Social partnership in accrediting Lithuanian VET qualifications

Dr **Vidmantas Tūtlys**, PhD

Centre for Vocational Education and Training, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

Lina Kaminskienė

Head of International Relations Department, Deputy Director of Kaunas Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts. A doctoral student in Vytautas Magnus University

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SUMMARY

This article examines social partnership in accrediting qualifications in Lithuania. It defines the factors influencing social partnership and surveys future development perspectives, referring to the creation and implementation of the national qualifications system in Lithuania. Social partnership in qualifications accreditation is regarded as a complex phenomenon consisting of the normative level (laws and legal regulations) and the process level (experiences and the existing models of cooperation). The situation in Lithuania is compared with that of other countries looking to apply western European experience in developing a model of social partnership in vocational education and training.

Accreditation of qualifications today influences not only education but also human resources development. Economic and social development, as well as increasing competition in national and international labour markets, make accrediting qualifications of increasing interest across society. Challenges to vocational education and training require integrated solutions to complex problems. Lithuania is in transition to a new model of socioeconomic development. Accreditation of qualifications no longer concerns purely vocational education and training (further VET) but becomes of joint interest to social partnership and the responsibilities shared by VET institutions and employers' organisations.

This article examines the development of social partnership in accrediting vocational qualifications and analyses the prospects of this partnership in relation to developing the national qualifications system in Lithuania. The main objectives of this article are to:

(a) analyse the background to the development of social partnership in the Lithuanian VET;

(b) survey the main problems of social partnership in accrediting and recognising qualifications in Lithuania;

(c) analyse the experience of social partnership in the vocational education and training of western European countries looking for transferable experience;

(d) define the perspective model of social partnership for accrediting qualifications in Lithuania.

PART I.
Background to the development of social partnership in Lithuanian VET

Today's Lithuanian VET system is based on the five-level qualifications framework. Initial vocational qualification can be acquired at vocational, advanced VET schools, and colleges. To create the most favourable conditions to acquire a vocation, training programmes are offered at several levels within the system. Vocational schools have a four-stage tuition system:
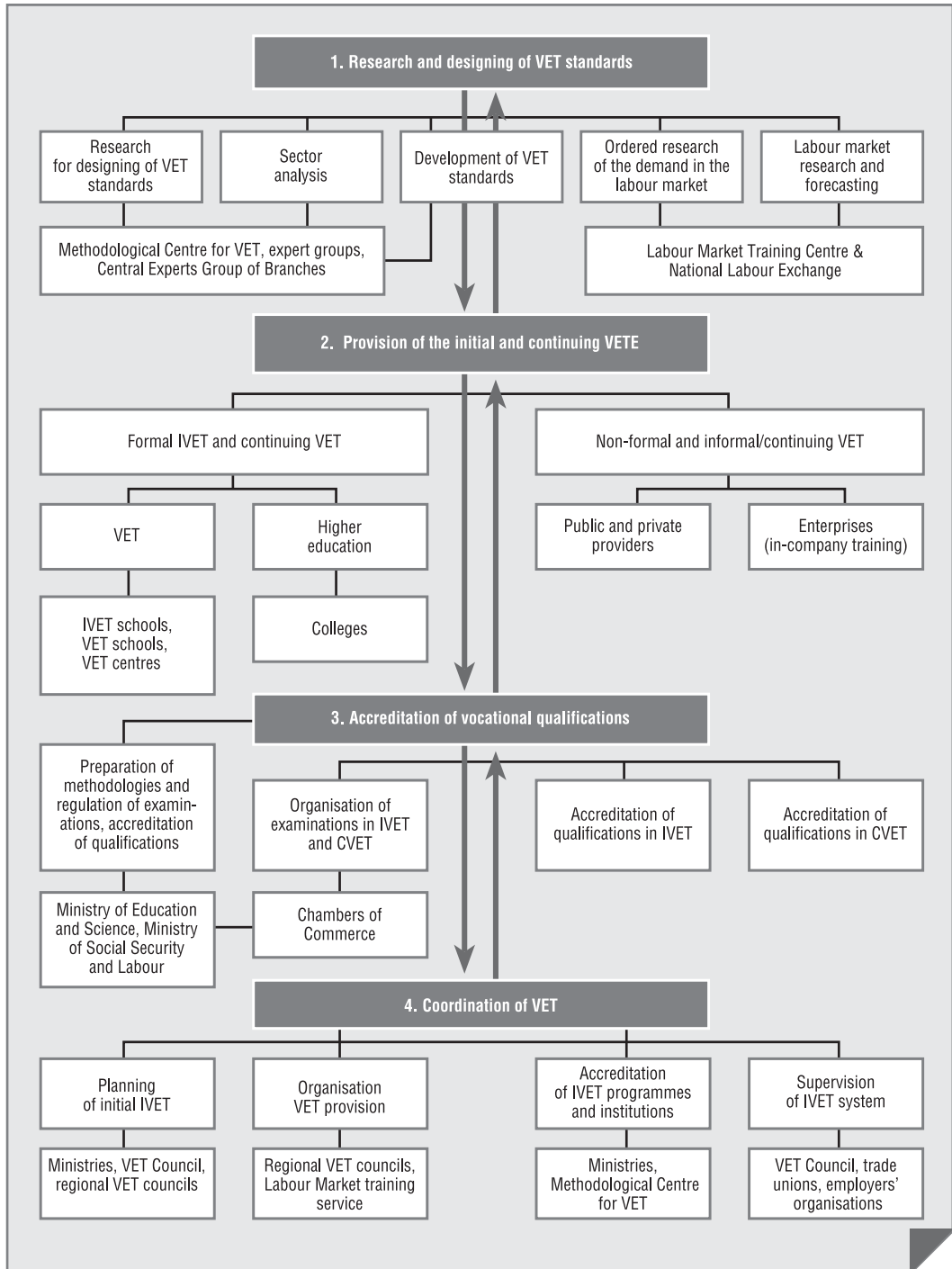
(a) Stage I vocational training programmes provide training to pupils aged at least 14 who have not finished basic general education and wish to acquire simple qualifications. Normally the training lasts two to three years, with the opportunity to acquire basic general education and receive an appropriate certificate. Successful completion of this option leads to acquisition of a qual-

