

IMPLEMENTATION OF COHERENT AND COMPREHENSIVE LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGY IN AUSTRIA (STATUS 2005)

1. Main Policies/Measures

1.1 State of Development of Austria vis-à-vis the Design and Implementation of a Coherent and Comprehensive Lifelong Learning (LLL) Strategy

The high priority of LLL in Austria is expressed in a decision of the Austrian National Council "for the strengthening of lifelong learning". It corresponds to the increase of the budget for general adult learning by 28% for 2005. In the Government Statement of the Federal Government it was decided to establish a national expert group for the co-ordination of LLL concepts and measures.

Important ideas and foundations of the Austrian strategic development of LLL have been:

- > The implementation of the consultation process for the Memorandum on LLL, taking into account all relevant actors & groups and the conclusions & consequences of this learning process
- > The concrete definition of objectives by the European benchmark passed in 2003: "by 2010, the average level of participation in LLL should be at least 12.5% of the adult working age population (group of 25 to 64-year-olds + Austria has already reached this benchmark).
- > The 2003 preliminary work ("Country Background Report") with generally accepted conclusions on a strategy for adult learning and discussions as part of the OECD Country Review on Adult Learning.
- > The discussion and conclusions from the OECD Country on Adult Learning since July 2004, from an event of the BMBWK on the same topic in June 2005, and the Synthesis Report of the OECD on all participating countries (Promoting Adult Learning)
- > The reception and discussion of European surveys (such as CVTS-2, Eurobarometer 2003) and indicators of LLL in education policy and academic discussions.
- > The commissioning of "Statistik Austria" with the implementation of an ad-hoc module on LLL within the framework of the microcensus in June 2003 by the BMBWK in addition to the required EU-wide Labour Force Survey and the publication of this module by EUROSTAT for all participating countries.
- > Production of an "Education & Training Strategy 2010" (2004) which includes considerations on school, pre-school and adult learning.

1.2 The General Austrian Access to the Policy of the LLL Strategy

The concept of the Austrian lifelong learning strategy is based on the main principles of the Austrian education policy.

Such already long-term effective principles with regard to the LLL strategy are:

- > The permeability and inter-accessibility of all education and training courses.
- > Equal opportunities and securing of standards by nationally binding curricula and professional images.
- > Legal possibilities and funds in order to allow for the possibility attain all school graduations and apprenticeship qualifications in second-chance education.
- > Promotion of a wide range of training after completion of compulsory education in order to do justice to all talents and interests of young people.
- > Constant adaptation of vocational education and training in the dual and full-time school system with the social partners, based on relevant research and development.
- > In case problems arise on the apprenticeship market, ensuring regional flexible reactions so that all young persons can be guaranteed training in schools or colleges, in the apprenticeship training system or in the "safety net" ("Auffangnetz") of the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS).
- > Promotion of adult learning by the Federal Government and the governments of the Austrian "Länder" (general and vocational adult learning) and the social partners (with a focus on vocational adult learning); in addition, individual promotion models, mainly in the form of reimbursement of course costs, are being offered in the "Länder".
- > Formation of partnerships on a federal, regional and local level (e.g. learning clusters or the JUNIOR24 project).

These basic principles are co-ordinated between the responsible ministries in the Council of Ministers. The development of a "comprehensive and coherent" strategy of lifelong learning will be tackled in a "Task force LLL". Another expert meeting on this topic was organised by the University of Continuing Education in Krems. Particularly in the field of basic school education, a commission (consisting of university educational researchers) was commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (BMBWK) to make proposals for measures to improve quality in the field of basic education.



1.3 Identification of Priority Reforms for the Implementation of LLL across the Systems

1. Systematic Involvement of All Key Actors through Developing Partnerships on a National, Regional & Local Level:

The key actors (involved federal ministries, the Public Employment Service Austria - AMS, social partners, adult learning institutions, provinces) were actively involved in the previous process for the development of a strategy for LLL on a national level in the LLL consultation process, in working groups and in public events as well as in the preparation of the OECD country analysis on adult learning. This was demonstrated by widely approved conclusions at the end of the country background report, which were generally accepted as the basis of further discussion on priorities and measures.

