

# novičke

## Summer 2006

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## PROGRAMME BASIS OF NOVIČKE

Novičke (The News) is an information bulletin with which we wish to inform individuals and organisations abroad with adult education and learning in Slovenia.

We plan to provide the following types of:

- description and presentation of events and activities in adult education;
- development, research and other programmes and projects;
- information on organisations, their needs, plans and activities;
- information on policy and strategies of adult education;
- the latest news in administration and legislation;
- statistical data;
- information on forthcoming events, workshops, seminars and conferences;
- presentations of new books and articles.

Novičke will provide brief, concise, objective and unbiased information.

Novičke will be published three times a year in English language.

Users will receive Novičke free of charge. This is a policy we intend to continue, provided we are able to cover the costs of publishing from the public funds allocated to adult education.

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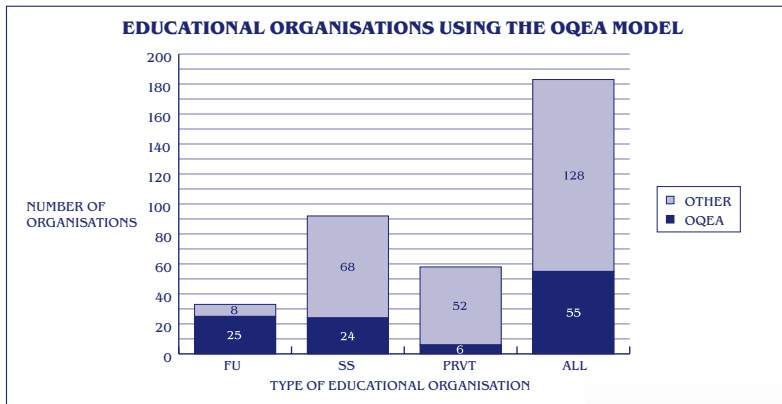
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## SIAE EVENTS

### We need a joint debate on basic issues of quality Expanding the network of quality experts in adult education

It is already a number of years since – with the assistance of the Ministry of Education and Sport (MES) through the Offering Quality Education to Adults (OQEA) project – we began introducing the OQEA model of self-evaluation into adult education practice. This September, OQEA will celebrate its fifth anniversary. The four secondary schools that in 2001 pioneered the assessment and development of quality in adult education have since been joined by new educational organisations each year.



By 2006, the OQEA self-evaluation model had been or was still being used by 25 (75%) folk universities, 24 (26%) secondary schools and 6 (10%) private educational organisations.

In recent years in Slovenia, there has been much debate suggesting that adult educators are not best able to establish links; all too often, rather than considering common goals and essential development guidelines for adult education that would bring us together, we instead focus on the differences, creating division and non-cooperation. Clearly this does not contribute much to development of the field; rather, it leads us to undermine all those solid foundations on which adult education was previously built. Five years ago, when we began introducing the OQEA model into adult education practice, cultivating and soon during each expansion also realising the concept of including in the project different types of educational organisations (secondary schools, folk universities, private

educational organisations) so that together, with professional support from SIAE and outside staff, we could develop a useful OQEA model, doubts were expressed. Are the differences between secondary schools and folk universities, and even more so for private educational organisations, not too great for them to be able to consider common solutions concerning quality issues? Will it be possible to create the required atmosphere of trust and exchanges of opinions, views and good practice if the project involves organisations competing against one another? We could also cite other doubts and dilemmas we encountered at the time.

After five years of common endeavour, which continually gives rise to exchanges of good practice and experience among members of quality groups from different types of educational organisation and those designing solutions on the national level, we can state with satisfaction that most people are no longer in doubt. On the contrary, evaluation of the OQEA project and discussions with members of quality groups always set out the possibility of such cooperation, exchanges of good practice and experience and a common search for solutions in the area of quality, all of which are basic features of work in the OQEA project. We can therefore say that the form of joint work cultivated in the project represents the necessary 'bond' that can contribute to the development of cooperation, the construction of the social capital still lacking in Slovenia. Experience of this form of work, which is not restricted to the OQEA project – at the SIAE we cultivate and promote it in other projects – confirms our belief that we must persist with it.

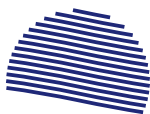
Taking account of all the teething troubles and obstacles we encountered when first introducing the OQEA project, we can consider it a success that over these five years, the OQEA project has been well received in adult education practice, and we are particularly pleased that each new quality group in the project gives a new impetus to development. While in the initial stages together with quality groups we sought and tested basic solutions for applying the self-evaluation model, we later extended this to the development and application of quantitative methods to assess quality; today we also pay greater attention to the qualitative approach to quality assessment. In June, educational organisations test the use of focus groups and benchmarking methods. In particular, we pay ever-increasing attention to balanced discussion and practical solutions when planning and introducing necessary improvements and development solutions into daily adult education practice in participating educational organisations.

Alongside these positive moves and achievements, over the years together with members of quality groups we have encountered obstacles or 'development dilemmas', which have further strengthened our belief that we must upgrade the self-evaluation activities that we 'launched' with the OQEA model using new strategic solutions. Members of quality groups implementing self-evaluation in their own educational organisations could most faithfully tell us how difficult it can sometimes be to achieve their objectives when the management of the educational organisation does not fully support such activities. We often encounter

cases where the management in principle supports efforts to improve quality, but when it comes to changing policies and strategies, changing established working methods, they withdraw from the process, leaving the work to people with less authorisation, as a result of which the effectiveness of the planned measures to develop quality is often questionable or even prevented. Members of quality groups thus find themselves under pressure when they carry out such activities alongside their many other duties and tasks. Often, with little management support, it is the determination, persistence and self-initiative of members of quality groups, who have tried to attract other colleagues towards quality work, that lead to good results. Consequently, management personnel often then play a more active role in the continuation of such activities.

Monitoring events in educational organisations has confirmed our belief that, with new strategic approaches developed on the national level, we must introduce into educational organisations greater knowledge of the processes of quality assessment and development. Here, such activities are geared primarily towards further development in educational organisations of staff dealing with questions of quality; a particularly important role will be played by the so-called 'knowledge multipliers' - those who will transfer their knowledge of quality to the greatest number of staff members. Implementations of the OQEA project to date have confirmed that quality groups in educational organisations responsible for such activities are a necessary and suitable solution. Following the examples of successful countries, this must be built upon by establishing stable conditions that will enable continued professional work in the area of quality. Thus in 2005 the SIAE prepared an expert study defining the role and place of quality advisors in adult education organisations. In 2006 the Ministry of Education and Sport, with support from the European Social Fund, supported a pilot project resulting this year in the initial establishment of a network of quality advisors, who began working initially in eighteen adult education organisations.

