European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Case Study: Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania)

Recognising non-formal and informal learning within university studies

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1 INTRODUCTION

The “Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning at University Studies” project1 (hereafter ‘the project’) was implemented by Mykolas Romeris University in Lithuania, in cooperation with three other Lithuanian universities: Klaipeda University, Siauliai University and Vytautas Magnus University. The project took place between May 2006 and April 2008 and was supported financially by the EU Structural funds and the state national budget. The overall aim of the project was to develop a system of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, for the award of academic credit relating to university studies.

This case study is interesting for several reasons. It provides an example of how non-formal and informal learning is being integrated within higher education studies in Lithuania; it gives an early indication of the benefits and challenges involved in introducing a new system of recognition of non-formal and informal learning and provides new insights into how traditional assessment tools and methods can be adapted to new circumstances and aims.

As an outcome of the project, a system of recognising non-formal and informal learning at the university was developed and implemented at Mykolas Romeris University in June 2009. The procedure, which became available from the academic year 2009/2010, offers the possibility for individuals to validate their knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning.

2 AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The project objectives included:

- To analyse available successful practices in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning in European universities and beyond (notably the US and Canada);
- To undertake a survey on adults’ needs to have their non-formal and informal learning assessed and recognised at the university in the four largest regions of the country;
- To develop a system of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning at the university;
- To present the system for scrutiny by international experts;
- To carry out a pilot test of the system at Mykolas Romeris University;
- To prepare methodological and practical recommendations in relation to assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in universities in Lithuania;
- To publish a guidebook for practitioners.

Assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning at universities is still a new concept in Lithuania, therefore a feasibility study was undertaken at the outset of the project to build a clearer picture of the needs and opportunities in this area. More than 1200 respondents participated in the study. The findings indicated that there was a great interest and need for assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in relation to HE. The majority of respondents considered that they had acquired valuable competences and knowledge through professional experience (71%), while a further 57% considered that

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1 Reference No. 2004-ESF-2.4.0-03-05/0086
they had gained this type of learning achievements at various training courses, and 6% through voluntary work.

In addition, the project also developed and tested an e-portfolio as a method of assessment. The pilot test was based on a number of workshops entitled ‘E-portfolio – a register of non-formal and informal learning achievements’. The purpose of these workshops was twofold. First, they had a number of practical aims:

• to introduce workshop participants to new ways being developed in Lithuania to formalise non-formal and informal learning achievements at the university;
• to present the requirements for acquiring university credits in this way;
• to equip the participants with practical knowledge on how to describe learning achievements acquired through non-formal and informal learning environments including paid work experience, training courses, internships, individual learning, and volunteering.

The workshops also had a scientific aim, which was to test the new e-portfolio assessment method. To this end, four learning modules (the module of strategic management, psychology, social work and foreign languages) and sample portfolios were designed for workshop participants in line with the corresponding four Bachelor study programmes delivered at Mykolas Romeris University. The modules contained descriptions of the subject content and requirements, and forms and criteria for the assessment of non-formal and informal learning.

The workshops brought together 80 participants from all around Lithuania who were streamed into four groups according to the area (management, psychology, social work or foreign languages) in which they claimed they had gained valuable knowledge and skills through different learning environments. All participants were provided with the learning materials and sample portfolios according to the learning modules they had chosen.

The workshops were run in two phases: the first phase was the delivery of the actual workshops (six workshops, making 12 academic/contact hours) held at Mykolas Romeris University and the second phase was 20 hours of e-mail consultations with lecturers.

In addition to the general information on assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, the workshops focused on the development of an e-portfolio – a method which either on its own or combined with other assessment methods is integrated within the assessment procedure. Workshop participants were introduced to the purpose of the e-portfolio, its structure, and the requirements for its development. The practical part of the workshop included the development of an expanded CV and a reflective self-assessment of skills and knowledge gained through various learning contexts. For one month after the workshops, lecturers provided counselling email consultations to workshop participants – reviewed their e-portfolios at various development stages, and provided guidance on the presentation of acquired knowledge and skills to seek academic credits in the future.

3 THE VALIDATION PROCEDURE

As a result of the project, Mykolas Romeris University has offered possibilities for individuals to validate their knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning since the academic year 2009/2010.

