POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA: CHALLENGES AND CHANGES

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1. LITHUANIA: STRATEGIES ON EDUCATION

Recent development of society, particularly the movement towards creation knowledge society, restructuring of labour market and rapidly growing economy of the country, the mission of education is to provide society members with possibility to acquire social and professional competences satisfying the needs of individual and society. The education system should guarantee an appropriate access to continuing life–long education and training of each individual and all the society groups without any exclusion. In 2003 a revised version of the Law on Education and the National Education Strategy were adopted, which define basic principles of Lithuanian education system [4]:

- **Equal opportunities** principle means that 1) education guaranties equal opportunities for all individuals without any exclusion, 2) education provides condition for acquiring general education and the first qualification as well ass create s conditions to improve the acquired qualification and obtain new ones.
- **Contextual interdependence** principle means that the education is closely linked to the economic, social and cultural development of country, in order to meet the needs of society.
- **Effectiveness** principle means the continuous assessment analysis and planning of use of available resources and activities.
- **Continuity principle** means that education system is flexible and open and provides possibilities for life-long learning.

In November 2002 the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania passed a resolution on Long-Term Development Strategy of the State, three main priority areas of the country development were identified: knowledge society, secure society and competitive economy [9]. The role of education in this development is of exceptional importance. The above mentioned document includes the Provisions for the National Education Strategy 2003–2012, the aims of which is providing the framework for implementation of the vision of education in Lithuania. Development of the Provisions is based on the Long-Term Development Strategy of the State, the Economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania until 2015, the European Memorandum of Life-Long Learning, the European Employment Strategy, the Bologna Declaration 1999, and common aims raised by the EU Commission for development of the education systems in the member states until the year 2010 [9]. Implementation of the Provisions shall be co-ordinated with other structural reforms of the country and priorities of the EU education policy. The Strategic Provisions define **the goals** for development of education, **the means** for achieving these goals, as well as establishes the quantitative and qualitative benchmarks for the targeted outcomes in Lithuania in the period 2003–2012. The main emphasis of the provisions is the necessity for improving of education system responding to recent needs of the society, facing rapid development of country economy, changes in society structure in general and labour market in particular. The reform and the development in Lithuania is focusing therefore on: improving accessibility to education, creating conditions for continuing education and life-long learning, increasing of education system efficiency, ensuring the quality of education that conforms to the European standards and meets the needs of the modern Lithuanian society [9].

2. FORMAL EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA

Formal education comprises state-regulated learning and studies, a successful completion of which leads to a state-recognised diploma or certificate. The Law on Education, the Law on Vocational Education and Training, the Law on Science and Studies, and the Law on Higher Education regulate formal education, which includes general education, vocational education, advanced and higher education-level studies [3;18]. Study programmes offered by higher education establishments must comply with the general requirements set by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. Education and training is delivered on the basis of programmes listed in the Register of Study and Training Programmes. The levels of education according to the official classification in Lithuania (which slightly differs from ISCED 97) are as follows:

Level 7 –Doctoral studies (higher university education), including postgraduate studies in Arts. This level corresponds to Level 6 according ISCED 1997.

Level 6- (higher university education, ISCED -5)– Bachelor's and Master's degree studies, programme of specialised professional studies provided at universities). The Bachelor programmes are aimed at expanding one's general education, providing knowledge and skills which would allow starting professional activity and creatively applying accumulated knowledge and skills. The Master's studies are aimed at preparing individuals for their career requiring scientific knowledge and skills, and developing ability to perform scientific or independent complicated creative work in wide areas of activity.

Level 5 (higher non-university education, ISCED -5) – development of the ability to perform complicated creative work in wide areas of activity; ability to engage in autonomous vocational activity based on thorough knowledge, leads to ability to plan and assess the work of others and to assume managerial functions.

Level 4 (advanced VET, which doesn't grant Higher education diploma ISCED -4) – ability to perform complicated work requiring personal responsibility in specific areas of activity. Leads to ability to carry out planning, organisational, administrative, and control functions independently.

Level 3 (basic vocational education) – development of the ability to perform fairly complicated work in areas requiring responsible and independent decisions, and the leads to ability to coordinate group work.

Levels 1 and 2 (labour market vocational training, ISCED -1 and 2) - development of the ability to perform specialised work not requiring important autonomous decisions or to carry out simple, routine work operations.

2.1. Higher education system in Lithuania

2.2.1. Structure and changes

In 1991 the Law on Research and Higher Education was approved in Lithuania. The Law introduced three-tier system in higher education, similar to that proposed under the Bologna Declaration: Bachelor's degree studies (4 years), Master's degree studies (2 year) and Doctor's degree or Ph.D. studies (4 years). Undergraduate university studies in Lithuania last 3½ to 4½ years, non-university studies last 3 to 4 years. Upon completing a Bachelor program, a specialized

professional or academic master program can be undertaken. Master courses last 1½ to two years. Integrated courses incorporating first- and second-level studies lead to a master's degree and last up to five years. Integrated master studies are offered in such disciplines as medicine, pharmacy and agriculture.