Tanja Možina, MSc, ([tanja.mozina@acs.si](mailto:tanja.mozina@acs.si)), SIAE



## New programme to raise literacy levels

### **Steps to Improved Literacy**

In contemporary world we are facing more and more rapid development of states and societies on all levels. The success of an individual society depends to a large extent on the abilities and capacities of its members to cooperate in the development process. Inevitably this requires from the individual to be trained for an independent performance of all their life roles- in the workplace, in society or in private life.

Literacy is a term that defines the level of training of an individual for successful performance of all their life roles. The level of adequacy of knowledge, skills and developed abilities incorporated in that term changes in accordance with the level of development of society, which affects the requirements for the level of ability of the individual for their life success. In the modern world of advanced information and communication technologies, completion of four-year secondary school is the generally accepted criterion for the expected level of literacy. It is to be expected that the achieved level of literacy also depends on achieved level of formal education, and that literacy problems are more expressive among less-educated adults; those expectations were confirmed by the results of an international research of adult literacy in Slovenia<sup>1</sup>.

Difficulties arising from poor adult literacy are becoming an increasing problem – not only in Slovenia, but also in Europe and worldwide. Experience shows that more developed societies pay greater attention to this phenomenon and that adult literacy problems are even greater than in less developed societies. This is understandable, since traditional conservative education systems cannot keep up with the rapid development of modern techniques and technologies. Promoting the research of the extent of the problem of poor literacy of the population, and planning of measures to reduce the deficit in adult literacy has been a permanent concern of adult education in contemporary world.

At the SIAE we have developed a new educational programme for improvement of adult literacy named *Steps to better literacy*. It is intended to provide additional professional training for teachers and education organisers in the Primary School for Adults programme with the aim to improve the level of literacy of participants in primary school for adults.

The target group – teachers and education organisers in primary schools for adults – was selected for a number of reasons:

- One of the findings of the previously mentioned international literacy research was that 99% of adults that have not completed their primary education fail to reach a level of literacy that adequately equips them to perform their basic life roles successfully (adults re-entering education to obtain primary education also belong to this group); even more surprising is the fact that 89% of adults who have completed primary education achieve a lower level of literacy.
- Therefore it is necessary that teachers, professionals and school management are acquainted with how the literacy problems affect the adult education process and how to find the way to help participants to overcome such difficulties. This kind of knowledge helps teachers to plan long-term effective learning processes which lead adults towards active learning at all stages of life after having completed their education.
- Reading literacy is the basic and the compulsory component of the broader understanding of literacy. One of the findings of the Conditions for the Development of Reading

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<sup>1</sup> Možina, E.: Adult Literacy in Slovenia. In: IB revija, 2000, no. 3-4

Literacy<sup>2</sup> research project is that class teachers and Slovenian-language teachers at subject level and in secondary education value their ability to develop reading literacy as not adequate enough (89%) since they were unable to acquire it during their studies.

- A review of the content of the undergraduate study programmes and programmes for permanent professional training of teachers of all subjects shows that none of them have literacy as a component.

The responses of teachers and education organisers to a questionnaire that was prepared for them reveal that only a few of those who responded to it participate in programmes of adult education (24%). We suppose that those who did not respond participate in such kind of education even less.

The interviews with heads of education and/or directors of adult education institutions that provide the primary school programmes for adults show that the problems in schools have been present and all participants expressed a need for teacher training related to literacy.

On the basis of summaries from researches and documents we prepared the programme for one-day workshop called *Steps to Improved Literacy*. Three workshops were held this year that fully confirmed our expectations:

- Teachers expressed the opinion that such kind of education was essential, not only for them, but also for professional staff and management.
- If literacy is understood in its narrow sense only as knowledge of reading and writing and on the basis of that also as a learning skill and as a component of learning Slovenian, the participants understand it as a kind of knowledge that they never can master as it is mastered, taught and checked only by Slovenian language teachers. Therefore it is important that all participants in the adult education process realize that the literacy of an individual is entirely linked to a system of various factors that the teachers of all subjects need to master and encourage the literacy development with their participants. Workshops Steps to Better Literacy are therefore intended for all teachers and organisers of adult education.
- The report on the findings ended up with the conclusion that by moving education closer to the life problems of adults, teachers can ensure more permanent knowledge and can better develop their skills and abilities. When we convince adults that they can use their newly acquired education in various everyday activities we also motivate them for further learning after having completed primary school. In that way we reach one of the priority goals of education in the programme of Primary School for Adults - willingness and ability for lifelong learning.

Marjana Komprej ([marjana.komprej@acs.si](mailto:marjana.komprej@acs.si)), SIAE

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<sup>2</sup> Grosman, M., S. Pečjak: Conditions for the development of reading literacy. In: Vzgoja in izobraževanje, 2005, no. 2-3



## SLOVENIAN ADULT EDUCATION SCENE

Analysis of data on adult participation in education

### Employee involvement in formal and non-formal education

The research project *Achieving Strategic Goals of Adult Education by 2010 - Studying Patterns of Adult Participation in Education*, carried out by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, analysed data on adult participation in education, collected in 2004, in terms of inclusion in formal and non-formal education. The results show that in the period studied, less than 8% of the Slovenian adult population received education in formal programmes, two percentage points lower than in 1998. More than 32% were involved in non-formal education and training programmes. Education, age and employment status remain the main factors behind participation in both forms of education. Restricting ourselves to participation by employees in education, we can conclude that 10% of employees – compared to 8% of the self-employed – participated in formal education in 2004. The equivalent figures for non-formal training and education in the same year were 39% for the employed and 51% for the self-employed (Figure 1).

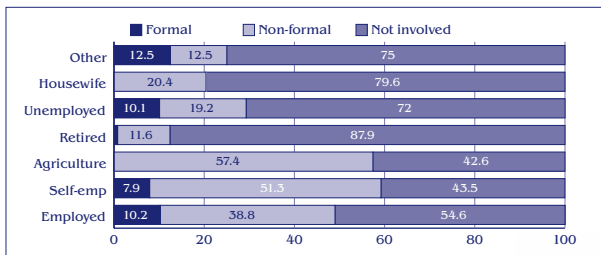


Figure 1: Formal and non-formal education – employment status, 2004 (%)

As previously mentioned, age and attained education have an important impact on adult education, and this also applies to employees. Employees also distinguish in terms of other characteristics, which additionally influence their opportunities for participation in education. Here we are primarily interested in the differences linked to the characteristics of employment, the sector of employed, occupation, size of the organisation and type of employment.

