Recognition of Prior Learning as a Tool for Enhancing Inclusion

The Austrian Example

Kick-off conference of the Erasmus+ project SIDERAL
Zadar, 2nd July 2019, Barbara Birke
Starting point

- At European level
  - several driving forces behind the recognition and crediting of competences towards degree and certificate programmes: Bologna Process (higher education), the Strategy for Lifelong Learning (LLL), the Copenhagen Process (vocational training), Lisbon Strategy (education sector), Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning...

- At national level
  - 2011: Austrian Lifelong Learning Strategy “LLL:2020”: ‘...acquired skills and competences, regardless of where they were acquired, be recognised and certified, thus placing non-formal and informal education processes on an equal level with formal education processes.’
  - 2017: National strategy on the social dimension of higher education. Refers to LLL:2020 strategy
Formal, non-formal & informal learning

- **formal learning**: takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education; Learning is controlled, restricted by a curriculum.

- **non-formal learning**: takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time); some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); eg in-company training, structured online learning, and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members.

- **informal learning**: resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; eg project management skills, ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country.
Reality check (1)

- 2011: Austrian Lifelong Learning Strategy “LLL:2020”: ‘...acquired skills and competences, regardless of where they were acquired, be recognised and certified, thus placing non-formal and informal education processes on an equal level with formal education processes.’

- 2019: Current Austrian legal provisions
  - **No** RPL of non-formal and informal learning at universities (except for postgraduate programmes)
  - RPL at Universities of Applied Sciences / Fachhochschulen (since 1994)
    - Upon admission to UAS with subject-relevant professional qualification
    - RPL of credits at UAS -> experience from the job has to be considered
Reality check & experience

- RPL at Universities for Applied Sciences / Fachhochschulen
  - Upon admission to UAS with subject-relevant professional qualification
- RPL of credits at UAS -> experience from the job has to be considered
  - No data available
  - Little experience with recognition procedures, little trust in the quality of competences acquired 'elsewhere'
  - Lack of transparent and quality assured procedures
  - ......

Information and promotion are required!
Promoting RPL – non-formal & informal competences

- 2 initiatives funded by Ministry -> promotion & support instead of legal prescriptions
- Co-ordinated by AQ Austria
- Carried out together with 11 HEI
  - all HE-sectors are represented
  - reality check, internal view
  - identification with recommendations/project outcomes
  - participation voluntary, no costs/fees

- Outcomes/benefits
  - Recommendations for RPL procedures
  - Individual support from experts for implementing procedures ’at home’
  - Increasing awareness
Basic recommendations for recognition & crediting procedures

- Integration into the higher education institution's strategy
- Developing suitable quality-assured procedures
- Curricula have to be competence based
- Ensuring transparency
  - Developing regulations and providing information
  - Defining the responsibilities
  - Defining and meeting criteria
  - Quality assurance of decisions
  - Ensuring documentation and monitoring
  - Transferring information to consultants
  - Providing applicants and students with information
Recommendations for implementation process

- Peer learning and networks
  - National network with HEIs and stakeholders
  - International experts with experience in RPL
- Clear legal provisions
  - RPL mandatory?
  - RPL permitted?
  - Legal provisions fit for RPL?
  - -> HEIs should have a strategy in place
  - Defining the role of external QA
- Guidelines mutually agreed
- Information, promotion, support from Ministry
Current status/outlook

- Increasing awareness mainly as a result of counselling processes at HEI
  - visiting 11 HEIs with external experts (Germany, Finland)
  - Workshops for exchange of experiences
  - Presentations, dissemination, partnerships, national working groups….

- Changes in the law
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