The workload of studies is measured in credit points. One credit point corresponds to 40 relative hours of student workload (including contact hours in classes and laboratories, independent work or self-studies), or to one work week. A full academic year is equal to 40 Lithuanian credits i.e. 60 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits, or one Lithuanian credit = 1.5 ECTS credit. The study level is a classifying parameter of study programmes, reflecting the complexity level of the programme, the rank of the awarded qualification within the national system of qualifications and other indicators.

In 14 years of operation in three-cycle system, some shortcomings came up (particularly lack of continuity), therefore, Bologna Declaration has been a good reason for the improving of existing status of education. The Bologna Declaration has clearly stimulated building of "bridges" [2] between the sub-systems of education systems. Recent changes in Lithuania are aimed to create study system avoiding dead-ends studies for technicum's and college's students, who change their plans to start job career and are willing to continue their studies. In response to that the new law introducing a binary system came into force from September 2001 in Lithuania. Lithuanian higher education of today has consecutive and non- consecutive types of studies. Consecutive studies are carried out according to the programmes included into the Registry of Studies and programmes. There are three types of consecutive studies: full **time, evening and extra-mural.** Higher education, obtained on completing the same level but in different modes of studies, is of the same value. The extra-mural studies, by using electronic means of learning, become more and more popular among people who do not have the possibilities to take full time studies. After completing a study programme a person is awarded an academic or a qualification degree. Consecutive studies at higher education institutions can be of two types:
- University studies, when an individual is a given higher education based on wide theoretical background and scientific investigation;
- Non-university studies –vocational studies intended for preparation for professional activities. An individual acquires professional qualifications on the basis of applied scientific investigation or applied research.

After completing consecutive studies an individual receives an academic certificate (diploma). An individual enrolled in non-consecutive studies and having collected a sufficient number of credits within a study programme, can also be considered as having completed studies at a higher education level. In Lithuania the possibility for colleges/polytechnics to award Master degree has been debated too. The outcomes of the debate until now are negative for college graduates [14]. The consolidation of the new system takes time and yet continues, in particular through its extension and development of college/polytechnic sector.

Total admission in Lithuanian higher education institutions in 2003 was 51 117 people or 1.46 per cent of the total population. On the average, the two thirds of the total number of students are studying at the undergraduate level, and one third is at the postgraduate level of studies. The number of people with tertiary education in Lithuania (in the group of the age 21-30) is 44% (to compare: an EU average is 20 %.). Within the goals of the government programmes it is stated the necessity to ensure the highest possible fluency in the transition of young people from a secondary school to an institution of higher education on the basis of coordinated requirements, a stable and clear system of knowledge and aptitude testing.

For the coordinating the activities of higher education institutions and their regulation by the state are responsible the following units: Higher Education Council of Lithuania, The Science Council of Lithuania, the Lithuanian centre for quality assessment in Higher education, the Rectors Conference and College Directors Conference.

2.1.2. QUALITY assessment of study programmes

For external quality assessment of study programmes in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions is responsible **Lithuanian centre for quality assessment in Higher education**. External quality assessment is organised by the centre according long term (a few-year) and annual external assessment plans. Long-term plans establish which subject areas of research and higher education are to be evaluated in respective years, while annual plans are intended to schedule the evaluation of study programmes, institutions and their subdivisions (indicating the year quarter). The Centre in co-ordination with the Rectors' Conference of Lithuanian Universities, Directors' Conference of Lithuanian College's, the State Research Institutes Directors' Conference and the Science Council of Lithuania prepares the draft plans. Not later than three months before the external assessment the time of any scheduled external assessment and the term to provide the centre with the self-analysis materials is to be known to the institutions to be assessed. **Lithuanian centre for quality assessment in Higher education** is carrying out the assessment of the following domains:

- Evaluation of study programmes (all study subject areas over 8 years);
- Research and development evaluation (all research areas over 8 years);
- Qualitative assessment of research and higher education institutions (all the higher education institutions over 8 year).

If quality of any evaluated unit (a study programme, a research and development or an institution of research and higher education) is unsatisfying, the Centre has to organize a repeated assessment of the unit after one or two years, unless the activity of the unit was stopped. The procedures of external quality assessment are the following [19]:

- Experts' analysis of the self-assessment of an institution of research and higher education,
- Experts' site visit for obtaining information about the unit being assessed,
- Experts' report and discussing it with the representatives of the institution being assessed,
- Delivery of the external assessment report to the institution and the Centre,
- Assessment report (summarized by the Council of Experts if needed) delivery to the Department of Science and Higher education at the Ministry of Education and Science,
- Publication of the summarized final assessment report in the official newsletter of the Centre.