ification corresponding to the second level of the currently designed national qualifications framework and to the same level of the European qualifications framework. At present, this qualification does not lead to certification but, with the introduction of the national qualifications framework, it will be recognised by special certification;

(b) Stage II vocational training programmes are aimed at pupils who have finished basic school (10 forms) and only wish to obtain a vocational qualification. The duration of studies is two years, leading to a qualification corresponding to the third level of the current national qualifications framework (diploma of a qualified worker) and to the same level of the European qualifications framework;

(c) Stage III vocational training programmes are aimed at pupils who have finished basic school and wish to acquire both a vocational qualification and a secondary school certificate. The study lasts three years and leads to a qualification corresponding to the fourth level of the current national qualifications framework and to the same level of the European qualifications framework. Successful completion leads to a diploma as a qualified worker and a secondary school-leaving (maturity) certificate. The latter provides an opportunity to continue education at an advanced school, college, or university;

(d) Stage IV vocational training programmes are aimed at pupils who have finished a secondary school or gymnasium (have obtained a maturity certificate) and wish to acquire a vocational qualification. Depending on the complexity of the chosen occupation, the studies last from one to two years and lead to a qualification corresponding to the fourth level of the current national qualifications framework and to the same level of the European qualifications framework.

Vocational education and training institutions, enterprises, and non-State advanced schools are allowed to deliver formal vocational training only after obtaining a licence issued by the Ministry of Education and Science. Non-State higher education establishments can operate subject to a licence from the government.

Continuing vocational training is provided at a variety of institutions, such as vocational and advanced vocational schools, higher education establishments, courses organised by enterprises and firms, private courses, etc. Part of this training is formally regulated. Institutions providing initial vocational education and training also use their training facilities and staff to provide continuing vocational training: 47 % of vocational schools, 37 % of advanced VET schools

Figure 1. **Processes and institutions of the VET system in Lithuania**

- **1. Research and designing of VET standards**
  - Research for designing of VET standards
  - Sector analysis
  - Development of VET standards
  - Ordered research of the demand in the labour market
  - Labour market research and forecasting
  - Methodological Centre for VET, expert groups, Central Experts Group of Branches
  - Labour Market Training Centre & National Labour Exchange

- **2. Provision of the initial and continuing VETE**
  - Formal IVET and continuing VET
    - VET
      - IVET schools, VET schools, VET centres
    - Higher education
      - Colleges
  - Non-formal and informal/continuing VET
    - Public and private providers
    - Enterprises (in-company training)

