

REFINE National report: Czech Republic (tool testing)

Introduction

Within the first year of REFINE project we did tool testing in Czech republic in co-operation with associated partners. Process of testing we divided into two phases and after the first parts we did some small, but necessary changes of tool. Both phases are described bellow.

FIRST PHASE

1. Current situation in the Czech Republic in the area of recognition and assessment of informal, non-formal and formal learning

In Czech Republic doesn't exist National policy adopted for implementation of the system for recognition and assessment of prior learning.

The 1998 Higher Education Act states that higher education institutions may provide lifelong learning programmes within the framework of their educational activity, either free of charge or in return for payment. Lifelong learning may be either vocationally oriented or follow personal interests. The detailed conditions to which it is subject are stipulated in internal regulations which must be provided in advance to all prospective participants. Higher education institutions issue certificates to all those who graduate from lifelong learning programmes. Those who receive lifelong learning forms of provision are not students under the 1998 Act, which means that they cannot be awarded any academic degree. If those who graduate from lifelong learning programs of this kind become students under the Act, a higher education institution may recognize up to 60 % of the credits they have already obtained as a result of such provision.

In Czech Republic is very little development of procedures for the recognition of learning that goes on outside the HE sector and little mutual understanding between sectors or institutions in the same sector. The Country Report for Czech Republic written by 6 professionals from Czech Republic is one of a series of European country reports. It has been written to support a larger report: Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the contribution of VET, prepared by the Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium for the European Commission. Authors of this report say: „There has not been any progress in the CR as regards integration of formal and non-formal education. Certification in initial education lacks links to continuing education outside the schooling system. The issue of certification of competencies acquired in a non-formal manner has yet been addressed systematically. School directors may only recognize, on the basis of documents presented, the applicant's qualifications acquired in the formal system. Although the new education bill provides more opportunities of recognizing non-formal

qualifications, the decision is still at the discretion of the relevant school director. So-called "balanced diagnostic" centers have been established at labour offices. Their task is to assess the overall potential and competencies of an individual and recommend what job or training opportunities should be offered to him/her. However, labour offices normally fail to make further use of the work of these centers, which could provide valuable experience and play an important role in recognizing the outcomes of non-formal learning. A law on lifelong (continuing) learning is currently in the making. It should address, in a coherent manner, the issue of recognizing non-formal education as part of acquiring qualifications at various levels. The foundation for this should be provided by a system of evaluation standards for various disciplines, which should be applied both in examinations within the formal education system and for the purpose of recognizing competencies acquired in a non-formal manner." Even if authors of this report say that this is not intended as an official view, but rather independent insight into specific aspects of National VET system, we have to say that this is very realistic picture of present situation in Czech Republic.

2. Testing carried out by Business School Ostrava (university sector)

2.1 Description of used tools and process of testing

Portfolio evaluation questionnaire for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR). This questionnaire has three parts: A- prior learning as result of work experience (informal learning, B – prior learning as result of non-formal learning, C – prior learning as result of formal learning (ECTS as an independent tool). The candidates filled up questionnaire (including relevant Annexes) as written part of testing forms and after that they had face to face meeting with PLAR advisor as oral part of testing.

2.2 Results of the testing and the comments

Testers describe strengths of the tool as:

- transparent,
- well structured,
- simple to be work with,
- using well understandable terminology,
- using module and courses codes for assessment of learning outcomes,
- making transparent distinction between different forms of learning (informal, non-formal and formal) in the questionnaire,
- enabling separate description of different competences independently in different forms of prior learning,
- enabling systematic approach for recognition and assessment of prior learning.

Testers describe weaknesses of the tool as:

- differences between credit systems of different HE institutions cause problems with using Part C of the tool (ECTS as independent tool is used here),
- lack of comparability of results of formal learning as result of above mentioned point,
- tool don't contain or is not connected with instructions enabling deeper insight and understanding of whole problematic and process, some candidates of older generation are not used to think on outcomes of informal and non-formal learning and are not used to distinguish and identify results of prior learning (especially informal learning), so candidates need help and further explanation in filling up questionnaire.

Testers comments:

There is necessity for change of unification of credit systems of HE institutions with standards of ECTS or further developing of the tool for recognition of formal learning (Part C) as learning outcomes orientated. Some candidates are not able to describe learning outcomes in non-formal and especially informal prior learning – this is mentioned also and with more details in weaknesses of the tool. In some cases was testing very complicated, because of candidate`s negative approach to informal learning, results of informal learning were by them taken as "second rated". If the tool should be widely used there is necessity to increase advisory system for candidates.

Candidates comments:

It was interesting occasion for self-evaluation and possibility to think on life experience and previous learning. For some candidates is in situation when meeting with completely new method and tool important to know experience of institution providing recognition and assessment of prior learning.

