

Recognition of APL/APEL in Finland

Riitta Pyykkö
University of Turku

LLL and accreditation of prior learning
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National background

- Lisbon Recognition Convention into force in Finland on March 1st 2004
- A new Universities' Act and a Government Decree on University degrees in 2004 > recognition of prior informal/nonformal learning became possible in university degrees
- Implementation of ECTS 100%
- HEIs build their QA systems, audits began in 2005
- Demography, globalisation > LLL a key question in education policy > recognition important from the point of view of 1) individuals, 2) HEIs, 3) the whole society
- A national working group on recognition of prior learning in higher education in 2006

Tasks of the working group

- chart the practices that HEIs apply in the recognition of prior studies and prior learning
- evaluate the functionality of the current procedures and their alignment with European policy and best practices
- identify and promote national and international best practices
- present recommendations for common principles and processes of recognition

Situation in HEIs I

- Recognition of studies in an other university in Finland or abroad functions quite well; in principle all credits from an other accredited HEI can be taken into account
- Planning process connected with the Bologna process gave tools for recognition (core content analyse, move towards a competence based approach, emphasis on learning outcomes more than courses/hours/work load)
- Personal study plans for every new student
- Students informed about recognition in study guides, at introductory courses etc.
- The system based on the student's right to apply for the recognition

Situation in HEIs II

- Decision making at different departments is not equal
- Even recognition of prior studies doesn't work well at polytechnics
- Recognition of prior learning abroad easier than recognition of prior learning in Finland (polytechnics > universities; universities > polytechnics)
- Accreditation of non- and informal learning still new, except a small amount of credits for work-based learning (e.g. 10 ECST) at almost every department; quite stable system in teacher training; language skills demonstrations < informal learning was not allowed to be taken into account before the 2004 Decree

Recommendations of the national working group

- for a recognition system
- for the common principles of the recognition system
- for the good practices in HEIs
- to the Ministry of Education on promoting the RPL at HEIs
- special emphasis on recognition and validation of prior informal and non-formal learning

Recommendations for a recognition system

- Each HEI devises a consistent, reliable and transparent system
- The system is applied to education leading to a higher education degree (also recognition of competence acquired abroad and other types of education provided by HEIs)
- Prior learning is assessed at two stages: when assessing an applicant's eligibility for HE and when assessing the prior learning of a student admitted
- The skills needs of working life and adequate quality assurance important; the quality of the degree is the responsibility of the HEI

Recommendations for the common principles (examples)

- System based on the student's right to apply for recommendation; the process is initiated by an individual student
- Decisions based on expertise and reliable documentation
- The system and criteria are based on a competence-based approach (QF prepared)
- Students are treated in a consistent, equal and predictable manner
- The HEI should determine the proportion of degree studies that must be completed at the degree-awarding institution

Recommendations for HEIs (examples) I

- HEIs draw up clear descriptions; they are incorporated into the institutional QA system
- The descriptions should include at least the following details:
 - where to apply
 - documents relevant to application
 - the time required for processing an application
 - documentation of decisions
 - how to enter credits into the HEIs electronic database
 - how to indicate them on the degree certificate

Recommendations for HEIs (examples) II

- Description of the system easily accessible to students, academic staff and stakeholders
- HEIs draw up plans for providing counseling and guidance
- HEIs introduce and develop methods for students to prove their competence; methods and practices will be specified and further developed in field-specific cooperation
- HEIs evaluate the effectiveness of the recognition

Recommendations to the Ministry of Education

- The Ministry supports activities aiming to develop methods to identify and recognise prior learning; the outcomes should be applicable at national level
- The Ministry appoints joint working groups of universities and polytechnics in order to prepare and implement field-specific policies
- Recognition of prior learning at HEIs is included as part of their steering by targets and results

The main challenge now

The academic staff