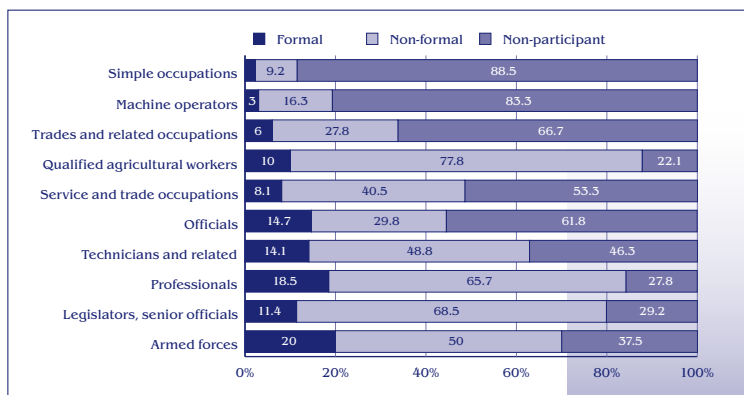
A review of participation in formal education by sector shows the following display of the highest participation rates: wholesale and retail trade; finance, insurance and business services; public, social and personal services. The lowest participation rates are in construction, industry, transport and communications. As for non-formal edu-



cation, the highest participation rates are for employees in the electricity industry (two-thirds), public, social and personal services (48.5%) and finance, insurance and other business services (48%). The lowest participation rates in non-formal education by employees are found in industry and construction.

The data also reveal the importance of the occupational group for access to education. Figure 2 shows the different opportunities provided by different occupational groups. The highest participation rates in formal education are by: armed forces (20%), professionals (18%), technicians and related occupations (14%) and clerical occupations (15%). Rates are also somewhat higher than average for legislators and managers, skilled agricultural occupations and skilled occupations in the service sector. Occupations for simple labour and manufacturing have the least access to formal education.

Surprisingly, the highest participation rate in non-formal education in the year studied was found among agricultural employees (78%), while the pattern was confirmed for other occupational groups. The highest participation rates were for legislators and managers, and professionals, with more than two-thirds of employees in these two occupational groups taking advantage of non-formal education. Above-average participation rates were also recorded for technicians and related occupations (about 50%) and military occupations (about 50%). Simple occupations and manufacturing provide the fewest opportunities for non-formal education, with participation rates far below the national average. Opportunities are also below the national average for skilled trade occupations and clerical occupations (30%).



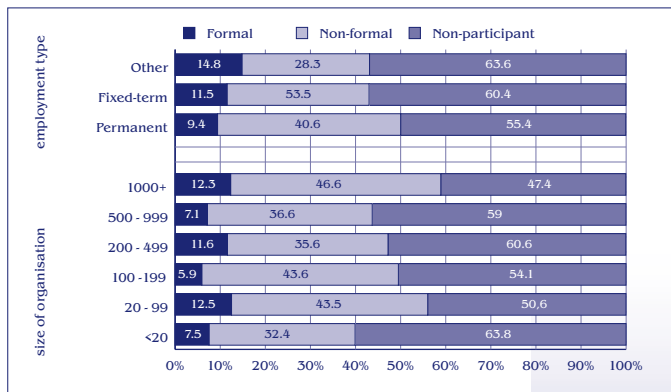
**Figure 2: Formal and non-formal education of employees and occupations, 2004 (%)**

It is generally argued that employees in small and medium-sized companies have substantially less access to education than those in large companies. Our data indicate

differences linked to the size of the organisation, but these differences do not reflect the anticipated pattern (Figure 3). Participation rates in formal education depending on the size of the organisation range from 6-12.5%. The highest rate was for organisations with 20-99 employees (12.5%), almost the same as the rate for organisations with 1,000 or more employees. The lowest rate was recorded for organisations with 100-199 employees.

The highest participation rate in non-formal education was recorded by the largest organisations, closely followed by the categories '20-99 employees' and '100-199 employees'; each had a participation rate of just under 44%. The lowest rate was recorded for companies with fewer than 20 employees, but even here it reached almost one-third of employees. Based on such data, we could suggest that the education structure and employment sectors/occupations are more important for employee participation in education than the size of the organisation itself.

The data also confirm the link between the type of labour relations or employment on one hand and opportunities for formal and non-formal education on the other. The less stable employment relations, the higher the participation rate in formal education. Conversely, the more stable the employment relations, the higher the participation rate in non-formal education (Figure 3).

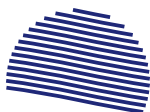


**Figure 3: Formal and non-formal education of employees, and organisation size and employment type, 2004 (%)**

To sum up, our findings suggest that non-formal education and training remains the dominant type of education and training for employees; only 10% of all employees participate in formal education programmes. They also confirmed that occupation and employment sector are the key employment characteristics affecting access to formal and non-formal education for employees. The highest participation rates are by employees in the service sector and occupations based on higher levels of education.

Moreover, the 2004 research showed that agricultural occupations deviated from this pattern, but it is unclear whether this is merely a consequence of some short-term measures introduced by the state or it represents a long-term change. On the other hand, the data do not support with any reservation the established view that employees in small and medium-sized companies are faced with most limited access to education and training.

Dr Angela Ivančič ([aivancic@acs.si](mailto:aivancic@acs.si)), SIAE



## Factors of adult participation in education

### What are the barriers in adult education?

Interest in the factors leading adults to participate or not in education has a long tradition in adult education. These factors are usually included in any research investigating adult participation in education. In addition to recognising the motives and motivation of adults as the factor that we expect encourages adults to enrol in educational programmes, and to persist with them, recognition of educational barriers is also extremely important.

Using the classification devised by *Patricia Cross*<sup>1</sup> in 1981, before joining an educational programme, and then after they have enrolled, adults must overcome three types of barrier:

- First, they must overcome family, financial and health difficulties, transport problems, lack of time and other problems in order to be able to participate in or remain in education. We call these barriers **situational barriers** and they arise from the individual's current position.
- Adults wanting education must also face barriers set by educational institutions. They often encounter numerous administrative tasks, tuition fees, unsuitable timetables, distant venues for education etc. We group all these factors as **institutional barriers**, which can prevent adults from participating in education.
- The third group of barriers is linked to the psychosocial characteristics of the individual, such as position, self-image, belief in his/her own abilities etc. We call these barriers **dispositional barriers**; recognising them is very important for planning, promotion and implementation of education.

