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CONTENTS

VALIDATION OF NONFORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN AUSTRIAN HE: BACKGROUND AND RATIONALES

Lifelong Learning and the Austrian Strategy of Lifelong Learning

In general The question of recognition and validation of nonformal and informal learning in Austria is tightly linked to the emergence of the concept of „Lifelong Learning" and the Austrian strategy of Lifelong Learning "LLL:2020". Even though the national strategy was adopted only quite recently, in 2011, the beginning of its development can be traced back to 2005, when the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture planned to develop a first basis for the development of a coherent LLL strategy in Austria to cover the whole educational sector, including higher education. An elaborated presentation of a rationality to develop a political framework for the promotion of Lifelong Learning and thus, for dealing with the validation of nonformal and informal learning, can be found in the 2007 published "Guidelines towards a coherent Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Austria until 2010". This document summarizes the results of a profound consultation process conducted in Austria between 2005 and 2007, being the starting point for the development of an Austrian national strategy for Lifelong Learning.[1] In the guidelines, Lifelong Learning is described as a „broad strategy, offering answers to the complex challenges both at the level of society and the individual person: The challenge of employability as well as that of political participation".[2] Thus, it follows the definition of the European Commission, building on the pillars of employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities. In a first definition of LLL given in the „Memorandum on Lifelong Learning"[3], a working paper of the EC published in 2000, Lifelong Learning was first understood as „*all intentional learning* aiming at the continuing improvement of knowledge, skills and competences", therefore identifying Lifelong Learning mainly in areas of organized (formal) learning processes. Shortly after, in 2001, this definition was followed by a broader one, published in the EC paper „Building an European Area of Lifelong Learning", in which it is stated that Lifelong Learning is „*all learning during the lifespan*, aiming at the improvement of knowledge, qualifications and competences and in the framework of a person".[4] In the context of Austria, the guidelines summarize the following dimensions which make a change towards lifelong learning necessary:

❖ Demographic changes: Here, the explanation goes, an ageing society with an increasing share of older workforce calls for a growing necessity to return repeatedly to education and training, so as they can be kept longer in the process of employment.

❖ (Inter-)Cultural dimensions due to growing international migration flows leading to the need of not only integrating migrants into social and economic processes, but also to keeping their employability, due to increasing mobility and thus, the need for an increased sensitivity in dealing with the „unknown" – being it cultures, languages and alike, is arising. Therefore, language competences as well as tolerance and openness towards different cultures need to be developed, being a prerequisite for a culturally diverse society.

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[1] "Leitlinien einer kohärenten LLL-Strategie für Österreich bis 2010", Donau-Universität Krems (2007). About this document: the first draft was based on main European strategy documents and working reports on Lifelong learning by the European Commission, national reports and analysis as the OECD-background report and the white book of the Austrian Association of Industries; it was followed by eight round table discussions with altogether 42 position papers from different stakeholders; the outcomes of the round table discussions and position papers were integrated into the next draft becoming the prerequisite for the Lifelong strategy LLL:2020 adopted in 2011 described in chapter B.
[2] Donau-Universität Krems (2007), p. 8
[3] European Commission: „Memorandum über Lebenslanges Lernen: Arbeitsdokument der Kommissionsdienststellen", Brussels, October 2000; cited from Donau-Universität Krems (2007), p.8
[4] European Commission: „Einen europäischen Raum des lebenslangen Lernens schaffen", Brüssel, 2001; cited from Donau-Universität Krems (2007), p. 8; translation and emphasis by the authors.

- ❖ Economic dimension: here, technological development and progress are making it more and more difficult for people to meet (faster changing) requirements at the workplace. Therefore, alongside formal qualifications, nonformally and informally developed competences are mentioned to become more and more relevant for the labour market. Also in more general terms, the concept of "Lifelong Learning" offers a strategy to cope with the quick „ageing" of knowledge, skills and competences developed through formal qualification.
- ❖ Political dimension, being twofold: on one hand, there is the aspect to improve employability, simply ensuring that people can make their living; on the other hand, there is the democratic aspect, ensuring an active participation of the individual in a diverse society;
- ❖ Social dimension; here aiming at overcoming social segregation in a context with growing globalization and individualization: For less skilled workers it is becoming more and more difficult to find a job and keep it; here, professional competences and linked to this, the continuous improvement or further development of these competences is seen as pivotal so as to ensure employment and social security.
- ❖ Gender dimension: calling for special attention to overcome disparities between men and women in education and employment, towards a more integrative society.[5]

These dimensions and linked argumentations can be partly found in different documents dealing with the recognition of nonformal or informal learning. However, it should be noted that most often, statements about the rationalities for the validation of nonformal or informal learning are plainly that „nowadays, there is a need for lifelong learning", or „demographic changes", „changes in the world of work" or the evolution of the European Higher Education Area, all not much substantiating the actual challenges for the higher education system in question.

Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area

Specifically for Austrian higher education, the picture on validation of nonformal and informal learning in Higher Education, or, to put it differently, of recognizing learning from outside higher education in the framework of - being it past (prior) and / or experiential learning, is a scattered one. This is not only due to the diversified sector of Higher education with different, sometimes contradictory legal frameworks, which will be dealt with later on. In addition to the mentioned concept of Lifelong learning, for the sector of HE, it is also the Bologna process and the development of the European Higher Education Area which made the topic relevant for higher education. Links to the Bologna process are made for example in a study on Validation of Nonformal and Informal Learning in Universities in Austria, where the authors refer to the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), forcing Austrian universities to deal with different traditions and forms to organize higher education. Also mentioned is the concept of Lifelong Learning, *per se* touching higher education, too: As the authors state, demographic developments, social, economical and political changes make Lifelong Learning more and more important in higher education. More precisely, this means that universities will be less confronted with a group of 18 to 30 years old „traditional students", who are in the possession of the university entrance qualification ("Reifezeugnis"). Instead, as the authors state, there will be a growing heterogeneity among students and thus, universities will need to deal with this. Furthermore, it is said that universities will also turn more into places to provide continuing education accross all types of studies.[6] This study informed a position paper on nonformal and informal learning published by the Austrian Conference of Public Universities "Universities Austria" or shortly „uniko": Here, it is stated that due to „changes in society", the expected

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[5] See Donau-Universität Krems (2007), p. 8 ff.
[6] See Westphal & Friedrich (2009), p. 9. When saying „accross all types of studies", this refers to a particular Austrian differentiation between „ordinary" or "regular" studies and „irregular" ("non-degree") studies described in more detail in chapter B.

demographic changes and „the concept of Lifelong Learning", educational institutions need to change as well, as they will stop being primarily educational institutions for adults of the age between 18 and 30, possessing the university entrance exam. Instead, the text goes, universities „become more and more a place for continuing education – not only in the field of explicitly declared continuing education programms, but also in the field of regular studies." And it is because of these developments that universities need to deal with the topic of nonformal and informal learning as well as ways of recognizing competences developed through such forms of learning.[7] In another, more recent update of the uniko position paper on „Principles and Recommendations for Continuing Education in Public Universities", published first in 2009 and updated in the beginning of 2014, the already mentioned Austrian Strategy for Lifelong Learning „LLL:2020", the existence of the National Qualification Framework and the realization of the Bologna Process aiming at the establishment of the European Higher Education Area are mentioned as the main rationales for public universities to deal with aspects as permeability of educational systems as well as alternative options for university access.[8]

A) DEFINITIONS OF VALIDATION AND NONFORMAL / INFORMAL LEARNING

According to the national report Austria in the framework of the project OBSERVAL-net published in 2010, there is no common definition regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The German term "Anerkennung" is used most often, mainly as an overall reference to processes of recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the issuing of a formal certificate, a competence profile or portfolio; furthermore, "Anerkennung" is used in a wider context, meaning "appreciation and acknowledgement".[9] For the moment this report is written in the context of VALERU, these observations are still valid: there is no commonly shared definition of "validation" or "recognition", but definition processes at national level are work in progress due to the development of a strategy for validation as part of the LLL:2020 strategy for Lifelong Learning. Part of these developments is the national project "Recognition of nonformally and informally developed competences in Austrian higher education"[10], which will feed into the development of the national validation strategy. Here, a differentiation is made between the German terms "Anerkennung", understood as the recognition of competences and qualifications for admission to HE, and "Anrechnung", meaning "to add something", which is refering to the *transfer of credits* in order to shorten the duration of study programmes. Either way, there are processes ("Verfahren") and "instruments" or "methods" ("Instrumente") linked to these.[11] The main difference is that for the first case ("Anerkennung"), the evaluation of competences developed is part of the process, leading to the accreditation (giving credits) of learning, whereas the second term "Anrechnung" is used as a cross check of already earned credits towards their use in a specific programme, without repeated assessment of the developed knowledge, skills and competences.

What can also be observed is that the term "Validierung" as closely reminding "validation" is not much found so far in the Austrian context: it started to appear in recent analytical work on the topic, some studies, but for example not in legal documents. According to our observation it seems that "Validierung" ("validation") and "Anerkennung" ("recognition" or even "recognition and accreditation", as the transfer into credit is what is relevant) are used more or less synonymous, with the term "Validierung" being used rather in situations where the focus or emphasis is on the technical realisation. Also, there are cases

[7] Vgl. Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz (2009), p. 1
[8] Vgl. Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz (2014), p. 1
[9] Prokopp & Loumi-Messerer (2008, with updates 2009 and 2010), p. 7
[10] Described in detail in chapter C.
[11] Processes can be divided into several steps like for example the "provision of information", "consultation", "application", "recognition/transfer of credit", whereas instruments describe the specific methods used as a basis for the evaluation of competences. Examples given in the project design are competence portfolios, samples of work, specific tasks to be fulfilled during evaluation etc.

where "Anerkennung" and "Validierung" are used together, implying that there is a difference in the use of the two terms, but which is not thoroughly explained.[12] In the scope of the above mentioned project in Austria, one proposal to differentiate between "Anerkennung" and "Validierung" is this: Validation ("Validierung") is described as a process, during which an authorized body gives proof that a person has reached certain learning outcomes, measured along relevant standards. As such, validation covers a process of four steps: *identification* of special experiences of a person, done during an interview, *documentation* to make these experiences visible, *formal evaluation* of these experiences and *certification* of the results from evaluation, leading to either parts or full qualifications. The term "Anerkennung" (of prior learning) is explained in the following way: it means that learning outcomes developed through nonformal and informal learning (and not yet validated) are validated. Which, in fact means that "Anerkennung" is "Validierung", where the process from a technical point of view is named "validation", which more generally could be also called "recognition".

