resolving the tasks of the board, making it rather centered on legal issues and therefore less on quality issues. If we consider the higher education institutions as *the market players*, then, other emphasis should be made. There are different motivations that the students follow when applying for studies. Not all of them are looking for a high quality education. There are

students in Latvia that are literally forced into studying under the fear of loosing the job. This fear is not always baseless; in separate cases it is even strengthened–required by law. Such student stakeholders create pressure on the higher education institutions to reduce the quality of education however, since there is also an ongoing competition between the higher education institutions, higher education institutions themselves are primarily not interested in reducing the level of quality. The indirect influence of "students by force" in their role of stakeholding (no direct allocation of funding from the students) reduces the impact of their needs. However the higher education institutions may run into a seduction to decrease the quality of tuition, as the effects of the diminished quality threshold are noticed in long term only. From this, it follows that the interests of the higher education institutions and public stakeholders have to be balanced. The higher education institutions seek a higher level of autonomy and, on the whole, are ready for improvements; nevertheless, they also strive to have a minimal display of negative information to the public on own institutional assessment, both internally and externally, which runs counter to the needs of public representatives wanting more transparency and public accountability from the higher education institutions.

International credibility of awards is probably the most important point that allowed reaching a consensus between higher education institutions, state, and other stakeholders upon establishing quality assurance in Latvia.

In Soviet Latvia, similarly like in other Eastern European countries, the higher education was strictly controlled nomenklatura system (Schwarz, Westerheijden, 2004) [74]. From the mid 90ties the universities in Central and Eastern Europe started slowly to retreat from what could be called "liberal absolutism" of the years immediately after 1989. Autonomy initially seen largely in terms of an absence of state power, was gradually replaced by new notions of civic and market accountability (Scott, 2007) [75]. After switching to the three cycle system in the early 1990s and the curricular reform following the 1991 Education law, as well providing HEIs with autonomy to decide regarding the programmes taught [152] (including private provision), stakeholders, especially the higher education institutions were in favour of measures that would support the international credibility of the at that time not-so-well-known Latvia credentials abroad, and, first of all, in Europe. The common goal results in a quite well functioning cooperation among the stakeholders involved and the HEQEC.
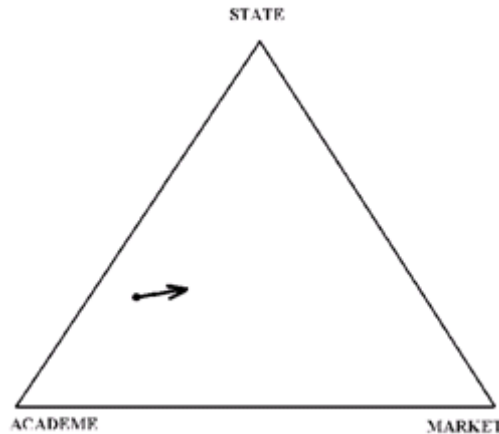
Illustration 7. Accountability Triangle of Quality Assurance in Latvia

Recent developments show that the employers become aware of own interest in the quality of higher education [71] and start to involve actively, supported by governmental activities [120], into the creation process of quality higher education. Still the major emphasis is on the academic community, with a slight increase in state involvement, as the society requires a reform of the higher education (e.g. more praxis based education) [50] and the state aims to answer these needs [160] and has undertaken to do so by signing the Bologna process supportive documentation.

The implementation of the ESG shifts the balance further on the accountability-improvement continuum at system and institutional level from academic to more state and market oriented, ensuring the participation of stakeholders in forming the higher education policy (see Illustration 7).

Formal self-assessment. The current system cannot ensure that the higher education institutions conduct a high quality genuine self-assessment and not a formal one, undertaken just to comply with the requirements set by the HEQEC.

Foreign experts. The argument of international credibility was the main reason why the higher education institutions that initially considered introduction of a quality assurance scheme as limiting their autonomy rather easily agreed upon establishment of the accreditation scheme with involvement of foreign experts in each assessment team. In this sense, the introduction of the scheme has been successful. However, there are some drawbacks as well as advantages of having assessment by international experts. The benefits of using international experts are evident, and they are the reason why Latvia decided to and is still ready to pay the costs and overcome difficulties. The benefits alluded to include: "outside view"; international credibility of Latvian accreditation; "European dimension";

strong arguments for the national debate with employers, parents, other stakeholders, and society at large; and, finally, reducing "small country effects" referring to the higher education system with strongly interrelated personal connections in which, therefore, finding a competent yet independent expert free from pre-assumptions for each field of study is quite an issue. There are, however, some possible constraints as well. Although in majority of cases the experience has been positive in Latvia, it might be interesting to other countries, thinking of introducing assessment with regular foreign experts' participation, to see, based on Latvia's experience, what difficulties in this respect could be foreseen and, possibly, avoided.

Knowledge of the Latvian system. It is quite clear that each country has its own balance among the educational, employment, and administrative system which is based upon a long tradition and where the peculiarities in relationship between the labour market and education system are known quite well and have (more or less) been kept in balance. In the Latvian context, it is not easy for a foreigner to immediately grasp the intrinsic features of the national higher education system, such as the role of research in studies, balance between academic and professional studies, kinds of institutions, types of qualifications awarded, etc. In this respect, it has to be admitted that there is a lot of positive experience when the same experts have been invited repeatedly.

Measuring against national standards and legal regulations. This issue is partly related to the previous one. It is essential that the Expert Team has to have a good knowledge regarding the requirements laid down in Latvian legislation and educational standards–something that is again not easy if the foreign expert is coming for the first time. In practice, it sometimes means that the Latvian expert on the team has to verify the compliance with the Latvian standards and regulations alone. So far, so good, but, unfortunately, this can also lead either to diverging views inside the Expert Team or, in extreme cases, to disagreement between the expert assessment report and the decision taken by the AC or HEC.

Language issue. Due to the usage of foreign experts, it is required that all the main documents submitted with the application for accreditation must also be translated in English–the requirement thus adding to the workload and costs of the institution. The need to speak in a foreign language during the assessment visit and at the conference following it presents difficulties, as not all staff members are supposed to speak English even if they might be fluent in another foreign language. Quite clearly, the usage of a foreign language when being assessed increases the probability of having misunderstandings. On the other hand, several exceptions are foreseen, for example, documents for accreditation of programmes in particular study fields such as linguistics can be submitted in the respective

language. The documents for the programmes that have once been accredited may be submitted for a repeated accreditation in Latvian language.

High costs of accreditation/assessment procedures. Even if enthusiastic foreign colleagues are ready to work as experts receiving fees they consider symbolic, paying the travel and subsistence costs plus expert fees is a heavy burden to the higher education institutions regardless of their type (state or private ones). Another weak point of the chosen accreditation system is that it turns comparatively expensive to conduct the programme accreditation; e.g. the accreditation costs are the same for the programmes that will be attended by 10 or 3,000 students. The HEQEC has calculated that the minimal number of students should be 1,000 in order for the accreditation costs not to be substantial. This is, in reality, often not the case. In the every-day work of the HEQEC, extremes have been encountered such as, for example, a college having 27 students per year only. The HEQEC's readiness to consider the cases individually and make a decision within the existing rules may be regarded as its strength. Correspondingly, the fact that the breakdown of costs for every particular accreditation case is based upon known methodology and tariffs and thus can be planned in advance helps, to some extent, offset high accreditation costs.

Judgments by foreign experts. Admittedly, this point is very subjective, yet interesting to be made. In some individual cases, the judgments of foreign experts can be over-forgiving or over-demanding, in both cases lead by their good will. The former has been observed more frequently than the latter, and needs a comment. It basically follows a concept that "the programme/ higher education institution is on the right way, let's accredit it", ignoring that it does not yet comply with the requirements and standards. In these cases, sometimes, the final decision made by the AC has been opposite. Also the cultural differences have to be taken into account. Sometimes, the foreign experts, wishing to remain polite, are not insisting clearly on changes to be made, leaving the local community to believe that the changes to be made are to be regarded as optional. Many of the difficulties related to the strategy to use foreign experts in accreditation process will be a question of past in the upcoming cases of re-accreditation. The future re-accreditation procedures will put more emphasis on the internal quality culture of the higher education institution, e.g. in the way that during the re-accreditation procedure only one expert will consider all the self assessment reports of the higher education institution, which may be done by an expert coming from Latvia. For a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the HEQEC please see Table 7.

Table 7. Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses of HEQEC and the Current Quality Assurance System by Rusakova

Issue	Strengths	Weaknesses
Accountability procedures of the HEQEC	• Latvia's external quality assurance system in general complies with the ESG • HEC has already committed itself to conduct the external assessment of the HEQEC • many of the elements of the self-assessment are already annually considered in the annual reports of the HEQEC	• the process of the external assessment has not yet been started
Legal status change	• by amending the statutes, it became possible to restore functionalities, but in slightly other form	• shareholders have to re-elect the board in case it does not follow the aims set by the shareholders • the seven board members are legal entities that are responsible with their own property for the activities conducted
HEQEC board and stakeholders: challenge to balance the representation of the shareholders in the board	• the shareholder may entrust any person with the right to represent it: the best experts may be selected	• the representative does not need to be attached to the shareholder's institution-the balance of shareholders' representation may be distorted
HEQEC board and stakeholders: challenge to balance the interests of the stakeholders	• a common aim - international credibility of awards allows to reach a consensus between stakeholders	• in separate cases students may be interested in decrease of quality of learning • the HEI are interested in a minimal display of negative information to the public
Staff of HEQEC and knowledge accumulation	• staff of HEQEC is professionally highly qualified • competences of the staff members are continuously developed • HEQEC closely cooperates with the academic community in Latvia • HEQEC actively and regularly participates in international networks system of knowledge accumulation exists	• in case of an unexpected increase of the average number of programmes to be accredited in the following years it will be necessary to increase the number of workers employed at the HEQEC
Quality assurance system	• future re-accreditation procedures will put more emphasis on the internal quality culture of the HEI	• it can not be ensured that the HEI conducts a high quality genuine self-assessment
Current quality assurance system: foreign experts role	• "outside view" • international credibility of Latvian accreditation • "European dimension" • strong arguments for the national debate with stakeholders • reducing "small country effects"	• see bellow
Current quality assurance system: foreign experts and the knowledge of the Latvian system	• same experts can be invited repeatedly	• it is not easy for a foreigner to immediately grasp the intrinsic features of the national higher education
Current quality assurance system: foreign experts and the language issue	• several exceptions are foreseen	• information exchange in English adds workload and costs for the HEI, may lead to misunderstandings
Current quality assurance system: foreign experts and the high costs of accreditation procedures	• cases may be considered individually • the breakdown of costs is based upon known methodology and tariffs	• paying the travel and subsistence costs plus expert fees is a heavy burden to the HEI
Current quality assurance system: foreign experts and the judgements	• there is a vast database of international experts available	• the judgments of foreign experts can be over-forgiving or over-demanding • the cultural differences

4.2.4 Implementation of the ESG in Latvia

Latvia is involved in the Bologna Process aiming at creation of the European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Process official documents, such as the 2003 Berlin Communiqué of Ministers, state as one of the main tasks aimed at the creation of EHEA the establishing of a coherent higher education quality assurance system, made more precise in 2005 by adopting *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area* (ESG) elaborated by ENQA and its partners. In general, it can be said that the HEQEC acts in accordance with the ESG for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions, as requested by the *ESG 3.1 Standard*.

Quality assurance procedure as ensured by the HEQEC complies with the *ESG 2.1 Standard* and takes into account the input oriented quality criteria such as teaching staff, learning resources etc. which are basically considered during the registration process of the higher education institutions, thus forming a basis for building up quality. In compliance with the *ESG 2.2 Standard*, the aims and objectives of quality assurance processes are determined and known in advance; in this regard, the homepage of the HEQEC contains a vast range of related information, also on the consistently applied criteria for the decision, as stated in the *ESG 2.3 Standard*. The designed external quality assurance processes are constantly improved according to the aims and objectives set for them, as expected by the *ESG 2.4 Standard*, but to the extent limited by the available resources, both financial, human and within available legal, social etc. frameworks. Thus, for example, the participation of students as observers is an element of the external review process. Currently the participation of students is to be regarded as rather formal [28], it is necessary to train the students correspondingly to ensure a more efficient participation in the quality assessment. A better comprehension of own role in the assessment process would thus enhance the motivation of student observators. A financial remuneration might improve the results of student observation activities, but under the current financial situation would be difficult to ensure. The current system applies the generally known model of review i.e. self-assessment/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up, but is unable to ensure that in, all cases, the higher education institutions indeed improve their own performance as the result of the self-assessment. The reports are published according to the requirements of the *ESG 2.5 Standard*. They are published in Latvian language and are accessible to the Latvian-speaking higher education community. The corresponding English translations are not always available. This limits the transparency to local academic community.

The *ESG 2.6 Standard* considers follow-up procedures. Currently, if a programme submitted for accreditation in general confirms to the quality requirements but contains essential problematic issues, the programme is accredited for 2 years only (instead of the usual cycle - 6 years), within which the problems should be lifted or otherwise the programme is not re-accredited. If a programme submitted for accreditation in general confirms to the quality requirements but contains minor problems, the HEQEC follows up by referring to them after the successful accreditation. This does not happen regularly, happens case to case, often as phone conversations and is subject to available resources (e.g. time) to do so.

In the current quality assurance system of Latvia the external quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes are undertaken on a cyclical basis as required by the *ESG 2.7 Standard*. After the first accreditation round completed in 2002, each programme and institution has to be accredited anew every 6 years. Year 2007 has completed the second accreditation cycle of higher education institutions' programmes. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used have been clearly defined and known in advance thus making it possible to maintain a continuous quality assurance. The progress is taken into account–the institutions/programmes already accredited undergo a simplified accreditation procedure there is only one–if the higher education institution wishes so–expert that checks the self-assessment reports of all years. This may be done in Latvian language. The process is clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and the demands of the HEQEC on institutions are not over exaggerated.

As stipulated by the *ESG 2.8 Standard* the HEQEC is also an important source of knowledge in the field of higher education quality in Latvia. The HEQEC regularly publishes results of own activities. The homepage of the agency contains a vast database on the accredited higher education institutions and programmes. The information is classified and arranged in a clear order, thus alleviating a structured analysis. It is possible to see all accredited programmes ordered according to the time factor. There is the following information available on every accredited programme: whether the programme is professional or academic, the general field of studies, qualification or degree to be awarded, required entrance level, type and duration of studies, profession standard (if applicable), accreditation valid till et c. As well the site contains link to the self-assessment report of the programme and the report of the Expert Team (containing student member(s) as one of the direct stakeholders). The information displayed on the higher education institution at the HEQEC homepage is: the contacts, information on accreditation, date of official publishing

of the accreditation information, link to the self-assessment report of the higher education institution, link to the report of the Expert Team (containing student member(s)), Rector and his/her approval date by the Cabinet of Ministers, approval date of the Constitution of the higher education institution by the Cabinet of Ministers or the Parliament. The site also contains useful information on methodology and recommendations for dealing with quality assurance, European and world guidelines on the issue (both in original language and translated in Latvian), Latvian laws and regulations that concern the quality assurance system, instructions by the MoES, reports on the higher education, projects conducted by the HEQEC and the press releases of the agency. Thus the processes, criteria and procedures applied by the HEQEC are pre-defined and publicly available both on webpage and in person during consultations.

The HEQEC currently is a full member of ENQA and is formally recognized in the EHEA as the agency responsible for external quality assurance in Latvia. However with respect to the *ESG 3.2 Standard* the HEQEC currently experiences some legal issues (see below). They are related to the changing legal framework – e.g. a new Law On Higher Education shall be introduced shortly.

The *ESG 3.3 Standard* defines the activities of the agency. The HEQEC complies with this ESG standard to a great extent. The HEQEC ensures that the external quality assurance activities (accreditation both at institutional and programme level) are conducted on a regular basis.

The HEQEC regularly considers own performance. Concerning the resources available to the HEQEC for (see the *ESG 3.4 Standard*) for organising and running the external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, both human and financial resources can be considered at the moment as quite adequate and proportional. Thus, for example, the agency has an extensive data basis of available experts for the external assessment of the accreditation subject. Only problem within the current economical slowdown context is the increasing pressure from the side of the stakeholders to decrease the costs resulting from accreditation. Nevertheless the stakeholders are aware of risks to the quality if the accreditation costs would be decreased and do not exercise much pressure. The provision for the development of the processes and procedures might have been higher to allow the implementation of more improvement oriented measures.

The HEQEC has not yet published policy for the quality assurance of the agency itself, as the *ESG 3.5 Standard* implies, but the website contains detailed information on the international and local law and guideline framework that the HEQEC declares to work

within, combined with a detailed description of the applied methodology. The statements within the Statutes of the HEQEC clearly show that the external quality assurance process is the main activity of the agency. Last but not least, the HEQEC analyses issues of the application of theory in real life and seeks for ways of improvement. Thus for example, the HEQEC has made available at its website both own selection principles of the Expert Team's experts, assessment principles applied by the experts when evaluating the higher education institution and programme, information about observer's activities in the Expert Team and during peer visits, feedback questionnaire both for experts and other stakeholders, and conducted researches in the field of ensuring best practice in external assessment.

The *ESG 3.6 Standard* insists that the agencies should be independent. Financially the HEQEC relies completely on the funding from the higher education institution. Nevertheless it is sought at all times that the conclusions and recommendations would not be influenced by third parties.

In conformity with the *ESG 3.7 Standard* the HEQEC has pre-defined and publicly available processes, criteria and procedures used by the agency. The accreditation procedure consists of a self-assessment of the higher education institution/an external assessment by a group of experts, including, (a) student member(s) in the role of observers, and peer visits/publication of a report, including outcomes/a follow-up procedure according to the detected drawbacks. The appeals procedure has not been introduced due to the additional costs that it would create.

The HEQEC has not yet published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, as the *ESG 3.8 Standard* implies. The HEQEC currently does not subcontract nor outsource anybody for activities foreseen in Statutes such as for example organizing the process of assessment. The HEQEC maintains an internal feedback mechanism; an internal reflection mechanism in the way of regular meetings; and an external feedback mechanism. For the purpose of gaining an external feedback, the HEQEC has placed anonymous questionnaires on the homepage, tailored according to the needs of the separate target groups: students, academic staff, employers and experts and routinely proposes to fill them in. The results are regularly analysed by staff members. It is planned to introduce an international, external assessment of the HEQEC to be run by the Higher Education Council not less than once per every six years. Thus the guidelines are met only partly – the agencies activities will be reviewed, but in slightly broader cycle- six years instead 5.

4.2.5 Challenges and Agenda Ahead

In the nearest future HEQEC plans to update the documents defining the cooperation of the HEQEC with the MoES. Two main issues i.e. the legal basis and funding of the HEQEC should be reconsidered more profoundly.

Legal basis. Agreement concluded with the MoES as of April 7, 1998 stipulates the activities of the HEQEC, when conducting the assessment necessary for the accreditation of the higher education institutions and programmes. According to the paragraph 4.1. of this agreement, the main task of the HEQEC is to „in due time submit to the HEC and/or the AC the statement on the accreditation of higher education institution and/or programmes in question". When organizing the assessment the HEQEC is first of all guided by „Law on Higher Education Institutions" The procedure and sequence of the measures relevant to the accreditation and external assessment is defined by the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers as of October 3, 2006 Nr. 821: "Accreditation Regulation of the higher education institution, Colleges and Programmes in Higher Education". Understanding the significance of the Bologna process and creation of EHEA as a result of it, as one of its important tasks in the nearest future the HEQEC considers own involvement in elaboration and implementation of the new Law on Higher Education, which should be consistent with requirements of the modern higher education environment and current trends of EHEA. The new Law on Higher Education stipulates also the quality assurance system of the higher education in Latvia.

Funding. Thus for example in 2007 the source of income of the HEQEC was based on the contracts with the higher education institution on the quality assessment. The HEQEC has never benefited financially from public budget. This makes it independent from the Ministry, but rather dependent on the higher education institutions. Taking into account the public good that is the result of the HEQEC activities, a funding from the MoES covering at least the maintenance costs could bring the advantage of diminished dependency on the higher education institution. On the other hand such system makes the higher education institution to approach the accreditation documentation and process in a responsible way and introduce a new programme only in case that the higher education institution is sure on it being demanded by the market. At the same time this threatens the development of innovative programmes. Expenses for the assessment of higher education institutions and programmes are covered by higher education institutions themselves. Therefore basically, the

accreditation costs include costs of expert assessment, the costs for publication of accreditation results, as well as maintenance costs of the HEQEC[164] itself.

The MoES usually argues that the costs for accreditation in the state institutions are funded from the state budget allocated to the institutions. However, the provided funding does not anticipate covering the costs for accreditation as well and is actually provided with the objective to serve other needs. In fact using state budget for aims other than they are provided for might theoretically result in legal consequences. Thus in the end the state higher education institutions have to allocate resources among other own income, such as for example tuition fees. In case of private institutions, the costs of accreditation are anyway covered from tuition fees paid by the students.

In condition of an overall underfunding of higher education system in Latvia, there could be other ways of using the funding for quality enhancement. Especially at the moment this problem aggravates and creates virulent discussions in academic community as Latvia is experiencing economical slowdown and the funding is decreasing in all areas, higher education and science being among them, in the next year's budget. The shortage of funding may lead to a decreased quality of assessment in the future and threatens the lowering of the quality threshold to fight with in the future. At the same time, the economical slowdown usually means higher unemployment rates and more interest from the side of the society about own re-education and re-qualification. This might lead to increased number of students within the current situation, again a threat to the quality. However the demographical factors suggest an overall decrease in student numbers in the future. Based on this reflection the academic community considers an idea to abandon the many different Bachelor programmes and introduce a general and common bachelor programme within a study field. This would be especially of an interest, since the modelling of the future student composition within different study cycles demonstrates that the number of students within first cycle will decrease and the number of students in further cycles will steadily increase. Thus instead of accrediting many separate bachelor programmes it will be possible to spare accreditation costs by accrediting one bachelor programme aimed at the same bachelor degree, e.g. in Economics. The meaning of specialization decreases with the shortened 3 (as expected by the Bologna process) year Bachelor. This model would require the accreditation of the separate Master programmes which would be then the carriers of the main specialization. Such development would threaten the HEQEC with decreased workload, but would provide an

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[164] HEQEC is a non-profit organization. It is funded only through the fees for accreditation, no state funds are directly allocated for its maintenance.

opportunity to reconsider own efficiency and probably would provide more time for improvement oriented activities.

It would be advisable to revise the legal basis and funding of the HEQEC by reconciling all essential issues with the MoES. Such reconciliation would alleviate the clearing up of many currently unclear issues concerning the tasks and responsibilities, and provide the opportunity to strengthen the rights and the fields of competences of the HEQEC. Thus, for example, it is hard for the HEQEC to counsel the higher education institution on the possible way of future development, with the priorities of the MoES unclear.

Other Issues. The average age of academic staff in Latvia is an important factor increasing the significance of the quality assurance activities in the future. Even though the average age structure of the academic personnel became stable in the last years, in average every ninth person from the academic staff is below 30, but every fourth is 60 or above. This leads to cases where one third or even more of the staff at a higher education institution is 60 or older. The number of doctoral students is unsatisfactory. Also the labs and other study infrastructure are morally and physically depreciating. It is planned to attract EU Structural Funds to address these issues. This is all supplementing to the significance of the activities run by the HEQEC and demonstrates clear opportunities for continuous development within quality assurance of higher education in Latvia.

Also some formal requirements of the existing accreditation framework have to be reconsidered; e.g. the academic community considers an idea to introduce the accreditation of a department, instead of personalities. This would alleviate the conflict which arises if the study courses are read by other lecturers from the same department than indicated by supplied CVs at the moment of accreditation of the programme.

One of the future challenges concerns the conceptual questions such as the assessment of different, less traditional study types, such as distance, part time, partial full time, and partial intensity studies. An important issue is the recognition of the lifelong learning and its proper inclusion in existing study system. It is also necessary to substantially improve the assessment of the results obtained after studying at a professional programme with the labour market requirements.

The good cooperation with the stakeholders brings many opportunities of detecting the problematic aspects of the existing quality assurance system and may lead to an ongoing improvement of the agency's activities. Sometimes, in cases when there is no direct interest in the results it is difficult to involve all stakeholders on time. In the future, when a closer cooperation of shareholder would be recommended, it is necessary to create rules in a way to

motivate all involved parties. Thus for example - since 2000 the Latvian legislation requires that at accreditation of professional higher education programmes, their compliance to the profession standards is sought. The profession standards, in its turn, had to be first elaborated by the labour market side – the employers and labour unions (in cooperation with educationalists). Since the higher education institutions were the ones who actually needed these standards, it was difficult to motivate the labour market to participate within the process of development. It is self-evident, that such situation was an additional burden to higher education institutions and that it also caused delays in accreditation. At the same time, the society ran the danger that a professional standard could be created that would suit the needs (with respect, for example, to the available teaching resources) of the higher education institutions better than the labour market-associated stakeholders.

4.2.6 Conclusions

In Soviet Latvia, similarly like in other Eastern European countries, the higher education was strictly controlled, this control was abandoned rather abruptly in early years of regaining independence and higher education institutions faced increased autonomy that slowly became replaced by new notions of civic and market accountability. After rather fundamental higher education reform started in 1991 through adoption of Education law and opening up of markets to the Western world, the stakeholders, especially the higher education institutions were in favour of measures that would support the international credibility of the at that time not-so-well-known Latvia credentials abroad, and, first of all, in Europe. The common goal results in a quite well functioning cooperation among the stakeholders involved and the HEQEC.

Recent developments show that the employers become aware of own interest in the quality of higher education and start to involve actively into the creation process of quality higher education. Still the major emphasis is on the academic community, with a slight increase in state involvement, as the society requires a reform of the higher education (e.g. more praxis based education) and the state aims to answer these needs and has undertaken to do so by signing the Bologna process supportive documentation. The implementation of the ESG shifts the balance on the accountability-improvement continuum at system and institutional level from academic to more state and market oriented, ensuring the participation of stakeholders in forming the higher education policy.

Currently the participation of students in the external quality assurance process is to be regarded as rather formal.

The current system applies the generally known model of review i.e. self-assessment/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up, but is unable to ensure that in, all cases, the higher education institutions indeed improve their own performance as the result of the self-assessment. The reports are published according to the requirements of the ESG. They are published in Latvian language and are accessible to the Latvian-speaking higher education community. The corresponding English translations are not always available.

If a programme submitted for accreditation in general confirms to the quality requirements but contains minor problems, the HEQEC follows up by referring to them after the successful accreditation. This does not happen regularly, happens case to case, often as phone conversations and is subject to available resources (e.g. time) to do so.

The HEQEC has not yet published policy for the quality assurance of the agency itself, but the website contains detailed information on the international and local law and guideline framework that the HEQEC declares to work within, combined with a detailed description of the applied methodology.

The ESG insists that the agencies should be independent. Financially the HEQEC relies completely on the funding from the higher education institution. Nevertheless it is sought at all times that the conclusions and recommendations would not be influenced by third parties. Taking into account the public good that is the result of the HEQEC activities, a funding from the MoES covering at least the maintenance costs could bring the advantage of diminished dependency on the higher education institution.

It is planned to introduce an international, external assessment of the HEQEC to be run by the Higher Education Council not less than once per every six years. Thus the guidelines are met only partly – the agencies activities will be reviewed, but in slightly broader cycle- six years instead 5.

These and other discrepancies have to be removed on the basis of a constructive and ongoing dialogue with the involved stakeholders. Coordinated activities when solving these and other issues would ensure improved cooperation between higher education institutions and society would assist the higher education institutions in providing education consistent with the labour market's demand and oriented at the future requirements.

One of the future challenges concerns the conceptual questions such as the assessment of different, less traditional study types, recognition of the life long learning and its proper inclusion in existing study system. The main issues still to be considered in Latvia in this

connection are the following: defining of the learning outcomes in competences and application of them in assessing the quality.

In fact by applying the ESG within the quality assurance system, Latvia has introduced a framework created to support the improvement of the quality and the recognition of qualifications. Now it is up to the stakeholders to apply the quality issues not just formally, but with regard to the philosophy behind it. Therefore the other future challenge is connected with the growing significance of internal quality culture development at higher education institutions.

The importance of the internal and external quality assurance at the higher education of Latvia is growing as the mobility of staff and students' increases and Latvia's higher education institutions become integrated in international higher education market.

The HEQEC is an important source of knowledge in the field of higher education quality in Latvia, not only because it contains useful information on methodology and recommendations for dealing with quality assurance, but also because of the possibility to access the self-assessment and peer review reports of HEI and their programs.

The implementation of transparency tools such as ESG in external quality assurance system of Latvia ensures that there is more mutual trust among Latvian higher education sector and that of the EHEA countries.

This alleviates the recognition procedure of at least the learning outcomes of formal education at this point.

With learning outcomes of informal and nonformal learning becoming integrated into qualifications of formal education through recognition of prior learning procedures in more and more countries, the significance of maintaining the trust of reliable higher education quality assurance system in the respective country is increasing.

5. Research on Problems of Recognition with Regard to Information Provision and Supportive Structure in the EHEA

5.1. Organization and Methodology of Research

Research issue

As already mentioned in Chapter 2 in the Berlin Communiqué, ministers stated that all countries in the Bologna Process should ratify the Lisbon Recognition Convention and by 2010 almost all EHEA countries had done so.

Rusakova shares the assumption that induced the study - even though there is an overreaching legal framework for recognition in place through the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts, local practice of putting into action the legal texts may create a challenge for successful implementation of Bologna Process and jeopardize the very objectives of creating a common EHEA. This on its turn may impede the development of educational infrastructure aimed at supporting the lifelong learning for all.

Therefore it is useful to check the progress of national legislation according to the code of good practice or guidelines available in Europe.

The EHEA is built on the assumption that mobility of learners and graduates is an important part of what it means to be European and that fair recognition of qualifications is an essential policy element to attain this key goal of the Bologna Process.

Within this respect information on recognition is of crucial importance in a number of contexts:

- it allows students and graduates to move as freely as possible within the EHEA;
- it ensures acceptance of qualifications from European countries in other areas of the world;
- it allows access to regulated professions and allows employment in the non-regulated parts of the labour market.

The reference document to check the practice against is the Code of good practice in the provision of information on recognition (ENIC/NARIC, 2004) [97]. Another document that sets the standards in the area of information provision on recognition is the Recommendation on Criteria And Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, 2001) [123].

To implement the Lisbon Recognition Convention and, in general, to develop policy and practice for the recognition of qualifications, the Council of Europe and UNESCO have established the ENIC Network (European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility). The ENIC Network cooperates closely with the NARIC Network of the European Union. The NARIC network is an initiative of the European Commission. The network aims at improving academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study in the Member States of the European Union (EU) countries, the European Economic Area (EEA) countries and Turkey. The network is part of the Community's Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), which stimulates the mobility of students and staff between higher education institutions in these countries [178].

Taking into account the important role of ENIC/NARIC in recognition and the role of quality assurance agencies in promoting and sustaining the trust, it is necessary to examine the interrelation of these both bodies in the responding country. The reference documents for checking the structure of the bodies involved in recognition procedure are the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Council of Europe, 1997) [102], the Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services (UNESCO/Council of Europe, 2004) [117], Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2005) [129].

Subtasks of the research

-to find out the status quo of the progress of improving fair recognition of qualifications in EHEA, to discuss the role of common European standards in supporting the progress of mutual recognition, to analyse the national, regional policy and practice in relation to international framework in the context of recognition, to find out whether due to different recognition practices the outcome of the assessment of the same qualification could differ in different countries.

Type of the research

classification [32] of the conducted research according to the -

- application mode: applied research, since it is planned that it will be possible to apply the results of the research for improving the existing policy and practice;
- applied research method: qualitative research, as it will be based on qualitative rather than quantitative data;

- research issue: survey approach- the aim is to describe the status quo of recognition in EHEA;
- data collection procedure: survey - collection of the same information about all the cases in a sample;

Tools of the research

Survey of 37 countries, structured questionnaire (elaborated by a group of experts, the contribution of Rusakova in creating the questionnaire is to be described as rather minuscule and insignificant), open questions - basically self-evaluation reports of the responding countries, content analysis of the reports.

Target group and the sample size[17]

Taking into account the specifics of the research, ad hoc the representativeness to the EHEA area, all 46 member countries[173] of the EHEA were initially included into the research target group. Acknowledging the committment to the submission of national action plans on recognition at the highest administrative level of the country (respective ministers of education) access to the target group was promoted, as well as the release of information was not impeded.

Consequently the submitted reports showed the response rate of 80,4% (thus the sample of the research became the 37 questionnaires returned out of 46), the data are to be regarded as rather reliable and valid, and so are the results of the analysed national action plans.

Template questionnaire with guidelines and explanatory note

As already mentioned in the Chapter 2, mutual recognition of qualifications has been allocated an important role in Bologna process. Chapter 2 also mentions the great diversity in the EHEA and the need to ensure fair recognition as stated in the Bergen Communiqué.

While the main legal framework for recognition was in place through the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts, the most important challenge was how the legal texts are implemented in practice. To address the issue the Ministers committed to elaborating national action plans for recognition, that should identify what is needed to improve the recognition of qualifications in their countries.

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[173] taking into account the national significance of the report, it would be inappropriate to reduce the target group to only the persons involved in writing it.

The diversity of the countries assumes that the precise actions and measures undertaken by each country will of course be different. Also the complexity of the subject needs some previous briefing as to what needs to be included in the action plans. Therefore in order to ensure the comparability between the national action plans for later analysis there was a need that there is both a consistency in structure of countries' answers, and a common understanding of the applied concepts.

There were four main research areas included in the questionnaire and the components of the national action plans were organised around four major categories, Rusakova analysed the category "Information provision" and "Structures".

The category "Information provision" considers the provision of information on recognition and questions the existence and content of information package available for applicants.

The category "Structures" discusses the formal status and role of the national information centre in academic and professional recognition in the respective country and examines the co-operation between recognition/quality assurance bodies.

Research organization and timeline

On behalf of the Bologna Follow Up Group, the ENIC Bureau and the NARIC Advisory Board (acting on the part of both networks) as well as the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, elaborated questionnaire with guidelines and explanatory note for the national action plans for recognition. The submitted documents were approved by the Bologna Follow Up Group, in Vienna April 7, 2006.

The approved questionnaire with guidelines and explanatory note were sent out to the respective Minister of Education in 46 countries, members of EHEA and part of "Bologna Process" at that time. Ideally the filled out national action plans had to be validated by local stakeholders, not only by persons involved in the preparation. Thus the national action plan in Latvia was prepared by Latvian ENIC/NARIC centre upon request of and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia (interviews with respective experts of the field). To validate the contents it was presented for the stakeholders at national seminar on implementation of Bologna process in Latvia on 14 December, 2006. Rusakova was closely involved in preparing the national seminar.

