

Where to obtain additional information

*For additional information
on NVQs contact one of the
following organisations:*

- *CPI – Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (www.cpi.si)*
- *Employment Service of Slovenia (www.ess.gov.si)*
- *National Reference Point (www.nrpslo.org)*
- *National Examination Centre (www.ric.si)*
- *Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (www.acs.si)*
- *Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (www.mddsz.gov.si)*

*CPI - Institute of the Republic of Slovenia
for Vocational Education and Training*

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*National
Vocational
Qualifications*

*Benefits of NVQs
for individuals,
companies
and society*



Investing in your future

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1.
Introductory
words



Introductory words

Slovenia introduced the National Vocational Qualification system 10 years ago thereby enabling the validation of non-formal and informal learning irrespective of how knowledge and skills had been obtained.

This system enables greater flexibility and adaptability when compared to traditional formal education programmes. What is more, it is better adapted to labour market needs. Thus, National Vocational Qualifications are seen as a quick response to labour market needs, particularly in the areas where the school system does not provide for any training programmes.

Non-formal knowledge and skills are becoming increasingly recognised by the society and are perceived as an important addition to formal education. Unrecognised, unutilized and silent knowledge and skills represent a great personal and economic loss. Thus, provisions need to be introduced to make invisible knowledge visible. This policy stems from the recognition that lifelong learning is indispensable for successful and active integration into the labour market and society. Also, it remains a fact that we “unconsciously” learn on a life-long basis, in different settings and situations, which go beyond organised learning processes. A possibility to validate prior learning and to elaborate shorter training programmes to compensate for missing knowledge and skills, ultimately leading to formal access to the occupation, has a positive impact as it eliminates disparities between supply and demand at labour market.

This is all the more important in times of the economic crisis posing huge challenges

on account of the unpredictability of the global economy as well as changed labour market needs. A need for new skills, competences, qualifications and greater adaptability of both individuals and society is increasingly coming to the fore in this period. Consequently, the educational system and the National Vocational Qualification management system should adapt accordingly. The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs is well aware of this fact, jointly with the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) which conducts important professional activities in the management of the National Vocational Qualification system. For that reason, the Ministry has been cooperating with the CPI, the National Examination Centre, the Slovenian institute for Adult Education, contractors and social partners. We have been investing efforts in the systemic simplification of National Vocational Qualifications in terms of their implementation and transparency. In doing so, one naturally has to follow the principles of quality and impartiality.

Slovenia has made important strides in the past ten years when it comes to the development of National Vocational Qualifications. Having said that, the process of setting up and developing the system has not yet been completed as it is necessary to make a step forward. One of these important steps also involves giving impetus to the development of the National Vocational Qualification system at the higher level of education. This is exactly the area which will pose a great challenge for us in the years to come.

Ivan Svetlik,
Ministry of Labour,
Family and Social Affairs



Introductory words

The validation of prior learning and experience is a process giving people of all ages and from different social backgrounds a possibility to validate their learning achievements outside the classroom. A shift towards the recognition of learning obtained through experience originates from the realization that everybody learns throughout one's lifetime in different vocational and private settings. The value of life experiences, including family life, volunteer work, tasks performed in different associations and free time work is thereby recognised and made aware of. Trends in VET and education in general in the last decades under the heading of lifelong learning have been particularly drawing on the identification and validation of prior knowledge and learning irrespective of learning paths and ways. All relevant international documents in the area of education, as well as labour market policies and strategies, at least indirectly refer to the area in question.

The beginnings of the identification and validation of non-formal learning in Slovenia can be traced back to the 1990ies as work organisations validated work-related experiences, knowledge and skills so as to enable their employees to be promoted in the light of their newly acquired competence. Some work organisations even awarded certificates at an appropriate level to their employees. The employee was monitored and observed at work so as to identify his/her competence. This was an in-house certificate.