Potential groups of applicants include:

• adults without a HE qualification in the field they have worked in for at least five years;
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• adults with a HE qualification but working in a different area than their qualification for at least five years;
• adults who dropped out of HE studies but want to return to a university; and unemployed adults, if they have previously gained valuable work experience or have taken up other learning opportunities.

Applicants must have completed general secondary education, possess at least five years of professional experience in the field concerned and must provide evidence of their non-formal and informal learning achievements and how they map to academic credits according to a chosen study programme at the University.

Achievements that can be validated are those gained through paid work experience, unpaid and voluntary work, individual learning, visits abroad (e.g. traineeships, internships and various courses), and leisure activities.

The main actors involved in the delivery of the validation procedure at the university are as follows:

The monitoring group of assessors: This group is usually made up of administrative staff.

Advisers: Members of the monitoring group take on the role of advisers, and work with the candidate to help him / her to reflect on his / her work experience and to identify and describe his / her skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

Assessors: This role is usually carried out by a subject expert from the relevant faculty.

The Commission / Council: The Commission is usually made up of permanent members and case-by-case members who are specialists in the relevant study programmes.

The system of assessment and recognition (which is presented in graphical form in Annex 1), consists of four functional parts: administration, monitoring, assessment and audit.

The assessment process (presented in graphical form in Annex 2) consists of two stages: 1) preparation for the assessment and 2) the assessment itself. The preparation stage includes support for the candidate to identify and describe relevant learning achievements for the assessment model selected; the development of a concrete action plan helping an adult to demonstrate acquired learning; and support him / her to prepare and present all necessary evidence for the assessment procedure. The assessment itself starts with an analysis of the assessment plan and its consistency; then the assessment of all presented evidence and the provision of feedback to the candidate; the last component is the final assessment and decision on the outcomes.

In detail, the assessment process involves the following stages:

- Stage 1 - application and information. The candidate receives all necessary information in relation to the process of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning at the university and is asked to fill in an application form and provide all other required documentation (ID card, acquired degree diplomas, etc.) for an initial administrative screening. If the person is considered to be sufficiently qualified to take forward the assessment procedure, a personal file containing all initial information is referred to the so-called ‘Monitoring Group of Assessors’ to assess the applicants’ potential against assessment requirements.

- Stage 2 - analysis of initial candidate information. The application file is assessed by the a monitoring group or a person responsible for the monitoring who works permanently in that position (in MRU case it is a person from administration) against the study programmes offered by the university. The outcome of the assessment is a decision on the applicant’s feasibility and potential to have his / her competences recognised by the university. In addition, the applicant’s general potential to undertake a university degree in
the future and ability to manage his / her own study pathway and deliver assignments is also gauged at this stage.

- **Stage 3 – an initial interview with the candidate and assessment against the selected study programme.** The overall objective of this assessment stage is to assess whether the application corresponds to the assessment requirements and the content of the selected diploma (module), i.e. whether the applicant's achievements gained through non-formal and informal learning can match the required outcomes of the study programme. The same assessment standards are applied to all students, i.e. students of full-time, part-time, extramural or modular studies, or candidates willing to validate their non-formal and informal learning. The first interview is carried out by the monitoring group to see whether the person corresponds to the requirements and has enough evidence to prove the achievements gained outside the university.

- **Stage 4 – Monitoring Group (further interviews).** This group carries out further interviews with the candidate and helps him/her to prepare a portfolio for assessment. This part of the assessment process consists of another two stages. In the first stage, information provided by the candidate is sorted and grouped into different domains enabling the development of an individual portfolio containing lists of competences in different areas. If the person has a question for a particular specialist/ subject teacher, it is the duty of a monitor/ advisor to help him/her find a solution. An adviser, who is a person from the monitoring group, works with the candidate throughout this entire process to help him/her to reflect on his/her working experience and therefore identify and describe the skills and knowledge gained through non-formal and informal learning. The process takes account of variety of learning contexts such as the applicant's working environment, his / her achievements at work and the type of activities undertaken – everything that might have directly influenced the acquired learning. The adviser then discusses with the candidate the way forward and the second stage of this process is focused on providing assistance for the candidate to prepare his /her individual portfolio, which constitutes the formal documentation for the assessment procedure. At this stage the information provided by the candidate is revised and edited. When this stage is completed, the Monitoring Group hands in all documents of the candidate to a group of assessment experts.