Assessment of institutions is voluntary action and us carried out by international peer-review groups (e.g. by EUA). The institution assessment results don't have direct consequences for institutions.

2.1.3. Academic recognition for enhancing of academic mobility

Academic recognition of study results abroad is inevitable necessity for organization and enhancing of future student mobility. The above mentioned **Lithuanian centre for quality assessment in Higher education** fulfils the functions of the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (ENIC/NARIC) in Lithuania.

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This Centre gives information, consultations and recommendations for research and higher education institutions, organizations and individuals when it is necessary to asses how diplomas of higher education, certificates or study programmes and their parts in foreign countries meet the system and requirements of Lithuanian higher education. The above mentioned centre :

- Provides information for counterparts and other institutions abroad fulfils functions, which are necessary that qualifications acquired in Lithuania could be evaluated and recognized abroad.
- Collects and analyses material which is necessary to evaluate and recognize qualifications acquired abroad.
- Evaluates qualifications of higher education, other qualifications and part –time studies [19].

For example for the recognition of the higher schools diplomas/certificates acquired abroad the following documents are needed [19]. :
- Copy of diploma of the higher school (legal copy);
- Copy of appendix of diploma (legal copy);
- Copy of translation of diploma and its supplement with transcript of records into Lithuanian language;
- Copy of marriage certificate (if diploma is issued according to maiden name);
- Copy of passport (if not a citizen of Lithuanian Republic);
- Filled in form see webpage of Lithuanian centre for quality assessment in Higher education http://www.skvc.lt/old/wwwskvc/anketa.doc

A working group with representatives from higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education and ENIC/NARIC began in 2002 to prepare for the full implementation of the supplement, which was first introduced later that year. Lithuania has signed and ratified (1999) the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications. Universities are going to issue **Diploma Supplements** to all students since 2005.

ECTS - European Credit Transfer System provides a way of measuring and comparing learning achievements, and transferring them from one institution to another. ECTS helps higher education institutions to enhance their cooperation with other institutions by improving access to information on foreign curricula, providing common procedures for academic recognition. The use of the national credit system is an essential element for the accreditation and registration of study programs in Lithuania and the national credit system has been compatible with ECTS. There were no significant problems for Lithuanian universities to implement the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), unfortunately there are still some problem with credit accumulation. The main obstacles are :

- Lack of internal flexibility of higher education institutions. The registration of students for separate modules or subjects is rarity yet;
- There are some operational problems with the proceeding of studies abroad results in internal information systems of universities, internal databases are not adjusted yet for part time studies needs.

It is pointed out in the Berlin communiqué [10], that there is a the necessity of the ensuring of a substantial period of study abroad in joint degree programs so that students may achieve full potential for European identity and employability. The most serious obstacles in this way are: lack of resources for international student mobility and support and lack of legal basis for recognition of this type of studies.

2.1.4. Cooperation on mutual academic transparency and recognition of qualifications: Baltic case

Considering that a follow-up to the ratification of the Lisbon Convention the Governments of the Republic of Latvia Estonia and Lithuania signed an Agreement **on the Academic Recognition of Educational Qualifications in the Baltic Educational Space** in February 2000 [1]. The agreement was signed in order to strengthen the Baltic common educational space, to stimulate the mobility of students and teaching staff among the Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania as well as recognition of the concrete educational qualifications among the Baltic States

The agreement states, that the Baltic States — the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Estonia and the Republic of Lithuania agree to recognise each other's higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education unless there is an evidence of substantial differences. This Agreement deals with the qualifications awarded after completion of study programmes, which are recognised in the home country and states that a higher education qualification or a qualification providing access to higher education shall give its holder the same rights in the all Baltic states as it gives in the State in which it has been awarded. The article No. 5 [1] **Recognition of the first Academic degrees** for further studies states the following:

- The Latvian *Bakalaura grads* , the Estonian *Bakalaureusekraad* and the Lithuanian *Bakalauro laipsnis* give equal access to further studies towards *Magistra grads* in Latvia, *Magistrikraad* in Estonia and *Magistro laipsnis* in Lithuania.
- The same conditions apply for access to professional study programmes that have the first academic degrees as the entrance requirement.
- In the case if the first degree in one of the States is awarded after a three-year study programme and the studies towards this degree do not include final thesis, the higher education institutions in the other States may impose additional requirements before admission of the holder to further studies.

The parties agreed, that if a qualification awarded after higher professional studies does not provide access to further studies towards *Magistra grads* , *Magistrikraad* or *Magistro laipsnis* in the State in which it was awarded, the Parties should look for possibilities of recognising it as periods of study in applicants further academic studies [1].