Apart from these sources, the term "Validierung" ("validation") or "validieren" ("to validate") is in Austria mainly used in the LLL:2020 strategy, and also here much less than "Anerkennung" or "anerkennen" ("recognition", "to recognize"). Unfortunately, the strategy does not provide any definition, therefore, one can only guess what the difference between the two would be: it seems that here, too, "Validierung" puts the focus on the technical process, expressed for example by the measure to establish a "national validation strategy" ("Validierungsstrategie"). The term "Anerkennung" ("recognition") seems to be used at a more general level. However, if looking more closely, it becomes obvious that terms are used almost synonymous, similarily to what has been described above for the definitions used in the national project. An illustration is given here:

Usage of "Validierung" and "Anerkennung" (validation, recognition) in the LLL:2020 strategy
Recognition of nonformal and informal learning as part of the validation strategy
Validierungsstrategie zur Sichtbarmachung und Anerkennung von NIL | *validation strategy towards visibility and recognition of NIL*
Validierungsstrategie zur Anerkennung von NIL | *validation strategy for the recognition of NIL*
Validierungsstrategie beinhaltet auch die Anerkennung von NIL| *validation strategy including also the recognition of NIL*
Recognition of nonformal and / or informal learning and to validate informal learning processes
Anerkennung von informellem Wissen und Kompetenzen | *recognition of informal knowledge and competences*
Anerkennung von nonformal und informell erworbenen Kompetenzen und Kenntnissen | *recognition of nonformally and informally developed competences and knowledge*
Anerkennung von Wissen, Fertigkeiten und Kompetenzen außerhalb des formalen Sektors | *recognition of knowledge, skills and competences from outside the formal sector*
Anerkennung früherer Lernleistungen und Erfahrungen | *recognition of prior learning and experiences*
Informelle Lernprozesse sollen validiert werden | *informal learning processes should be validated*
Processes of recognition - processes of validation
Anerkennungsverfahren von informell erworbenen Kompetenzen und Fähigkeiten | *processes of recognition of informally developed competences*
Standardisierung von Verfahren zu Validierung von Wissen, Fertigkeiten und Kompetenzen, die informel und nonformal erworben wurden | *standardization of processes of validation of knowledge, skills and competences developed informally and nonformally*
System zur Validierung von nonformalen und informellen Lernprozessen | *system of validation of nonformal and informal learning processes*

In our opinion, this mirrors the currently ongoing process of developing a common understanding in Austria and one has simply to wait for the outcomes of this process setting up a national validation strategy, hopefully bringing also some more clarity into terms and definitions used. The increasing use of the term "Validierung" is probably also due to the council recommendation on validation of nonformal and informal learning, published 2012, which is translated into German as "Validierung nichtformalen und informellen Lernens". But also publications by Cedefop with its many interlinks to European projects like

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[12] For example, in the section on projects on validation of nonformal and informal learning, the information portal www.erwachsenenbildung.at lists projects "on recognition/validation": "Several projects have been conducted in Austria on the topic of how competences (including informally developed competences) can be recognized and validated". "Zur Frage, wie (vor allem auch informell erworbene) Kompetenzen anerkannt und validiert werden können, wurde in Österreich eine Reihe von Pilotprojekten durchgeführt." http://erwachsenenbildung.at/themen/nqr/umsetzung/pilotprojekte/anerkennung_validierung.php

observal-net, the European Inventory for validation of nonformal and informal learning, led to several translations of terms and definitions, which were reused and transformed in different contexts, can be found in glossaries like that of erwachsenenbildung.at or of institutions as the wba (see D).

In the legal frameworks relevant for Austrian higher education, the term "Anerkennung" (or the verb "anerkennen") is used. The table below gives some examples, how this reads in the legal context of the UG (public universites) and the FHStG (Universities of Applied Sciences), with translations from the Austrian Legal Information System:

Terminology in legal documents and their translation: "Anerkennung" and "anerkennen"	
UG - Universitätsgesetz	
"(…) auf Anerkennung erbrachter, den Universitätsstudien gleichwertiger Vorleistungen zur Verkürzung der Studienzeit"	"(…) recognition of equivalent prior learning, leading to shortening of the period of study required."
"Die wissenschaftliche Tätigkeit in Betrieben oder außeruniversitären Forschungseinrichtungen, die eine wissenschaftliche Berufsvorbildung vermitteln können, sind entsprechend der Art der Forschungstätigkeit und der Forschungsprojekte der betreffenden Einrichtung sowie nach Art und Umfang der Mitwirkung oder Tätigkeit der oder des Studierenden nach Maßgabe der Gleichwertigkeit auf Antrag der oder des ordentlichen Studierenden bescheidmäßig als Prüfung anzur- kennen."	"Scientific research at business establishments or non-university research establishments capable of providing preparatory scientific training may be recognized as equivalent to examinations on application of a degree student if the nature of the research and the research projects at the establishment concerned, and the nature and extent of the student's participation therein or activities is comparable."
FHStG - Fachhochschulstudiengesetz	
"Anerkennung nachgewiesener Kenntnisse"	"Recognition of documented knowledge"
"Anerkennung nachgewiesener Kenntnisse im Sinne einer berufsorientierten Ausbildung"	"For recognizing proven knowledge in terms of the job-oriented training"

In past years, several publications in Austria have dealt with the question of how to understand and define "nonformal and informal learning" versus "formal learning", comparing more or less common definitions and approaches.[13] Most commonly used in our observation are the definitions published by the European Commission, distinguishing between formal, non-formal and informal learning. For example, the widely known Austrian portal on adult education "erwachsenenbildung.at" refers to three "types of learning" shown in the table below:[14]