- **3. Accreditation of vocational qualifications**
  - Preparation of methodologies and regulation of examin-ations, accreditation of qualifications
    - Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Social Security and Labour
  - Organisation of examinations in IVET and CVET
    - Chambers of Commerce
  - Accreditation of qualifications in IVET
  - Accreditation of qualifications in CVET

- **4. Coordination of VET**
  - Planning of initial IVET
    - Ministries, VET Council, regional VET councils
  - Organisation VET provision
    - Regional VET councils, Labour Market training service
  - Accreditation of IVET programmes and institutions
    - Ministries, Methodological Centre for VET
  - Supervision of IVET system
    - VET Council, trade unions, employers' organisations

and 80 % of higher educational institutions offer adult learners upgraded qualifications or retraining courses.

The Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour are the main policy-makers, initiators and coordinators of Lithuanian VET. The Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training under the Ministry of Education and Science provides methodological assistance to all levels of VET. Based on Lithuanian law, mainly State or the State-funded institutions (the only exception is the involvement of Chambers of Commerce and of the Chamber of Agriculture), remain the main VET actors. All of these institutions have their VET roles and responsibilities (see Figure 1).

Social partnership is one of the most important processes providing the basis for the functioning and continuing development of the VET system. Laužackas (2005) distinguishes three levels of social partnership in Lithuanian VET:

(a) national policy level. At this level, social partnership is ensured through the activities of the Council of Vocational Education and Training, established on the basis of tripartite cooperation with the participation of government institutions, employers' organisations and trade unions. The Council cooperates with the Ministries of the Education and Science and Social Security and Labour in coordinating the VET activities (Figure 1). The main objective of the Council is to ensure coordination of all the main social partners' interests in the processes of the VET system. However, it should be noted that this institution plays an advisory role in decision-making processes;

(b) sector level. At this level, the main institutions ensuring social partnership are branch expert groups and the Central Experts Group of Branches. These expert groups are constituted on a tripartite basis with representatives of the branch employers, trade unions and VET institutions. Their main responsibility is designing initial VET standards with the supervision of the Methodological Centre for VET (public institution established by the Ministry of Education and Science) – see Figure 1;

(c) practical vocational level. At this level, different local working groups comprising VET school representatives and employers are the main actors. These groups develop vocational training standards within separate occupations and curricula for vocational schools. Social partnership can be organised in different forms. For example, organising practical training in companies illustrates a clear cooperation between VET schools and employers. However, this partnership is rather fragmentary and unsystematic (Laužackas, 2005).

The Lithuanian VET system is in a transitional period from the State-regulated (or supply model) to the market-regulated (demand) model. However, the State's dominant role in organising VET still prevails. This can be seen even in the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science to introduce measures strengthening social dialogue, though the experience of other countries shows that 'securing a regular and rich supply of high, transferable skills depends neither on the free market or State intervention but on corporative self government of social groups' (Streek, 1989; quoted in Trade Union Congress, 2005).

The participation of social partners in VET was first defined in a *White paper* (1998) and the Vocational Training Law of the Lithuanian Republic *(Lietuvos Respublikos profesinio mokymo įstatymas)* (1997). Social partners have been allocated concrete functions in VET to:

(a) supply proposals to the Lithuanian VET Council, while defining requirements for VET programmes (modules) and final qualification examinations;

(b) organise final qualification examinations;

(c) register practical training agreements/contracts between school, enterprises and a trainee;

(d) supervise practical training agreements and their implementation.

Taking into consideration that Lithuanian VET and general education have been traditionally school- (but not company-) oriented and centralised, this new law radically reformed VET.

The *White paper:VET* (1998) described social partnership as regular cooperation, negotiation and coordination of interests among governmental institutions (mainly, Ministries of Education and Science, Ministry of Social Security and Labour and VET schools), employees' representatives (trade unions) and employers' representatives (associated business structures). 'The involvement of social partners in the coordination of supply and demand of skills and qualifications is often manifested in neo-corporatism, which refers to tripartite bargaining of trade unions, employers' representatives and the State' (Trade Union Congress, 2005). Thus, the first practical steps, trying to coordinate educational and vocational activities, were implemented in 1998, when the State delegated several concrete functions in VET to social partners – Lithuanian Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Crafts – and, a few years later, to the Chamber of Agriculture. Unfortunately, trade unions were not encouraged to share VET responsibilities, mainly because of their weakness.