The completed by the countries' national action plans on recognition were envisaged to be returned by May 2007 as the national action plans formed part of countries' national report for the London Ministerial Conference 2007. With a few exceptions, countries

submitted their national action plans in time. At the time of the ministerial conference in total 37 countries out of 46 had presented their reports: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Belgium French Community, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, UK, Ukraine.

Put together, the national action plans ran to some 700 pages. Apparently a subsequent summary and even more- an analysis- of the results was needed in order to increase the usability of the information submitted.

As a result in their London Communiqué, ministers asked the Bologna Follow-Up Group "to arrange for the ENIC/NARIC networks to analyse our national action plans and spread good practice" [139]. ENIC/NARIC appointed a working party for this purpose and the Council of Europe Secretariat commissioned Andrejs Rauhvargers and Agnese Rusakova (the author of this paper) to draft the study.

In total the authors- A. Rauhvargers and A. Rusakova have analysed the National Action Plans for Recognition submitted by 37 countries in 2007. Some of the countries submitted a document in a different form, structure and depth than required by the guidelines, which did not allow for a homogenous comparison of the countries in some aspects and made it difficult to draw conclusions about EHEA as a whole.

In order to alleviate the follow up, the analysis is structured according to the structure of the template questionnaire, rarely the information concerning one point of interest has been drawn from other part of the document. The analysis is concluded by national action plans as a collection of best and not-so-good practices.

5.2. Research

Research on Problems of Recognition with Regard to Information Provision and Supportive Structure in the EHEA

5.2.1 Information Provision

Summary of the National Action Plans with regard to:

Provision of information on recognition

a. Measures taken or envisaged to improve the provision of information on recognition criteria and procedures and on the national education system;
b. The timetable envisaged for such measures;
c. The bodies or institutions responsible for the measures;
d. The state of electronic provision of information on recognition;
e. Whether the national information centres establish and maintain their own web pages, linked to the ENIC-NARIC Web site.

Information package for applicants

a. The extent to which information packages are provided for applicants by higher education institutions and other competent recognition authorities and,
b. If needed, how practice could be improved.

Provision of information on recognition and information package for applicants

It is important to note that most countries have not distinguished between both points in their national action plans. The answers are often unclear and represent a mix of descriptions as to how countries provide information on their own educational systems and how they provide information to holders of foreign qualifications applying for recognition.

Most countries have mentioned their ENIC/NARICs as the main disseminator of information packages for applicants. Some countries have mentioned the respective Ministry of Education, its division responsible for academic recognition or the higher education institution itself.

The level of support to applicants for recognition differs from country to country. There are countries with a high level of service that, as well as an information package, provide applicants with feedback on the status of their applications. The French Community in Belgium offers the possibility of an online status check on their website. In Denmark the applicants are notified if the processing of their application has been prolonged. Denmark is planning a user survey to gather information on how the existing system can be improved while Sweden has stressed the need for more active information measures at higher education

institutions in their follow-up study of 2004. Germany is currently developing standards of assistance in recognition procedures.

The service level in some countries is more passive. Some of the respondents declare that they provide the very basic information needed for starting the application process – just the list of documents necessary for the recognition of qualifications and the special application form. This is less applicant-friendly and efficient if the applicant needs more standardised information. There are cases where information is provided only by putting notices up in the building of the recognition authority, which makes the information rather inaccessible to applicants. The applicants can be better assisted, not only through face-to-face or telephone counselling, but also by being able to carry out research on the Internet (where the information should also be organised in an accessible manner), and to request the necessary documents by email or standard mail. Provision of information in paper form only (Armenia) may mean longer processing times altogether.

Most often the criteria and procedures for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications are regulated at national level, prepared in the majority of cases by the ENIC/NARIC or the respective ministry. The recognition authorities have to follow standard criteria and procedures, but usually there is no regulation at national level on standardised information packages.

Denmark, Estonia, Iceland and others state that a standardised information package or a list of documents based on experience have been drawn up and at best contain information on:

- who may apply;
- guidelines on how to fill in the application;
- the purpose(s) of recognition;
- documents required;
- assessment procedure, including the role of the recognition authority, other assessment agencies and higher education institutions (who takes the decision, how binding this decision is);
- object and criteria of the assessment;
- processing fees;
- time normally required for processing;
- outcome of the assessment;
- status of assessment;

- conditions and procedures for appealing against a recognition decision, according to national legislation, rights regarding recognition;

- final clauses;

- contact data;

- additional information (government decrees on recognition – full text, reference to the national laws and international conventions and agreements which may be relevant to the assessment of foreign qualifications).

Such standardised information is available on the website and as printed material (brochure) in the national language.

In some countries not all information on recognition is yet available online. Albania plans to link the recognition authorities responsible for recognising foreign master degrees and foreign doctorates to the ENIC/NARIC website by the end of 2007. While responsibility for the recognition of different levels of diplomas in Albania is dispersed among different recognition authorities, the French Community of Belgium plans to create a one-stop office dealing with all requests for the recognition of qualifications from secondary and higher education, believing that this would allow applicants to be guided more efficiently. Several countries have a single e-mail address to which questions concerning recognition can be sent.

In the good examples, the information is available in both electronic and printed form in a number of locations, for instance on the website and in the programme prospectus of the higher education institution and on the websites of various state bodies and agencies (stakeholders). Higher education institutions are usually the first stop for applicants. Therefore Albania is planning to link the website of the recognition authority to the higher education institution websites.

Even if the information is provided, one has to make it accessible to the audience: both local and foreign. Denmark and Hungary not only provide information to the local audience, but also take a step further by ensuring that the information available is understandable and does not contain terms that are not easily understood by non-specialists.

It can be seen that in several countries the recognition information is provided in the national language only. Without information available in widely spoken European languages the content of the websites is not easily accessible to speakers of other languages.

Some countries report that if the main information on recognition is available and accessible (easy to find, no language barrier) on the website of the ENIC/NARIC, higher education institutions might only need to provide information in their programme prospectus

on the entry requirements for each programme alongside information on the ENIC/NARIC. In Poland the higher education institutions provide all information on their own. Each body responsible for publishing the information is usually in charge of updating that information. In Germany the information is provided by many stakeholders and a review could be carried out as to whether the requirements and process of assessment and recognition could be presented more concisely.

In Hungary the recognition application form and relevant information on recognition is available on the ENIC/NARIC website but, due to the great variation in foreign applicant numbers at the higher education institutions, the level of support varies from standard information already accessible on the website of the higher education institution to answers given by phone upon request. It is recommended that higher education institutions with a significant number of applications also provide essential information on their academic recognition procedure on their websites. Armenia is even planning to introduce the possibility of applying for recognition online.

Several countries, for example Belgium and Sweden, are currently conducting research into how to improve the recognition process in the country. Ireland is reorganising the website in a more user-friendly manner.

In "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", the ENIC/NARIC is highly involved in creating and improving the legislative framework, while the assessment of foreign qualifications itself is delegated to the higher education institutions, whose recognition decisions are then monitored, examined and approved by the information centre.

An interesting observation is that, as with some other issues, the countries that already provide good information are also the ones planning further improvements.

Just a few countries mention information provision on their education systems at all. This is symptomatic and links to fulfilling the obligations that parties have undertaken when they ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Provision of information regarding one's own educational system is of high importance for credentials evaluators in other countries. It is very helpful on condition that it is specifically targeted at credentials evaluators and contains concentrated information, for instance, on the types of institution, programme and qualification, quality assurance and also recently the qualifications frameworks. Some countries in their national action plans have mentioned that the function of information provision on their education systems abroad is delegated to other bodies. At best, those bodies are specific education information agencies that might also be able to provide recognition-related information, but this arrangement is highly questionable if the

information provision is left to the general representations of countries abroad (for example overall national promotion agencies, embassies), as mentioned in several national action plans. The problem here is that the information at the level of those providers is usually too general and too much targeted at the general public or at young people who are considering going to study abroad. Lack of recognition-specific information leads to the need to send large numbers of questions to other countries' ENICs to receive information that could otherwise have been found on the Web.

5.2.2 Supportive Structures

Summary of the National Action Plans with regard to:

National information centre

Outline the functioning of the national information centre (ENIC/NARIC), e.g. with regard to:
a. The formal status of the centre;
b. Legal competence (e.g. advisory or decision making; academic, de jure professional, de facto professional recognition);
c. Staff and budget;
d. Capacity building in terms of expertise and service to the public;
e. Networking and co-operation at national level and internationally.

Co-operation recognition/quality assurance bodies

a. Information exchange between the bodies responsible for recognition and quality assurance;
b. Discussion of an agreement on working methods between these bodies;
c. Use of information on the outcomes of quality assessments in the recognition of qualifications;
d. Use of membership of international networks and associations in recognition (e.g. ENIC and NARIC Networks) and quality assurance (e.g. ENQA) for the mutual benefits of both bodies.

National information centre

The formal status of the national information centre

The different options for the setting up of the national recognition centre (ENIC/NARIC) may vary greatly across the EHEA. The main ways in which the national ENIC/NARIC can be established are:

- as a part of the ministry responsible for higher education:

- as an organisation subordinated to the ministry (e.g. the Flemish Community of Belgium, Denmark, Turkey);

- as an independent agency established either by the government/ministry or ministry together with higher education institutions (e.g. Italy, Norway, Sweden);

- as a part of the national rectors' conference (e.g. Switzerland);

- as a private body operating on a government mandate (e.g. the United Kingdom).

In most countries the national information centre is not formally separated from the ministry responsible for higher education. In such cases the ENIC/NARIC activities are fulfilled by a separate department, for example Albania, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia; or a division of the corresponding ministry (Greece). In Ukraine it is a board (Licensing, Accreditation and Nostrification Board) of the Ministry of Education and Science.

In some countries, for instance Greece, it is planned to increase the autonomy of the national information centre by establishing it separately from the ministry as an authority dealing with ENIC/NARIC issues.

There are countries where the national information centre enjoys a formal status of independence. For example, the Danish ENIC/NARIC is part of the national authority CIRIUS, which in its turn is under the supervision of the Danish Ministry of Education. The Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange in Poland is a state institution informing the minister of higher education about its activities. In Norway the NOKUT is an independent government agency. In Sweden the national information centre is a part of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. It is independent, but it gets its mandate and funding from the government. In France the International Centre for Education Studies (CIEP) is a public institution of the Ministry of National Education.

In most cases the national information centre is financially dependent on the respective ministry. In some countries special funding for this function has been allocated, for example in Armenia and Latvia, which makes financial management easier. In a few cases the ENIC/NARIC is a structural unit of a foundation, for example the Estonian ENIC/NARIC is a structural unit of the Archimedes Foundation.

In the Czech Republic, the Centre for Equivalence of Documents about Education is one of the sections of the state-funded Centre for Higher Education Studies. In Italy the role of the national information centre is entrusted to CIMEA, a section of the Fondazione Rui, a private entity legally recognised as a non-profit body.

There are countries where the tasks of the ENIC/NARIC centre are fulfilled by higher education institutions. For example, the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture entrusted the University of Iceland with the supervision of Iceland's ENIC/NARIC centre. In

Switzerland, in its turn, the ENIC/NARIC centre is a department of the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS). In these cases, the bodies designated by the ministry have a national mandate.

There are countries where the national information centre has not been founded by the respective national ministry of education. In Germany the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) is a department of the Secretariat of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the federal states.

The UK ENIC/NARIC is managed by a private company on behalf of the UK Government's Department for Education and Skills. It is thus a private body operating under a public mandate. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is an agency of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The competences of the ENIC/NARICs are usually regulated by national law or secondary legislation. Serbia considers adopting a separate recognition law.

In most cases the ENIC/NARIC's main function is to inform and support the decisions made by the competent authorities for recognition.

Role of national information centre in academic and professional recognition

The area of recognition (professional and academic) and sometimes even the extent of the qualification level affected by the decision vary among the different countries. Thus, for example, Albania states that "there is no actual difference between the academic and the professional recognition". In Denmark, to create a better synergy, one single national entry point (namely CIRIUS) in relation to recognition of all kinds of qualifications, both professional and academic, has been created. The ENIC/NARICs of EU and European Economic Area (EEA) countries are often also the contact points for recognition of professional qualifications covered by EU Directive 2005/36/EC. The ENIC/NARIC in Iceland, however, deals with academic recognition issues only, while professional recognition is handled by the appropriate ministries.

In cases where the ENIC/NARIC is not responsible for professional recognition in the relevant professional area, it refers applicants to the appropriate competent authority, acting as the contact point on professional recognition. Some ENICs give de jure professional recognition of teacher qualifications for the purpose of practising the profession (e.g. Denmark, Hungary). In other cases, at the request of the applicant, the Hungarian ENIC/NARIC assesses the foreign qualification and give de facto recognition.

In Sweden the decisions by the ENIC/NARIC on teaching certificates have formal legal status, whereas other regulated professions in Sweden are evaluated by the competent authority appointed by the government.

In most cases the ENIC/NARIC has an advisory role and the decision on recognition is taken by a different competent authority. The recognition statement delivered by the ENIC/NARIC is essentially a recommendation and thus not legally binding. It usually describes the level and status of the given credential in the country of its origin and often the possible level of recognition in the host country in question. The final decision in countries such as Cyprus, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK lies with the higher education institution, employer or professional body concerned. However, it is usual that the position taken by the national information centre is trusted and endorsed by the bodies concerned. In order to ensure the quality of decision making on the basis of the recommendations issued, the Swiss ENIC/NARIC participates in the CRUS (Commission for Admission and Equivalence), which oversees the recognition practices of the universities.

In some cases it is planned to change the competence of the ENIC/NARIC so that they can make the decisions (e.g. Latvia), but other countries (e.g. Estonia) do not plan to change anything in the status of the national information centre.

The decisions taken by the national information centre in the French Community of Belgium have the form of decrees in the name of the government and therefore have legal status: "a favourable decision on the equivalence of a foreign diploma … provides the same legal effects as the diploma awarded in the French Community to which it is considered equivalent". France in its turn states that "a legal principle of equivalency between foreign qualifications and French qualifications awarded by the ministry of national education, higher education and research does not exist". Therefore the admission of foreign students to French higher education institutions requires a decision on exemption, issued by the rector (Président de l'Université in the French terminology) or the director of the institution concerned.

There are countries in which the ENIC/NARIC has both advisory and decision-making functions by having an advisory role in academic recognition and a decision-making role in professional recognition. Thus, for example, the Hungarian ENIC/NARIC operates as an advisory body on issues of academic recognition but it makes legally binding decisions in cases concerning recognition for employment purposes. The situation is similar in Armenia. The Slovak Centre for Recognition of Diplomas decides on the recognition of qualifications of citizens of the Slovak Republic and EU member countries wishing to perform regulated

professions and issues a certificate for automatic recognition of third cycle higher education qualifications obtained abroad and for educational competence obtained on the territory of the Slovak Republic. In Albania, the Department of Higher Education and Recognition of Diplomas researches the cases and provides a draft decision, which is then signed by the deputy minister and thus becomes valid.

Legal competence

The most typical case is that the national information centre is an advisory body for both academic and professional recognition while the decisions are taken:

- for academic recognition – by higher education institutions;
- for de facto professional recognition in non-regulated professions – by employers; and
- for regulated professions – by the competent authorities of each profession.

There are several other possibilities:

- the ENIC/NARIC is the decision-making body for all cases of recognition;
- the ENIC/NARIC makes the decision in the name of a minister;
- decisions are taken by a minister/deputy minister/ministry upon the advice of:
  - the ENIC/NARIC;
  - higher education institutions; or
  - committees of academics/scientists.

In a number of countries the ENIC/NARIC makes recognition decisions with a view to employment in non-regulated professions, while in most cases the de jure professional recognition for employment in regulated professions is carried out by the competent authorities (often professional organisations) nominated by the government (in Malta and Iceland the relevant specialised ministries are in charge).

Capacity building in terms of expertise and service to the public

The United Kingdom operates a structured and continuous staff development policy, including induction training and continuous professional development.

CIRIUS in Denmark demonstrates the most detailed model of capacity building, it:

"employs internal as well as external Quality Assurance mechanisms. An employee manual (personalehåndbog) collects the accumulated knowledge and best practice. The manual functions as a starting point for staff training and is a guarantee that cases are handled in a professionally consistent way. The assessment procedures for the various recognition modes are described step by step. Other internal mechanisms are recurring evaluation seminars, checklists supporting the evaluation procedure and double-checking of all statements. The filing of all incoming and outgoing

In Albania no special qualifications are formally stipulated for the ENIC/NARIC staff. In some cases, for instance in Sweden, credentials evaluators should have at least a first (bachelor) degree. Except for the secretary and the student employees all employees hold a second (master) degree in Denmark. All staff members of the Estonian ENIC/NARIC hold at least master-level qualifications and the same is true in the United Kingdom. Many countries emphasise that staff members should have skills in the assessment of foreign qualifications and should be familiar with the international and national legal framework for recognition. This can be acquired either by recruiting the new staff members preferentially from related fields of activities or, ideally, by maintaining staff loyalty and accumulating staff experience. Thus, for example in Iceland, both of the specialists have been involved in academic recognition for more than twenty years. In Sweden half of the staff have been working with credentials evaluations for more than ten years; several others have about five years' experience.

Knowledge of languages is essential. Apart from commonly spoken languages such as English, French and German and the other Nordic languages, including Finnish, the office in Sweden handles documents in Spanish, Russian, Polish, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic. In Denmark, apart from Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, English, French and German, CIRIUS is currently able to deal with files in Finnish, Spanish, Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish and Arabic. Five nationalities are represented in the CIRIUS staff. In addition to language competences, candidates for employment at the Latvian ENIC/NARIC have to be computer literate and have skills in using information and communication technologies.

The expertise of the staff is built up through on-the-job training, and processing of case files is the most common method (Armenia, Latvia): Other forms of training include communication with other members of diverse networks, regular training and participation in international meetings both as speakers, trainers and simple participants, study visits and international projects and co-operation. The Latvian ENIC/NARIC organises internal staff training in order to present and implement the latest developments in the field of recognition.

The ENIC/NARIC often acts as an information resource for the national higher education institutions and other competent recognition authorities. As a result, these external bodies should be able to improve their services to the public. Georgia shows forged

documents they have discovered on the website of the ministry. The Estonian ENIC/NARIC in co-operation with partners from other countries or under the auspices of some international organisations, organises at least one international training course per year on recognition issues, the Bologna Process or assessment of foreign qualifications. It is planned to run such training courses at national level regularly one to three times a year. Poland also invites foreign experts to conferences and workshops organised for higher education institutions. It is quite common for staff members to be invited to participate in working groups established by the respective Ministry of Education and other legislative bodies.

An information database is essential for the work on academic recognition. The ENIC/NARIC in the Czech Republic maintains two databases on higher education institutions, their accredited study programmes and fields of study – in Czech and English. Ireland is currently developing an online database which will provide advice regarding the comparability of foreign qualifications in Ireland as well as information regarding education and training systems abroad.

Networking and co-operation at national and international levels

The range of co-operation partners is directly dependent on the range of activities of the office. Thus, for example, in Germany the Central Office for Foreign Education works very closely with the German Federal Foreign Office, the German University Rectors' Conference and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), as it is "involved in the preparation of government agreements on equivalency in the higher education area as well as in equivalency arrangements of another sort". CIRIUS' assessments are seen as part of the integration process of foreigners in Denmark. In this respect CIRIUS has close relations with guidance counsellors, job centres, social partners and other parties engaged in integration.

The partners depend on the role the recognition office plays. The Danish Integration Ministry is another important partner of CIRIUS, since its assessments form part of the integration process by clarifying foreigners as to their possibility of seeking employment or further education in Denmark. A collaboration worth mentioning has developed in Italy "with professional councils, and such organisations as chambers of commerce, trade unions, etc., regional authorities competent for education and training, CRUI, higher education institutions, and other public authorities in charge with finalised academic recognition".

Staff members also define the scope of collaboration and networking. Due to the part-time nature of their work, the office employees in Iceland participate in the work of the NUAS Ekvivaleringsgruppen, the NUS (the Association of Nordic Universities) and the EUA

(European University Association). The head of staff in Iceland is the Secretary General of the Icelandic rectors' conference. Staff members in the Netherlands are active in various national and international networks, for example KBS, a network of international student counsellors.

At national level the ENIC/NARICs collaborate with different ministries, and national education institutions, student unions, rectors' conferences, national accreditation services, quality assurance agencies and similar bodies.

Other co-operation partners are mentioned including transparency and information centres (e.g. Europass, Euroguidance, Eurydice, and Eures) and mobility agencies (e.g. Socrates). Ireland, for co-operation at national level, has even established a consultative group "to advise it on its approach to performing its recognition co-ordination function and to working with stakeholders, in general, and awarding bodies, in particular, in this regard".

The Nordic ENIC/NARICs have formed an umbrella organisation called NORRIC. There is also strong co-operation between the Baltic ENIC/NARICs. The Austrian ENIC/NARIC has organised a close co-operation with the ENICs of the neighbouring countries and beyond.

At international level ENIC/NARICs, first of all, are members of the ENIC and, within the EU/EEA, also of the NARIC networks. Apart from that, they most often mention collaboration with foreign higher education institutions. There are evidently centres that are very internationally active; for example CIMEA (the Italian ENIC/NARIC) is a member of the ENIC, NARIC and MERIC networks, but it also co-operates with the EAIE (European Association for International Education), EURES (the European Job Mobility Portal), and FEANI (the European Federation of National Engineering Associations), as well as with foreign organisations, such as Education International, NAFSA (the Association of International Educators), NIAF (the National Italian American Foundation) and WES (the World Educational Services Foundation) in the USA, BBT (the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology) in Switzerland, DAAD in Germany, the British Council as well as foreign embassies and consulates.

Co-operation between recognition and quality assurance bodies

The section on co-operation between recognition and quality assurance bodies seems to be one of the least developed in many national action plans. The answers to the questions in this section, if provided at all, are inconsistent and do not allow us to draw many conclusions. One reason for this might be that the information on quality assurance that the

ENIC/NARICs need in their everyday work is nowadays available on the websites of the quality assurance bodies and so the ENIC/NARICs can use them without direct contact with the staff of national quality assurance agencies. With regard to information on the quality assurance status of programmes or institutions in other countries, ENIC/NARICs can easily get information through the close and well-established co-operation within the ENIC and NARIC networks.

Information exchange between the bodies responsible for recognition and quality assurance

In a number of countries, for example Armenia, France, Ireland and the United Kingdom, there is close co-operation between the bodies responsible for recognition and quality assurance, and others, for example Serbia, plan to establish such co-operation. There are countries, such as Belgium (French Community) Estonia, Denmark, Ireland and Norway, where the quality assurance body is a part of the body responsible for recognition or vice versa, or where both bodies are part of some umbrella organisation.

Others, such as the Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia and the Slovak Republic, do not have institutionalised co-operation between recognition and quality assurance bodies, but these bodies have frequent contact in everyday work and use each other's information base. Some of these countries admit that informal information exchange also takes place when representatives of both bodies participate in seminars on quality evaluation and recognition or when both bodies are represented in working groups concerning development of higher education, including in creating a national qualifications framework. This might also be the case in other countries.

Finally, some of the countries, for example Georgia, did not yet have a quality assurance agency.

Discussion of and agreement on working methods between these bodies

The most far-reaching agreement on working methods between ENIC/NARICs and quality assurance bodies is the joint declaration made by some of the countries participating in the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA). This declaration aims at establishing mutual recognition of accreditation decisions that might in the future also lead to automatic recognition of qualifications. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (see Appendix V) are also important in this respect.

Other countries state that they have a clear structure of competences in both bodies and therefore believe that there is no need to have a specific agreement on working methods between these bodies. France is currently studying the activities of the two institutions, while Germany plans to do so. In Denmark both organisations already have descriptions of their working methods in the fields of recognition and quality assurance. These have been published on their respective websites. A proposal for setting up new structures for accreditation and quality assurance in Denmark is being discussed.

Norway has put forward an important point concerning co-operation between quality assurance and recognition bodies: quality assurance is a powerful implementation tool in the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in higher education institutions if the assessment of recognition practices becomes part of the quality assurance of institutions and programmes.

Use of information on the outcomes of quality assessment in the recognition of qualifications

In most countries the ENIC/NARIC disseminates information on the outcomes of quality assurance to other ENIC/NARICs so that the latter can use this information when assessing qualifications. They seek similar information from sister ENIC/NARICs but also consult national and international quality assurance bodies regarding quality assessments which have been undertaken abroad.

The United Kingdom takes into account a range of factors, including any available information on the outcomes of quality assessments. France seeks to improve its current procedures, which could evolve towards the inclusion of competences in the recognition process. The French Community of Belgium states that "information about the quality of foreign institutes that award diplomas for which recognition is requested is not taken into account in the criteria for awarding equivalence. Estonia states that "all outcomes of quality assessment are available to the Estonian ENIC/NARIC". Germany reports that German legislation does not allow accreditation of degree courses in which a degree is awarded exclusively according to foreign law. The Swiss ENIC/NARIC recognises accreditation decisions taken by the respective quality assurance body.

Use of membership of international networks

Most of the countries simply state that the respective bodies are active members of the ENIC and NARIC networks and of ENQA (Norway, United Kingdom). The participation of

different countries in current international debates on quality assurance varies in its involvement and strength, if applicable. France and Poland are "observers" in ENQA. Both Ireland and the United Kingdom report very close co-operation with ENQA based on the close involvement of the representatives of their relevant bodies in the board of the association. Estonia reports that "there are no direct contacts between the Estonian ENIC/NARIC and ENQA." In Iceland the recognising bodies are the universities, which makes it difficult and costly for them to be members of international networks and associations. The French Community of Belgium plans, in the future, to be more "active in events related to mobility and the recognition of diplomas and qualifications (NAFSA, EAIE, student exhibitions…)". Thus for example AEQES (Agency for the Evaluation of the Quality of Higher Education) is a candidate member of the ENQA network, and so is the respective institution in Serbia.

5.2.3 Conclusions

During analysing the National Action Plans a number of good and not so good practices emerged (see Table 8).

The quality of information provision seems to vary considerably in different countries, and the spectrum is quite broad. It ranges from countries that have excellent information for applicants in their national language and in English (or another widely spoken European language) available online, in printed and possibly in other forms, to countries where only minimum information is provided in the national language only and this information may be available only at the ENIC/NARIC.

An example of good practice is that provision of recognition information is co-ordinated between the ENIC/NARIC and the higher education institutions so that the specific information from higher education institutions adds to the general information provided by the ENIC/NARIC.

Information on education systems relating specifically to the recognition of qualifications is well established in some countries but other countries only provide general information on their educational systems that contains too little of the information actually needed for credentials evaluation.

In a substantial number of countries, for example the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, the national information centre is an advisory body while the decisions

Table 8. Collection of good and not so good practices by Rusakova

Good practice	**Not so good practice or unacceptable practice**
Information provision	
Applicants are provided with a full set of the necessary information on recognition: criteria and procedures, how to apply, what documents should be provided. This is done using different means of provision: printed, electronic and by telephone.	Fragmented information on recognition is provided. Information is provided only by putting notices on the wall at the ENIC/NARICor only in paper format.
Applicants are given opportunities to monitor the progress of the application online or given feedback.	Recognition information in given in the national language only.
There is a hotline for higher education institutions to quickly consult on recognition issues.	
Information provision between the ENIC/NARIC and higher education institutions is co-ordinated, covering both the general and institution-specific information.	
Information on the higher education system is available electronically in widely spoken European languages and the content is specifically prepared to be useful in assessment of a country's qualifications in other countries.	Information on a country's education system is: • only available in the national language; • is not focused on issues important in the recognition of qualifications; • is being disseminated through non-specialist channels with no experience in education (e.g. embassies, representations, etc.).
National information centre	
The ENIC/NARIC acts as one single entrance point for both academic and professional qualifications.	Decisions upon recognition are made by bodies outside the ENIC/NARIC and outside higher education institutions such as "nostrification boards" or "equivalence boards".
The ENIC/NARIC co-operates with higher education institutions or other organisations with a view to ensuring the quality of decision making on the basis of ENIC/NARIC recommendations.	Higher education institutions do not participate in decision making on recognition at all.
The ENIC/NARIC has established an internal quality assurance system and is also being assessed externally.	
The ENIC/NARIC has prepared internal manuals for staff containing step-by-step description of recognition procedures.	
The ENIC/NARIC organises regular study visits and training of its own staff and training events for credentials evaluation staff of higher education institutions and competent authorities.	

are taken: by higher education institutions for academic recognition; by employers for de facto professional recognition in non-regulated professions; and by competent authorities nominated for each profession for de jure professional recognition for access to regulated professions. Due to different recognition practices the outcome of the assessment of the same qualification could differ in different countries.

However, this is not the only possibility. In some cases, for example Armenia, the French Community of Belgium and Croatia, the ENIC/NARIC is the decision-making body for all cases of recognition.

Recognition decisions can also be taken (at least nominally) by the minister/deputy minister/ministry, as, for example, in Albania, Denmark, Lithuania, Romania and Ukraine (by the nostrification board of the ministry) or Bulgaria (commission for recognition established by the minister. The case of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" is interesting, as recognition seems to be done in a reverse order compared to the "typical" case: the higher education institutions prepare recognition decisions; these decisions are examined by the ENIC/NARIC and then officially signed by the minister. In Turkey the recognition decisions are made by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK, in which the ENIC/NARIC is located) and higher education institutions have no function in recognition at all. In Spain, while higher education institutions can decide on recognition of master and doctoral degrees, for all other degrees the decisions are no longer taken by the ministry. Instead, technical committees created within the University Co-ordination Council will issue statements on recognition of a particular foreign qualification or parts of it.

In a number of countries the ENIC/NARIC makes recognition decisions with a view to employment in non-regulated professions, for example in Greece (here the academic and de facto recognition are considered the same), Hungary, Slovenia and Sweden.

While in most cases de jure professional recognition for employment in regulated professions is carried out by competent authorities (often professional organisations) nominated by government, in Malta and Iceland the specific ministries are in charge.

Competence development is underlined as an important aspect by a number of ENIC/NARICs. The main kinds of capacity-building measures inside ENIC/NARICs are staff training and regular updating, participation in the joint ENIC/NARIC network meetings, study visits, organising national or regional training and dissemination events (Nordic, Baltic countries and others), preparing detailed manuals for staff, recruiting staff with specific knowledge of education and/or language skills relevant to different world regions.

Another important part of capacity building is organising different dissemination and training events for the recognition staff of higher education institutions and providing guidance to higher education institutions..

Again, many of these important measures seem to be present in a number of the most well-supported and well-developed national information centres while a number of others mainly mention study visits or have not given any information on capacity-building measures at all.

Information on quality assurance is used in the daily work of credentials evaluation. In a number of countries the ENIC/NARICs widely use the information on quality assurance when assessing foreign qualifications. They also provide the sister ENIC/NARICs with information on the quality assurance status of programmes and institutions in their countries. As the information on quality assurance is often accessible online, the above does not necessarily mean that ENIC/NARICs have intensive daily contact with their own country's quality assurance body.

It has been noted that recognition and quality assurance bodies often discuss the relevant issues and work together in various national working groups or during workshops, especially in those devoted to the establishment of national qualifications frameworks.

Quality assurance is a powerful implementation tool in the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in higher education institutions if the assessment of recognition practices becomes part of the quality assurance of institutions and programmes.

The most far-reaching agreement between ENIC/NARICs and quality assurance bodies is the joint declaration made by some of the countries participating in the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education. Its final goal – eventual automatic recognition of qualifications – can, however, only be reached through long-term bilateral work.

It is clear that the diversity so characteristic to the European Union is observable also in the areas of information provision on recognition and in functioning of supportive structures. However an apparent contradictory activities with regard to established code of good practice has to be eradicated if a genuine EHEA is to be created within Europe.

The provision of information on the procedures and criteria for recognition and on the education system of the country supports the recognition of qualifications and are of key importance to the mobility of students, staff and holders of qualifications and. The structures such as the operating system of recognition in the responding country – the functioning of national information centre (ENIC/NARIC) and its cooperation with the body responsible for

quality assurance are ensuring both the recognition of qualifications and maintenance of trust among EHEA countries.

The study has enabled to detect how diverse are the approaches and actions in EHEA countries that are aimed at supporting and ensuring the recognition of learning outcomes gained through formal education in other countries.

With increasing importance of lifelong learning, the awarding qualifications or credits through full, partial or alternative recognition of learning outcomes achieved through such forms of learning as informal and nonformal learning will become a wide spread and actively employed practice in Europe.

Therefore a timely minimization of the differences that are already in place in recognition of qualifications practice in EHEA is necessary. This will allow the challenge of recognizing the prior learning to build upon a stable system of recognition of qualifications.

It is also important to think in advance of ways to promote transparent and mutually acceptable recognition of prior learning practices across countries, as these practices inevitably will intensify the complexity of recognition practice and make the mutual recognition among EHEA countries an up to date issue.

6. Current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia

6.1.Organization and Methodology of Research

Research issue

In Chapter 3 the author mentioned the agents of change that allow strengthening the link between qualification systems and lifelong learning, some of them were identified as particularly powerful, highly ranked strong mechanisms, playing not just supporting role but being able to induce major changes [18]:

- providing credit transfer;
- optimising stakeholder involvement in the qualifications system;
- recognising non-formal and informal learning;
- establishing a qualifications framework; and
- creating new routes to qualifications.

Validation of non formal and informal learning has been identified as a European priority on repeated occasions, including the Communication on Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality (2001) [99], the Education Council Decision Concrete future objectives for European education and training systems (2002) [108], and the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) [101].

A set of 'Common European Principles' for the validation of non-formal and informal learning [106] have been developed by the Commission in collaboration with a range of partners.

The need for common guiding principles for validation have been stated repeatedly in recent years, most significantly in the Copenhagen declaration. The 31 Ministers of Education and Training, the European social partners and the Commission stated that there is a need to

"…develop a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels."

In order to monitor the implementation of the European Common Principles, the European Commission and Cedefop, have produced a European Inventory of validation of non-formal and informal learning [141]. The European Inventory [110] helps by means of a

detailed survey to accomplish this task by collecting updated information on current practices in a wide range of countries and making this information, including best practice examples, available to a wide range of audiences. It also makes the informal and non-formal learning visible.

The European Inventory fulfills the following tasks and allows answering the following research questions:

Subtasks of the research

- analyse the international, national, regional strategic policy documents and the legal framework in the context of lifelong learning and recognition; consider the role of common European standards in supporting the progress of mutual recognition; describe the legal framework for validating non-formal and informal learning in Latvia; discuss whether Latvia is progressing towards becoming a part of EHEA.

Type of the research

classification [32] of the conducted research according to the -

- application mode: applied research, since it is planned that it will be possible to apply the results of the research for improving the existing policy and practice;

- applied research method: qualitative research, as it will be based on qualitative rather than quantitative data;

- research issue: case study- the aim is to research an instance - namely, current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia;

- data collection procedure: secondary (desk) research; primary research: content analysis of documents; expert interviewing.

