



Referencing of the Latvian Education System to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area

Situation Assessment

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The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and should not be considered as representative of the European Commission’s official position.

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Abbreviations

- ACHEP – Accreditation Commission of Higher Education Programmes
- AIC – Academic Information Centre
- CEEN – Central and Eastern European Networking Association
- CoM – Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia
- CP – credit points
- EAQAN – Euroasian Quality Assurance Network
- ECTS – European Credit Transfer System
- EHEA – European Higher Education Area
- ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- EQANIE – European Quality Assurance Network in Engineering Education
- EQF – European Qualifications Framework
- ERDF – European Regional Development Fund
- ESF – European Social Fund
- HEC – Higher Education Council
- HEI – higher education institution
- HEQEC – Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre
- INQAAHE – International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
- LQF – Latvian Qualifications Framework
- MoES – Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia
- NCE – National Centre for Education
- NCP – National Coordination Point
- NQF – National Qualifications Framework
- QF-EHEA – Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area
- SAC – Study Accreditation Commission

Introduction

The general aim of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as a system of common references is to facilitate the development of the principle of lifelong learning and promote the cross-border mobility of citizens. The EQF offers to Latvia the possibility to describe its system of education, to make it and the awarded education documents more understandable to other countries. Simultaneously, also inhabitants of Latvia can better understand the systems of education in their own and in other countries, i.e., documents of education, which have been referenced to EQF. Referencing the national qualifications to the EQF offers a number of advantages:

- The implementation of qualifications framework will, definitely, improve the international comparability for the Latvian qualifications, as well as help employers better understand the process of education and its outcomes;
- A learner will develop a greater clarity about the learning/teaching process, and better lifelong learning opportunities will be provided;
- The descriptors of qualification levels, which are based on learning outcomes, can be used and are already used as guidelines for elaborating education programmes.

However, the process of referencing contains also risks, which must be taken into consideration when referencing the qualifications of national education to the EQF. To prevent hasty and ill-considered organisation of the referencing process, it is implemented in two stages in Latvia:

- The first stage, 2009-2011, included the elaboration of the Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF), as well as referencing the existing system of formal education to the EQF for lifelong learning and the Qualifications Framework of European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).
- The second stage was planned for 2013-2015, as an update of the self-assessment report, on the basis of the new Vocational Education Law, Law on Higher Education, as well as the results of a number of existing pilot-projects, for example, ESF project “Development of sectorial qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (2010-2013). The planned achievements, on which the scheduled review of the self-assessment report had to be based, have not been fully attained (the laws have not been drafted, the project has been extended); therefore the National Coordination Point (NCP) conducted an assessment in 2013 – what kind of changes had occurred in Latvian education system with regard to the aspects of EQF implementation and what was needed for a successful implementation of EQF.

In terms of ESF project “Development of sectorial qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (2010-2013), which is implemented by an institution under MoES – the State Education Development Agency, occupations in 12 sectors, and tasks, knowledge, skills and competences relevant to the professional activity of these occupation were explored, as well as the sectorial structure of qualifications (key occupations, related occupations and specialisations) was elaborated. Appendix 4 comprises recommendations regarding the corresponding EQF/LQF levels for qualifications (Latvian professional qualification level 1-3) discussed in the project.

All stakeholders must be involved in the referencing process, therefore the Academic Information Centre in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, also following the submission of the self-assessment report to the European Commission, continues organising various seminars, conferences, discussions to inform society about European and Latvian Qualifications Frameworks and to identify deficiencies in elaboration and implementation of qualifications framework.

The referencing procedure in Latvia has resulted in the elaboration of eight-level LQF. The descriptors of the qualification levels are based on learning outcomes, and the qualifications in formal education are linked to the aforementioned levels. The level

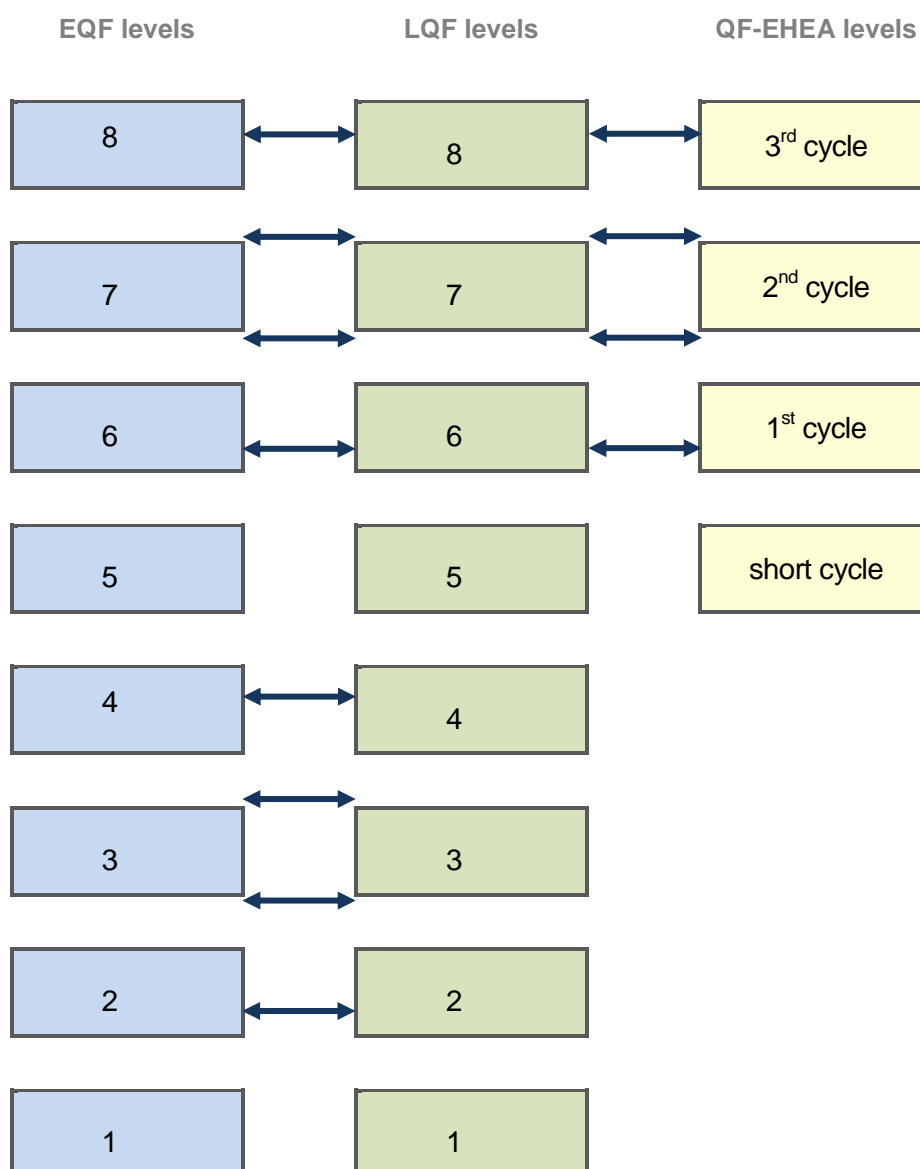
descriptors were drafted in accordance with the state education standards and occupational standards, as well as with the EQF level descriptors. The LQF covers the fields of formal higher, vocational and general education. The table below contains the placement of qualifications of Latvian formal education in eight LQF and EQF levels.

Table 1. The placement of the Latvian formal qualifications in the LQF and EQF

Latvian education documents (qualifications)	LQF and EQF level
Certificate of general basic education (for students in special educational programmes for students with severe mental development disorders or several severe development disorders)	1
Certificate of general basic education (for students in special educational programmes for students with mental development disorders)	2
Certificate of general basic education Certificate of vocational basic education	3
Certificate of general secondary education Certificate of vocational education Diploma of vocational secondary education	4
Diploma of first level professional higher education (1 st level professional higher (college) education, the length of full-time studies 2-3 years)	5
Bachelor's diploma Professional Bachelor's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (2 nd level professional higher education, the length of full-time studies – at least 4 years)	6
Master's diploma Professional Master's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (2 nd level professional higher education, the total length of full-time studies – at least 5 years)	7
Doctor's diploma	8

When developing the LQF levels, they were made compatible with the QF-EHEA levels (see figure below).

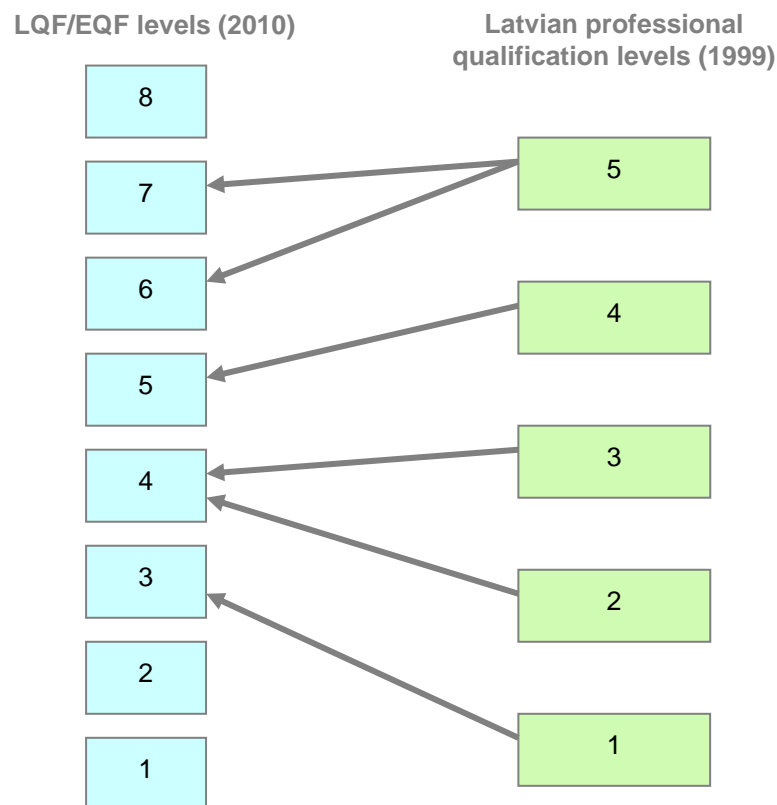
Figure 1. The compatibility of LQF/EQF levels with the QF-EHEA levels



During the first referencing stage, while referencing formal qualifications to the EQF, experts agreed that by referencing vocational secondary education and vocational education programmes to a single EQF/LQF level the existing inequality and artificially created differences were reduced.

As illustrated in Figure 2 below, at present five Latvian professional qualification levels impart qualifications only up to professional higher education level, i.e. not including qualifications corresponding to the LQF level 8. When developing the LQF in the future, it will be taken into account that both a Doctor's degree and vocational education qualifications, which do not belong to higher education, may be referred to the LQF level 8. Yet currently such vocational education qualifications do not exist in the Latvian education system.

Figure 2. The placement of five Latvian professional qualification levels¹ on eight LQF/EQF levels²



The project implemented with ESF support “Evaluation of higher education study programmes and proposals for improving quality” foresaw to conduct detailed assessment of study programmes in 40 higher education institutions throughout Latvia within 2 years, to improve the quality, effectiveness and international competitiveness of higher education and to verify the compatibility of study programmes with the needs of economy. In 2012-2013 major changes were introduced to the system of accreditation of higher education in Latvia – the former accreditation of individual study programmes was replaced with the accreditation of study fields. Chapter 2 of the Report presents the changes in greater detail.

Learning outcomes are essential concept of the EQF as it is core for level descriptors. To explore the understanding of learning outcomes among the representatives of education sector, a study on the use of learning outcomes in the Latvian education institutions was conducted. Chapter 3 of this Report outlines its main results and conclusions.

¹ Vocational Education Law (10.06.1999)

² Amendments to CoM Regulation of 2 December 2008 No.990 “Regulation on the classification of Latvian education” (5.10.2010)

1. Assessment of Latvian Qualifications Framework Level 1-4 Descriptors and Proposals for Their Improvement

In the discussion of the stakeholders coordinated by the Academic Information Centre, the level descriptors for the LQF levels 1-4 were examined to assess, whether the compatibility of professional qualifications with EQF should be reviewed, and, if necessary, to draft proposals for amendments to these level descriptors in laws and regulations.

Currently two different level descriptors are binding in vocational education:

- 1) The one defined in Section 5 of the Vocational Education Law (1999), which provides descriptors of five levels for vocational qualifications³;
- 2) The levels of EQF and their descriptors included in Table 2 of the Cabinet Regulations of 2 December 2008 No. 990 "Regulation on the classification of Latvian education"; Table 1 of Annex 1 to this Regulation defines the compatibility of EQF levels with the relevant education programme.

When in discussion the evaluation of the classification "The First and the Second Qualification Level and its Comparison with the International Standard Classification of Education (*ISCED-97*) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)" included in Table 1, Annex 1 to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.931 "Amendments to the Cabinet Regulation of 2 December 2008 No.990 "Regulation on the classification of Latvian education" (5.10.2010) was carried out, the stakeholders concluded that the following amendments should be included:

1. Section: First stage of basic education – 10T – Continuing vocational education (acquisition of professional qualification level 2), to be implemented without restrictions regarding former education
 - Proposal – to reference this education to EQF/LQF level 2
 - Rationale – such education programmes are implemented to obtain very simple qualifications (e.g., construction worker, cook's assistant, etc.), acquiring basic knowledge and skills for performing previously known, simple tasks under supervision.
2. Section: Second stage of basic education – 21 – General education, basic education (Grades 1-9) programmes
 - Proposal – to reference this education to EQF/LQF level 1-2
 - Rationale – in accordance with the CoM Regulations No. 1027 "Regulations on the state standard in basic education and in basic education study subjects standards" (19.12.2006), the primary objectives of basic education programmes include providing students with the basic knowledge and basic skills necessary for social and personal life; creating a basis for students' further education; encouraging harmonious formation and development of students; promoting responsible students' attitude towards themselves, family, society, surrounding environment and the State. Whereas the tasks include: forming preconception and understanding regarding major natural and social processes,

³ Vocational Education Law. Section 5. Levels of Vocational Qualification

There are five levels of vocational qualifications specified in the education system of Latvia (hereinafter – qualification levels):

- 1) the first qualification level – theoretical and practical training, which provides an opportunity to perform simple tasks in a specific sphere of practical operation;
- 2) the second qualification level - theoretical and practical training, which provides an opportunity to perform independently qualified artisan work;
- 3) the third qualification level – higher theoretical preparedness and professional skill, which provides an opportunity to perform specific artisan duties, which also include planning and organising of the work to be implemented;
- 4) the fourth qualification level – theoretical and practical training, which provides an opportunity to perform complicated artisan work, as well as to organise and manage the work of other specialists; and
- 5) the fifth qualification level – higher qualification of a specific sector, which provides an opportunity to plan and also perform scientific research work in the relevant sector.

moral and aesthetic values; providing an opportunity to acquire basic knowledge of and basic skills in language and mathematics; providing an opportunity to acquire basic learning abilities and basic skills in using information technologies, the knowledge and democratic values necessary for a citizen of Latvia, to gain experience in creative activity; to form a basic concept of the cultural heritage of Latvia, Europe and the world, as well as cultivating communication and cooperation skills. When comparing with the EQF level descriptors, conclusion can be drawn that the knowledge of the basic facts of the field of study, various basic skills, which are needed in order to use information, perform tasks and solve routine problems, as well as competence, which ensures work or studies, conducted under supervision with certain autonomy, ensure maximum compliance of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by a person at EQF level 2. The descriptors of EQF level 3 contain higher requirements, which comprise already the knowledge of facts, principles and general concepts. At the same time, Latvia should take into consideration the referencing results for this education level in other countries, as well as the results of international studies on education (e.g., OECD PISA 2009), which shows that Latvian young people aged 15 demonstrate outcomes in mathematics below the average level of the EU Member States, but the level complies only with the EU average in literature and natural sciences⁴. Therefore, Latvia has no grounds to classify the knowledge, skills and competence acquired in basic education as EQF/LQF level 3, which is higher than the classification of other EU Member States.

3. Section: Second stage of basic education – 22 – Vocational basic education, to be implemented without restrictions regarding prior education
 - Proposal – to reference to EQF/LQF level 2
 - Rationale – the majority of these vocational basic education programmes are implemented in special education establishments (60% of vocational basic education programmes licensed in 2012 were licensed for implementation at special education establishments, for persons with special needs), including for persons with mental health disorders, mental development disorders, multiple mental development disorders, etc. after the acquisition of special basic education programmes. In these vocational basic education programmes simple knowledge and skills in the field are acquired, the lowest qualification in the sector is obtained (see Annex 4) and acquired knowledge, skills and competence do not reach the level defined by the descriptors of EQF/LQF level 3.
4. Section: Secondary education level – 32 – Vocational education (acquisition of professional qualification level 2)
 - Proposal – to express the last phrase in the following wording: “Vocational education (acquisition of professional qualification level 2, to be implemented following acquisition of partial or complete basic education)” and reference to the EQF/LQF level 2-3 regarding the duration of implementation of the particular vocational education programme and rules of enrolment
 - Rationale:
 - As the descriptions of 12 sectors and qualification structures show, the differences between the knowledge, skills and competences of the Latvian professional qualification level 2 ensured by vocational education and the Latvian professional qualification level 2, which is ensured by vocational secondary education (see Appendix 4), are significant; therefore, learning outcomes achieved in vocational education cannot be classified on the same level as vocational secondary education⁵;
 - Section 27 (1) of Vocational Education Law provides that admission is equal with vocational basic education, i.e., persons are admitted to vocational basic

⁴ Geske, A. u.c. (2010). Ko skolēni zina un prot – kompetence lasīšanā, matemātikā un dabaszinātnēs. http://www.izglitiba-kultura.lv/system/application/uploads/file/LU_petijums_pdf.pdf

⁵ More about this ESF project see <http://www.viaa.gov.lv/lat/strukturfondi/12111/>.

education and vocational education programmes without any restriction regarding prior education and not earlier than in the calendar year when the person becomes 15 years old. Since the law has a higher legal force compared to CM regulations, Latvia may encounter the practice of admitting to vocational education programmes persons without completed basic education. Such education programmes should be referenced to the EQF/LQF level 2;

- Only vocational education programmes, to which students are admitted after basic education and which last for three years, should be referenced to the EQF/LQF level 3 (see the CoM Regulation No. 211 “Regulations on the state vocational secondary education standard and the state vocational education standard” (2000), Appendix 3, 1st row of Table 1).
5. Section: Secondary education level – 35a – Vocational secondary education (acquisition of professional qualification level 2) to be implemented after the acquisition of general secondary education
- Proposal – to reference to the EQF/LQF level 3
 - Rationale – the structure of sectorial qualifications does not prove an approach that different levels of knowledge, skills and competences can be set for one qualification (e.g., tailor, carpenter, cook, etc.)..
6. Section: Secondary education level – 30T – Continuing vocational education (acquisition of professional qualification level 2 or 3), to be implemented after the acquisition of general or vocational secondary education
- Proposal – to express the 4th column in the following wording: “Continuing vocational education (acquisition of professional qualification level 3), to be implemented after the acquisition of general or vocational secondary education”, Latvian professional qualifications of level 3 should be referenced to the EQF/LQF level 4
 - Rationale:
 - Section 27 (7) of Vocational Education Law states that a person is admitted to continuing vocational education programmes, which provide an opportunity to acquire the Latvian professional qualification level 3, after the acquisition of vocational education or secondary education;
 - Regarding the significant differences in the descriptors of knowledge, skills and competence for the Latvian professional qualification level 2 (e.g. tailor, cook, hair-dresser, etc.) and level 3 (e.g., architectural technician, utilities technician, etc.), as well as in the relevant sectorial qualification structures (see Appendix 4), the occupations of the Latvian professional qualification levels 2 and 3 cannot be classified as one EQF/LQF level.