According to the Methodological Centre for VET (2005), the responsibilities for social partners in VET were distributed as follows.

Table 1. **The responsibilities of social partners in VET**

	Responsibilities of social partners	Level of responsibility
National level	Perform strategic and advisory functions in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour for VET questions	Advisory
	Organise and participate in final qualifications examinations, evaluate the acquired qualification	Decision-making
Regional level	Coordinated consultancy and expertise; initiate new training programmes, help to organise practical training for pupils; updating of practical training basis	Advisory
Sector level	Advisory function in developing VET programmes; approval of the developed VET standards	Advisory
Company level	Participate in managing training institutions, while defining qualifications needs; participate in developing relevant training programmes.	Advisory

Table 1 illustrates the present state of social partnership in Lithuanian VET. Organising accreditation and recognition of qualifications is the only area where social partners have decision-making power. Because of that, social partnership has not been effectively developed at all levels of the VET system.

PART II.
The main problems of social partnership in VET

Today, social partnership development issues in Lithuania are discussed from a bottom-up approach. It is of primary importance to identify the main barriers and problems which do not allow social partnership to develop successfully in vocational education and training.

First, employers are not satisfied with the skills and competences of VET school leavers. This was apparent in recent interviews with the industrial companies in the frame of the Leonardo da Vinci research project CVTS revisited. Employers claimed that the main problem lies in inappropriate vocational training curricula ('school leavers do not have the competences that we need') and in the low

quality of practical training ('school leavers do not have any practical experience'). The existence of such claims shows that participation by employers or their organisations in the accreditation of qualifications of VET school leavers is too formal and ineffective.

Representatives of VET institutions often express the opinion that the role of employers in vocational training and accreditation of qualifications is very fragmentary. In public debates on VET policies, there is a tendency to shift the responsibility for problems or shortages to other partners, criticising them for outdated curriculum and training methods (position of employers towards VET institutions) or for the passive attitude to the partnership in organising practical training and curriculum design (position of VET institutions towards employers).

A prerequisite for an effective social partnership in assessing qualifications is sharing of responsibilities and opportunities between VET institutions and employers in designing and providing qualifications. This can be assured only by the active partnership and cooperation of these stakeholders. When employers are active in creating and developing VET design and organisation of practical training, they will be sufficiently motivated and have sufficient theoretical and practical background for effective cooperation in the accreditation of qualifications. They understand that their involvement in curriculum design and in organising practical training becomes more and more important to preparing and developing new human resources and to ensuring the competitiveness of companies in the increasingly competitive human resources market. There is an increased interest among branch organisations in cooperating with VET institutions. However, strong competition for the skilled labour force, increasing the risk of poaching and emigration of the skilled workforce, discourages employers from more significant financial investment in vocational training projects (for example, establishment of practical training centres).

A second aspect is the comparatively slow establishment of the legal background regulating initial and continuing vocational education and training, provision, accreditation and recognition of vocational qualifications. In 2003, the *Guidelines of the national strategy of education of 2003-2012* (*Valstybinės švietimo strategijos 2003-2012 metų nuostatai*) were approved. These guidelines foresee transferring a large part of responsibility for the initial and continuing vocational training to regional governments. Other important changes foreseen include increasing the proportion of in-company practical training in VET programmes to at least half of all training time and development of the national qualifications system to facilitate coor-

dination of supply of qualifications with demands from the labour market.

Next is the slow and rather ineffective establishment and development of interest groups representing employers and employees. Trade unions in Lithuania represent only about 20-25 % of the employees (Krupavičius and Lukošaitis, 2004). This unpopularity has several contributing factors:

(a) the negative inheritance of the Soviet tradition of trade unions and lack of real leaders with new thinking and understanding of the changed role and objectives of unions. In the Soviet period, the *raison d'être* of trade unions was the ideological supervision of the working population, not the defence of their interests. Therefore, there were no conditions for developing leaders capable of gaining the confidence of members and organising activity oriented to the defence of interests of employees in industrial relations;

(b) because of the economic and social complexities of transition to the market economy and the growth of unemployment during the first decade of the independence, employers acquired more powers in negotiations with employees and used this power by pushing employees to accept their proposed conditions. This situation also discouraged employees from participation in unions. However, laws regulating labour relations opened opportunities for unilateral decisions by employers in recruitment, work conditions, training, career and wage setting (Dobryninas, 2000);