3. Testing carried out by Association World of Education (adult education sector)

3.1 Description of used tools and process of testing

Portfolio evaluation questionnaire for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR). This questionnaire has three parts: A- prior learning as result of work experience (informal learning, B – prior learning as result of non-formal learning, C – prior learning as result of formal learning (ECTS as an independent tool). The candidates filled up questionnaire (including relevant Annexes) as written part of testing forms and after that they had face to face meeting with PLAR advisor as oral part of testing.

3.2 Results of the testing and the comments

Testers describe strengths of the tool as:

- transparent and well structured tool,
- enabling assessment of all kinds of prior learning,
- enabling transfer of relevant parts of formal learning,

- tool has strong motivation element for further personal development,
- in cases when candidate is able without problems to describe learning outcomes the tool gives good basis for not only for recognition but for transfer into formal learning also,
- tool enabling assessment and identifying of level of work experience.

Testers describe weaknesses of the tool as:

- causing problems of candidates to distinguish learning outcomes of prior learning in annexes (I know - knowledge/ I am able -skills/ I got - summation , especially with the last one) some candidates has problems to distinguish between knowledge and skills,
- tool is not enabling to describe experience out of work place,
- for some candidates is the tool too complicated.

Testers comments:

The tool and process of recognition and assessment of prior learning works as strong motivation factor for further learning and education, it is showing us new possibility of using this, for example in work on motivation programmes for unemployed. The tools for recognition and assessment of prior learning could be then used also as part of process for personal balance diagnostics. Most of candidates has problems to describe summation of learning outcomes (I got) and it show us necessity to transform the part describing learning outcomes. On the other hand in case when the candidate is able to describe outcomes of prior learning then and distinguish between (I know/ I am able / I got), the tool is well distinguishing between results of informal and non-formal learning. It happens in cases when the candidates went through some kind of higher education (further education college or university education) in near past (aprox. Not more than 3 years) or the candidate could be indicated as member of "younger generation".

Candidates comments:

Candidate understands this as very practical tool, which can ensure effective system for accumulation of lifelong learning. Some candidates feel problems with describing of work experience in learning outcomes, but some candidates appreciate possibilities for validation of prior learning and possibility of concretization of learning outcomes of informal and nonformal learning. Candidates appreciate possibilities for self-evaluation and identification of "pure" areas which should be further developed (in the sense of learning and education) also. One candidate has got fear that she will not go through concrete courses or modules once her prior learning is recognized and assessed in this concrete area, the "information hunger" and will to learn is very visible here.

4. Conclusions and comparisons for the first phase

If we will go through strengths and weaknesses of the tool and comments of testers and candidates to make comparisons between two sectors where testing was provided, we could find this conclusion:

1. **Description of strengths** of the tool by testers in both sectors is **very similar** as above mentioned.

2. **Description of weaknesses** of the tool by testers in both sectors is **similar in the case when necessity of instructions enabling deeper insight and understanding of whole problematic and process**. This is because some candidates are not used to think on outcomes of informal and non-formal learning and are not used to distinguish and identify results of prior learning (especially informal learning), so candidates need help and further explanation. We can find some **differences between descriptions of weaknesses** by testers in both sectors. Weaknesses in university sector are orientated on problems with **differences between credit systems of different HE institutions** which causes problems with transferability of formal learning (ECTS as independent tool is used here). Weaknesses in adult education sector are orientated on **problems of candidates to distinguish learning outcomes of prior learning**.

3. For candidates tested in **university sector** is important **experience of institution providing recognition and assessment of prior learning**. But we could expect that this will be important in all sectors.

4. **Important “side effect” of the tool in adult education sector** - the tool and process of recognition and assessment of prior learning works as **strong motivation factor for further learning and education**, it is showing us new possibility of using this, for example in work on motivation programmes for unemployed. The tools for recognition and assessment of prior learning could be then used also as part of process for personal balance diagnostics.

For further development of the tool it means:

- using of the tool have to be connected more with some kind of introduction seminar which will give candidates deeper insight and understanding of whole problematic and process;

- we cannot expect significant development in further unification of credit systems in HE institutions, anyway even if this will happen it will not assure that the same courses and modules will contain the same learning outcomes, that is why the further development of the tool in transfer of formal learning should be orientated on learning outcomes as part of candidate`s portfolio (tool);

- the part describing learning outcomes should be transformed (part describing summative learning outcomes which causes most problems is not necessary and could be taken off);

- add into the tool part enabling recognition of experience out of work place.