After the evaluation of the compatibility of documents certifying acquisition of formal education with EQF/LQF levels, resulting from the elaboration of LQF and the first stage of referencing⁶, proposals for formulation of document descriptions are provided in Appendix 2. These recommendations include a proposal to move the education document – certificate of vocational education – placed on the EQF/LQF level 4 to the EQF/LQF level 3, The qualifications included in the descriptors and 14 sectorial qualifications structures point at significant differences between qualifications/occupations acquired in vocational education (Latvian professional qualification level 2) and qualifications acquired in vocational secondary education (Latvian professional qualification level 2) (see Appendix 4). At the same time, additional entries must be made regarding the certificates of professional qualifications in the descriptors of the EQF/LQF level 2-4, since continuing vocational education programmes are implemented for the acquisition of occupations/qualifications of the Latvian professional qualification level 1, 2 and 3.

⁶ See http://www.nki-latvija.lv/content/files/Latvian%20Self-Assessment%20Report%202nd%20version_May%202012.pdf.

Appendix 3 contains proposals on the formulation of learning outcomes included in the LQF.

Appendix 4 comprises the summary of information included in the 14 sectorial qualification structures, to illustrate the proposals for amending descriptors of EQF/LQF levels 1-4.

2. Reforms in the Quality Assessment of Higher Education

In 2013, a new kind of accreditation of study programmes was introduced, replacing the accreditation of individual programmes with accreditation of study fields.

The previous accreditation of higher education programmes envisaged that a graduate could receive the state recognised higher education qualification if both the higher education institution and the study programme had been accredited. All new study programmes initially received a licence, which functioned as permission for enrolling applicants in the study programme under the condition that the higher education institution accredited the study programme no later than within three years following the receipt of the licence. Thus, at the time when the first students graduated, the study programme was already accredited. A programme was granted accreditation for two years (if a need to improve the study programme was identified) or six years.

In accordance with the new procedure, since 2013 higher education institutions obtain accreditation for study fields. This means that by accrediting a study field, all higher education programmes included in this study field are accredited. A study field is accredited for six years, as previously or for two years if deficiencies that can be eliminated are identified. The higher education programmes included in a study field are listed and described in detail in the Annex to the Accreditation Sheet of the study field issued to the higher education institution.

On 25 September 2012, the CoM Regulations No. 668 "Procedure for accreditation of higher education institutions, colleges and study fields" were adopted. The main changes compared to the previous CoM Regulations No.821 "Procedure for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions, Colleges and Higher Education Programmes" (3.10.2006) are listed below:

- 1) Transition from the assessment and accreditation of study programmes to the assessment and accreditation of study fields;
- 2) Since 2013, the assessment and accreditation is organised by the Ministry of Education and Science;
- 3) Experts are selected according to the principle of randomness.

As previously, in order to receive a state recognised diploma, both the higher education institution (and all its separate branches) and the study programme (separately in branches) must be accredited. The accreditation already granted to the higher education institutions is valid, and the accredited higher education institutions will not undergo repeated accreditation. However, those new higher education institutions, which so far have not yet obtained accreditation, will be able to apply for accreditation when at least half of its provided study fields is accredited. The list of higher education institutions, which previously have been accredited, is available from the home page of HEQEC (<http://www.aiknc.lv/lv/list.php>).

The list of newly accredited study fields (and the study programmes they comprise) is available in the form of an Excel table on the homepage of the MoES (<http://izm.izm.gov.lv/nozares-politika/izglitiba/augstaka-izglitiba/akreditacija.html>, see section "Accredited study fields and programmes").

The main changes in the CoM Regulations No. 230 "Regulation on licencing study programmes" (adopted on 25.04.2013), compared with the previous regulations, are shown below:

- 1) The composition of the licencing commission is identical with the composition of the study accreditation commission (SAC); therefore, the SAC can and actually does perform the tasks of the licencing commission⁷;
- 2) A new study programme is added to an accredited study field on the basis of a decision by the SAC, and, in fact, the new study programmes are immediately accredited;
- 3) The decision on creating a new study field at a higher education institution or college is adopted by the CoM;
- 4) An expert for assessing a new study field or study programme is selected according to the principle of randomness.

Three different systems for evaluating higher education have been used in the recent years:

- 1) Evaluation and accreditation of higher education (higher education institutions, colleges and programmes thereof) in accordance with CoM Regulation No. 821 "Procedure for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions, Colleges and Higher Education" (3.10.2006) was conducted until March 2013. The evaluation was organised by HEQEC;
- 2) Almost all Latvian study programmes, divided into 28 study fields, were evaluated in the framework of ESF project "Evaluation of higher education study programmes and proposals for quality improvement" from September 2011 to June 2012. The implementation of project was coordinated by the HEC, the evaluation of all study programmes was organised by HEQEC. Due to various reasons (higher education institution did not participate in the project or did not register all the study programmes, dissatisfaction with the evaluation received in the project, new study programmes created recently, etc.), approximately 30 study programmes were not evaluated during the project;
- 3) In May 2013, the evaluation and accreditation of higher education (higher education institutions, colleges and their study programmes) was commenced in accordance with the CoM Regulations No. 668 "Procedure for accreditation of higher education institutions, colleges and study fields" (25.09.2012). Almost all Latvian study programmes, divided into 29 study fields, were accredited on basis of the ESF project results. At present part of 30 study programmes, which were not examined in the ESF project, have been evaluated.

Even though formally all three methods of evaluation applied recently differ as to their methods and are organised in a different way, in all cases great focus is placed on learning outcomes, and experts verified the compliance with the European principles and guidelines for higher education. The composition of experts changed very little, because the same database of experts and similar principles for selecting experts and expanding the database (searching for new experts) were used.

The new CoM Regulations "Procedure for accreditation of higher education institutions, colleges and study fields" (25.09.2012) set out clear and very detailed criteria and requirements for elaborating the self-assessment report, for evaluating study fields and study programmes. Appendix 6 and 7 of the CoM Regulations define the criteria to be used by experts:

- "The consistency of the study programmes and their separate parts appropriate for the study field with the requirements regarding the development of Latvian and common European higher education area, including the comparison of each study programme corresponding to a study field with at least one study programme of the same level and

⁷ During the preparation of the new CoM Regulations, rather extensive discussions were focused on the overlap of the licencing and accreditation procedures and decision was made to join SAC and the licencing commission.

corresponding to the same study field in Latvia (if a similar study programme is implemented in Latvia) and at least two study programmes of higher education institutions or colleges recognised by the European Union Member States.” (Appendix 6 to the CoM Regulations)

While evaluating study programmes, experts must use the document elaborated by European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area", must assess the aims and objectives of study programmes, how clear, attainable and verifiable these are, consistency of the study programme and its separate parts with the requirements for creating the Latvian and EHEA (including the comparison of the study programme with at least two other study programmes of the European Union Member States). Experts in their report must include answers to the questions:

- Are **the expected learning outcomes** of the studies **clearly presented**, are problem solving skills developed in practice?
- Do the students, who are enrolled in the study programme, have appropriate **knowledge, skills and competence** to attain the planned **learning outcomes** within the envisaged time?
- Does the testing of interim-results during the course of studies ensure reaching the **learning outcomes** of the study programme? (Appendix 7 to the CoM Regulations).

The experts, in evaluating study programmes and study fields, use holistic, integral approach, paying more attention to the functioning of quality management and assurance system in HEIs and colleges. If these internal systems function, during the external inspection there is no need to conduct an in-depth study of the operation; for example, exact analysis of the wording of the learning outcomes, and checking the compliance with the Latvian and European recommendations and regulatory enactments. Some control is necessary, but in this case accreditation maybe focused only upon discussions about various development options and future outlooks, opportunities and risks. Therefore, the experts' reports have rather different level of detailed analysis on the use of learning outcomes, but the problem in general has been evaluated in all cases. If the experts agree that the criterion "the compliance with the requirements regarding development of Latvian and European higher education area" has been attained, it is not always specially highlighted; thus, the experts' reports sometimes lack more detailed analysis, but contain only general positive assessment. A recommendation could be made to the experts to provide a more detailed description of the situation, even in the absence of significant deficiencies, since the issue of using learning outcomes, EQF and LQF gains importance with the growing diversity in the content of study programmes and methodological solutions.

Improving Organisation of Quality Assessment

Point 3.6 of "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" elaborated by the ENQA states:

- Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, **ministries** or other stakeholders. [...] The definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and **independently from governments**, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence.

Currently Latvia is the only one among the EU states, in which the standard is not implemented. Therefore, the informative report "On the course and procedure of accreditation of study fields, according to which by 1st January 2014 the accreditation of higher education institutions and colleges, as well as study fields will be organised and conducted, using the European quality assurance agencies registered in the European

Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)” (submitted to CoM on 10.10.2013.) prepared by the MoES analyses the possibility of decreasing the direct interference of the MoES and CoM in the quality assessment of higher education. The MoES wants to involve foreign specialists and organisations in the quality assessment of higher education and accreditation, to renew compliance with the European requirements and to ensure that the evaluation is international.

The main part, and the one most visible to society, of quality assessment of higher education is expert group’s visits to the higher education institution and the following report on the quality of the higher education institution, college or study programme. In Latvia, this part is international; since in almost all commissions part of the experts come from abroad (1st level professional higher education programmes and colleges are exceptions).

The second part of quality assessment is its organisation: searching for experts and their education, planning and implementation of the visit, summarizing and publishing the results. This work must be done by an independent institution, which could be both Latvian and foreign.

The foreign institutions, which comply with the European standard and guidelines, have developed procedures and methods appropriate for their own states. Aligning these with requirements of Latvian system would be a difficult process, in view of the fact that the current CoM regulations contain numerous rather specific elements of methodology intended for Latvia, e.g., the ones elaborated in the ESF project “Evaluation of higher education study programmes and proposals for quality improvement”. Moreover, it should be taken into consideration that approximately half of the EU states do not have quality assurance institutions registered in the EQAR; thus, the choice could be rather limited.

The Use of Distance Learning and Prior Experience in Assessment

Distance learning, the Internet resources and systems like massive open online course (MOOC) are more frequently used in the study process. For a successful study process, it is necessary to combine various study methods, i.e. using virtual space together with full-time studies (so called blended learning); combining formal, non-formal and informal learning, and the use of joint programmes. The quality assurance system must pay special attention to these new forms; parallel use of diverse methods of learning should be facilitated with the assistance of LQF and the system of learning outcomes.

Special attention should be paid to the assessment of the operations of the branches and contact points of higher education institutions and colleges, ensuring that equal learning outcomes are attained. Appropriate criteria should be used in assessing the branches and joint programmes. The use of LQF and learning outcomes should facilitate comparison and merging of education parts obtained under various circumstances, integrating these in united, internationally aligned and recognisable qualifications.

At national level, criteria for assessing previous experience and for practicing the recognition of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal learning should be developed and used in quality assessment. Quality assurance experts should present to students, faculty members and society the best practice examples, in order to select and apply the most appropriate study methods.

Assessing during the accreditation the changes achieved in study process

The extensive use of lifelong learning involves students with very diverse levels of previous experience in the study process. In assessing the learning outcomes experts should pay attention not only to the final, but also the initial level and the path for reaching the planned learning outcomes from various starting points. The experts should especially support greater changes in the level of knowledge, skills and competences, should help popularise and distribute methods that ensure students’ fast progress in the study process.

3. Introducing Learning Outcomes

In Europe learning outcomes are used increasingly more often as the basis for occupational and education standards, education content, assessment criteria and descriptors of qualifications and levels of education in national qualifications frameworks. All these tools define learning outcomes on various levels of specificity and envisage them for a number of goals, for example: to define the abilities to be expected from a person, who has obtained a concrete qualification; for managing the learning process, for managing the assessment process⁸.

In terms of this study, the concept “learning outcomes” was defined regarding the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the institution of the EQF for lifelong learning (2008) – statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after a certain period of learning, and learning outcomes are expressed in three categories: knowledge, skills and competence.

The Latvian legal regulation – to a certain extent – also comprises learning outcomes. For instance, since 1999 the Education Law defines education as “a process of systematic acquisition of knowledge and skills and development of attitudes, and result thereof”. The use of learning outcomes in education is ensured by the state education standards and occupational standards, the system of state examinations, as well as licensing and accreditation of education institutions and programmes.

As regards general education, the state standard of general basic⁹ and secondary¹⁰ education, as well as standards of study subjects, set requirements for education programmes or study subjects: main aims and objectives, the mandatory content, key principles and procedures for students’ assessment. The state education standards comprise also the necessary knowledge and skills that students should acquire in order to obtain basic or secondary education. Education institutions elaborate education programmes, but teachers – study subject programmes in accordance with the state education standards and methodological guidelines provided by the National Centre for Education. If the education programme elaborated by an education institution does not comply with the requirements of state education standard, it cannot be licensed and accredited; thus, the education institution has no right to issue qualifications recognized in Latvia. Upon concluding general basic and secondary education programme, students take state centralised exams, the content of which is also elaborated in compliance with the state education standards.

The content of vocational education is defined by the state vocational education standards, occupational standards and vocational education programmes:

- The state vocational education standards (state vocational education and vocational secondary education standards¹¹) define the strategic aims of education programmes,

⁸ Cedefop’s study “Learning Outcomes Approaches in VET Curricula: A Comparative Analysis of Nine European Countries” revealed that on the level of the education content and study programmes learning outcomes have two main functions: regulatory and didactic. According to the regulatory function, the education content is a tool, which ensures equally high standards in the education provided throughout the territory; thus, learning outcomes must ensure a stable basis for assessment. The didactic function states that the education content provides guidelines for directing the study process; hence, learning outcomes may be broadly defined, including knowledge, skills or competences that cannot be measured; they reflect values and the roles, for which learners are prepared during the study process.

⁹ CoM Regulations No.468 “Regulations on the state basic education standard, standards of basic education study subjects and samples of basic education programmes” (in force since 23.08.2014).

¹⁰ CoM Regulations No.281 “Regulations on the state general secondary education standard, standards of study subjects and samples of basic education programmes” (in force since 6.06.2013).

¹¹ CoM Regulations No.211 “Regulations on the state vocational secondary education standard and the state vocational education standard” (in force since 1.07.2000).

the mandatory education content, as well as the key principles and procedure for evaluating the acquired education;

- Occupational standards define the basic objectives and responsibilities appropriate for the occupation, basic requirements regarding professional qualification, the general and professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences necessary for performing them;
- Vocational education programmes comprise objectives, content and implementation plan of vocational education programme, as well as requirements regarding previous education.

Vocational education institutions use occupational and state education standards and methodological guidelines provided by the National Centre for Education to elaborate their own education programmes. If the designed education programmes do not correspond to the requirements, the education programmes may not undergo licensing and accreditation. Students demonstrate the acquired learning outcomes during the state centralised exams in general study subjects (in vocational secondary education programmes) and professional qualification examinations, the content of which is elaborated in compliance with respective occupational standards.

The content of higher education is stipulated by study programmes, which are designed according to relevant state education (state standard of the academic education¹², state standard of first level professional higher education¹³ and state standard of the second level professional higher education¹⁴) and occupational standards (professional higher education programmes). HE study programme includes all the necessary requirements for obtaining an academic degree or professional qualification; aim, content and expected learning outcomes of study programmes, including study courses, modules and their expected learning outcomes; requirements regarding previous education; study field corresponding to the study programme; volume of study programme parts; criteria for attaining and assessing learning outcomes, as well as forms and procedures for tests. HEIs review the implemented study programmes in order to introduce learning outcomes and to pass the accreditation procedure.

Both in vocational and higher education, system for assessing/validating learning outcomes outside formal education has been established. See Chapter 4 of this Report.

3.1. The methodology of study

The aim of the study conducted in terms of the European Commission project “European Qualifications Framework – National Coordination Point” (2012-2013) was to explore:

- The knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes among the members of education institution administration and teaching staff;
- The application of learning outcomes in teaching/learning process;
- Respondents’ expectations in connection with the implementation of learning outcomes approach.

In the course of the study (October and November 2013), 66 structured interviews were planned in all regions of Latvia (see Table 2). The interviews were conducted at education institutions of all levels and types; the qualifications offered by the institutions are included in the LQF. At each education institution two structured interviews were conducted

¹² CoM Regulations No.240 “Regulations on the state standard of the academic education” (in force since 16.05.2014).

¹³ CoM Regulations No.141 “Regulations regarding the state standard of first level professional higher education” (in force since 5.04.2001).

¹⁴ CoM Regulations No.512 “Regulations on the state standard of the second level professional higher education” (in force since 12.09.2014).

– one with a representation of administration and one interview the representative of teaching staff.

Table 2. Distribution of the planned interviews by education institutions and regions

Education institutions in Riga	Education institutions in regions	Total
General education institutions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 secondary schools • 1 secondary school with Russian as the language of instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 basic schools • 3 secondary schools • 1 primary school • 1 evening school with two parallel languages of instruction • 1 basic school with Russian as the language of instruction • 1 secondary school with two parallel languages of instruction 	16
Vocational education institutions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 secondary school • 1 secondary school (under the direction of Ministry of Culture) • 1 secondary school (functions in terms of college) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 secondary schools/technical schools • 1 secondary school (under the direction of Ministry of Culture) • 1 secondary school (functions in terms of college) 	10
Higher education institutions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 state founded HEIs • 2 private HEIs • 1 state founded college • 1 private college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 state founded college • 1 state founded HEI 	8

The number, type and the proportion (Riga – region) of the surveyed institutions in three groups was selected according to the proportional distribution of education institutions as to their number. This proportion, however, is not observed between the three groups (general, vocational and higher education), since the differences among the total number of education institutions regarding the stages and types of education are too great.

During the study, in total **54 interviews** were conducted:

- 23 interviews in 12 general education institutions;
- 17 interviews in 9 vocational education institutions (including 2 colleges implementing first level professional higher education programmes);
- 14 interviews in 5 higher education institutions and 2 colleges.

34 interviews were conducted at education institutions located **in regions outside Riga**:

- 19 interviews with the representatives of general education institutions;
- 11 interviews with the representatives of vocational education institutions;
- 2 interviews with the representatives of college;
- 2 interviews with the representatives of higher education institutions.

20 interviews were conducted at education institutions located **in Riga**:

- 4 interviews with the representatives of general education institutions;
- 6 interviews with the representatives of vocational education institutions;
- 2 interviews with the representatives of college;
- 8 interviews with the representatives of higher education institutions.

Partly structured interview was chosen as the data collection method, since this way more extensive and accurate answers may be obtained, which can be analysed using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The interview consisted of four sets of questions including several issues. The interviews imparted the following main questions: data about respondents; knowledge about learning outcomes; application of learning outcomes in education; as well as respondents' expectations in regards to the use of and obtaining information about learning outcomes. To collect comparable data, the content of interview templates was designed similarly for all education institutions (regardless the stage and type of education); apart from questions relevant to a particular target group, e.g., questions about state education or occupational standards, exams prepared by the National Centre for Education, as well as in the interview part about expectations – questions about lifelong learning, validation of previous education/experience and connection with labour market. All questions of interviews (with representatives of HEIs) are outlined in the Appendix 6.

Since the sample is not very extensive, wherever possible, the acquired quantitative data were examined in the cross-section of all stages and types of education. Whereas the recommendations and the results of qualitative analysis were described both in terms of individual stages and types of education and providing shared proposals and conclusions regarding the entire education system in general.

3.2. Main Results of Study

In total 54 respondents participated in the study, of which 44 were females and 10 – males. The most of respondents were at aged of 36-55 (55.5%) or 26-35 (25.9%). 26 teachers and 28 representatives of education institution administration were interviewed.

Accessibility of information

This set of questions included the following topics: availability of information on learning outcomes; information sources; main obstacles in work with learning outcomes (at national and education institution level); level of knowledge on learning outcomes (in country and colleagues).

The results of interviews on “**availability of information on learning outcomes**”:

- 38.9% respondents consider that availability of information is “good”;
- 27.8% respondents – availability of information is “rather good”;
- 25.9% respondents – availability of information is “average”;
- 5.6% respondents – availability of information is “rather bad”;
- 1.9% respondents – „hard to say”.

The results of interviews indicate that differences in answers according to the stage and type of education can be observed: the personnel of general education institutions provided the most positive assessment of the accessibility of the information, while the representatives of higher education institutions and colleges were more critical in this question.