Examples for the definition of formal, nonformal and informal learning: erwachsenenbildung.at	
formales Lernen: zielgerichtet, festgelegte Curricula, zumeist in anerkannten Bildungseinrichtungen, offiziell anerkannter Abschluss	**Formal learning:** intentional, defined curricula, mostly in recognized educational institutions, officially recognized diploma
non-formales Lernen: zielgerichtet, zumeist in Kursen, Seminaren etc., keine allgemein anerkannte Zertifizierung	**Nonformal learning**: intentional, mostly in courses or seminars etc., without widely recognized certification
informelles Lernen: kann nichtintentional sein, im Alltag (Arbeitsplatz, Freizeit etc.), zumeist keine Zertifizierung	**Informal Learning:** can be not intentional, takes place in daily life (workplace, leisure etc.), mostly not certified

These definitions should be understood as standing next to each other, not in a hierarchical order. In relation to the term "informal learning" ("informelles Lernen"), the main aspect underlined is that adults develop knowledge, skills and competences also during daily activities, for which they usually do not receive any official certificate; the same is for young adults entering the world of work and who more and more often develop knowledge outside school.[15]

Another picture on terminology used gives the above mentioned study on recognition of nonformal and informal learning at Universities published 2009 by Spiel et al. Here, the authors argue that in higher education the following terminology is more commonly used: "prior learning" and "accreditation of prior learning (APL)", as well as "accreditation of prior experiential

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[13] See for this for example Zürcher 2009, Spiel et al 2009, Biffl et al 2013
[14] Authors own translation "(…) Formale, non-formale und informelle Lernprozesse: Im lebenslangen, lebensbegleitenden Lernen werden verschiedene Lernformen nebeneinander gestellt. In bildungspolitischen Dokumenten wird zwischen formalem, non-formalem und informellem Lernen unterschieden. Die EU hat mit der Definition dieser drei Begriffe handlungsleitende Vorgaben gemacht (…)"http://erwachsenenbildung.at/themen/lebenslanges_lernen/was_ist_lll/lernformen.php (accessed 02-07-2014)
[15] http://erwachsenenbildung.at/themen/neue_lernformen/informelles_lernen.php (accessed 14-02-2015)

learning" (APEL) and "prior certificated learning" (APCL), all given as English terms. As to "prior learning", the authors explain that it covers both forms of learning - "formal" and "informal", without distinguishing between the two forms or settings. "Prior certificated learning" is understood as learning certified from recognized educational institutions or "providers of education", whereas "prior experiential learning" is described as learning which has not been certified and comes from experience, self directed studies or on the job. As the authors note, these concepts are not always used consequently. For example, sometimes "prior learning" is used when the actual example is about prior experiential learning.[16] Following this argumentation, these terms can be found in the position paper on nonformal and informal learning issued 2009 by uniko. Here, the English expression is directly put in connection with a German one: "recognition of prior learning" as "Anerkennung von früherem Lernen". Without going deeper into this discussing of how to name different types of learning, we would like to underline that in this study as in the general discussion, the focus is on the evaluation of learning which already took place, that is: prior to higher education.

Within the LLL:2020 strategy, being a relevant document for the whole educational sector, regardless the type of education or institution, mainly the terms "formal, non-formal and informal learning" (German: "formales, nonformales und informelles Lernen") are used. Yet, the document itself does not provide any definition of these terms, similarly to "validation" or "recognition". The closest description of what is understood by "non-formal and informal learning" and the recognition of such learning is found in the chapter on action line 10 "Recognition procedures of non-formally and informally developed knowledge and competences in all educational sectors", where it is stated: "Developing knowledge in classical educational institutions like schools and higher education institutions will be supplemented by non-formally organized places of learning. Developed skills and competences will be recognized and certified as qualifications independently from where these skills and competences were developed. Thus, nonformal and informal educational processes will be equally put next to formal educational pathways".[17]

Finally, based on the documents the strategy is referring to, but also in general, one can say that definitions and terms are largely inspired by or referring directly to political documents of the European Union and it is our impression that the council recommendation on the validation of nonformal and informal learning with its terms, definitions and including also its German version, gave a stronger twist to this development.

B) FRAME CONDITIONS AND REGULATIONS

Sectors in Austrian Higher Education System

So far, there is no uniform legal framework regulating the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Austria, whereas currently a national strategy for the validation of non-formal and informal learning is developed. However, there are several legal regulations already in place allowing the recognition of nonformal and informal learning in higher education. From our viewpoint, there are three major aspects relevant for a better understanding of the frame conditions and regulations in Austria: 1) the Austrian higher education system is involves four types of higher education institutions or sectors of HE, based on different legal regulations; 2) the specific Austrian differentiation between "regular" studies and studies called "außerordentlich" (university studies being different from "regular"), and 3) the differentiation between "teaching and learning" and "continuing education".