On a regional level, so far there have mainly been activities on the co-ordination of the territorial employment pacts. In the federal provinces the Public Employment Service Austria has set up bodies in which the social partners & the provinces formulate priorities for the active labour market policy and vocational qualifications. The introduction of a "one desk shop" for SOCRATES and LEONARDO projects in the national agencies (2004), which allocates the funds of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (BMBWK), the Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour (BMWA) and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, the Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW), facilitates and improves the participation in European education and training programmes.

The launching of information campaigns within the framework of the *Adult Learners' Week* of UNESCO (1999-2003) and of a media initiative on adult learning (2005) in co-operation with the *Austrian Conference of Adult Education Institutions (KEBÖ)* was intended to involve also other key actors and, in particular, to raise the interest in CVET among people who had hardly been addressed before and to motivate them to take part.

2. Developing the Foundations for Further Learning at the Earliest Possible Stage in the Education System:

An increasing number of courses are being offered for the later completion of compulsory school education ("secondary school graduation"). Over the past few years, the Education Ministry has substantially increased funding for related course offers in adult education institutions with ESF support (Objective 3).

Since 1996, every year in autumn a "screening process" has been carried out in the form of course places or other training possibilities in order to keep the number of young people without access to training and training qualifications as low as possible. In the recent past, above all pre-school financing, particularly for children whose first language is not German, has been discussed. Here work is already being carried out on the implementation of a concept.

3. Definition of the Objectives and Curricula from Pre-School to Upper-Secondary Education in Terms of the Attainment of Key Qualifications:

The matter of the definition of objectives of courses and the curricula in terms of the attainment of key qualifications received various responses in all forms of school education as well as the dual apprenticeships. Social skills, basic computer skills and basic school qualifications were included in all curricula. The relatively new concept of "education standards" aims to ensure the teaching of basic school qualifications. This is currently in its trial phase in primary and lower secondary schools.

In December 2003, the *Austrian Language Committee (Österreichisches Sprachenkomitee - ÖSKO)* was officially set up by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (BMBWK). The Committee's first and foremost task is to make proposals with regard to lifelong language learning and to dedicate itself to the promotion of language learning. Since the 2003/04 school year, the teaching of a modern foreign language has already been compulsory in the 1st grade of Austrian elementary schools.

4. Recognition and Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning:

In the field of vocational education and training, the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning has a long-standing tradition and quantitative significance. More recent approaches include the admission to the universities of applied sciences without a school-leaving examination. In the *Universities of Applied Sciences Development and Financing Plan III for the Period 2005/06-2009/10*, which was submitted in 2004, the increased recognition of non-formal subject qualifications of employees is quoted as an objective.

5. Development of Diverse Learning Pathways and Open Learning Environments:

The principle of the diversity of learning and training pathways is a basic principle of the Austrian educational system. VET schools and colleges with various work placements and dual training courses co-exist as various options. The diversity is being further increased via the definition of focuses within vocational training courses.

6. Investment in Teachers' and Trainers' Training to enable them to play their New Role in the Knowledge-based Society:

The subject and general teacher further training is, above all, organised by the teacher training colleges. Many teachers, however, organise their own training, both at external education and training providers as well as in the form of specialist reading or computer or web-based measures. In the sector comparison, all available data (e.g. microcensus LLL of June 2003) show the highest participation in LLL for employees in the teaching sector.