- **Stage 5 – expert assessment.** Each university faculty has a person responsible for training courses and professional development. This person is also the reference point for the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning for the Monitoring Group. They identify subject experts from the faculty, who will be able to undertake the assessment in their competence area. Usually the Monitoring Group then hands in the fully developed individual file (which includes the portfolio) to the proposed subject expert, who within 14 days reviews the individual file, fills in the form of report of the assessment procedure and provides feedback to the individual. Three outcomes are possible: 1) credit award for competences gained through different learning environments, 2) if the expert states that there are certain gaps in the evidence provided by the candidate in his / her portfolio, the candidate is given some extra time to prepare for the second assessment round. In this case additional assessment method is decided upon and an assessment date is agreed; 3) if the evidence provided by the candidate is not grounded or does not correspond to the level of learning outcomes required at the university, the candidate's claim for credit is rejected and credits are not awarded. In the latter case the candidate is provided with detailed explanation of the reasons for his / her failure so that he / she can go through the assessment procedure at some time in the future.

Among the assessment methods used alongside the portfolio method are formal examinations, presentations, practical assignments, interviews etc. If the subject expert is undertaking an assessment for the first time, he/she receives a short training from the Monitoring Group on the procedure, the requirements and the key aspects of the process before the assessment is carried out. Sometimes other people may also participate in the assessment, for instance a faculty dean, a deputy dean for studies of the faculty or an
external expert. It is not very common to invite a practitioner. This is more required, for instance, in natural sciences, engineering or medicine, rather than the subjects for which validation can be undertaken at MRU.

The main aim of the subject specialist is to analyse the learning contexts of the applicant and to examine the candidate’s proof of his / her learning achievements presented in the portfolio. Within 14 days after the assessment takes place, the expert has to provide feedback on the assessment results and recommendations. There are again two possible outcomes: if there are certain gaps which prevent the candidate from being awarded academic credits, detailed recommendations on the knowledge he/she still needs to improve before returning for re-assessment are provided or, if the decision is partial recognition of achievements, the candidate is offered to continue his / her studies by choosing the most appropriate type of studies available at the University. In contrast to the practice in some universities (for instance, in Canada), it is not obligatory for the candidate to stay at the university and undertake an additional number of credits after the assessment procedure is completed. The candidate is free either to stay and proceed towards a full HE degree at MRU or can decide on other learning and career development pathways. Then the expert recommendation to recognise the candidate’s non-formal and informal learning is reviewed by the study commission committee and on the approval of the committee a certification is issued by the University Rector’s order, i.e. the experts/subject teachers decide whether to award the credits and it is the duty of a study commission committee to give the final approval before the rector signs the certification. This last stage of approval of the experts’ decision by the Committee is short in most cases, unless the complexity of the case requires more procedural actions to be taken (Stage 6, described below).

- **Stage 6 – the Commission / Council.** Usually the Commission consists of permanent members (for instance, the head of the university unit responsible for lifelong learning, a faculty dean, or deputy-dean for studies etc.) and case-by-case members (specialists of different study programmes). The Commission is responsible for approving the composition of the assessment experts’ group², reviewing assessment results and providing recommendations. In some cases, before taking a final decision, the Commission invites the candidate for a short interview. Then it either approves, rejects or adjusts the response which becomes the final decision. The final decision is then processed by the administrative group and is then presented to the candidate. Award of a certain number of academic credits, or part of them and / or recommendations for further possibilities are the final possible outcomes of the assessment process.

- **Stage 7 – implementation of concrete recommendations.** In case the Commission / the subject expert recommends partial recognition of the candidate’s competences, it / the expert provides concrete recommendations to the candidate on the skills and knowledge that he/she still needs to acquire in order to achieve a full diploma and recommends ways of doing so. The list of subjects which will be included in the diploma, its content and terms are discussed with the candidate and / or his/her organisation, if the Commission is interested in the employee’s education / qualifications. In a meeting the following aspects are discussed: work that needs to be done (e.g. a project, or a traineeship, practical assignments that would be used to prepare a presentation, a file, or final course thesis); results that are expected to be delivered and required resources (such as tutoring, assistance, documentation etc.) and timeframes. After that, the candidate may renew the process of assessment and recognition to acquire a full university degree. If the candidate decides to proceed towards a full university degree or acquire additional credits, the Monitoring Group helps him/her to implement proposed recommendations, provides counselling services in relation to further study forms according to an individual study plan.