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<sup>1</sup> Cross, K. P. (1981). *Adults as learners: Increasing participation and facilitating learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This classification of barriers can be of great help to educators in understanding the numerous factors that influence motivation for and during education, since it can help them recognise the factors that can lead to leaving education. We must be aware that educational organisations are to a degree restricted in eliminating these barriers. For instance, educational organisations have little influence on eliminating situational barriers. They can merely advise participants how to deal with such barriers themselves. They have greater influence in reducing or eliminating institutional barriers, but here too organisations are to an extent restricted by statutory, spatial and financial factors. It seems that educational organisations have the greatest chance of influencing the third group of barriers, dispositional barriers. They are not directly observable, but they are a constant presence in education and key to learning success. Participants often enrol in a programme with unclear positions, fears and expectations. Often, these are negative due to past negative educational experiences, and have a greater influence on their motivation than they are prepared to admit. Such beliefs and opinions can be changed in contact with a teacher or advisor, and so the training and willingness of teachers and other school professionals to recognise these barriers is often key to participants completing educational programmes.

Analysis of barriers in our research<sup>2</sup> has again confirmed that some of the most important barriers are situational barriers – particularly 'lack of time' and 'too expensive'. It seems that all barriers (except 'lack of time') bother less educationally active adults more than those who regularly participate in education. The differences between these two groups are particularly clear in the barriers relating to perceived difficulty of education and the importance of the educational programme. Educationally less active adults more often cited excessive difficulty or unimportance of education as factors dissuading them from participating in education.

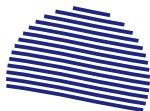
In conclusion, the possibility of financing participation in adult education is a very important incentive or an insurmountable barrier. The state already implements certain measures to subsidise education for those with less education, but clearly companies too should be encouraged in this area through certain systemic measures. In addition to financial incentives, company employees might have an even greater incentive if they could study during working hours. Clearly, for adults with family obligations in the afternoon, time for education is often a luxury they cannot afford. Much work also awaits educational institutions. Educational programmes must be suitably promoted, and a range of programmes developed that in terms of content and particularly of implementation would better suit the target groups

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<sup>2</sup> Mohorčič Špolar V., Mirčeva J., Ivančič A., Radovan M., Možina E. (2005): Pismenost in ključne življenjske spretnosti v družbi znanja: Družbeno-skupinski vplivi udeležbe odraslih v izobraževanju kot dejavnik razvoja družbe znanja. Raziskovalno poročilo, ACS, Ljubljana.

missing from education. At the same time, the need is also clear to ensure guidance in choosing suitable education, and help with learning difficulties for adults in education.

Marko Radovan, MSc, ([marko.radovan@acs.si](mailto:marko.radovan@acs.si)), SIAE



## Adult participation in education

### **Proposals for involving non-participants in adult education**

Research to date on participation in adult education has not concentrated on the phenomenon of non-participation, which we define as non-enrolment in organised forms of education and training. The central interest of researchers has been on adult participation in organised learning and the motives that encourage adults to participate in education. Likewise, researchers have been interested in the barriers faced by adults on the road to achieving their educational ambitions.

Interpretation of participation in adult education thus focussed on identification of groups active in education in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. The same applied to both other groups: would-be-participants and non-participants. For these two groups, researchers attempted to determine the barriers to their participation in education and training. By recognising the socio-demographic characteristics of all three groups and the factors that prevent participation in education by the would-be-participants and the non-participants, they could look for ways to eliminate barriers and to design suitable strategies for individual groups.

Research carried out in 2004 by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education was the first of its kind that – in addition to studying adult participation in education – also researched the factors that would encourage non-participants to participate.

Given the results of previous research (1987 and 1998) and the fairly high percentage of educationally inactive adults (62% in 1987, 42% in 1998), in our 2004 research in Slovenia, we paid particular attention to the non-participants' group. In terms of education policy, it is important to recognise the factors that encourage this group to participate in education. With their help, we can through a range of instruments influence participation in education and consequently contribute to improving the quality of personal and social life of the individual and the community.

We designed the research so that the non-participants were asked about the conditions under which they would participate in education. Respondents were given a number of possible answers to choose from. If there was no suitable answer, they gave their own. From the responses received, we can elucidate five of the most important for the whole population, regardless of age, sex, education or employment status: keeping current employment (76.2% of responses), greater satisfaction with work (73.7%), higher pay (72.9%), if they were made redundant (71.3%), if education would help them find employment (70%). All respondents said that it would be very important if such education was recognised in attaining the level of formal education. The rate of response to this question was different, but generally in the upper-50% range.

The advantages of participation in education differed with regard to age and sex, education and employment status. The distribution of responses with regard to the educational level of the entire population shows that willingness to participate in education increases with the level of education.

Detailed processing of the data showed that there are differences that are greater with respect to age than sex. The 16-24 age group were most motivated to participate in education by higher pay, while for the 25-39 age group the most important incentive would be if the education was recognised in obtaining the level of education. For the 40-49 age group, the most important factor would be if education helped them find employment. Those towards the end of their working career (50-65) would be most motivated by retaining their current employment.

The key national documents, including the *Development Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia*, give importance to lifelong learning and increasing the educational level of the population. Experts say that we can only talk about lifelong learning when more than half of the population is involved in various forms of education and training (excluding informal learning). Given the results of the research, we cannot claim that Slovenia is already at that level. It is true that we are all involved in lifelong learning, if we include formal, non-formal and informal learning, but the fact is that analysts view participation in lifelong learning in terms of participation in different forms of organised learning activities of different durations.

Achieving the objectives of the development strategy will require coordinated and targeted operation of everyone, not just those involved with education in general. Taking into account the results of the research the following has to be considered in order to increase participation of non-participants in education and training:

- In terms of the whole population of non-participants, education and training should be a constituent part of work for all those employed, not just professionals.