The previous teacher training colleges are upgraded in institutional and qualitative terms to teacher-training universities, whereby – based on the Bologna model – special focuses are placed on Bachelor and Master courses, the information and competence-based selection of students as well as the quality assurance of training institutions. For the future, substantial improvements are expected by the institutional upgrading of



pedagogic colleges to teacher-training universities as well as by the establishment of a "Leadership Academy". The Leadership Academy is a nation-wide project across all institutions for the qualification of leaders in the pedagogic field. Its principle consists in a high skills potential of managers which must be used and developed in networked school development projects. In October 2005 the first generation of Leadership Academies was certified, the second is currently running until October 2006, a next generation is currently in the planning stage due to the high level of interest.

In 2003 the BMBWK increased its financial support for train-the-trainers projects for trainers and training managers in not-for-profit adult education institutions with ESF and national funds. Several skills training projects for teachers are currently being carried out.

7. Integrated Use of ICT in Education and Training Systems:

The integration of ICT in education and training has been a priority of the lesson administration since the mid-1990s and is conceived and promoted by a department and working group of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (BMBWK). Since the end of the 1990s, ICT has not only been integrated in VET schools and colleges through new special training focuses within existing subjects, but above all across all disciplines in adjusted cross-curricular changes of the curricula. The IT initiative "eFit-Austria" has existed since 2000. This initiative's goal is to increase access to education, improve quality of education for the individual and of the entire education system by the sustainable use of modern information and communication technologies. As part of eFit-Austria, in the field of "eEducation", special skills training programmes are being implemented for pupils, and in the field "eTraining" CVET programmes, particularly for people who need to be integrated in the labour market.

In higher education, as part of the initiative "New Media in Teaching at Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences", between 2000 and 2003, 25 project developments with a budget of approximately € 8 million were commissioned. These project developments reached 44,000 students, 2,000 graduates, 4,500 teachers and 36,000 people who were interested in CVET as defined by LLL. This basis is expanded with the strategy call for tender to the tune of € 3 million between 2005 and 2007 in which universities and the universities of applied sciences can submit their application with their e-Learning/e-Teaching models and implementation projects.

8. Focus on Disadvantaged Groups:

For a long time, the focus on disadvantaged groups in Austria has been placed on the initial training of young people. Supplying all young people interested in training with a training place is an education and labour market policy priority since approximately 1996.

The statutory possibility of "inclusive vocational training" was anchored in the Vocational Training Act 2003 ("*Berufsausbildungsgesetz*", BAG). This concept, based on principles of social pedagogy and VET-training, is aimed at young people with a disadvantage and integration problems on the apprenticeship training market and combines financial subsidies by the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS), needs-oriented extendable apprenticeship terms and graduated qualification possibilities. The allocation of young people in no way implies a reduction of later possibilities, as it is designed in an open and flexible manner. The AMS further expanded the labour market promotion scheme for unemployed young people (with the focus on 19 to 24-year-olds) JOBS FORYOU(TH)'04 in 2004 and thus created qualification & employment opportunities for at least 10,400 people. Programme priorities include the repeated increase of JOBS FORYOU(TH) funds, the promotion of additional apprenticeship vacancies (Project '06), and the acquisition of the lower secondary school qualification by adults. In the field of adult education, the Education Ministry with the support of the European Social Fund has been supporting measures for basic education / literacy enhancement within the framework of second-chance education and other projects for disadvantaged people (women, immigrants, disabled people, etc.); also in connection with the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion) as well as some major Equal Development Partnerships (DPs) in the same areas.

9. Prolonging the Habit of Learning Throughout Life and Enhancing Learning Access and Opportunities for Older Citizens and Workers:

Older groups of people with disadvantaged access to LLL were previously not focused on as much as young people without a training place. Part of the OECD Country Review focused on the problem of "unreached" adults and on adults with deficits in their basic education, reference was also made to the significance of adult education centres which are easily accessible for all. In May 2004, the social partners organised an enquiry on the topic of "Ageappropriate World of Work" in which the participation in CVET played an important role.