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² The monitoring group does not assess because the people involved in that group are usually administrative staff and the experts are the subject teachers who have competences in a particular subject field.
If required, there is a possibility to submit an appeal which will be examined in accordance with the appeals procedure established at the University.

4 ASSESSMENT METHODS

Among the assessment methods that can be used throughout the assessment process are: portfolio presenting a collection of evidence from work experience, interviews, examinations, case studies, observation, preparation of a business plan, practical assignments, simulation and testing (for both knowledge and practical skills). These are usually used in a combined way, where a portfolio is always the first and additional methods are used on a case-by-case basis. As an example, Annex 3 presents a graphical representation of a validation process, which uses combined assessment methods (portfolio and an interview / examinations). A graphical representation of a standard portfolio procedure is included in Annex 4 (Portfolio Assessment Module).

5 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION PROCESS

So far, quality assurance systems / procedures have been developed and applied individually by two universities in Lithuania providing assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning opportunities. Quality assurance mechanisms at MRU are embedded within the entire assessment procedure. For instance, the assessment and recognition procedure itself was assessed and approved by both national and international experts; information files for applicants and a guidebook for practitioners were developed and published to ensure the consistency of the process; training was organised for the assessors; and professional counselling services are provided for all applicants throughout the entire assessment and recognition process. The monitoring group provides an overall quality assurance for the entire process, including the information given to candidates, guidance on the process, training of assessors, the development of a candidate’s portfolio, etc.

If required, the assessment process may include both internal and external subject experts. Permanent members of the Committee ensure qualitative continuity, whereas case-by-case members ensure that there is flexibility and specific competence in the process. Formal control instruments are also very important in this respect – the regular assessment and recognition procedure includes internal and external audit components providing quality checks on different assessment and recognition aspects. Internal audit reviews the appeal applications at various stages of the assessment and recognition procedure, ensures the qualification of the assessors and that appropriate assessment methods are used, whereas external audit is undertaken according to university rules in relation to the overall quality of studies at the particular university (usually undertaken by an external body called Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras3).

6 COSTS AND BENEFITS

It is too early to make observations on the benefits to individuals or institutions, but available qualitative evidence suggests that some of the potential perceived benefits of the validation process are:

- shorter timeframes for acquiring a HE diploma for applicants,

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3 For more information about the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education please refer to: http://www.skvc.lt/en/
new flows of students with a rich work experience,
new lifelong learning opportunities,
recognition of practical skills and knowledge and further career development for the candidates,
the introduction of an e-portfolio.

In relation to costs, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning offered by the education and training providers require a financial contribution by the individual. At MRU one common basic administration fee is applied for every application submitted; then a second fee is based on the volume and level of study programme credits applied for. The actual overall fee is not high and is always much lower than the fee for study programme credits / modules offered by education providers as part of formal education study programmes. For instance, at the moment at MRU one programme credit currently costs 130 Litas (about EUR 38)\(^4\).

The present fees only cover the actual administrative costs, with little resource available for marketing initiatives, which for a new initiative as such within the national context are of ultimate importance. The effectiveness of awareness-raising activities was observed after two special radio programmes were dedicated to the Project in 2006 and 2008. Within only a number of few days the project organisers were able to raise substantial interest from people who had registered, willing to have their non-formal and informal learning assessed and recognised.

It is also worth mentioning that according to the Project’s timeframe, the system had to be developed by the end of 2008 and there was an EU Structural Funds requirement to make the process free of charge in the first year after the implementation, which was 2009.

After the completion of the Project its coordinators initiated the process of implementation of the system at MRU. University authorities supported the idea and the Senate issued an order that became the starting point of the implementation process. Due to internal procedures, the system was fully implemented in June 2009 and has been offered for use since the academic year 2009-2010 (i.e. September 2010). This meant that only one person has so far been fast enough to complete the procedure free of charge. As mentioned above, at MRU one programme credit costs around EUR 38 at the moment\(^5\), in addition to a small administration fee for every application.

There are no direct financial compensations foreseen for the experts involved in the assessment and recognition procedure but their input is acknowledged within an annual self-assessment form, which is later taken into account for salary rewards.