The respondents expressed a number of insights how of improving the accessibility of information. Even though the employees of the HEIs expressed the most critical opinion on the accessibility of information, these respondents mentioned for a couple of times that they gained information during the seminars organised by EQF national coordination point and other institutions, and from the materials available on the Internet. When evaluating the study results, conclusion may be drawn that the informative seminars organised so far have been mainly targeted at the employees of HEIs; even though the accessibility of information is not given high evaluation, the most extensive information had been available to this group of respondents.

The representatives of HEIs in the interviews mentioned the experience of other countries and information sources in foreign languages. The results of interviews prove that the respondents mainly search information in foreign sources; thus, it would be necessary to improve and popularize national information sources in connection with learning outcomes.

At vocational and general education institutions included in the study learning outcomes were predominantly linked with the relevant state education standard, study subject standards, and occupational standards (vocational education institutions). The availability of these documents explains why the accessibility of information was evaluated positively by the mentioned respondents. Yet, according to the respondents, the standards are rather heavy and bulky, as well as learning outcomes included in the standards are given different interpretations among education institutions, which causes the main obstacles for the system to take a uniform approach to this issue. The results of interviews show that education institutions rarely considers a purposeful acquisition of the interdisciplinary knowledge, skills and competences if these are not listed in one of the standards. Information about the enumeration of learning outcomes is easy available; however, the information on the concept of learning outcomes is more difficult to find and understand their meaning the education system.

It can be concluded that the representatives of HEIs are better informed about learning outcomes, but being aware of the scope of the concept, understand that more information could be made accessible. Whereas vocational education institutions, due to the specific features of their functions, are more oriented towards labour market and practical application of knowledge, skills and competences, which facilitate personnel's understanding of learning outcomes; however, not all vocational schools, especially in regions, are sufficiently involved in the circulation of information. At general education institutions learning outcomes are often perceived as implementation of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations, not as a tool for organising teaching/learning process and performing students' assessment.

The results of study indicate that if need be all the necessary information can be found using Internet. The collected data on “**information sources**” (multiple answers could be provided):

- 49 replies – Internet;
- 42 replies – seminars;
- 35 replies – colleagues;
- 22 replies – publications;
- 18 replies – direct communication with the competent institution working on learning outcomes.

The respondents' answers about existing and potential information sources are outlined in Table 3. The representatives of HEIs, especially, mentioned various web sites of various institutions, seminar materials, as well as *Twitter* accounts as useful sources of information. The interviewed employees of general education institutions highlighted that Internet sources could not always be trusted and that they lacked knowledge on where to look for necessary information.

To explore good practice and introduce positive changes, seminars and other types of direct communication is very crucial. The interviewed representatives of HEIs not only participate in various seminars and experience sharing events, but also organise them. The personnel of HEIs often are members of working groups dealing with the respective issues at national or international level. The employees of institutions of general and vocational education have high evaluation of experience sharing seminars; however, these are not always accessible to everybody. The interviewed employees of general and vocational education institutions highly appreciated exchange of experience during the seminars, as well, although these events are not available for everyone. Particularly the results of interviews with employees of general and vocational education institutions, located show that the administrative territorial reform has resulted in decreasing of information and best

practice sharing among faculty members, i.e., active communication among education employees predominantly takes place within the county (*novads*), which includes a smaller number of schools, compared to the time when such sharing of information took place on the district (*rajons*) level. Moreover, the funding principle “money follows the student” does not facilitate the wish of large and strong city education institutions to share their best practice with smaller schools, because due to the decreasing number of children schools actively strive to maintain a stable number of children in all the groups of grades.

Table 3. Existing and preferable information sources on learning outcomes by types of education institutions (frequencies)

	Internet	Publications	Seminars	Direct communication with competent institution	Colleagues
Higher education institutions					
Existing sources	14	6	10	4	9
Preferable sources	13	10	13	7	5
Vocational education institutions					
Existing sources	14	10	13	6	9
Preferable sources	13	6	14	3	8
General education institutions					
Existing sources	21	6	19	8	17
Preferable sources	17	9	14	9	10
Total (existing)	49	22	42	18	35
Total (preferable)	43	25	41	19	23

The results of interviews with the vocational education institutions point out that excellent way how to obtain the latest information about learning outcomes is employers' opinion, participation in the elaboration of occupational standards, as well as qualification examinations. Moreover, it is also a way of establishing professional contacts in order to share best practice in further work, as well.

The “**preferable ways of obtaining information**” indicated in interviews are not essentially different from the existing information sources:

- In total 43 replies – Internet;
- In total 41 replies – seminars;
- In total 25 replies – publications;
- In total 23 replies – colleagues;
- In total 19 replies – direct communication with the competent institution working on learning outcomes.

Comparing the existing and preferable way of obtaining information (see Table 3), the demand for publications has slightly increased, but the need to share information with colleagues – decreased. The representatives from education institutions of all stages and types noted that it was important to share the best practice; thus, inspiring and supporting changes at other education institutions. Moreover, these examples should be sufficiently detailed to ensure that, when necessary, the best practice could be adopted in a qualitative way.

The results of interviews with the representatives of HEIs suggest the following measures should be performed for information distribution:

- Internet tools should be used more extensively in providing information on learning outcomes

- The responsible institutions should collect topical information, for example, by creating regular newsletter on the relevant topic; thus, education institutions would not have to spend so much time looking for credible topical information;
- Wider public should be informed about learning outcomes and the qualifications framework in general using the media.
- The main topical issues should be presented to the vice-rectors for academic affairs of HEIs.

The representatives from the vocational and general education institutions provided the following proposals for improving information exchange:

- Seminars and study visits should be arranged, as well as their quality should be improved;
- The good practice should be observed directly by visiting other schools; in the case of vocational schools teachers should be ensured possibility to have internship periods in the companies of the sector, thus ensuring better understanding of the best practice to be adopted;
- Learning outcomes should be explained from the perspective of didactics – first learning outcomes should be formulated for education programmes, thereafter – for study subject in order to facilitate link between subjects;
- In order to understand, which learning outcomes can be attained by the Latvian youth at particular age, diagnostic testing should be conducted involving all the students because at present there is lack of information concerning the average level of youth’s knowledge; and, therefore, it is not possible to evaluate objectively, what level corresponds to high or low achievements;
- Clear information should be ensured, where the teachers of various study subjects should turn for advice, if they wish to receive methodological support regarding the introduction and use of learning outcomes in classes.

According to the results of this study, conclusion can be drawn that the representatives of HEIs are satisfied with the quality of seminars held thus far, but they wish to have more extensive possibilities of finding various materials on the Internet. Whereas the respondents from the general and vocational education institutions stressed the need to improve the quality of seminars and develop additional networking tools, as well as ensure the necessary information on the Internet.

Knowledge about learning outcomes

Regarding the results of interviews, the majority of employees of vocational and general education institutions interpreted learning outcomes as the assessment that students receive during their learning. When the interviewees were provided with more extensive explanation about the term, learning outcomes were usually linked with the existing education and occupational standards. Especially the representatives of general education institutions perceived the state education standards as a direct reflection of learning outcomes. Due to this view, broader view on the learning outcomes was not frequently observed in the interviews. Whereas the respondents at the HEIs predominantly immediately recognised the concept of learning outcomes and mentioned a seminar or process for improving internal quality, in which the higher education institution applied or intended to apply learning outcomes.

The results of interviews on **“the general level of knowledge about learning outcomes in the country”** (see Table 4):

- 53.7% of respondents evaluated public knowledge on learning outcomes as “average”;
- 25.9% of respondents – “rather low” knowledge;
- 13.0% of respondents – “rather high” knowledge;
- 5.6% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 1.9% of respondents – “low” knowledge;

- 0% of respondents – “high” knowledge.

The results of interview show, firstly, teachers and society often have intuitive understanding of the concept of learning outcomes, yet they would rarely define the term as formulated in this study, as well as, most probably, they would not be able to explain how learning outcomes fit into the education system. Secondly, learning outcomes approach and its meaning should be explained to pupils starting with basic school, since currently young people focus more upon the result – the grades and the diploma that they get, not upon the education content.

Table 4. Level of knowledge on learning outcomes (%)

	Low	Rather low	Average	Rather high	High	Hard to say
At national level (general level of knowledge)	1.9	25.9	53.7	13.0	0.0	5.6
Colleagues' level of knowledge in the education institution	0.0	1.9	22.2	51.9	24.1	0.0

The results of interviews on “**colleagues’ level of knowledge at the education institution represented by the respondent**” indicate that the assessment is higher comparing to society in general:

- 51.9% of respondents evaluated colleagues’ knowledge on learning outcomes as “rather high”;
- 24.1% of respondents – “high” colleagues’ knowledge;
- 22.2% of respondents – “average” colleagues’ knowledge;
- 1.9% of respondents – “rather low” colleagues’ knowledge;
- 0% of respondents – “low” colleagues’ knowledge.

The results of study differ if the data are analysed according to the stage and type of education. The employees of the vocational education institutions had the most critical opinion of themselves and their colleagues, but the employees of the general education institutions had the highest assessment of their colleagues – almost 90% of the answers were “high” and “rather high”.

The results of interviews with the representatives of the HEIs indicate that the main problem is poor understanding of the concept of learning outcomes, especially among the professionals of the field, who are involved in developing and ensuring the study process. Learning outcomes have been defined for many study courses; however, not all teachers are familiar with the specific terminology of the learning outcomes approach. The respondents at the vocational education institutions emphasised that, although the understanding of the term “learning outcomes” was not always high, since the studies were very practical, every teacher or trainer was rather aware of what knowledge, skills and students should acquire for them to pass the centralized qualification exam. Whereas the interviewed employees of the general education institutions said that the teachers had very good knowledge of the state education standard, but it did not mean that the concept of learning outcomes was also understood. General education institutions experience particular difficulties in exploring and introducing interdisciplinary skills and competences.

Obstacles to introducing learning outcomes

During the interviews respondents were asked about obstacles in working with learning outcomes both at the national and institutional level. The respondents in 5 point Likert scale evaluated the significance of six obstacles – (1) education institution personnel’s lack of knowledge about learning outcomes; (2) lack of common understanding of learning outcomes; (3) lack of information; (4) unclear (fragmented) policy for introducing learning outcomes; (5) lack of resources for dealing with this issue; (6) unwillingness of

teachers to accept the changes – in which 1 meant “not an obstacle”, but 5 – “a significant obstacle” (see Table 5).

Table 5. Main obstacles in the work with learning outcomes at the national and education institutional level (%)

	Not an obstacle	Rather not an obstacle	Average obstacle	Rather significant obstacle	Significant obstacle	Hard to say
Education institution personnel’s lack of knowledge about learning outcomes						
National level	24.1	33.3	24.1	13.0	5.6	0.0
Education institutional level	46.3	35.2	14.8	1.9	1.9	0.0
Lack of common understanding of learning outcomes						
National level	11.1	11.1	31.5	25.9	20.4	0.0
Education institutional level	35.2	27.8	25.9	9.3	1.9	0.0
Lack of information						
National level	35.2	20.4	24.1	13.0	7.4	0.0
Education institutional level	55.6	29.6	11.1	3.7	0.0	0.0
Unclear (fragmented) policy for introducing learning outcomes						
National level	24.1	1.9	16.7	35.2	20.4	1.9
Education institutional level	44.4	29.6	14.8	7.4	1.9	1.9
Lack of resources for dealing with this issue						
National level	11.1	16.7	20.4	25.9	18.5	7.4
Education institutional level	29.6	27.8	16.7	22.2	3.7	0.0
Unwillingness of teachers to accept the changes						
National level	14.8	27.8	29.6	14.8	7.4	5.6
Education institutional level	44.4	22.2	18.5	9.3	3.7	1.9

The results of interviews point out that the work with learning outcomes at the national level was evaluated more critically compared to the institutional level. The data show that the respondents, when analysing the work of their own education institution, assessed all the obstacles as insignificant – more than 50% of respondents chose “not an obstacle” or “rather not an obstacle”. Thus, conclusion can be drawn that the employees of the education institutions have noticed problems in the implementation of learning outcomes at the national level. The results of interviews on “**main obstacles in the work with learning outcomes at the national level**” (assessed as “rather significant obstacle” or “significant obstacle”):

- Unclear (fragmented) policy for introducing learning outcomes – 55.6% of respondents;
- Lack of common understanding of learning outcomes – 46.3% of respondents;
- Lack of resources – 44.4% of respondents;
- Unwillingness of teachers to accept the changes – 22.2% of respondents;
- Lack of information – 20.4% of respondents;
- Education institution personnel’s lack of knowledge about learning outcomes – 18.6% of respondents.

The results of interviews on “**main obstacles in the work with learning outcomes at the education institutional level**” (assessed as “rather significant obstacle” or “significant obstacle”):

- Lack of resources – 25.9% of respondents;
- Unwillingness of teachers to accept the changes – 13.0% of respondents;
- Lack of common understanding of learning outcomes – 11.2% of respondents;

- Unclear (fragmented) policy for introducing learning outcomes – 9.3% of respondents;
- Employees' of the education institutions lack of knowledge about learning outcomes – 3.8% of respondents;
- Lack of information – 3.7% of respondents.

In order to describe the reasons why the mentioned obstacles were evaluated as significant or insignificant, the respondents' comments concerning the difficulties in the work with learning outcomes at the national level are outlined in Table 6.

Whereas Table 7 summarises the respondents' comments concerning the issues in the work with learning outcomes at education institutional level.

According to the results of study, conclusion may be made that the respondents mainly see the obstacles in the work with learning outcomes at the national level, rather than at the education institutional level. The respondents do not have common understanding of the necessity of learning outcomes approach. Likewise, the results of interviews do not reveal a joint vision on the development of the education system and the contribution of each stage of education to it, especially among education institutions of various types and stages. During the interviews the following problems were highlighted: fragmented policy for implementing learning outcomes and lack of resources, especially lack of human resources. As less significant obstacles in the work with learning outcomes, the respondents named: lack of personnel's knowledge and lack of information.

Table 6. Respondents' comments about the obstacles in the work with learning outcomes at the national level

Obstacles	Respondents	Higher education institutions	Vocational education institutions	General education institutions	Comments referring to all stages and types of education institutions
Education institution personnel's lack of knowledge about learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The professionals of the field and also young teachers are not always able to understand the concept of learning outcomes in full (especially in professional HE programmes) The professionals of field are able to intuitively ensure their students an opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences, without always understanding how these fit into the common concept of learning outcomes 	---	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers have good knowledge of "knowledge", but not as good of skills and competences 	---	
Lack of common understanding of learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lack of common understanding and vision on the application of this concept Certain difficulties in differentiating skills and competences exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General and vocational education should be differentiated more, as rather different understandings of learning outcomes exist, but all the students have to take the same centralised examinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The various understanding of learning outcomes exists among the education institutions The education standards should be reviewed (e.g., the transition from primary school to basic school has not been sufficiently aligned) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the main obstacles; therefore, the explanatory work should be continued 	
Lack of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The information is not always offered proactively, yet if there is a wish to find anything there are not too many obstacles 	---	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is little information about skills and competences, especially as regards methodological material, since the existing listing of knowledge, skills and competences included in the CoM Regulation is too general and insufficient to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the least significant obstacles 	

Obstacles	Respondents	Higher education institutions	Vocational education institutions	General education institutions	Comments referring to all stages and types of education institutions
			support teachers' work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Therefore education institutions have to elaborate their own methodological materials, which may lead to an erroneous interpretation of regulations 		
Unclear (fragmented) policy for introducing learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too little explanations are provided on the meaning and application of learning outcomes at the national level The legal basis has been aligned, but there are problems in implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The content of the natural sciences subjects is not always synergetic, moreover, sometimes the education standard is changed, but the adjusted textbooks appear only afterwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The content of the natural sciences subjects is not always synergetic; sometimes the education standard is changed, but the adjusted textbooks appear only afterwards There is a lack of diagnostic work regarding skills; therefore, the general level of knowledge in the state is not known (except in financial literacy) leading to wrong implementation policy of learning outcomes in the state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the main obstacles in the work with learning outcomes 	
Lack of resources for dealing with this issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resources exist, but the ability to find and use them is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers' motivation, knowledge and workload The capacity of NCE to provide support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers' motivation, knowledge and workload The capacity of NCE to provide support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the main obstacles in the work with learning outcomes The lack of financial resources was not emphasised, but human resources 	

Obstacles	Higher education institutions	Vocational education institutions	General education institutions	Comments referring to all stages and types of education institutions
Unwillingness of teachers to accept the changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This obstacle is less significant in private HEIs, because teachers change more often, on the basis of students' assessment and other criteria In private HEIs more professionals are involved in the implementation of study programmes and who may not have as good understanding of the learning outcomes, but the content of studies that they offer is oriented towards application 	---	---	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The “generation” of teachers does matter regards accepting changes (some of the interviews) This issue requires examination on case by case basis; therefore, no group can be stated as having particular problems with accepting changes
Other obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural wish of system to resist bureaucratic activities The limited possibility of policy makers to take a distanced look at the process of implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers' poor knowledge of the concept of learning outcomes, which hinders exchange of opinions and development of qualitative occupational standards Lack of youth's motivation, which does not permit teachers to implement their ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of youth's motivation, which does not permit teachers to implement their ideas Due to the competition between schools and the regional reform, the methodological associations have become less active There is little public interest in on the implementation of the learning outcomes approach Mass media and non-governmental organisations show little interest in issues of education quality (especially in general education); thus, society does not develop understanding of these issues 	---

Table 7. Respondents' comments about the obstacles in the work with learning outcomes at the education institutional level

Obstacles	Higher education institutions	Vocational education institutions	General education institutions	Comments referring to all stages and types of education institutions
Education institution personnel's lack of knowledge about learning outcomes	---	---	---	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less significant obstacle compared to the national level • Teachers have an intuitive understanding of the learning outcomes concept, but they cannot provide the definitions of various terms and explain learning outcomes approach
Lack of common understanding of learning outcomes	---	---	---	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More often noted as problematic obstacle • The interpretation of education and occupational standards is possible, which allows adjusting the education programmes to the capacity of the education institution, at the same time retaining the learning outcomes defined in the standard
Lack of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The solution is seminars for employees, in which they could explore the issues of methodology and didactics • Professionals, who are busy with their everyday work, are not interested in such additional lessons 	---	---	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of least significant obstacles
Unclear (fragmented) policy for introducing learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To overcome, clear study course descriptions are elaborated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These issues are explored in the teacher council's meetings, stressing the implementation of the state education standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These issues are dealt with in the teacher council's meetings, emphasising the implementation of the state education standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are problems in the process of policy implementation (some interviews) • Mainly all the information obtained from the state institutions is forwarded to the employees using various mechanisms

Obstacles	Higher education institutions	Vocational education institutions	General education institutions	Comments referring to all stages and types of education institutions
Lack of resources for dealing with this issue	---	---	---	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lack of human resources • Lack of time (work-load) and knowledge • Lack of resources for exhaustive analysis of the situation in the particular education institution • The drop in the number of students
Unwillingness of teachers to accept the changes	---	---	---	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional work and the change of previous approach face certain resistance • Initially there were certain problems, but after repeated explanations, the teachers accepted the changes with understanding (especially employees of the HEIs)
Other obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant discussions of reforms creates concerns for teachers about their jobs, which creates additional daily stress • Teachers have poor knowledge of terminology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are overloaded, therefore, they do not have motivation and time for introducing new approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of human resources emphasised • In the existing assessment system, grades are more important than the achieved outcomes, especially at the national level (in the context of centralised examinations) the grade is valued, but not the progress achieved with a particular child • Teachers are overloaded, therefore, they do not have motivation and time for introducing new approaches • There is lack of materials in sciences – equipment for every student • It is more difficult to work in the combined classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The low level of students' previous education and motivation • Some teachers do not want to know what their colleagues are doing and how to create synergy in the study process • The respondents are not convinced that the proposed changes will facilitate higher level of students' knowledge

The use of learning outcomes at the education system level

The results of interviews on **“the elaboration of education programmes on basis of clearly defined and valid¹⁵ learning outcomes”**:

- 33.3% of respondents consider that designing learning outcomes based education programmes is “rather common” practice in Latvia;
- 18.5% of respondents – “moderately common” practice in Latvia;
- 18.5% of respondents – “common” practice in Latvia;
- 18.5% of respondents – “rather not common” practice in Latvia;
- 9.3% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 1.9% of respondents – “not common” practice in Latvia.