Formal VET programmes were not able to provide adequate and timely answers to subsequent structural labour market changes, changes in the qualification structure and fast growing unemployment rates, which brought about the need for the validation of non-formal learning and experience. The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs initiated

a project leading to the establishment of the NVQ system. The legal basis was obtained following the adoption of the National Professional Qualifications Act in 2000. The Act lays down competences, essential operators and the ways they function within the NVQ system, as well as the implementation of key validation procedures making it possible for adults to assess and validate their knowledge, skills and competences acquired through work or non-formal learning.

Within this system, the CPI plays the central role as the institution responsible for elaborating professional bases and for managing relevant procedures when drafting NVQs forming the basis for assessment and validation procedures of non-formal knowledge, skills and competences at the national level. It cooperates with social partners in the process. Following ten years from the introduction of the NVQ system, the CPI designed 224 NVQ catalogues, while more than 40,000 NVQ certificates or publicly recognised documents based on the catalogues and testifying to the individual's qualifications to perform an occupation were awarded in assessment and validation procedures.

After ten years of the NVQ system implementation, we can come to the conclusion that the system has become the most established way to assess non-formal learning paths. Also, it provides a framework for further activities leading to the elaboration of more comprehensive concepts for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Elido Bandelj,
Director of the Institute of the Republic
of Slovenia for Vocational Education
and Training (CPI)



2.

NVQ
and its
benefits



National Vocational Qualifications attest to vocational qualification

National Vocational Qualifications enable the individual to obtain a publicly recognised document attesting to his/her vocational qualification.

National Vocational Qualifications give an opportunity to assess and validate knowledge and skills

obtained through non-formal learning: pursuit of the occupation, volunteer work, leisure activities, participation in non-formal training programmes, self-learning etc. Thus, National Vocational Qualifications make it possible for the individual to attest to his/her competence in order to pursue a certain profession.

NVQs recognize knowledge and competence

National Vocational Qualifications can be obtained by adults who:

- acquired different vocational competences throughout their lifetime, but did not have them assessed or validated;*
- reached the age of majority (18) or are exceptionally younger and who no longer enjoy the status of apprentice or secondary school student and have gained relevant work experience;*

- wish to be promoted in their professional career without obtaining a higher level of professional education or completing a formal education programme.*

NVQs open the door

The applicant who has obtained a National Vocational Qualification has better chances to find a job or to be promoted in the workplace.

Benefits accruing from National Vocational Qualifications include:

- *providing for fairly quick and simple acquisition of publicly recognised documents to pursue the occupation;*
- *enabling the development of one's career and personal development as results of learning and experience acquired throughout one's lifetime are validated;*
- *facilitating the applicant's transition between different companies and sectors since National Vocational*

Qualifications represent a publicly recognised document;

- *applicant is more competitive in labour market, both in Slovenia as well as in the EU Member States;*
- *applicant can be promoted in his/her career at the same level of education as he/she can obtain a publicly recognised document to pursue the occupation at a more advanced level in terms of work complexity;*
- *applicant acquires the basis for possible remuneration by the company;*
- *enhanced social integration and motivation for further training;*
- *better job opportunities for job seekers and inactive population.*

The use of National Vocational Qualifications also brings a host of benefits for employers as adequately trained and qualified workforce represent an asset for every company. By submitting proposals for National Vocational Qualifications, employers equip their new employees with knowledge and skills required by the company.

Comparison between NVQs and formal education

A publicly recognised document is awarded to the National Vocational Qualification holder. National Vocational Qualifications attest to the applicant's vocational qualification in the occupation at a certain level of work complexity, however, one does not obtain a level of education.