7 RESULTS, OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

As indicated above, the main results of the Project are scientific and practical, including a thorough analysis of other countries’ experience in validating non-formal and informal learning at the university; representative research into adults’ needs to have their non-formal and informal learning assessed and recognised at the university carried out in four major regions of Lithuania followed by the publication of scientific articles in national scientific journals cited internationally (see list of literature and Annex 6: Methodological Material, Delivered by the Project); the design and testing of the system of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning at Mykolas Romeris University; and the publication of a guidebook for practitioners willing to implement the procedure of

\(^4\) i.e. October 2010.
\(^5\) i.e. October 2010.
The major outcome of the Project is the implementation of the procedure of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning at MRU a year after the Project was completed. MRU is the second university in Lithuania which since September 2009 has started the formalisation of non-formal and informal learning.

However, financial aspects have become an issue for the project’s sustainability. For instance, mainly due to the economic situation, especially since the economic downturn which hit Lithuania at the end of 2008 – beginning of 2009 and beyond and which coincided with the take-off of the implementation of the procedure at MRU, from an initial number of 80 candidates willing to participate in the assessment and recognition procedure in 2008, only 19 remained in October 2010, with only four actually completing the validation procedure. Most of the candidates have postponed their intentions to have their non-formal and informal learning assessed and recognised because of restricted personal finances. A number have emigrated from the country, while others are waiting for an improved financial situation.

Although the numbers of people who have actually completed the assessment and recognition procedure to date are low, personal stories of the four people who have completed the procedure successfully to date are very rewarding and suggest that the system has a great potential for success in the future. The project has so far benefitted older workers in the main. For instance, one of the beneficiaries was a woman in her early 60s, with a degree in nursing, who has run her own wood processing company for the last ten years. Although she had a lot of practical experience on how to run a successful company, she did not have a university degree in management. Using the assessment and recognition procedure, at MRU she has had her learning achievements assessed and recognised in seven management subjects totalling to the award of 26 academic credits. She was so happy with the outcome that she decided to acquire full university degree in management. Another woman in her early 60s was working as an administrator in a hotel with some responsibility for staff when she decided to come and have her knowledge assessed and recognised. Among the main motivating factors was the fact that she wanted to be given more responsibility and a higher position at work as a manager, because of her years of experience in this sector, but she was unable to do so due to her lack of formal qualifications in this area. The degree she gained years ago was in tailoring and was of little help for the current work that she enjoyed so much. She has had her learning achievements assessed and recognised in three subjects in management (interpersonal conflicts, HR management and English for specific purposes) making in total 10 academic credits. After that she was offered better career opportunities at work. Another woman in her early 50s had dropped out of university studies years ago. Assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning gave her a second chance to acquire a HE degree within a shorter timeframe. The fourth beneficiary, a man his late 40s, decided to have his knowledge assessed and recognised in order to gain better career and salary prospects. He was a valuable employee within a successful IT company and although being keen on computers from his early professional career, he never actually pursued a formal diploma due to his family circumstances. He had reached a role where further career prospects are very limited without formal certification. This is why he decided to undergo the procedure of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. He passed seven subjects of the Business Informatics programme, gaining 24 academic credits in total. He surprised assessors by his excellent professional knowledge. He also decided to pursue a HE diploma in the future.

In terms of the workshops carried out to pilot an e-portfolio method, the majority of the participants considered the process to be very well organised and informative. Based on feedback provided by the participants, around 95% have improved their practical skills for the development of an e-portfolio and an expanded CV; around 98% felt they had an
increased awareness of the assessment and recognition possibilities available to them and the associated requirements for candidates; with a further 90% stating that based on the training they were given, they would be able to develop and present for assessment and recognition their non-formal and informal learning achievements. According to specialists that provided advisory assistance to the workshop participants by email, the majority of them provided very good descriptions in their e-portfolios and around half of them could apply for university credits for their accumulated knowledge and skills straight away.

In addition, a monograph on assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning at the university was published by the project coordinators in October 2010. Recently Klaipeda University, which was a partner in the Project, has made initial steps to implement the system at their university as well.

It is too early to talk about a wider impact. However there is enough evidence that the project has made a contribution towards further developments in the field. In May 2010 the Minister for Education and Science has established an expert group to prepare a draft of recommendations for assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning within HEIs in Lithuania. The recommendations drafted by the work group were officially adopted and an Order by the Minister was issued in December 2010. The MRU project coordinators were part of that group, which allowed them to share their accumulated experience with decision-makers in education policy.