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[16] Spiel et al 2009, p.10

[17] „Der Wissenserwerb in den klassischen Bildungsinstitutionen wie Schule und Hochschule wird durch das Lernen an non-formal organisierten Lernorten ergänzt. Erworbene Fertigkeiten und Kompetenzen werden unabhängig davon, wo sie erworben wurden, Bildungsprozesse gleichwertig neben formale Bildungswege treten." Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen, p. 44

Four types of higher education institutions exist in Austria:

a) *öffentliche Universitäten* (public universities), including special forms as medical universities, universities of arts and/or music, but also a public university for continuing higher education (Danube University) which was founded 1994 specifically for the implementation of continuing higher education. The legal basis for public universities in general is the "Federal Act on the Organisation of Universities and their Studies" (Universities Act 2002, shortly UG 2002), in the case of Danube University it is a special federal law (DUK-Gesetz) to be read in combination with the UG. The introduction of the University Act in 2002 lead to a major shift in Austrian higher education, as public universities became autonomous.

b) *Privatuniversitäten* (private universities), for which the legal basis was introduced only in 1999, having the first private university accredited in 2000. Private Universities Act "PUG".

c) *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied sciences), established in the early 1990ies, having their legal basis in the Federal Act on University of Applied Sciences Degree Programmes (FHStG).

d) *Pädagogische Hochschulen* (University colleges of Teacher Training).

Since 2013, after the last parliamentary elections and some resort changes in the resorts of some ministries, the Ministry for Science, Research and Economy is responsible for the public and private universities as well as for the universities of applied sciences. The university colleges for teacher training are under the auspices of the (also in 2013 newly rearranged) Ministry of Education and Women, responsible for organization of school education. Linked to the different types of higher education, there are different networks or lobby organisations for the development of the respective HE sector: the Austrian university conference "Universities Austria" (uniko), representing all public universities in Austria (except for Danube University); furthermore the „Fachhochschulkonferenz" for the universities of applied sciences, the Conference of the Private Universities in Austria and the Conference of the University Colleges for Teacher Training. Beside these organisations arranged on the basis of the legal type of HEI, there is a specific Austrian network for university continuing education and university staff development (AUCEN), founded in 2005, in which all public universities can be member, including Danube University[18]. As represented by the name of the organisation, the main lines of work are "university continuing education" and "staff development". In practice, this means that actors meeting there come mainly from a) university continuing education departments - which means in Austria that they are dealing with the "irregular" type of studies within their university, namely programmes in continuing education (in our understanding: "continuing higher education"), which in the case of Danube University is relevant for the whole institution, and b) members from human resources / staff development departments, focussing on internal staff development within the universities. AUCEN as a network is also represented in uniko, which is of special relevance for Danube University, which is not yet member of uniko, despite the fact that it is a public university.

In this chapter, we will focus on the frame legal conditions of validation of nonformal and informal learning in HE for public universities and universities of applied sciences, and here especially with an eye of the differentiation between regular studies and continuing higher education. We will not deal with the private universities and will also leave aside university colleges for teacher training, as this would go beyond the limits of this report.

Differentiation of Studies into "ordentlich" and "außerordentlich"

In Austrian higher education a differentiation is made between "teaching and learning" and "continuing education": According to UG § 3, it is one of the tasks of the universities to provide opportunities for continuing higher education, especially in relation to its graduates and for school teachers. The specific format for continuing higher education are university courses called

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[18] From the 22 public universities, 20 are currently members of AUCEN

Universitätslehrgänge ("Universitätslehrgänge dienen der Weiterbildung", see UG 2002, § 51). In the the Austrian legal context these are qualified as "außerordentlich", in the sense of "being different from regular university courses. *Universitätslehrgänge* can be short programmes not leading to a degree, but they can as well lead to a degree, but exclusively a master degree.

One form of *ordentliche Studien* ("regular studies"), is a special format called *Individuelles Studium* (translated by the sources of the Austrian Legal Information System as "individually designed degree programmes"). This format was introduced for universities in 1966, giving students the opportunity to design their study programmes individually, involving not only one institution, but even several universities; the rational was to keep more flexibility in the system and thus, making it possible to apply for not-yet-designed combinations of studies, providing a mechanism to innovation in study programme design. In the beginning, this type of studies was called "Studium irregulare" (which might be translated as "irregular studies") and was renamed later towards "Individuelles Studium" ("individual studies", or "individually designed study programme"), assuming that "irregulare" would call for rather negative associations.[19] Due to the existence of this specific form of regular (and "individually designed" & "degree-seeking"!) form of studies in the context of the public universities, we will keep with the wording of "continuing higher education" for the "außerordentlichen Studien" instead of "irregular", so as to avoid mixing these terms. In the case of the universities of applied sciences, the situation and understanding is similar, keeping the differentiation between "ordentlich" and "außerordentlich". The term for those studies in "continuing education" (or "further education", as it is stated by the Legal Information System) is "Lehrgänge zur Weiterbildung". In the following table, we highlight the most important terms and definitions in the university act.