(c) the development of employers' organisations was also very slow and difficult. According to Krupavičius and Lukošaitis (2004), organisations representing the interests of business and employers were unstable and this prevented them from developing firm traditions of corporative representation of business interests;

(d) there are no incentives on the government side for employers' organisations to invest in human capital, though there is always a risk that State incentives may develop a VET system very much dependent on financial benefits to employers. Culpepper notes that the 'high-skill equilibrium is vulnerable to a change in the pattern of the incentives to invest in human capital' (quoted in Burgess and Symon, 2005). The Lithuanian situation shows the other extreme. Economic and social factors remain the main incentives for employers to invest in the development of employee skills.

PART III.
Social partnership in the western European countries – what experience can be transferred to Lithuania?

Social partnership in Lithuania, as in other post-Soviet countries, is a new phenomenon compared to such countries as Germany, the Netherlands or Austria, which have long traditions of social dialogue. Referring to the ideas of Finegold and Soskice (1988), one can discern the following factors for effective social partnership in VET.

First is provision of reliable information flows about the appropriate skills levels. This information can be ensured by special institutional instruments and mechanisms, such as national frameworks of qualifications. Countries with liberal market economies, which do not have an efficient industrial relations system playing a regulatory role in employment, labour market and human resources development, tend to compensate by establishing comprehensive and prescriptive frameworks of qualifications. However, if the information on appropriate skills levels and qualifications is too prescriptive, it cannot reflect changes in the labour market and in the world of work, especially in liberal market economies. The quality of available information on appropriate skills levels, labour market needs and the opportunities provided by VET institutions depend on the real intentions and interests of the social partners. For example, if the competition strategy of an enterprise is based on low labour costs, deskilling and work intensification policies (Warhurst et al., 2004), such an enterprise may be unaware of, or reluctant to provide, information about skill needs or to cooperate with VET institutions. The same is true for VET institutions. If vocational schools or higher education institutions depend only on the State and are too isolated from the real world, they usually lack experience of social partnership and are not interested in disseminating sufficient information about the training possibilities offered.

Smooth relations between initial and continuing vocational training also have an impact. Two main priorities can be discerned in initial and continuing vocational training in the human resources development strategies of the corporate actors.

A shortage of skilled workers that cannot be solved by enterprises alone leads to priority in hiring skilled employees and demand for qualifications provided by initial vocational training. Robert Boyer noticed that intensive technological and organisational changes in professional activities also incite companies to invest more in

recruiting new employees from VET school, college and university graduates rather than relying on continuing vocational training at the workplace (*Conseil d'analyse économique*, 2000). This is because hiring costs in such cases are lower than training costs and enterprises often lack the necessary expertise to provide the skills to respond to intensive technological and organisational change. In this situation, enterprises are more interested in cooperating with VET institutions to design, provide and assess initial vocational training.

Priority for continuing vocational training is given when the qualifications of human resources provided by initial vocational training cannot satisfy the needs of the enterprises.

Individuals in the labour market have similar strategies and priorities. When there is a sufficient supply of skills in the labour market and intensive competition for high quality jobs, individuals prefer to get the highest possible qualification in initial vocational training and higher education. However, a shortage of skills and improving employment perspectives in the labour market stimulate them to give priority to earlier employment and the development of skills through continuing vocational training. In this situation, enterprises are more interested in cooperating with providers of continuing vocational training services.

It is possible to see the influence of both factors in Lithuania. Enterprises traditionally refer to initial vocational training and higher education institutions, requiring them to provide skilled human resources. However, cooperation between enterprises and initial vocational training institutions has only recently started to improve with increased emigration among skilled workers and consequent difficulties finding skilled employees in the labour market. Because of this, enterprises are also developing their cooperation with providers of continuing vocational training.

