

Presentation of background document on APEL 10.00-10.30

Why is the recognition of prior experiential learning important and what are the national and institutional implications of this for lifelong learning?

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Official Bologna process seminar

**NEW CHALLENGES IN
RECOGNITION**

Recognition of prior learning and
recognition of European degrees outside

Riga, Latvia, January 25-26, 2007

Why is the recognition of prior experiential learning important and what are the national and institutional implications of this for lifelong learning?

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1. Introduction - the recognition of prior learning

- **Focus of paper is:**
 - APEL in the context of lifelong learning and current developments
 - Identify APEL advantages, problems + techniques
 - Explore APEL implications for states + institutions
- **Much APL/APEL good practice and experience exists**
- France, Denmark, Ireland, UK, Netherlands, etc.
- **The challenge is to implement existing recognition tools not to create more**
- **The construction of the EHEA creates immense opportunities for countries/institutions but they have to exploit these!**
- **The Bologna educational revolution amounts to the more than the sum of its parts:**

The wider Euro... or reform of
higher education... - a brief review
of the new eme... onal educational
architecture

**Competitiveness,
Knowledge economy,
growth + employment,
Commission
communication
on modernising
higher education.
EIT proposals**

EU LISBON STRATEGY



**Professional
Recognition
(regulated and
non-regulated)**

**PROFES
SIONAL RECOGNITION**

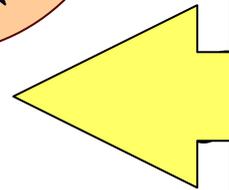
**VET + ECVET
Lifelong learning
EQF and
level descriptors+
Common principles
for validation of
non/informal learning**



**Convention +
Diploma
Supplement
(EUROPASS) +
ENIC-NARICS**

**LISBON
RECOGNITION
TOOLS**

**EHEA (cycle descriptors)
Qualifications frameworks
Quality Assurance
Mobility & Recognition tools
Learning Outcome (Tuning)
Credits
Qualifications**



2. Definitions, boundaries and scope

Formal learning:

Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification.

Informal learning:

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

Non formal learning:

Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It normally does not lead to certification.

- The preoccupation with lifelong learning naturally highlights the need to evaluate learning wherever it has taken place.
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- Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) refers to the recognition of certificated learning (learning formally assessed by another body) for the purposes of access (credit entry) to a programme, or exemption (credit exemption) from part of a programme of study within the national and/or international context.
 - The Accreditation* of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) refers to the process whereby the individual's competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities) gained in non-formal (work-based) and informal (life experience) learning environments are accredited (assessed and recognised). APEL involves the comparison of the outcomes of the previous 'experiential' learning against the requirements of existing qualifications for the purposes of credit access and credit exemption.