A broader outlook on NVQs

Knowledge-based economy will fully develop and use HR. In such economy, maintaining competitiveness will be the decisive factor. Under these circumstances, National Vocational Qualifications serve as an important recommendation for employees as well as individuals at labour market and in companies. A need for the recognition of non-formal learning has never been greater due to an increase in demand for skilled workforce by employers and due to fierce competition between individuals to obtain and maintain a job. The EU has been increasingly involved in policies and questions pertaining to solutions on how to

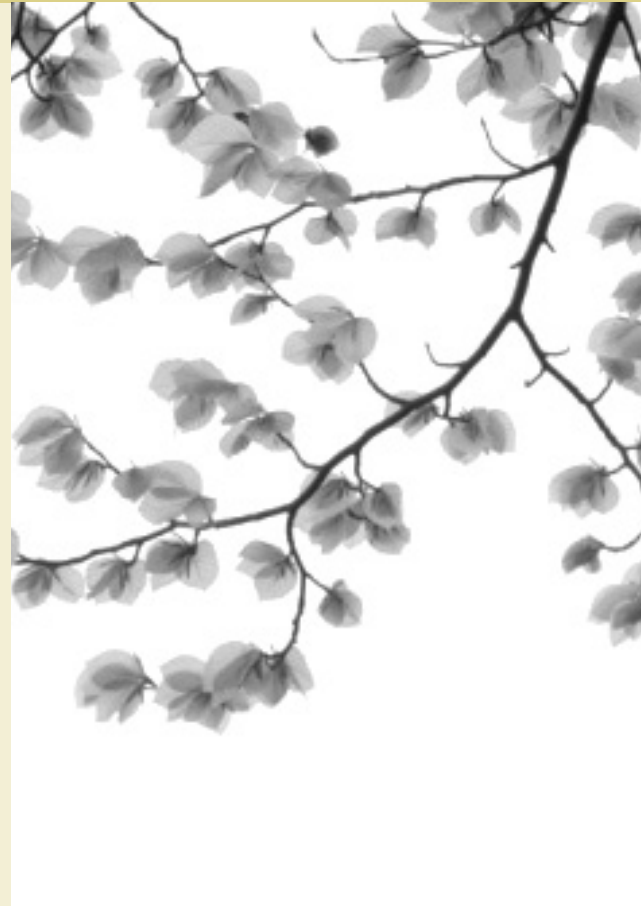
best modernize assessment and validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning to respond to new conditions within the economy and society.

The failure of formal education, which is often incapable of providing adequate and timely answers to structural labour market changes, changes in the qualification structure and fast growing unemployment rates, merely corroborates this. Recommendations issued by international institutions emphasize the need for expanding job opportunities by assessing and validating non-formal and informal learning. Their recommendations inter alia also highlight better communication between social partners, companies and professional associations. The recognition of validity and appropriate assessment of National Vocational Qualifications enhance trust among afore-mentioned entities thereby benefiting the economy and in turn the society as a whole.



3.

*Opinions
and views
by the NVQ
system
users*



Centre for Handicraft and Art Craft, Marianum Veržej Institute

Slovenia belongs to Europe whose identity rests on cultural diversity of individual nations. In turn, Slovenia's visibility in Europe is also reflected in the heritage revealing its identity. It is exactly handicraft that left a mark on the Slovenians in the past and we have been able to maintain some of this creativity to date. We are well aware that handicraft occupations can pose a huge challenge and represent a lifestyle. At the same time, they can be on a par with other contemporary occupations. However, one can face many problems when entering the occupation: where to train to enter labour market successfully, how to validate acquired knowledge and skills, and how to demonstrate one's competence, individually or to potential employers. The formal education system lacks secondary VET handicraft and art craft programmes. In most cases, handicraft skills are passed on by parents, relatives, family relatives, but this does not lead to publicly recognised documents attesting to one's competence. National Vocational Qualifications can be obtained on the basis of certification and this can be an important consideration – firstly, to prove one's self-worth as well as to arouse interest among potential employers. The first step in the right direction has been made upon the introduction of the National Vocational Qualification system. Yet this is merely the beginning since the certificate itself is not enough for handicraft masters as

they do not benefit from it when it comes to the development of handicraft or marketing of their own products. This is also one of the reasons behind a low level of interest for the National Vocational Qualifications in handicraft and art craft in the past years.