In western European countries, independent interest groups strongly influence cooperation between different industrial relations stakeholders in the supply, evaluation and recognition of qualifications. Sometimes governments consider national economic and social needs and make suggestions on policies of initial and continuing vocational education and training. The interest groups actively discuss these government initiatives and, after negotiations, they very often become common initiatives. Some researchers (Aguilera and Jackson, 2003) point out that the German model is an interesting case, where 'firms participate in occupational training to create publicly certified skills that are portable across firms'. Given the problems of the social partnership in Lithuania, the German model is hardly transferable. Another interesting model of social partnership in VET

can be observed in the Netherlands, with its inclusive participation by all social partners in decision-making, a bottom-up approach to social partnership, and reference to sectoral qualifications structures. The 'polder model' of social partnership helped to establish a constructive and compromise-based negotiations mechanism between employers, trade unions and the State. All political and social stakeholders were involved in formulating and implementing the new law on adult and vocational education (WEB) in 1996. This law fore-

Table 2. **Transferable elements of the Dutch social partnership model to the VET system of Lithuania**

Weaknesses of the social partners' involvement in the Lithuanian VET system	Potentially transferable elements of the experience of the Dutch model of social partnership	How the application of the experience of the Dutch model of social partnership could address the weaknesses of social partnership in the Lithuanian VET system
Distrust and dissatisfaction of employers with the VET system; lack of involvement and motivation to cooperate with VET institutions in the processes of the qualifications system: designing, provision and accreditation of qualifications.	Inclusiveness of all social partners in the decision making process in VET. Bottom-up approach of social partnership and reference to the qualifications structures of branches.	Stakeholder participation in the design of qualifications, provision of training and the accreditation of acquired competences and qualifications should be expanded. Creation of the national system of qualifications provides such possibility. In addition, the inclusion of all stakeholders is one of the most important preconditions for successful implementation of the national qualifications system.
Lack of experience of the social partnership in VET among the interest groups and corporate institutions representing the interests of employers and employees.	Experience of the partnership between the unions, employers' organisations and VET institutions at local level. (Partnership between the ROCs, local employers and unions in the design of curriculum, practical training provision and accreditation of qualifications).	To create the experience of VET social partnership through the development of local VET partnership projects, involving local employers, unions and VET institutions in the regions.
Lack of a strategic approach to development of human resources from all stakeholders: employers' organisations, unions, VET institutions and State. Lack of understanding of the role of social partnership in the development of VET and human resources can also be noted.	The Dutch social partnership model demonstrates that social partnership on the national level, based on VET legislation would not be effective without active cooperation of social partners at sectoral and regional levels.	Finding a compromise between the prescriptive approach in designing qualification structures and setting examination guidelines and the need to consider the changing models of professional activity to increasing flexibility, continuing acquisition and recognition of new skills and competences.

sees sharing of responsibilities among social partners in VET at regional level. It established the regional vocational training centres (ROCs) on the basis of the 'mergers of the former sectoral vocational schools, the adult education centres and the apprenticeship support structure' (Cedefop, Nieuwenhuis and Shapiro, 2004).

According to Cedefop, Nieuwenhuis and Shapiro (2004), the Dutch social partnership model established by the law on VET in 1996 is mainly based on the assumptions of the industrial VET system. Employers are able to formulate their qualification needs in the sectoral qualifications structures and employees are well organised in the networks and trade unions which protect the permanence of their employment status and ensure social welfare. The new paradigm of the knowledge-based economy requires different approaches to social partnership, based not merely on the prescription of training needs by employers and the execution of these prescriptions by VET institutions but on 'the flexibility and expertise of colleges to organise flexible pathways towards competence in close cooperation with the local companies'.

What are the positive aspects of the Dutch model and how can they be applied in Lithuania? This question can be answered by analysing how the potentially transferable elements of the experience of Dutch model could address the main weaknesses of the social partners' involvement in VET in Lithuania (see Table 2).

PART IV.
Accreditation and recognition of qualifications in Lithuania and its development perspectives

Previously, vocational schools themselves conducted assessments according to general regulations set by the Ministry of Education and Science. This system made it difficult to ensure the comparability of qualifications awarded. To ensure a more consistent approach, the Ministry of Education and Science decided to involve the employers' organisations and set up a process of reform in 1998. The modified examination system was implemented throughout the country in 2003.