In general the results of interviews show that the respondents’ opinions disagree as regards the use of learning outcomes, although more than half of respondents (52.9 %) consider this to be “rather common” or “common” practice, while only 18.9 % of the respondents – “not common” or “rather not a common” practice. The respondents noted that education programmes did not reflect learning outcomes and the achievements of individual students, the study subjects were outlined instead. Thus, education programmes mainly are elaborated by focusing on the education content, not the expected outcome.

According to the results of interviews with the representatives of all the education institutions, a significant deficiency of the existing system is the fact that the education programmes do not ensure mastering interdisciplinary skills and that the possibilities to modify the content of education within the framework of the education programme are very limited. The interviewed representatives of the vocational education institutions pointed out that, on one hand, occupational standards had a positive impact on the elaboration of education programmes based on learning outcomes. On the other hand, there was also the view that occupational standards facilitated separation of vocational education from the rest of education system, as well as caused difficulties in combining vocational and general study subjects, at the same time defining skills, which were not used in practice within the particular sector. The respondents representing the general education institutions frequently emphasised that basic and secondary education programmes were oriented towards the admission requirements of HEIs; thus, the amount of material that had to be mastered in each separate study subject was too large and the content of education programme was connected neither with the content of the possible study programme, nor the content of vocational secondary education.

The results of interviews on **“best practice examples in linking the learning/teaching process and content with learning outcomes”**:

- ESF projects for improving natural sciences study subjects, experience of other ESF projects, e.g., ESF project “The improvement of theoretical knowledge and practical competences for vocational subject teachers and for supervisors of practical training” (*Profesionālo mācību priekšmetu pedagogu un prakses vadītāju teorētisko zināšanu un praktisko kompetenču paaugstināšana, 2009-2012*).
- HEIs: science subjects in general, especially professional HE study programmes (regulated study programmes), which have clearly defined and exact occupational standards. The College of Culture: particularly successful example about one education programme offering 12 specializations, i.e., specially adjusted modules for reaching specific learning outcomes.
- HEIs and vocational education institutions: applied character of education programmes, development of successful cooperation and consultations with employers (particularly, Employers’ Confederation of Latvia) in the process of developing new and updating

¹⁵ Valid learning outcomes are formulated on ground of previous research of sector in cooperation with employers and exploring labour market forecasts (in vocational and higher education), as well as on ground of skill tests etc.

present education programmes, as well as the involvement of the employees of education institutions in elaboration of occupational standards. Best practice example: continuing education programmes offered by the State Employment Agency, which graduates already know their future employers.

- General education institutions: the interactive education programmes of natural sciences, for which the learning aids were created after the education programme was elaborated (mathematics education programme for grade 7–9, etc.); education programmes for other subjects, e.g., the Latvian language for secondary school, in which grammar is linked with creative tasks. Individualised method has been implemented in a number of institutions, where for each student in each study subject a notebook has been created by the teacher, in which study materials are placed in, at the beginning of each topic a note listing the knowledge, skills and competences that the student will acquire, is pasted, as well as information on the structure of tests and their relations with knowledge and skills, after the test – an extensive interpretation of results is inserted. Some education institutions have developed also a plan for introducing inter-disciplinary skills.
- General education institutions: education programmes designed for children with special needs. Some institutions have implemented a system – children with learning disorders by a referral may be transferred to a special class; when the child has reached a certain level of learning outcomes (teacher has ascertained the fact), the child can return to the general class.

The results of interviews with the representatives of vocational education institutions indicate that in the context of good examples some drawbacks may be observed: the limited possibilities in terms of ESF projects to create something new, since the personnel has too large workload; education programmes are not flexible, the procedure for updating them is long and complicated; the majority of best practice examples are borrowed from abroad and that it is easier to mention foreign examples, since the Latvian education institutions seldom share their best practices.

The results of interviews on “**the importance of using learning outcomes in various fields**” are outlined in Table 8.

Table 8. The importance of using learning outcomes at the education system level (%)

	Little or rather little	Average	Rather great or great	Hard to say
Development of education content	9.3	16.7	72.2	1.9
Learning assessment	7.5	31.5	69.2	1.9
Quality assurance process	7.5	18.5	68.5	5.6
Validation of prior learning or experience	16.7	16.7	61.1	5.6

Regarding the results of interviews, learning outcomes have evident significance in all the mentioned fields. Yet the greatest importance had the development of education content (72.2% of respondents replied “rather great” or “great”), while the least significant aspect in relation with learning outcomes was validation of prior learning or experience (61.1% of respondents replied “rather great” or “great”).

The respondents’ comments on each field in the context of learning outcomes are listed below.

Development of education content. As the results of interviews point out, part of respondents consider that education content defines learning outcomes, not vice versa, because in addition to the overcrowded education content, during the teaching/learning process, teachers need to work with topics from the previous stages of education; therefore, the use of learning outcomes is fictitious and not relevant.

Learning assessment. The results of interviews show that learning outcomes are used most effectively in centralized professional qualification exams, because then it is the easiest way to verify achieved learning outcomes. A number of respondents noted that learning outcomes were not properly applied, since within the existing assessment system the individual growth, nor the skills or competences could not be evaluated. This is the most essential in education institutions attended by children with special needs, as well as in evening schools, where often every student has their individual education programme; therefore, a proper assessment of learning achievements cannot be applied. One of the solutions offered by the respondents would be to define the sufficient level of skills, not only the maximum level; hence, children with special needs could receive higher assessment.

Education quality assurance process. According to the results of interviews, this aspect needs to be greatly improved, e.g., learning outcomes used to be more significant in the quality assessment process, whereas currently – only formal. Learning outcomes have no significance in the quality assessment process, and they are not verified in practice, since the accreditation of education institutions is only formal, as well. The external education quality assessment process is oriented towards numerical indicators (school ratings, reports on grades), which are included in the self-assessment report, and no attention is paid to individual learning outcomes.

Validation of prior learning or experience. The interviewed representatives of HEIs pointed out that the importance of learning outcomes grew in this aspect. The system for recognition of formal education is more developed than the system for validation of non-formal/informal learning. The financial aspect of recognising prior outcomes (setting the fee, granting tuition fee discounts) creates problems for HEIs. The interviewed representatives of vocational education institutions emphasised the necessity to ensure opportunity to resume studies for those students who previously had dropped out. Vocational education institutions have comparatively numerous examples of successfully conducted validation. The results of interviews with the representatives of general education institutions indicate personnel of education institutions (especially of gymnasiums) do not always trust the assessments granted by the previous education institutions. For example, pupils' achievements are assessed when moving from pre-school to the first grade; entrance exams are arranged to be admitted to a state gymnasium; after returning from abroad, tests have to be passed to allocate students to a grade. In general the results of interviews prove that the transition between different stages of education is not effective, because in reality each successive level is not based upon the previous one; the state education standards define the succession, but due to the lack of individual approach it is impossible to ensure this principle in reality.

When analysing the results of interviews, conclusion may be drawn that representatives of education institutions consider that the study subjects and education programmes already now are based on learning outcomes. However, as good examples, the majority of respondents from general education institutions named only the education programmes in science subjects for secondary schools elaborated with the ESF support. The use of learning outcomes is particularly important in the development of education content and in the validation of learning outcomes achieved through prior learning or professional experience.

The use of learning outcomes in the development of education content at national level

The results of interviews (with the representatives of general and vocational education institutions, including colleges) on **“the significance of the state education standards in formulating learning outcomes”**:

- 41.0% of respondents consider that the state education standards “to great extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 28.2% of respondents – “to rather great extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 25.6% of respondents – “to average extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;

- 2.6% of respondents – “to rather small extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 2.6% of respondents – “no reply”.

The results of interviews indicate that the state education standard is used more by the administration of general education institutions than teachers; furthermore, the representatives of administration provided more positive assessment regarding the significance of the standard. The interviewed representatives of general education institutions pointed out that the state education standards were rather static, general and they could be successfully used as the basis, which gave indications and outlines directions for work. However, the methodological materials, which would be very useful in arranging education process, are not available for teachers.

The representatives of vocational education institutions admitted that the state education standard enumerated the knowledge and skills necessary for obtaining general education, yet the employees of vocational education institutions do not always have the time to include these in education process, since vocational subjects and practice is more important for obtaining a professional qualification. To improve the quality of vocational education, it would be important to separate the state centralised examinations for general and vocational secondary education programmes, since there are essential differences in the examination results. Regarding the results of interviews, the teachers of vocational education institutions have to be flexible and able to interpret the state education standard for students to achieve better results. The state education standard of education insufficiently describes interdisciplinary skills and links between study subjects.

The results of interviews (with the representatives of general and vocational education institutions) on **“the importance of study subject standard in the formulation of learning outcomes secondary education centralised examinations”**:

- 44.7% of respondents consider that the study subject standards “to great extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 34.2% of respondents – “to rather great extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 13.2% of respondents – “to average extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 5.3% of respondents – “to rather small extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 2.6% of respondents – “hard to say”.

The results of interviews with the representatives of vocational education institutions show that the study subject standard cannot be applied without adaption, since the number of classes allocated for mastering general study subjects is smaller than in general education programmes, but there are no standards for subjects of vocational education. The development of such study subject standards would evidently facilitate educational work.

The interviewed representatives of general education institutions noted that the study subject standards both partially facilitated and partially encumbered education process, since these documents had great volume and in some study subjects the transition from one stage to the next had not been harmonised, e.g., the transition in the standard of the Latvian language from basic school to secondary school for minority schools. The study subject standards are mainly focused on preparing students for examinations; teachers are offered particular set of topics to be mastered, to be included in education programme. Thus, students in all the education institutions acquire topics that are included in the study subject standards.

The results of interviews (with the representatives of education institutions providing first level professional higher education programmes) on **“the meaning of the standard for first level professional higher education in the formulation of learning outcomes”**:

- 50% of respondents indicate that this education standard has “rather great” significance in the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 25% of respondents – “great” significance in the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 25% of respondents – “little” significance in the formulation of learning outcomes.

The results of interviews show that the standard for first level professional higher education provides a framework for study process, in which it is possible to work creatively, Yet this framework is rather specific and does not allow introducing in the studies any deviations from the stipulated regulations.

The results of interviews (with the representatives of HEIs) on **“the negative influence of absence of the standard for academic education on the formulation of learning outcomes”**:

- 30% of respondents consider that the absence of the standard for academic education “to small extent” makes the formulation of learning outcomes difficult;
- 30% of respondents – “to average extent” makes the formulation of learning outcomes difficult;
- 20% of respondents – “to rather small extent” makes the formulation of learning outcomes difficult;
- 20% of respondents – “hard to say”.

The majority of the interviewed representatives from higher education institutions noted that the standard for academic education was not necessary when arranging study process. On the one hand, the standard would be necessary as a framework for working. Furthermore, defining the expected learning outcomes is easier if a standardised sample is available, since teachers lack resources for formulating all the necessary information themselves. On the other hand, the possible standard for academic education would be so general that it would not provide any support for teachers.

The results of interviews (with the representatives of vocational education institutions and HEIs) on **“the meaning of occupational standards in the formulation of learning outcomes”**:

- 50% of respondents indicate that occupational standards “to great extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 20% of respondents – “to rather great extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 16.7% of respondents – “to average extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes;
- 10% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 3.3% of respondents – “to rather small extent” facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes.

The results of interviews prove that using the occupational standards involves more benefits than drawbacks. The requirements of occupational standards can be restrictive if they are poorly interpreted, but mainly there are not such problems. The interviewees highlighted the procedure for updating occupational standards was complex and lengthy. The quality of occupational standards depends on their authors’ competence in sector; the standards elaborated in the recent years are more successful. Often employers slow down the updating of occupational standards due to their reluctance introducing changes.

According to the analysis of study results, conclusion was drawn that in general various standards are of great importance in developing the content of education. In the majority of cases, the standards, especially study subject standards and occupational standards, facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes.

The use of learning outcomes at the education institutional level

The results of interviews on “**the elaboration of study subject and education programmes in accordance with learning outcomes**”:

- 45.3% of respondents consider that the study subject and education programmes in their education institutions are designed “to great extent” regarding learning outcomes;
- 24.5% of respondents – “to rather great extent” regarding learning outcomes;
- 20.8% of respondents – “to average extent” regarding learning outcomes;
- 5.7% of respondents – “to rather small extent” regarding learning outcomes;
- 3.8% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 0% of respondents – “to small extent” regarding learning outcomes.

As the results of interviews with the representatives of those education institutions providing vocational education programmes of various levels show, it is easy to introduce learning outcomes in vocational education programmes, because particular skills are defined in the occupational standards, and learning outcomes are formulated using the occupational standard and employers’ recommendations. The results of interviews with the representatives of general education institutions indicate that the linkage with learning outcomes depends on each study subject, since for some study subjects it is easier to define learning outcomes (e.g., mathematics) and for some study subjects this task is more difficult (e.g., visual art). The majority of general education institutions do not elaborate new study subject and education programmes, since education process is arranged according to the state education standard. If new education programmes are developed, the focus is placed on making the education content interesting both from the perspective of the teacher and the students.

The results of interviews on “**the importance of various factors in developing new study subject or education programme**” (at education institutional level) are included in Table 9.

Table 9. The importance of various factors in developing new study subject or education programme (%)

	Small or rather small	Average	Great or rather great	No reply
Experience of foreign education institutions (all respondents)	46.3	13.0	38.9	1.9
Experience of the Latvian education institutions (all respondents)	14.9	22.2	61.1	1.9
Teachers’ experience (all respondents)	1.9	1.9	94.4	1.9
National qualifications framework (all respondents)	20.4	11.1	44.4	24.1
Learning outcomes (all respondents)	1.9	18.9	75.4	3.8
Education standards and study subject standards (general, vocational education institutions and colleges)	0.0	0.0	97.8	2.3
Occupational standards (vocational and higher education institutions)	0.0	6.5	93.6	0.0

The results of interviews prove that the respondents’ views on the significance of the experience of other countries are very diverse, because education institutions of different levels have peculiar traditions of cooperation with education institutions in other countries. Higher and vocational education institutions implement more cross-border collaboration and transpose more experience than general education institutions. For example, Olaine Technical College – by adapting the experience from Dresden – in the terms of the ERDF project has established a mini workshop for conducting study experiments and testing in practice the competences needed for producing medications. The vocational education

institutions represented in the study have a “friendly” education institution abroad, exchange of students and teachers is organised.

There are leading education institutions in each professional sector in Latvia, whose experience is transposed. Vocational education institutions have a successful cooperation with vocational education competence centres by exchanging among themselves the elaborated education programmes. Hence, cooperation among Latvian education institutions is more typical for vocational education sector, because the competition among general education institutions is too tough. In addition, the education institutions for a specific target audience, e.g., evening schools, have limited possibilities of cooperation, as involving in this process is difficult.

The interviewed representatives of HEIs emphasised that the HE teachers’ experience was highly important, because, in the most cases, teachers elaborated the content of their study courses on the basis of their own experience and consultations provided by the professionals in the sector.

The results of interviews indicate that a number of other factors have great importance in the elaboration of new study subject or education programmes. Several factors are typical of all stages of education included in the study; however, some aspects are typical to the education institutions of a particular level. The following factors were mentioned during the interviews:

- HEIs and vocational education institutions: employers’ recommendations and the general labour market trends (sectors that experience lack of specialists, technological development, demanded skills).
- HEIs: the councils of study programmes, which regularly examine issues linked with the content and implementation of a study programme and make decisions on introducing amendments to the content of study programmes or implementation process.
- Several education institutions: the internal need of administration and faculty to update the content of education programme or improve the content of study subjects.
- General education institutions: resources of various kinds, i.e., accessibility of essential information, textbooks and various study aids (often the available teaching/learning aids are not appropriate for education programmes, and when implementing a new programme, teachers cannot use study literature from the previous education programme), as well as resources available for teachers’ salaries. The results of some interviews show that significant resource is the internal environment and the administration’s attitude and support.
- General education institutions: the current system gives very restricted possibilities of sharing best practice examples and get familiarised with them; the system of cooperation among education institutions functioned more successfully prior the administrative territorial reform.
- General education institutions: updating and amending is more successful in those study subjects, which do not include centralised examinations, compared to the study subjects that have centralised examinations. The existence of the centralised examinations hinder creative approach to elaborating the content of study subjects and implementing study subject programmes.

Regarding the results of interviews, a general conclusion can be made that the teachers’ experience and expected learning outcomes, as well as the state education standard of and occupational standards have the greatest importance in the elaboration of new study subject and education programmes. The experience of Latvian and foreign education institutions is not evaluated unambiguously. The results of interviews show that also national qualification frameworks have a crucial meaning; however, the representatives of general education institutions pointed out that a direct influence of qualifications frameworks on the content of education programme and process of their elaboration did not exist.

The results of interviews on **“the implementation of learning outcomes based study subject and education programmes”**:

- 50% of respondents consider that the implementation of study subject and education programmes is “based” on learning outcomes;
- 35.2 % of respondents – “rather based” on learning outcomes;
- 11.1% of respondents – “on average based” on learning outcomes;
- 3.7% of respondents – “rather not based” on learning outcomes;
- 0% of respondents – “not based” on learning outcomes.

According to the results of interviews, the books and methodological materials elaborated in recent years are structured, and the descriptions of study subjects and courses are updated and improved on basis of learning outcomes. The representatives of vocational education institutions implementing vocational education programmes of various levels noted that learning outcomes were used more during the practical training.

The majority of the representatives from general education institutions pointed out that part of students was able to apply knowledge acquired during lessons for solving various tasks and to search information independently and adapt it to their needs.

The results of interviews with the representatives of general education institutions, who work with students having special needs, prove that teaching/learning is focused on reaching individual aims – the ability of a particular child to do certain things is considered as an outcome, not what the state education standard has prescribed.

The results of interviews allow concluding that one of the reasons why study subject and education programmes are insufficiently learning outcomes based is the fact that young people not always believe that education is the foundation for their success in future life. It is difficult for teachers to work with these young people and plan the achieving of learning outcomes; therefore, the teaching/learning process is analysed in order to define new goals, in particular for students with special needs.

The results of interviews on **“the harmonisation of education content within the framework of education programmes”**:

- 37% of respondents indicate that education content “is” harmonised;
- 31.5% of respondents – “is rather” harmonised;
- 25.9% of respondents – “is on average” harmonised;
- 3.7% of respondents – “is not rather” harmonised;
- 1.9% of respondents – “hard to say”.

The results of interviews prove that various methods are used to harmonise teaching/learning methods and education content within the framework of education programmes, e.g., first surveys of various target groups (teachers, students, employers) are conducted, the discussions with colleagues are held. It is important to avoid both horizontal and vertical overlapping.

Many representatives of education institutions emphasised that harmonisation of teaching/learning methods and education content should be implemented more consistently, actively and directly, as well as it should be included as an element in the education quality assurance.

The results of interviews on **“students’ knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes”**:

- 53.8% of respondents consider that students have “average” knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes;
- 28.8% of respondents – “rather complete” knowledge and understanding;
- 7.7% of respondents – “rather incomplete” knowledge and understanding;
- 5.8% of respondents – “complete” knowledge and understanding;
- 3.8% of respondents – “incomplete” knowledge and understanding.

Regarding the results of interviews, the representatives of education institutions mostly do not use the term “learning outcomes” when working with learners, because young people frequently pay more attention to the numerical assessment, not the acquired skills. The results of interviews indicate that during the lectures in HEIs the expected learning outcomes are often in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, yet the students do not always understand them and the understanding develops only after completion of the study course. To deal with this situation, as the representatives of vocational education institutions suggested, the students should be encouraged to evaluate the achieved learning outcomes using various methods, e.g., by applying their knowledge in practice, performing hands-on tasks.