Janez Krnc

Iskra Avtoelektrika d.d.

A company with a global market presence has to be supported by the environment in order to meet its set objectives. The National Vocational Qualification system is of great relevance for our company since it enables speedy and high-quality acquisition of requisite expertise. What is more, it brings about added value of a product on account of professionalism, in-depth cooperation and increased innovation capacity. All these factors are of key importance for the company's competitiveness. On the other hand, the system is also significant for individuals and their personal development because it boosts their employment potential, both within the company as well as at labour market.

Edvard Gal

KRKA, d. d.

Krka, d.d., Novo mesto had long been searching for the most adequate way to test and validate learning of its employees who acquired enormous amount of knowledge, skills and experience on the job by engaging in the work process.

The awareness about adequately educated and trained workforce guided Krka through three different education systems corresponding to development stages and technology requirements in the production of raw materials, finished products and logistics, i.e. ranging from the system of in-house qualifications (1955-1983), transition to the school system (oriented education from 1983 until 1996 at education levels II and IV) and the National Vocational Qualification system after 2000.

The process of elaboration and introduction of the new training system following the adoption of the National Professional Qualifications Act in 2000 was extremely complex. The national level saw the elaboration of 6 new National Vocational Qualifications for the pharmaceutical and chemical sector enabling individuals to work in the pharmaceutical manufacturing of raw materials, finished medicine and logistics at levels of complexity III and IV, and 6 at level V for technicians.

Krka's Training Centre was approved as the contractor by the Ministry of Labour, Family, and Social Affairs as early as 2002. Knowledge and skills required for the pharmaceutical sector are specific; therefore Krka drafted a special training programme giving participants the possibility to systematically obtain theoretical knowledge and skills. A one-year programme incorporates both theory and practice ranging from lectures, interviews, technical observations to on-the-job learning. All supporting documents collected within the portfolio are examined by the commission.

To date, the procedure for the acquisition of National Vocational Qualifications in the pharmaceutical and chemical sector has been successfully completed by 620

applicants, out of which 478 come from Krka, 137 are employed by Lek, 3 work for Lekarne and 2 are employed by the Drug Testing Institute.

Krka is of the view that there are many benefits associated with this new path. Participants had the possibility to undergo on-the-job training by being directly engaged in the work process, working state of the art process machines, being familiarized with new technology, work processes, control systems, quality assurance systems for the employees, processes, manufacture procedures for active substances, semi-finished products and finished products. The learning process was combined and it involved both theoretical explanations with lecturers speaking from their practical experience as well as practical part in pharmaceutical manufacturing supervised by superior technicians – shift managers and technologists. Consequently, state of the art knowledge is passed on to participants. The completion leads to the National Vocational Qualification certificate and opens up a new possibility for employees to apply for and be assigned to more demanding jobs, thereby improving their mobility within the company. The National Vocational Qualification system enables participants to be familiarized with the state of the art theoretical and practical knowledge, skills and competences directly in the work process for a certain job profile within a shorter time period (1 year) when compared to the school system (part time programmes take 6 years) and less resources. All the parties involved in the setting up of a new learning process from the beginning to the end have remained highly engaged and motivated throughout the process since the endeavour is linked to the values held in high esteem by Krka: speed and flexibility,

partnership and trust as well as creativity and efficiency.

Alenka Kralj Pučko,
Petra Novak

Pomelaj, cooperative for rural development

Handicraft and other traditional rural activities represent part of natural and cultural heritage in the countryside. What is more, they contribute to the diversity of the demand in the area and reveal our attitude towards cultural heritage. The certification system in fact upgrades handicraft as the area of education and is in turn offered a possibility to give relevance and to validate traditional knowledge and skills forming part of Slovenia's cultural heritage. Traditional skills are promoted by raising the profile and validity of the obtained certificate. Last but not least, traditional handicraft skills can also provide alternative options for (self)-employment in the countryside for different target groups. Each certificate conferred on the individual also attest to one's knowledge and skills, and boosts one's confidence and self-trust as one can - despite age and low level of education - acquire a publicly recognised document (certificate) based on knowledge and skills.