* NB. terminological problems

3. National and international applications of APEL

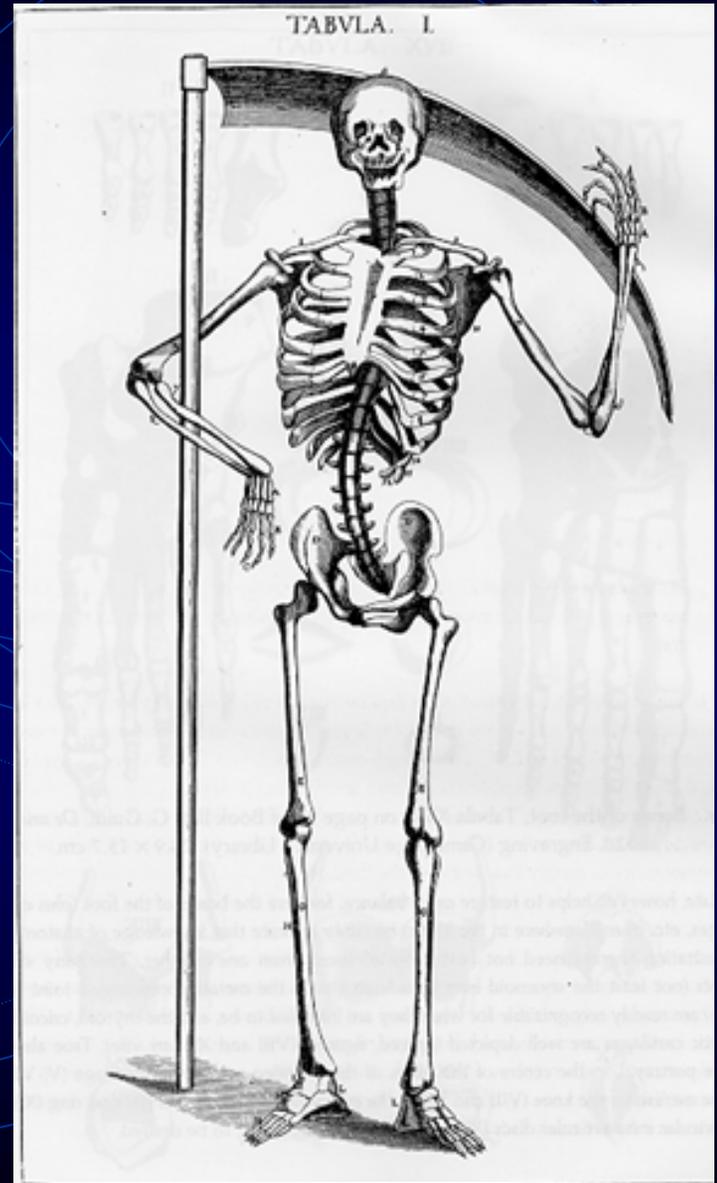
- The application of APEL is likely to become a more prominent element in the EHEA.**
- Progress to date in using APEL is localised and often ineffectual (Trends IV noted this).**
- The development of systems to record lifelong learning encourages APEL approaches.**
- APEL is important for CPD, work-related programmes, refugees, part-time students, etc.**

4. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA), lifelong learning and APEL

- Bologna reforms have achieved little in terms of lifelong learning – yet the reforms facilitate APEL + more accurate recognition decisions**
- The relationships between traditional higher education institutions, non-traditional providers (in-house company universities, etc.) and business and industry are being re-examined.**
- Lifelong learning encompasses all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills/competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and professional reasons. It thus encompasses the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning...**

LIFELONG LEARNING: Lifelong learning is defined by the European Commission as 'all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective'

**Pre-school to post-retirement,
everything between...**



5. The European Commission's European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning and APEL

- The Lisbon Strategy 2000+**
- The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)**
- Consultation on ECVET 2007**
- New EC Lifelong Learning (€7,000 million!) Programme 2007-2013**

6. APEL: benefits, applications, approaches and implications

Benefits of APEL

It represents a process by which people of all ages and backgrounds can receive formal recognition for the skills and knowledge they already possess. This can help citizens in number of ways.

- Mature students and socially excluded minority groups returning to education who lack the formal qualifications required for entry to a course of study;
- Students of all ages who wish to study overseas, and whose domestic qualifications are not automatically accepted for entry to the overseas course of study;
- Past students who have previous educational qualifications but now seek to add to those qualifications in order to broaden their expertise or change careers. APEL can be used to avoid repeating specific modules/units;
- Students who wish to return to courses of study that have been interrupted by work or family commitments. APEL can provide evidence that learning in the intervening period has occurred;
- Anyone seeking professional qualifications who needs to provide evidence that specific training and practical work experience has taken place. APEL provides the framework for collecting and presenting this sort of evidence;
- Students on full or part-time courses who wish to gain recognition for informal learning that has taken place through work or leisure-related activities.

