

OVERALL NATIONAL COMMENTARY AUSTRIA

This overall national commentary outlines the national and institutional state of play concerning the implementation of the LLL Charter.

Andrea Waxenegger, University of Graz, Austria

Lifelong learning policy in Austria

Under the leadership of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture and the Ministry of Science and Research, a Lifelong Learning strategy for Austria is currently being developed. Learning (lifelong and lifewide) at all ages is included. Presently the strategy is undergoing a process of realisation and consolidation. The strategy includes formal and informal learning for all ages. The basic targets of the Austrian LLL strategy are:

- the setting-up of a framework which would make it possible for all those interested in learning, regardless of their age and their previous schooling, to continue their education, to acquire the qualifications they need and to add to those they have;
- to create incentives and to cultivate an economic and social climate in which Lifelong Learning is seen as a valuable pursuit and is also attractive to those individuals who are not well qualified and/or who are generally not interested in (formal) learning;
- to improve the system of granting credit for learning, so that knowledge, skills and competences that have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning can be recognised officially as qualifications, thus permitting the orientation of learning processes to the outcomes.

The five strategic guidelines of the Austrian LLL Strategy are: 1.) Lifelong Learning for all stages of life, 2.) Focus on the learner, 3.) Lifelong Guidance, 4.) Acquiring competences through Lifelong Learning and 5.) Promoting participation in Lifelong Learning. An expert group has analysed the consultation process concerning the five strategic guidelines of the Austrian LLL Strategy and translated them in 12 lines of action for better realisation. An inter-ministerial working group (Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture; Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research; Austrian Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth; Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection) will develop a mission, goals, actions and indicators for each line of action. Line of action "Number 11", for example, declares the importance of enhancing the quality of life through learning in later life, especially for socially disadvantaged seniors. Main topics are: quality development and assurance as well as professionalisation of staff working in the field of Learning in Later Life; regional balance/infrastructure; diversity; promotion of the use of IT; facilitated access. The work process on the 12 lines of action is ongoing. The proposals are discussed with experts and all stakeholders. The results and the strategy shall be concluded by the government at the end of 2010.

University Continuing Education and University Lifelong Learning in Austria

In Austria, there is a clear legislative distinction between "regular" degree programmes (Bachelor, Master programmes, and PhD studies) and university continuing education (ULLL). Both strands have their own institutional regulations based on the Universities Act 2002. UCE in Austria covers a wide range of activities opening up learning opportunities at university level through open lectures, workshops, seminars, summer schools, courses, degree courses and other programmes. The majority of programmes have a clear vocational purpose and are credited (ECTS); some lead to an international Master's degree. Non-

P8- UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ (AT)

credited activities are open to the general public regardless of age. To some extent, professional UCE programmes are open to professionals lacking the formal requirements for university entry. In general, UCE in Austria has to be self-financed and/or externally sponsored. Some activities such as open public lectures or Universities of the Third Age etc. are financed by the universities themselves (including participants' fees) and by public funds/sponsoring.

National state of play concerning the implementation of the LLL Charter

As previously mentioned, the development of a National Strategy for Lifelong Learning was concluded in the Government development plan 2008-2013; this Strategy will be completed by the end of 2010 and ULLL will be part of it. As a framework for discussion, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research formed a Lifelong Learning Advisory Board in 2008 for the HE sector. The Ministry of Science and Research and the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance have also set up a project (financed by the Ministry) to develop quality assurance mechanisms for UCE in the HE sector (results to be expected in spring 2012). An Act on Quality Assurance in HE is currently being prepared to be concluded in 2011. Since the implementation of the Universities Act 2002, Austrian Universities are autonomous and the most important instrument for the relationship between the state and the universities are the so-called "performance agreements" which are negotiated for a period of 3 years. The Ministry of Science and Research as well as the universities are familiar with the Charter – at least those working in UCE. The Ministry used the Charter in negotiations for the current performance agreement contracts with the universities (2010-2012): the universities had to declare how they were implementing the Charter and what they were planning according to their current strategy and development plan. They were also asked to develop or revise (as needed) their strategy for ULLL. They were asked to report regularly on their progress. Indicators for the implementation of ULLL will be developed by the Ministry for the performance agreement period 2013-2015.

All Austrian universities are in one way or another engaged in University Continuing Education, but since they are autonomous institutions it is up to them to develop a strategy, an adequate infrastructure and attractive provision for the target groups they want to serve. Cooperative projects in UCE are frequent and sustainable. Provision is not only developed for university graduates/professionals but also for a wider public. Services such as RPL are, if they exist at all in universities, offered in UCE; services such as career guidance, counselling and coaching are available for different target groups. Forums and associations such as the "Universities Austria" (the Rectors' Conference) and AUCEN (Austrian University Continuing Education and Staff Development Network) are important platforms for strategy development, peer-to-peer consultation and professionalisation. In January 2009, Universities Austria published "Grundsätze und Empfehlungen zum Weiterbildungsangebot an Universitäten" [Guidelines and Recommendations for University Continuing Education]. This document includes a definition of UCE, a list of the types of UCE and a statement defining the minimum quality standards.

To develop "University Continuing Education" into a real "University Lifelong Learning system" is still a perspective to be developed: the strands which are now strictly separated need to be looked at as "one system of learning opportunities", especially for those who are in employment and want to engage in university studies part-time. In 2013 elections will take place at national level and subsequently a new government development plan 2013-2018 will be presented. A big question mark is the budgetary restrictions already announced for 2013 onwards. The really big problems of our HE system, incl. lack of financing, open access to university studies, will perhaps function as a driving force for the process of making ULLL (not just "UCE") a reality at Austrian universities.