Dragica Horvat

Idrija City Museum

Preservation and respect for cultural heritage is perceived as the commitment on

the part of individual, nation or the state. However, heritage preservation should not merely be confined to museums and proceed under the auspices of the so-called ethnology and ethnography events. It can and has to be a day-to-day reality of contemporary life.

Some crafts are merely part of historic memory, which is why we need to make timely provisions to maintain at least that. In turn, we need new craftsmen, new art handicrafts and new master handicrafts. Not necessarily in huge numbers. It is more important that they are the "right men for the job". Therefore, we are in need of high-quality knowledge transfer to give rise to high-quality design signalling the continuation of 100-year heritage.

National Vocational Qualifications enable and at the same time provide education to interested individuals. They are in a position to obtain a high level of knowledge that is otherwise outside the scope of other educational programmes. In turn, high-quality knowledge can be passed on to younger generations by way of extracurricular activities etc.

The youth can thereby learn about the roots of the nation or can make their first step on the way to the occupation, while the community can be rest assured that specific skills will be preserved in the home town or individual region.

A wide range of heritage preservation options enrich us and testify to creative and cultural diversity of the united Europe.

Ivana Leskovec,
University Graduate Ethnologist,
director of the Idrija City Museum

Radio Television Slovenia

In total, our public institute has so far had a large number of certificate holders who had their work competences recognised at professional levels V and VI. This has significantly improved their qualification levels, boosted their self-confidence and professional development, and at the same time also raised a question of how to systemically regulate the job classification system. The process does not only refer to the regulation of their work status, it is even of greater relevance to create conditions providing for increased HR mobility and the recruitment of new employees. Unfortunately, we all know that the present classification system merely serves the purpose of pay accounting.

This document attesting to work competences at professional levels V and VI enables certificate holders to turn their hidden knowledge into applicable asset at labour market, thereby contributing to their further professional and personal growth within our institution.

The Training Centre plans to organise testing and validation procedures for maskers, media production organisers, TV cameramen, image and sound editors this year. Simultaneously, this will enhance self-confidence of co-workers who were not in a position to obtain appropriate levels of education. Namely, the education system of the past did not respond to the needs of media sector organizations.

Training Centre
of the Radio Television Slovenia

Slovenian armed forces

As the Slovenian armed forces underwent professionalization, legislation in the area of defence was amended. The new Services in the Slovenian Armed Forces Act introduced a host of amendments regulating service conditions in the Slovenian armed forces as well as amendments to education and training for military occupations. In the light of national legal bases, regulations and requirements brought about by Slovenia's accession to the NATO Alliance, there was a need for the transition from the conscript system to the professional armed forces complemented by the contractual reserve army.

The training of employees and reserve army was organised on the basis of certification procedures due to flexibility in supplementing the military personnel (recruiting and supplementing existing civilian HR with military contents). Thus, the Slovenian armed forces elaborated appropriate legal bases in cooperation with the CPI. A number of National Vocational Qualifications and catalogues of expertise and skill standards for infantry, armoured units, artillery, RCB weapons (radiological, chemical and biological weapons), engineering, communications, air defence, air force, maritime, ancillary staff services, IT services, health care, logistic supply, logistic transport, logistic maintenance (material resources) and military police services were drafted. In total, 87 different vocational standards were elaborated for military occupations. When elaborating National Vocational Qualifications, great attention was paid throughout the process to the significance of bringing together military

and civilian components of the occupation facilitating the employment of soldiers in other, also non-military occupations. At the same time, this will be seen as the important element of job promotion and of keeping HR within the Slovenian Armed Forces.