The results of interviews prove that vocational education students become aware of learning outcomes only during the practical training, linking their knowledge acquired in education institution with the real work environment. The students’ understanding of learning outcomes is negatively impacted by the fact that the practical training in enterprises, in which the students develop more complete understanding, takes place during the later years of studies.

The results of interviews with the representatives of general education institutions indicate that students’ understanding of learning outcomes depends on the subject teachers, since this issue is not focused on centrally, at the education institutional level. For instance, teachers together with student analyse results of tests and, depending on previously acquired skills, define the content of the test individually for each student.

The results of interviews on **“the accessibility of learning outcomes”**:

- Higher education institutions: ECTS catalogues, study course and study programme descriptions, e-study environment, HEIs’ self-assessment reports; learning outcomes are presented to students during the introductory lectures of study courses.
- Vocational education institutions: education programme descriptions, occupational standards, electronic register; printed information – from subject teachers and administration (teaching/learning department and/or heads of education programme); the students are informed during the study subjects “Introduction to the field of study”, “Introduction to the occupation”.
- General education institutions: e-register (numerical assessments, in many cases – descriptions of skills); teaching/learning plans and descriptions of assessment; learning outcomes are discussed at methodological meetings, parents’ meetings, parents can get acquainted with learning outcomes on individual basis.

The results of interviews with the representatives of general education institutions, who have better understanding of the concept of learning outcomes, indicate that such general data are not available in general education institutions, since the state education standard stipulates that only numerical assessment should be awarded to students. Learning outcomes will have no significance in teaching/learning process and student learning assessment, until the state defines the level, on which particular knowledge, skills and competences should be mastered for obtaining a certain grade. The interviewed representatives of education institutions highlighted that more attention should be paid to relating the assessment of learning achievements with students’ actual skills, but the state education standards did not ensure this possibility.

Assessment of learners’ achievements

The results of interviews on **“the significance of using learning outcomes in the assessment of learners’ achievements”**:

- 40.7% of respondents consider that learning outcomes have “rather great” significance in the assessment of learners’ achievements;
- 31.5% of respondents – “average” significance;
- 18.5% of respondents – “great” significance;
- 5.6% of respondents – “rather small” significance;

- 1.9% of respondents – “small” significance;
- 1.9% of respondents – “hard to say”.

The results of interviews with the representatives of vocational education institutions prove that centralised qualification exams reflect the acquired knowledge, skills and competences the most successfully; the exams are arranged and assessed in cooperation with employers. In general study subjects the acquired knowledge is mostly tested, but the acquired skills and competences are not tested sufficiently, and there are several reasons for that (e.g., lack of time, inappropriate material and technical provision or even lack of it, not using the respective teaching/learning methods both in teaching/learning and assessment process).

The results of interviews with the teachers indicate that single definition of learning outcomes does not help in performing adequate assessment of learners' achievements, because the wording is too general. The interviewees consider that learning outcomes do not contain any gradation of learning achievements; thus, it is impossible to define the minimum requirements in the study subject/course that learners must meet. The results of interviews show that at present the interviewees do not understand how to link the set learning outcomes with numerical assessments; therefore, when performing learning assessment, teachers rely on their interpretation. The linking of learning outcomes with the system of numerical assessments is crucial in teaching/learning process, particularly in education institutions, which are attended by children with special needs, learning difficulties or disorders.

The results of interviews on **“the linking of tests with learning outcomes”**:

- 41.3% of respondents consider that the tests designed by teachers are “to great extent” based on learning outcomes;
- 41.3% of respondents – “to rather great extent” based on learning outcomes;
- 15.2% of respondents – “to average extent” based on learning outcomes;
- 2.2% of respondents – “to rather small extent” based on learning outcomes.

The results of interviews prove that in recent years the inclusion of learning outcomes in higher education programmes was largely facilitated by the mandatory requirement to formulate learning outcomes in the descriptions of study courses, which are presented to students. In connection with these changes the representatives of HEIs' administration and teachers have attended various seminars, read materials on the Internet and consulted with their colleagues, which in general promoted the knowledge and understanding of HEIs' personnel concerning the use and meaning of learning outcomes. As the representatives of HEIs' administration pointed out, there were teachers, who followed changes and worked hard on improving the teaching/learning process; however, there were also such teachers, who were reluctant to accept changes, met the requirements rather formally and did not adapt the tests to the descriptions of study courses.

In accordance with the results of interviews, learning outcomes are more clearly defined in the study courses of professional higher education programmes, compared to academic higher education programmes, since their content is stipulated by the occupational standards. The requirements of occupational standards have been elaborated in cooperation with employers and are regularly updated, although not all the interviewed representatives of HEIs were satisfied with the developed occupational standards. Furthermore, the updating of occupational standards is a very bureaucratic and complex procedure, which takes long time. The results of interviews reveal that, when higher education programmes envisage more individual approach to students, the achievement of learning outcomes gains greater importance. There is a possibility for analysing each student's individual progress more precisely, which cannot be done while working with large groups of students.

The results of interviews (with the representatives of general and vocational education institutions) on **“the compliance of test content elaborated by the National Centre for Education (NCE) to the expected learning outcomes”**:

- 34.3% of respondents consider that the tests designed by the NCE “to great extent” correspond to the expected learning outcomes;
- 34.3% of respondents – “to rather great extent” correspond to the expected learning outcomes;
- 14.3% of respondents – “to average extent” correspond to the expected learning outcomes;
- 11.4% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 5.7% of respondents – “to rather small extent” correspond to the expected learning outcomes.

The results of interviews prove that the content and learning outcomes of study subjects in general education programmes are defined by the state education standards. Since general education study subjects are implemented by great number of teachers, various standardized methodologies for teaching/learning and assessment have been elaborated. The interviewed representatives of general education institutions admitted that teachers often even were not able to create tests independently, because they had no knowledge of testing methodology. Currently there is no need to know these issues, as the testing methods are freely available in a ready-to-use form. General education institutions differ among themselves in how much attention is paid to quality indicators in the teaching/learning process – the majority of general education institutions analyse students’ grades and teachers’ self-assessment of their work; fewer general education institutions also focus on reaching learning outcomes, by creating additional, comprehensive tests, analysing teachers’ reports and by involving students in analysing the attained learning outcomes.

The interviewed representatives of vocational education institutions were critical of the tests elaborated by the NCE – due to vocational study subjects imparted in vocational education programmes, the number of classes for general study subjects was decreased, but this fact was not taken into consideration, and vocational education students had to take the same tests designed by the NCE as the general education students. Since the NCE elaborates tests on the basis of complete volume of each study subject, these tests are too complicated for vocational education students, which has a negative impact on students’ self-assessment. The representatives of general education institutions pointed out that the tests elaborated by the NCE complied with the study subject standards, yet they did not reveal a complete picture about learning outcomes, and more time should be allocated for taking exams.

The results of interviews on **“learners’ understanding regarding the principles of designing tests”**:

- 38.5% of respondents consider that the learners “to average extent” understand the principles of designing tests;
- 36.5% of respondents – “to rather great extent”;
- 13.5% of respondents – “to great extent”;
- 9.6% of respondents – “to rather small extent”;
- 1.9% of respondents – “hard to say”.

Large share of respondents admitted that learners’ understanding of these questions depended on teachers’ ability to explain the assessment procedure to learners; although many learners were not interested in or even did not need to understand the principles. The results of interviews with the representatives of general education institutions show that the tasks included in the tests predominantly are similar to the examples examined in classes; thus, students know what kind of tasks to expect in the tests. The students are informed that it is possible to get grade “8” for doing a standard tasks, but higher assessment can be obtained by demonstrating additional knowledge and creativity.

The results of interviews revealed that the greatest discrepancy of opinions may be observed among the representatives of higher education institutions. This fact may be explained by different possibilities for dealing with students' assessment, lack of uniform system, academic freedom of teachers and the possibility to create the content of studies and tests according to their own views. The interviewed representatives of HEIs pointed out that the requirements for obtaining an assessment were available in the descriptions of study courses, but not all students understood them and were interested in it. More motivated students pay attention to the description of study course and follow whether the study process complies with the description. Some representatives of HEIs highlighted that the requirements of assessment were clearly defined; the criteria for assessing the work were available for students are available or the number of points that could be obtained for each task was indicated.

The results of interviews on **“the influence of learning outcomes on learners' understanding regarding the significance of study subjects”**:

- 48.9% of respondents consider that the learners' understanding as regards the significance of the relevant study subject “will be influenced” by the shift to learning outcomes;
- 26.7% of respondents – “will rather be influenced” by the shift to learning outcomes;
- 13.3% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 8.9% of respondents – “will on average be influenced” by the shift to learning outcomes;
- 2.2% of respondents – “will not rather be influenced” by the shift to learning outcomes.

The results of interviews show that promoting learners' understanding of the significance of study subjects would be very important in the context of lifelong learning, in which individuals with previous knowledge and clearer vision of what they want to acquire participate. Furthermore, this issue is crucial in vocational education, where it is easier to explain the role of study subjects in the acquisition of occupation, since the learning outcomes included in the study subjects to a large extent are linked to knowledge and skills needed in professional activities. These learning outcomes are tested in practice during the teaching/learning process, and also employers are involved the assessment. The results of interviews with the representatives of general education institutions indicate that currently many students have poor understanding of the application of study subjects in work; hence, they do not understand their importance and lack motivation to learn. Several interviewed representatives of general education institutions proposed promoting career education and helping young people start thinking about their future possibilities in due time; thus, granting greater importance to the teaching/learning process and purposely choosing leisure time activities, which is currently under-estimated by students and their parents.

Regarding the results of interviews, conclusion may be drawn that the majority of respondents consider that the use of learning outcomes is “of average” importance or “rather important”. However, in general the education system is not homogenous and also the work in implementing and applying learning outcomes significantly differs in different levels and types of education; moreover, differences can be observed even in the same level of education and type of education institutions. This fact may be explained by the fragmented education system, lack of common understanding in the state, as well as representatives of education institutions having large workload and not enough time for dealing with these issues properly. The results of interviews indicate that stronger links should be established between learning outcomes and learners' assessment methodology, which would be designed in accordance with learning outcomes.

Institutions of education that cooperate closely with employers regarding this issue are mentioned as successful examples of defining and evaluating learning outcomes.

For teacher to have the possibility to pay more attention to reaching of learning outcomes, engage in more individualised work with learners and facilitate more creative teaching/learning process, a number of activities should be implemented, for example, reducing the current workload of teachers, the number of learners per one teachers,

introducing the position of teacher's assistants, as well as additional educative activities should be arranged and examples of best practice should be popularised.

Internal quality assessment of education institution

The results of interviews on **“the significance of learning outcomes in ensuring improvement of education process in education institution”**:

- 56.9% of respondents consider that learning outcomes have “great significance” in ensuring improvement of education process;
- 29.4% of respondents – “rather great significance”;
- 9.8% of respondents – “average significance”;
- 2% of respondents – “rather little significance”;
- 2% of respondents – “hard to say”.

The results of interviews prove that even though the majority of respondents are aware of the significant meaning of learning outcomes, lack of time is an important obstacle for qualitative assessment of the achieved learning outcomes and analysis of potential shortcomings. Therefore, more attention in education quality assurance is paid to the obtained grades and the indicators of learners' progress – it is easier to demonstrate and substantiate these. Yet the interviewed representatives of education institutions emphasized that this information also allowed improving education process, as well as showed the direction for further development.

The results of interviews reveal that during the process of internal quality evaluation and improvement, purposeful attainment of learning outcomes included in study subjects is controlled in various ways: observations of teaching/learning process are conducted; in higher education students and graduates are surveyed; employers are also surveyed; at general education institutions teachers must submit half-year and annual reports, as well as self-assessment reports. The obtained results and documents are analysed and then discussed at the methodology meetings. Usually in general education institutions commissions of methodology or individual salaried employees dealing with methodology are ensured; their main duty is to analyse the teaching/learning process and to develop suggestions for its improvement. Some general education institutions organise special days of teaching/learning methodology or conferences, as well as best practice presentations.

The results of interviews on **“the definition and attainment of learning outcomes as a criterion in the process of evaluating and improving internal quality of education institution”**:

- 54.9% of respondents consider that the definition and attainment of learning outcomes “is criterion” for the process of evaluating and improving internal quality;
- 25.5% of respondents – “rather is criterion”;
- 13.7% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 3.9% of respondents – “on average is criterion”;
- 2% of respondents – “rather is not criterion”.

The results of interviews with the representatives of HEIs indicate that in the recent years learning outcomes have become an important criterion, especially since the introduction of mandatory requirement to describe learning outcomes for study subjects. The representatives of HEIs' administration pointed out that formulation of learning outcomes was a time-consuming and complicated process, which in many places was still not concluded, but it helped improving the control of internal quality, made it easier to avoid overlapping of study subjects, as well as identify deficiencies or lack of learning outcomes in education programmes. Although the results of interviews reveal that the definition and attainment of learning outcomes “is” or “rather is” a criterion in the process of evaluating and improving internal quality, the reports mainly reflect learning assessment in grades. Providing written comments on the reached learning outcomes is not required in all the education institutions; thus, there is no uniform system and understanding of how to reflect

the achieved learning outcomes and its importance. The interviewed teachers highlighted that that individual assessment of learning outcomes reached by learners currently is impossible due to large workload of teachers and lack of time.

External quality assessment of education institution

The results of interviews on **“the evaluation of learning outcomes during the experts’ accreditation visits”**:

- Higher education institutions: during accreditation visits experts verify, whether the self-assessment reports of study programmes contain the descriptions of learning outcomes for both study programme and each study subject; still experts must assesses very diverse factors and usually attention is not paid to whether the described learning outcomes are attained and properly assessed; in some cases great attention is paid to learning outcomes – questions are asked to teachers, students in hallways, and the applied assessment methods are checked; usually foreign experts pay more attention to the assessment of learning outcomes.
- General education institutions: recently part of education institutions have been accredited remotely by checking documentation of education institutions and the submitted reports, students’ assessments (grades) are more important for the experts. If the accreditation is conducted on-site, experts observe classes, but the observation of some classes cannot give complete impression of the teaching/learning process, since the teachers are informed about the dates of experts’ visits and prepare for these classes. The observations of classes during the accreditation visits subject teachers to a great stress and does not bring the expected outcome. Mostly teachers are not informed about experts’ reports. The education institutions crucially differ as to their type, specialisation, location, funding, number of students and their previous education, but during the accreditation process all education institutions are evaluated in accordance with identical criteria. The representatives of education institutions, who work with learners having special needs, emphasised that students’ individual development that had been achieved at education institutions should be considered during the accreditation process, not only analysis of students grades and results of centralised exams.
- Vocational education institutions: external quality assessment is rather formal process, in addition experts are more interested in students’ grades, not learning outcomes. During the external quality assessment, quality of qualification exams should be ascertained, because they reflect students’ knowledge, skills and competences. Initially legal framework should be organised, then the concept of learning outcomes should be introduced in accreditation.

The results of interviews on **“basing accreditation of education programmes on the assessment of learning outcomes”**:

- 37.3% of respondents consider that accreditation of education programmes “should be based to great extent” on the assessment of learning outcomes;
- 35.3% of respondents – “should be based to rather great extent”;
- 13.7% of respondents – “should be based to average extent”;
- 7.8% of respondents – “should not be based”;
- 3.9% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 2% of respondents – “rather should not be based”.

The results of interviews indicated that reaching of learning outcomes is a significant criterion and it should be taken into account during the accreditation of education institutions, but it is only one education quality criterion of many, and all criteria should be assessed in the context of others. In terms of accreditation it is important to assess the teaching/learning process, internal quality control mechanisms, results of centralised examinations in general study subjects and centralised qualification examinations, the individual development of learners, as well as the employment indicators of graduates.

Validation of prior learning

The results of interviews on **“the respondents’ experience regarding validation of prior learning”**. The majority of respondents pointed out that the education institutions were predominantly engaged in recognising formal education in terms of learners’ transition from one education institution to another, recognition of credit points acquired in Erasmus exchange studies. In these cases, frequently attention is paid to grades and credit points, not to the concrete acquired knowledge, skills and competences. In some interviews examples of the validation of non-formal and informal education were mentioned – predominantly validation of previous work experience as practical training. The results of interviews show that vocational education institutions collaborate with companies that employ students, who have previously dropped out - education institutions urge enterprises to motivate their employees to complete their studies, offering validation of work experience. In some cases when the previous work experience is validated, the candidate only has to pass the final examinations for acquiring qualification.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning was more extensively studied in the project Val-Net, its publication “Recognition of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning”¹⁶ contains information on the progress thus far in validation of learning outcomes, as well as outlines recommendations for improving the process. The results of study prove that until February 2013 the non-formal and informal learning has been validated for 478 people. As indicated in the section of recommendations, even though the validation system formally functions, a range of educational activities should be conducted for the society and education institutions to use more successfully the possibilities of validation. A similar conclusion was made regarding the learning outcomes approach, which is one of the corner stones in implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning in Latvia. Formally learning outcomes are used; however, stakeholders need more extensive information.

The results of interviews on **“the significance of shift to learning outcomes in the recognition of prior learning”**:

- 35.5% of respondents consider that the shift to learning outcomes “will facilitate” the recognition of prior learning;
- 35.5% of respondents – “will rather facilitate” the recognition of prior learning;
- 12.9% of respondents – “will on average facilitate” the recognition of prior learning;
- 9.7% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 3.2% of respondents – “will rather not facilitate” the recognition of prior learning;
- 3.2% of respondents – “will not facilitate” the recognition of prior learning.

According to the results of interviews, the respondents rather positively evaluated the introduction of learning outcomes in terms of the recognition of prior learning. To conclude, in general the respondents expressed positive attitude towards the recognition of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning, yet in practice this has happened comparatively seldom. Therefore, extensive measures to raise awareness is needed among both employees of education institutions and society in general, in order to people, who have appropriate knowledge, skills and competence, would be aware of their possibilities, but at the same time would understand that they have to demonstrate their abilities in practice to obtain the relevant document confirming the qualification.

The respondents’ expectations as regards to the use of learning outcomes

The final section of the interview focused on the respondents’ opinion whether the learning outcomes approach supports or, on the contrary, hinders various processes linked with teaching/learning. In total ten questions were asked to all the target groups. The

¹⁶ Val-Net project working group, “Validation of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning”, <http://www.valnetlatvija.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/ValNet-e-gramata2.pdf> (accessed on 15.12.2013)

results of interviews concerning this section are outlined in Table 10. The overview of all the respondents' replies is provided below.

Table 10. The respondents' expectations as regards to the use of learning outcomes (frequencies)

	No or rather no	Average	Rather yes or yes	Hard to say
Does the shift to learning outcomes approach support learner-centred approach?	3	3	39	8
Does the shift to learning outcome facilitate the possibility to adjust education to individual needs (facilitating "interactive learning")?	5	8	37	3
Will the shift to learning outcomes promote better learners' understanding of the meaning and importance of the respective education programme or study course/subject?	1	4	42	6
Will the shift to learning outcomes influence the methods of learners' assessment?	2	6	39	5
Will the shift to learning outcomes facilitate more comparable learners' assessment?	6	5	20	22
Will shift to learning outcomes reduce obstacles to lifelong learning?	2	2	11	1
Will the shift to learning outcomes facilitate dialogue between stakeholders from the education sector and labour market?	0	3	13	0
Will the shift to learning outcomes facilitate recognition of prior learning?	2	4	22	3
Will the shift to learning outcomes improve the internal quality assessment of education institution?	5	2	36	10
Will the shift to learning outcomes improve the external quality assessment of education institution?	0	8	30	15

The results of interviews on "**the support of learning outcomes to learner-centred approach**":

- 37.7% of respondents consider that learning outcomes "support" learner-centred approach;
- 35.8% of respondents – "rather support" learner-centred approach;
- 35.8% of respondents – "hard to say";
- 5.7% of respondents – "on average support" learner-centred approach;
- 3.8% of respondents – "do not support" learner-centred approach;
- 1.9% of respondents – "rather do not support" learner-centred approach.

Analysing the data according to the type and stage of education, conclusion may be drawn that by the increase of education stage, the share of answers "hard to say" decreases. The results of interviews with the representatives of HEIs reveal that students are actively involved in improving study programmes and courses. The interviewed representatives of vocational education institutions highlighted that teachers had no space for adapting the content of education to the interests of the respective learners for the students to master the knowledge, skills and competences defined in the occupational standard.