The recognition of periods of study abroad is based on the following principles:

- Each State shall recognise the periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education programme in the other States.
- In cases when periods of study have been completed according to previous Agreements among higher education institutions, a full credit transfer shall be granted.
- In all other cases the parties should look towards transfer of maximum credits relevant to the programme.

The academic recognition of higher education qualifications awarded in other States should facilitate recognition of these qualifications also for professional purposes **(Article 10)**.When the professional activity is regulated by national or international legislation binding to a State; the appropriate legislation applies to the professional recognition. Special article defines the recognition of the qualifications which are not awarded anymore. Each State shall recognise higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education awarded in the other States during the transition period after re-gaining independence, and which are not awarded any longer, as following (**Article 11,** [1]):

— qualifications which gave access to higher education and correspond to the present general access requirements in one State shall be given access in the other States;

— higher education qualifications which correspond to the certain qualification in the present higher educational system in one Party shall be recognised in other Parties.

This creates the preconditions for continuing adult studies and life –long learning in Baltic countries. An important role towards implementation of the agreement has been ascribed to the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (ENIC/NARIC centres). They are supposed to 1) provide the higher education institutions and/or employers with the relevant information regarding educational systems, and qualifications awarded in other states; 2) evaluate the qualifications awarded in other parties; 3) provide and regularly renew information about state recognised higher education institutions and programmes.

2.2. Vocational education and Training in Lithuania: continuity demanded

Vocational education and training system encompasses initial vocational training and continuing professional development. Initial vocational training leads to a vocational qualification. It can be acquired at institutions of vocational education and training, advanced schools, and colleges. Continuous professional development comprises formal and non-formal adult education, and provides an opportunity for every citizen to acquire a new vocation or professional qualification and improve it. It can be delivered at any of the institutions mentioned above.

2.2.1. VET Reform: chronology and main facts

The reform of initial vocational training started with the first days of re-established independence in Lithuania. In 1990 four-level studies were introduced in vocational schools to ensure that initial accessibility of vocational training to every one and to create possibilities for every citizen to acquire a profession that best suits one's interests and abilities. In 1991 former technicums, which provided specialised secondary education, were replaced by advanced VET schools, i.e. institutions of post-secondary education offering practice-oriented 3-year programmes. That meant further restructuring and diversification of available programmes [18]. The efforts of latter changes were targeted for broadening study fields of formerly rather narrowly specialised programmes. The peak of the reform in Lithuania was reached in 1994. The Government declared vocational education and training to be a priority area within the context of PHARE programme, and received an especially strong impetus in 1995, with the start of the PHARE VET Reform Programme [18]. This allowed us to increase investment into the system of vocational education and training and created opportunities for a planned restructuring of the system [18].

In 1997 the Law on Vocational Education and Training was adopted. The law became a legal basis for regulating of initial VET (focusing on consecutive education of young people) and labour market (in-service) vocational training (oriented towards adult continuous, and in some cases, initial vocational training).

The White Paper on Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Lithuania (up to university level) mapped out the main directions in the development of vocational education and training to ensure compatibility of education and qualifications with relevant recommendations within the EU and assessing specific social and economic needs of the country with the requirements of the European Union. The Law on Higher Education (2000 m.) formalised non-university higher education and justified the establishment of colleges. The reorganisation of the already existing institutions - advanced VET schools - into colleges, has been an axis of the transformation to the binary system. An assessment of advanced VET schools seeking college status

was carried out to determine their preparedness to provide non-university higher education. The assessment showed that 8 state and 3 non-state advanced schools were prepared for the provision of this type of education. They have developed new curricula in line with the requirements of non-university higher education and possessed adequate resources to ensure successful delivery of the programmes offered. In the result 7 colleges started their activities in September 2000. They have four years to get accreditation; if some of the schools fail their status will be changed into vocational schools.

The overall responsibility for the general policy in the area of initial vocational education and training and its strategic development lies with the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), whereas labour market vocational training is within the competence of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour [18].

Tri-partite partnership, i.e. collaboration of educators, employers and industrial lead bodies are the pillars of the social partnership in VET dialogue [18]. The main actor of this process on the national level is **Lithuanian VET Council**, which has a network of regional boards. The Council functions as an advisory institution helping the ministries of Education and Science and Social Security and Labour to deal with strategic VET issues. The boards function as advisory institutions performing the expertise, VET counselling, coordination and evaluation. **Industrial lead bodies (ILB)** are dealing with VET reform problems within a particular branch of economy and advise the staff of the vocational training centres on these issues. The ILBs establish the priorities as far as the drafting of occupational and vocational training standards are concerned perform expert evaluation and validation of draft standards, put forward suggestions to the ministries on the approval of standards [www]. Representatives of **employer organisations** and **trade unions** (Chambers of Industry, Trade and Crafts, Chambers of Agriculture, etc.) have been authorised to participate in the organisation of qualification and final examinations of vocational and advanced schools and have been granted the right to award qualifications.