Tools of the research

Desk research, expert interviews, analysis of national legal documentation.

Target group and the sample size [17]

The author researches the current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia.

At a more abstract level, this single intrinsic case study is part of a collective case study of validation of nonformal and informal learning in European countries [110].

Research structure

The layout that Rusakova had to follow for structuring the research of the national case was provided by Cedefop.

Research team and timeline

Important to note: the study depicts the state of art of legislation in May 2011. It does not include later developments in legislation.

In May 2010 Rusakova conducted desk research and analysed the international and national documents. In connection to the research questions two experts were interviewed: Baiba Ramiņa, Director of the Academic Information Centre (Latvian Enic/Naric) and Solvita Siliņa, Expert, Academic Information Centre; Chair of the Task Force in the National Program of Structural Funds: "Development of uniform procedures to improve the quality of vocational education and to involve social partners and educate them".

In August 2010 the author received the edited results of the study and checked them again by interviewing the following experts: Mr. Dmitrijs Kulšs (Deputy Director – Head of Lifelong Learning Division, Policy Co-ordination Department, Ministry of Education and Science), prof. Dr. Tatjana Volkova (Rector, BA School of Business and Finance, former Chair of Latvian Rectorsʻ Council).

The study had to be updated in September 2010 due to a recent and significant change in legislation (on June 10, 2010 the Parliament had approved amendments in the Vocational Education Law [166] which became valid as of July 1, 2010 and directly influenced the national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia). During the process of updating the information an additional expert interview was necessary- the author interviewed the following experts: Ingūna Ķīse (Senior Referent, Vocational Education Division, Vocational Education and General Education Department, Ministry of Education and Science) and Dmitrijs Kuļšs (Deputy Director – Head of Lifelong Learning Division, Policy Co-ordination Department, Ministry of Education and Science).

6.2. Research

Current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia

6.2.1 National perspective

National legal framework, system or policy on validation

Government support is crucial in preparing the legal framework for a system of validation in Latvia. The Declaration of the future activities of the current Prime Minister of the Republic of Latvia, Valdis Dombrovskis (appointed March 2009) [165] states the priority tasks for his Cabinet of Ministers. Point 10.7 of this declaration states as one of the priority tasks for the Ministry of Education and Science the validation of professional knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal learning.

On June 10, 2010 the Parliament has approved amendments in the Vocational Education Law [166] which is valid as of July 1, 2010. Section (29.[1]) has been added to the amendments and declares the following: " (1) The assessment of professional competence shall take into account the requirements of the respective Occupational Standard. (2) The accredited education 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 process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning is defined by the Cabinet of Ministers". The part (1) and (2) will come in force as of January 1, 2011. The amendments delegates the Cabinet of Ministers to prepare the regulation mentioned in part (3) till December 31, 2010. At the moment the draft "Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers on the validation process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning " has been passed to government discussion on July 15, 2010 [148]. The amendments also set among other competencies of the Ministry of Education and Science - the competence of ensuring the validation of non formal learning (6.[1]).

Thus the creation of the validation system in Latvia is at the final stage – approval of legislation. Recently more and more policy and legislative documents supporting the policy of validating non-formal and informal learning appear.

One of the documents is the national Lifelong Learning Strategy "Guidelines for Lifelong Learning 2007-2013" [168], adopted on 23 February 2007. The introduction to this

document states that *"The development process of modern society changes rapidly knowledge and the way it is applied, as well as the competencies that are needed in the labour market and society as a whole. Therefore non-formal education and informal learning, including adult learning, regardless of the learner's age and whether they have already completed compulsory education, have begun to achieve more autonomy and weight next to formal learning. Formal, non-formal and informal learning policies are equally important and mutually reinforce each other, enriching the learning culture, experience and expanding the educational environment of the individual, community and society".*

In order to achieve the aims stated in the above mentioned policy document, the action programme thereof [171] identifies the definition of the procedure of validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside of the formal education system among the tasks to be carried out during the period 2008-2013. One of the sub-aims of this action programme identifies the need to conduct measures for ensuring quality education and requires, among others, the following results to be achieved:

- The introduction of a National Qualifications Framework; and

- The introduction of a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The action programme envisages the first results by the end of the year 2010. Some of the results have already more or less been achieved as planned - the National Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning has indeed been developed, its tertiary levels and descriptors are defined in accordance with European Qualification Framework and it has been approved by Latvian Rectors' Council as well as the Council of Higher Education. Working group under patronage of MoES has been established and the relevant stakeholders adapted the whole education system of Latvia to the European Qualification Framework. The working group approved all qualification levels and descriptors and gave MoES mandate on June 2, 2010 to move forward with approval of those at the government (national) level [172]. On June 17, 2010 the draft amendments have been passed to government discussion.

Other results planned by the action programme to be achieved by the end of 2010 are less likely to be achieved on time, for example the target: *"the first 100 persons will have acquired a qualification through the validation system of non-formal learning in 2010"* which, seeing the development stage of the national legal framework seems to be rather optimistic. At the same time it is unclear whether the term "validation system of non-formal learning" was meant to refer to the validation system of informal learning as well or whether

this is still an area where it is hard to make even rough estimations about the future development.

The Cabinet of Ministers has appointed the Ministry of Education and Science as coordinating institution of the aforementioned action programme. The Ministry prepares an annual report on advances in the implemented measures, in accordance with the aims defined by the programme.

The 2008 report [174] states that within national programme of the Structural Funds *"Development of uniform procedures to improve the quality of vocational education and to involve and educate social partners"* a working group with the aim to ensure the Implementation of Validation System of Nonformal Education had been established. This working group drafted the abovementioned amendments to the Vocational Education Law [166], that are currently in force. The 2008 report also states that the same task force has agreed upon the basic principles of implementing a validation system of non-formal learning (based on the European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning [96]), elaborated proposals for the adjustment of legislation for the organisation of validation of non-formal learning.

However, the methodology for assessing non-formal learning and skills as elaborated by the task force defines a procedure for the vocational qualification system, namely for acquiring vocational qualifications from level one to three[201], without affecting the higher vocational qualificaztions and regulated professions. The methodology creates a pathway (defines the procedures and assessment criteria) for validating professional competences acquired in a non-formal way, as defined by the professions standard and without having to become part of formal education system, nevertheless obtaining a state-recognised professional qualification document. The obtained certificate will be identical to the one acquired through formal learning pathway and will not contain any indication that the document has been obtained through validation of nonformal and informal learning.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education (also in the field of higher vocational qualifications) is –submitted to the Parliament for approval. The draft Law on Higher Education [158], is still awaiting adoption at the Parliament (first passed on to government discussion on August 31, 2006) and there is no clear deadline for its adoption. This draft Law foresees that a methodology of recognition of prior learning should

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[201] There are 5 vocational qualification levels in Latvian system, levels 4 and 5 refer to the higher professional qualification. For more information: Vocational Education Law, Profesionālās izglītības likums, 1999.gada 10.jūnijā, http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=20244

be elaborated and a Cabinet Regulation on the procedure should be adopted within six months of the adoption of the Law itself.

The policy of validation in Latvia during the period of economic downturn is targeted primarily at individuals that are willing to receive professional qualification - official certificate, meaning support to enter the labour market and possible further acquisition of lacking competences, if not full qualification may be awarded at this time. Nevertheless, every non-formal education and informal learning counts when it comes to validation.

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

The National Qualifications Framework of higher education [159] has been partly prepared: the national level descriptors have been developed according to the European Overarching qualifications framework of the Bologna process and as such is compatible with levels 5-8 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). National cycle descriptors have been elaborated in cooperation with social partners and approved by the Latvian Rectors' Council and the Council of Higher Education. It, together with Occupational Standards [161] – for professional higher education, provides the higher education sector (including short-cycle college and higher professional education), with a framework for defining learning outcomes for each qualification and each subject course within the programme leading to that qualification and will be the basis for linking non-formal and informal learning to credit points up to a full degree.

Regarding vocational education at secondary education levels, the current Vocational Education Law defines a system of five levels of professional qualification, including higher education qualifications.. The referencing to the EQF eight levels is planned to be introduced in Latvia by the end of 2010, according to the Concept *"Increasing the attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners in quality assurance of vocational education"* [156] adopted by Regulation No. 629 of the Cabinet of Ministers, as of 16 September 2009. To prepare the necessary changes the Ministry of Education and Science has appointed a working group for implementation of the EQF. This working group has agreed that the aforementioned framework for higher education will be used without changes for the higher education part. The ongoing work currently is focusing on the vocational education levels (EQF levels 1-4) and general education.

The task force working under the programme *"Development of uniform procedures to improve the quality of vocational education and to involve social partners and educate them"* agreed on basic principles [163] of implementing a validation system of non-formal learning

(based on the Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning) [98] had planned that the Occupational Standards would be the basis for creating the questions considered by the self-assessment form for validating professional qualifications from level one to three. According to the recently accepted amendments of Vocational Education Law the validation in order to receive professional qualification will be based on the same Occupational Standards like regular after-VET-program assessment, meaning that person will be able to receive the same qualification document as if he/she would undergo regular educational program.

Other standards to be mentioned in this respect are the following: *"Regulations on State Academic Education Standard"*[149] (Regulations Nr. 2 of the Cabinet of Ministers, 3 January 2002), which stipulate the general requirements of programmes, as well as marking the specifics of bachelor and master programmes; *"Regulations regarding the State Standard for the Second Level Higher Professional Education"*[150] (Regulations Nr.481 of the Cabinet of Ministers, 20 November 2001), which stipulate the general requirements of programmes, as well as marking the specifics of bachelor, master and short-cycle programmes and the assessment in the programmes; *"Regulations regarding the State Standard for the First Level Higher Professional Education*" [151] (Regulations Nr.141 of Cabinet of Ministers, March 20 2001), which stipulates the general requirements of programmes and the assessment in the programmes.

National institutional framework

The "Vocational Education Law" (1999) determines the competence of those institutions responsible for the organisation of vocational education. The "Law on Institutions of Higher Education" [152] (1995) determines the competence of those institutions responsible for the organisation of higher education.

The **Cabinet of Ministers**[186] determines the state's political and strategic areas in education; it funds educational providers according to criteria established by the Ministry of Education and Science; it sets the framework for issuing state-recognised qualifications and sets regulations for the recognition of qualifications obtained in other countries. It will adopt the rules of validation both for vocational and higher education.

The **Ministry of Education and Science**[187] develops the framework regulations for both academic and professional/ vocational education and accredits providers. It also creates and updates the register of Occupational Standards and makes proposals for the allocation of funds from the state budget. It organises guidance and counselling services and researches the skills needs of the labour market. It monitors the activities of higher education

institutions and short-cycle colleges, and ensures the licensing of higher education programmes. Through the recently adopted amendments of the Vocational Education Law the Ministry of Education and Science will coordinate the validation system of professional skills acquired in learning other than formal learning. The **Policy Coordination Department** of the ministry develops the policy of education and life-long learning, as well as organizes and coordinates its implementation, conducts the analysis and evaluation of the policy results, assesses the dynamics of the educational development for determining the indicators of educational quality, plans and conducts the statistical monitoring of education in Latvia. The Policy Coordination Department, in accordance with the competence of the ministry, elaborates projects of the national position of Latvia in EU issues, develops and coordinates the policy implementation in international cooperation. It also organizes, coordinates and controls the adoption of international and EU laws in accordance with the competence of the ministry. The Policy Coordination Department is the major coordination unit for the EQF and implementation of validation system as such. The **Department of Higher Education** is part of the Ministry of Education and Science. It develops and implements the state policy and strategy in higher education and science, including the policy and strategy for validation. The department oversees providers of higher education. It collaborates with social partners and develops the legal framework. It also ensures that national policy meets the agreed EU policy principles and takes part in developing transnational agreements. The **Department of Vocational and General Education** is part of the Ministry of Education and Science. It develops state policy and strategy in vocational education, including the policy and strategy for validation. The department guides, plans and coordinates development and supervises providers of vocational education. It collaborates with employer institutions and trade unions and provides technical support for the work of the National Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Subcouncil. It also ensures that national policy meets the agreed EU policy principles and takes part in developing transnational agreements.

The **State Service of Education Quality** is a direct administration institution under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science. The State Service of Education Quality will be the body that will delegate the task of assessing the professional competences (validation) to state accredited educational institutions or examination centres.

The **Vocational Education Administration** was under the Ministry of Education and Science and organised the accreditation of vocational education providers and programmes. It participated in the development of occupational standards as well as prepared the content and methodology for exams and oversaw the functioning of learning and examination centres. In

2009 the Vocational Education Administration was reorganised and its functions were delegated to the **State Service of Education Quality** and **State Education Content Centre**.

The **Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Subcouncil** is part of National Tripartite Cooperation Council (an institution working at national level of tripartite social dialogue, where the appointed representatives of Government, Employers' Confederation of Latvia and Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia collaborate as social partners). The **Vocational Education** and Employment **Tripartite** Cooperation Subcouncil is taking care of elaborating and updating the Occupational Standards and their relation to the educational programs, it is responsible for organizing the vocational further education in the lifelong learning framework; it coordinates the creation and activities of Sectoral expert councils. The **Vocational Education** and Employment **Tripartite** Cooperation Subcouncil will also provide experts for conducting the validation process at the delegated validation institutions and/or examination centres.

The **Latvian Rectors' Council**[181] comprises the rectors of all state accredited higher education institutions in Latvia. It provides experts for institutional and programme accreditation processes and is actively involved in initiating, preparing proposals and statements about laws and other regulatory enactments regulating higher education.

The **Higher Education Council** [188] - is a body with members approved by Parliament which, among other responsibilities in higher education, has the mandate to take decisions upon institutional accreditation and elaborate recommendations for improving higher education. HEC membership comprises one member from each of the following: the Latvian Academy of Sciences, the Latvian Rectors' Council, the Association of Professors of Higher Education Institutions, the Association of Art Higher Education Institutions, the Council of College Directors, the Latvian Student's Union, the Latvian Association of Education managers, the Chamber of Trade and Industry, the Latvian Employers' Confederation, the Trade Union of Education and Science Employees, and a representative of higher education institutions established by local governments and other legal entities - 12 members in total. The Minister of Education and Science is a member of the HEC *ex officio.* The Head of the Ministry of Education and Science Higher education department participates in all HEC meetings but does not have a voting right. Representatives from the Latvian Lawyers' Association, the Association of Latvian Medical Doctors and other similar professional organisations may participate on the basis of counsellors rights in case there are issues considered that are under the competence of these organisations. After approval of the Draft Law on Higher Education the Higher Education Council is planned to have additional

tasks such as elaborating recommendations for improving the quality of higher education, decide upon regular and extraordinary accreditation of the higher education institutions and programs, identifying the needs and interests of society in higher education.

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

The Ministry of Education and Science proposes and the Cabinet of Ministers adopts the rules and procedures of a validation system of non-formal and informal learning in Latvia both for vocational and higher education. The amendments of the Vocational Education Law (valid as of July 2010) define among other competencies of the Ministry of Education and Science - the competence of ensuring the validation of non formal learning (6.[1]). The same amendments declare that the accredited education institutions and accredited examination centres can be delegated to perform the validation process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning (2).

Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

Currently, the activities at a regional and local level concentrate more on the provision of non-formal and informal learning (e.g. the "Youth in Action" programme [189]). This is because there is currently no legal framework for validation. The national programme "Development of uniform procedures to improve the quality of vocational education and to involve social partners and educate them", supported by both national and EU funds (the European Social Fund) aimed to develop a regulatory basis for validation and elaborate recommendations for validating non-formal learning following the European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning. ESF funding is allocated for the implementation of lifelong learning policy in general, according to the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 [153] (approved by the Cabinet of Ministers 29 October 2007). Thus under the action program "Human Resources and Employability" the subactivity 1.2.1.1.1 "Elaboration of Sectoral Qualification System and Restructuring of the Professional Education" [154] aims to improve the quality and efficiency of the professional education by creating the sectoral qualification system; implementing modular approach for acquiring basic profession, speciality and specialization; developing or improving the basic occupational standards and basic requirements of specialized qualifications and developing the validation of skills acquired in other than formal learning.

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

This link can be relatively easily used in higher education where the credit system has been used for more than a decade, but in vocational education a credit system is yet to be established. The "Concept of Education Development 2007-2013" [155] (approved by Regulation No. 742 of the Cabinet of Ministers, September 27, 2006) states not only that it is necessary to develop a methodology of assessing the knowledge and professional skills acquired by non-formal learning, but also mentions the possibility of allocating credit points for non-formal learning. The aforementioned draft Law on Higher Education foresees that a methodology of recognition of prior learning should be elaborated and a Cabinet Regulation on the procedure should be adopted (within six months of the adoption of the Law itself). Some higher education institutions (HEIs) are preparing for the upcoming legislation – they are already considering what number of credits acquired in theory through personal development/ further education activities could be counted towards a higher education qualification when the legislation is adopted. As it is still not legal activity, the validation of non-formal learning is limited to the reduction of the practice/ placement periods for those who have work experience in an appropriate field for admission and credit allocation, if used at all. Another possible route is that HEIs may allocate credits for further education courses that they themselves have carried out in case learners with certificates of such courses enrol for studies in the HEI in question [94].

In the professional education it is planned to implement the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), which will allow individually transferring, validating and accumulating the formal, nonformal and informal learning outcomes till 2014 [156].

Funding framework

It is planned that validation candidates will have to cover the costs for the service of completing the process of validation of non-formal learning. Thus it will affect neither the state nor the self-government budget. The institutions or examination centres that have been delegated the task of validation will have to provide a free of charge consultation prior to the validation

The annotation of the adopted Vocational Education Law states that the draft amendments of the Vocational Education Law will promote competition among the educational institutions and examination centres in providing a quality service of non-formal learning validation. It will also promote settling objectively reasonable and proportionate

fees, as the Cabinet of Ministers will quote publicly the fees of the services provided by the institutions licensed to validate non-formal learning. They will make sure that the fees do not exceed the costs of the validation procedure and thus will make sure that the rights and possibilities to obtain the assessment are not infringed for different target groups.

6.2.2 Organisational perspective

Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

The Vocational Education Law states that accredited educational institutions/examination centres will be able to apply for a licence to perform the validation of non-formal learning. The educational institutions will also provide either study units or modules which result in gaining different competences.

As the current legislation does not foresee any recognition of prior learning before the appropriate regulations are adopted, higher education institutions would risk being penalised if they applied validation of non-formal learning. As already mentioned in section 2.6, the activities of higher education institutions in the field of validating non-formal learning are currently limited to the reduction of the practice/ placement periods for those who have work experience in an appropriate field for admission and credit allocation, if used at all.

Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

The State Service of Education Quality will be providing the information on validation- on their webpage will be listed the educational institutions and examination centres licenced to conduct validation. Regulation project of the Cabinet of Ministers on validation section 10 obliges provider of validation to provide free of charge guidance personnel for consultation on the procedure of validation. This decision has been inspired by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, in which Latvia is an active partner. Also different ministries and their units will inform the society about the possibility to validate both formal and informal learning: e.g. the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Welfare.

Currently the Academic Information Centre [190] (Latvian Enic/Naric) is very actively involved in developing validation. Thus one of the experts of the Centre has been the chair of the taskforce in the National Programme of the Structural Funds *"Development of uniform procedures to improve the quality of vocational education and to involve social partners and educate them"*. The Academic Information Centre represents Latvia as national

coordinator for the EQF and it will be involved in distributing the information on the validation system in Latvia.

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

The private sector is also becoming more involved in non-formal learning in Latvia. Stakeholders such as employers, trade unions and students are involved in forming the education policy through their representation in bodies such as the Higher Education Council. The Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Subcouncil (employers and trade unions) is actively involved in updating and elaborating the Occupational Standards. Social partners actively engage in forming the legal framework, for example representatives of the Employers' Confederation of Latvia and the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia were in the task force that elaborated the draft amendments of the Vocational Education Law.

The involvement of the private sector is also promoted by different incentives of the government, thus for example the concept "Increasing the attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners in quality assurance of vocational education" proposes tax incentives for companies wishing to support the training or professional education of their staff as one of the ways of making non-formal learning more accessible for larger groups of people. Even without tax incentives the companies often support staff endeavours to improve their qualifications by either providing staff with official leave for studies or by covering part of the tuition fees. It is anticipated that with non-formal learning attaining its place in the lifelong learning by validation measures it will become more popular in society and in the eyes of employers as well. Many of the companies (usually the larger ones- with employees over 250 [127]) have own training centres e.g. Center for Training and Recreation of Bank of Latvia.

The Latvian Chamber of Crafts uses a validation procedure for the award of journeyman and masters of crafts qualifications, as outlined in the box below.

Validation for the award of vocational certificates in Latvia

The journeyman and master of crafts vocational qualifications is awarded to successful learners following a two month theoretical course offered by the Latvian Chamber of Crafts. The course consists of two stages. The first stage is the evaluation of a portfolio, followed by an examination.

To be allowed to sit the examination for obtaining the journeyman/master of crafts the candidate must prepare a portfolio with the following documents:

- Certificate/recommendation letter from the Professional or Territorial craftsmen organisations

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Validation for the award of vocational certificates in Latvia

- Curriculum Vitae
- Copy of Passport
- Confirmation of home address
- Copy of General Secondary Education documentation
- Copy of vocational education documentation
- Document certifying practice under supervision of a master
- Document certifying the duration of employment as craftsman
- Portfolio of own creative activities: e.g. photography, projects, sketches, relevant to the qualification in question
- Paid receipts

In order to obtain the qualification of master of crafts the candidate must present in addition:

- A copy of a document stating the knowledge of state language
- The candidate's Journeyman Diploma (if he / she has one)

Documents stating the previous acquisition of formal vocational education are not prerequisites for obtaining the qualification however the theoretical part of the exam is compulsory for all candidates.

The next stage of the course is the examination of practical skills (the central creative masterpiece of the candidate) and theoretical knowledge.

As a result of this process two different levels of the craft education qualification are available. The Latvian Chamber of Crafts (LCC) awards the following qualifications:

- journeyman diploma
- master craftsman diploma

Two months of theoretical courses for the candidate of the master of crafts award cost approximately EUR 284. The application fee for the qualification examinations is approximately EUR 56 for the candidate for the master of crafts award, EUR 85 for the candidate for journeyman awards who is not a student and EUR 14 EUR for a candidate for journeymen award who is a student.

The vocational qualification acquired is recognised abroad, this is considered to be a great benefit to the candidate.

The awarding of qualifications at the Latvian Chamber of Crafts started in 1994, soon after the Law on Craftsmanship was introduced in February 1993. The awards are funded through the collection of the membership fee for the Professional or Territorial craftsmen organisations. The government does not provide funding for the Latvian Chamber of Crafts financially. So far the available funding is regarded as sustainable. The membership fee for the Professional or Territorial craftsmen organisations starts from EUR 8 for pensioners and EUR 17 for others, per year. The company membership fee depends on the size of the company and the number of employed persons etc.

The Latvian Chamber of Crafts is a member of NORM APME (international non-profit association created in 1996 with the support of the European Commission, under the full name of the "European Office of Crafts, Trades and Small and Medium sized Enterprises for Standardisation"). It is also a member of other different international organizations:

- UEAPME (European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises)
- EACD (European Association of Building Crafts and Design)
- Hanse-Parlament (Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Chambers of Skilled Crafts and other institutions who promote small and medium-sized businesses from all Baltic Sea Countries)

The examination of the journeyman qualification ensures that the candidate knows the craft by nominating a

craft master to monitor the creation of the central work of the candidate. The candidate should be able to follow the master's instructions and to demonstrate their own crafting skill.

The validation process for the journeyman qualification is led by an examination commission. Each organisation of craftsmen has a special examination commission, composed of 3-5 members. The members are nominated by the respective organisations of craftsmen. The vocational (crafts) schools are represented by one member with voting rights. One representative from the apprentices' and journeymen union of the respective organisation of craftsmen may participate, without voting rights.

The examination of the master craftsman qualification also ensures that a candidate knows the craft by nominating several masters to monitor the creation process of the central work of the candidate.

The validation process for the master craftsman qualification is also led by an examination commission, composed of 5 members. All members of the commission are nominated by the main Examination and Monitoring Commission of Council of Crafts from members of the Latvian Chamber of Crafts.

As a result of the programme 257 master of crafts qualifications and 5532 journeymen qualifications have been awarded since 1994.

There has been no internal or external evaluation of the programme. Internally the Latvian Chamber of Crafts reports on its own activities four times a year at the meeting of chairs of membership organisations of the Council of Crafts.

For further information see:

www.lak.lv
Law on Craftsmenship, as of 02.02.1993 (LR Likums "Par amatniecību",
http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=63052&from=off (in Latvian)
Terms and Conditions of Master Craftsmen Examination,
http://www.lak.lv/uploads/filedir/12_Amatu_meistaru_parbaudes_note.pdf (in Latvian)
Terms and Conditions of Journeymen Examination,
http://www.lak.lv/uploads/filedir/11_Amata_zellu_parbaudes_noteiku.pdf (in Latvian)

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

Non profit organisations are involved as social partners in different councils, for example the National Council for the Supervision of Lifelong Learning and the Regional Council of Lifelong Learning Development. Non profit organisations are quite active players in different projects aimed at the provision and promotion of non-formal learning. Concerning initiatives for validation, no direct validation is undertaken, only the promotional activities aimed at making the public aware of the necessity to have such validation available. Some researchers (e.g. Kravale M.) [46] have concluded that one of the reasons that the youth is mentioning as hindrance to their participation in nonformal and informal activities is the lack of validation of such activities. For example a project led in 2005 by the National Youth Council of Latvia (an NGO, umbrella organization of 49 youth organisations in Latvia) "Youth for Development of Non-formal Education in Latvia" [191] had following aims: to discover the role of nonformal education as an integral part of civic society development for children and youth; to update on the need to validate the non-formal learning

at the national level; create a theoretical reference material and to develop a non-formal educational training program for young people.

Costs to organisations

It is hard to estimate at this stage both direct and indirect costs of organisations involved in the validation process, however the expenses will be covered by the applicants for validation and for some groups by the state. The Cabinet of Ministers, by quoting publicly the prices charged by validation providers, will make sure these do not exceed the real costs of validation (as the objective of providing such service is not mere gaining of profit) and hopefully will be set at a reasonable and cost-effective level, promoting competition among validating institutions and also encouraging the provision of such service.

6.2.3 Individual perspective

Awareness-raising and recruitment

The State Service of Education Quality will be providing the information on validation- on their webpage will be listed the educational institutions and examination centres licensed to conduct validation, also the data basis will include persons that have obtained state accredited qualification.

The Ministry of Education and Science will coordinate the validation of learning other than formal learning according to the interests of society, ensuring the accessibility of the service to individuals. The Ministry of Welfare is similarly interested in promoting awareness, as the validation of nonformal and informal learning promotes the employability of labour force and improves their welfare. The *"Methodology of Validating Non-formal Learning and Assessing Skills"* suggests also the State Unemployment Agency as one of the main players in fulfilling the awareness-raising and recruitment function.

It is clear that the education providers/examination centres will be interested in awareness-raising and recruitment, as validation will be a paid service and thus it will be possible to attract persons that otherwise would not necessarily choose to spend time on studies providing them mostly with routine knowledge, gained already through nonformal learning.

Both employers and individuals will be target groups for the awareness-raising, as among them the interest persists for the possibility to validate non-formal learning. The document entitled *"Methodology of Validating Non-formal Learning and Assessing Skills"* elaborated during the programme *"Development of uniform procedures to improve the*

quality of vocational education and to involve and educate social partners " reports that during the multiplier seminar the participants (employers, individuals, policy makers) demonstrated a very vivid interest in the perspective of validating non-formal learning. The survey of social partners which was carried out during the approbation of the *"Methodology of Validating Non-formal Learning and Assessing Skills"* demonstrated that in general the attitude of social partners towards validation of non-formal learning is positive. On the basis of this methodology the regulation on the validation process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning by Cabinet of Ministers has been elaborated and is currently passed on the government discussion.

Provision of guidance and support

The education institutions and examination centres licensed to provide validation will be the main providers of basic guidance and support in preparing the documentation necessary for applying for validation procedure and will do so free of charge. They are also supposed to maintain a database on educational institutions that provide study modules necessary for the individual to achieve a qualification due to the absence of certain competences / skills in the individual portfolio. The State Service of Education Quality will list on their webpage the educational institutions and examination centres licensed to conduct validation in specific qualifications. In case the candidate for validation wants to be tested for a qualification so far not on the list, the State Service of Education Quality will inform the candidate within month of receiving an application on the appropriate institution or examination centre/or a mix of them that is/are able to conduct the validation process.

Costs to individuals

As already mentioned in previous section of this report, the assessment of professional competences, passing of qualification examination and the resulting attainment of validation of non-formal learning will be a paid service, fees quoted by the regulation of Cabinet of Ministers. However it is still too early to give details about the direct (fee structure) and indirect (time needed to complete the procedure) costs. At the same time the action programme *"* Guidelines for Lifelong Learning 2007-2013*"* emphasises the accessibility of formal and non-formal learning by for example considering possible motivational measures (tax reductions). There is a monthly allowance available to unemployed persons wishing to undertake non-formal learning (*"Regulations Regarding the Unemployment Allowance During Occupational Training, Retraining and Raising of Qualification and During Obtaining of Informal Education*[147], adopted by Regulation No. 212 of the Cabinet of Ministers, March 3, 2009). Once the validation system is in place, non-

formal learning will become more attractive. This will strengthen and will even make more meaningful the incentives aimed at making non-formal learning more accessible.

Initiatives focused on specific target groups

Since the system of validation itself is still not in place, it is hard to provide information on possible specific target groups. However, when observing the governmental measures of non-formal learning provisions, the following specific target groups can be identified: young people, children, offenders, young mothers, early school leavers, minorities, unemployed persons, disabled persons etc.

Evidence of benefits to individuals

The benefits to individuals are currently only evident at the abstract level – in concepts and guidelines elaborated by the policy makers.

- Potential benefits of the forthcoming validation system include for example:
- Reduced period (terms) of education;
- Reduced education fee;
- Better career possibilities;
- Increased possibilities of mobility;
- Increased competitiveness;
- More opportunities for further education; and
- Flexible learning pathways.

During the approbation of the *"Methodology of Validating Non-formal Learning and Assessing the Skills"*, four potential applicants for validation were involved in testing the methodology. Even though the initial attitude towards validation is rather positive, it was evident that it is necessary to discuss the benefits and necessity of the procedure and its components with social partners and other representatives, the concept is rather new and many uncertainties create a hesitant and reserved attitude.

6.2.4 Quality assurance and evaluation

Quality Assurance Framework

There is a legal framework in place for validating the nonformal and informal learning for level 1-3 vocational qualifications (regulated professions and higher professional education excluded). According to the draft regulations [148] the main quality assurance body is the State Service of Education Quality. It will monitor the quality of validation by delegating the right to provide this service to educational institutions and/or examination centres. The State Service of Education Quality maintains the right to refuse the assessment organization of professional competence to a candidate in case that there is no accredited state education institution that provides formal education program for acquiring the professional qualification that the candidate is applying for. In case that it will improve the quality of validation the State Service of Education Quality may delegate several institutions and/or examination centres to cooperate on validation for the same qualification.

There is of course a functioning quality assurance framework in place for higher education (based on European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance), however, the legal framework for validation and quality assurance framework for validation is still under governmental discussion.

Quality assurance systems / procedures

According to the draft regulations [148] the delegated institution and/or examination centre has to establish Assessment commission of professional competence with at least three members. At least one of the members has to be from the delegated institution and/or examination centre. Not less than two members are delegated experts of the corresponding sector by the Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Subcouncil. The education and professional activities of the delegated experts have to converge to the professional competence to be assessed. The assessment takes place based on the methodology elaborated by the State Service of Education Quality. The methodology will be published on its website as soon as it is elaborated. The commission evaluates the documents submitted by the candidate and assesses the professional competences of the candidate in relation to the requirements defined by the respective Occupational Standards. In case of positive decision the candidate is granted the right to pass within 12 months the professional qualification examination. The delegated institution and/or examination centre organizes and practices the professional qualification examination according to the procedure of centralized professional qualification examination as defined by regulatory enactments. The candidate that has passed the professional qualification examination with mark less than "5 -

satisfactory" [230] , is allowed to repeat the examination within six months. The candidate has to pass the examination at least with mark "5 - satisfactory" to receive state recognized 1-3 level qualification document.

The candidate may object the decision of the assessment commission about the relevance of the candidate's professional competences to the Occupational Standards and/or the examination results by submitting an application for reconsideration to the head of the delegated institution and/or examination centre. The candidate may appeal to the court in case that he disagrees with the decision made by the head of the delegated institution and/or examination centre.

Evaluation framework

The legal framework is at a too early stage of development to comment on evaluation of the validation system.

6.2.5 Assessment methods

Methods used

The assessment takes place in two successive phases:

1. The assessment of the professional competence of the candidate according to the submitted documentation portfolio. The portfolio consists of the following documents: application for the assessment of the professional competence (attached: CV; self-assessment report; copies of education certificates; certificates on work or voluntary work experience; copies of recommendations from employer or other person that has organized the learning process aimed at obtaining competences, skills and knowledge; other documents that the candidate considers as essential for assessment of professional competence; competence assessment fee payment receipt). The self-assessment report contains the identification of the professional qualification title and level that the candidate applies for, requirements by the respective Occupational Standard, way of acquiring the professional competence and the corresponding work experience or voluntary work experience (in months);

2. The passing of professional qualification examination by the candidate. The professional qualification examination is identical to the one passed at the formal education institution.

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[230] out of 10. More information on grading system in Latvia - http://www.aic.lv/portal/en/grading_system.html

Advantages and disadvantages of the methods used

During the approbation of the "*Methodology of Validating Non-formal Learning and Assessing Skills*", which have served as basis for the regulation [148], the following conclusions were drawn:

- the quality of the self-assessment report depends on the quality of the respective occupational standard. The constituents of the self-assessment report have to be set by experts from the industry/sector – who should be nominated by social partners and the tasks have to be grouped according to the technological process;

- the Europass CV is complicated and help from the consultant is needed to complete it;

- employees have difficulties in proving their work experience because very often the position does not correspond to the responsibilities and tasks;

- participants would prefer to take examinations tailored for the individual rather than to take an examination of the same content and structure as those taken at the end of formal education.

6.2.6 Validation practitioners

Profile of validation practitioners

The validation will be conducted by the state accredited educational institutions and/or examination centres that will be delegated to provide the service. According to the draft regulations [148] the delegated institution and/or examination centre has to establish Assessment commission of professional competence with at least three members. At least one of the members has to be from the delegated institution and/or examination centre. Not less than two members are delegated experts of the corresponding sector by the Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Subcouncil.

Provision of training and support to practitioners

One of the conclusions of the approbation of the *"Methodology of Validating Non-formal Learning and Assessing the Skills"* is that the preparation of experts is crucial for ensuring a fair, transparent and professional assessment process.