The results of interviews on **“the support of learning outcome for the possibility to adjust education to individual needs”**, i.e. facilitating “interactive learning”:

- 39.6% of respondents consider that learning outcomes “rather facilitate” the possibility to adjust education to individual needs;
- 30.2% of respondents – “facilitate” the possibility to adjust education to individual needs;
- 15.1% of respondents – “on average facilitate” the possibility to adjust education to individual needs;
- 7.5% of respondents – “rather do not facilitate” the possibility to adjust education to individual needs;
- 5.7% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 1.9% of respondents – “do not facilitate” the possibility to adjust education to individual needs.

The examination of the data in various cross-sections shows that the representatives of education institution administration more frequently replied “yes” and “rather yes”, compared to the teachers. Whereas according to the type of education institution – answers “yes” and “rather yes” were given by the representatives of higher and vocational education institutions.

The results of interviews with the representatives of HEIs prove that the individual approach to students is facilitated by the study courses available online (MOOCs), frequent individual consultations, as well as are additional study activities are offered to the most capable students. The learning outcomes approach helps including this individual work in the study process more successfully. The results of interviews with the representatives of vocational education institutions reveal two trends. Firstly, the respondents emphasized that teaching/learning was already much individualised; thus, developing the skills of each student. Secondly, the students’ level of previous education, when enrolling in vocational education institution, often was low; therefore, complying with the state education standard was impossible, since teachers had to explain education content from the previous stages of education. Hence, individualised approach in fact already is implemented in vocational education, but it does not comply with the state education standards. The results of interviews with the representatives of general education institutions indicate that there is lack of resources to implement individual treatment of every student. The teachers need more time, larger financial resources are necessary, and posts of teachers’ assistants should be introduced. Moreover, the state education standards should be improved, expanding them and supplementing with appropriate methodological materials.

The results of interviews on **“the support of learning outcomes in facilitating learners’ understanding of the meaning and importance of the respective education programme and study course/subject”**:

- 47.2% of respondents consider that learning outcomes “facilitate” learners’ understanding of the meaning of the education programme and study course/subject;
- 32.1% of respondents – “rather facilitate” learners’ understanding;
- 11.3% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 7.5% of respondents – “on average facilitate” learners’ understanding;
- 1.9% of respondents – “rather do not facilitate” learners’ understanding.

The analysis of the results of interviews suggests that in general no essential differences in opinions may be observed as regards the type of education institution represented by the respondents. Still the most positive replies were provided by the representatives of HEIs, who highlighted the significance of learning outcomes approach in the context of lifelong learning.

The results of interviews on **“the influence of learning outcomes on the methods for the assessment of learners’ achievements”**:

- 40.4% of respondents consider that learning outcomes “influence” the methods used for the assessment of learners’ achievements;

- 34.6% of respondents – “rather influence” the assessment methods;
- 11.5% of respondents – “on average influence” the assessment methods;
- 9.6% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 1.9% of respondents – “rather do not influence” the assessment methods;
- 1.9% of respondents – “do not influence” the assessment methods.

The analysis of data by the groups of respondents and education institutions they represented reveals that quite similar – positive – replies were provided. The results of interviews prove that, firstly, teachers not always have sufficient knowledge about various methods for the assessment of learners’ achievements; and the state does not offer appropriate methodological materials, where it would be possible. Secondly, since the teachers have to elaborate the materials and choose the methods for the assessment of learners’ achievements themselves, additional time and financial resources are needed. Moreover, as more qualitative methods of learners’ assessment will be used instead of quantitative methods of learners’ assessment, greater investments of time and financial resources will be necessary.

The results of interviews on **“the influence of learning outcomes on the comparability of learners’ achievement assessments”**:

- 41.5% of respondents replied “hard to say”;
- 22.6% of respondents consider that learning outcomes “will facilitate” the comparability of learners’ achievement assessments;
- 15.1% of respondents – “rather will facilitate” the comparability;
- 9.4% of respondents – “on average will facilitate” the comparability;
- 9.4% of respondents – “rather will not facilitate” the comparability;
- 1.9% of respondents – “will not facilitate” the comparability.

Examination of the data according to the types of education institution shows that the answer “hard to say” dominates among the representatives of general and vocational education institutions, in comparison with the replies provided the representatives of HEIs. The results of interviews indicate that, on one hand, as the representatives of HEIs emphasised, the learning outcomes approach will make the achievement assessment criteria clearer and more valid. When regular assessment of students’ achievements is conducted during the study course, the progress of reaching learning outcomes is analysed, which allows adjusting the pace of work and the teaching/learning methods applied. On the other hand, the representatives of general education institutions pointed out that comparison between students should not be made.

The results of interviews (with the representatives of HEIs) on **“the support of learning outcomes to lifelong learning”**:

- 56.3% of respondents consider that the introduction of learning outcomes “will reduce” obstacles to lifelong learning;
- 12.5% of respondents – “rather will reduce” obstacles to lifelong learning;
- 12.5% of respondents – “on average will reduce” obstacles to lifelong learning;
- 12.5% of respondents – “rather will not reduce” obstacles to lifelong learning;;
- 6.3% of respondents – “hard to say”.

The importance of the recognition of prior learning was emphasized by the interviewees, as it would facilitate return of adults to education.

The results of interviews (with the representatives of HEIs) on **“the significance of learning outcomes in facilitating the dialogue between stakeholders – education institutions and labour market”**:

- 43.8% of respondents consider that learning outcomes “will facilitate” the dialogue between stakeholders;
- 37.5% of respondents – “rather will facilitate” the dialogue between stakeholders;

- 18.8% of respondents – “on average will facilitate” the dialogue between stakeholders.

The results of interviews reveal that the use of learning outcomes will allow assessing the results of practical training more completely, since HEI and practice providers will have common understanding of the assessment criteria. In general the learning outcomes, comparing to the list of study subjects or number of credit points, more precisely will describe students’ and graduates’ knowledge, skills and competences in a way that is better understood by employers both for those who cooperate with HEIs and those who employ the graduates of HEIs. The interviewees highlighted that HEIs had to strike a balance between satisfying the labour market needs and the development of science.

The results of interviews on **“the influence of learning outcomes on the internal quality assessment of education institution”**:

- 34% of respondents consider that learning outcomes “will facilitate” the internal quality assessment of education institution;
- 34% of respondents – “rather will facilitate” the internal quality assessment;
- 18.9% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 5.7% of respondents – “rather will not facilitate” the internal quality assessment;
- 3.8% of respondents – “will not facilitate” the internal quality assessment;
- 3.8% of respondents – “on average will facilitate” the internal quality assessment.

Examination of the data regarding type of education institutions represented by the respondents shows that the employees of general education institutions most often chose the answer “hard to say”, followed by the answer “yes”; whereas the representative of vocational education institutions – the answer “rather yes”; and the representatives of HEIs – the answer “yes”, but no one – “hard to say”. These results indicate that the representatives of vocational and higher education institutions perhaps have better understanding of learning outcomes approach in the context of internal quality assessment of education institutions. Yet the results of interviews prove that the analysis of attaining the relevant learning outcomes should not be the only aspect used during the internal quality assessment of education institutions.

The results of interviews on **“the influence of learning outcomes on the external quality assessment of education institution”**:

- 30.2% of respondents consider that learning outcomes “rather will facilitate” the external quality assessment of education institution;
- 28.3% of respondents – “hard to say”;
- 26.4% of respondents – “will facilitate” the external quality assessment;
- 15.1% of respondents – “on average will facilitate” the external quality assessment.

Analysing the answers regarding type of education institutions represented by the respondents indicates that the representatives of general education institutions mostly replied “hard to say”; the representatives of vocational education institutions – “hard to say” or “rather yes”; the representatives of HEIs – “rather yes” or “yes”. These results of interviews lead to the conclusion that the representatives of HEIs have clearer understanding as regards the significance of learning outcomes in the process of the external quality assessment of education institutions. It should be emphasised that comparing answers between the representatives of administration and teachers, the teachers more frequently selected the answer “hard to say” more often, while other answers prevailed among the representatives of administration. The results of interviews prove that the representatives of HEIs’ administration in their daily work deal more with the issues related to external quality assessment of education institution. The results of interviews indicate that for the interviewees it is difficult to assess the possible improvements in the work of accreditation experts’ commission, depending on the changes in methods used for the external quality assessment of education institution. Furthermore, the process of external quality assessment of education institution is subjective.

3.3. Conclusions

Analysing the results of study, conclusion may be drawn that an interview as the form for obtaining replies was successful. The face-to-face interviewers ensured the possibility to explain to the interviewees in more details the concept of learning outcomes, which was completely clear only for some respondents from the general education institutions, for the part of respondents from the vocational education institutions and for the majority of respondents from HEIs.

As mentioned above, in general the representatives of HEIs have better understanding of the concept “learning outcomes”, which this could be explained by the fact that thus far awareness raising work on implementation of learning outcomes approach to a great extent was directed at this target group. It is more difficult to ensure that also the stakeholders of vocational and higher education are informed about the learning outcomes approach. Regarding the results of interviews with the representatives of vocational education institutions, the stakeholders of higher education have to perform tasks – to assist students in acquiring knowledge, skills and competences – which can be perfectly implemented without good knowledge about the concept of learning outcomes. The centralised qualification examinations at the end of vocational education programmes measure the knowledge, skills and competences of all students acquired during their learning; hence, providing information about achieved learning outcomes. Vocational education programmes are elaborated in conformity with the expected learning outcomes, even without detailed knowledge of the learning outcomes concept. The results of interviews prove that occupational standards, particularly those, which are revised recently, impart information about learning outcomes necessary for performing professional activities.

As the results of interviews reveal, the implementation of learning outcomes in general education is a serious challenge, because this concept was mainly linked with the numerical assessment (grades). Moreover, there is an assumption that general education is concerned only with students’ knowledge, while only few general education institutions ensure the acquisition of skills and competences (especially interdisciplinary). This shortcoming is partly compensated by the broad availability of leisure education (extracurricular activities); however, not all students use the provided opportunities. The respondents suggested expanding the state education standards and standards for study subjects, as well as offering more extensive and more available methodological support for teachers.

The following main obstacles to implementation of learning outcomes approach at all stages and in all types of education were mentioned: incompetent and fragmented implementation of policy by authorities; as well as lack of resources – human and financial resources – for tackling this issue. The results of interviews show that major problems regarding the introduction of learning outcomes are identified at the national, not the education institutional level. For example, the general level (national) of knowledge on learning outcomes was assessed as average, while the knowledge of colleagues in education institution – “rather high”. One of the most essential issues is the lack of respondents’ conviction that the learning outcomes approach, indeed, will bring any benefit to the teaching/learning process.

The results of interviews indicate that the majority of respondents consider that at least partly the learning outcomes approach is already in use, in particular as regards the development of education content and recognition of prior learning. In the accordance with the replies of respondents, learning outcomes approach is less significant in the assessment of learners’ achievements, as well as in education quality assessment processes.

When new education and study subject programmes are elaborated, the experience of teachers and the expected outcomes are the most important aspects. The occupational and/or state education standards are also of great significance, as they facilitate the formulation of learning outcomes. The results of study prove that the respondents have varied opinions concerning the possibilities to gain experience from international or local good practice examples – a part of respondents perceive the experience of other education

institutions as a very important. The results of interviews with the representatives of HEIs point out that the national qualifications framework is an essential point of reference when designing study programmes.

Regarding the results of interviews, learners predominantly are informed about the procedure for assessment, as well as the elements constituting their final grade. However, the learners' knowledge about learning outcomes was evaluated as average. The results of interviews allows concluding that the learning outcomes approach should be explained more to the learners, so that they would become more involved in the teaching/learning process and understand more precisely the meaning and use of their education. There is a view that vocational education institutions can more successfully to demonstrate the meaning of learning outcomes in education, since the teaching/learning process is practical and acquired knowledge, skills and competences are tested in centralised qualification examinations. The experience of using learning outcomes is complemented through the cooperation between vocational education institutions and employers, who engage in the creating, improving and implementing of education content.

The results of this study reveal that several steps should be taken in order to focus more on the attainment of learning outcomes during the teaching/learning process, to facilitate more individualised approach to learners and develop more creative teaching/learning process. For instance, the current teachers' work-load and the number of learners per one teacher should be decreased, the post of teacher's assistant should be introduced, as well as additional educative activities should be conducted and the best practice examples – popularised. Of course, the implementation of such measures involves the revision of financial mechanisms and other practical matters.

In the accordance with results of this study, conclusion may be drawn that procedures for assessing the quality of education institutions need a number of improvements. As the results of interviews show, the mechanisms for internal quality assessment of education institutions to a certain extent are introduced in all education institutions, furthermore, these mechanisms take into consideration the principles of learning outcomes approach. Meanwhile, the mechanisms for external quality assessment of education institutions, especially in general education, in which the analysis of numerical assessments of students' achievements dominates, in fact do not apply learning outcomes. For example, also in higher education during accreditation attention is seldom paid to the implementation of the learning outcomes approach at the respective education institution.

The results of study regarding the recognition of prior learning and experience indicate that in the majority of cases this activity was positively evaluate, yet the experience of education institution staff is not extensive. Therefore, activities for raising the awareness of both employees of education institutions and general public should be conducted. The recognition of prior learning and experience must be based on the acquired learning outcomes; moreover, citizens, who want involve in this process, must be provided with the necessary information and support (especially for identifying their knowledge, skills and competences).

The analysis of study results proves that education system is not homogenous; therefore, work in the implementation and application of learning outcomes differs significantly by various levels and types of education. In addition, the differences are seen also in education institutions of the same level and type. These differences can be explained by fragmented education system, lack of common understanding in the state, as well as the huge workload of education institution personnel and their lack of time. However, the majority of respondents saw the strong sides of learning outcomes, which is illustrated by the results in the section "expectations".

The results and conclusions of this study provides an insight on the significance and use of learning outcomes in the Latvian education institutions, but additional research and analysis should be carried out in order to obtain more complete information on the tendencies in teaching/learning process.

4. Recognition of Knowledge and Skills Acquired outside Formal Education

In Latvia the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education is based upon the principle that knowledge and skills are valuable, irrespectively of the way in which they are acquired. The mechanism of recognition allows the state to confirm this value, by issuing a document of formal education or qualification, thus making a person's knowledge or skills visible.

In 2008 a working group was established at MoES with the aim to reach an agreement regarding the definition, aims and principal scheme of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education, the practical aim and basic principles for developing the system, as well as to define the approaches, methods, levels affected by the system, responsible institutions, as well as to prepare recommendations on the necessary amendments to the laws and regulations. The working group took into consideration "Methodology for validating prior learning and skills" (2007), which was elaborated in the framework of MoES National Programme ESF project (2005-2007).

In developing the system the summative approach to the validation of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education was set as a priority, i.e. a candidate proving their knowledge and skills receives a formal certificate on it. The working group agreed on the main pre-condition for successful introduction of system for validating knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education – the acquired formal education or qualification document should be identical with the document issued by an education institution upon a successful graduation of programme.

The working group discussed the education and qualification document levels, which could be obtained in the terms of validation process of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education. The following suggestions were evaluated:

- 1) **General education (basic, secondary, the LQF levels 1-4).** A person may obtain general basic or secondary education by proving that they have the knowledge and skills included in the education standard. Decision was made to postpone the implementation for a definite period of time and to introduce after the introduction of the LQF levels 2-3.
- 2) **Vocational education (the LQF levels 3-4).** A person may obtain vocational education by proving that they have the knowledge and skills included in the education and occupation standard. Decision was made to ensure the implementation of the process by 1st January 2011 with regard to initial professional qualifications.
- 3) **Higher education (the LQF levels 5-8).** A person can acquire higher education (or become enrolled into a concrete stage of HE), by proving that they have the knowledge and skills included in the education standard.

Since the beginning of 2010, there have been public discussions about the idea of validating knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education for obtaining a professional qualification, by the initiative of MoES, involving also the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Welfare, the State Education Quality Service, the National Centre for Education, AIC, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, the Latvian Adult Education Association, the Latvian Chamber of Crafts and other institutions.

On 1st July 2010, the Amendments to the Vocational Education Law (1999) came into force establishing the rights of a person to obtain knowledge and skills assessment with the aim of obtaining a vocational qualification document. The Law defines the term "professional competence", which includes the totality of knowledge, skills and responsibility for performing professional activities in a concrete working situation. The Law stipulates that the responsible body for the process is MoES, and delegates to the

government to adopt the procedure for assessing the knowledge and skills obtained outside formal education.

On 22 February 2011, CoM Regulations No.146 "Procedure how professional competence obtained outside formal education system is assessed" were approved. These Regulations to a great extent are based on the results of the MoES working group. The Regulations stipulate the procedure how professional competence (except regulated professions) that corresponds to the Latvian professional qualification level 1-3, i.e. the LQF level 3-4, obtained outside formal education is assessed. The institutions assessing professional competence may be accredited education establishments or examination centres, which have been assigned by the State Education Quality Service. The procedure on validating professional competence obtained outside formal education is as follows:

- 1) Individual's application for assessment of their professional competence;
- 2) Professional qualification exam;
- 3) Awarding document certifying a professional qualification.

The validation process of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education is for a fee; thus, a person can take a conscious decision to participate with the aim to receive a professional qualification document. A person, who wishes that their professional competence were assessed, has to submit relevant application to institution assessing professional competence. The institution assessing professional competence must provide to the candidate consultations free of charge regarding the requirements set in the concrete occupational standard and the procedure of professional qualification exam. Up to the point of deciding to take the exam the procedure is free of charge for the candidate.

In the period of two months after receiving an application for assessment, the institution for assessing the professional competence organises and holds the professional qualification exam in conformity with the procedure of organising professional qualification exam as defined by the legislation.

The applicant, who has successfully passed professional qualification exam (grade no lower than "5 – satisfactory"), is awarded with a state recognized document certifying the Latvian professional qualification of level 1-3 (LQF level 3-4) by the institution for assessing the professional competence in line with procedure stated by laws and regulations.

Regarding the HE level, on 10 January 2012, the CoM approved Regulations No.36 "Regulations of recognizing the learning outcomes acquired in the previous education and professional experience" that were issued in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions (1995, amendments in force since 1.08.2011). These Regulations determine the procedures for the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes (for higher education level) obtained during the previous education or professional experience, as well as criteria for recognition.

The decision regarding the recognition of learning outcomes is taken by a Commission of Learning Outcomes Recognition established at the relevant higher education institution or college. In the case of recognition, the Commission awards a certain volume of credit points to the applicant.

The learning outcomes achieved through professional experience may be recognized only within the part of study programme including practice; furthermore, these learning outcomes should be obtained in a profession relevant to the educational thematic field of particular study programme. The mentioned type of learning outcomes may be also recognized in a study course or module of a study programme, which ensures the acquisition of practical knowledge, skills and competence. Meanwhile, the learning outcomes acquired in the previous education may be recognized if they correspond to higher education stage and have been achieved through:

- Continuing vocational education programme, which leads to the Latvian professional qualification level 4 or 5 (LQF/EQF level 5-7);

- Individual course of a study programme or study module, which an applicant has acquired as a listener;
- Part of a study programme;
- Other types of education mastered outside formal education, except study programmes preparing for the regulated professions.

Applicant who is not student in particular study programme, after the recognition of their learning outcomes can be matriculated in the relevant study stage of the mentioned study programme, and if need be, additional study courses or modules to be acquired or exams may be assigned.