Legal definitions from the University Act (UG 2002) "General provisions", § 51 (2)	
"Certificate university programmes for further education" mean courses providing continuing education. The establishment of certificate university programmes for further education to prepare students for bachelor or diploma degree programmes in the fine and applied arts is permissible.	Universitätslehrgänge dienen der Weiterbildung. Die Einrichtung von Universitätslehrgängen zur Vorbereitung auf ein künstlerisches Bachelor - oder Diplomstudium ist zulässig.
"Master degrees in continuing education" mean internationally used degrees awarded to students who successfully complete certificate university programmes for further education, the admission requirements, scope and standards of which are comparable with those of similar master degree programmes abroad.	Mastergrade in Universitätslehrgängen sind jene international gebräuchlichen Mastergrade, die für die Absolventinnen und Absolventen jener Universitätslehrgänge festgelegt werden, deren Zugangsbedingungen, Umfang und Anforderungen mit Zugangsbedingungen, Umfang und Anforderungen entsprechender ausländischer Weiterbildungsangebote vergleichbar sind.
"Non-degree programmes" mean certificate university programmes for further education and individual courses in scientific subjects.	Außerordentliche Studien sind die Universitätslehrgänge und der Besuch einzelner Lehrveranstaltungen aus wissenschaftlichen Fächern.
"Non-degree seeking students" mean students admitted to non-degree programmes.	Außerordentliche Studierende sind die Studierenden, die zu den außerordentlichen Studien zugelassen sind.
"Degree programmes" mean diploma, bachelor, master and doctoral degree programmes	Ordentliche Studien sind die Diplomstudien, die Bachelorstudien, die Masterstudien und die Doktoratsstudien.
"Degree students" mean students admitted to degree programmes.	Ordentliche Studierende sind die Studierenden, die zu den ordentlichen Studien zugelassen sind.
Legal definitions from University of Applied Sciences study programme act FHStG	
Lehrgänge zur Weiterbildung	"Certificate University of Applied Sciences degree programmes for further education", "Non-degree programmes"
Ordentliche Studierende	Degree programme students
Außerordentliche Studierende	Non-degree seeking students
Ordentliche Studien sind Fachhochschul-Bachelorstudiengänge, Fachhochschul-Masterstudiengänge und Fachhochschul-Diplomstudiengänge. Außerordentliche Studien sind Lehrgänge zur Weiterbildung gemäß § 9 sowie der Besuch einzelner Lehrveranstaltungen.	Degree programmes mean University of Applied Sciences bachelor, master, and diploma degree programmes. Non-degree programmes mean certificate programmes for further education under § 9 and the attendance of individual courses.

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[19] Cf. stenographic protocol, nr. 588, as of 26.2.1997, from a reading at the national council proposing changes in § 17 (studium irregulare) of the then existing Universitäts-Studiengesetz (UniStG), own translation.

Master Degrees in Non-degree Programmes

Another specifity in Austrian higher education are the regulations enabling the award of a master degree for *Universitätslehrgänge* (universities) or *Lehrgänge für Weiterbildung* (universities of applied sciences): As it can be seen in the table above, "regular" studies (or, to keep with the translation of the Legal Information System, "degree programmes") are per definition diploma, bachelor, master or doctoral programmes (universities of applied sciences: bachelor, master and diploma). However, it is possible to combine the form of "non-degree programme" with a degree, following the regulation that "Master degrees in continuing education" mean internationally used degrees awarded to students who successfully complete certificate university programmes for further education, the admission requirements, scope and standards of which are comparable with those of similar master degree programmes abroad."[20] In practice this means that the point of reference for such "non-degree programmes leading to a master degree" are master programmes from an institution outside Austria, which need to meet a couple of features, mainly that of being a "recognized postsecondary institution". Of high relevance seems to us the formulation "the admission requirements, scope and standards of which are comparable". For universities of applied sciences, the conditions are similarly stating that access requirements, scope and qualifications need to correspond to a foreign master programme, but in addition, they can offer only programmes in the fields in which the university of applied science offers regular "degree programmes".[21]

Options to Recognize Nonformal and Informal Learning in Higher Education

In UG 2002 § 78 on "Recognition of Examinations" ("Anerkennung von Prüfungen"), the concept of "examinations" captures as forms of "prior learning" *a) credits from prior learning at other institutions, not necessarily HEIs* - for example, higher vocational schools, but from the formal educational system, and *b) learning from "activities" from prior work* (German: "Tätigkeiten"), covering "scientific" or "artistic" activities at "business establishments", "non-university establishments", or plainly "institutions outside the university" and provided that this learning leads to "preparatory scientific training" or "artistic pre-vocational training".[22] These results of prior learning, being it considered nonformal or informal, can be recognized if it is matching parts of the master programme for which they are brought in for recognition. Consequently and in compliance with § 59 UG 2002, such recognition should also lead to the shortening of the respective programme. As to the universities of applied sciences, the situation is similar: As stated in § 12 (2) FHStG "Recognition of documented knowledge" ("Anerkennung nachgewiesener Kenntnisse"), learning from outside the university can be recognized: "Specialist knowledge or experience from the job shall be taken into consideration for the recognition of courses or the professional practical training; this shall apply in particular to part-time degree programmes and parts of degree programmes."[23]

However, the area for which the validation of nonformal and informal learning is mostly discussed in Austria is that of access to higher education, for example, if the applicant does not have a general university entrance qualification allowing access to

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[20] UG 2002 §51 (2)

[21] See FHStG § 9. (1) "The providers shall be entitled to establish also certificate University of Applied Sciences programmes for further education in those fields for which they offer accredited University of Applied Sciences degree programmes. These certificate programmes for further education shall be integrated into the internal quality assurance and quality enhancement processes in an appropriate manner.
(2) In the curriculum of a certificate University of Applied Sciences programme for further education in the respective disciplines internationally common degrees may be laid down, which may be conferred upon the graduates of those certificate University of Applied Sciences programme for further education whose access requirements, scope and qualifications are comparable with the access requirements, scope and qualifications of corresponding foreign master degree programmes." Translation from the Austrian Legal Information System.

[22] See § 78 UG: "(…) wissenschaftliche Tätigkeiten in Betrieben oder außeruniversitären Forschungseinrichtungen, die eine wissenschaftliche Berufsvorbildung vermitteln entsprechend der Art der Forschungstätigkeit und der Forschungsprojekte der betreffenden Forschung" bzw. "künstlerische Tätigkeiten an Institutionen außerhalb der Universität, die eine künstlerische Berufsvorbildung vermitteln können."