The importance of **vocational counselling** and enhancing of its quality is obvious. Information on educational institutions, training programmes qualification certificates, and vocational training possibilities should be enhanced in order to ensure better accessibility to the VET itself and to the related information. This is especially important in peripheral and rural areas, where the lack of information services still occurs (particularly because of low accessibility of the Internet and related services). The VET counselling is directly related with such issues of VET reform as retraining and decreasing of unemployment in the country.

2.2.2. VET providers and the role of the universities

Institutions of vocational education and training, all types of enterprises, and non-state advanced schools are allowed to deliver formal vocational training only after obtaining a licence issued by the Ministry of Education and Science. Non-state higher educational establishments can operate with the licences from the government, which are issued on the basis of an examination of the documents submitted by the applying institution and the teaching facilities it posses. Such an audit is carried out by independent experts from research and study institutions, public administration bodies, county governor administrations, employer organisations, VET institutions, etc. [18]. To enhance the transparency and comparability of vocational training and to strive for a better balance between the supply and demand of qualifications, a **system of standards** regulating VET is being developed [www], the work on VET standards started in 1998.

While reforming VET system in Lithuania it has been paid great attention on teaching and learning as a life-long process, the activities towards a modular structure of the education content in basic and labour market VET implemented. The aim is to make the provision of VET more flexible and capable of better meeting the expectations of trainees and employers. The curriculum is designed in a way that enhances the development of core skills, such as the knowledge of foreign languages and information technologies, team working, independent learning techniques, professional improvement, and decision making. While designing their curricula, vocational and advanced schools are guided by a relevant VET standard.

The continuing vocational education and training as well as distance learning is one of the market niches for the universities in Lithuania [13;14]. The continuing education as a study form which corresponds best the idea of life-long learning. Usually different courses and programmes of continuing education are provided by universities and colleges according to programmes of continuous education, registered at the Ministry of Science and Education or according to in-service training programmes. The development of continuing education programme sand courses is featured by the grooving collaboration with employers: 1) setting goals and content of programmes and courses; 2) providing training and counselling for enterprises and organisations. Universities are actively participating in the continuing vocational training while offering different courses for qualification improvement. E.g. At Vilnius Gediminas Technical University there over 140 courses offered to the organizations as well to individual customers. All information is continuously updated and provided on university web-site. The majority of these programmes or courses is developed in response to the demand stated by Lithuanian Labour Exchange, professional organizations or enterprises. In a 200-2001 more than 1,5 thous. of participants of these courses were provided by certificates on completion of different training courses at VGTU [13].

2.2.3. Free movement and recognition of vocational qualifications

The recognition of the qualifications directly influences the free movement of labour force. The details on policies and procedures for the recognition of qualifications with regards to freedom of movement in Lithuania provided in this chapter are retrieved from the **European gateway to recognition of academic and professional qualifications** [5]. The basic decisions on free movement of persons were described in the **Position Paper of Lithuania**, in December 2000, There is stated that the Republic of Lithuania accepts in full the *acquis* concerning Free Movement of Persons and will be ready to implement the *acquis* from the date of accession to the European Union.. The *acquis* in the area of professional qualifications and mutual recognition is composed of two Council Directives 89/48/EEC and 92/51/EC, Commission Decision 97/42/EC, and Directive 99/42/EC of the European Parliament and the Council. The provisions of mutual recognition of professional qualifications and diplomas are laid down in the following acts of national legislation [3;5]:
- The Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania;
- Law on Vocational Education and Training of the Republic of Lithuania;
- Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania;
- Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition of Qualifications Acquired Abroad adopted in 1999 by Government Resolution No 1460;
- Procedure for the Recognition and Assessment of the Evidence of International Bachelor's Education approved by the Order of the Minister of Education and Science No 1195 of 25 September 2000;
  - Government resolution No 624 on the Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition of Qualifications and on the Approval of the List of Competent Authorities Exercising the Assessment and Recognition of Qualifications and of Regulated Professions approved in 2000;

This Resolution approves 123 regulated professions and 15 competent bodies which will exercise the assessment and recognition of professional qualifications.

The **Position paper** describes the legal frame of the practicing for professionals, the professional qualifications of which are treated in correspondence with general Directives of Council: lawyers, architects*,* health care specialists etc. The main steps taken before the EU membership *were* 1) preparation and adoption of legal acts regulating the activities of the institutions exercising the assessment and recognition of professional qualifications; 2) seeking membership in the European professional associations.

Striving to guarantee the preconditions for free labour mobility Lithuanian system of vocational education joins such European initiatives on recognition and transparency of qualifications as: N**ational Reference Point on qQalifications Network , ECDL, Certificate supplement, Europass etc**.