- Education and training should also be linked to promotion to higher pay scales, as already regulated for certain professions (e.g. teachers). Given the high proportion of responses linked to this issue, this would certainly be an incentive for those inactive in education and training.
- Excluding responses linked to employment and redundancy, promotion to a more demanding job is a good incentive for the non-participants. When unemployment is relatively high, employers invest less in education and training for their employees, since people with the knowledge and skills they need can be found in the labour market. Nevertheless, encouraging employees to participate in education with the prospect of promotion is rational. This builds loyalty to the employer, avoids familiarising new employees with the workplace, takes advantage of the knowledge and experiences that employees already have, and updates them. In addition, employees would probably also gain self-confidence and would be more effective at work.
- Education and training should also be linked into an integrated system, which would like a mosaic put together individual education and training courses on a path to obtain the level of education. This is an issue that the profession must pay greater attention to than in the past. Recognising prior knowledge and experience should not remain at the level of individual attempts, or be limited merely to the acquisition of qualifications under a certificate system; it should rather become a serious research challenge. That such a solution is very important for the non-participants is also shown by the responses by individual age groups (from 16-49), education and position at work.
- For the educationally inactive, covering the cost of education is of great importance, both for the whole group, and by age group, employment status and position at work. It is not as important as for example retaining employment, but it is still sufficient to allow consideration of investment in education for all the employed, not just managers and professionals. Here we would likely have to consider the roles and interests of employers, employees and trade unions. The latter should primarily be interested in education and training of all the employed, and not just of union members. This issue should find its place in collective bargaining, since it is inseparable from employability and retaining employment.
- It seems that people are insufficiently aware of the possibilities offered by guidance and counselling in education (help in choosing a programme). Human resources departments should be better connected to centres offering such services. But prior to that, they should be well familiar with the educational needs in their institutions<sup>1</sup>. Although help in choosing a programme at the level of the whole population does not differ from that which would encourage the

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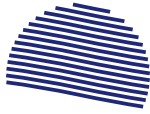
<sup>1</sup> Cross, K. P. (1981). *Adults as learners: Increasing participation and facilitating learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

non-participants to participate in education, it has a relatively high proportion in the 16-49 age groups, in the group having completed two-year vocational school, self-employed farmers, the unemployed, employed and housewives.

- Irrespective of age, sex, work or employment status, we should encourage the non-participants to continue their education through motivational programmes. These programmes contain elements that help participants to update their knowledge and skills, which they may have lost due to their educational inactivity.
- Educational incentives should be adapted to different age groups. The greatest incentive for the 16-24 age group is higher pay. We could speculate that these are people working in less demanding posts due to the level of their educational attainment. This is also a group that would participate in education if it was recognised in gaining the level of education, and this is just as important for the 25-49 group. This is in any event an additional incentive for serious work in the area of valuing learning, as discussed in *The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*.
- Greater effort than in the past should be paid to preparation of educational programmes based on modern technology (online courses, CD-ROMs), without neglecting other media (radio, television). These methods at the level of the whole population could attract 43% of the non-participants, 82% of the 16-24 age group, 64% of the 25-39 age group and 44% of the 40-49 age group. Thirty-six percent of women and 48% of men would participate in education using such media. Taking into account these responses, such programmes should be differentiated in order to attract those with completed further education (61%) as well as those with higher education or more (52%). Those with completed four-year upper secondary education (57%) would also be attracted.
- Given the rate of responses indicating that the non-participants would also be motivated by knowing people who were professionally and personally more successful because of education and training (from 50% of the whole population to 69% in the 25-39 age group), we should promote and present learning achievements of individuals to the wider public. Though this is one of the purposes of the Lifelong Learning Week the media (particularly national radio and television) unfortunately pay too little attention to this matter. At the same time, such practices should also be extended to the level of individual institutions.

Dr Vida A. Mohorčič Špolar ([vida.mohorcic.spolar@acs.si](mailto:vida.mohorcic.spolar@acs.si)), SIAE





How can we improve child, youth and adult literacy?

## **First draft of the National Literacy Development Strategy of Slovenia**

In the last fifteen years, considerable international and local research has been conducted in Slovenia in the area of literacy<sup>1</sup>, showing that Slovenian children, youths and adults achieve lower results in this area than people in other countries. There has been considerable critical discussion of the results of the research in the professional and general public, but in all this time, school and other authorities have failed to approach this field systematically. Although the documents concerning the most extensive reforms of the education system at the end of the 1990s described numerous guidelines referring to the development of literacy at all levels, these guidelines have remained mere declarations, and for the most part have not thrived in practice. Evidence for this is the fact that none of the higher-education faculties provide subjects or study streams to train future teachers to develop reading and other types of literacy, except of course for teachers in the first triad, as if the whole development of literacy ended at this stage. Literacy experts in Slovenia have for years been stressing that without a planned national strategy, the deficit in the level of literacy revealed by international research compared to other developed countries would only increase.

The experts' warnings were nevertheless not in vain, since Slovenia recorded the need to raise the literacy level of the population in all the key development documents, such as the *Development Strategy of Slovenia*<sup>2</sup> and the *National Development Programme 2007-2013*<sup>3</sup>, and in the area of adult education, the *Resolution on the Adult Education Master Plan in the Republic of Slovenia to 2010 (Uradni list RS 70/2004)*. Also contributing were resolutions and documents of the European Council on improving competencies and basic skills in relation to realising the Lisbon strategy.<sup>4</sup> None of these documents of course discuss methods and measures to improve the literacy of all generations. For adults, the answer to this question was provided by the draft *Strategy to Raise the Adult Literacy Level* (March 2003) and the *Strategy to*

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<sup>1</sup> We shall mention only the research project *Adult Literacy and Participation in Education* (1998) and *International reading literacy research IEA* (1991, repeated 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Available online: <http://www.gov.si/umar/projekti/srs/StrategijarazvojaSlovenije.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see <http://www.svlsrcp.gov.si/index.php?id=1182>.

<sup>4</sup> Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, COM (2005) 548 final

*Improve Basic Skills of Employees* (December 2004). The proposals were never confirmed at ministerial or government level as was planned, but informally they provided a sufficient professional basis for adoption of the *Action Plan to Raise the Adult Literacy Level*. Funding was provided from the European Social Fund for 2004-2007 to support realisation of the Action Plan, while it is implemented as a constituent part of the annual work plan of the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education; part of this is a special strategic task, the preparation of a professional basis and vision for the development of literacy across the spectrum – for children, young people and adults. In May 2004, the minister of education and sport appointed a national Literacy Development Commission<sup>5</sup> to prepare a draft national strategy for literacy development. At the end of last year, a group of experts prepared a draft document, which was discussed and adopted in December by the minister of education and sport. The commission members are circulating the draft document in professional groups, and it is also available online at <http://pismenost.acs.si/datoteke/komisija/strategija.pdf> (in Slovenian language).