Qualifications requirements

The education and professional activities of the delegated experts have to converge to the professional competence to be assessed.

6.2.7 Conclusions

The policy of validation in Latvia during the period of economic downturn is targeted primarily at individuals that are willing to receive professional qualification - official certificate, meaning support to enter the labour market and possible further acquisition of lacking competences, if not full qualification may be awarded at this time. Nevertheless, every non-formal education and informal learning counts when it comes to validation.

The government support is crucial in preparing the legal framework for a system of validation. Recently more and more policy and legislative documents supporting the policy of validating non-formal and informal learning appear.

Working group under patronage of MoES has been established and the relevant stakeholders adapted the whole education system of Latvia to the European Qualification Framework. The working group approved all qualification levels and descriptors and gave MoES mandate on June 2, 2010 to move forward with approval of those at the government (national) level.

On June 10, 2010 the Parliament in Latvia has approved amendments in the Vocational Education Law. They will come in force as of January 1, 2011. The Cabinet of Ministers is delegated to prepare the regulation "Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers on the validation process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning" till December 31, 2010. The draft regulation has been passed to government discussion on July 15, 2010. The adopted amendments allow assessing non-formal learning and skills in vocational qualification system, namely for acquiring vocational qualifications from level one to three (there are 5 vocational qualification levels in Latvian system, levels 4 and 5 refer to the higher professional qualification), without affecting the higher vocational qualifications and regulated professions.

The draft Law on Higher Education anticipates validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education (also in the field of higher vocational qualifications). It is submitted and still awaiting adoption to the Parliament for approval (first passed on to government discussion on August 31, 2006); there is no clear deadline for its adoption. The draft Law foresees that a methodology of recognition of prior learning should be elaborated and a Cabinet Regulation on the procedure should be adopted within six months of the adoption of the Law itself. Some higher education institutions (HEIs) are preparing for the upcoming legislation – they are already considering what number of credits acquired in theory through personal development/ further education activities could be counted towards a higher education qualification when the legislation is adopted. As it is still not legal activity,

the validation of non-formal learning is limited to the reduction of the practice/ placement periods for those who have work experience in an appropriate field for admission and credit allocation, if used at all. Another possible route is that HEIs may allocate credits for further education courses that they themselves have carried out in case learners with certificates of such courses enrol for studies in the HEI in question. As the current legislation does not foresee any recognition of prior learning before the appropriate regulations are adopted, higher education institutions would risk being penalised if they applied validation of non-formal learning. Taking into account that the draft Law takes such a long time to be adopted it is necessary to think of alternative ways of legalizing the recognition of prior learning. One way would be by preparing amendments to the Law on Higher Education Establishments, currently in force. Otherwise further progress of Latvia in EHEA within respect of merging the formal, nonformal and informal learning in a common framework of lifelong learning will be impeded by a missing legislation that defines essential concepts.

The national institutional framework for validation has the following players in Latvia:

- The Cabinet of Ministers will adopt the rules of validation both for vocational and higher education.

- The Ministry of Education and Science will coordinate the validation system of professional skills acquired in learning other than formal learning. The Policy Coordination Department is the major coordination unit for the EQF and implementation of validation system as such. The Department of Higher Education is part of the Ministry of Education and Science. It develops and implements the state policy and strategy in higher education and science, including the policy and strategy for validation. The Department of Vocational and General Education develops state policy and strategy in vocational education, including the policy and strategy for validation.

- The State Service of Education Quality is a direct administration institution under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science. The State Service of Education Quality will be the body that will delegate the task of assessing the professional competences (validation) to accredited educational institutions or examination centres according to the adopted amendments. The State Service of Education Quality will list on their webpage the educational institutions and examination centres licensed to conduct validation in specific qualifications. In case the candidate for validation wants to be tested for a qualification so far not on the list, the State Service of Education Quality will inform

the candidate within month of receiving an application on the appropriate institution or examination centre/or a mix of them that is/are able to conduct the validation process.

- The Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Subcouncil is part of National Tripartite Cooperation Council and will provide experts for conducting the validation process at the delegated validation institutions and/or examination centres.

- In the field of validation of higher education the Latvian Rectors' Council and the Higher Education Council might be involved by elaborating recommendations for improving higher education and validation in the sphere.

The involvement of the private sector is also promoted by different incentives of the government, thus for example the concept "Increasing the attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners in quality assurance of vocational education" proposes tax incentives for companies wishing to support the training or professional education of their staff as one of the ways of making non-formal learning more accessible for larger groups of people. Even without tax incentives the companies often support staff endeavours to improve their qualifications by either providing staff with official leave for studies or by covering part of the tuition fees. It is anticipated that with non-formal learning attaining its place in the lifelong learning by validation measures it will become more popular in society and in the eyes of employers as well.

EU funds are allocated for developing a regulatory basis for validation. Thus under the action program "Human Resources and Employability" the subactivity 1.2.1.1.1 "Elaboration of Sectoral Qualification System and Restructuring of the Professional Education" aims to improve the quality and efficiency of the professional education by creating the sectoral qualification system; implementing modular approach for acquiring basic profession, speciality and specialization; developing or improving the basic occupational standards and basic requirements of specialized qualifications and developing the validation of skills acquired in other than formal learning. In the professional education it is planned to implement the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), which will allow individually transferring, validating and accumulating the formal, nonformal and informal learning outcomes till 2014.

The assessment of candidates will take place based on the methodology elaborated by the State Service of Education Quality. The methodology will be published on its website as soon as it is elaborated. The commission evaluates the documents submitted by the candidate

and assesses the professional competences of the candidate in relation to the requirements defined by the respective Occupational Standards.

The assessment will take place in two successive phases: 1) The assessment of the professional competence of the candidate according to the submitted documentation portfolio; and 2) The passing of vocational qualification examination by the candidate. The professional qualification examination is identical to the one passed at the formal education institution. The obtained certificate will be identical to the one acquired through formal learning pathway and will not contain any indication that the document has been obtained through validation of nonformal and informal learning.

It is planned that validation candidates will have to cover the costs for the service of completing the process of validation of non-formal learning. Thus it will affect neither the state nor the self-government budget. Regulation project of the Cabinet of Ministers obliges provider of validation to provide free of charge guidance personnel for consultation on the procedure of validation. This decision has been inspired by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, in which Latvia is an active partner. Cabinet of Ministers will quote publicly the fees of the services provided by the institutions licensed to validate non-formal learning, promoting competition among validating institutions and also encouraging the provision of such service.

It is still too early to give details about the direct (fee structure) and indirect (time needed to complete the procedure) range of costs arising to individuals seeking for validation.

According to the draft regulations the main quality assurance body in the sphere of validation is the State Service of Education Quality. It will monitor the quality of validation by delegating the right to provide this service to educational institutions and/or examination centres.

The quality of the respective occupational standard will have an important influence on the quality of validation process. The employees in Latvia might have difficulties in proving their work experience because very often the position does not correspond to the actual responsibilities and tasks. It is necessary to improve the existing system by involving as many social partners as possible.

The Latvian Chamber of Crafts uses a validation procedure for the award of journeyman and masters of crafts qualifications.

There is a legal framework in place for validating the nonformal and informal learning for level 1-3 vocational qualifications (regulated professions and higher professional

education excluded), however some essential enactment laws have still to be adopted. The recognition of prior learning at the tertiary level is still lagging behind.

Taking into account the current delayed stage of development of the legal framework, the estimate of the results to be achieved in the following years (e.g. 100 validation beneficiaries), as stated in the "Programme for Implementation of Guidelines for Lifelong Learning 2007-2013 in 2008-2013" will not reflect the real situation of validation at least by the end of 2010.

Since the system of validation itself is still not in place, it is hard to provide information on possible specific target groups. However, when observing the governmental measures of non-formal learning provisions, the following specific target groups can be identified: unemployed persons, young people, children, offenders, young mothers, early school leavers, minorities, disabled persons etc.

Once the validation system is in place, non-formal learning will become more attractive. This will strengthen and will even make more meaningful the incentives aimed at making non-formal learning more accessible.

7. Methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program as basis for future Recognition of Prior Learning

7.1.Organization and Methodology of Research

Research issue

As already mentioned in Chapter 3 in order to ensure that the formal system of education becomes a fully fledged constituent of lifelong learning system it is necessary to provide means of recognizing the non-formal and informal learning. The qualification framework covers the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. The different levels of qualifications are based on learning outcomes, this facilitates the validation of outcomes ofboth non-formal and informal learning One of the means for incorporating the outcomes of both non-formal and informal learning is through translating the competencies and skills obtained through alternate forms of learning into common currency – credits. According to "Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF" [104] the learning outcomes approach is fundamental to the EQF and the national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications should be demonstrably based on learning outcomes. At the same time strong links with the use of learning outcomes are a central element for the recognition of prior learning.

The objective to be reached as declared by the policy makers is understandable and so is the rationale to do so. However unclear is the way how to translate the theory into a working practice. In the following chapter the author will address this problem by proposing and examining a methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program . Correctly implemented learning outcomes can serve as quality instrument. The formulated learning outcomes will relate the program to the qualification framework and make it compatible to RPL.

Subtasks of the research

-propose a methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program as basis for future RPL, research on the implementation of learning outcomes in a study program and discuss the implementation of learning outcomes as tool of quality assurance, transparency and recognition.

Type of the research

classification [32] of the conducted research according to the -

- application mode: applied research, since it is planned that it will be possible to apply the results of the research for improving the existing policy and practice;

- applied research method: mix of qualitative and quantitative research, as it will be based on both qualitative and quantitative data drawn from conducted survey;

- research issue: case study- the aim is to research an instance - namely, the methodology of implementing learning outcomes in bachelor study program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy"; for a more complete overview stakeholder perspectives are required;

- data collection procedure: secondary (desk) research; primary research: content analysis of documents; expert interviewing interviews with lecturers and students, survey results discussed with the lecturers.

Tools of the research

Desk research, results of structured questionnaire as basis for focus group discussion, elaboration of a methodology by the author.

Target group and the sample size [17]

The convenience sample consisted of eighteen lecturers (58% of lecturers involved in the program). The use of convenience sampling provides results that are limited in generalization and inference making about the whole population – which in this case would be a team of 31 lecturers. However many of thequestioned lecturers form the core team that works with students, as they are profoundly involved in the program by holding more than one lecture at the abovementioned program. , e.g. doc. Silvija Kristapsone (from the Chair of Statistics and Demography) holds two lectures at the program: Inhabitants and Development (Demo4001) and Statistics of Business and Economics (Ekon1020).

The research did not cover the intended learning outcomes of all creditpoints of the program (see Table 9 and Table 10). The convenience sample lecturers were not surveyed apropos the intended learning outcomes of the Bachelor thesis, course paper and internship. This was done with the aim to minimize the impact of the individual work with a student on survey results that depict the generalized intended learning outcomes of the average student in the program. Thus, e.g. if one of the lecturers, when tutoring the Bachelor thesis, has taken

special effort in ensuring that the student learns to create an attractive PowerPoint presentation, then his statement does not relate to all other students of the program. The case is opposite, if the lecturer teaches the students to apply PowerPoint presentations in his course, then the impact is attributable on all students of the program.

Table 9. Division of creditpoints in the program that were covered and/or left out by the research

Part of curricula	Description	Creditpoints that were left out deliberately
A. part	Bachelor Thesis	10
B. part	Course paper: International Economics	2
	Course paper: Studies of Diplomacy	2
	Internship	6
	Module of Language Studies	14
C. part	2 elective courses	4
The research did not cover:		**38 creditpoints out of 160**

The research neither did include the survey of lecturers involved in teaching the module of language studies – 14 creditpoints in total. The rationale was that the learning outcomes of language studies are rather specific. There would not have been much for the language lecturers to mark in the survey.

The lecturers of the following courses did not return the filled in questionnaires in time for discussing the results at the focus group discussion: Philosophy, Sociology, Cultural History and Theory, Political Science, Psychology of Interrelation, World's Religions, Econometrics, Integrated Marketing Communication, Introduction to the International Policy, Negotiation, Latvian History of Diplomacy.

Table 10. Total number of creditpoints covered by the surveyed lecturers

Part of curricula	Total number of creditpoints covered by the surveyed lecturers	% from total creditpoints	% from creditpoints included in research
A. part	34	53%	**62%**
B. part	60	65%	**88%**
C. part	-	-	**-**
TOTAL	94	58%	**77%**

As it is to be seen from the Table 10, the surveyed lecturers cover 58% of total creditpoints of the program and 77% of all creditpoints included in research.

The results of the filled in questionnaires formed a basis for focus group discussions (with lecturers).

To gain more complete picture of the current state of implementation of LO in the program it is necessary to question the remaining lecturers as well. The lecturers of the

following courses have not been surveyed (have not returned the filled in questionnaire by the time of second focus group discussion in June 2011): Philosophy, Sociology, Cultural History and Theory, Political Science, Psychology of Interrelation, World's Religions, Econometrics, Integrated Marketing Communication, Introduction to the International Policy, Negotiation, Latvian History of Diplomacy.

Another target group that should be questioned on the LO are the graduates of the program. However, due to the fact that the first graduates of the program (the program was introduced in 2007) are due June 2011, the author could not involve them as a target group in this research, as they would not have the whole picture on the LO of the program at the point of conducting the research.

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Questionnaire with guidelines and explanatory note

The questionnaire contains both open and predefined questions (see Attachment, page 210).

Research organization and timeline

1. phase. Desk research, acquaintance with theory, formulation of research rationale and research issue: Summer 2008.

2. phase. Within the framework of UL research project "Principles of Formulating Skills and Competences Acquired as the Result of Studies: International Experience" visit to Bergen University (Norway) in October 2008 and University College Cork (Ireland) in November 2008; gathering information and acquaintance with the practical implementation of learning outcomes in experienced European higher education institutions at different its aspects – administration, lecturers, students.

3. phase. Dissemination of information acquired during visits to both European higher education institutions in academic community of Latvia. October 2008-February 2009.

4. phase. Choice of a study program for practical formulation of learning outcomes at the University of Latvia- bachelor study program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy", first draft of methodology, presentation of methodology at international conferences in Riga in October 2009 and in Bonn (Germany) in November 2009. In Bonn the methodology was presented as case study to national Bologna Experts, in the section of Business and Social Sciences.

5. phase. Participation in the meetings of the task force founded by the Ministry of Education and Science "Formulating the Tertiary Qualification Framework and

Learning Outcomes thereof". The aim of the task force – to adopt the national qualification framework and learning outcomes of individual higher education levels of Latvia to the European Qualification Framework. February-April 2010.

6. phase. Correction of learning outcomes of the bachelor study program according to the NQF adopted to EQF, drafting the plan and defining the research target groups for defining learning outcomes in a study program in accordance with NQF, elaboration of questionnaire for the lecturers involved in the study program, presentation of questionnaire at the Research Seminar of Doctoral Students at the Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Latvia. April-May 2010.

7. phase. Conducting pilot project in filling in the questionnaire by lecturers (six) involved in bachelor study program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy". Corrections in the strategy, June 2010. Focus group discussion with the lecturers from the abovementioned program in November 2010.

8. (5 about to-graduates (further in text-graduates) and 9 third year students – in June 2011). The students were asked to fill in the questionnaires phase. Filling in the questionnaire by another 12 lecturers involved in bachelor study program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy". Focus group discussion with the lecturers from the abovementioned program in May 2011.

7.2. Research

Methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program as basis for future RPL: the case of bachelor study program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy", University of Latvia

There are two main approaches to conduct the implementation of learning outcomes (further in text LO) in a study program. The top-down approach is useful, when the study program is already functioning, then the course-level LO is adapted to the LO as specified for the program. The bottom-up approach can be applied in cases when the program LO will be inferred from LO of existing courses or modules.

At the point of introducing learning outcomes in the bachelor study program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy" at the Faculty of Economics and Management, the University of Latvia, it was already a fully operational and accredited study program. This allowed for choosing the top-down approach; it is easier to adjust the learning outcomes of individual courses than the learning outcomes of the whole program as stated in the accreditation documentation. Top-down approach also enables the study program director to better coordinate the implementation process and address the program in a holistic manner.

Since the Faculty of Economics and Management is still working on implementing the learning outcomes, the annotations of individual courses were not formulated according to the main principles of LO. Namely, majority of the course annotations contained aims that focused rather on teacher' s intentions than on what the learner can demonstrate at the end of a learning activity

Conducting the research will promote the discussion on intended learning outcomes, bring the lecturers closer to the concept and thus support the transfer to the LOs.

The first step is to ensure that the LO of the program are formulated correctly (see Illustration 8). The accreditation documentation of the program contained section of program's tasks and intended outcomes, as well as section that stated what kind of generic and specific competences will be ensured by the program. Many of the tasks were clearly formulated in a way to reflect the teacher's intentions:".. *to provide theoretical and practical knowledge in international economics, commercial diplomacy, as well as in fields of political science, culture and legislation*". Even more, the abovementioned excerpt divides knowledge

into practical and theoretical. Thus the LO of the program had to be created by merging the two sections, reformulating, where necessary, the outcomes in a student-centered wayand eliminating incorrect formulations. While formulating the LO the author followed the guidelines (Kennedy, 2007) [44]outlined by Dr. Declan Kennedy, making sure that the LO are:

- Observable

- Measurable

- Student-centered

- 5-8 in total.

and applied action verbs as suggested by Bloom' s taxonomy (Bloom, 1975) [11].It is important to point out that the: "learning outcomes are statements of essential learning, and as essential learning, they are written at minimum acceptable or threshold (pass / fail) standard. The learning described in learning outcomes is the learning that must be attained in order that the learner can pass" (Moon, 2008) [53]. Student performances above this basic threshold level are differentiated by applying grading criteria.

The LO have to relate to external reference points (qualifications descriptors, levels, level descriptors) (Adam, 2004) [2]. It is important to note that the accreditation documentation of the program was prepared before the National Qualification Framework (NQF) was adopted to the EQF. This means that the outcomes of the entire program had to be adjusted to the respective level descriptors of the NQF of Latvia.

The descriptor "Knowledge and Comprehension" of the respective level "demonstrate general and specialized knowledge and understanding of the corresponding to the field of profession facts, theories, causal relationships and technologies" is too general to be used as the learning outcome of the program. It is necessary to bear in mind, that the LO should serve as tool of transparency for the stakeholders – " for those who pay the bills—taxpayers, parents, and students—to evaluate critically what they get for their money from public education" (Frye, 1999) [31]. It is necessary to specify the LO, however formulation "Demonstrate knowledge that is connected to economics, communicational theory and practice, new technologies, management, business legislation etc" would be too detailed to provide a concise overview of what the study program is all about.

The curriculum demonstrates that the program has two basic minors - blocks of general studies:

- University studies (e.g. Political Science, Theory and History of Culture)
- Economy (e.g. Microeconomics, Macroeconomics),

as well as two main majors – blocks of specialized studies:

– International economics and

– Commercial diplomacy.

Therefore the LO that would suit best should be formulated by taking into account these curriculum specifics: "*Demonstrate knowledge and skills in international economics, commercial diplomacy, as well as in fields of political science, culture and legislation*". Table 11 depicts the cycle descriptors of NQF of Latvia and the LO of the bachelor study program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy"[242].

```
┌─────────────────────┐
│     Conceptual      │
│     decisions       │
└─────────────────────┘
           │
    -top-down/bottom-up
    -taxonomy
           ↓
┌─────────────────────┐
│   Formulation of    │◄──────┐
│    program' s LO    │       │
└─────────────────────┘       │
           │                  │
        -NQF                  │
        -curriculum           │
           ↓                  │
┌─────────────────────┐       │
│  Mapping the program's      │
│  LO to separate courses     │
└─────────────────────┘       │
           │                  │
       -detailed LO           │
       -methods & assessment  │
       -responsibility        │
           ↓                  │
┌─────────────────────┐       │
│   Feedback from     │       │
│ stakeholders (lecturers     │
│   and students)     │───────┘
└─────────────────────┘
```
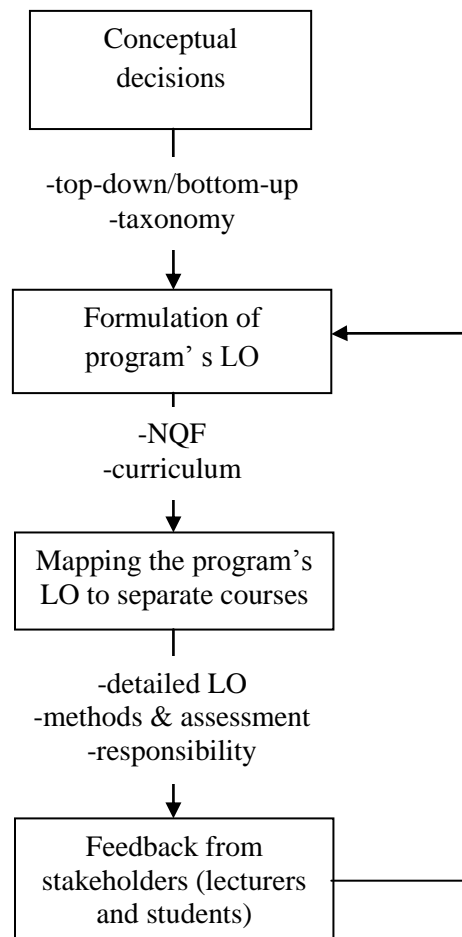
Illustration 8. Proposed methodology by Rusakova for implementing learning outcomes in the study program (top-down approach)

Of course the attribution of individual program' s LO to the individual level descriptors is only referential. Thus, for example, the LO No.2 "*Analyze and assess these processes, by applying statistical, econometrical, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis and apply the acquired results of analysis for improving the performance*

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[242] the LO of the program have been numbered for easier reference

of company or institution, comprehending the professional ethics in international business environment" actually refers partly to the descriptor "Analysis, Synthesis, Assessment" – "*Analyze and assess these processes, by applying statistical, econometrical, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis... comprehending the professional ethics in international business environment*" and to the descriptor "Application of Knowledge" – "*...and apply the acquired results of analysis for improving the performance of company or institution,...*". The next step is to continue the top-down approach and link the program's LO to the individual courses of the curriculum. By taking a closer look at the formulated LO, it becomes clear that the LO can be further divided into several sub-LO. Thus the LO No.2 can be divided further into three distinctive parts and those can be linked by logic to several courses of the curriculum. Apparently the part "*Analyze and assess these processes, by applying statistical, econometrical, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis...*" corresponds to the following courses - Economic Informatics I, Statistics of Economics and Business, Econometrics. The part "*...and apply the acquired results of analysis for improving the performance of company or institution,...*" correlates to the LO of the Management Theory, International Economics, Research Workshop. And, finally, the part "*... comprehending the professional ethics in international business environment*" conforms to the intended LO of the courses - Economics and World Security, Comparative Analysis of World's Regions, World's Religions, Intercultural Environment of Economics, History of Business and Economics in the World.

If we assume that these are the courses that will indeed address the specific program's LO, it will mean an unavoidable jeopardy of running into quality problems – the overlapping and redundancy of course content. This requires more discussion among the teaching staff in order to eliminate the possible repetition of the study material.

Also the part of the LO No.3 "*... and do so by applying knowledge of several languages*" seems to be best allocated to the courses - Business English, English for Business and Law, Business Correspondence in English, French. However, this would be a too simplified and confined approach. Excluding other lecturers from addressing this LO, the overall quality of the program may suffer or at least may reach unsatisfactory results.

Such curriculum constituents as Internship, defense of course projects, defense of Bachelor thesis, defense of internship are presumed to take care of the more generic LO No. 5 "*Apply competency of presentation and scientific polemics, communication skills, team work abilities with the aim to analyse the application of theory in hypothetical and real situations*".

Table 11. Cycle Descriptors of NQF of Latvia and the LO of the bachelor study program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy"

NQF of Latvia descriptors for tertiary education, bachelor cycle (EKI level 6)		Learning outcomes of the bachelor study program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy" at the Faculty of Economics and Management, University of Latvia
Knowledge and Comprehension	demonstrate general and specialized knowledge and understanding of the corresponding to the field of profession facts, theories, causal relationships and technologies	1. Demonstrate knowledge and skills in international economics, commercial diplomacy, as well as in fields of political science, culture and legislation;
Application of Knowledge	· based on analytical approach, conduct practical tasks in the corresponding profession · demonstrate skills, that allow to find creative solutions to professional problems	
Analysis, Synthesis, Assessment	· independently acquire, select and analyze information, know how to apply it · take decisions and solve problems in the corresponding academic discipline or profession · comprehends professional ethics · assesses the impact of own professional activities upon environment and society	2. Analyze and assess these processes, by applying statistical, econometrical, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis and apply the acquired results of analysis for improving the performance of company or institution, comprehending the significance of the professional ethics in international business environment;
Communication	· formulate and analytically describe the information, problems and solutions in own academic discipline or profession, explain them and discuss them by being able to justify own viewpoint both to specialists and non-specialists	3. Defend the national or corporative interests in international trade, finance or other economical activities, by being part of different national or international institutions, as well as local, private, national and multinational companies and corporations, and do so by applying knowledge of several languages;
Continuing Education	· independently structure own studies, direct the own continuing education and the continuing education of subordinates, as well as the professional perfection	4. Demonstrate competency in knowledge acquisition sources (related to the comprehension of processes of international economics and commercial diplomacy), paying attention to the development tendencies of leading national economies, foreign investment attraction and promotion of export growth;
Other Generic Skills	· demonstrate scientific approach in solving the problems · undertake responsibility and initiative, by conducting the work individually, in teams or by leading the work of others · take decisions and find solutions in changing or unclear conditions	5. Apply competency of presentation and scientific polemics, communication skills, team work with the aim to analyze the application of theory in hypothetical and real situations.

Nevertheless improvement of generic skills can become and often is part of all courses. The generic nature of this LO may lead to a too scattered perception of lecturer's responsibility in leading students to the achievement of this, even though transversal, LO, as the lecturer of the individual, specialized course (such as f.ex. World's Religions) most probably does not feel obliged to make sure that the students advance in achieving this LO. Theoretically it can happen that the generic LO is not reached at all by the graduates of the program as all lecturers expect other lecturers to take care of it. To avoid such unwishful consequences it is necessary to further interpret and define the responsibility of individual course lecturers in achieving this LO.

As a matter of fact the generic skills can be further divided:

- apply competency of presentation (structure, style, visual image of presentation, rethorics etc.)
- scientific polemics (argumentation, dispute, structure of speech etc.)
- team work abilities (take on initiative, work with people from different backgrounds etc.)...

Even in the case when the lecturers state that they take care of the generic skill "*team work abilities*", by regularly assigning the students with team projects, it is necessary to check the extent and emphasis of lecturers' approaches within this respect.

Thus it may happen, that the lecturers do not make sure that each of the students take on initiative, but always allow the same students to apply for leading the group. It can happen that all lecturers allow the students to form teams according to own preferences. In such a way the development of sub-skill „*work with people from different backgrounds*" is impeded. Per contra, if the group of lecturers, that assign team projects during their lectures agree in advance, that one of them will always group the teams in a random way, the other will group the team by students sitting next to each other etc, the achievement of the sub-skill „work with people from different backgrounds" and correspondingly the umbrella-skill „team work abilities" will be achieved in a more qualitative way.

Many of the benefits (Adam, 2006 [1]; Jenkins and Unwin, 2001 [41]) said to arise from implementing learning outcomes can serve as quality instrument.

LO as quality instrument provides more transparency, time economy, requires clearly set responsibility and promotes target orientation.

To support the further implementation of LO it is necessary to develop a map (see Table 12) of detailed learning outcomes (aim) -> teaching methods (how to reach it?) -> assessment tools (is it reachable?) -> courses (responsible lecturer).

On the basis of the program's LO, in close collaboration with the director of the study program, the author created a questionnaire , where each program's LO is further divided in approx. 3 further LOs (the lecturers are able to add their own LOs in case that they are addressing any sub-LOs in relation to the program's LO). Additionally the lecturers are asked to define the method through which the respective LO is taught to the student, whether it is task to be done individually or in groups and whether the lecturer considers the attainment of this LO a priority or not (priority level 1 corressponds to the statement „I am taking special care to make sure that the students at the end of my course have attained this learning

Table 12. Mapping detailed LO to the individual courses

LO: the graduate is able..	How to reach this LO, how to assess it?	The lecturer of which course will be responsible?
.. find solution to the problem by providing a list of possible actions	case studies	Commercial Diplomacy
..organize the time planning of middle sized group	group tasks, projects	?
..select and concentrate the most important information	create a title and annotation to an article	?
..explain and justify own viewpoint in a written form	report, A4 dispatch, write critical review	Economics and World's Security
..choose one of the alternatives of the action, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the decision made	article +task, SWOT analysis	?
..evaluate the trustworthiness of the information source	article analysis, argumentation by applying references	?

outcome", priority level 2 coresponds to the statement „During my course the students will work towards reaching this learning outcome, however I do not consider this learning outcome to be of priority No.1 of my course, to really make sure that they reach it").

The aim of the questionnaire was to provoke discussion on:

- the attained cluster of skills and competences of the average graduate of the program based on the activities undertaken in sum by the team of lecturers;

- the cluster of skills and competences that currently is being attained at an unsatisfactory level;

- the conformity of the LO of the program to the content provided.

The lecturers were asked the questions according to the questionnaire and offered an explanation, if needed.

Results

The first results of surveying the lecturers involved in the analyzed program show that the LO are currently implemented rather formally. During focus group discussion an insufficient understanding of the term LO and student centered learning has been detected. Thus the annotations of individual courses of two lecturers were not formulated according to the main principles of LO – they contained formulations that were teacher centered. One lecturer stated that she is covering all LO's of the program within her course, which is also a sign that the approach is rather superficial – as it cannot be ensured that all LO of the program are covered by one lecturer only. Apart from discrepancy with the student centered

learning philosophy, the lack of understanding creates a resistance to change among the teaching staff.

The majority of lecturers do not think of ways to indicate to the students the specialized learning outcome of the separate seminar task, instead of providing the task with an indicative name e.g. "Analysis of Country's External Direct Investment Attractiveness", they simply name it: "group task on a country". Such approach may lead to hard to perceive learning outcome of the task.

As mode value of student number that forms a group for accomplishment of a group task was mentioned by lecturers - 2-3 students, but also group of 7 students working on the same task was mentioned. However the lecturer that stated allowing students forming groups of up to 7 persons does not take attention whether each person in the group has been allocated a task to do. The larger the group the more important it is to make sure that the students really collaborate and all of them are involved in solving the group task.

1. Demonstrate   knowledge and skills in international economics, commercial diplomacy, as well as in fields of political science, culture and legislation
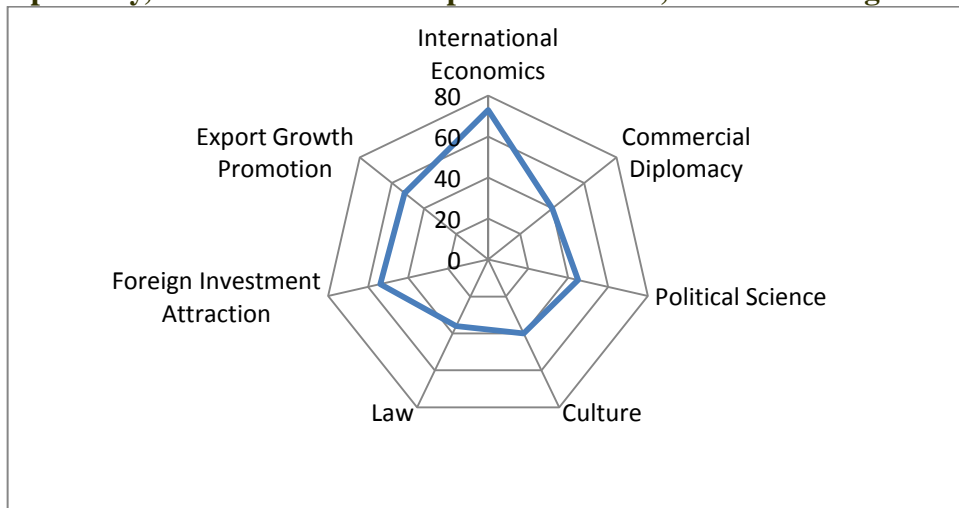
Chart 1. Share of Specific Components of Course Content (lecturers)

The learning outcomes form the core of the course and should remain unchanged irrespectively of the lecturer that holds the lecture. However the illustrative examples and the covered border sciences will differ based on the background of the lecturer of the course. E.g. one lecturer may apply illustrative examples from his own experience and has more interest and knowledge in human rights, the other one will extensively apply examples as found in the textbooks but be especially familiar with cultural phenomena and both lecturers may teach the same core elements of the course successfully. Therefore, even though the name of the

course is explicit "Political Science", due to the lecturer's background it can provide a taint of e.g. international economics with it.
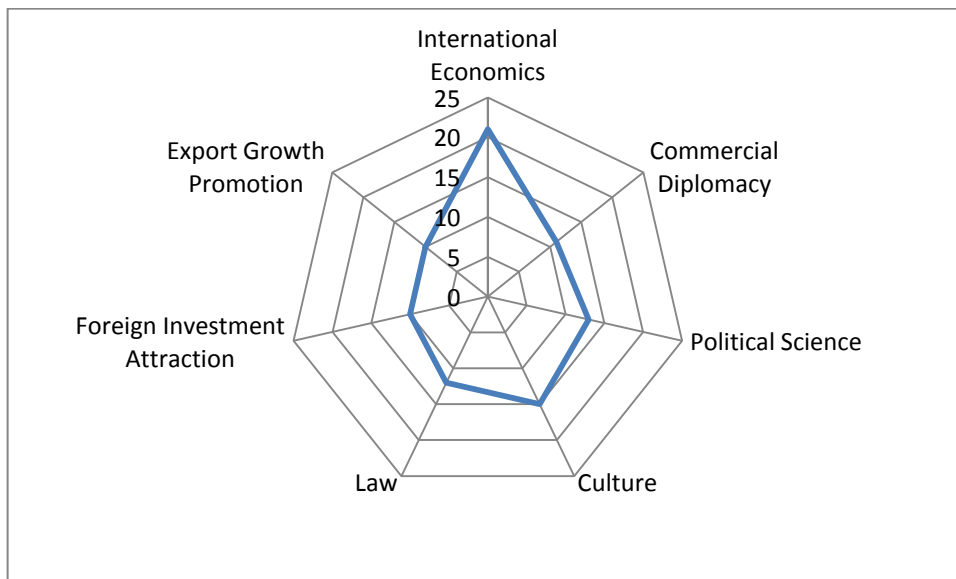
Chart 2. Share of Specific Components of Course Content (graduates)

Both the lecturers and students were asked to describe the course content according to, as defined by the self-evaluation report, the main fields of study of the program. "Export growth promotion" and "Foreign investment attraction", crucial issues for both "International economics" and "Commercial diplomacy" have been added, as it is stated explicitly in the self-evaluation report, that the graduates will be able to do both. In the Chart No. 1 it is possible to see the share of specific components of the course content as stated by the surveyed lecturers. There is a high data sensitivity to separate study courses (e.g. the lecturer of "Political Science" has not been surveyed) however the more lecturers are surveyed, the less the individual impact of the lecturer on the results of the survey will be.