10. Developing Flexibility within and between all Sectors of Education and Training:

One focus of the past years has been the promotion of permeability and the recognition of already completed services in the transition between education and training levels. For a long time, there have been "add-on apprenticeships" in vocational training for graduates of a VET school (BMS) to acquire the qualification of a VET college (BHS). For secondary education graduates, colleges are set up at VET colleges (BHS), where pupils can attend full-time and part-time courses. For graduates of apprenticeships, there have long since been VET schools and colleges for employees in employment, which are mainly attended in the evenings (generally part-time while in employment).

Since the amendment to the University of Applied Sciences Study Law 2003, not only the universities but also the universities of applied sciences have been entitled to offer CVET courses. As the universities of applied sciences, due to the large number and needs-oriented foundation of locations, offer regionally widespread



business-oriented and vocationally oriented training, the development of an additional attractive CVET offer was initiated.

The goal of the University of Applied Sciences Development and Financing Plan III for the years 2005/06-2009/10 is to increase the number of students registering with a university entrance and vocational qualification, increase the recognition of nonformally acquired subject qualifications of employees in employment as well as increase the significance of distance learning in courses of the universities of applied sciences.

11. Improvements in Curricula, Learning Tools and Methods:

The adjustment of curricula, learning tools and methods in schools and learning institutes is a continuous challenge. Thus, since the mid-1990s, more than 150 apprenticeships have either been modernised or completely recreated. In the VET schools and colleges (BMHS), via internal differentiation based on special focuses, not only the diversity of the offer was increased, but also and rather considerably the percentage of teaching of information and communication technologies and other basic qualifications. In general education, the entire curricula of secondary level have been updated continuously since 2000.

12. Promotion of Lifelong Learning through National or Regional Economic and Social Partnerships and through Civil Society: Austrian adult learning is characterised by a range of networks right across the Austrian provinces. Thus, the major general education adult learning institutions, such as the adult education centres VHS and the Catholic educational associations as well as CVET providers such as the Economic Promotion Institute WIFI, the Vocational Training Institute Vienna (BFI) or the *Ländliches Fortbildungsinstitut* (LFI) each have a large number of regional locations and a national network. The Austrian Conference of Adult Education Institutions

(KEBÖ) also functions as an interface between the non-profit adult learning providers. A good example for the promotion of LLL by partnerships is the University of Continuing Education in Krems, a co-operation between the Federal Government and the provincial government of Lower Austria.

1.4 Use and Implementation of Instruments that Have Been Developed under the European Work Programme (Objectives, Copenhagen Process) in the Context of Putting in Place the LLL Strategy

The European benchmarks for general and vocational training have gained a central orientation function for education policy in Austria. For the more effective use of the LLL structural indicator, the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture financed a survey in 2003 (ad-hoc module on lifelong learning) which was carried out by "Statistik-Austria" and which offers differentiated and empirically well-founded insights into the structure and financing of the LLL and, among other things, showed that in the sector of the LLL structural indicator the 2010 target value for training and CVET was already attained with 12.5% in June 2003. Both with regard to this indicator and in the successful integration of young people in training in lower secondary level, the values should be maintained or improved.

The working groups of the Copenhagen process provided important suggestions, which are currently being intensively discussed by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, with the involvement of the social partners and the education providers (e.g. EQF and ECVET).

2. Next Steps and Challenges for Future Reforms

The next central step is the formation of a "Task Force LLL" commissioned to elaborate more detailed targets – both thematically and time-wise – until 2010 and to co-ordinate their implementation.

The orientation towards European benchmarks and goals is an important input for the Austrian education policy and, in connection with Eurostat surveys of "Statistik-Austria", has led to improved insights into the structure of participation, interests and financing of LLL.

Based on this, the strategic key points should be developed step by step in the form of a broad consultation and discussion process.

More Info in e.g.:

- > www.lebenslangeslernen.at (only German)
- > www.bmbwk.gv.at/europa/bildung/abb2010/abb2010_zwb.xml



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