[23] See § 12 (2) FHStG" Besondere Kenntnisse oder Erfahrungen aus der beruflichen Praxis sind in Bezug auf die Anerkennung von Lehrveranstaltungen oder des Berufspraktikums zu berücksichtigen; das gilt insbesondere für berufsbegleitend organisierte Studiengänge und Studiengangsteile"

higher education. One form lays in the so called Studienberechtigungsprüfung or "University entrance qualification examination", relevant for public universities for admission to degree programmes ("regular studies). Here, a candidate without university entrance qualification can apply under the condition that he/she is at least 20 years old and "can submit proof of the completion of professional or non-professional prior education that clearly goes beyond compulsory education for the studies aimed for."[24] The application is handed in at the rectorate of the university the candidate seeks to register in a certain study programme, providing personal information, the name of the programme the application wishes to study, the elective plus a statement on the number of failed university entrance qualification examinations, if any. The examination itself has to cover five exams: An essay on a general topic, two or three exams during which the prior knowledge of skills necessary for the study programme in question need to be demonstrated and one to two exams upon the candidates choice from the area of the study programme in question. Another type could be seen in admission examinations for certain fields in arts or sports in "regular studies" (degree programmes) at universities, as laid out in § 76 UG 2002, which aim at testing the candidates aptitude for artistic studies or for sports studies.

In relation to "non-degree programmes" (even if leading to a degree), or, as we would put it, continuing higher education programmes in public universities, § 70 (1) UG 2002 states: "Admission to non-degree programmes is conditional on proof that the applicant fulfils any requirements laid down in the curriculum of the certificate university programme for further education concerned."[25] This means that *each* curriculum of a *Universitätslehrgang*, whether it is leading to a university certificate or a master degree, has to define its specific admission criteria, which is done autonomously by the university. Thus, depending on the admission criteria defined - and here, related to the planned learning outcomes or qualification of the study programme - there can be programmes allowing to admit individuals without university entrance qualification and / or a first university degree, but it can be as well that only individuals with a first degree (and who in practice might be also in the possession of a second or even third cycle degree) can apply and be admitted to a certain programme. This also means that an institution could for example ask for the same entrance criteria in continuing higher education as in "regular" studies at master level.

Given all these requirements, it may make one wonder, why there is an ongoing discussion in Austria, whether master programmes in continuing higher education are in line with Bologna. Another observation is that many of the aspects shown here are often overlooked in practice: There is a low awareness that "non-degree programmes" make part of the educational offers of all higher education institutions, including the public universities; or the mere fact that these can lead to a degree and that admission criteria might just as the case for "regular" studies. For example, in a general information document on studying in Austria, the center for student services of a public Austrian university gives the following information: "Non-degree students are students who are not yet holding a secondary school leaving certificate. As a non-degree programme student you cannot receive an academic degree – this is only possible within the framework of a degree programme."[26] A similar example can be found on the website of the Austrian Students' Union, saying that a student studying in continuing higher education programms, it is not possible to receive a degree - this is only possible in the framework of regular studies"[27] The main point is that the terms "degree student" and "non-degree student" are misleading. All in all, the bottom line for making a difference

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[24] §35 (2) UG 2002: "Zur Studienberechtigungsprüfung sind Personen, die die Zulassung zu Studien einer Studienrichtungsgruppe an einer Universität anstreben, das 20. Lebensjahr vollendet haben und eine eindeutig über die Erfüllung der allgemeinen Schulpflicht hinausgehende erfolgreiche berufliche oder außerberufliche Vorbildung für das angestrebte Studium nachweisen, zuzulassen."

[25] "Die Zulassung zu den außerordentlichen Studien setzt den Nachweis der allfälligen im Curriculum eines Universitätslehrganges geforderten Voraussetzungen voraus"

[26] See website of students services at the University of Vienna, https://studentpoint.univie.ac.at/en/application/admission-without-school-leaving-certificate/non-degree-students/ accessed 15-01-2015

[27] Authors own translation: "Als außerordentliche/r HörerIn erlangst du im Rahmen deines Studiums keinen Studienabschluss – dies ist nur im Rahmen eines ordentlichen Studiums möglich." http://www.oeh.ac.at/#/studieren-leben/studieren/studieren-in-oesterreich/#c349

beside framing "außerordentliche Studien" as specifically continuing higher education is that of a) more freedom to define admission criteria in a certain curriculum, even though there is a limit to this due to the requirement to be comparable with admission criteria from a similar course abroad; and b) tuition fee, as in "irregular studies" (außerordentliche Studien) universities are allowed to raise tuition fees for programmes in continuing higher education (regardless if leading to a master degree or not). In relation to the "non-degree" programmes in continuing higher education at universities of applied sciences (Lehrgänge zur Weiterbildung), there is no special regulation on entrance requirements apart from the degree programmes.