The network of **national reference points on qualifications** (NRPQ) [5] gives access to information on national vocational training systems. The functions of NRPQ are to be first point of contact when questions relating to national qualifications, certificates and certificate supplements arise, to provide relevant information other national bodies and individuals, which need corresponding information. Lithuania was planning to establish a national reference point in 2004, unfortunately, it has been not done yet.

The **certificate supplement**, developed by the European forum on transparency of vocational qualifications describes competences acquired by certificate holders, which among other data provides information on skills and competences acquired, (including language skills) range of occupations accessible, access opportunities to next level education etc. This certificate is not a substitute for the original qualification and not an automatic system that guarantees recognition. The certificate supplement is rather new initiative for Lithuania, the **Europass** is wider known.

On the initiative of the European Commission, a new Community document, **Europass**, came into effect on 1 January 2000. The aim of the document is to assist and promote mobility within work-linked training by providing a voluntary Europe-wide means of recording periods of training. Europass is available to trainees whose placements began after January 1 2000, and initially will be operated for a period of five years. EUROPASS provides the personal details of the trainee and training period abroad (host partner, mentor, etc.). This measure is largely decentralized, because of the differences in National training systems [5,17]. All initiatives related to Europass training are coordinated by Lithuanian Leonardo da Vinci Programme Coordination Support Foundation [17]. Since January, 2005 first Eurppasses may be obtained at Lithuanian Higher Education institutions.

3. NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

As it is stated in the Lithuanian Law on Education [7], non-formal adult education covers learning, personal development, or studies undertaken in the interests of an individual and society that do not lead to a state-recognised document attesting to a full or partial education, completion of a regulated module, or to the acquisition of a qualification. Programmes of non-formal education can be prepared and implemented by bodies of non-formal education and also by institutions of vocational education and training, general education and advanced schools, establishments of higher education, other natural and legal persons who, in the manner prescribed by the Government or its authorised institution, have been granted the right to engage in non-formal education activity. Legal bodies can provide non-formal education if this type of activity is included in the statutes (articles of

association) of such an enterprise, institution, or organisation. On completion of a non-formal education programme, learners may be issued a certificate that does not grant a vocational qualification. It could be presumed, that Lithuanian non-formal education system will get the development **impulses** from the new initiative of the European Union on **recognition of non-formal learning** [5], which aims to enhance the visibility of skills and competences on the labour market. Recognition of non-formal learning should cover the overall process of granting status to competences of individuals, either

- **formally** (by awarding certificates or granting equivalence, credit units, validation of gained competences) or
- **unformaly** (by acknowledging the value of competences by economic and social stakeholders).

It is obvious that recognition of **non-formal learning** is becoming more and more important, because of 1) growing part of competences, which are gained outside the formal educational system; 2) of increasing employability and mobility of workers, if the competences gained within non-formal education system would be recognised.

4. LIFE-LONG LEARNING AND ADULT EDUCATION

The creation of the life-long learning opportunities is an area of prime importance in the national education strategies. Life long learning is widely used concept especially within the context of adult education. The need of the enhancing of this area in Lithuania is obvious, Life long learning and training is an acute necessity for many people involved into economy. Unfortunately there is still lack of coordinated activities and adequate financing. The obstacles for participation of potential students or trainees in life-long learning in many cases could be defined as 1) the lack of resources (basically financial ones), 2) Lack of information about the education and training possibilities, 3) Lack of the recognition of the learning importance, therefore, motivation. Recent initiatives of Lithuanian government is namely addresses to the solving of these problems, especially focusing on increasing of the accessibility to the information resources, related to adult education and life –long learning [9]. Therefore an external input (e.g. through EU programs such as GRUNDVIG, MINERVA) is very important here.

For the future of adults' education in Lithuania are extremely important the activities, which ensure appropriate counselling and accessibility of information about learning opportunities, and eliminate such barriers as fixed learning time and speed, limitations of the learning location, strict pre-requirements of formal education at the beginning of learning or studies [9]. The introduction of new methods into non -formal education of adults is still vague. As for example, a widely discussed participatory teaching approach could be more extensive used in adult learning domain, as it takes into account the various needs of learners and provides opportunities for both learners and facilitators to share their experiences. It is especially important for the adult learning, that this approach is particularly effective in regard to a learner's personal empowerment and social capacities building. The limited use of this approach in adult education in Lithuania is still determined by the necessity to have a flexible curriculum with the possibility for students and trainees to choose from different subject area and qualified teachers, who would be able to include all students in participation and discussion. Thus, the training of the teachers, working in the area of vocational training and retraining, especially in the area of adult education is an important constituent towards the quality of education and training. The role of the teacher in this area is changing towards becoming a learning adviser and in some cases even mediator between the learner and sources of learning. This requires very high professional and social competence and continuous renewal of the qualification. The first step here is the defining of status quo of teachers'

qualifications and the needs for the qualifications and the opportunity to satisfy the existing demand. The teacher training importance is one of the target points in the national strategy on education and training.