The participants of the focus group discussion with lecturers were satisfied with the results of the survey, as the illustration in general corresponds to the expectations, with main study emphasis being on "International economics", "Export growth promotion" and "Foreign investment attraction". Even though "Commercial diplomacy" is also part of the title of the program, the low in comparison value is fine, as long as both "Export growth promotion" and "Foreign investment attraction" value is set high.

The same information as displayed by graduates (see Chart No. 2) shows the same characteristic emphasis of the program on "International economics", however the values "Export growth promotion" and "Foreign investment attraction" are less outspoken.

Explanation on charts to follow:

(1) The first column shows the maximum number of lecturers that could have answered – 18. The other columns under the depiction "Lecturers" show the number of lecturers stating that they are working towards the respective intended learning outcome.

(2) The second group of columns under the depiction "Individually" shows the number of lecturers that state that they design the tasks that lead to the intended learning outcome to be done individually by the students and provide, whenever possible, an individual feedback

(3) The third group of columns under the depiction "In groups" shows the number of lecturers that state that they design the tasks that lead to the intended learning outcome to be done in groups and provide a feedback to a group of students.

(4) The fourth group of columns under the depiction "Priority No.1" shows the number of lecturers that state "I am taking special care to make sure that the students at the end of my course have attained this learning outcome".

(5) The fifth group of columns under the depiction "Priority No.2" shows the number of lecturers that state „During my course the students will work towards reaching this learning outcome, however I do not consider this learning outcome to be of priority No.1 of my course, to really make sure that they reach it".

It can happen that some of lecturers make all students both work individually and in groups towards reaching the learning outcome. Therefore the sum of values in columns "Individually" and "In groups" may exceed the respective value in the column "Lecturers".

Since some of the surveyed lecturers teach several courses and the learning outcome priorities of courses may differ, the sum of values in columns "Priority No.1" and "Priority No.2" may exceed the respective value in the column "Lecturers". However, the sum of column "Priority No.1" and "Priority No.2" cannot be less than 18, since the learning outcome has to be at least of "Priority No.2" for the lecturer to be added to the column group "Lecturers".

1.2. Analyze and assess these processes..;
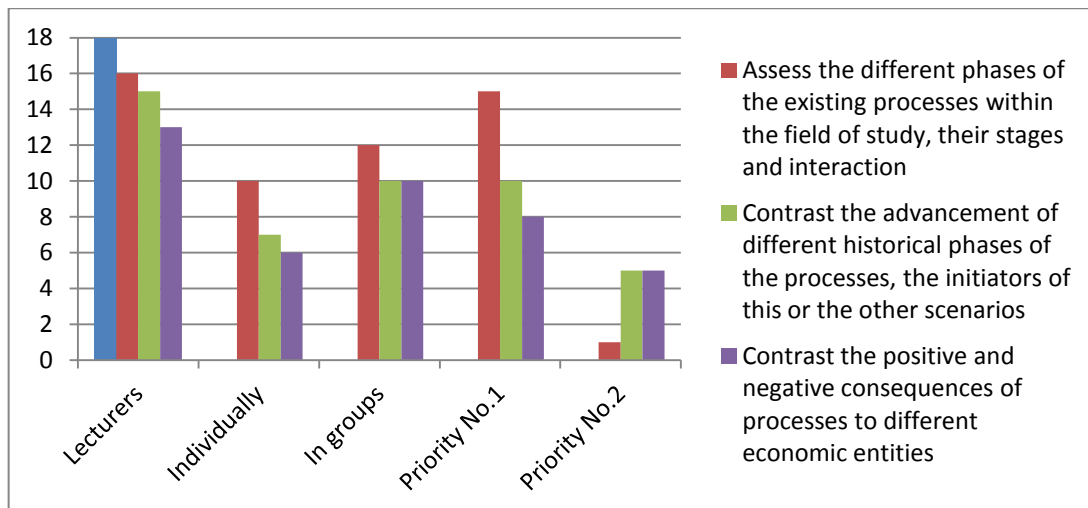
Chart 3. Group of Learning Outcomes: "Analyze and assess these processes.." (lecturers)

As this is a bachelor program, making sure that there is a general understanding of the existing processes within the field of studies, is considered very important – 15 out of 16 lecturers consider it to be "Priority No.1". The majority of lecturers teach this learning outcome to groups of students, to provide a common ground for later discussions on the topic.

Two of the surveyed lecturers do not consider working towards this learning outcome. The lecturer of "Economic Informatics" is among those that did not consider this to be the learning outcome of his course, reasoning that "I am teaching basics of working with software and do not go into explaining the processes that take place in the hardware".

2.1 Analyze and assess these processes, by applying statistical, econometrical, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis ..;
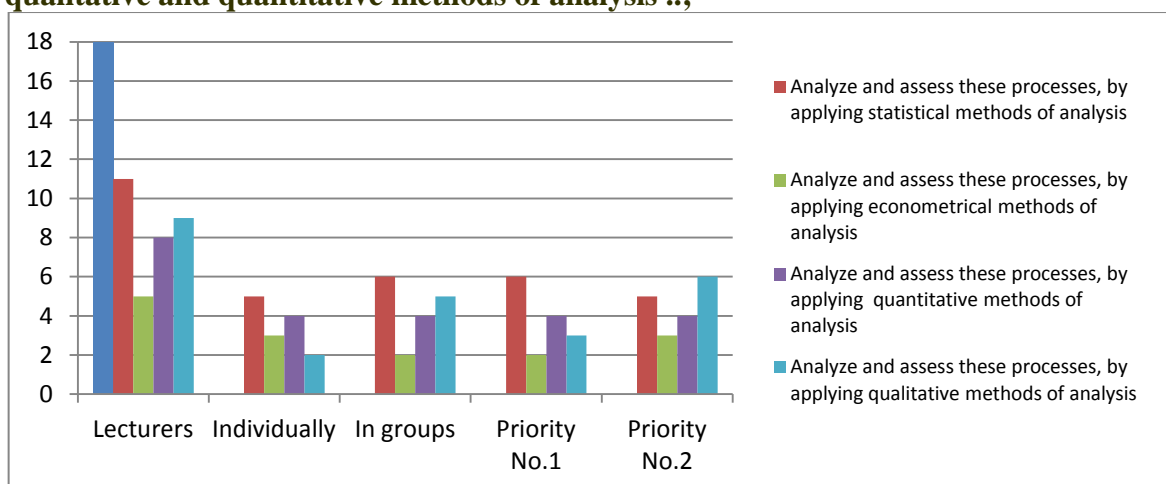
Chart 4. Group of Learning Outcomes: "Analyze and assess these processes, by applying statistical, econometrical, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis .." (lecturers)

In general the surveyed lecturers teach students to apply statistical (both individually and in groups) and qualitative (in groups) methods of analysis. The students are less thought to apply quantitative and econometric methods of analysis. Also 2 graduates out of 5, when compared to other learning outcomes have stated that these both are the learning outcomes that they: "Rather have not reached". However due to the fact that the lecturer of course "Econometrics" (4 creditpoints) has not returned the survey, the least taught, as demonstrated by the survey results, econometric methods of analysis are taught at a sufficient, according to the lecturers' focus group's point of view, level, supported by the fact that the graduates of the program will get a degree in management and not in economics. However 2 graduates have stated that they would have liked more to work on attaining skills to conduct econometric methods of analysis. In comparison, only one has stated the same about the quantitative methods of analysis.

2.2 .. apply the acquired results of analysis for improving the performance of company or institution..;
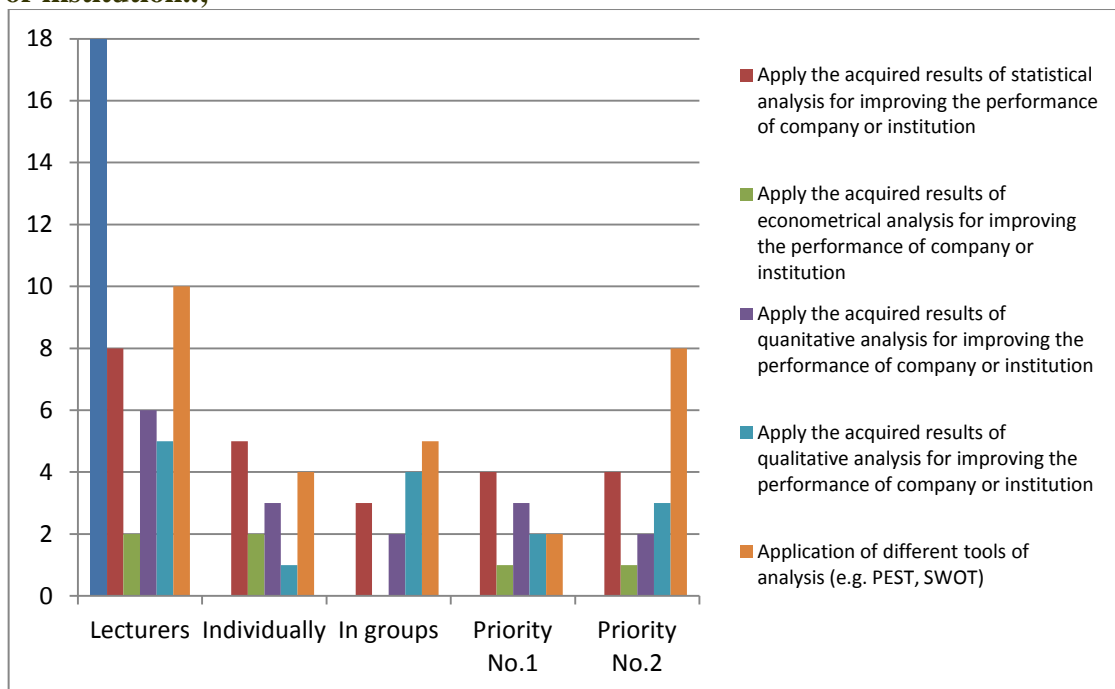
Chart 5. Group of Learning Outcomes: ".. apply the acquired results of analysis for improving the performance of company or institution.." (lecturers)

According to the results of the survey many of the lecturers, that teach the students to apply the methods of analysis, teach the students to apply the results of the conducted analysis for improving the performance of company or institution. 10 lecturers out of 18 teach the students skills to apply different specific tools of business analysis, however the

majority consider them to be of "Priority No.2", e.g. basically these are applied as means to reach some other learning outcomes of the course. The second most widely applied results for improvement of performance of company or institutions are those of statistical data analysis, the third – results of quantitative analysis. Also here the least applied are econometric methods of analysis, however, the both lecturers that state working towards this intended learning outcome, do this on an individual basis with each student and one of the lecturers even consider this to be "Priority No.1" learning outcome of the course. However in the learning outcomes of this group the majority of graduates (e.g. in "Apply the acquired results of quantitative and qualitative analysis for improving the performance of company or institution" – even all 5 graduates) would have liked to be better skilled.

2.3 .. comprehending the significance of the professional ethics in international business environment;
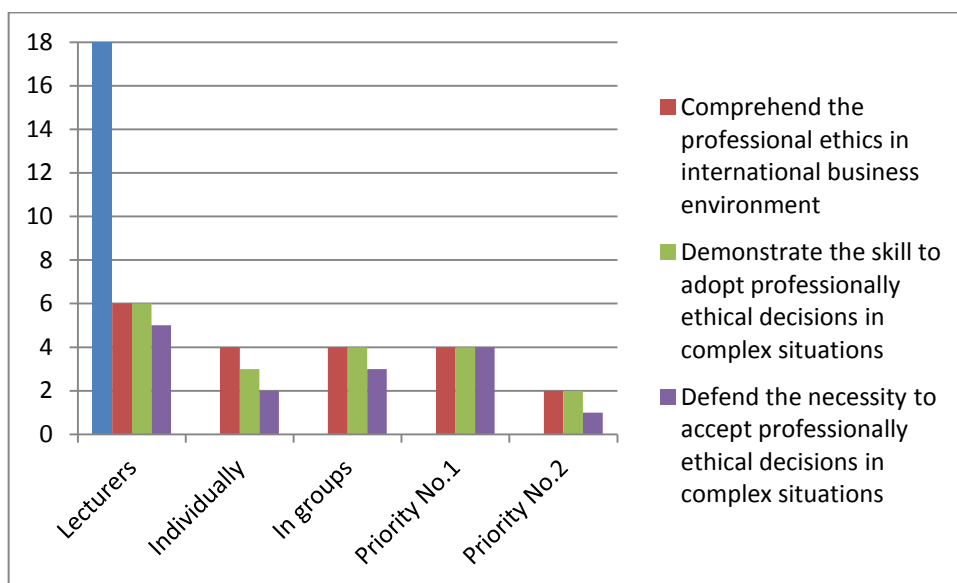
Chart 6. Group of Learning Outcomes: ".. comprehending the significance of the professional ethics in international business environment" (lecturers)

Only one third of the surveyed lecturers state that they work towards reaching the intended learning outcome "comprehending the professional ethics in international business environment". Even less than one third consider this learning outcome to be the "Priority No.1" learning outcome of the course. The conclusion drawn by the focus group when discussing this result of the survey was that it is necessary to stress the importance of ethics, as the team of lecturers run the danger that this learning outcome and the related competencies and skills are attained at an unsatisfactory level. It was decided that the lecturer of course "Behavior of International Organizations" will allocate additional hours for

discussing the subject and will change the learning outcomes of the course correspondingly. Only one graduate has stated that he would have liked to be better skilled in the learning outcomes of this group.

3.1 Defend the national or corporative interests in international trade, finance or other economical activities..;

Chart 7. Group of Learning Outcomes: ".Defend the national or corporative interests in international trade, finance or other economical activities.." (lecturers)

Two thirds of surveyed lecturers work towards the intended learning outcome "comprehend the interests of different economic entities in a case study", majority considering this learning outcome to be the "Priority No.1" learning outcome of the course. Less attention is devoted to promote the comprehension of the possibilities and tools of defending the interests of different entities. The focus group decided that the results correspond in general to the requirements set to bachelors – with more emphasis on comprehension of the subject and less on hands-on actions. Two graduates have stated that they would have liked to be better skilled in the learning outcome "Comprehend the interests of different economic entities in a case study".

3.2 Defend the national or corporative interests in international trade, finance or other economical activities, by being part of different national or international institutions, as well as local, private, national and multinational companies and corporations..;
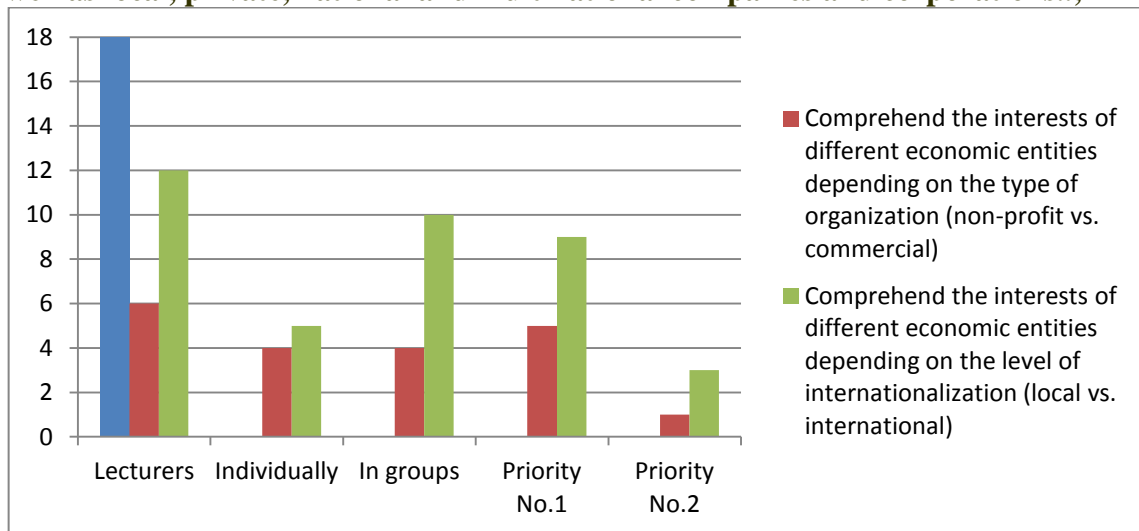
Chart 8. Group of Learning Outcomes: ".Defend the national or corporative interests in international trade, finance or other economical activities, by being part of different national or international institutions, as well as local, private, national and multinational companies and corporations.." (lecturers)

The majority of lecturers consider this learning outcome to be important, especially with respect to the level of internationalization of the economic entities. Half as many lecturers consider important that the students reach the learning outcome of comprehending the interests of different economic entities with respect to the type of organization. Taking into account the strongly international orientation of the program, it was confirmed to be a satisfactory result by the participants of the lecturers' focus group discussion.

3.3 .. do so by applying knowledge of several languages;
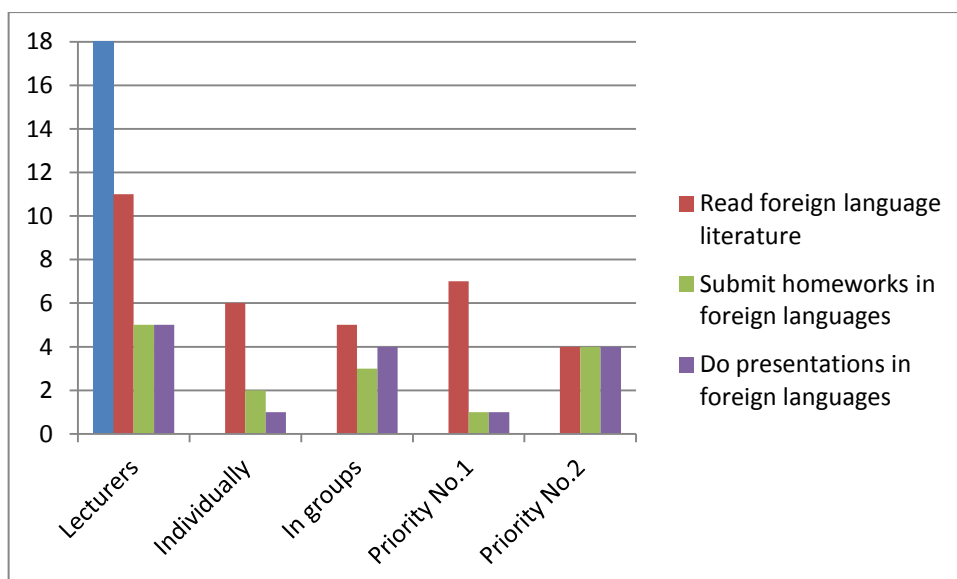
Chart 9. Group of Learning Outcomes: "... do so by applying knowledge of several languages" (lecturers)

Even though almost two thirds of the lecturers state that they believe that reading literature in foreign languages is important, almost half of them do not really make sure that the students do read. This is due to different reasons (e.g. not always the recommended literature is accessible to many students at once). Several lecturers allow submitting homework in foreign language, but do not require explicitly that the students to do that. Several lecturers categorically do not want students to submit homework in foreign language, reasoning it by e.g. high rate of plagiarism. Even though the lecturers do not require as a rule to work in foreign languages, one of the graduates believes, that there could be less attention directed towards attainment of learning outcomes of this group. The participants of lecturers' focus group discussion agreed that the language module alone does not ensure reaching the intende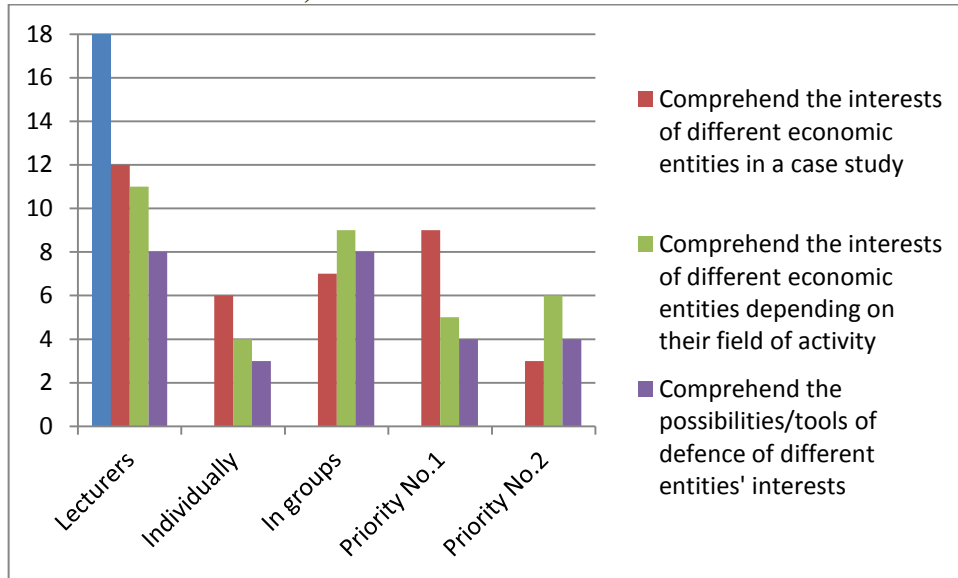d learning outcome "Defend the national or corporative interests in international trade, finance or other economical activities.. and do so by applying knowledge of several languages". It is planned that starting from September several of the courses that used to be in Latvian will be offered in English in parallel, e.g. "Microeconomics" and "Economic Anthropology". This will allow the local students to gain an international experience when studying together with international exchange students of the university, who also will benefit from the offer. It is also planned to increase step by step the involvement of foreign guest lecturers in the program.

4.1 Demonstrate competency in knowledge acquisition sources (related to the comprehension of processes of international economics and commercial diplomacy)..;
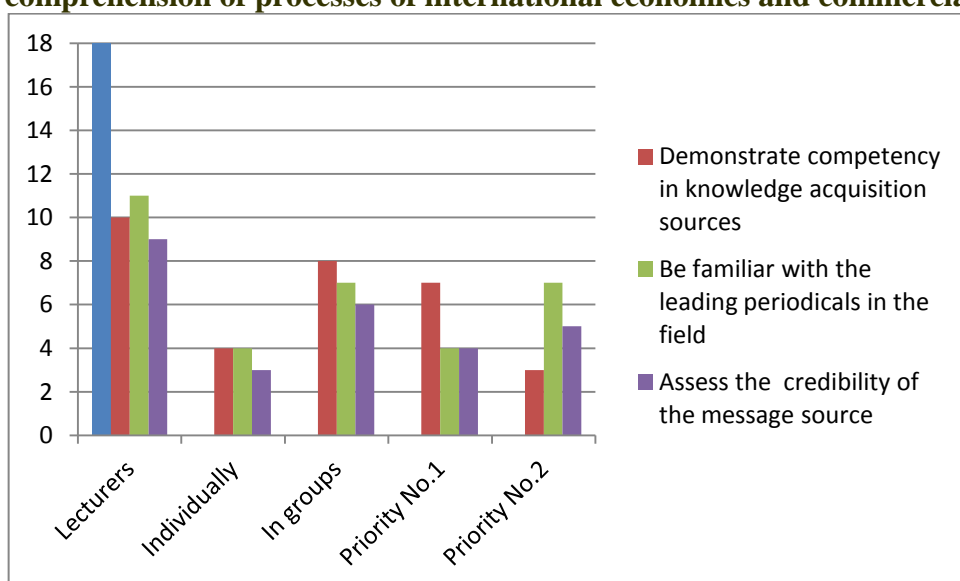
Chart 10. Group of Learning Outcomes: ".Demonstrate competency in knowledge acquisition sources (related to the comprehension of processes of international economics and commercial diplomacy).." (lecturers)

Even though only 4 lecturers out of 18 consider the learning outcome "assess the credibility of the message source" a "Priority No.1", the majority of lecturers stated that they mainly work towards reaching the intended learning outcomes of this group on an individual basis with students, when supervising course papers, bachelor papers. These issues are also discussed when analyzing student reports, mainly providing feedback to groups of students. This is done deliberately; to make sure that the message reaches as many students as possible at once: "The teachers at school often do not address the issue of plagiarism and students are used not to refer to the knowledge acquisition sources". As least important learning outcome on the list was named the familiarity with the leading periodicals of the research field, which is due both to the rather restricted access to them in the library and still rather general (sometimes even insufficient for comprehending advanced theories in the field) level of knowledge of bachelor students about the subject. However 3 graduates would have liked to have done more to attain the familiarity with the periodicals.

4.2 „paying attention to the development tendencies of leading national economies, foreign investment attraction and promotion of export growth;
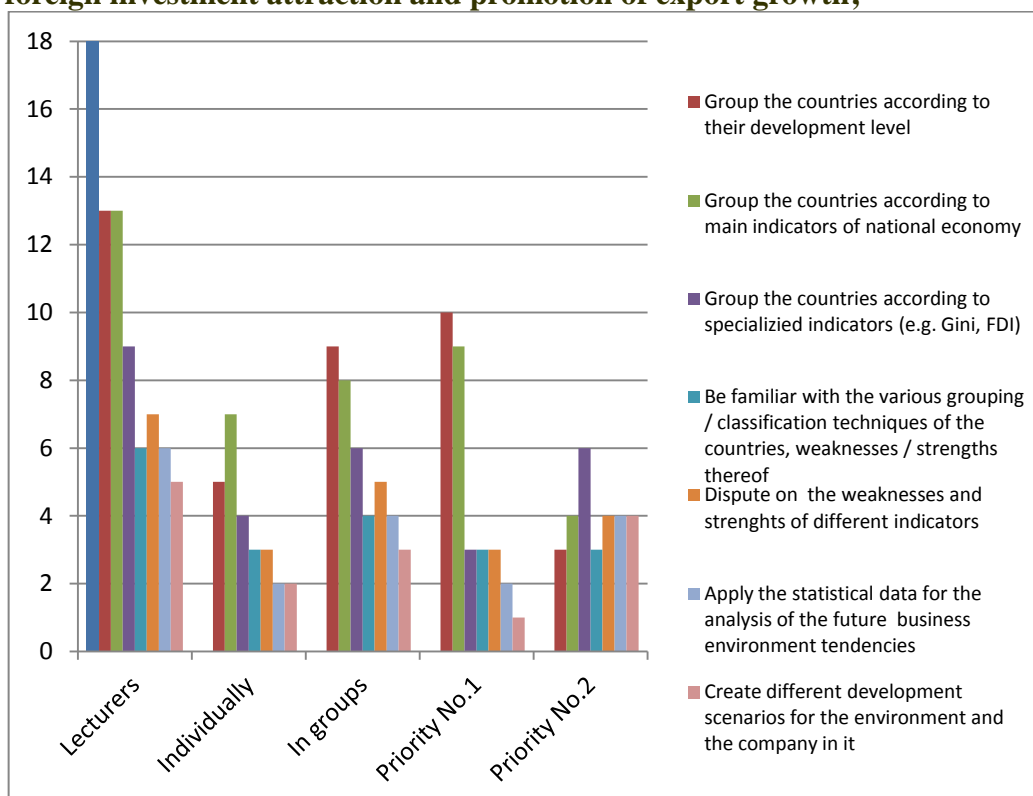
Chart 11. Group of Learning Outcomes: "..,paying attention to the development tendencies of leading national economies, foreign investment attraction and promotion of export growth" (lecturers)

The learning outcomes of this group are apparently the most important, when considering the response level and the priorities of the lecturers. Towards the attainment of several learning outcomes the lecturers work with students both in groups and individually, the group work at all cases prevailing over individual work. The least attention is directed towards developing skills to create different development scenarios for the future, however the participants of the focus group discussion agreed that the lecturer of the bachelor level student has to make emphasis on the general understanding of the subject. Nevertheless all 5 graduates stated that they would have liked more information about how to do future forecasts.

5.1 Apply competency of presentation (not only PowerPoint) skills..
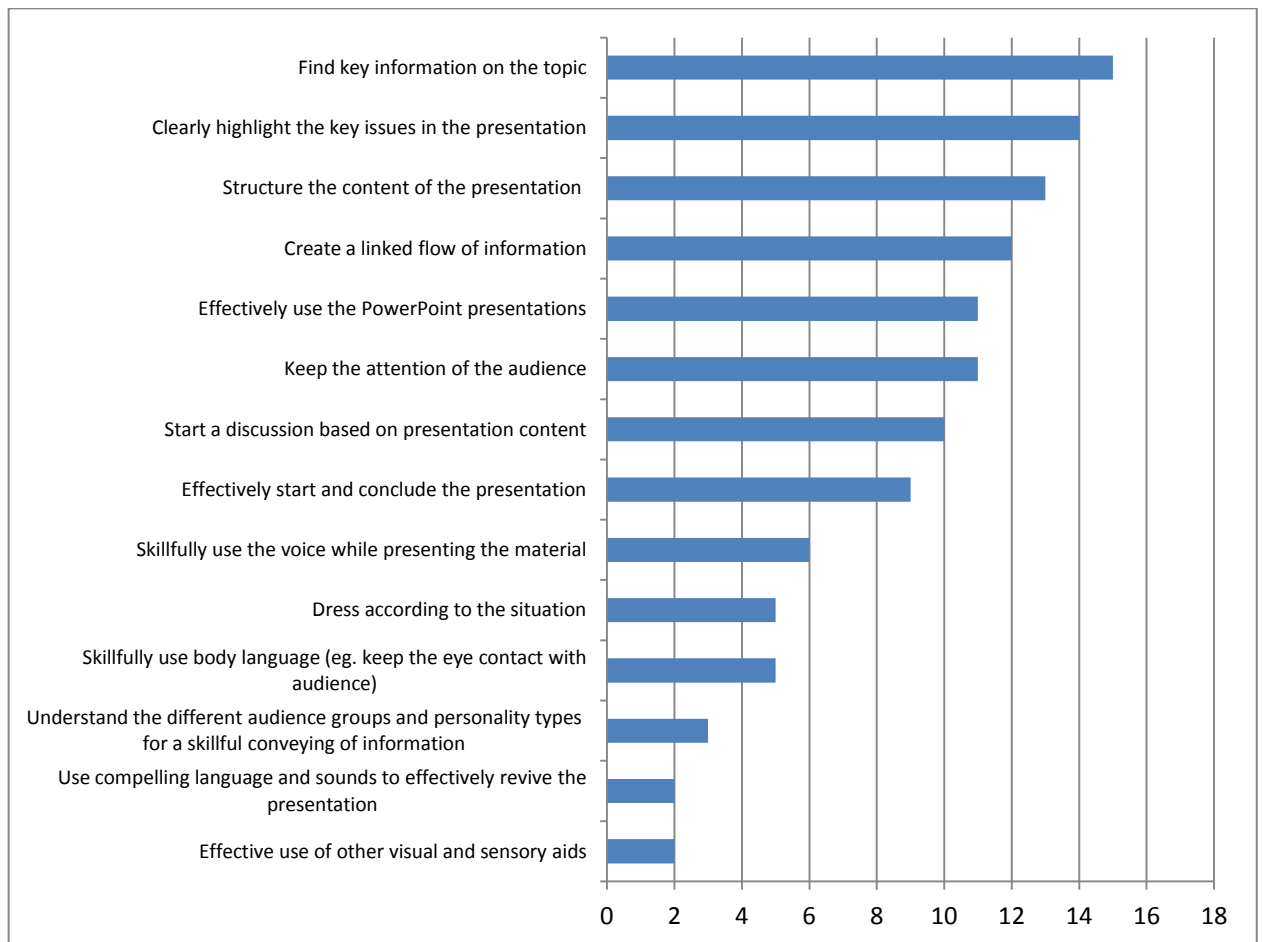
Chart 12. Group of Learning Outcomes: ".Apply competency of presentation (not only PowerPoint) skills." (lecturers)

The majority of lecturers are involved in ensuring that the intended learning outcome "Apply competency of presentation (not only PowerPoint) skills" is reached by the student. More than half of all surveyed lecturers are working on the sub-LOs. The participants of the focus group discussion agreed that two of the lecturers will think of a way to promote the

attainment of the intended LO "Understand the different audience groups and personality types for a skillful conveying of information". Currently only 3 lecturers out of 18 state working towards this learning outcome. This is regarded as insufficient, since the ability to convey information both to experts and layman is one of the explicit cycle descriptors for Bachelor level. Even though "Dress according to the situation" is one of the straightforward learning outcomes of the course "Business Etiquette and Protocol" and 4 other lecturers state taking care of leading students to this intended learning outcome, the participants of the focus group discussion expressed concern, that the students nevertheless lack the skill and arrive at significant examinations (such as e.g. defence of internship) dressed up as if ready to go to the beach. The participants of focus group discussion expressed the viewpoint that both learning outcomes that are the least taken care of "Use compelling language and sounds to effectively revive the presentation" and "Effective use of other visual and sensory aids", can be abandoned from the list of the intended learning outcomes of the next survey, as they are to be considered as rather unimportant. The graduates evaluated the learning outcomes of this group more or less satisfactory. One of the participants at the focus group discussion with students mentioned that even though they had to hold many presentations, often they lead to no learning outcomes, e.g. there is no feedback on how to improve the presentation skills, as the lecturers comment scarcely and students are (1) too busy with other activities than listening and (2) afraid of criticizing openly e.g. out of solidarity, to really contribute to the learning process of the student that does the presentation. At the end there are many students that still feel uncomfortable while doing presentations.