A decree from the Ministry of Education and Science regulates the organisation of the final examinations for VET students: it stipulates the responsibilities of Chambers of Commerce in the process. The Chambers have the role of monitoring the preparatory phase of final qualifications examinations by involving specialists from enterprises to review vocational programmes, and to develop ques-
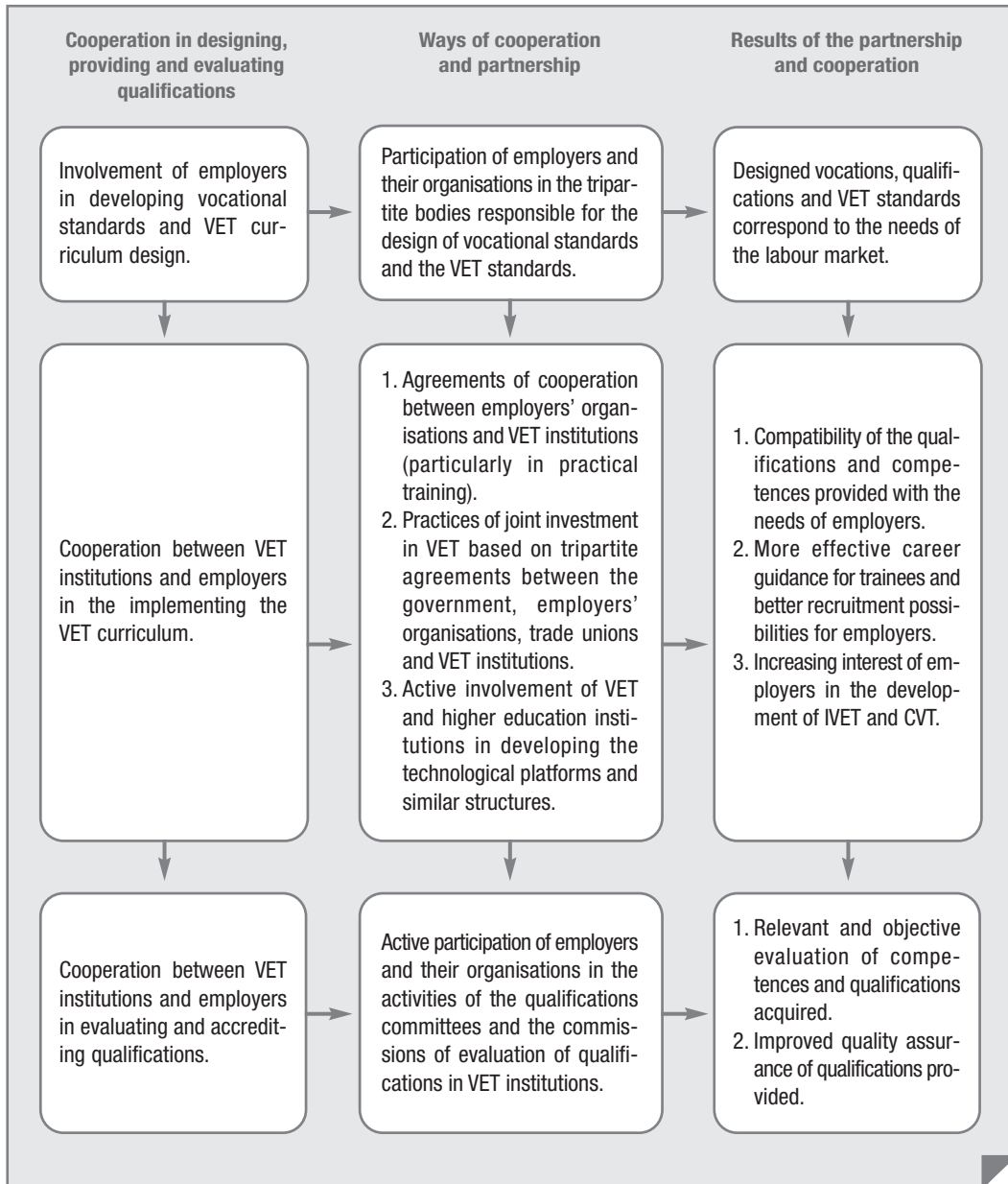
tions and tasks for a theory exam in cooperation with vocational schools. In addition, Chambers of Commerce are responsible for supervising practical training in companies to ensure that VET students gain the necessary practical skills and knowledge.

The development of social partnership in accrediting and recognising qualifications is closely related to the establishment and implementation of the national qualifications system in Lithuania. Accreditation and recognition of qualifications comprise a major subsystem of the national qualifications system. This subsystem is related to the other subsystems: designing of qualifications and acquisition of qualifications. A systematic approach to accreditation and recognition presumes that the quality and effectiveness of the process depends not only on its internal factors but also on the factors of the other subsystems. Therefore the quality and effectiveness of the social partnership in accreditation and recognition depends to a large extent on the cooperation of the social partners in design and provision of qualifications.