Other dimensions:

- **APEL and Work Based Learning (WBL):**
 - Focus on development of competences
 - Professional Doctorates
 - Experience-related approaches: internships, work placements
- **APEL tools, techniques and approaches:**
 - Examination/assignment
 - Portfolio
 - Project work
 - Personal development plan
 - Interview/Jury (see French approach)
- **APEL theoretical and pedagogical dimensions:**
 - Challenges distinctions between types of education
 - Constructivist attack on traditional 'formal learning'
 - Focus in learning contexts
- **APEL and Quality Assurance:**
 - APEL must be integrated into normal QA processes

7. Obstacles to the introduction of APEL and lifelong learning

- ❑ Potential problematic relationship between ECTS, ECVET and APEL
- ❑ A seamless pan-European credit-based framework for lifelong learning needs to emerge
- ❑ Disjunctions between the EQF and the overarching Bologna Framework (proliferation of rival frameworks = a recipe for confusion)
- ❑ Incomplete shift to learning outcomes
- ❑ Misunderstandings/prejudice about APEL
- ❑ Over-complicated, time-consuming APEL systems

8. Conclusions and challenges:

- The new 'Bologna' educational architecture is designed but not fully implemented
- The learner is being placed more centrally in new educational reforms
- Credit systems are developing rapidly and the ECTS needs to be 'modernised' and 'clarified' to take account of its accumulation function, the APEL dimension + lifelong learning
- The introduction of APEL systems opens up a number of exciting possibilities that help change the focus of universities and their relationship with employers, citizens, professional bodies and colleges + rethink the way qualifications are earned and recognised.

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- ❑ **APEL techniques have an, as yet unexploited, role to play in international credential evaluation, to aid the mobility and recognition of citizens.**
 - ❑ **Modern conceptions of lifelong learning centre on social inclusion, wider participation, employability and partnership with business and community organisations. Learning opportunities at work, both paid and unpaid, and through individual activities and interests must be recognised.**
 - ❑ **The landscape of European education is being transformed by the requirements for lifelong learning and the remaining barriers to change need to be addressed. The accreditation of learning and achievement is one of the central functions of any education system and European providers must acknowledge that in this century learning takes place in multiple contexts that require rigorous and effective assessment recognition processes.**

International challenges:

- 1. The Ministers at the Bologna meeting in London, May 2007 should reaffirm their commitment to lifelong learning and support effective ways to implement national lifelong learning strategies that promote the widespread use of APEL to increase the flexibility of their educational systems and minimise artificial barriers between academic and vocational education and training (VET).**
- 2. The Bologna Process countries and the European Commission should ensure that potential disjunctions between the '*Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*' and the '*European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)*' are not allowed to emerge. A fully integrated trans-national credit based framework for lifelong learning that aligns national systems is essential to ensure transparency, transferability and consistency between higher education and vocational education and training.**

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- 3. The European Association for Quality Assurance Higher Education (ENQA), in conjunction with other appropriate bodies, should explore the creation and implementation of good practice (models, procedures and guidelines) for APEL (consistent with their 'Standards and Guidelines') in the context of lifelong learning developments, with particular reference to higher education.**