We should also briefly present the National Literacy Development Strategy. The authors wrote that this is a strategic document of comprehensive lifelong literacy development, including children, youths and adults; the document sets targets and priorities for education policy in the area of literacy. By adopting the document, the Government of RS will accept responsibility for the development of literacy among the population of Slovenia. To achieve this goal, it will use all key resources down to the lowest level of their competence – not just education and labour, but also economy, health and agriculture. The document consists of two parts. The **general part** summarises the *key reasons* for the creation of the strategy; it shows the *development vision* for literacy (definition of terms and strategic objectives); it defines *six basic principles* for realising the national strategy (raising awareness of the importance and problem of literacy, comprehensive approach to realisation, access for all, partnership in implementation, professionalism and evaluation and self-evaluation of measures and effects). In this section, the commission also defined literacy as “*continually developing ability of individuals to use socially agreed systems of symbols to receive, understand, create and use texts for living in a family, school, the workplace and society.*”<sup>6</sup> As well as the basic skills, such as reading, writing, arithmetic, it also defined other abilities (for instance listening) and new literacies, the most commonly mentioned of which in recent years have been information, digital and media literacy.

The **specific part** defines *specific goals* and certain *levels of development* of literacy by school periods, from pre-school to higher-education institutions, and in adult edu-

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<sup>5</sup> Members and duties of the commission, chaired by Dr Sonja Pečjak, can be found at: <http://pismenost.acs.si/projekti/komisija/>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://pismenost.acs.si/datoteke/komisija/strategija.pdf>, p. 6

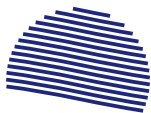
cation. For adults, it states that the goals are operationalised in the aforementioned strategies to improve adult literacy, emphasising also the relation between national strategy and special strategies for the area of adult literacy. The final part of the strategy consists of four areas *of measures to realise the national strategy*:

- The first area comprises programmes, meaning development and implementation and upgrading of public programmes for target groups;
- The second area consists of education and training for staff in the sector, emphasising the introduction of skills in the area of literacy in undergraduate and post-graduate teacher education, and in subsequent continuous teacher training;
- The third area comprises the formation of a network of programme providers, and securing resources;
- The last area defines special systemic changes and solutions for implementing the strategy, among which the establishment of an inter-departmental national literacy council at the Government of RS and the adoption of an action plan for the period to 2013 are worth emphasising.

In the spring, members of the national commission took a step forward and prepared a concrete proposal for an action plan for literacy development and a draft comprehensive plan for literacy promotion.

In doing so, the commission fulfilled its mission and completed its work. Following discussions in professional councils and ratification of the draft national strategy, the document should be adopted later this year by the Government of RS, thereby triggering the necessary procedures for realising the strategy in the next eight years.

Ester Možina, MSc, ([ester.mozina@acs.si](mailto:ester.mozina@acs.si)), SIAE



## Contribution to better teaching quality

### **National e-Learning Strategy**

The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (MHEST) gave the initiative for preparation of a National e-Learning Strategy. Nevron d.o.o. was chosen as project provider in a public tender. Other recognised Slovenian experts in the field are also cooperating in formulating the strategy. Through the strategy, we want to help improve the quality of learning and teaching at all levels of society, and consequently also to contribute to the development of an innovative, competitive and knowledge-based society, with access to knowledge and effective learning and teaching methods for all.

E-education or distance education is a priority task for MHEST, which considers e-education in the broadest sense: both in applied support and preparation of digital materials and in the sense of communications and links. The main guideline is the strategic document i2010<sup>1</sup>, which defines the basic emphasis of the development of the information society.

The main **purpose** of the e-learning strategy is to settle, guide and encourage the development of e-education on the national level with the **objective** of increasing economic growth and the competitiveness of Slovenian society, as well as the quality of life of Slovenian citizens. Using information and communications technology (ICT) we would like to improve learning success, ensure the most learner-friendly forms of learning, and provide quality support to teaching staff in the use of educational technologies in organising and providing education.

E-education does not just mean 'electronic' but also more economic, efficient, enhanced and extended education. It exploits modern ICT. The correct use of ICT in teaching has been shown to substantially improve learning outcomes<sup>2</sup>. Given the importance of knowledge today, it would be entirely irresponsible of the state not to encourage the use of ICT for the needs of education for all target social groups.

E-education places the learner, and not the teacher or the educational institution, at the heart of the learning process. It allows the learning process to be adapted to the needs, goals and desires of the individual, and enables access to knowledge at a time and place and in a manner suited to the student, while taking account of the desires, needs and opinions of educators.

Introducing new procedures, and modifying and monitoring strategies in most cases is a protracted process, dependent on a whole range of factors. The introduction and development of e-education are in the first instance dependent on technological development, which in turn depends on political interests or government and regional initiatives. It must also take account of the desires, requirements and needs of learners, teachers and parents; we could also add adaptation of learning processes, learning materials and additional training for teaching staff. All of these factors can accelerate or hinder the development of e-education. In order as far as possible to be promoters of development, individual bodies and services of the European Union are adopting various guidelines and documents followed more or less successfully by all EU members. In

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<sup>1</sup> Document i2010 – European Information Society for Growth and Employment was created at the European Union level. ([http://www.mvzt.gov.si/index.php?id=235&tx\\_ttnews\[pointer\]=26&tx\\_ttnews\(tt\\_news\)=499&tx\\_ttnews\(backPid\)=101](http://www.mvzt.gov.si/index.php?id=235&tx_ttnews[pointer]=26&tx_ttnews(tt_news)=499&tx_ttnews(backPid)=101), 20 May 2006)

<sup>2</sup> English national strategy for e-education: eStrategy: Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children's services. (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/e-strategy/>, 25 May 2006)

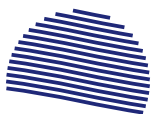
line with these guidelines, Slovenia too must adopt documents that will provide guidance and encouragement in achieving the national and European objectives set.

The National e-Learning Strategy monitors several key national objectives in 2007-2013<sup>3</sup>, such as sustainable increase in well being and quality of life, or increase in global competitiveness by fostering innovation and enterprise and through efficient investment in education, training, research and development. It defines six strategic areas: organization and administration learning process, teaching staff and learners, e-learning content, educational technologies and information-communications infrastructure. It discusses all social classes within the framework of five target learning groups: education, individuals, industry, public sector and groups with special needs. The most effective methods for accessing knowledge with regards to the needs of the individual must be available to all citizens of the Republic of Slovenia.