5.2 Apply competency of scientific polemics, communication skills...
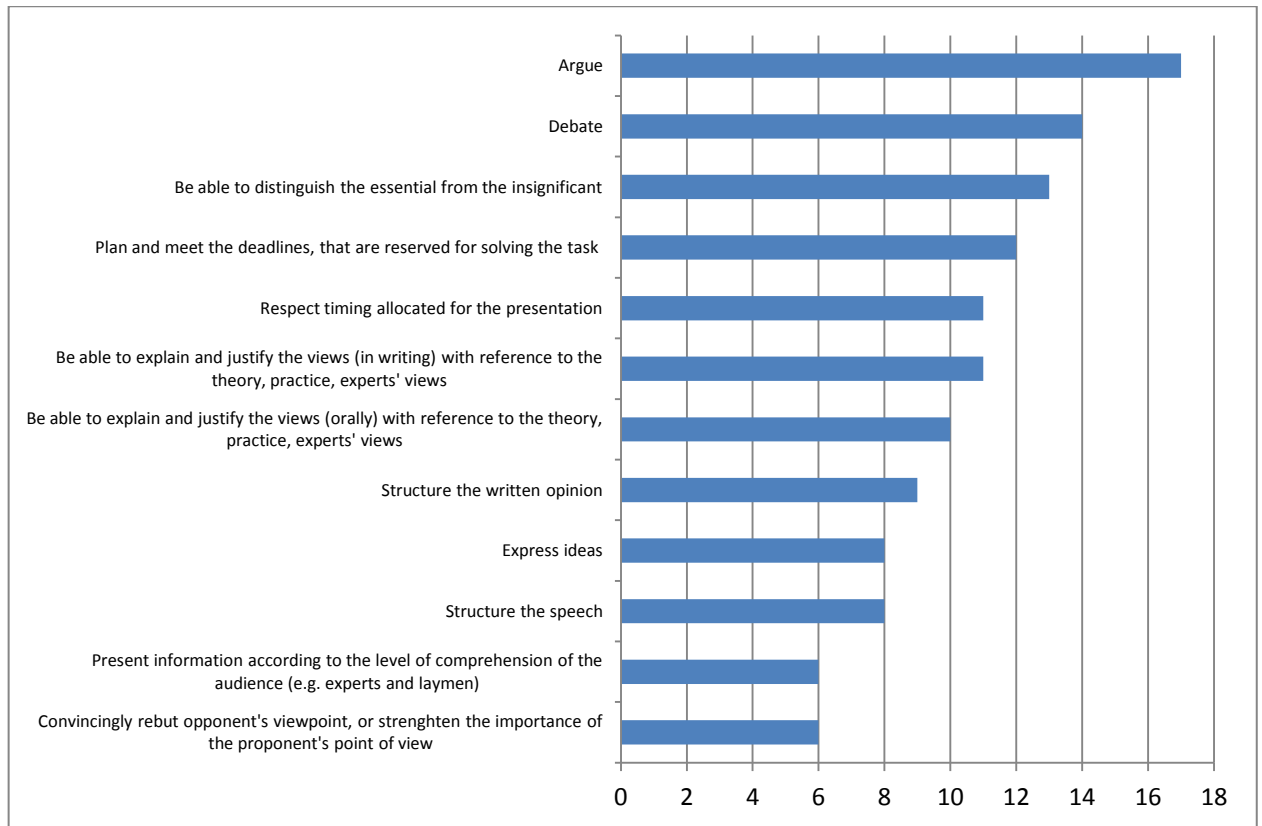
Chart 13. Group of Learning Outcomes: ".Apply competency of scientific polemics, communication skills.." (lecturers)

The majority of lecturers are involved in ensuring that the intended learning outcome "Apply competency of scientific polemics, communication skills" is reached by the student. More than half of all surveyed lecturers are working on the half of the sub-LOs. The participants of the focus group discussions were in general satisfied with the results. The most (3 out of 5) students believe that more attention to attainment of learning outcome "Convincingly rebut opponent's viewpoint, or strengthen the importance of the proponent's point of view" would be wishful. This learning outcome is also one of the least taken care of, according to lecturers' survey. One of the students at the focus group discussion missed the course of rhetoric's in the program; several others agreed to the point of view, that it would be useful to think of ways how to help those students that are uncomfortable with oral presentation. Very often the same students, that have it easy to speak out in publics, are actively discussing in every lecture, without letting other students improve their communication skills. However, it must be admitted, that the less active students may make the lecture less interesting, as they are not as apt to create an involving discussion and often are unwilling to use the opportunity at all.

5.3 Apply competency of team work (including taking on initiative).
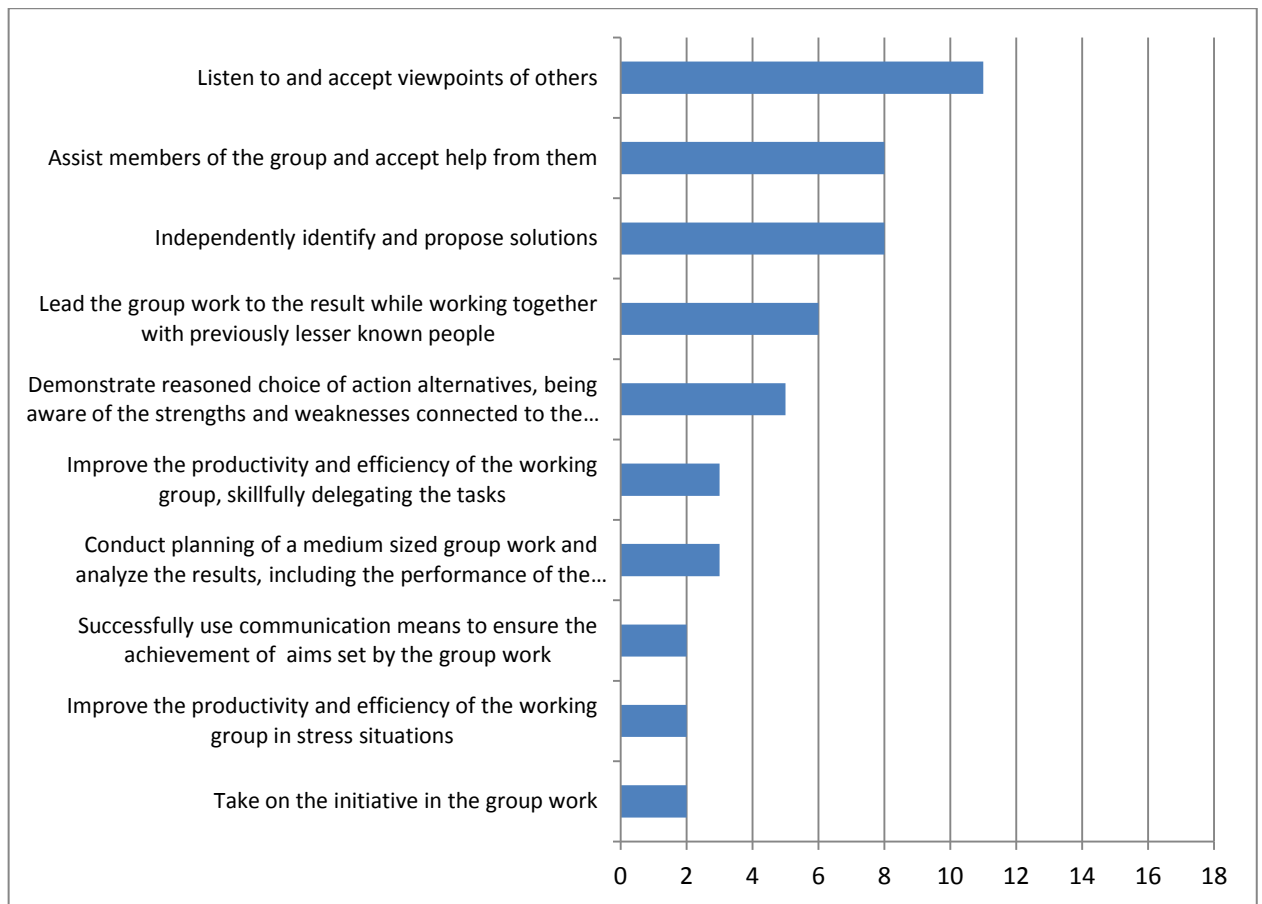
Chart 14. Group of Learning Outcomes: ".Apply competency of team work (including taking on initiative)"
(lecturers)

Surprisingly the group of sub-LOs under the learning outcome "Apply competency of team work (including taking on initiative)." are the least taken care of, even though the team work is applied extensively by the lecturers. One third of surveyed lecturers think of special ways how to form group of students for the team work (promoting thus the attainment of sub-LO "Lead the group work to the result while working together with previously lesser known people"). The applied methods for creating teams of students do not repeat among these lecturers, e.g. using surnames in alphabetical order or mixing students of better performance together with not that diligent ones. However, as acknowledged by the lecturers, such approach is usually encountered by resistance from the side of the students. Therefore the majority of lecturers still let the students form groups according to their preferences. One of the lecturers even declared that there are too much students in his class for him to even think about fair, individual and formative assessment of the students , so no individual work of students is conducted during his class (even the assessment of results at final examination is a shared mark by group of students). Two of lecturers deny any team work as such in their

courses, believing that the overall student performance drops slightly as soon as team work is introduced. The courses of these both lecturers are linked to developing skills of modeling and calculation by applying certain rules. Even though 17 out of 18 surveyed lecturers use team work at some point in their course, only three of them ask for evaluation of performance for each team member. No control over performance of each member in combination with free formation of groups runs the danger of having students -"free riders". One of graduates stated that he is not skilled in 4 learning outcomes of this group. However, not that many graduates believe that more work towards the attainment of this learning outcome is necessary.

Conclusions

In order to fully benefit from learning outcomes as quality instrument it is necessary to check not only the formal implementation, but also the quality dimension thereof. Even though majority of lecturers apply the team working among students extensively, the sub-LOs under the learning outcome "Apply competency of team work (including taking on initiative." are the least taken care of, according to the survey of lecturers.

The map of detailed LO to the individual courses can help provoking discussion on: the attained cluster of skills and competences of the average graduate of the program based on the activities undertaken in sum by the team of lecturers; the cluster of skills and competences that currently is being attained at an unsatisfactory level; the conformity of the LO of the program to the content provided.

The cross checking of the results of lecturers' survey with opinion of some of the graduates showed, that even though all in all the results are similar, there can be some substantial differences between how the students and the lecturers view the attainment of the same learning outcome.

To gain more complete picture of the current state of implementation of LO in the program it is necessary to question the remaining lecturers as well. The further research would require checking the opinion of the stakeholders (such as graduates and employers) on the implementation of LO in the program too.

According to the results it is necessary to adjust the program's LO and restart the cycle, entering the process of an ongoing aspiration for quality. Once formulated the LO can serve as basis for conducting the procedure of recognition of prior learning.

Thus for example, the lecturers believed, that the students are more skilled in team working skills than they actually are. This means that the requirements to provide evidence in

team working skills for persons that want to have their prior learning recognized would be higher for RPL candidates than they are in place for the regular students of the program. Also the expectations of students having read the program' s description and chosen the program on the basis of it show that in many cases they would have liked the emphases on other learning outcomes than the lecturers believe they would like to have. This means that the program' s description (with learning outcomes stated) might attract candidates for recognition of prior learning, that do not seem to be the appropriate candidates (having portfolio of skills that is different to the expected) in the viewpoint of the lecturers running the program.

8. Implementation of recognition of prior learning in higher education institution in Latvia

8.1.Organization and Methodology of Research

Research issue

As already mentioned in Chapter 3 recognition of prior learning is one of the most innovative features of the qualification frameworks and was originally based on the need to provide access to learning for workers who had informal skills and knowledge that could never be recognized formally, unless they went back to school.

In order to allow the recognition of prior learning, the qualification framework, a single unified framework for all national academic and vocational qualifications, should be outcomes based, contain level descriptors and define credit points needed to reach the respective level.

There is a National Qualifications Framework elaborated in Latvia, thus one of the next steps could be setting the strategic goal of implementing the RPL procedure at a higher education institution - the University of Latvia.

One of the tools helpful for strategic decision making is the SWOT analysis, which allows developing effective strategies that exploit the operational advantages over competitors, while minimizing the disadvantages. Through contrasting and considering the internal organizational strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats the author will be able to elaborate the recommendations for the action.

Subtasks of the research

- conduct SWOT analysis on implementation of RPL in a higher education institution; elaborate recommendations for implementation of RPL in a higher education institution.

Type of the research

classification [32] of the conducted research according to the -

- application mode: applied research, since it is planned that it will be possible to apply the results of the research for improving the existing policy and practice;

- applied research method: qualitative research, as it will be based on qualitative rather than quantitative data;

- research issue: case study- the aim is to research an instance - namely, possible implementation of RPL at the University of Latvia;

- data collection procedure: secondary (desk) research; primary research: content analysis of documents; expert interviewing, focus group discussions.

Tools of the research

Desk research, expert interviews and focus group discussions, analysis of institutional policy documents. In order to elaborate recommendations for RPL implementation at the University of Latvia the author considers the RPL implementation through four dimensions of SWOT matrix. This allows detecting both internal and external potentials and pitfalls. In order to extend the overview the author has conducted interviews with actors at all levels of implementation staircase (Trowler 2003) [84][245] (see Illustration xxx -in Attachments).

Target group and the sample size [17]

The author researches the possible implementation of RPL at the University of Latvia, a single intrinsic case study. Apart from other chapters this chapter includes also the primary research data that resulted from focus group discussion with 5 students of bachelor program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy", interviewed in March 2011, as well as expert interviews (2 persons in Estonia and 1 person in Poland).

Research structure

The research starts by introductory part, and then follows the SWOT analysis on basis of which the author elaborates conclusions and recommendations.

Research team and timeline

This chapter being the closing chapter, it consists of reflections that have evolved during whole period of thesis writing.

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[245] *Implementation staircase*: The various levels or sites, national, regional and local, at which education policy is received, interpreted and put into practice, sometimes in ways which are quite different from those originally intended by policy-makers. The actors at different levels of implementation staircase may thus create barriers to the implementation, increasing the overall policy implementation gap.

8.2. Research

Recommendations for RPL implementation at the University of Latvia

Even though at the point of conducting this research the appropriate legislative basis for introducing a genuine recognition of prior learning practice is missing, Rusakova believes that introduction of such supportive legislation, is just a matter of time. Therefore, a timely consideration of actions to be taken as soon as opportunity to create recognition of prior learning scheme is provided, has to be considered of an importance.

The implementation plan for creating the basic principles of recognition of prior learning methodology at the University of Latvia has to be developed using top-down approach. This approach [39] is suggested when the situational parameters are characterized by incremental change, low goal conflict and stable environment [8]. The implementation of recognition of prior learning implies an incremental change to be made towards new paradigm - student centered learning. As a tool for quality improvement and transparency it follows the common aims of all sub-units of the university, as well as those of the other stakeholders, thus ensuring a low goal conflict. The well regulated administrative basis provides a stable environment for implementation.

The bottom-up approach would allow too much ambiguity as to ways of implementing the recognition of prior learning scheme, which would endanger the recognition of the learning outcomes of the students'/graduates' by compromising the accountability and trust of the university in both local and international arenas.

Therefore according to Matland' s Ambiguity-Conflict Matrix [51] of policy implementation process it is necessary to follow administrative implementation process, which will allow the policy recommendations to become effective through means of implementation.

Since the learning outcomes concept (one of the cornerstones of recognition of prior learning scheme) is commonly misperceived as just another name for former aims and objectives of the study course (one of the conclusions from the focus group discussion with lecturers) it is necessary to do explanatory work, since this is a potential source of conflict of policy goals between the actors of different levels of implementation staircase. Placing a policy in an environment, where it conflicts, even if just notionally, with existing policies and goals leads to few resources, little support and almost certain implementation failure.

In order to elaborate recommendations for RPL implementation at the University of Latvia the author considers the RPL implementation through the four dimensions of SWOT matrix (see Table 13). This will allow to detect both internal and external potentials and pitfalls. In order to extend the overview the author has conducted interviews at all levels of implementation staircase.

Strenghts

- As already mentioned in Chapter 5, the UL and other HEIs are rather autonomous in Latvia in their decision-making. This can alleviate and fasten the RPL implementation process; to a certain limit even without the underlying national legislation.

- According to the interview with the UL adminstrative respresentative, the UL is interested in increasing the student numbers. One of the possible ways to do so is through providing flexible learning paths to individuals of the society. Within this respect the policy makers in educational sector of Estonia[250] already speak of allowing persons, that have not graduated secondary education institutions to enter the tertiary education through completing RPL procedure.

- The UL representatives have been actively involved in elaborating draft laws and regulations and submitting them for adoption at the governmental institutions. One of the organizations through which the UL is lobbying own interests is the Latvian Rectors' Council[251]. The UL was leading the working group on elaboration of the Draft Law on Higher Education. This experience can be applicable when creating legislative basis necessary for the RPL.

- There is a system in place at the UL for recognizing the learning acquired abroad through different mobility schemes, the UL is already reducing the practice/ placement periods for those who have work experience in an appropriate field for admission and UL may allocate credits for further education courses (also non-formal). This system can serve as basis for creating the RPL system.

- UL has been active in promoting Bologna process by hosting majority of national seminars. The so far one of the leading roles in promoting Bologna-coherent reforms can be helpful in

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[250] Interview with Dr. Siret Rutiku, Head of the Office of Academic Affairs, University of Tartu, February 2011
[251] Cooperation with Latvian Rectors' Council has been depicted by the governmental institutions as good practice example, see: "Līdzdalības iespējas valsts pārvaldē; Rokasgrāmata nevalstiskajām organizācijām un apņēmīgiem indivīdiem", SIA „Madonas poligrāfists", Rīga, 2006, http://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/noderigi/sabiedribas_integracija/lidzdalibas_rokasgramata_vk.pdf

case the university assumes to create network aimed at experience exchange and improvement of RPL system in Latvia.

- Some of the leading researchers in the field in Latvia are employed with the UL. This creates an internal human capacity that can be successfully mobilized for creating the system of RPL implementation.

- UL has already started to formulate the learning outcomes of the programs and courses. Transfer to learning outcomes based approach in studies, that is the basic precondition for the prospective RPL, is one of the tasks defined by the UL strategy [173].

Weaknesses

- Elaboration of legal framework and implementation of RPL requires additional financial funds. Apart from developing the legal framework and supporting the entities of functional system, other activities connected with RPL will require funding as well. A certain starting capital will be needed to both cover the trainings for the persons involved in the RPL process, advertising campaigns of the RPL etc. However, as long as it is not defined by law differently, it will be possible to account for charges the persons aiming at gaining the recognition.

- As already mentioned in the Chapter 6, the concept is still rather new and unknown to the academic community. During the focus group discussion with lecturers of bachelor program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy" in October 2010 the author encountered opinions that reflected myths like- the RPL can be regarded as the cheap and easy way for getting the diploma etc. As already perceived by other researches [164], it is necessary to do more explanatory work.

- In some cases (see Chapter 6) the learning outcomes of courses and programs, which form the basis for RPL, are implemented rather formally. This creates an unstable if not impossible basis for building RPL system on top of it.

Threats

- Currently there is a lack of political committment in the government to consider the national legislation for RPL in the sphere of higher education - according to the interview with the representative of the Ministry of Education and Science:"The tertiary education is less of an interest in these times of crisis as it takes in general a longer time for its graduates to achieve qualification and be ready for the labour market."

- As stated in Chapters 5 and 7, the Draft on Higher Education in its current version apparently will not be adopted. Another point is that the formulations and concepts incorporated there become outdated as the time passes and Bologna process further evolves.

- Under conditions of lacking national legal framework and increasing pressure from the society to implement RPL the HEIs may consider starting autonomous RPL incentives. Lack of common guidelines for RPL implementation in Latvia may lead to contrasting quality of RPL activities and waste of resources.

- The politicians can be eager to believe that through RPL procedures funding available to higher education can be saved. The HEIs should be prepared to face and oppose such point of view.

- Too fast adoption of new approaches may dillute the initial context of the concepts and lead to a substantial implementation gap (Trowler 2003) [84] [254] as the result of the activities.

- As mentioned in the focus group discussion with students one of the important advantages of the studies at the UL is the possibility to study with experienced students. They create an enriching study environment and provide a broadening of horizon through examples from own practical experience. In case the experienced students choose to skip the classess through RPL procedures this added value will disappear.

- Students may choose to study less and use the saved through RPL procedures time for other activities. This also can dillute the study experience and promote unfavorable image of the university. Therefore it is crucial to encourage the RPL candidates to consider accepting other study opportunities offered by the university.

Opportunities

- One of the leading countries in implementing the RPL in Eastern Europe is Estonia- the neighbouring country of Latvia. Estonia has a relatively similar system of education. Among the HEIs in Estonia Tartu University is the leading HEI in RPL. The closiness to the best practice example in Eastern Europe may decrease the costs of experience exchange.

- The experience of Tartu University[255] shows that RPL has allowed to attract to the studies persons that otherwise would not have considered studying.

- The experience of Estonia[256] shows that there is a steadily increasing interest in RPL in the society. Also during the focus group discussion with students of bachelor program

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[254] *Implementation gap*: the differences between the intended outcomes of policy as originally envisaged by policy-makers, and those which were actually realized after the policy had been implemented.
[255] Interview with Dr. Siret Rutiku, Head of the Office of Academic Affairs, University of Tartu, February 2011

"International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy" in March 2011 the author faced positive attitude towards potential opportunity of RPL.

- As already mentioned in the Chapter 7, in the period of economic downturn in Latvia the policy aims to undertake measures for increasing the mobility on the labour market, as well as the flexibility of the labour force.

- The experience on validation of the nonformal and informal learning for level 1-3 vocational qualifications in Latvia will create a basis for discussing the RPL system in tertiary education sector.

- Similarly like the government of Latvia has allocated European funds for implementing RPL for vocational education, it might decide to allocate means for implementing RPL in tertiary education. This is the case in Estonia and it can be taken as a good practice example in debates with the government.

- The active involvement in Bologna process and international associations can provide necessary knowledge and experiencial basis for appropriate decision making in the context of Latvia.

- The implementation of RPL may decrease the resource waste associated with teaching the persons that already have the knowledge. This can help them to move forward with acquiring knowledge that is still missing. The perceived quality (Ophuis and Van Trijp 1995) [57] [258] of studies will improve and herewith the image of the UL as provider of educational service;

- The National Qualification Framework, a single unified framework for all national academic and vocational qualifications, is about to be elaborated.

Conclusions and recommendations:

- University of Tartu has experienced increase in student numbers through RPL procedures and therefore their experience is of an interest to the University of Latvia.

- The UL should consider the benefits of RPL implementation (in relation to financial, power, prestige, competition etc. aspects). Thus for example, the experienced students, that currently create an enriching study environment through examples from own practical experience, may choose to skip the classess through RPL procedures. However they may also be convinced to take other classes instead.

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[256] Thus for example in 2009 there have been 4728 applications for RPL in Estonia; the RPL started in 2004 [Interview with Raul Ranne, Coordinator of recognition of prior learning, Archimedes Foundation, Estonian Enic/Naric, February 2011]

[258] *Perceived quality*: perception of quality may have a different content for various persons, products and places

Table 13. The summary of the SWOT analysis „Implementing RPL at the UL"by Rusakova

Strenghts	Weaknesses
- UL is rather autonomous in its decision-making; - UL is interested in increasing the student numbers; - UL representatives have been actively involved in elaborating draft laws and regulations; - There is a system in place at the UL for recognizing the learning acquired abroad and for transferring the credits; - UL has been active in promoting Bologna process; - Some of the leading researchers in the field in Latvia are employed with the UL; - UL has already started to formulate the learning outcomes.	- Additional financial funds are required; - The concept is still rather unknown to the academic community; - The learning outcomes are sometimes implemented rather formally.
Threats	**Opportunities**
- There is a lack of political committment in the government for RPL in the sphere of higher education; - The Draft on Higher Education in its current version apparently will not be adopted and becomes outdated as the time passes; - Lack of common guidelines for RPL implementation may lead to contrasting quality of RPL activities; - The politicians can be eager to believe that through RPL procedures funding available to higher education can be saved; - Too fast adoption of new approaches may dilute the initial context of the concepts; - The added value of students-professionals in classroom will disappear; - Students may choose to study less having saved time through RPL procedures.	- One of the leading countries in implementing the RPL in Eastern Europe is Estonia; - RPL has allowed to attract to the studies persons that otherwise would not have considered studying; - There is a steadily increasing interest in RPL in society; - In the period of economic downturn in Latvia the policy aims to undertake measures for increasing the mobility on the labour market, as well as the flexibility of the labour force; - The experience on validation of the nonformal and informal learning for level 1-3 vocational qualifications in Latvia will create a basis for discussing the RPL in tertiary education; - European funds may be allocated for implementing RPL in tertiary education; - The active involvement in Bologna process and international associations can provide necessary knowledge and experiential basis for appropriate decision making in the context of Latvia; - The resource waste will decrease and perceived quality of studies will increase; - The NQF is about to be elaborated.

- In case of positive Social Return on Investment the administration of the UL should consider mobilizing the network of HEIs through own participation in Latvian Rectors' Council for creating an overarching RPL system for tertiary sector in Latvia. Here the experience both from Latvia (on validation of the nonformal and informal learning for level 1-3 vocational qualifications) and from Estonia can be summarized.

- The UL has human resources that can be successfully applied for implementation of RPL at the university. Estonia can be taken as a good practice example (for allocating European funds with the aim to implement RPL in the country) in debates with the government. The HEIs should stress the relevance of RPL to increased mobility on the labour market, as well as to the flexibility of the labour force. At least some of the costs arising from RPL procedure may be returned through fee paid by the RPL candidate. However some initial funding for both training the persons involved in RPL and advertising of RPL will be needed.

- The UL should continue adjusting the study content and the learning outcomes by making sure that the assessment is related to the learning outcomes, increasing thus the quality. The learning outcomes have to become a transparency tool that will help the students to make the right decision for study subject. By diminishing the discrepancy between the expectations and reality the perceived quality of studies in the eyes of the students will increase.

- The author suggests modifying the RPL system currently applied at the Tartu University (The RPL advisors at the Chairs are abandoned, as they are more into such operational procedures as ensuring that all programs are learning outcomes based. This ir regarded as prerequisite step and is conducted under supervision of Academic department of the University of Latvia) according to the currently existing system of credit transfer at the University of Latvia. According to the system developed by the author, a RPL advisor at the central administration level will be required – preferably this should be person employed by the Student Service. The initial phase of RPL procedure requires helping an RPL candidate to orient himself in the system in general, find contact persons at the faculty level and learning outcomes of courses/programs offered by the university (see Illustration 9).

- The process flow then requires 5 major steps, with prerequisite being that the RPL candidate knows about the RPL opportunity. Other functional positions that have to be created are the RPL advisors at the faculty level (second information point), RPL commissions within the faculties and RPL quality commission at the central level of the university that would be the first instance in the case of appeal.

- There are several strong arguments in favor of considering implementation of RPL at UL- the RPL procedures allow attracting students and basic prerequisites for the RPL

implementation are met – the NQF is about to be finalized and the learning outcomes are being introduced at the UL.

RPL candidate finds out about the opportunity (media).

Step 1. Individually on Internet or through help of RPL advisor at Student Service (first information point)
RPL candidate finds learning outcomes of the course/program in question and informs himself about the basic procedure. RPL candidate analyzes learning outcomes of the course/program, and considers if own experience is sufficient.

Step 2. RPL candidate consults the RPL advisor at the faculty (second information point) .

a) if gained experience and prior learning meets learning outcomes, student fills the application forms, adds additional documents and hands them in

b) if gained experience or prior learning does not fit in the curricula, the RPL procedure ends here

Step 3. RPL advisor at the faculty controls if the application is correctly filled out and all necessary additional documents are added.

a) if something is missing the RPL candidate completes the application

b) if the application is complete, RPL candidate pays the fee for further RPL procedure depending on the amount of credits the RPL candidate is opting for and the application is submitted to the commission for consideration

Step 4. RPL commission looks through the application and if necessary – consults experts from other faculties or outside the university; if necessary – invites the applicant to the interview.

Step 5. RPL candidate is given feedback on the decision.

a) in case of positive decision the recognized credits will be entered in the LUISs; the RPL candidate is informed about additional study opportunities for enriching the study experience

b) in case of negative decision the RPL candidate is informed about the possible courses/modules available for studies according to the applicant' s interests.

Illustration 9. Proposed RPL procedure at the University of Latvia

Conclusions

The author has analysed the information provision and supportive structures in recognition practice as described by National Action Plans submitted by 37 countries.

The quality of information provision seems to vary considerably in different countries, and the spectrum is quite broad. It ranges from countries that have excellent information for applicants in their national language and in English (or another widely spoken European language) available online, in printed and possibly in different other forms, to countries where only minimum information is provided in the national language only and this information may be placed as paper notices on the wall at the ENIC/NARICs facilities.

Information on education systems relating specifically to the recognition of qualifications is well established in some countries but other countries only provide general information on their educational systems that contains too little of the information actually needed for credentials evaluation.

Apropos the supportive structure in a substantial number of countries, for example the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, the national information centre is an advisory body while the decisions are taken: by higher education institutions for academic recognition; by employers for de facto professional recognition in non-regulated professions; and by competent authorities nominated for each profession for de jure professional recognition for access to regulated professions. Due to different recognition practices the outcome of the assessment of the same qualification could differ in different countries.

Quality assurance is a powerful implementation tool in the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in higher education institutions if the assessment of recognition practices becomes part of the quality assurance of institutions and programmes.

It is clear that the diversity so characteristic to the European Union is observable also in the areas of information provision on recognition and in functioning of supportive structures. However an apparent contradictory activities with regard to established code of good practice has to be eradicated if a genuine EHEA is to be created within Europe.

The author has evaluated the external quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes in Latvia with regard to European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).

In Soviet Latvia, similarly like in other Eastern European countries, the higher education was strictly controlled by the governing party's nomenklatura system. From the

mid 90ties the universities in Central and Eastern Europe started slowly to retreat from what could be called "liberal absolutism" of the years immediately after 1989. Autonomy initially seen largely in terms of an absence of state power, was gradually replaced by new notions of civic and market accountability. After switching to the three cycle system in the early 1990s and the curricular reform following the 1991 Education law, as well providing HEIs with autonomy to decide regarding the programmes taught (including private provision), stakeholders, especially the higher education institutions were in favour of measures that would support the international credibility of Latvia' s credentials.

The importance of the quality assurance, recognition and validation of nonformal and informal learning in the higher education of Latvia is growing as the mobility of staff and students' increases and Latvia's higher education institutions become integrated in international higher education market, as well as since the higher education seeks to increase own accountability.

The study shows that in Latvia the ESG has been introduced, in some respects even up to the point, and within this respect Latvia is progressing towards becoming a part of EHEA. However the research on the real status quo displays many mismatches of the ESG within the existing social, legal etc framework, to which the ESG is implemented. Currently the participation of students in the external quality assurance process is to be regarded as rather formal, it is necessary to train the students correspondingly to ensure a more efficient participation in the quality assessment, which would also enhance the motivation of student observators.

The ESG insists that the agencies should be independent. Financially the HEQEC relies completely on the funding from the higher education institutions. Nevertheless it is sought at all times that the conclusions and recommendations would not be influenced by third parties.

The current quality assurance system applies the generally known model of review i.e. self-assessment/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up, but is unable to ensure that in, all cases, the higher education institutions indeed improve their own performance as the result of the self-assessment.

These and other discrepancies have to be removed on the basis of a constructive and ongoing dialogue with the involved stakeholders. In fact by applying the ESG within the quality assurance system, Latvia has introduced a framework created to support the improvement of the quality and the recognition of qualifications. Coordinated activities when solving these and other issues would ensure improved cooperation between higher education

institutions and society, as well as would assist the higher education institutions in providing education consistent with the labour market's demand and oriented at the future requirements.

The author has described and analysed the current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia.

One of the future challenges in Latvia concerns the conceptual questions such as the assessment of different, less traditional study types, recognition of the lifelong learning and its proper inclusion in existing study system.

The policy of creating legislation that would support the validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia during the period of economic downturn is targeted primarily at individuals that are willing to receive vocational qualification - official document, meaning support to enter the labour market. Another scope of activities within this respect is the modular approach for acquiring basic profession, speciality and specialization. The modular approach will alleviate flexible learning pathways and possible further acquisition of lacking competences.

The recently adopted amendments in the Vocational Education Law allow assessing non-formal learning and skills in vocational qualification system, namely for acquiring vocational qualifications from level one to three (without affecting the higher vocational qualifications and regulated professions).

The assessment will take place in two successive phases: 1) The assessment of the professional competence of the candidate according to the submitted documentation portfolio; and 2) The passing of vocational qualification examination by the candidate. The vocational qualification examination is identical to the one passed at the formal education institution. The obtained certificate will be identical to the one acquired through formal learning pathway and will not contain any indication that the document has been obtained through validation of nonformal and informal learning.

It is planned that validation candidates will have to cover the costs for the service of completing the process of validation of non-formal learning. Thus it will affect neither the state nor the self-government budget.

The quality of the respective occupational standard will have an important influence on the quality of validation process. The employees in Latvia might have difficulties in proving their work experience because very often the position does not correspond to the actual responsibilities and tasks conducted.

The draft Law on Higher Education anticipates validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education (also in the field of higher vocational qualifications). It is submitted to the Parliament for approval (first passed on to government discussion on August 31, 2006); however there is no clear deadline for its adoption. **The absence of legal basis delays e.g. the implementation of RPL and thus the involvement of HEIs in LLL [Thesis No. 1].**.

The recognition of prior learning at the HEIs is currently limited to the reduction of the practice/ placement periods for those who have work experience in an appropriate field for admission and credit allocation for further education courses in case learners with certificates of completing such courses enroll for studies in the HEI in question.

It is anticipated that with non-formal and informal learning attaining its place in the lifelong learning system by validation measures it will become more popular with all stakeholders. This will strengthen and will even make more meaningful the so far very popular with the national government incentives aimed at making non-formal more accessible.

The author has proposed a methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program as basis for future recognition of prior learning.

The chosen top-down approach was useful, since the study program was fully operational and accredited. Also the fact that many of the LO's of the individual courses still have to be adjusted to student centered approach speaks in favor of the top-down approach as it is easier to change the learning outcomes of individual courses than the learning outcomes of the whole program as stated in the accreditation documentation.

The study shows that the implementation of learning outcomes at the analysed study program is formal. In order to fully benefit from learning outcomes as quality instrument it is necessary to check not only the formal implementation, but also the quality dimension thereof. [Thesis No.2]. In order to fully benefit from learning outcomes as quality instrument it is necessary to check not only the formal implementation, but also the quality dimension thereof. According to the survey, even though five of the questioned lecturers require the students to prepare a presentation in at least one of their lectures, however they do not pay attention to such details as – whether each of the students has the chance to present at least once (especially in the case of group presentations), or whether the students receive a constructive feedback that could help to improve the respective generic skills.

The map of detailed LO to the individual courses can help provoking discussion on: the attained cluster of skills and competences of the average graduate of the program based on the activities undertaken in sum by the team of lecturers; the cluster of skills and competences that currently is being attained at an unsatisfactory level; the conformity of the LO of the program to the content provided.

The generic skills are often considered of second importance and are left out of the field of responsibility of the lecturers' team, as they strive to make sure that the students know mainly the specific content of their courses.

The author has considered implementation of recognition of prior learning at the University of Latvia.

There are several strong arguments in favor of considering implementation of RPL at UL- the RPL procedures allow attracting students and basic prerequisites for the RPL implementation are met – the NQF is about to be finalized and the learning outcomes are being introduced at the UL.

Providing flexible learning pathways and implementing recognition of prior learning the University of Latvia might attract students that otherwise would not consider studying.

A system of RPL can be developed only after profound change of education paradigm towards learning-outcomes-based approach, until then it is possible to implement limited activities of RPL at HEI.

Some of the costs arising from RPL procedure may be returned through fee paid by the RPL candidate. However some initial funding for both training the persons involved in RPL and advertising of RPL will be needed.

However before implementing the RPL the UL should consider the benefits of RPL implementation (in relation to financial, power, prestige, competition etc. aspects). Thus for example, the experienced students, that currently create an enriching study environment through examples from own practical experience, may choose to skip the classess through RPL procedures. On the other side they may also be convinced to take other classes instead.