Jože Majcenovič
Retired colonel

Private security

The establishment of private property led to huge expansion of private security. Security is regarded as a good and as such calls for appropriate regulation by the state. The Republic of Slovenia intends to pursue this policy by meeting the following objectives in the private security sector:

- developing private security as a regulated branch of economy by consistently complying with the principles of legality, human rights, freedoms and the rule of law;
- systemic regulation of private security;
- high-quality education, training and further training of private security staff;
- efficient supervision of private security entities;
- achieving synergy in the sector of private security by promoting partner relations between state and private security mechanisms.

The awareness about the importance of professional educational, training and further training of individuals pursuing private security significantly affected

activities in the field. Cooperation in the elaboration of vocational standards and catalogues of expertise and skill standards as well as drafting training programmes leading to National Vocational Qualifications merely constitute some of the tasks in the field.

The certification of qualifications not imparted in formal education attest to qualifications for performing one's job. The learning assessment and validation system for security personnel is in line with the National Professional Qualifications Act setting out procedures, entities and organizations responsible for learning assessment and validation. It has also been transposed into an in-house training system which does not conclude with National Vocational Qualifications, but merely adds another layer to professional competence of public protection employees enabling them to perform certain tasks.

Simon Savski
Head of the Private Protection Sector and responsible for other protection tasks at the Ministry of the Interior



4.

*Opinions
and views by the
representatives
of institutions
guiding the
NVQ system*



NVQ system and key challenges of labour market policies

Labour market is characterised by fast changes closely intertwined with state of the art development trends, ranging from technology, globalization to demography, climate and ecology. Lines of business within sectors and work tasks within the same organisation or company are changing, occupations and types of employment are undergoing changes as well. Competition is getting fierce and consequently many jobs are lost, however, new jobs are being created as well. Labour market is becoming increasingly dynamic and less predictable social space. The central question for all of us linked to labour market is how to manage changes and how to be prepared so that the changes do not pass us by and come as a surprise.

Appropriate answers and responses to these questions already condition decent survival of individuals, as well as economic and social development of the society. National policies and measures have already been tested; this especially goes for employment, education and training areas. The objectives and guidelines that have been systematically subsumed under the heading of best practice examples in European employments strategies since 1997 were also adhered to by Slovenia. These guidelines point to employment mobility and efficient placement, employability preservation and increase, lifelong learning, active ageing, flexicurity and social inclusion for as many people as possible. More than ever the issue of the transition from appropriate measures,

programmes, operative approaches and strategic guidelines into practice is seen as the set of questions explaining the differences in the management of changes in labour market of individual states. The National Vocational Qualification system was introduced almost a decade ago and it undoubtedly represents one of systemic solutions equipping Slovenia with appropriate answers to aforementioned challenges.

The National Vocational Qualification system helped us to finally realize that individuals broaden their knowledge in all work settings and as a rule also beyond this area throughout their entire active working life. What is more, these skills are of relevance to labour market and employers increasingly judge their potential employees on the basis of specific knowledge, skills and competences acquired implicitly through experience in concrete work and social settings. Assessment and validation of these elements within the certification system has at least three important benefits: hidden knowledge potential is translated into a transparent and visible entity at labour market; individuals' occupational, employment and social mobility is facilitated; employer's time and costs linked to the recruitment of right people for the job are substantially reduced.

In this way, employment services also more efficiently provide placement and thereby do away with short-term discrepancies between supply and demand. National Vocational Qualifications are incorporated as an important dimension of placement procedures or they serve as an integration criterion between employment seekers, unemployed and vacancies. The recognition of National Vocational Qualifications, including training programmes imparting

missing knowledge and skills, have become part and parcel of active employment policies. Such employment policies assist many employees in planning new employment objectives and finding new employers. Added value of the integration of the National Vocational Qualification system into employment programmes also stems from the fact that we can more successfully cater for occupations in shortage from the ranks of unemployed. These sectors have long suffered due to a modest or even non-existent inflow of graduates from full-time courses. Growing numbers of unemployed involved in National Vocational Qualification acquisition procedures prove that the certification system has turned into an important systemic arrangement regulation whereby employment services respond to labour market needs more quickly and timely.