According to the Regulations, IHEs or colleges may determine fee for the recognition of learning outcomes. In case of the state owned IHEs or colleges, the fees are determined by the CoM.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Proposed amendments regarding the first and second qualifications level to “Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 2 December 2008 No. 990 “Regulations on the classification of the Latvian education”

The first and the second classification level and its comparison with the International Standard Classification of Education (*ISCED-97*) and European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

First Classification Level		Second Classification Level		EQF
1st No. of code	education level	1st and 2nd No. of code(with/without letter)	type of educational programme	
1	2	3	4	
1	First stage of basic education	10T	Continuing vocational education (to obtain level 1 professional qualification), to be implemented without restrictions regarding prior learning	2
2	Second stage of basic education	21	General education, basic education programmes (Grades 1-9)	1- 2
		22	Vocational basic education, to be implemented without restrictions regarding prior education	2
3	Secondary education level	32	Vocational education (acquisition of 2nd level professional qualification, to be implemented following acquisition of partial or full basic education)	2 - 3
		35a	Vocational education (acquisition of level 2 professional qualification), to be implemented following acquisition of general secondary education	3
		30T	Continuing vocational education (acquisition of level 3 professional qualification), to be implemented following acquisition of general or vocational secondary education	4

Appendix 2. Proposals regarding compatibility of Latvia's formal education credentials with EQF and LQF levels 1-4

Latvia's formal education credentials (qualifications)	EQF/LQF level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate of general basic education (for acquisition of special educational programme for learners with mental development disorders or severe mental development disorders or multiple severe development disorders) 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate of general basic education • Certificate of vocational education (for acquisition of programme of vocation education, for learners following partial basic education) • Certificate of vocational basic education • Certificate of vocational qualification (for acquisition of vocational continuous education programme, for learners without restrictions regarding previous education) 	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate of vocational education • Certificate of vocational qualification (for acquisition of vocational continuous education programme, for learners with previously acquired basic education) 	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate of general secondary education • Diploma of vocational secondary education • Certificate of vocational qualification (for acquisition of vocational continuous education programme, for learners with previously acquired basic education) 	4

Appendix 3. Proposed changes in wording of the descriptions of knowledge, skills, competences and education documents included in the LQF

European descriptors of learning outcomes levels ¹⁷			Latvian descriptors of learning outcomes levels ¹⁸			Latvian education documents	EQF and LQF level
Knowledge	Skills	Competence	Knowledge	Skills	Competence		
Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context	Able to demonstrate elementary knowledge, which manifests itself in recognition and recollection	Able to use elementary practical and cognitive skills, able to execute them under direct supervision using simple tools. Able to perform simple tasks, which are repetitive as to their content and predictable.	Able to perform simple tasks in a structured environment, to function in a limited context. Is able to perform elementary tasks, following a model, able to master basic self-care skills.	Certificate of general basic education (for acquisition of special educational programme for learners with mental development disorders or severe mental development disorders or multiple severe development disorders)	1.
Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy	Able to demonstrate basic knowledge in concrete subject syllabi in the field of professional activity to be acquired or the field of study.	Able to use basic cognitive and practical skills, which are necessary to solve everyday problems by using relevant information, perform tasks and using basic rules and means. Able to understand the consequences of one's	Able to perform tasks under the supervision of a specialist, performing the given tasks individually or in a working group, or semi-independently. Able to participate in setting the goals for some learning or work tasks and planning of the process of action.	Certificate of general basic education Certificate of vocational education (for acquisition of programme of vocation education, for learners following partial basic education) Certificate of vocational basic education	2.

¹⁷ Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council (23 April 2008) on the establishment of European qualifications framework for lifelong learning.

¹⁸ In accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 2 December 2008 No. 990 "Regulation on the Classification of Latvian Education" (with amendments of 17.02.2009 and 05.10.2010) Table 2 of Appendix 1

				own actions with regard to self and others.		Certificate of vocational qualification (for acquisition of vocational continuous education programme, for learners without restrictions regarding previous education)	
Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or stud	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems	Able to demonstrate the knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts and to use them in the field of studies and professional activities. Able to understand various information about materials, technologies in the relevant field of studies or a concrete profession.	Able to use various cognitive and practical skills, which are necessary to perform tasks and to solve simple problems, by selecting and using basic methods , means, materials, information and technologies.	Able to be aware of and assume responsibility for performing his or her work or study tasks in a permanent and stable environment under the supervision of a specialist in the sector. When solving the tasks, is able to adjust one's actions to conditions and to be responsible for the result of work.	Certificate of vocational education Certificate of vocational qualification (for acquisition of vocational continuous education programme, for learners with previously acquired basic education)	3.
Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility	Able to demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of facts, theories and causalities, which are needed for personal growth and development, civic participation, social integration and continuous education. Able to comprehend in detail and demonstrate knowledge of diverse	Able to plan and organise work, using various methods, technologies (including information and communication technologies), equipment, tools and materials for performing tasks. Able to find, assess and creatively use information for performing study or	Is motivated for further career development, continuous education, lifelong learning in a knowledge-oriented democratic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society in Europe and in the world. Able to plan and perform study or work tasks in the profession individually, in a team or by managing the teamwork. Able to assume responsibility for the quality and quantity of the outcomes of study or	Certificate of general secondary education Diploma of vocational secondary education Certificate of vocational qualification (for acquisition of vocational continuous education programme, for learners with previously acquired basic education)	4.

		for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities	<p>facts, principles, processes, concepts in a specific field of studies or professional activities in standard and non-standard situations.</p> <p>Has good knowledge of technologies and methods for performing study or work tasks in the profession.</p>	<p>professional work tasks and problem solving.</p> <p>Able to communicate at least in two languages both in writing and orally in a known and unknown context.</p> <p>Able to work independently in the profession, to learn and to improve professional qualifications.</p> <p>Able to cooperate.</p>			
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Appendix 4. The results of ESF project “Development of sectorial qualifications system and improvement of the efficiency and quality of vocational education” – sectorial qualifications, evaluation of the compatibility of professional qualification level 1-3 with EQF/LQF levels

Sector / qualifications of professional qualification levels 1-3	Currently established EQF/LQF level	Proposal on compatibility/incompatibility	Substantiation of incompatibility and proposal
1. CONSTRUCTION			
Professional qualification level 3	4	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilities technician • Heating, ventilation, air conditioning technician • Water supply and sewage system technician • Refrigerating systems technician • Finishing works technician • Building manager • Building technician • Road building technician • Hydro buildings technician • Arborist • Interior design specialist • Architectural technician • Gardener • Building restoration technician • Dry construction technician • Roofer • Carpenter • Concrete placement technician • Building frame assembler • Construction machines mechanic 			
Professional qualification level 2	4	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction machines driver • Auto crane and other loading equipment operator • Utilities fitter • Ventilation systems fitter • Gas systems fitter • Water supply and sewage systems fitter 			EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanitary ware fitter • Air conditioning and refrigeration systems fitter • External water supply systems and sewage systems fitter • External gas systems fitter • External heating supply systems fitter • Building finisher • Decorator • Plasterer • Tile setter • Floor layer • Wallpaper fitters • Dry construction fitter • Stove builder • Brick-layer • Paving installer • Concrete worker • Building management handyman • Maintenance worker 			Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.
Professional qualification level 1	3	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction worker 			EQF/LQF level 2 should be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 1 comprise basic knowledge and basic skills for performing simple tasks in pre-defined context.
2. POWER INDUSTRY			
Professional qualification level 3	4	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrician • Electrician of power networks • Agriculture electrician • Electronics mechanic • Heating, gas and water systems technician • Electric line installer • Electrical transmission networks • Substation electric equipment • Electronics mechanic • External power supply networks • Distribution power networks • Power supply in agriculture • Interior electric line installing works • Substation electric equipment • Automatic electric drive • Protection against lightning and overvoltage • Power supply to utilities consumers • Heating (refrigeration) equipment 			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire and security alarms • Protection of relays of power systems and automatics • Client consultant • Technician of production facilities power equipment • Power supply to production facilities • Elements of production facilities automatics • Lighting equipment • Servicing electric equipment • Electric drive technician • Electric machinery • Automatics of electric drive • Programmable controller • Electricity measurements technician • Electricity measurements • Design technician 			
Professional qualification level 2	4	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wireman • Low-voltage equipment wireman • Heating, gas and water system fitter • Electric wiring installer • Relay protection and automatics electrician • Heating, gas and water equipment fitter • Control panel (or other equipment) operator • Heating systems fitter • Aerial conductor and cable line electrician • Gas equipment fitter • High-voltage line electrician • Water equipment fitter and repairer • Average voltage cable ends and adaptors • Ventilation systems fitter and repairer • Electrician • Electric fitter • Electric fitter of control measuring equipment • Electrical equipment installer and fitter 			<p>EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work.</p> <p>Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.</p>
Professional qualification level 1	3	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications not defined 			
3. TIMBER INDUSTRY			
Professional qualification level 3	4.	Compatible	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest management technician • Forest machinery operator • Timber product production technician • Program controlled processing equipment/ line operator • Building ware carpenter • Furniture maker 			
Professional qualification level 2	4	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motor saw operator • Wood processing equipment operator • Carpenter • Upholsterer • Timber material treater • Log-hauling truck driver 			<p>EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work.</p> <p>Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.</p>
Professional qualification level 1	3	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest worker • Carpenter's assistant 			<p>EQF/LQF level 2 should be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 1 comprise basic knowledge and basic skills for performing simple tasks in pre-defined context.</p>
4. CHEMICAL INDUSTRY			
Professional qualification level 3	4	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chemical processes technician • Perfumery and cosmetics processes technician • Pharmaceutical processes technician • Analytical chemistry technician • Biotechnologist's assistant • Microbiologist's assistant • Environment technician • Environment equipment technician (mechanic) • Biological treatment equipment technician • Chemical and biochemical industry equipment mechanic 			
Professional qualification level 2	4	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chemical products production operator • Pharmaceutical products production operator • Biotechnological processes 			<p>EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge</p>

operator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfumery and cosmetics production operator • Chemistry laboratory assistant • Analytical chemistry laboratory assistant • Microbiology laboratory assistant • Sanitary engineering equipment fitter 			and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work. Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.
Professional qualification level 1	-	-	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications not defined 			
5. AGRICULTURE			
Professional qualification level 3	4	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horticulture technician • Horticulture • Floriculture • Fruit-growing • Growing seedlings • Plant cultivation/ field-crop cultivation technician • Apiculturist • Cattle breeding technician • Fish farmer • Cattle breeding technician specialising in veterinary • Cattle breeding technician specialising in animal husbandry • Mechanization technician 			
Professional qualification level 2	4	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gardener • Crop farmer • Cattle-breeder • Aquaculture worker • Fishermen (continuous training programme) • Mechanic 	A		EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work. Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.
Professional qualification level 1	-	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development programmes 			Professional development is a special type of professional education, which allows acquiring systematic professional knowledge and skills compatible with the labour market requirements. Professional development does not ensure qualification on any occupation; however, it is elaborated for

			acquiring additional knowledge and skills and should be classified in accordance with qualification.
6. METAL PROCESSING MECHANICAL ENGINEERING, MECHANICAL SCIENCES			
Professional qualification level 3	4	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metal processing machine tool mechanic • Numerical control (CNC) machine tool adjuster • Mechanical engineering technician • Mechatronics systems technician • Installer and repairer • Tools fitter • Ship mechanic (on ships with the with main engine propulsion power below 750kW) • Motor engineer • Car body installer and fitter • Metal rolling worker 			
Professional qualification level 2	4	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitter • Lathe operator • Milling machine operator • CNC operator • Grinder • Manual metal arc welder (MMA) • Metal inert gas welder (MIG) • Tungsten inert gas welder (TIG) • Oxy-fuel welder (OAW) • Thermocutter • Sheet treater • Sheet cutting (Guillotine, plasma cutting, laser cutting, waterjet cutting) operator • Punching and sheet folding equipment operator • Metal processing (sheet, band) technological lines and machine-tools operator • Tinsmith • Ship building fitter • Car mechanic • Metal caster • Former • Structural metal fitter • Furnace operator • Smith 	Metal		<p>EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work.</p> <p>Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.</p>
Professional qualification level 1	3	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assembly works fitter 			EQF/LQF level 2 should be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of

			professional qualification level 1 comprise basic knowledge and basic skills for performing simple tasks in pre-defined context.
7. FOOD			
Professional qualification level 3	4	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food products production technician • Meat and meat products production technician • Fish and fish products production technician • Dairy products production technician • Bread and flour products production technician • Fruit and vegetables processing production technician • Beverages production technician • Sweets and chocolate products production technicians • Assistant to specialist in food product quality 			
Professional qualification level 2	4	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food products production operator • Meat and meat products production operator • Fish and fish products production operator • Dairy products production operator • Fruit and vegetables processing operator • Bread and flour products production operator • Beverages production operator • Butcher • Meat carver • Sausage maker • Baker • Confectioner 			EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work. Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.
Professional qualification level 1	3	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food products production worker • Baker's assistant • Confectioner's assistant 			EQF/LQF level 2 should be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of the professional qualification level 1 comprise basic knowledge and basic skills for performing simple tasks in pre-defined context.
• 8. BEAUTY INDUSTRY			
Professional qualification level 3	4	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautician 			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hair-dresser stylist • Visual image stylist • SPA specialist • Specialist in bath-house treatments 			
Professional qualification level 2	4.	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manicure and pedicure specialist • Hair-dresser • Make-up specialist • Make-up artist • Bath-house attendant 			<p>EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work.</p> <p>Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.</p>
Professional qualification level 1	-	-	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications have not been defined 			
9. TEXTILE PRODUCTS, CLOTHES, LEATHER AND LEATHER GOODS			
Professional qualification level 3	4	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textile production technician • Spinned textiles production technician • Woven textiles production technician • Knitter textiles production technician • Unwoven-cloth garment production technician • Textiles laboratory assistant (quality controller) • Textiles production specialist • Producer of woven products • Producer of sown products • Producer of un-woven products • Producer of knitted-fabric products • Clothing style specialist • Design specialist • Foot-wear maker • Specialist of leather and fur product production 			
Professional qualification level 2	4	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operator of textile material production equipment • Spinning equipment operator • Weaving equipment operator 			<p>EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knitting operator • Unwoven cloth garments production equipment operator • Textile trimming operator • Dressmaker • Embroidery equipment operator • Sewing equipment operator • Tailor • Cutter • Cobbler • Furrier 			<p>and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work.</p> <p>Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.</p>
Professional qualification level 1	3	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothing repairer's assistant • Cobbler's assistant 			<p>EQF/LQF level 2 should be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of the professional qualification level 1 comprise basic knowledge and basic skills for performing simple tasks in pre-defined context.</p>
10. TOURISM			
Professional qualification level 3	4	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural tourism specialist • Eco tourism specialist • Hospitality services specialist • Restaurant services specialist • Hotel services specialist • Guest accommodation specialist • Waiter • Barman • Catering services specialist 			
Professional qualification level 2	4	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook • Pastry-cook 			<p>EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work.</p> <p>Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.</p>
Professional qualification level 1	3.	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook's assistant • Pastry-cook's assistant • Room attendant 			<p>EQF/LQF level 2 should be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of the professional qualification level 1 comprise basic knowledge and basic skills for performing simple tasks in pre-defined context.</p>

11. ENTREPRENEURSHIP, FINANCES, ACCOUNTANCY, ADMINISTRATION			
Professional qualification level 3	4.	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company workers • Warehouse supervisor • Purchasing worker • Sales worker • Marketing worker • Sector company workers • Secretary • Accounting clerk • Organiser of security works 			
Professional qualification level 2	4.	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail store sales person • Clerk • Security staff member • Patrol officer • Collector • Body guard 			<p>EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work.</p> <p>Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.</p>
Professional qualification level 1	3.	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail worker 			<p>EQF/LQF level 2 should be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 1 comprise basic knowledge and basic skills for performing simple tasks in pre-defined context.</p>
12. PRODUCTION OF ELECTRONIC AND OPTICAL EQUIPMENT, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES			
Professional qualification level 3	4.	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programming technician • Computer systems technician • Telecommunications technician • Electronic equipment technician 			
Professional qualification level 2	-	-	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications not defined 			
Professional qualification level 1	-	-	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications not defined 			
13. TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS			

Professional qualification level 3	4.	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistics worker • Forwarding agent • Stevedore • Towing vehicle operator (engine driver) • Diesel locomotive driver (engine driver) • Steam locomotive driver (engine driver) • Diesel-engine train driver (engine driver) • Electric train driver (engine driver) • Rail transport motor vehicle driver (engine driver) • Deck officer (depending upon the size of the vessel) • Marine • Ship electrician • Ship technician • Cook of the ship • Ship mechanic (depending upon the engine power) • Refrigeration equipment mechanic • Warehouse worker • Assistant to the towing vehicle driver • Assistant to diesel locomotive driver (engine driver) • Assistant to steam locomotive driver (engine driver) • Assistant to diesel-engine train driver (engine driver) • Assistant to electric train driver (engine driver) • Assistant to rail transport motor vehicle driver (engine driver) • Marine • Sailor • Motorman • Pump mechanic • Road transport controller • Rail transport shipment organisation and traffic safety technician • Mechanics technician • Locomotives park technician • Railroads technician • Freight cars technician • Technician of railroad transport automatics, telemechanics and communications • Electrician 			
Professional qualification level 2	4	Incompatible	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warehouse worker • Assistant to the towing vehicle driver • Assistant to diesel locomotive driver (engine driver) • Assistant to steam locomotive driver (engine driver) • Assistant to diesel-engine train driver (engine driver) • Assistant to electric train driver (engine driver) • Assistant to rail transport motor vehicle driver (engine driver) • Marine • Sailor • Motorman • Pump mechanic • Mechanic's assistant 			<p>EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work.</p> <p>Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.</p>
<p>Without defined level of qualifications</p>		<p>Incompatible</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot • Airline transport pilot (ATPL) • Pilot • Commercial pilot (CPL) • Pilot navigator • Pilot engineer • Pilot radiophone operator • Driver of motor vehicle • D1, D1E, D, DE, C1, C1E, C, CE category motor vehicle driver • Qualification of drivers of vehicles intended for transportation of hazardous cargos (ADR) Initial professional category (code 95) • Airplane steward 			
<p>Without defined qualifications level</p>		<p>Incompatible</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loaders LOADER (manual work) • SLINGSMAN • Transport WORKER • Warehouse WORKER • Motorized crane and other loading equipment operators • Crane OPERATOR • Ship /crane OPERATOR • Lift fork MACHINE OPERATOR • Loading equipment ATTENDANT • Hydro loader MACHINE OPERATOR • Railroad crane DRIVER • Railroad crane DRIVER'S ASSISTANT • DOCKER • Postal delivery and sorting 			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> workers • Courier • Train guard • Marine • Steward • Fisherman • Trawl master 			
14. PRINTING AND PUBLISHING INDUSTRY, PAPER AND PAPER PRODUCTS PRODUCTION, COMPUTER DESIGN			
Professional qualification level 3	4.	Compatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist in print work design • Offset printer • Silk screen printer • Flexoprinter • Digital printing equipment operator • Reproduction equipment operator • Adjuster of printing equipment • Printing production technician • Printing production specialist • Print work processing specialist • Cutting equipment operator • Paper production equipment operator • Paper, cardboard products production equipment operator 			
Professional qualification level 2	4.	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typist • Offset printer's assistant • Book binder • Paper production equipment operator's assistant • Paper, cardboard products production equipment operator's assistant 			<p>EQF/LQF level 3 must be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of professional qualification level 3 comprise acquisition of complex knowledge and skills, which exceed the level of qualified execution of work, containing also skills for planning and organising work.</p> <p>Thus, lower responsibility for work (responsible only for one's own work) and also respective level of competence of typical of the occupations of professional qualification level 2.</p>
Professional qualification level 1	3.	Incompatible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print works processing worker 			<p>EQF/LQF level 2 should be set for this group of qualifications, since the occupations of the professional qualification level 1 comprise basic knowledge and basic skills for performing simple tasks in pre-defined context.</p>

Appendix 5. Regulations on the classification of Latvian education

Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.931

Riga, 5 October 2010 (Minutes No.51, § 16)

Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 2 December 2008 No.990 “Regulations on the classification of Latvian education”

Issued pursuant to Section 71 of the Official Statistics Law

The following amendments shall be introduced to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 2 December 2008 No.990 “Regulations on the classification of Latvian education” (The newspaper *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 2008, No.190, 2009, No.29):

1. To express Annex 1 in new wording (Annex 1).
2. To express Annex 3 in new wording (Annex 2).

Prime Minister *V.Dombrovskis*

Minister of Education and Science *T.Kože*

Annex 1 to Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.931 of 5 October 2010