Recommendations:

International higher education policy players:

- To minimize the possibility that through different recognition practices the outcome of the assessment of the same qualification could differ in different countries it is necessary to continue implementing activities aimed at increasing transparency, and promotion of the good practice;

- To support networking activities on distributing information on RPL activities in EHEA countries and to create a standard of action explaing dealing with full, partial and alternative recognition of qualifications obtained through recognition of prior learning procedures in different countries;

National higher education policy players:

- To enhance the motivation and ability of student observers to contribute to the external quality assessment it is necessary to create an expert training system and not only relay on candidates delegated by the student union;

- Taking into account the public good that is the result of the Latvian Quality Assurance Agency -HEQEC activities, a funding from the Ministry of Education and Science covering at least the maintenance costs could bring the advantage of diminished dependency on the higher education institution;

- To ensure that the external quality assurance system is not only formal, it is necessary to promote and strengthen the internal quality assurance system of the higher education in parallel to the external quality assurance;

- Taking into account that the draft Law takes such a long time to be adopted it is necessary to think of alternative ways of legalizing the recognition of prior learning. One way would be by preparing amendments to the Law on Higher Education Establishments, currently in force and under discussion;

- To make the national government incentives of promoting accessibility of non-formal learning in the society more meaningful and increase the accountability it is necessary to make sure that the validation of nonformal and informal learning can take place at all levels of qualification framework;

Higher education institutions:

- To help universities to convince society, governments and the private sector that they are worth investing in it is necessary to promote accountability measures such as more profound involvement in lifelong learning e.g. through implementing learning outcomes based approach, which will alleviate the communication with stakeholders;

- To be able to apply for the funding that the government allocates for nonformal learning measures, the HEIs have to emphasize own role in ensuring LLL in society;

- To diminish the implementation gap that is observable with regard to implementation of learning outcomes it is necessary to do more explanatory work among teaching staff;

- To apply the map of detailed learning outcomes as basis for discussion of implementing learning outcomes in a program;

- In debates with the government to take Estonia as a good practice example and to stress the relevance of RPL to increased mobility on the labour market, as well as to the flexibility of the labour force;

University of Latvia:

- UL should mobilize the network of HEIs through own participation in Latvian Rectors' Council for creating an overarching RPL system for tertiary sector in Latvia. Here the experience both from Latvia (on validation of the nonformal and informal learning for level 1-3 vocational qualifications) and from Estonia can be gathered and applied;

- UL should apply internal human resources for implementation of RPL at the university;

- To apply the RPL procedure developed by the author on the basis of the procedure currently applied at the Tartu University and the currently existing system of credit transfer at the University of Latvia.

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Conducted expert interviews:

1. Baiba Ramiņa, Director of the Academic Information Centre (Latvian Enic/Naric), Interviewed: September 2009, March 2010.
2. Solvita Siliņa, Expert, Academic Information Centre; Chair of the Task Force in the National Program of Structural Funds: "Development of uniform procedures to improve the quality of vocational education and to involve social partners and educate them", Interviewed: April 2010.
3. Ingūna Ķīse, Senior Referent, Vocational Education Division, Vocational Education and General Education Department, Ministry of Education and Science, Interviewed: September 2010.
4. Viktors Kravčenko, senior expert, EURYDICE Latvia, Interviewed: May 2009.

5. Dmitrijs Kuļšs, Deputy Director – Head of Lifelong Learning Division, Policy Co-ordination Department, Ministry of Education and Science, Interviewed: September 2010.
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7. Juris Dzelme, Chair of Latvian Higher Education Quality Evaluation centre (HEQEC), Interviewed: October 2007, February 2008.
8. Aija Lejasausa, senior expert, EURYDICE Latvia, Interviewed: July 2010.
9. Jānis Stonis, Administrative Director, University of Latvia, Interviewed: November 2009, May 2010.
10. Ojārs Judrups, Director of Academic Department, University of Latvia, Interviewed: March 2010.
11. Andrejs Rauhvargers, Secretary General, Latvian Rectors' Council, Interviewed: April 2010, November 2010.
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13. Inese Leduskrasta, Deputy Director, Student Services, University of Latvia, Interviewed: May 2010.
14. Viesturs Karnups, Program director, Faculty of Economics and Management, University of Latvia, Interviewed: June 2010.
15. Ērika Šumilo, Program director, Faculty of Economics and Management, University of Latvia, Interviewed: April 2010.
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17. Siret Rutiku, Head of the Office of Academic Affairs, University of Tartu, Interviewed: February 2011
18. Raul Ranne, Coordinator of recognition of prior learning, Archimedes Foundation, Estonian Enic/Naric, Interviewed: February 2011
19. Ewa Chmielecka, Chair of Working Group for Implementation of RPL, Ministry of Higher Education and Science in Poland, professor, Warsaw School of Economics, Interviewed: February 2011

Conducted focus group discussions:

1. LECTURERS of bachelor program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy", Interviewed: June, November 2010 and May 2011.
2. STUDENTS of bachelor program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy", Interviewed: June 2011.

ATTACHMENTS

Dear Lecturer!

The aim of this questionnaire is to find out the attained cluster of skills and competences of the average graduate of the Bachelor program „International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy" based on the activities undertaken in sum by the team of lecturers; the cluster of skills and competences that currently is being attained at an unsatisfactory level; the conformity of the LO of the program to the content provided.

IMPORTANT:
1. If You plan to achieve other sub-learning outcomes that can be derived from the program's learning outcomes, please add to the table!
2. In the cell „Individually/in groups" please write individually, if the student is supposed to work on achieving the learning outcome in person, in groups – if the student will work in groups to achieve the learning outcome.
3. In the cell „1/2" , please write „1", if You believe that You are taking special care to make sure that the students at the end of Your course have attained this learning outcome, and „2" if You would rather describe the situation with respect to attainment of this learning outcome „During my course the students will work towards reaching this learning outcome, however I do not consider this learning outcome to be of priority No.1 of my course, to really make sure that they reach it".

My study course _____ .

1. **Demonstrate knowledge and skills in international economics, commercial diplomacy, as well as in fields of political science, culture and legislation**				
The sub LO derived from the program's LO	*The student at the end of the course is able:*	*How do You reach this LO/ assess (e.g. group work, case study, etc.)*	*individually/in groups*	*1/2*
Analyze and assess the processes	Assess the different phases of the existing processes within the field of study, their stages and interaction			
	Contrast the advancement of different historical phases of the processes, the initiators of this or the other scenarios			
	Contrast the positive and negative consequences of processes to different economic entities			
Please assess the share of specific components of content of Your course with 1-5 (1- the course content deals with this component minimally, 5 – this component is an essential part of the course content)				
International Economics				
Commercial Diplomacy				

Political Science				
Culture				
Law				
Foreign Investment Attraction				
Export Growth Promotion				

2. Analyze and assess these processes, by applying statistical, econometrical, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis and apply the acquired results of analysis for improving the performance of company or institution, comprehending the significance of the professional ethics in international business environment

The sub LOs derived from the program's LO	*The student at the end of the course is able:*	*How do You reach this LO/ assess (e.g. group work, case study, etc.)*	*individually/in groups*	*1/2*
2.1 analyze and assess these processes, by applying statistical, econometrical, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis	Analyze and assess these processes, by applying statistical methods of analysis			
	Analyze and assess these processes, by applying econometrical methods of analysis			
	Analyze and assess these processes, by applying quantitative methods of analysis			
	Analyze and assess these processes, by applying qualitative methods of analysis			
2.2 apply the acquired results of analysis for improving the performance of company or institution	Apply the acquired results of statistical analysis for improving the performance of company or institution			
	Apply the acquired results of econometrical analysis for improving the performance of company or institution			
	Apply the acquired results of quanitative analysis for improving the performance of company or institution			
	Apply the acquired results of qualitative analysis for improving the performance of company or institution			
	Application of different tools of analysis (e.g. PEST, SWOT)			
2.3 comprehending the	Comprehend the professional ethics in international business environment			

significance of the professional ethics in international business environment	Demonstrate the skill to adopt professionally ethical decisions in complex situations			
	Defend the necessity to accept professionally ethical decisions in complex situations			

3. Defend the national or corporative interests in international trade, finance or other economical activities, by being part of different national or international institutions, as well as local, private, national and multinational companies and corporations, and do so by applying knowledge of several languages			
The sub LOs derived from the program's LO	*The student at the end of the course is able:*	*How do You reach this LO/ assess (e.g. group work, case study, etc.)*	*individually/in groups*	*1/2*
3.1 defend the national or corporative interests in international trade, finance or other economical activities	Comprehend the interests of different economic entities in a case study			
	Comprehend the interests of different economic entities depending on their field of activity			
	Comprehend the possibilities/tools of defence of different entities' interests			
3.2 defend the national or corporative interests in international trade, finance or other economical activities, by being part of different national or international institutions, as well as local, private, national and multinational companies and corporations	Comprehend the interests of different economic entities depending on the type of organization (non-profit vs. commercial)			
	Comprehend the interests of different economic entities depending on the level of internationalization (local vs. international)			
3.3 defend the national or corporative	Read foreign language literature			
	Submit homeworks in foreign languages			
	Do presentations in foreign languages			

interests by applying knowledge of several languages				
4. Demonstrate competency in knowledge acquisition sources (related to the comprehension of processes of international economics and commercial diplomacy), paying attention to the development tendencies of leading national economies, foreign investment attraction and promotion of export growth				
The sub LOs derived from the program's LO	*The student at the end of the course is able:*	*How do You reach this LO/ assess (e.g. group work, case study, etc.)*	*individually/in groups*	*1/2*
4.1 demonstrate competency in knowledge acquisition sources (related to the comprehension of processes of international economics and commercial diplomacy)	Demonstrate competency in knowledge acquisition sources			
	Be familiar with the leading periodicals in the field			
	Assess the credibility of the message source			
4.2 paying attention to the development tendencies of leading national economies, foreign investment attraction and promotion of export growth	Group the countries according to their development level			
	Group the countries according to main indicators of national economy			
	Group the countries according to specializied indicators (e.g. Gini, FDI)			
	Be familiar with the various grouping / classification techniques of the countries, weaknesses / strengths thereof			
	Dispute on the weaknesses and strenghts of different indicators			
	Apply the statistical data for the analysis of the future business environment tendencies			
	Create different development scenarios for the environment and the company in it			
5. Apply competency of presentation and scientific polemics, communication skills, team work with the aim to analyze the application of				

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theory in hypothetical and real situations.		
I am taking special care to make sure that the students at the end of my course have attained this learning outcome	*Yes / No*	
5.1 apply competency of presentation (not only PowerPoint)	Find key information on the topic	
	Structure the content of the presentation	
	Create a linked flow of information	
	Understand the different audience groups and personality types for a skillful conveying of information	
	Effectively start and conclude the presentation	
	Skillfully use body language (eg. keep the eye contact with audience)	
	Skillfully use the voice while presenting the material	
	Keep the attention of the audience	
	Effectively use the PowerPoint presentations	
	Effective use of other visual and sensory aids	
	Start a discussion based on presentation content	
	Use compelling language and sounds to effectively revive the presentation	
	Dress according to the situation	
	Clearly highlight the key issues in the presentation	
I am taking special care to make sure that the students at the end of my course have attained this learning outcome	*Yes / No*	
5.2 apply competency of scientific polemics, communication skills	Argue	
	Debate	
	Structure the speech	
	Structure the written opinion	
	Respect timing allocated for the presentation	
	Plan and meet the deadlines, that are reserved for solving the task	
	Convincingly rebut opponent's viewpoint, or strenghten the importance of the proponent's point of view	
	Be able to explain and justify the views (in	

	writing) with reference to the theory, practice, experts' views	
	Be able to explain and justify the views (orally) with reference to the theory, practice, experts' views	
	Present information according to the level of comprehension of the audience (e.g. experts and laymen)	
	Express ideas	
	Be able to distinguish the essential from the insignificant	
5.3 apply competency of team work (including taking on initiative)	Lead the group work to the result while working together with previously lesser known people	
	Improve the productivity and efficiency of the working group in stress situations	
	Take on the initiative in the group work	
	Successfully use communication means to ensure the achievement of aims set by the group work	
	Improve the productivity and efficiency of the working group, skillfully delegating the tasks	
	Demonstrate reasoned choice of action alternatives, being aware of the strengths and weaknesses connected to the decision	
	Independently identify and propose solutions	
	Conduct planning of a medium sized group work and analyze the results, including the performance of the individual members	
	Listen to and accept viewpoints of others	
	Assist members of the group and accept help from them	

Results of surveying 5 graduates of the bachelor program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy"

Share of specific components of program's content.

International Economics	3	5	5	3	5	**21**
Commercial Diplomacy	1	2	3	3	2	**11**
Political Science	3	4	1	3	2	**13**
Culture	5	3	1	3	3	**15**
Law	4	3	1	1	3	**12**
Foreign Investment Attraction	1	2	4	1	2	**10**
Export Growth Promotion	1	4	2	2	1	**10**

Learning outcome	I believe that I have achieved this learning outcome.					The amount of attention directed towards the attainment of this learning outcome		
	I disagree	I rather disagree	It is hard to say	I rather agree	I agree	more attention would be necessary	is just right	less attention would be necessary
Assess the different phases of the existing processes within the field of study, their stages and interaction			1	2	2	3	2	
Contrast the advancement of different historical phases of the processes, the initiators of this or the other scenarios				5		4	1	
Contrast the positive and negative consequences of processes to different economic entities			2	2	1	4	1	
Analyze and assess these processes, by applying statistical methods of analysis		1		3	1	2	3	
Analyze and assess these processes, by applying econometrical methods of analysis		2		2	1	2	3	
Analyze and assess these processes, by applying quantitative methods of analysis		2		1	2	1	3	1
Analyze and assess these processes, by applying qualitative methods of analysis		1		1	3	1	4	
Apply the acquired results of statistical analysis for improving the performance of company or institution			2	2	1	3	2	
Apply the acquired results of econometrical analysis for improving the performance of company or institution		2	2	1		4	1	
Apply the acquired results of quanitative analysis for improving the performance of company or institution		2	1	1	1	5		
Apply the acquired results of qualitative analysis for improving the performance of company or institution		2	1	1	1	5		

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
Application of different tools of analysis (e.g. PEST, SWOT)	1		2	2		4	1	
Comprehend the professional ethics in international business environment			2	1	2	1	4	
Demonstrate the skill to adopt professionally ethical decisions in complex situations			1	1	3	1	4	
Defend the necessity to accept professionally ethical decisions in complex situations			1	1	3	1	4	
Comprehend the interests of different economic entities in a case study	1			2	2	2	3	
Comprehend the interests of different economic entities depending on their field of activity	1			1	3	1	4	
Comprehend the possibilities/tools of defence of different entities' interests		1		3	1	1	4	
Comprehend the interests of different economic entities depending on the type of organization (non-profit vs. commercial)			1	1	3	1	4	
Comprehend the interests of different economic entities depending on the level of internationalization (local vs. international)			1		4	1	4	
Read foreign language literature					5		4	1
Submit homeworks in foreign languages					5	1	3	1
Do presentations in foreign languages			1		4	1	3	1
Demonstrate competency in knowledge acquisition sources				1	4		4	1
Be familiar with the leading periodicals in the field			3		2	3	2	
Assess the credibility of the message source				3	2	2	3	
Group the countries according to their development level				1	4	1	4	
Group the countries according to main indicators of national economy				1	4		5	
Group the countries according to specializied indicators (e.g. Gini, FDI)		1		2	2	2	3	
Be familiar with the various grouping / classification techniques of the countries, weaknesses / strengths thereof			1	3	1	4	1	
Dispute on the weaknesses and strenghts of different indicators			1	3	1	3	2	
Apply the statistical data for the analysis of the future business environment tendencies			2	1	2	5		
Create different development scenarios for the environment and the company in it	1		1	2	1	5		
Find key information on the topic				1	4	1	4	
Structure the content of the presentation					5		4	1
Create a linked flow of information					5		5	
Understand the different audience groups and personality types for a skillful conveying of information				1	4	1	4	
Effectively start and conclude the presentation			1		4		4	1
Skillfully use body language (eg. keep the eye contact with audience)				1	4	2	2	1
Skillfully use the voice while presenting the material			1		4	1	3	1
Keep the attention of the audience				5		2	2	1

Effectively use the PowerPoint presentations					5		4	1
Effective use of other visual and sensory aids			1		4		4	1
Start a discussion based on presentation content				2	3		5	
Use compelling language and sounds to effectively revive the presentation			1	1	3	2	3	
Dress according to the situation				1	4		5	
Clearly highlight the key issues in the presentation				2	3	1	4	
Argue				2	3	2	3	
Debate		1		2	2	2	3	
Structure the speech				1	4	2	3	
Structure the written opinion					5	1	4	
Respect timing allocated for the presentation				3	2	2	3	
Plan and meet the deadlines, that are reserved for solving the task	1				4		5	
Convincingly rebut opponent's viewpoint, or strenghten the importance of the proponent's point of view			3	1	1	3	2	
Be able to explain and justify the views (in writing) with reference to the theory, practice, experts' views			1		4	1	4	
Be able to explain and justify the views (orally) with reference to the theory, practice, experts' views				3	2	1	4	
Present information according to the level of comprehension of the audience (e.g. experts and laymen)			3		2	1	4	
Express ideas				1	4		5	
Be able to distinguish the essential from the insignificant				3	2	1	4	
Lead the group work to the result while working together with previously lesser known people	1			1	3	1	4	
Improve the productivity and efficiency of the working group in stress situations			2	1	2		5	
Take on the initiative in the group work				1	4		5	
Successfully use communication means to ensure the achievement of aims set by the group work	1				4	1	4	
Improve the productivity and efficiency of the working group, skillfully delegating the tasks	1			1	3	2	3	
Demonstrate reasoned choice of action alternatives, being aware of the strengths and weaknesses connected to the decision				3	2	1	4	
Independently identify and propose solutions			1		4		5	
Conduct planning of a medium sized group work and analyze the results, including the performance of the individual members	1			1	3	2	3	
Listen to and accept viewpoints of others				1	4	1	4	
Assist members of the group and accept help from them				1	4	1	4	

Introduction
Basic characteristics of the research

Theoretical part

Practical contribution of the author in the chapters of the theoretical part

Chapter 1
-role of lifelong learning (LLL) in knowledge economy
-role of higher education in providing LLL

Author: reviews the main indicators used to measure the progress of countries in attaining the goal of becoming knowledge based economy on the basis of implementing lifelong learning policy

Chapter 2
-role of recognition in promoting LLL
-main principles of recognition in the EHEA
-common standards promoting recognition

Author: conducts content analysis of Declarations and Communiqués (1998-2010, 8 documents in total) of the Bologna Process and determines the appearance frequency of selected keywords (e.g.recognition, quality assurance, qualification frameworks)

Chapter 3
- role of learning outcomes based education in recognition of prior learning- recognition and different forms of learning

Author: compiles definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning taken from recent documents of the major international education policy players – OECD, EC, UNESCO and analysed them against 4 aspects (e.g. intended, structured, recognition, learning outcomes)

Illustration 10. Structure of the Theoretical Part of the Doctoral Thesis „Recognition of Prior Learning and Lifelong Learning in Higher Education"

Illustration 11. Interrelation of Chapters of the Theoretical Part and the Chapters of the Practical Part of the Doctoral Thesis „Recognition of Prior Learning and Lifelong Learning in Higher Education"

Theoretical part

General theory

Chapter 1
-role of lifelong learning (LLL) in knowledge economy
-role of higher education in providing LLL

Chapter 2
-role of recognition in promoting LLL
-main principles of recognition in EHEA---------
-common standards promoting recognition---

Chapter 3
- role of learning outcomes based education in recognition of prior learning-------------------
- recognition and different forms of learning -

Conclusions

Practical part

Research on Problems of Recognition with Regard to Information Provision and Supportive Structure in the EHEA
Chapter 5:
Comparative analysis of National Action Plans for Recognition submitted by 37 countries

Analysis of external quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes in Latvia with regard to European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)
Chapter 4: Assessment (against ESG) of quality assurance agency and external quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes in Latvia

Methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program as basis for future RPL
Chapter 7:
Elaboration of methodology for defining learning outcomes in a study program in accordance with National Qualification Framework

Current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia
Chapter 6:
European Inventory on current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia

Implementation of recognition of prior learning in higher education institution in Latvia
Chapter 8:
SWOT analysis of the current stand and elaboration of recommendations.

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Illustration 12. Research Methods and Tools Applied in the Chapters of the Practical Part of the Doctoral Thesis „Recognition of Prior Learning and Lifelong Learning in Higher Education"

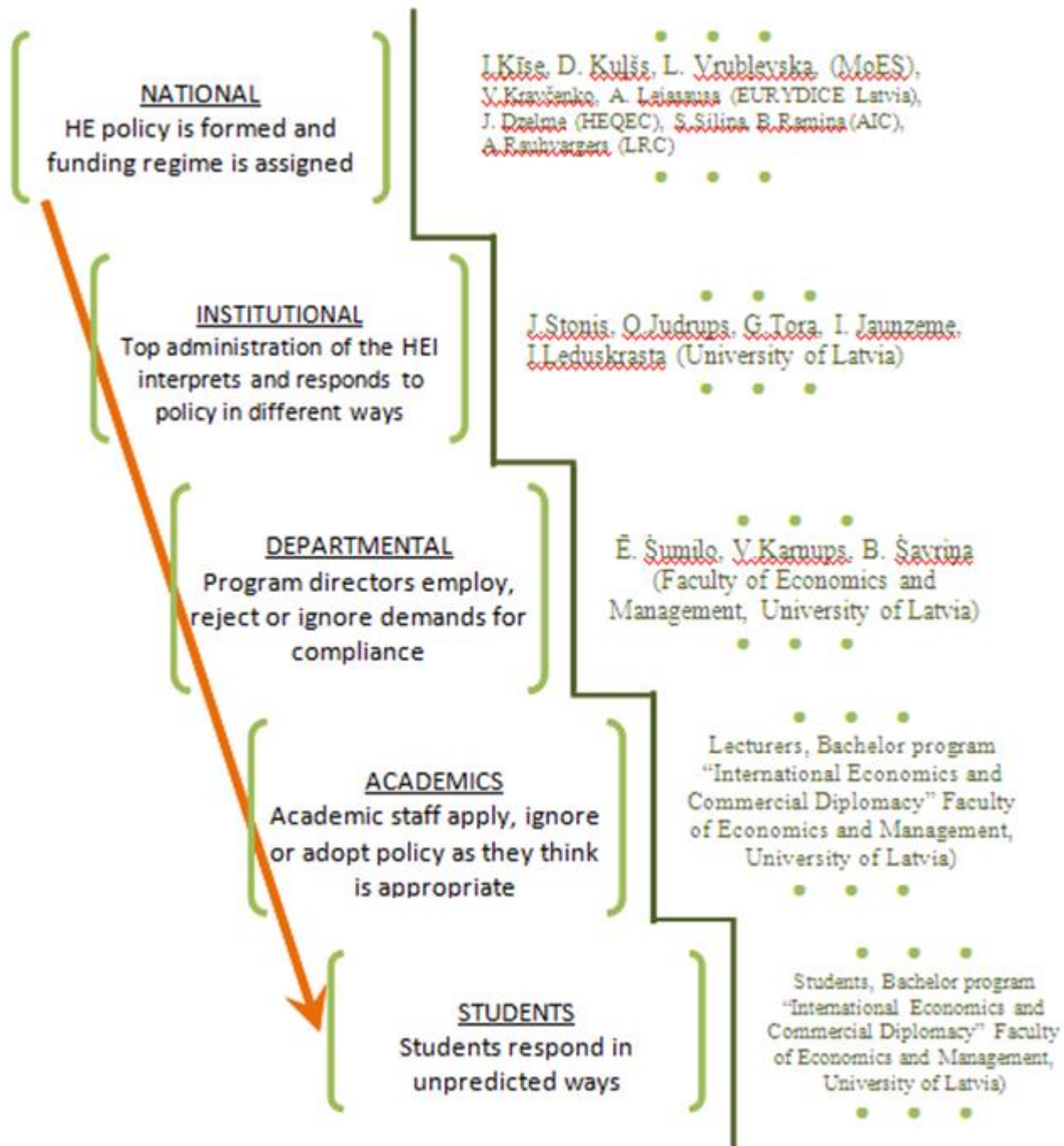*Illustration 13. Implementation staircase[259] and conducted interviews*

NATIONAL
HE policy is formed and funding regime is assigned

I.Kīse, D. Kulšs, L. Vrublevska, (MoES), V.Kravčenko, A. Lejassauja (EURYDICE Latvia), J. Dzelme (HEQEC), S.Sīliņa B.Ramiņa (AIC), A.Rauhvargers (LRC)

INSTITUTIONAL
Top administration of the HEI interprets and responds to policy in different ways

J.Stonis, O.Judrups, G.Tora, I. Jaunzeme, I.Leduskrasta (University of Latvia)

DEPARTMENTAL
Program directors employ, reject or ignore demands for compliance

Ē. Šumilo, V.Kamups, B. Šavriņa (Faculty of Economics and Management, University of Latvia)

ACADEMICS
Academic staff apply, ignore or adopt policy as they think is appropriate

Lecturers, Bachelor program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy" Faculty of Economics and Management, University of Latvia)

STUDENTS
Students respond in unpredicted ways

Students, Bachelor program "International Economics and Commercial Diplomacy" Faculty of Economics and Management, University of Latvia)

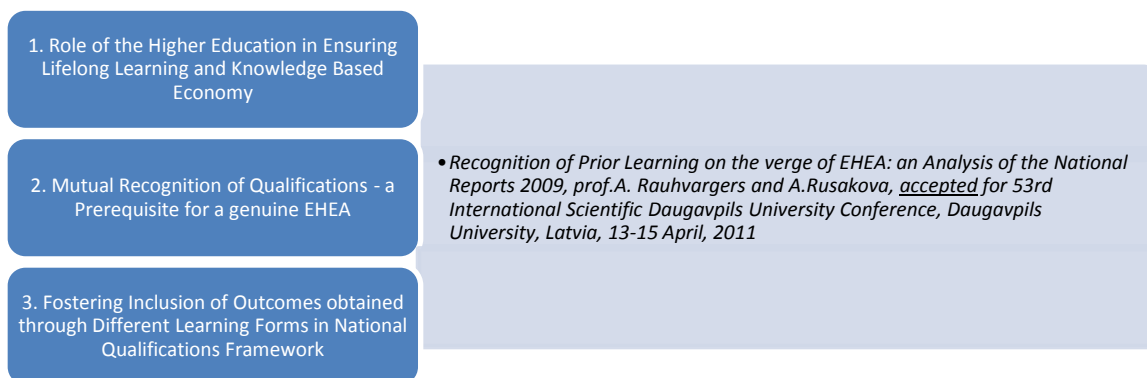[259] **Implementation staircase** (Trowler 2003): The various levels or sites, national, regional and local, at which education policy is received, interpreted and put into practice, sometimes in ways which are quite different from those originally intended by policy-makers.
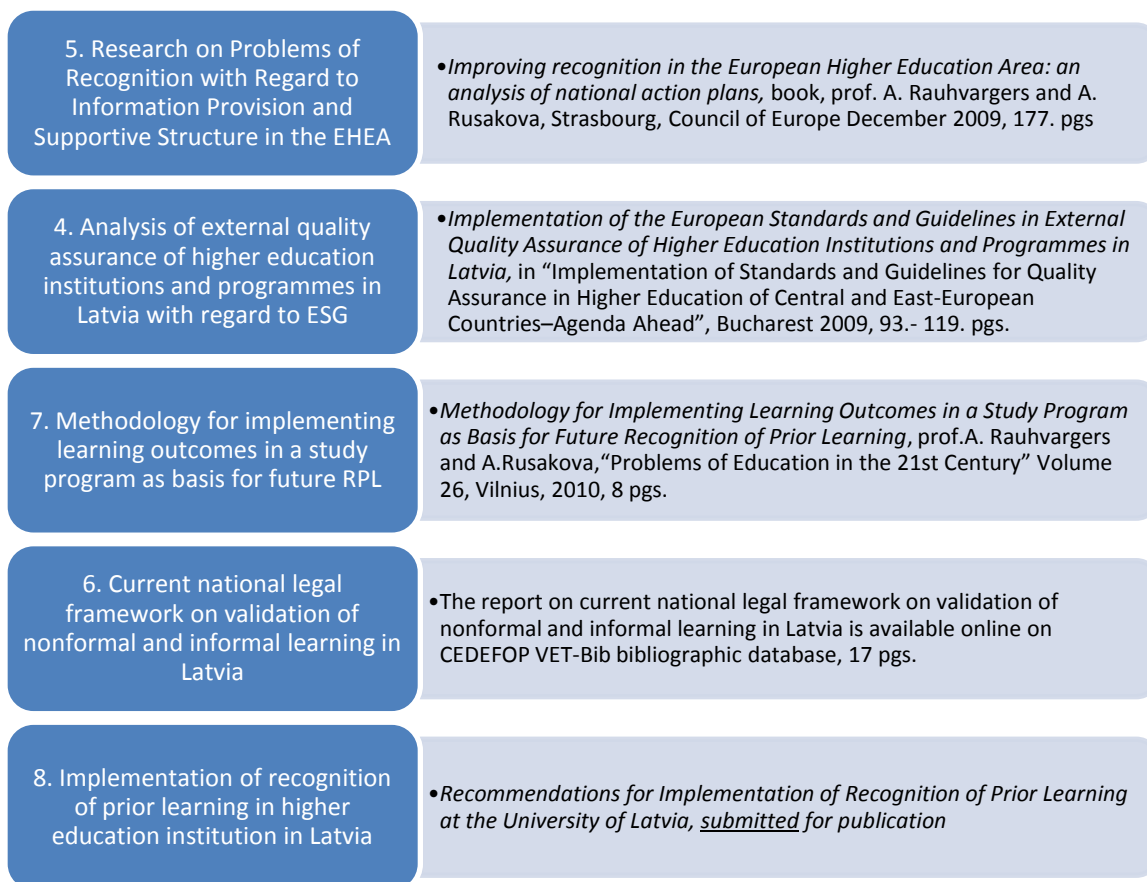The actors at different levels of implementation staircase may thus create barriers to the implementation, increasing the overall implementation gap.

Illustration 14. Chapters of the thesis and related, most significant publications

THEORETICAL PART

1. Role of the Higher Education in Ensuring Lifelong Learning and Knowledge Based Economy

2. Mutual Recognition of Qualifications - a Prerequisite for a genuine EHEA

- *Recognition of Prior Learning on the verge of EHEA: an Analysis of the National Reports 2009, prof.A. Rauhvargers and A.Rusakova, <u>accepted</u> for 53rd International Scientific Daugavpils University Conference, Daugavpils University, Latvia, 13-15 April, 2011*

3. Fostering Inclusion of Outcomes obtained through Different Learning Forms in National Qualifications Framework

PRACTICAL PART

5. Research on Problems of Recognition with Regard to Information Provision and Supportive Structure in the EHEA

- *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans,* book, prof. A. Rauhvargers and A. Rusakova, Strasbourg, Council of Europe December 2009, 177. pgs

4. Analysis of external quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes in Latvia with regard to ESG

- *Implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines in External Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions and Programmes in Latvia,* in "Implementation of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of Central and East-European Countries–Agenda Ahead", Bucharest 2009, 93.- 119. pgs.

7. Methodology for implementing learning outcomes in a study program as basis for future RPL

- *Methodology for Implementing Learning Outcomes in a Study Program as Basis for Future Recognition of Prior Learning*, prof.A. Rauhvargers and A.Rusakova,"Problems of Education in the 21st Century" Volume 26, Vilnius, 2010, 8 pgs.

6. Current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia

- The report on current national legal framework on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Latvia is available online on CEDEFOP VET-Bib bibliographic database, 17 pgs.

8. Implementation of recognition of prior learning in higher education institution in Latvia

- *Recommendations for Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning at the University of Latvia, <u>submitted</u> for publication*

MATERIĀLS FOKUSGRUPAS DISKUSIJAI (pasniedzēji)
Bakalaura studiju programma: „Starptautiskā ekonomika un komercdiplomātija": studiju rezultātu analīze

Tika aptaujāti 18 pasniedzēji: Fortiņš, Dunska, Karnups, Brēķis, Baumane-Vītoliņa, Lošaka, Kristapsone, Rigerts, Jēkabsone, Škapars, Šavriņa, Medne, Taurēns, Petrovskis, Vitkovskis, Buševica, Gulbe, Kincāns

Studiju plāns	Sadaļa	Neietvertie kredītpunkti
A. Daļa	Bakalaura Darbs	10
B. Daļa	Kursa darbs starptautiskajā ekonomikā	2
	Kursa darbs diplomātijas studijās	2
	Prakse	6
	Valodu studiju modulis	14
C. Daļa	2 izvēles kursi	4
Kopā netika iekļauti pētījumā		**38 kredītpunkti no 160**

Studiju plāns	Nointervēto pasniedzēju kursu kredītpunktu skaits	% no visiem kredītpunktiem	% no ietvertajiem kredītpunktiem
A. Daļa	34	53%	62%
B. Daļa	60	65%	88%
C. Daļa	-	-	-
KOPĀ	94	58%	77%

Studiju rezultātu sasniegšanai un novērtēšanai pasniedzēji izmanto:

- --- kursa darbs, bakalaura darbs---
- Praktiskie un mājas darbi
- Semināru uzdevumi
- Situācijas analīzes
- Diskusijas
- Ziņojums
- Zinātnisko rakstu lasīšana gatavojoties semināriem
- Kursa ziņojums
- Teorijas uzdevumi
- Testa analīze
- Uzdevuma analīze pie tāfeles
- Referāts
- Teksts ar jautājumiem
- Grupas darbs pie valsts
- Praktiskie darbi par esošo situāciju
- Semināra uzdevumu gatavošana
- Valstu analīze pēc ĀTI pievilcības
- Investoru uzvedības un interešu analīze
- Pārrunu imitācijas
- Lomu spēles
- Apaļā galda diskusijas
- Videoconference
- Debates

- Ieskats praktiskos piemēros
- Situācijas modelēšana
- Pretnostatīšana
- Kopsavilkuma sagatavošana par zinātniskajiem rakstiem
- Ziņojuma prezentēšana
- A4 ziņojuma sagatavošana

Grupās pamatā tiek strādāts ar 2-3 studentiem, taču ir arī grupu darbi, kur kopā viena mērķa sasniegšanai strādā 7 studenti.

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:
Vai studentiem vienmēr ir skaidrs, kādas tieši prasmes tiek apgūtas, veicot konkrēto semināru, praktisko un mājas darbu uzdevumu? Piem. ir vairak vai mazāk skaidrs, ko spēs students pēc uzdevuma: " Investoru uzvedības un interešu analīze" veikšanas.