While taking stock of the achievements, one should not overlook a need for increasingly better exploitation of the certification system in the future. It would be most welcome and necessary to introduce systemic incentives that would clearly connect the certification system with employability preservation and promotion of the already employed as well as to start with the incentives to direct a large number of workers towards the certification system and into jobs at risk economically and technologically. A prerequisite for implementing such proactive measures are undoubtedly universally accessible career information and counselling services. Employed, job seekers and unemployed have to have access to self-service tools and professional assistance when identifying individual knowledge and competences as well as when taking important career decisions. If such infrastructure employing state of the art counselling method and tools is not enhanced, it will be impossible to fully

capitalize on economic and social potential of National Vocational Qualifications. Thus, there is a lot of work to do in this field.

*Sonja Pirher,
Employment Service of the Republic
of Slovenia*

Association of free trade unions of Slovenia

The role of trade unions in the National Vocational Qualification system to date has been limited to their cooperation in legislation deliberation and other systemic solutions, their cooperation in committees addressing vocational standards and promotion of lifelong learning, notably acquiring qualifications to serve work needs. Vocational standards in particular seen as the commissioning or starting point for the elaboration of educational programmes and catalogues for expertise and skills standards constitute an important element, which makes it possible for social partners – also trade unions - to affect the level of education complexity, vocational qualification scope, integration of qualifications into the occupation, its designation as well as its international relevance and comparability.

Vocational standards also form a basis for the National Vocational Qualification certification system making it possible for adults to obtain a publicly recognised document testifying to their occupational, professional or work qualifications. Trade unions as representatives of workers' interests are not directly incorporated into the National Vocational Qualification assessment and validation system although their views and activities endorse in-service training and further training of employees so as to improve their competitiveness at the workplace and labour market. Last but not least, trade unions signed the social agreement for the period 2007 – 2009 and committed themselves to promote their members to engage in lifelong learning and develop key and professional competences

directly influencing their economic and social status.

Following the adoption of the National Professional Qualifications Act in 2000, the National Vocational Qualification system was formally enforced, but the majority of acquired certificates were designed for regulated occupations or qualifications. Individuals deciding to obtain certificates were forced by regulations in order to obtain or preserve their job. National Vocational Qualifications stemming from the vocational standard have not always brought about promotion at the workplace for individuals. Employers and trade unions in most cases did not consider National Vocational Qualifications in collective agreements as the basis for higher salary. The salary system for the most part still rests only on completed levels of general or professional education, not only in the public but also in the real sector. Consequently, many question the relevance of vocational qualification validation, especially if this entails costs.

On the other hand, the emergence of the economic crisis and a wave of dismissals gave rise to a substantial increase of on the job training programmes offered by employers or other contractors. The Employment Service of Slovenia pursues active employment policies and invests huge amounts of partial work time subsidies in such training; however it has so far been impossible to assess the impact of training. Trade unions - with the exception of political debates on principles - do not have an impact on such training or are not given an opportunity to assess the results of such training session which are undoubtedly necessary. There is also a question of whether it would not be worthwhile to in some extent consider the wishes of workers alongside those voiced by employers and speedily direct workers

towards the acquisition of transparent National Vocational Qualifications so as to better respond to requirements of technology changes and markets, both in Slovenia as well as in the EU.

In the process of the elaboration of vocational standards providing a basis for the National Vocational Qualification certification, trade unions undoubtedly most often face a problem of how to identify vocational qualifications in great demand at labour market. Professional institutions designed methodologies, yet it is still difficult in some sectors to identify an actual need for expertise contributing to economic growth in the long run. The VET system is in fact founded on key qualifications as the basis for vocational education, but particularly employers demand professional competences from VET graduates. The National Qualifications Framework containing descriptors in order to enable comparability of professional competences, identification of levels of complexity, description of key works, knowledge and skills as well as search for trends of knowledge required by labour market would certainly represent a useful tool; however the state still failed to compile it despite the requirements enshrined in the Lisbon Strategy. The European Parliament recommendations stipulate that a national body (also involving trade union representatives) has to monitor the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. This framework would certainly be of great assistance in further upgrading of the National Qualifications System also encompassing National Vocational Qualifications.