Two levels of its development of social partnership can be distinguished in the accreditation and recognition of qualifications: the normative level and the process level.

(a) the normative level is related to establishing the legal basis, rules, norms, regulations and the institutional infrastructure of this partnership. The national qualifications system will create a comprehensive institutional and legal framework to assist the development of social partnership in this respect. The concept of the national qualifications system foresees that VET institutions shall be responsible for organising the internal accreditation of qualifications. The qualifications committee prepares the accreditation methodology and coordinates the process across the country. This committee also empowers VET schools or other organisations to organise internal accreditation and approves the results. The qualifications committee is established on a collegial basis and comprises employers' representatives and experts from VET institutions. Analysing this institutional infrastructure, one can note intentions to combine social partnership based on the initiatives of the stakeholders and interest groups with an attempt to establish the centralised control and supervision of the accreditation and recognition of qualifications. Regarding developing the legal basis of the accreditation and recognition of qualifications, the main challenge is the adoption of the new laws and legal regulations to the existing situation of the partnership in this field. The legal basis should leave enough space for initiatives and negotiations between employers and VET institutions.

Figure 2. **Process of social partnership in the development of VET**

Cooperation in designing, providing and evaluating qualifications	Ways of cooperation and partnership	Results of the partnership and cooperation
Involvement of employers in developing vocational standards and VET curriculum design.	Participation of employers and their organisations in the tripartite bodies responsible for the design of vocational standards and the VET standards.	Designed vocations, qualifications and VET standards correspond to the needs of the labour market.
Cooperation between VET institutions and employers in the implementing the VET curriculum.	1. Agreements of cooperation between employers' organisations and VET institutions (particularly in practical training). 2. Practices of joint investment in VET based on tripartite agreements between the government, employers' organisations, trade unions and VET institutions. 3. Active involvement of VET and higher education institutions in developing the technological platforms and similar structures.	1. Compatibility of the qualifications and competences provided with the needs of employers. 2. More effective career guidance for trainees and better recruitment possibilities for employers. 3. Increasing interest of employers in the development of IVET and CVT.
Cooperation between VET institutions and employers in evaluating and accrediting qualifications.	Active participation of employers and their organisations in the activities of the qualifications committees and the commissions of evaluation of qualifications in VET institutions.	1. Relevant and objective evaluation of competences and qualifications acquired. 2. Improved quality assurance of qualifications provided.

(b) the *process level* of social partnership. The development of social partnership and cooperation between employers, unions, VET institutions, government and other partners in the field of accreditation of qualifications depends on the existing experi-

ence and networks of cooperation. The setting of the advanced legal basis with the comprehensive rules and proceedings cannot compensate the lack of the experience of cooperation or to change the existing models of the institutional behaviour. The process of social partnership creates new experiences opening possibilities for the improvement and development of accreditation and recognition of qualifications. An example of model of a social partnership process is given below:

Conclusions

1. The development of social partnership in accrediting and recognising qualifications in Lithuania was influenced by the institutional and socioeconomic factors of the development of a reestablished State and post-Soviet society: lack of interest and initiatives of participation from employers and their organisations, reform of the VET system, creation and development of new institutions. Because of the absence of activeness and initiatives from social partners, government institutions have to play a more important role in proposing different initiatives in the field of accreditation and recognition of qualifications. In most cases, social partners only play an advisory role.

2. The analysis of the existing experiences of social partnership in the accreditation of qualifications suggests that the effectiveness of social partnership can be achieved through the relevant legal basis and the active involvement of stakeholders on a voluntary basis. Social partnership can be strengthened by implementation of important national projects like national qualifications frameworks.

3. Social partnership cannot be effectively implemented in the accreditation and recognition of qualifications if it is underdeveloped in the designing and provision of qualifications. Today there can be noticed separate attempts to involve the social partners in the measures of accreditation and recognition of qualifications. However, these attempts lack a systematic approach. In this regard, the development and implementation of the national qualifications system in Lithuania presents a unique opportunity to strengthen social partnership in the whole process consisting of design, provision, recognition and accreditation of qualifications.

4. The normative and process level of the development of social partnership in the accreditation and recognition of qualifications can be distinguished. Setting the legal basis and institutional infra-

structure is very important for the development of the social partnership. However, the model of the social partnership is shaped by the experiences and approaches of the stakeholders and cannot be changed in a short time.

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