For further discussion in the framework of recognition and transfer of prior learning in Czech Republic it means:

We could see a little development in orientation of study programs in HE, this should go on and it should take place also in lower levels of formal education. That way we could recognize and transfer results of formal

learning. It is not so visible from the testing finished (LLL programs of World of education are developed on the basis of description of learning outcomes), but institutions providing activities in non-formal learning (adult education, education provided by employers, etc.) should more take into consideration development of their education and training activities on the basis of description of learning outcomes. On the other hand institution in the area of formal leaning (which could also provide non-formal learning activities) could work more on the orientation of their activities not only for development of knowledge, but for development of (practical and work orientated) skills (as provided by sectors of adult, employers etc education), as most of this development happened in VET in the near past. This could help in recognition of non-formal learning and transfer between formal learning. As far as this will be developed the influence on recognition of informal learning is possible. The connection with providing valid information explaining framework of recognition and transfer of prior learning for all citizens will strengthen further development in this area. In the light of above mentioned it looks that the Portfolio as a tool for recognition and assessment of candidate`s prior learning could further developed and used. In the market orientated society this tool could be used not only by state offices with very passive approach (as in introduction of this report mentioned) but also as competitive advantage used by educational providers to motivate citizens for further learning and education. That is why the legislative changes (as mentioned in introduction of this report) are expected and highly welcomed, and development of National policy for implementation of the system for recognition and assessment of prior learning necessary.

SECOND PHASE

1. Description of used tools and process of testing including tool and process changes

Portfolio evaluation questionnaire for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR). This questionnaire has three parts: A- prior learning as result of work experience (informal learning, B – prior learning as result of non-formal learning, C – prior learning as result of formal learning (ECTS as an independent tool). The candidates filled up questionnaire (including relevant Annexes) as written part of testing forms and after that they had face to face meeting with PLAR advisor as oral part of testing.

Canges: In correspondence with above described weaknesses: “problems of candidates to distinguish learning outcomes of prior learning in annexes (I know - knowledge/ I am able -skills/ I got – summation , especially with the last one)”, we took out after discussion with associated partners and other experts the relevant part of tool (Annexes A, B) – part describing learning outcomes as I got – summation. In correspondence with other described

weaknesses we put more emphasis on counseling for individuals/candidates during the process of recognition.

2. Testing carried out by Regional Economic Chamber Ostrava (trade unions and employers education sector)

2.1 Results of the testing and the comments

Testers describe strengths of the tool as:

- transparent and well structured tool,
- enable summarizing of outcomes of prior learning,
- tool has strong motivation element for further personal development.

Testers describe weaknesses of the tool as:

- using the tool takes too long time,
- tool should enable anonymous using,
- tool is too extensive and detailed.

Testers comments:

For some candidates is description of learning outcomes too difficult, they are not able effectively and individually think about real learning outcomes and need more guidance and counseling.

Candidates comments:

Candidate understands this as very practical tool, which leads at least to thinking of achieved results in lifelong learning. Candidates appreciate possibilities for self-evaluation and identification of "pure" areas which should be further developed (in the sense of learning and education) also.

3. Testing carried out by Intermundia o.p.s. (third sector)

3.1 Results of the testing and the comments

Testers describe strengths of the tool as:

- transparent and well structured tool,
- enable summarizing of outcomes of prior learning,
- tool has strong motivation element for further personal development.

Testers describe weaknesses of the tool as:

- using the tool takes too long time,
- tool should enable anonymous using,
- tool is too extensive and detailed.

Testers comments:

For some candidates is description of learning outcomes too difficult, they are not able effectively and individually think about real learning outcomes and need more guidance and counseling.

Candidates comments:

Candidate understands this as very practical tool, which leads at least to thinking of achieved results in lifelong learning. Candidates appreciate possibilities for self-evaluation and identification of "pure" areas which should be further developed (in the sense of learning and education) also.

Testers describe strengths of the tool as:

- transparent and well structured tool,
- enable summarizing of outcomes of prior learning,
- tool has strong motivation element for further personal development.

Testers describe weaknesses of the tool as:

- using the tool takes too long time,
- tool uses too complicated formulations and questions.

Testers comments:

For some candidates is description of learning outcomes too difficult, they are not able effectively and individually think about real learning outcomes and need more guidance and counseling.

Candidates comments:

For further development of the tool is necessary to identify common understanding of sense of words: I know and I am able. The tool should content the introduction part also, this part should explain whole process, sense of key words, etc. Candidate understands this as very practical tool, which leads at least to thinking of achieved results in lifelong learning. Some candidates has problem to describe results of previous learning at general level and will need practical examples for explanation: candidate have experience with organization of leisure time activities, it could be interpreted as some kind of managerial experience etc.

3. For further development above mentioned means this conclusions for second phase of project:

A. develop set of standards for concrete educational area (managerial skills etc.), as example how to increase better understanding of tool instructions and enable better description of learning outcomes;

B. develop proposal for training program for guiders and assessors (independently) to support process of recognition;

C. develop proposal for workshop for candidates with model situations to support their abilities to describe learning outcomes at general level

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