The National Vocational Qualification system should not and cannot replace compulsory VET for the youth. Having said that, National Vocational Qualifications are still needed as a complementary system for lifelong acquisition of new knowledge and

competences for employees and all dropouts from the education system who wish to obtain qualifications as adults regardless of the level of education. Therefore, National Vocational Qualifications should not merely be limited to those areas where no training programmes exist, but have to enable the constant upgrading of knowledge and competences and provide a basis for career or job promotion.

Trade unions agree that all vocational qualifications required by a certain workplace should find its way in the salary system and be properly assessed, both in the real and public sector. Formal level of education can be a condition for filling job vacancies, whereas publicly recognised qualifications should also be considered in the salary, which in turn will motivate workers to participate in further education and training. VET and National Vocational Qualifications need to be considered in the transition into higher education. The National Vocational Qualification system will have to be upgraded in the future to enable recognition or validation of all formal, non-formal and informal general and vocational competences. The system of qualification validation has to be as simple and transparent as possible. For that reason, the NQF as an instrument for the classification of qualifications in respect of agreed criteria for acquired level of learning achievements should be passed as soon as possible. Only the implementation of the NQF (should not be equated with the classification system of education KLASIUS) will enable transparency, better access, promotion and the quality of qualifications in the light of labour market and civil society demands, as well as provide for comparability of qualifications within the EU.

Vladimir Tkalec,
Secretary General of the Association
of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia

5.

Conclusion



N/V/Qs provide motivation for integration into learning to adults

Constant changes of employment and work systems call for work competence in as many different fields as possible. This in turn enables flexible assignment to different work tasks within companies and facilitates transitions between companies. In parallel, lifelong learning increasingly brings to the fore the realization that traditional learning settings represent merely one out of many and diverse possibilities providing for education and learning that sometimes is not even considered to be the most important aspect. For that reason, it increasingly points to the development of paths leading to more flexible approaches enabling recognition and assessment of all education and learning, regardless of methods and learning settings. For about a decade, Slovenia

has been developing the National Vocational Qualification assessment and validation system constituting a flexible approach to obtaining vocational qualifications in the light of labour market demand and simplifying their modernisation and upgrading.

The National Vocational Qualification system provides a possibility for individuals to attest to their competence in a publicly recognised procedure, thereby boosting one's employability and possibilities for career development, also in times of instable and precarious employment, which is typical of crisis periods.

National Vocational Qualifications are not only based on knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom. Assessment and validation procedures take into consideration all knowledge and skills, also including those acquired in different forms of out-of-school training, by way of self-learning, work experiences and participation in different extracurricular and other activities. The integration into the validation procedure does not require prior matriculation in the education programme.

National Vocational Qualifications do not replace formal education; however, in conjunction with formal level of education individuals gain competitive edge in employment and career promotion. By identifying already mastered knowledge, skills and competences and by their evaluation in respect of vocational standards elaborated in cooperation with business representatives, the system also serves as a sound basis for rational planning of individual professional careers. The recognition of National Vocational Qualifications in formal education alongside appropriate career counselling facilitates return to training by making it shorter and cheaper. Planned acquisition and a combination of National Vocational Qualifications make it possible for progressive improvement of the level of formal education under certain conditions.

National Vocational Qualifications bring about important benefits to employers as well. The visibility of all knowledge and skills possessed by employees ensures better harmonization of employees and workplaces. Consequently, this leads to better knowledge utilization

and increased productivity. In replacing competence testing procedures of employment seekers, National Vocational Qualifications cut costs stemming from the recruitment of new employees, but they also contribute to more efficient planning of education and training for employees.

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