5. E-LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

Transition from centralised economy to market oriented economy in democratic society caused the restructurisation of the labour market and therefore necessitated new or updated Professional skills. The demand is significant; therefore the expansion of the education services in Lithuania has been one of the main features of recent education and training system development. Traditional face-to-face courses are not always responding to the trainees needs, because of time, space and number of participants' restrictions. The obstacles could be eliminated by introducing modern information technologies and distance learning, that makes teaching process flexible and much more individualised in terms of students or trainees needs. The main users groups of modern life-long e-learning are [11,14]:

> 1. Employees of public and private sector companies, including SMEs employees and other groups of employed population, as there is significant demand for in-service training (and retraining).
> 2. Adult population demanding formal post- secondary education, but alienated from this because of the restrictions of time and place. E-learning could be successfully used as a tool for the diminishing of such barriers.

Emerging of the knowledge society requires ease accessible system of life long learning in country, which could be partially created by modern information technologies. The flexibility and adaptability of modern distance education to the needs of the individual makes it the most user-friendly form of continuous education especially for employed population. The first steps of the implementation of the distance education model (creation of infrastructure, developing of first study guides and programmes) was started with the support of EU programmes, Nordic Countries, Open Society Fund and Lithuanian Investment Fund in 1998. As the result of Phare multi-country cooperation Distance Education Development programme (1995-1999) first modern Distance learning centres were established in Kaunas and Vilnius. In 1996 The Ministry of Education and Science established Lithuanian Distance Education Centre, to coordinate The government of Lithuania recognises the necessity of the creation of information and knowledge –based society [8;11]. The development of science and innovative technologies is a strategic task of Lithuania and a trend of its economic development. Therefore, in Lithuanian government programmes as a task is stated an implementation of a common e-education programme covering schools, teacher training, teaching of students, education of public servants and other professionals. Now Lithuania has several computer networks, e. g. LITNET (**Academic and Research Network in Lithuania**), which are used for life-long learning. Nevertheless there is the nescesity to develop appropriate system of modern equipped education centres, relevant software and interconnections.

In the end of 2000 the National strategy for Implementation of Information and Communication technologies into Lithuanian education was developed and approved. In January 2001 the Ministry of Education and Science launched a program named "Information Technologies for Science and Higher Education". The program is devoted to one of the most important areas of the society's activities, i.e. science and higher education, for everyone who creates, accumulates and transfers the information. The program outlines the general directions of its computerization. The program is based on an **Academic and Research Network in Lithuania** LITNET that provides wide scale Internet services for all users. By using lines of permanent connection (mainly fiber optical) there are networks that are united to all higher education institutions, colleges, research institutions,

libraries, university clinics and many other organizations. LITNET forms an environment for other systems and networks, e.g. science and education information system, libraries information system, distance education, information system for the admission to higher education institutions and others [12]. This programme was a breakthrough in the development of e-learning too. Among the seven areas that should be developed immediately the following ones related to le-learning were stressed out in the strategy: contents and methods of education; provision of computer equipment and learning aids; management and funding of ICT implementation. The first steps of the strategy implementation proved that the Lithuanian education needs purposeful and systematic ICT implementation policies [mark], which encompass all areas and levels of education. The supporting initiatives, which carried out in parallel were definitely needed. Further development of E-learning in 2001-2004 was enhanced in-line with the implementation of the **Strategic plan for the Development of Information Society for 2001-2004.** In order to develop and maintain a countrywide Distance Education System and to assist in the preparation of distance education courses the centralized activities were decisive. Since 2001 the programme on Information Technologies for Science and Studies development (ITMIS) became a common basis of further development The main objective of the ITMiS program is to develop Lithuanian science and education information environment by using the available recourses [15,16]. The information environment is meant to:

- Accumulate information about science and studies, which can be used in the activities of the organization, while decision-making and presenting Lithuanian science and education in the international computer networks.
- Help scientists, teachers and students to receive the needed information
- Use information technologies for the education of the Lithuanian people.

The program comprises of three main parts that are closely interrelated: **Lithuanian science and education information system (LieMSIS), Lithuanian distance learning network (LieDM) and Lithuanian academic libraries network (LABT).** All activities works are preformed within the LITNET environment. It is foreseen that while implementing the program it will undergo further development and new sub programs will be added.

The main aim of the LieMSIS is standardisation and integration of the information systems developed at different Lithuanian education and research institutions as well at other bodies related to assessment and legislation of education and research in Lithuania [15,16].

The main aim of the LABT is to create the vistual library in Lithuania, through unification nad standartization of search ans asccess system to vaailable resources. As the establishment of information systems designed for the libraries of higher education institutions was started In 1998, now the LABT services is further developed and improved.