8 SUCCESS FACTORS

There were several conditions which needed to be in place for the project to be successful, including a dedicated and knowledgeable project team; internal support from the university; information dissemination and marketing; providing individual assistance and support for the candidates throughout the entire assessment and recognition process, providing training to the assessors, etc. The project has also shown that trust is vitally important in order for an assessment and recognition system to succeed.

Re-designing study programmes in terms of learning outcomes and competencies had an ultimate importance for the development and successful implementation of the system, as did the provision of individualised assistance for every candidate throughout the entire procedure.

Overall, the system which has been designed is considered to be robust and trustworthy. It has helped to create new possibilities for lifelong learning and more openness within the HE system. Adapting one of the main assessment methods used in assessment of non-formal and informal learning - the e-portfolio - to the Internet age (by creating an e-portfolio) is also an innovative outcome of the Project.

Further detailed insights into the project coordinators recommendations for aspects that are important for a successful system for assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning can be found in Annex 5.

9 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AND LESSONS LEARNED

Initial challenges for the project were related to the lack of awareness about the role, goals, challenges and benefits of the system of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in relation to HEIs among members of the academia. This was overcome by providing more information on the topic, training the assessors and having robust quality

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assurance mechanisms in place. As noted above, a considerable challenge was the drop in
demand for the assessment and recognition, which resulted in part from the economic
downturn. Information dissemination and marketing is another big challenge for the Project
to succeed in the future.

As the initiative is innovative in the national context, other national-level developments in
relation to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning took place at the same time,
or after the project had ended. For instance, work has started to re-design the Lithuanian
formal education system in terms of learning outcomes, competence-based approaches
and to create a modularised structure of qualifications. A comprehensive NQF is currently
being prepared. The Government Decision on the Lithuanian Qualifications’ Structure was
adopted in May 2010\(^7\), describing the content of eight levels of national qualifications.

Yet the Lithuanian HE sector is still at an early stage regarding the use of a learning-
outcomes based approach for qualifications. University curricula in Lithuania largely refer to
inputs and are so far oriented towards the time spent in formal learning and/or credits
achieved by the individual to date. In spring 2009, Mykolas Romeris University became one
of the first universities in the country to re-design its study programmes in terms of learning
outcomes and competence-based approaches. According to the project coordinators, this
had great importance for the implementation of the assessment and recognition system\(^8\).

A national project for the implementation of the ECTS system has been launched in 2010,
aiming to re-design the national system of credits in higher education on the basis of ECTS,
which may facilitate the use of learning outcomes in defining higher education degrees and
qualifications. It is expected that all these developments will contribute towards better
acceptance of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning on a wider scale.

\section*{10 CONCLUSIONS}

This initiative provides good insights into assessment and recognition of non-formal and
informal learning in relation to the university-level qualifications. The model developed as a
result of the project is based on a wide analysis of successful assessment and recognition
initiatives available in Europe and beyond, which were adapted to the national context and
to take account of new technological possibilities (i.e. through the creation of an e-portfolio).
The results achieved so far and ‘personal stories’ of the candidates involved promise
greater success in the future, as a result of this innovative pilot project.

However, challenges encountered were related to lack of awareness about the role, goals,
challenges and benefits of the system of assessment and recognition of non-formal and
informal learning in relation to HEIs among members of the academia, as well as the
financial sustainability. For instance, there was a drop in demand for the assessment and
recognition, resulting in part from the economic downturn, which hindered the overall
success of the project. These aspects shall be taken into account by every similar initiative
at their outset. Appropriate planning for information dissemination and marketing once the
programme is up and running is a key and also need to be taken into account for
sustainable benefits to be achieved.