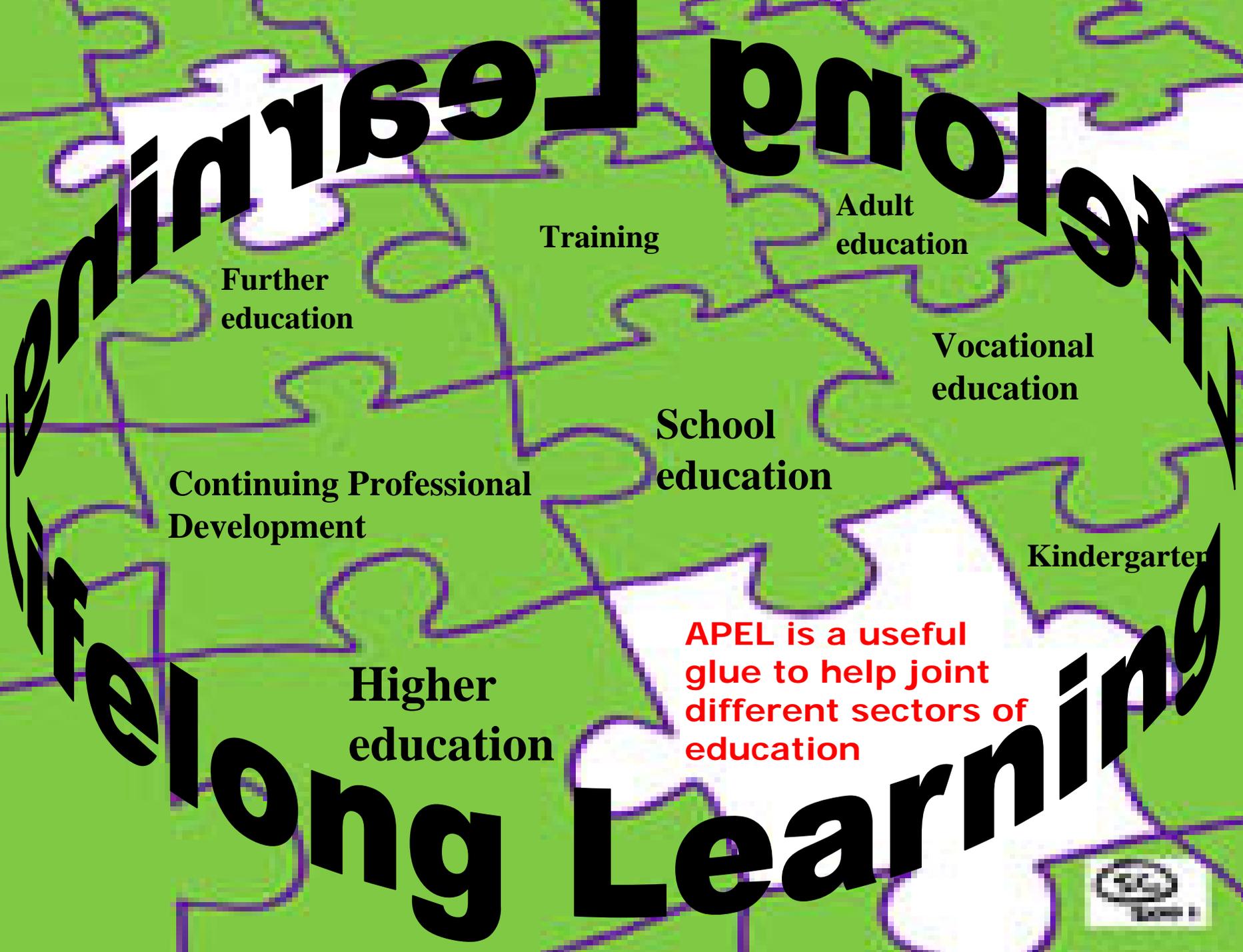
 - 4. The ENIC/NARIC networks should be tasked with the responsibility providing national and international information on the existing national and international provision of APEL, and advice for citizens in terms of gaining recognition.**

National challenges:

- 1. Existing and planned developments to create national lifelong learning systems, including the development of 'new style' qualifications frameworks, should include systems to facilitate APEL. Appropriate authorities should develop a strategy to promote the widespread implementation and acceptance of APEL and lifelong learning by academics, employers and students.**
- 2. National authorities should introduce operational guidelines and principles for APEL fully integrated with national quality assurance processes.**

Institutional challenges:

- 1. Institutions in the process of reconsidering their traditional curriculum in the light of current needs should acknowledge that learning takes place in many contexts and this has implications for the design of their study programmes in terms of structure, delivery and assessment. Work placements, blended learning, company in-house training and learning through work schemes need to be increased and formally integrated with mainstream education programmes. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) need to develop institutional strategies towards APEL and Work-Based Learning (WBL) for all three Bologna cycles.**
- 2. HEIs should put in place clear processes and practices that transparently detail their internal APEL systems and procedures for staff, students and employers. They should also adopt appropriate staff development strategies to overcome resistance to APEL and ensure that all processes are transparent, fair, rigorous and efficient.**



Lifelong Learning

Further education

Training

Adult education

Vocational education

School education

Continuing Professional Development

Kindergarten

Higher education

APEL is a useful glue to help joint different sectors of education