The aim of the Lithuanian distance learning network LieDM [15,16] is to develop and coordinate the ICT –based continuous higher education and life –long learning system in Lithuania. The activities within Lithuanian distance learning network LieDM deserve to be presented in more details. While implementing the projects "Development of the Lithuanian distance learning" in the period of 1998-2001 the network of distance learning (LieDM) centers and other distance-learning providers was established. The network was necessary in order to create better conditions for long-life learning as well as to encourage higher education institutions to develop and apply methods of e-learning while developing new courses and full study programmes for different target groups. Teaching within the LieDM network is conducted using video conferences and www environment/medium. The possibilities offered by the LieDM network are especially important for the education and training of the human recourses (especially important in the remote regions).

From 2001 the further development of the network has been carried out within the frame of the ITMiS (Information Technologies for Science and Studies) program.

The LieDM system helps to access studies and training organized by higher education institutions without leaving living and working places, simplify the sharing of knowledge and experience accumulated in scientific centres, create and sustain a universal *e-*learning environment that is used in both distance education and continuous studies. The system is intended to raise the qualifications of the personnel from state institutions (local governments and regional administration), improve the qualification of specialists (teachers, librarians, nursing personnel and others), to train business people, retrain unemployed people, train the disabled people. The main tasks of LieDM at the moment are: establishment of video studios and distance education classrooms; establishment of new connection links; upgrading of software and hardware in video studios and distance education classrooms; maintenance of distance education videoconference network and assistance in the organization of studies; development and delivery of distance education courses; training of distance education participants (lecturers, tutors, consultants, administrators, managers and technical personnel); development of software to enhance the interaction between a lecturer and student within Distance learning process. One of the recent activities of LieDM network is the become a basis of the „common education market" i.e. to develop a portal of all distance-learning courses created and offered by different distance education providers in Lithuania, in order to create possibilities to collect courses and create different individualized combinations of courses corresponding to the needs of each individual.

Three big distance education centres serving the needs of the country were established in Lithuania, all of them are connected within LITNET network, which substantially improves the accessibility to the e-learning and distance education. The main providers of distance learning programmes are Vilnius Gediminas Technical University and Kaunas University of Technology, the distribution of the programmes is presented in Table 1.

Provider of the programme	*Title of study programme*	*Student number*
KTU	*Information technologies*	*133*
KTU	*Professional teachers' studies*	*24*
VGTU	*Construction economics and business*	*40*
VGTU	*Property evaluation and management*	*50*
VGTU	*Internet technologies and real estate business*	*45*
VU	*International communication*	*42 (Lithuanian students) 11 (foreign students)*
KTU and VGTU	*Information technologies for distance learning*	*42*
VGTU	*Business value management*	*16*
VGTU	*Investment management*	*19*
In total		*422*

Table 1. Distance learning programmes for Master studies in Lithuania, 2004 [Atask]: VGTU-Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, KTU- Kaunas University of Technology, VU- Vilnius University.

The demand for the e-learning is rather high, and the major obstacle for faster and wider expanding of distance learning are mainly related to the lack of appropriately trained teaching staff and the

raining materials thoroughly adapted to the needs and the specifics of distance education. The increase of general advancement in the use of ICT among society members would also stimulate the demand of such form of education. International projects within such programmes as SOCRATES/MINERVA, SOCRATES/GRUNDVIG, LEONARDO DA VINCI, PHARE have been very important for meeting national needs to the opening and widening education possibilities through the use of ICT.

FINAL REMARKS

In response to the Bologna process as well trends stated in Copenhagen and Berlin communiqués, in order to ensure efficiency and sustainability of the education development in all possible forms (formal, non-formal, traditional and distance, adult education, vocational education and retraining) the following tasks shall be fulfilled on the country level in Lithuania:

1) Responsibility of education institutions for the quality of studies, close links with the labour market as well forecasting of labour market needs shall be increased, in parallel the influence of labour market on education shall be strengthened through coordinated involvement of all stakeholders of Education into education policy development and implementation processes.

2) Accessibility and quality of education within all the country (including all the regions) should be increased. Flexible and open structures of education, integrating all formal and non-formal education (vocational education and training including) should be developed, using such tool as credit accumulation and the recognition of competences acquired through different forms of education [9].

3) The quality of the education and training of teachers for all the levels of education should be enhanced, developing their ability to introduce new active learning methods into teaching process.

4) The management system based on periodic status analysis of all levels of education, oriented education to improvement and to the information and participation of the society at large should be introduced [9]. For this purpose functions, obligations, responsibilities and accountability of the state, municipalities and institutions revised and redistributed, following the principles of subsidiarity.

5) Raising value of education within modern knowledge society and promotion the idea of lifelong learning, acquisition of skills and competences should be increased in order to build up an adequate attitudes of citizens to the education and training and to increase their awareness and safety facing changing labour market conditions.

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