\footnote{\(^7\) Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės nutarimas “Dėl Lietuvos kvalifikacijų sandaros aprašo patvirtinimo”. 2010 m. gegužės 4 d. Nr. 535. Internet: \url{http://www.lrvk.lt/bylos/Teises_aktai/2010/05/15258.doc} .}

\footnote{\(^8\) Interview with Dr. Nijolė Burkšaitienė, Head of Study Department (Deputy Vice-Rector), Academic Affairs Centre, Mykolas Romeris University. October 2010.}
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ANNEX 1. VALIDATION SYSTEM OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

ADMINISTRATION
- Providing information in the centre
- Receiving documents, filling in the application forms
- Providing all the necessary documents
- Order signed by the Rector of the university
- Award of academic credits/full diploma

MONITORING
- Examining of applications; The evaluation of correspondence of study programme; Reaching the decision to continue the procedure
- Preparing the portfolio; Consulting, Teaching/courses how to prepare for the assessment
- Help for the candidate to implement recommendations
- Suggestions for the candidate on further study forms and available study pathways

ASSESSMENT
- Providing documents to the monitoring group; Providing documents to the experts.
- Choosing the methods of assessment; Appointing the date of assessment
- Detailed analysis of portfolio; Examining; Decision of experts.
- Assessment and decision of commission/council
- Evaluation of experts’ qualification/programmes/methods of assessment

AUDIT
- Institutional audit: Examining the appeals
- External audit: Assessment of study quality
- Evaluation of experts’ qualification/programmes/methods of assessment
ANNEX 2. ASSESSMENT STAGES OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Stage 1
Reception-information

Stage 2
Analysis of initial candidate’s information

Stage 3
The first interview – correspondence of the study programme

Stage 4
Monitoring Group (further interviews)

Stage 5
Experts

Stage 6
Commission / Council

Stage 7
Implementation of recommendations

Sorting and selection of information

Editing, revising and finalising of documents

Appeals

ANNEX 3. 2ND PHASE OF A COMBINED ASSESSMENT MODEL (PORTFOLIO – INTERVIEW; PORTFOLIO-EXAMINATION)

Setting interview / examination date → Feedback analysis of the 1st assessment phase → Candidature’s preparation for the interview / examination → Consulting a candidate

Additional preparation of the candidate → Participation in an interview / examination → Assessors’ decision → Assessment feedback to the candidate

Submission of appeals → Reviewing of submitted appeals → Final decision


9 For more information on 1st assessment phase (portfolio) in a combined assessment model please refer to ANNEX 4: Portfolio Assessment Model.
ANNEX 4. PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT MODEL

Introduction to the portfolio requirements → Self-assessment of learning achievements → Identification of the study field in which academic credits will be sought

Analysis of module descriptions of study programmes where academic credits will be sought → Accumulation of evidence of non-formal and informal learning → Formalisation and description of non-formal and informal learning achievements

Portfolio development; Portfolio structuring according to acquired evidence → Portfolio submission for the assessment → Portfolio assessment

ANNEX 5. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of the system of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning</th>
<th>Practical recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guidance on assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning shall include:</td>
<td>- To provide consultation on further career opportunities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Information about the study programmes/study courses on offer;</td>
<td>- Individual assistance to select study programmes and filling in documentation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Information about assessment requirements and standards.</td>
<td>- Personalised assistance for identifying learning achievements;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Describing all learning achievements;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- To provide a short introduction to the learning module/subject (for instance, a booklet about the study course).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>- To provide individual consultations;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- To prepare booklets, brochures and posters;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- To organise information events;</td>
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<td>- To organise preparation workshops;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Considerable attention to marketing;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- To undertake a comparative analysis of validation systems available in other HEIs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistance to the candidate</td>
<td>- To offer individual consultations, to provide advice on further career opportunities;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- To prepare a guidebook and practical recommendations for candidates on identification of non-formal and informal learning achievements;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- To organise training courses for candidates on how to describe learning achievements;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- To provide assistance and support throughout an entire assessment process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Application form</td>
<td>- To provide a self-assessment form or a ‘check list’ for candidates helping them to gather all necessary documentation;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- To prepare a simple and brief application form, detailed instructions and questions;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- To prepare guidelines on how to prepare a portfolio of one’s learning achievements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment process</td>
<td>- To prepare for an interactive process when a candidate and an expert together discuss candidate’s application;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | - To foresee participation of an assisting
personnel in the assessment and recognition process;
- To provide various combinations of evidence: presentations, photos, copies, duplicates, documents, templates, samples etc.
- To review a portfolio and examine provided evidence;
- To undertake expert assessment in accordance with approved assessment methods and requirements;
- To provide expert's decision to a committee / a council for final approval;
- To develop a system for appeals.

ANNEX 6. METHODOLOGICAL MATERIAL, DELIVERED BY THE PROJECT