For effective implementation of measures in the six strategic areas and to satisfy the demand for knowledge for all social groups, an organisational model is proposed that will ensure realisation of the National e-Learning Strategy. It was compiled by different expert groups of professionals, guided by the Council for e-education.

The National e-Learning Strategy is intended for public debate. The first discussion has already been held - on 7 June MHEST in conjunction with the Network of Excellence in Professional Learning PROLEARN and the Jožef Štefan Institute organised a round table at Bled with the title *E-education in Slovenia*.

Rok Kokalj, MSc, ([rok.kokalj@nevron.si](mailto:rok.kokalj@nevron.si)), Nevron d.o.o.



Knowledge, a bridge between school and the economy

## **Education is a constant for the successful professional**

Through Phare programmes, the European Union is funding projects for education of young people and adults, the aim of which is to increase the level of education and reduce unemployment. Through these educational projects, it is reducing the differences among the criteria required for individual occupations in different European

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<sup>3</sup> Introduction to the strategic assessment of the National Development Programme (NDP) for sustainable development, 2005 (<http://www.svlsrcp.gov.si/index.php?id=1148>)

countries. In May 2005, the EU provided financial support to School Centre Ptuj – SC Ptuj for the project Phare 2003: *Lifelong Learning, Natural Science and Technology – the Present for the Future* amounting to SIT 63 million (EUR 260,000), of which project partners contributed SIT 8 million.

The project brings together more than 30 partner institutions from industry, small business, primary and secondary schools and university faculties. Partners involved in the project come from all over Slovenia. Implementation of the project includes more than 3,000 users and more than 200 experts in different fields responsible for activities.

SC Ptuj adapted information and animation in the area of natural sciences and technology to various age groups. We specially prepared information, animation and educational content for primary school pupils, secondary school students and adults.

Companies involved in the project take the employee education process very seriously; this is confirmed by the fact that the number of adults participating rose from 117 in 2004 to 166 in 2006. We provide adult education at the secondary and further technical levels in the area of mechanical and electrical engineering.

The most active companies in the project are TBP d.d. Lenart and Prevent-Halog d.o.o. Lenart. 80 employees from these two companies will receive additional education in SC Ptuj in stages.

At this time, SC Ptuj is already providing companies with education to improve information literacy and for electrical engineering constructors. They will successfully complete their education in May 2006 with internationally recognised examinations. More than 480 teaching hours will be provided in the education process, at least a third of which is given over to practical training. These involve optional modules in electrical engineering, electronics, physics, chemistry, computing, informatics and communications technology, in short knowledge that they will be able to use in their daily work. Around the world, it is common for individuals to contribute 30% towards the cost of such education from their own pockets, with the remainder provided by companies, sponsors and the state. We adopted a similar system in SC Ptuj.

The link with industry represents a major step and effort for our centre. But a commitment to bring technology and natural science closer to the young and the not-quite-so-young, and to captivate them with the concept of lifelong education, is a necessary and urgent investment in our future, since without it, Slovenia will struggle to survive in the face of global competition.

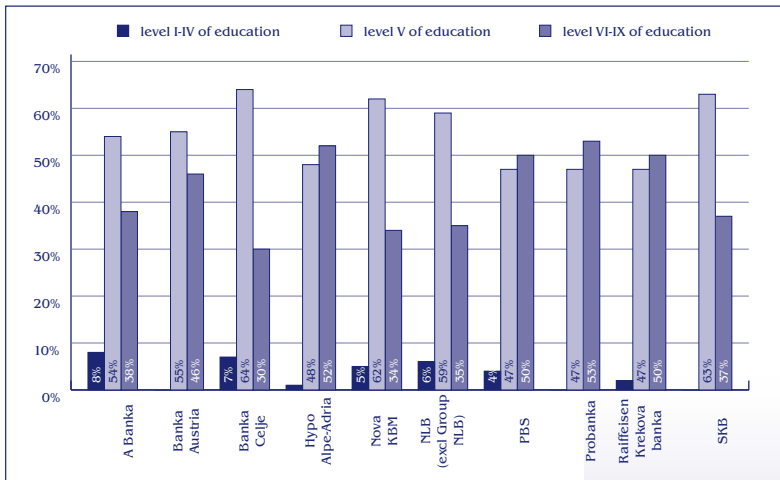
Franc Vrbančič ([franc.vrbancic@guest.arnes.si](mailto:franc.vrbancic@guest.arnes.si)), School Centre Ptuj



## INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

### Value of work Experiential knowledge in Slovenian banks?

In the Spring issue of *Novičke*, we described in detail the international project *Value of Work (Leonardo da Vinci)*, which we joined in November 2005. It concentrates on learning in the workplace or the acquisition of various non-formal knowledge and skills in the workplace, and the possibility of assessing and certifying knowledge obtained in the work process. The target group is employees in the banking sector with low levels of education.



**Table 1: Educational structure of employees in certain Slovenian banks, 2004**

A report on the educational structure in the banking sector<sup>1</sup> confirmed our assumptions that in Slovenia, the proportion of employees with less than level V education is falling year-on-year, while the proportion with levels V, VI and VII in economics, including individuals with master's degrees and doctorates, is increasing (Table 1). When hiring, banks concentrate on staff with formally acquired education, which the

<sup>1</sup> Cross, K. P. (1981). *Adults as learners: Increasing participation and facilitating learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Employment Relationship Act stipulates as a requirement for employment. Since this target group does not represent a problem in Slovenia, we will test methods and tools for assessing and certifying competences in sectors where the employee educational structure is lower.

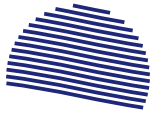
Despite numerous offers, banks encounter the problem that the knowledge candidates acquire in the formal education system does not meet the needs of a particular post. Thus each new employee must attend brief induction programmes, where they learn of the mission, objectives and vision of the bank, legal aspects of banking and finance etc. Draft revisions are being prepared to the nomenclature of occupations and occupational standards as the basis for educational programmes. A working group at the Bank Association of Slovenia, comprising representatives of a number of Slovenian banks, has been tasked with studying the need for changes to the standard classification of occupations and occupational standards in terms of updating existing occupations and introducing new ones; together with the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training, it must prepare a draft for the formulation of systemic solutions.