"Annex 1 to Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.990 of 2 December 2008

Table 1

The first and the second classification level and their comparison with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

First Classification Level		Second Classification Level		ISCED-97	EQF
1 st No. of code	education level	1 st and 2 nd No. of code (with/without letter)	type of education programme		
0	Pre-school education	00	Compulsory pre-school education programmes for five and six year-olds (for children, who have not attended a pre-school institution of education prior commencing compulsory education)	0	
		01	Pre-school education programmes		
1	First stage of basic education	11	General education, programmes of the first stage of basic education (Grades 1-6)	1	
		10V	Professional orientation education, to be implemented parallel to the programme of the 1 st stage of basic education		
		10T	Continuing vocational education (to obtain level 1 professional qualification), to be implemented without restrictions regarding prior education		
2	Second stage of basic education	21	General education, basic education programmes (Grades 1-9)	2A, 2B	1-3
		23	General education, programmes of the second stage of the basic education (Grades 7-9)		3

		26	General basic education pedagogical correction programmes (education adjustment programmes for Grade 9)	2A, 2B	3
		22	Vocational basic education, to be implemented without restrictions regarding prior education	2C	3
		20T	Continuing vocational education (to obtain level 2 professional qualification), to be implemented after full or partial acquisition of basic education programme		3
		20P	Professional improvement programme to be implemented after acquisition of basic education		3
		20V	Professional orientation education, to be implemented parallel to the programme of general basic education (Grades 1-9)		3
3	Secondary education level	31	General education (acquisition of general secondary education), to be implemented following the acquisition of basic education. Length of studies – 3 years.	3A, 3B	4
		32	Vocational education (acquisition of 2nd level professional qualification)	3C	4
		33	Vocational secondary education (acquisition of level 3 professional qualification), to be implemented following acquisition of basic education	3A, 3B	4
		35a	Vocational education (acquisition of level 2 professional qualification), to be implemented following the acquisition of general secondary education	4B	4
		35b	Vocational secondary education (acquisition of level 3 professional qualification), to be implemented following the acquisition of general secondary education		4
		36	General education (acquisition of general secondary education), continuation of vocational education. The length of studies – a year.	3A, 3B	4
		37	Vocational secondary education (acquisition of level 3 professional qualification), continuation of vocational education		4
		30T	Continuing vocational education (acquisition of levels 2 or 3 professional qualification), to be implemented following the acquisition of general or vocational secondary education		4
		30P	Professional improvement programme to be implemented following the acquisition of general or vocational secondary education		4
		30V	Professionally orientated education, to be implemented parallel to the acquisition of general or vocational secondary education		4

4	Higher education level	41	1 st level professional higher (college) education (acquisition of level 4 professional qualification). The length of full-time studies - 2-3 years	5B	5	
		42	2 nd level professional higher education (acquisition of level 5 professional qualification and professional Bachelor's degree in the field of professional activities) or 2 nd level professional higher education (acquisition of level 5 professional qualification). The length of full-time studies – at least 4 years		5A	6
		43	Academic education (Bachelor's degree). The length of full-time studies – 3-4 years			6
		44	2 nd level professional higher education (acquisition of level 5 professional qualification), continuation of college education. Length of full-time studies – at least 1 - 2 years. Total length of full-time studies – at least 4 years.			6
		45	Academic education (Master's degree). Length of full-time studies – 1-2 years. The total length of full-time studies - at least 5 years.			7
		46	2 nd level professional higher education, which is implemented on the basis of higher education and which ensures the acquisition of level 5 professional qualification (continuation of education with code 43). The length of full-time studies – at least a year. The total length of full-time studies – at least 4 years			6
		47	2 nd level professional higher education, which ensures the acquisition of level 5 professional qualification and the professional Master's degree or professional Master's degree in the field of professional activities. The length of full-time studies – at least a year. The total length of full-time studies – 5 years.			7
		48	2 nd level professional higher education (acquisition of 5th level professional qualification). The length of studies - at least a year. The total length of full-time studies – at least 5 years.			7
5		51	Doctoral studies (doctoral degree). The length of studies – 3-4 years. Full-time studies.	6		8

Table 2

Descriptors of knowledge, skills and competence confirming to the EQF level

EQF level¹⁹	Knowledge (knowledge and comprehension)	Skills (ability to apply knowledge, communication, general skills)	Competence (analysis, synthesis and assessment)
1	Able to demonstrate elementary knowledge, which manifests itself in recognition and recollection.	Able to use elementary practical and cognitive skills, able to execute them under direct supervision using simple tools. Able to perform simple tasks, which are repetitive as to their content and predictable.	Able to perform tasks in a structured environment, to function in a limited context. Is able to perform elementary tasks, following a model, able to master basic self-care skills.
2	Able to demonstrate basic knowledge in concrete subject syllabi.	Able to use basic cognitive and practical skills, which are necessary to solve everyday problems by using relevant information, perform tasks and using simple rules and means. Able to understand the consequences of one's own actions with regard to self and others.	Able to perform tasks individually or in a group under supervision or semi-independently. Able to participate in setting some learning objectives and planning the course of actions.
3	Able to demonstrate the knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts and to use them in the field of studies and professional activities. Able to understand various information about materials, technologies in the relevant field of studies or a concrete profession.	Able to use various cognitive and practical skills, which are necessary to perform tasks and to solve simple problems, by selecting and using basic methods, means, materials, information and technologies.	Able to be aware of and assume responsibility for performing work or study tasks in a permanent and stable environment under the supervision of a specialist in the sector. When solving the tasks, is able to adjust one's actions to conditions and to be responsible for the result of work.
4	Able to demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of facts, theories and causalities, which are needed for personal growth and development, civic participation, social integration and continuous education. Able to comprehend in detail and demonstrate knowledge of diverse facts, principles, processes and	Able to plan and organise work, using various methods, technologies (including information and communication technologies), equipment, tools and materials for performing tasks. Able to find, assess and creatively use information for performing study or professional work tasks and problem solving. Able to communicate at least in two languages both in writing and orally in a known and unknown context. Able to work independently in the profession, to learn and to improve professional qualifications. Able to cooperate.	Is motivated for further career development, continuous education, lifelong learning in a knowledge-oriented democratic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society in Europe and in the world. Able to plan and perform study or work tasks in the profession individually, in a team or by managing the teamwork. Able to assume responsibility for the quality and quantity of the outcomes of study or professional activities.

¹⁹ These level descriptors were elaborated referring to the EQF lever descriptors; therefore, here eight levels are called "EQF levels" although these descriptors feature the LQF.

	<p>concepts in a specific field of studies or professional activities in standard and non-standard situations.</p> <p>Has good knowledge of technologies and methods for performing study or work tasks in the profession.</p>		
5	<p>Able to demonstrate comprehensive and specialised knowledge and understanding of facts, theories, causalities and technologies of the concrete professional field.</p>	<p>Able, on the basis of analytical approach, to perform practical tasks in the concrete profession, demonstrate skills, allowing to find creative solutions to professional problems, to discuss and provide arguments regarding practical issues and solutions in the concrete profession with colleagues, clients and management, able to, with an appropriate degree of independence, to engage in further learning, improving one's competences.</p> <p>Able to assess and improve one's own actions and those of other people, to work in co-operation with others, to plan and to organise work to perform concrete tasks in one's profession or to supervise such work activities, in which unpredictable changes are possible.</p>	<p>Able to define, describe and analyse practical problems in one's profession, select the necessary information and use it for solving clearly defined problems, to participate in the development of the concrete professional field, demonstrate understanding of the place of the concrete profession in a broader social context.</p>
6	<p>Able to demonstrate the basic and specialised knowledge typical of the concrete branch of science or profession and a critical understanding of this knowledge, moreover, a part of this knowledge complies with the highest level of achievement in this branch of science or profession. Able to demonstrate understanding of the most important concepts and causalities of the concrete branch of science or professional field.</p>	<p>Able, by using the mastered theoretical foundations and skills, perform professional, artistic, innovative or research activity, to define and describe analytically information, problems and solutions in one's own branch of science or profession, to explain them and to provide arguments when discussing these with both specialist and non-specialists. Is able to structure independently one's own learning, to guide one's own and subordinates' further learning and improvement of professional qualification, to demonstrate scientific approach to problem solving, to assume responsibility and take initiative when performing individual work, when working in a team or managing the work of other people, to take decisions and find creative solutions under changing or unclear conditions.</p>	<p>Able to obtain, select and analyse information independently and to use it, to take decisions and solve problems in the concrete branch of science or profession, demonstrate understanding of professional ethics, assess the impact of one's professional activities on environment and society and participate in the development of the concrete professional field.</p>
7	<p>Able to demonstrate advanced or extensive knowledge and understanding, a part of which conforms to the most recent findings in the</p>	<p>Able to use independently theory, methods and problem solving skills to perform research or artistic activities, or highly qualified professional functions. Able to provide arguments when explaining or discussing complex or systemic aspects of the concrete branch</p>	<p>Able to define independently and critically analyse complex scientific and professional problems, substantiate decisions and, if necessary, carry out additional analysis. Able to integrate knowledge of</p>

	concrete branch of science or professional field and which provide the basis for creative thinking or research, inter alia, working in the interface of various fields.	of science or professional field both to specialists and non-specialists. Able to guide independently the improvement of one's own competences and specialisation, to assume responsibility for the results of staff and group work and analyse them, to perform business activities, innovations in the concrete branch of science or profession, to perform work, research or further learning under complex or unpredictable conditions, if necessary, change them, using new approaches.	various fields, contribute to the creation of new knowledge, research or the development of new professional working methods, demonstrate understanding and ethical responsibility for the possible impact of the scientific results or professional activity on environment and society.
8	Able to demonstrate that has knowledge of and understands most topical scientific theories and insights, has mastered research methodology and contemporary research methods in the concrete branch of science or professional field and in the interface of various fields.	Able to assess and select independently appropriate methods for scientific research, has contributed to the expansion of the limits of knowledge or given new understanding of the existing knowledge and its use in practice, by carrying out an original research of major scope, part of which is on the level of internationally cited publications. Able to communicate both orally and in writing about one's own field of scientific activity (one's own branch) with wider research community and the general public. Able to improve one's scientific qualification independently, by implementing scientific projects, attaining achievements meeting the international criteria of the branch of science, to manage research or development tasks in companies, institutions and organisations, requiring extensive research knowledge and skills.	Able, by performing independent critical analysis, synthesis and assessment, to solve significant research or innovation tasks, to set independently research idea, to plan, structure and manage large-scale scientific projects, including projects in international context.

Note. The subsequent the EQF level includes the knowledge, skills and competence set for the previous the EQF level.”

Minister of Education and Science T.Koç

The sixth classification level in general education (special types of general; education programmes, the language of instruction and the form of obtaining education)

The sixth classification level					
5 th and 6 th No. of code	Special type of education programmes, the EQF level	7 th No. of code	language of instruction	8 th No. of code	form of obtaining education
18	pedagogical correction programmes	1	Latvian as the language of instruction	1	day
				2	night (shift)
19	social correction programmes	2	minority language as the language of instruction	3	extramural
51	special education programmes for visually impaired students – 3rd level				
52	special education programmes for students with hearing disabilities – 3rd level				
53	special education programmes for students with physical development disorders – 3rd level				
54	special education programmes for students with somatic diseases – 3rd level				
55	special education programmes for students with speech disorders – 3rd level				
56	special education programmes for students with learning disabilities (mixed development disorders – pre-school) – 3rd level				
57	special education programmes for students with mental health disorders – 3rd level				
58	special education programmes for students with mental development disorders – 2nd level				
59	special education programmes for students with severe mental development disorders or several severe development disorders – 1st				

Note. For pre-school and basic education programmes the 6th number is 1, for other programmes – 0."

Minister of Education and Science T.Kože

Appendix 6. Questionnaire for the study on the introduction of learning outcomes in Latvia (for the representatives of HEIs)

Learning outcomes are what a learner should know, be able to understand or what they should be able to do when completing studies.

Mark the chosen answer with “x”.

1. Information about the respondent

		10-18	19-25	26-35	36-55	56-75	75-
1.1.	Age						
		Female			Male		
1.2.	Gender						
		Academic personnel		General staff		Student	
1.3.	Position						
		Established by the state			Established by private persons		
1.4.	HEI						

2. Knowledge about learning outcomes

		Accessibility of information					
		Poor	Rather poor	Average	Rather good	Good	Hard to say
2.1.	Please assess and characterise the accessibility of information on learning outcomes						
2.1.1.	Comments						
		Internet	Publications	Seminars	Direct communication with the competent institution	From colleagues	Other
2.2.	Where do you find information on learning outcomes?						
		The level of knowledge among employees of education field in the state in general					
2.3.	What are the main obstacles in working with learning outcomes in Latvian higher education in general? (Please assess on the scale from 1 to 5, 1 denoting “is not an obstacle”, but 5 – “a significant obstacle”)						
		1	2	3	4	5	Hard to say
2.3.1.	Lack of knowledge about learning outcomes among the staff of HEIs						
2.3.2.	Lack of uniform understanding of learning outcomes on the level of the state						

2.3.3.	Lack of information on the national level						
2.3.4.	Unclear (fragmented) policy for the implementation of learning outcomes in the state						
2.3.5.	Lack of resources in order to deal with this issue on the national level						
2.3.6.	Faculty members' unwillingness to accept changes						
2.3.7.	Another important factor (comments):						

		Low	Rather low	Average	Rather high	High	Hard to say
2.4.	What is the general level of knowledge about learning outcomes in the state?						
Level of knowledge at your higher education institution							
		Low	Rather low	Average	Rather high	High	Hard to say
2.5.	What is your colleagues' level of knowledge about learning outcomes at your HEI?						

2.6. What are the main obstacles in working with learning outcomes at your HEI? (Please assess on the scale from 1 to 5, 1 denoting "is not an obstacle", but 5 – "a significant obstacle")		1	2	3	4	5	Hard to say
2.6.1.	Lack of knowledge about learning outcomes among the staff of the HEI						
2.6.2.	Lack of uniform understanding of learning outcomes among colleagues						
2.6.3.	Lack of information						
2.6.4.	Unclear (fragmented) policy for the implementation of learning outcomes at your HEI						
2.6.5.	Lack of resources at your HEI for dealing with this issue						
2.6.6.	Faculty members' unwillingness to accept changes						
2.6.7.	Another important factor (comment):						

3. The use of learning outcomes:

The use of learning outcomes in the system of education in general							
		No	Rather no	Average	Rather yes	Yes	Hard to say
3.1.	Is the elaboration of study programmes, which are based on clearly defined and valid learning outcomes, a common practice?						

3.2.	Do you know best practice examples from Latvia regarding elaboration of study programmes and directions, in the framework of which the study process and content is based on learning outcomes? Describe these examples:							
	The importance of learning outcomes according to fields in the state in general							
3.3.	What is the importance, to your mind, of the use of learning outcomes in the following fields in the state in general?	Little	Rather little	Average	Rather great	Great	Hard to say	
3.3.1.	Development of education content							
3.3.2.	Assessment of learners' achievements							
3.3.3.	Quality assessment process							
3.3.4.	Recognition of learning outcomes acquired in prior learning or experience							
	Use of learning outcomes in development and implementation of education content (in education institutions)							
		Little	Rather little	Average	Rather great	Great	Hard to say	
3.4.	To what extent elaboration of study programmes and study courses at your higher education institution is subject to learning outcomes and attaining them?							
3.5.	How important are the factors mentioned below in the elaboration of a new study course/ programme at your higher education institution? (Please assess on the scale of 1 to 5, in which 1 denotes "insignificant", but 5 – "significant")							
			1	2	3	4	5	Hard to say
3.5.1.	Experience of foreign higher education institutions							
3.5.2.	Experience of Latvian higher education institutions							
3.5.3.	Faculty members' experience							
3.5.4.	National qualifications framework							
3.5.5.	Learning outcomes							
3.5.6.	Occupational standards							
3.5.7.	Another important factor (comment):							
		No	Rather not	Average	Rather yes	Yes	Hard to say	
3.6.	Is the implementation of study programmes and study courses based on learning outcomes and oriented towards reaching them?							
3.6.1	Comment:							
		No	Rather no	Average	Rather yes	Yes	Hard to say	
3.7.	Are colleagues aligning the content of the study courses in the framework of a study programme?							
3.7.1.	Comment:							

		Incomplete	Rather incomplete	Average	Rather complete	Complete	Hard to say
3.8.	How complete are students' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes?						
3.8.1.	Comment:						
3.9.	Is it possible/ where is it possible to familiarise oneself with the learning outcomes for a study programme and its study courses implemented at your higher education institution? Comment:						
The use of learning outcomes in development of education content on the national level							
		Little	Rather little	Average	Rather large	Large	Hard to say
3.10	To what extent the absence of standard for academic education complicates defining of learning outcomes?						
3.10.1.	Comment:						
		Little	Rather little	Average	Rather large	Large	Hard to say
3.11.	To what extent the standard of occupations alleviates defining of learning outcomes?						
3.11.1.	Comment:						
The use of learning outcomes in the assessment of learners' achievements at the HEI							
		Little	Rather little	Average	Rather great	Great	Hard to say
3.12.	To what extent are the tests elaborated by the faculty members learning outcomes based?						
3.12.1.	Comment:						
		Little	Rather little	Average	Rather great	Great	Hard to say
3.13.	To what extent learners at your HEI understand the principles for elaborating tests?						
3.13.1.	Comment:						
Use of learning outcomes in the internal quality assessment/ improvement process at the HEI							
3.14.	How is reaching of the learning outcomes included in study courses controlled in the process of internal quality assessment and improvement at your higher education institution? Comment:						
		Insignificant	Rather insignificant	Average	Rather significant	Significant	Hard to say
3.15.	How important are learning outcomes in your institution for ensuring improvements in the study process?						

3.15.1. Comment:

	No	Rather no	Average	Rather yes	Yes	Hard to say
3.16. Is defining and reaching of learning outcomes a criterion in the process of evaluating and improving internal quality?						

3.16.1. Comment:

Use of learning outcomes in external quality assessment process

	Little	Rather little	Average	Rather great	Great	Hard to say
3.17. What is the importance of learning outcomes for the elaboration of the self-assessment report?						

3.17.1. Comment:

	Little	Rather little	Average	Rather great	Great	Hard to say
3.18. To what extent do the experts' commissions focus upon learning outcomes during accreditation visits?						

3.18.1. Comment:

	Are not	Rather are not	Average	Rather are	Are	Hard to say
3.19. To what extent are learning outcomes and their attainment discussed in expert reports?						

3.19.1. Comment:

	No	Rather no	Average	Rather yes	Yes	Hard to say
3.20. Should accreditation be to a large extent based upon the assessment of learning outcomes?						

3.20.1. Comment:

Use of learning outcomes in the recognition of prior learning

3.21. **Do you have experience and what kind of experience in recognition of prior learning?**
Comment:

4. Expectations regarding use of learning outcomes and obtaining of information

	No	Rather no	Average	Rather yes	Yes	Hard to say
4.1. Will the shift to learning outcomes support student-centred approach?						
4.2. Will the shift to learning outcomes facilitate the possibility to adjust education to individual needs (facilitating "interactive learning")?						

4.3.	Will the shift to learning outcomes promote better understanding of the meaning and importance of the respective study programme/study course among learners?						
4.4.	Will the shift to learning outcomes influence methods for assessment of learners' achievements?						
4.5.	Will the shift to learning outcomes facilitate more comparable assessments of learners' achievements?						
4.6.	Will the shift to learning outcomes reduce obstacles to lifelong learning?						
4.7.	Will the shift to learning outcomes facilitate dialogue between stakeholders from the sector of education and labour market?						
4.8.	Will the shift to learning outcomes facilitate recognition of prior learning?						
4.9.	Will the shift to learning outcomes improve the education institution's internal quality assessment?						
4.10.	Will the shift to learning outcomes improve the external quality assessment of the education institution?						

		Internet	Publications	Seminars	Directly communicating with the implementing institution	From colleagues	Others
4.11.	What would be the preferable way for obtaining information in learning outcomes?						