Studiju kursa satura sastāvdaļu īpatsvars:

Secinājumi:
Paaugstināta datu jutība attiecībā uz atsevišķiem studiju kursiem (nav aptaujāti daudzi studiju kursa pasniedzēji ar izteiktu kursa ievirzi, piem. "Politikas zinātne", "Kultūras vēsture un teorija"). Lai varētu spriest par studiju programmas absolventu - nepieciešams aptaujāt VISUS pasniedzējus.
Nav aptaujāti sekojošu kursu pasniedzēji: Filosofija, Socioloģija, Kultūras vēsture un teorija, Politikas zinātne, Saskarsmes psiholoģija, Pasaules reliģijas, Ekonometrija, Integrētā mārketinga komunikācija, Ievads starptautiskajā politikā, Sarunu vešana, Latvijas diplomātijas vēsture
Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:
Vai šāda kursu ievirze saskan ar iecerēto mērķi- vēlamo programmas: „Starptautiskā ekonomika un komercdiplomātija"
absolventa prasmju ievirzi?

2.1 analizēt un novērtēt šos procesus, izmantojot statistiskās, ekonometriskās, kā arī citas kvantitatīvās un kvalitatīvās analīzes metodes...
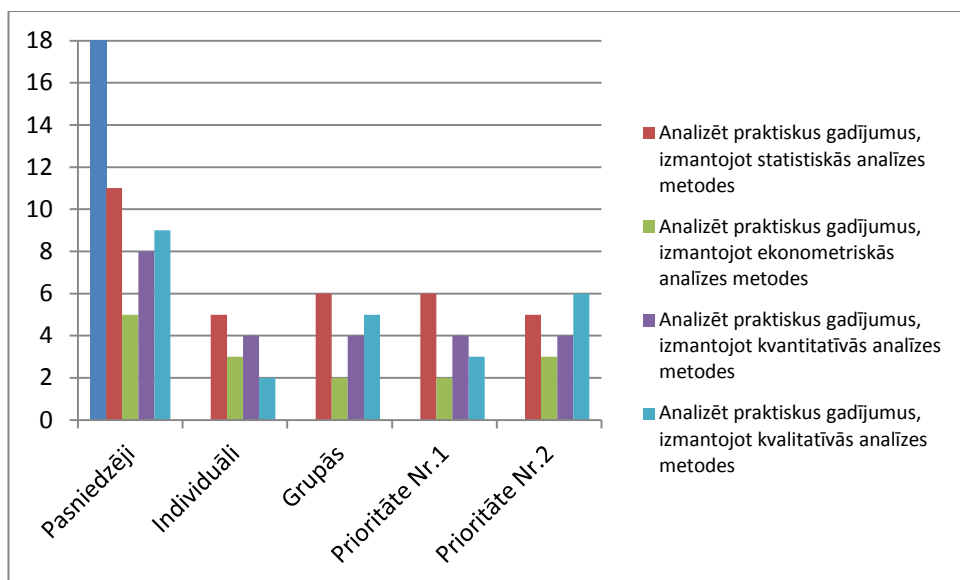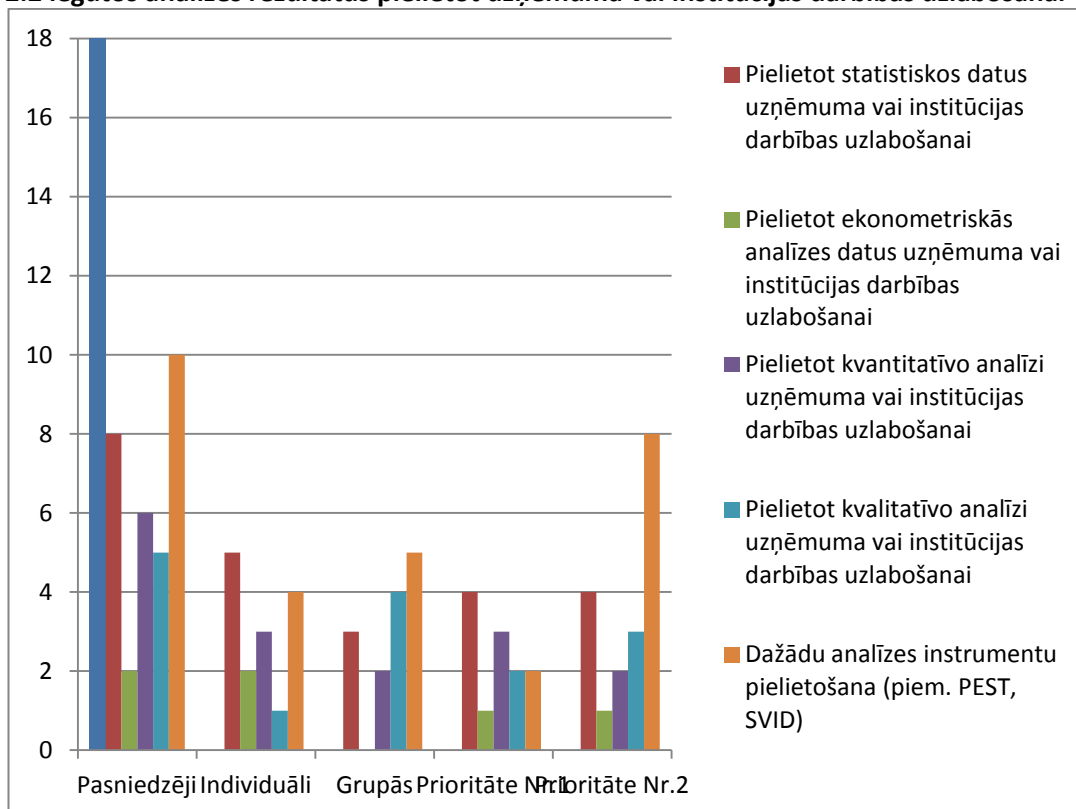
Secinājumi:

Pamatā intervētie pasniedzēji apmāca studentus izmantot statistiskās (gan individuāli, gan grupās) un kvalitatīvās analīzes (pamatā grupās) metodes. Studenti mazāk tiek apmācīti izmantot kvantitatīvās un ekonometriskās analīzes metodes.

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai nepieciešams pastiprināt kvantitatīvās un ekonometriskās analīzes metožu apmācību?

**2.2 iegūtos analīzes rezultātus pielietot uzņēmuma vai institūcijas darbības uzlabošanai**

Secinājumi:

Uzņēmuma vai institūcijas darbības uzlabošanai pielietot dažādus specializētos analīzes instrumentus izmanto 10 no 18 pasniedzējiem, taču uzskata šo analīzes instrument izmantošanu par drīzāk palīglīdzekli kāda cita kursa mērķa sasniegšanai. Otra plašāk izmantotā analīzes metode- statistisko datu analīze. Trešā vietā – kvantitatīvā analīze. Studenti arī šeit tiek mazāk apmācīti izmantot ekonometriskās analīzes metodes. Kvalitatīvo analīzi pamatā apmāca grupās.

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai nepieciešams pastiprināt kvalitatīvās un ekonometriskās analīzes metožu apmācību tieši to pielietošanā uzņēmuma vai institūcijas darbības uzlabošanai?

**2.3 izprotot profesionālās ētikas nozīmi starptautiskā uzņēmējdarbības vidē**
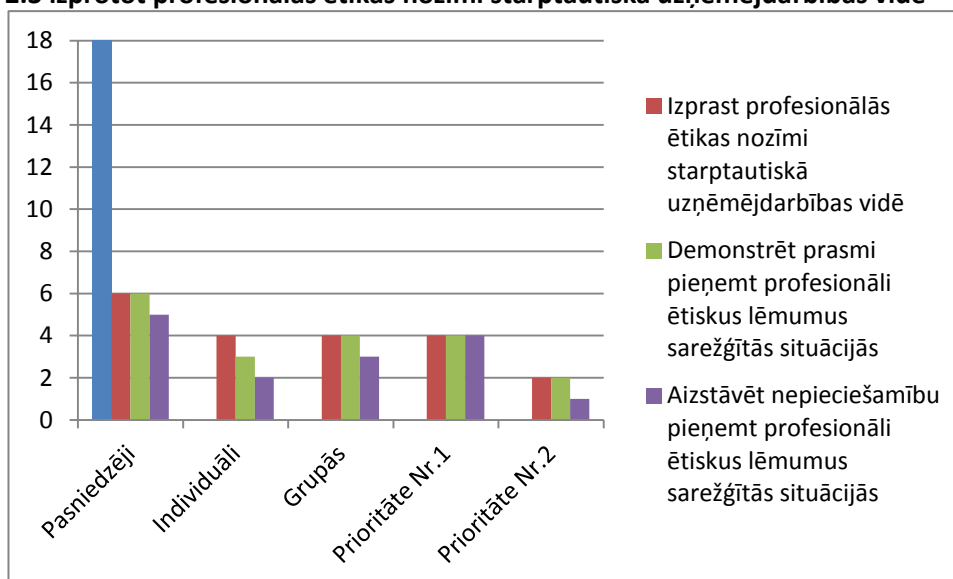
Secinājumi:

Salīdzinoši maz pasniedzēju (1/3) savu kursu ietvaros apmāca studentus ar mērķi, lai tie izprastu profesionālās ētikas nozīmi starptautiskā uzņēmējdarbības vidē. Taču tie, kas to dara, uzskata par būtisku šo mērķi sasniegt.

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai nepieciešams palielināt to pasniedzēju īpatsvaru, kuri sava kursa ietvaros aplūko profesionālās ētikas nozīmi, ņemot vērā studiju programmas: „Starptautiskā ekonomika un komercdiplomātija" absolventa vīziju?

3.1 aizstāvēt nacionālās vai korporatīvās intereses starptautiskajā tirdzniecības, finanšu un citā ekonomiskajā darbībā
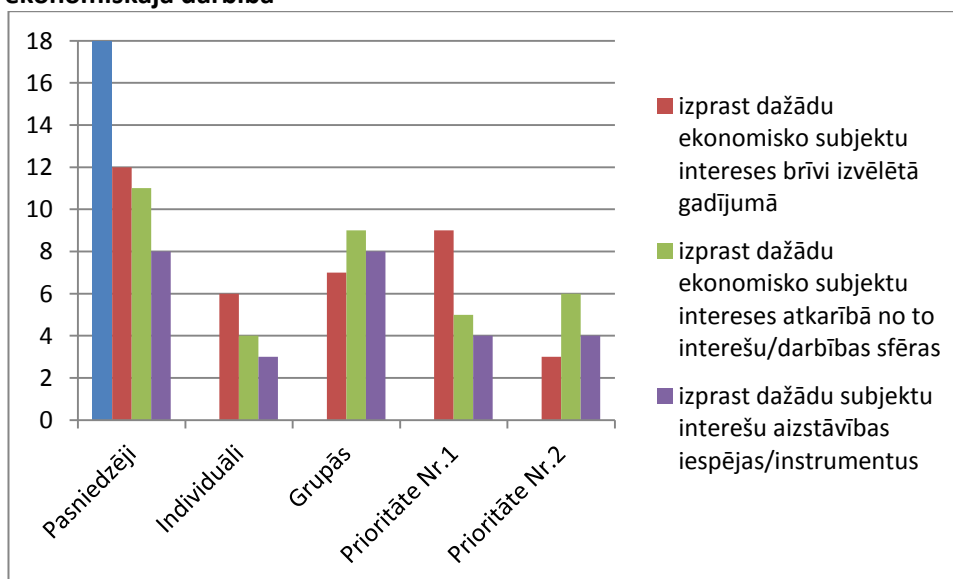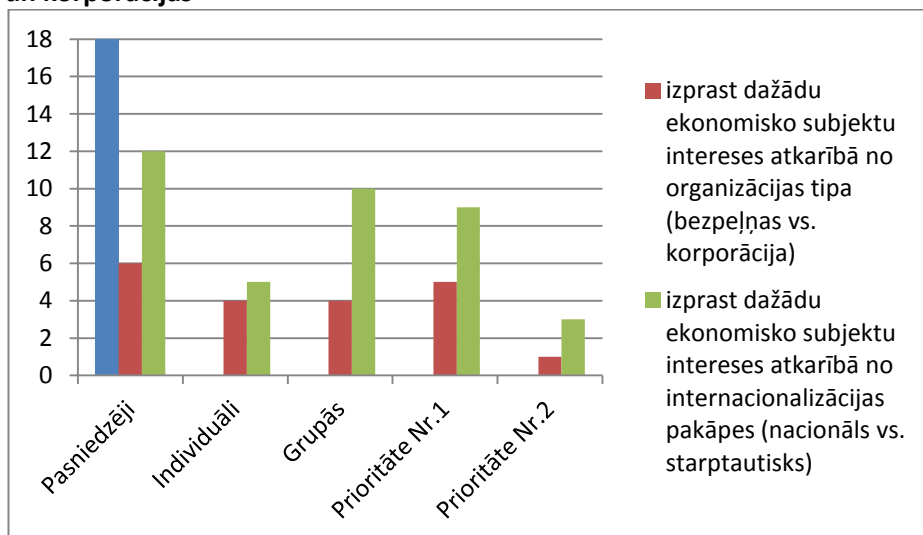

Secinājumi:

2/3 pasniedzēju savu kursu ietvaros apmāca studentus izprast dažādu ekonomisko subjektu intereses brīvi izvēlētā gadījumā, liela daļa uzskatot šo par prioritāru studiju rezultātu.Mazāk

uzmanības tiek pievērsts dažādu subjektu interešu aizstāvības iespējām/instrumentiem.

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai nepieciešams līdztekus apmācīt studentus par dažādu subjektu interešu aizstāvības iespējām/instrumentiem, jeb pietiek, ka bakalaura (ar profesionālu ievirzi) līmenī tie izprot subjektu intereses?

3.2 aizstāvēt nacionālās vai korporatīvās intereses, darbojoties dažādās nacionālā un starptautiskā līmeņa institūcijās, organizācijās, kā arī vietējos, privātos, valsts un daudznacionālos uzņēmumos un korporācijās
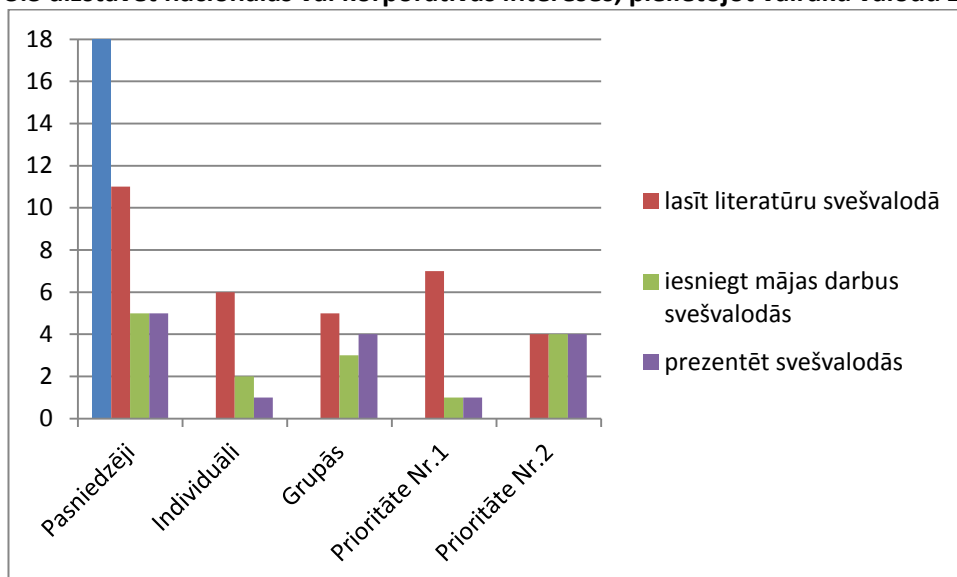

Secinājumi:

Lielākā daļa pasniedzēju savu kursu ietvaros apmāca studentus izprast dažādu ekonomisko subjektu intereses atkarībā no uzņēmuma un/vai institūcijas intereses atkarībā no internacionalizācijas pakāpes. Uz pusi mazāk pasniedzēju aplūko dažādu ekonomisko subjektu intereses atkarībā no organizācijas tipa (bezpeļņas vs. korporācija).

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai „Starptautiskā ekonomika un komercdiplomātija" absolventam vienlīdz svarīgi ir izprast arī dažādu ekonomisko subjektu intereses atkarībā no organizācijas tipa? Vai tomēr izprast intereses atkarībā no internacionalizācijas pakāpes ir svarīgāk un turpmāk neko studiju rezultātos nav jāmaina?

**3.3 aizstāvēt nacionālās vai korporatīvās intereses, pielietojot vairāku valodu zināšanas;**

Secinājumi:

Daudzi pasniedzēji aicina studentus lasīt literatūru svešvalodā, taču dažādu iemeslu dēļ (piem. nevienmēr ieteiktā grāmata ir pieejama lielam studentu skaitam) neseko, lai tas arī tiešām tiktu darīts. Daži pasniedzēji ļauj, bet nepieprasa iesniegt mājas darbus svešvalodās. Vairāki pasniedzēji kategoriski nevēlas pieņemt mājas darbus svešvalodās (piem. plaģiātisms).

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai „Starptautiskā ekonomika un komercdiplomātija" absolventam pietiek ar valodas studiju moduli pilnvērtīgas spējas "*aizstāvēt nacionālās vai korporatīvās intereses, pielietojot vairāku valodu zināšanas*" attīstīšanai, vai tomēr nepieciešams veicināt iespējas studentiem vienlaicīgi praktizēt svešvalodas citu kursu ietvaros?

4.1 orientēties zināšanu (kas saistītas ar starptautiskās ekonomikas un komercdiplomātijas procesu izpratni) ieguves avotos
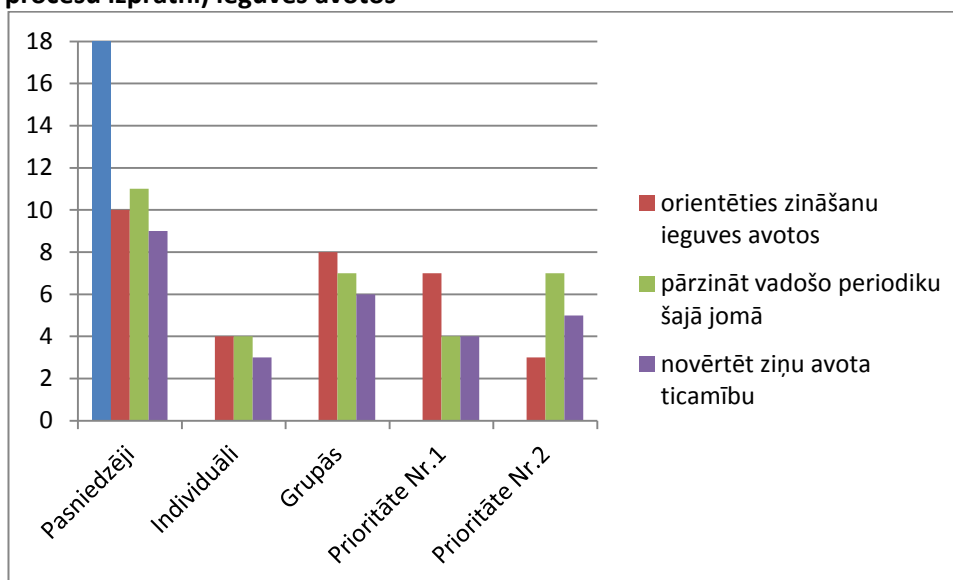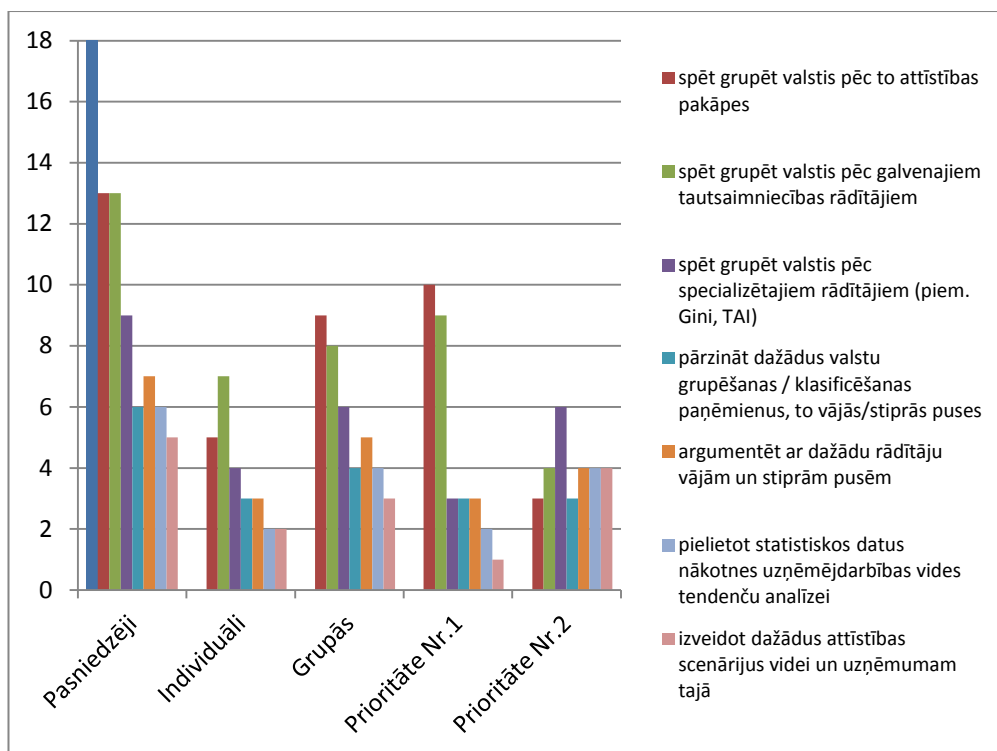

Secinājumi:

Lielākoties ar šīs sadaļas studiju rezultātu sasniegšanu pasniedzēji strādā studentu referātu, kursa darbu, bakalaura darbu izstrādes laikā. Tikai 4 pasniedzēji no 18 pievērš sevišķu vērību, lai studentiem būtu skaidrs, kā novērtēt ziņu avota ticamību.

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai jāakcentē nepieciešamība novērtēt ziņu avota ticamību „Starptautiskā ekonomika un komercdiplomātija" studentu vidū?

**4.2 sevišķu vērību pievēršot vadošo valstu tautsaimniecības nozaru tendenču analīzei**

Secinājumi:

Šīs sadaļas studiju rezultāti ir vieni no svarīgākajiem, spriežot pēc pasniedzēju daudzuma un prioritātes pasniedzēju vidū. Vairāku studiju rezultātu sasniegšanai tiek strādāts ar studentiem vienlaicīgi gan grupās, gan individuāli; grupu darbam visos gadījumos prevalējot pār individuālo darbu. Vismazāk uzmanības tiek pievērsts studiju rezultātam: "*izveidot dažādus attīstības scenārijus videi un uzņēmumam tajā*".

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai orientācija uz nākotnes prognožu izstrādi bakalaura līmeņa studentam ir pietiekama?

## 5.1 pielietot prezentācijas prasmi (ne tikai ar PowerPoint palīdzību)
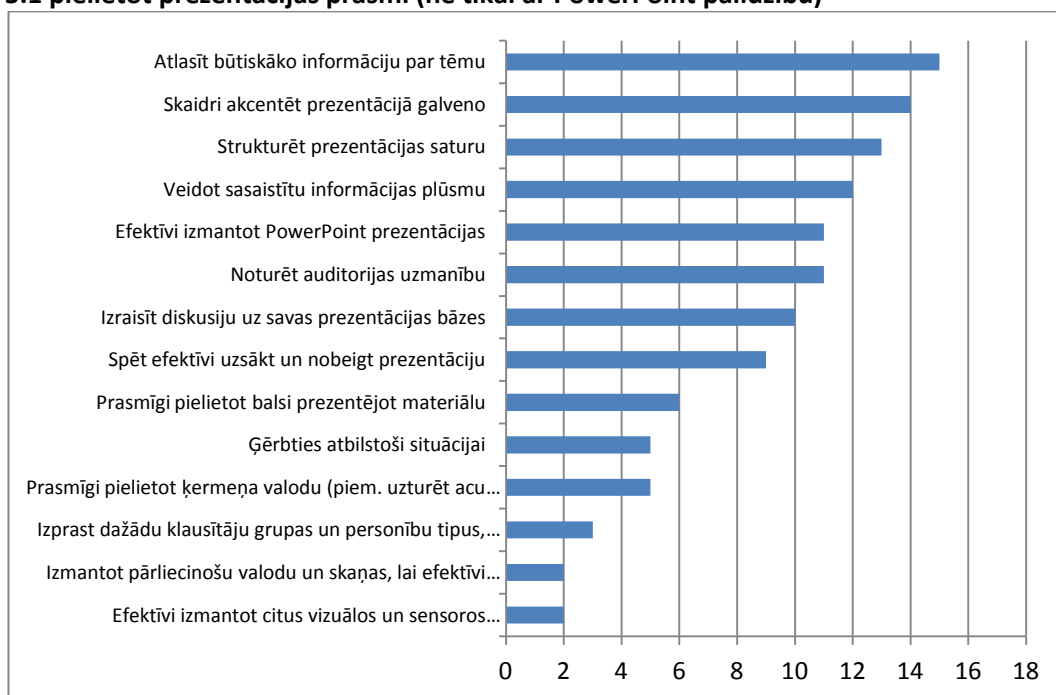
Secinājumi:

Liela daļa pasniedzēju iesaistās studiju rezultāta "pielietot prezentācijas prasmi (ne tikai ar PowerPoint palīdzību)" apmācībā. Vairāk par pusi no pasniedzējiem strādā pie puses no šī studiju rezultāta apakšprasmēm.

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai nav nepieciešams palielināt to pasniedzēju skaitu, kas strādā ar mērķi, ka studenti apgūtu prasmi "Izprast dažādu klausītāju grupas un personību tipus, prasmīgai informācijas nodošanai", "Ģērbties atbilstoši situācijai", "Prasmīgi pielietot ķermeņa valodu (piem. uzturēt acu kontaktu ar auditoriju)"?

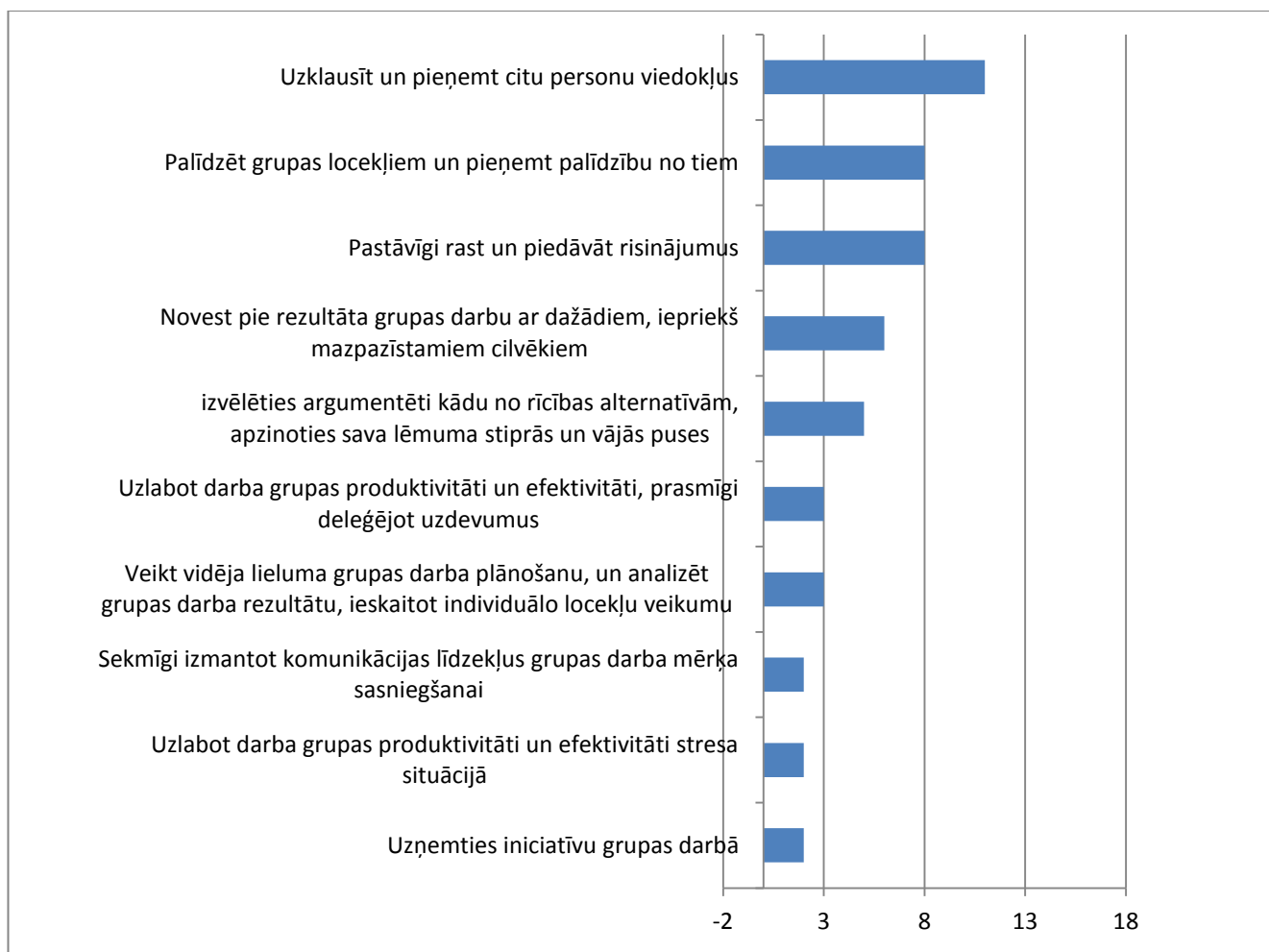**5.2 pielietot zinātniskās polemikas prasmi, komunikācijas spējas,**
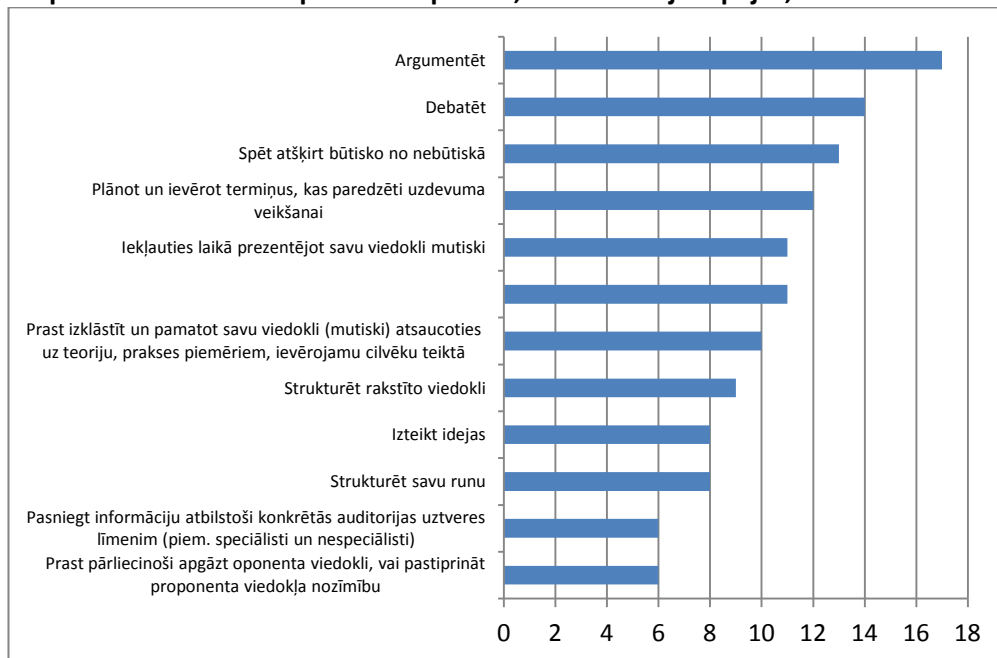
Secinājumi:

Liela daļa pasniedzēju iesaistās studiju rezultāta "*pielietot zinātniskās polemikas prasmi, komunikācijas spējas*" apmācībā. Vairāk par pusi no pasniedzējiem strādā pie vairāk kā puses no šī studiju rezultāta apakšprasmēm.

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai nav nepieciešams palielināt to pasniedzēju skaitu, kas strādā ar mērķi, ka studenti apgūtu prasmi "*Prast pārliecinoši apgāzt oponenta viedokli, vai pastiprināt proponenta viedokļa nozīmību*", "*Pasniegt informāciju atbilstoši konkrētās auditorijas uztveres līmenim (piem. speciālisti un nespeciālisti)*"? Prasme "*Pasniegt informāciju atbilstoši konkrētās auditorijas uztveres līmenim (piem. speciālisti un nespeciālisti)*" ir viens no nacionālās kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūras Bakalaura līmeņa absolventu deskriptoriem.

5.3 prasmi strādāt komandā (iesk. iniciatīvas uzņemšanās)

Uzklausīt un pieņemt citu personu viedokļus

Palīdzēt grupas locekļiem un pieņemt palīdzību no tiem

Pastāvīgi rast un piedāvāt risinājumus

Novest pie rezultāta grupas darbu ar dažādiem, iepriekš mazpazīstamiem cilvēkiem

izvēlēties argumentēti kādu no rīcības alternatīvām, apzinoties sava lēmuma stiprās un vājās puses

Uzlabot darba grupas produktivitāti un efektivitāti, prasmīgi deleģējot uzdevumus

Veikt vidēja lieluma grupas darba plānošanu, un analizēt grupas darba rezultātu, ieskaitot individuālo locekļu veikumu

Sekmīgi izmantot komunikācijas līdzekļus grupas darba mērķa sasniegšanai

Uzlabot darba grupas produktivitāti un efektivitāti stresa situācijā

Uzņemties iniciatīvu grupas darbā

-2   3   8   13   18

Secinājumi:

Lai gan liela daļa pasniedzēju izmanto grupu darbu savu kursu ietvaros, taču īsta vērība studiju rezultāta "*prasmi strādāt komandā (iesk. iniciatīvas uzņemšanās)*" sasniegšanai pievērsta netiek.

Jautājumi pašpārbaudei:

Vai šis ir apmierinošs rezultāts?

Jautājumi diskusijai:

1. Vai aptaujas rezultāti saskan ar Bakalaura studiju programmas: „Starptautiskā ekonomika un komercdiplomātija" absolventa vīziju?
2. Vai starp aptaujā minētajiem studiju rezultātiem ir studiju rezultāti, kuru sasniegšana nav būtiska?
3. Vai ir studiju rezultāti, kurus vajadzētu noteikti pievienot?
4. Vai šāda aptauja, pie visu pasniedzēju aptaujāšanas, ļautu strādāt pie studiju programmas uzlabošanas?
5. Vai nepieciešams aptaujāt absolventus, lai gūtu priekšstatu par viņu izpratni par sasniegtajiem studiju rezultātiem?