Although the banks are not considering introducing procedures to assess and certify informally acquired knowledge and skills, the Bank Association of Slovenia has joined the European Bank Training Network. At present they are in the accreditation procedure for introducing an examination for the European Foundation Certificate in Banking (EFCB), enabling mutual recognition and comparability of banking qualifications and increasing the mobility and integration of the workforce in the financial sector throughout Europe. In the certificate system, this represents a useful tool for financial institutions all over Europe in procedures for assessing and certifying knowledge, in training and development of success, and in consolidating standards of quality of service for their customers.

One of the main tasks of all partners in the *Value of Work* project is the formation of a *Professional Task Group (PTG)*, comprising representatives of social partners. The group, which will be involved throughout the project, represents a dissemination body on the national level. With its active role, it will ensure realisation of the goals, such as publication and implementation of the results of the project. The role of social partners is becoming increasingly important, since they can have a fundamental impact on the system of vocational and professional education on the national level, and can contribute to its modernisation.

Neda Đorđević ([neda.dordevic@acs.si](mailto:neda.dordevic@acs.si)), SIAE





## International cooperation of adult education institutions

### **Representative of Slovenia chairing the executive committee of ERDI**

From 9 to 14 May 2006 Bäckaskog in Sweden hosted the assembly of the Consortium of European Research and Development Institutes of Adult Education (ERDI). Sixteen eminent institutions<sup>1</sup> have their representatives in the consortium. Generally only one institute is involved from each country; if two are involved, the membership is shared. The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education became a member of ERDI at the assembly in Athens in 2002. ERDI's activities are financially supported through membership fees (the level of contribution depends on the number of employees of the individual institution) paid by network members, which means that it involves self-financing of development initiatives in the area of adult education in Europe.

In the ERDI, members establish creative links through participation in conferences and seminars, joint projects and the preparation of publications. The main body is the assembly of ERDI, organised once a year. Representatives of twelve members attended this year's assembly. This year the assembly was a bit different than in the two previous years. It had to elect a new Board and was also combined with a seminar on Validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In the first session, delegates adopted a report on the work of ERDI in the previous period, a financial report for 2005 and a financial plan for 2006, and elected a new Board comprising: *Dr Vida A. Mohorčič Špolar* (SIAE, Slovenia), president; *Alistair Thomson* (NIACE, England and Wales), vice-president; *Dr Jesús Gómez* (CREA, Spain), vice-president; *Peter Strijdonk* (VOCB, Belgium) and *Susanne Lattke* (DIE, Germany).

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) from England, Flemish support and development agency for adult basic education (VOCB) from Belgium, CVU and DPU Pedagogic Universities from Denmark, the German Development Institute (GDI), the Palmenia Centre for continuing education at the University of Helsinki from Finland, Vocational Training Centre Ergon Kek from Greece, The National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) from Ireland, the National Institute for Evaluation of Education and Training (INVALSI) from Italy, the Centre for Innovation in Adult Education (CINOP) from the Netherlands, the Norwegian Institute for Adult Education (VOX), the Adult Education Association at the University of Minho from Portugal, the Rumanian Institute for Adult Education, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE), the Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC), the Centre for Social and Educational Research (CREA) from Spain, the National Institute for Flexible Learning (CFL) from Sweden and the Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (FSEA)

*Dr Vida A. Mohorčič Špolar described the role of ERDI as follows: "Looking back at the development of the consortium since the electoral assembly in 2003, when I took over the presidency, the network has consolidated. It appears unified, ensures the flow of information, and cooperates in European projects. In this time, the ERDI has been recognised in the working group for the Grundtvig programme, where it was resolved that the consortium should present itself at a later session."*

The substantive part of the meeting was – in line with tradition – given over to presentation of the latest events in the host country – in this case two countries, Sweden and Norway, which were joint organisers of the meeting, presentation of innovations in participating institutions and a central professional theme. The professional session, *Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning*, was organised in the form of a seminar. *"Contributions were interesting. In general, I could say that most of the countries from which ERDI members come are only just learning of the problem of validating non-formal and informal learning. It seems that the greatest barrier to an important step forward is the education system, which views this with considerable doubt. In Norway, for instance, which in this field is a considerable step ahead, participants can obtain even a formal upper secondary education with this system. This is of course enabled by legislation. The path to higher education is only just being established even in Norway,"* Dr Vida A Mohorčič Špolar wrote in her report.

Of particular interest was the seminar paper by Dr Per Anderson of the University of Linköping, who discussed research and theory on the recognition of prior learning<sup>2</sup>. He warned that recognition of prior learning refers both to the individual and to the knowledge per se. It must take account of the exchange value of knowledge in the individual, serve for enrolment in continuing education and accreditation of such knowledge. In selecting the knowledge required for accreditation, we must take account of the purpose served by the knowledge, determine the most important contents and competences, adopt criteria and methods for assessment, and be able to evaluate practical experience and define subjects or vocational areas to which the system will apply. Here we must be aware that the assessment procedure could be a challenge for the individual and the environment, or it could have the opposite effect.

Another valuable contribution was that of *Dr Torild Nilsen* (VOX, Norway), who spoke of the Norwegian approach to non-formal and informal learning. The ice was broken in 1994, with the adoption of legislation stipulating that each young person aged 16-21 has the right to the complete secondary education. Reforms were undertaken from 1999 to 2003, including educational reforms, since from then on programmes were built on competences. Participants in reform processes were all social partners (ministries, trade unions, youth organisations, adult education organisations), and this is

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<sup>2</sup> The book to be published by NIACE: *Current Research and Theory of Recognition of Prior Learning*.

probably the reason for study leave for continuing education to be enacted by law. Dr Nilsen defined assessment in a way similar to CEDEFOP as a process of evaluation and recognition of a range of skills and competences that people acquire and develop in the course of their life (at work, through education, and in their spare time). In order to achieve its goals concerning validation, Norway established a network of nineteen regional centres responsible for information, guidance, identification of areas of knowledge, evaluation and documentation.

Slavica Borka Kucler ([slavica.borka.kucler@acs.si](mailto:slavica.borka.kucler@acs.si)), SIAE

God's blessing on all nations,  
Who long and work for a bright day,  
When o'er earth's habitations  
No war, no strife shall hold its sway;  
Who long to see  
That all men free  
No more shall foes, but neighbours be.

*F. Prešeren: The Toast*  
Slovenian national anthem