LLL:2020 Strategy

Beside the legal regulations, the Austrian Strategy for Lifelong Learning provides another important frame condition in dealing with validation of nonformal and informal learning, as it is since its publication in 2011 an overarching point of reference for the whole sector of education and training, including higher education. It was agreed among four federal ministries (Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture; Ministry for Science and Research; Ministry for Economy, Ministry for Family and Youth; Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs), the social partners and key stakeholders.[28]

According to the strategy LLL:2020, the level of qualification so far is mainly considered on the basis of formal certificates, whereas the participation in seminars for continuing education as well as workplace learning has only little relevance. And this even despite the fact that especially the skills and competencies developed at work can be decisive for the fulfillment of a job. The strategy also states that there are several measures in place, but these instruments are not as much harmonized and also not embedded in an overarching general strategy. Instead, a lot is done autonomously at the institutional level and in different ways, missing systematic approaches and without sufficient coordination of responsibilities.[29]

The main aims or measures proposed to improve the situation are the following: a) to establish responsible bodies for qualification ("Qualifikationsverantwortlichenstellen") to ensure the implementation of the national qualification framework NQR; b) to redesign curricula (school and HE curricula) towards learning outcomes; c) to develop a national "validation strategy" for the broad recognition of non-formal and informal learning, including the relevant ministries, the federal states and the social partners; d) to implement models to sum up competencies, which take into consideration also outcomes from prior learning, including experiential learning and e) to build up capacities to conduct evaluations of competencies through trainings and the establishment of systems of quality assurance of these evaluation approaches.

The strategy is based on a set of guiding principles, benchmarks for the year 2020 and altogether 10 action lines with related measures for the implementation of the strategy.[30] Overall, the validation of nonformal and informal learning is a "central element" of this strategy and explicitly mentioned in action lines 5, 6, 7 and 10, of which action line 10 is the most prominent one, specifically dedicated to the recognition of nonformal and informal learning and including as one measure the the establishment of a national validation strategy.[31] The overall implementation of the strategy is coordinated by a "national platform 20:20", including representatives from involved ministries (currently 3 instead of 4, due to the reorganisation of some ministries after last parliamentary elections); social partner organisations, federal states, the Austrian Employment Service AMS and from higher education and from adult education. For the operationalisation, a task force was established with

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[28] European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014), p. 5
[29] Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen, p. 46
[30] European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014), p. 5 f.
[31] The Austrian country report 2014, however, mentions that there is doubt on the feasibility of such a validation strategy. See for further background European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014), p. 6

representatives of the involved ministries, for strategic steering of the development.[32] There are yearly implementation reports to the parliament, which give a very rough overview on the status of implementation from the previous year. It should be noted that if one is not involved directly in the process, there is up to now not much information available to a wider audience, giving visibility of the whole implementation process and raising awareness among society - for example, with a clear source of reliable information. From the Austrian country report provided for the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014, one can learn that the process for the development of a national validation strategy will be based on a status quo and needs analysis, which are currently carried out in the following three areas: Low-qualified people, VET and higher education, and here, the results are supposed to be integrated in the second quarter of 2014 in the context of a consultation process for developing the natioal validation strategy and the definition of relevant measures.[33] As of today, there is no yet public information available on the outcomes of this analytical work, neither of the defined measures.

National Qualification Framework and Learning Outcomes

Another important role for dealing with the recognition of nonformal and informal learning in Austria is the National Qualification Framework (NQR) and the orientation towards learning outcomes. Among the strategic aims and benchmarks of the Austrian Strategy of Lifelong Learning LLL:2020, nr. 12 is directly referring to the "validation of NIL", linking it directly to the NQR: "Implementation of the National Qualification Framework (NQR) until 2012 and to put into practice a validation strategy for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning until 2015.[34]

The objective of the NQR was to support LLL and recognize a broad range of learning, and here, nonformal and informal learning "should be given the same value as formal learning". As such, the NQR is seeking to map all qualifications, to include all forms of learning and should furthermore cover all sectors. Similarly to what has been said about the LLL:2020 strategy, there is much work in progress. The development of the NQR in Austria is organized in three strands or "sectors of learning", "corridors", which are corridor 1) formal qualifications system, corridor 2) qualifications from nonformal learning - as for adult education institutions not considered from formal learning, and corridor 3) informal learning. Work on informal learning started in autumn 2013, given the council recommendation for validation of nonformal and informal Learning, which will form the core of the work within corridor 3. In relation to corridor 2 - nonformal learning - criteria and procedures for allocating qualifications from the non-formal learning context towards the NQF were tested and simulated; furthermore, 15 qualifications were analysed. One of the main results was that further sharpening of the terminology is needed - for example, for qualification and qualification providers, and also, that there is an ongoing need for many institutions to describe their qualifications in learning outcomes so as to link them to the NQR.[35]

Of central relevance in the Austrian context in general and higher education in particular is the concept of learning outcomes, allowing to certify knowledge, skills and competencies developed outside formal educational settings and thus, to relate them in a transparent way to formal qualifications. A widely used definition of learning outcomes is that from the European Commission, which is for example also mentioned in the Principles and Guidelines on Offers for Continuing Education at Public Universities: "Learning outcomes are sets of competences, expressing what the student will know, understand or be able to do

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[32] European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014), p. 6

[33] European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014), p. 6

[34] Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen, Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur et al. (2011), p. 4

[35] European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014), p. 8

after completion of a process of learning, long or short. [...] Competences represent a dynamic combination of attributes, abilities and attitudes. They can be subject specific or generic."[36]

C) EXISTING PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

As to existing projects and initiatives, it should be noted that most of the examples or best practice in recent years as well as analytical work came from or was done with focus on vocational training and adult education, but not higher education. This is also true for several European projects with Austrian participation, as for example, Observal-net or the OECD RNFIL initiative (Recognition of nonformal and informal learning).[37] In this section, we would like to mention those initiatives dealing with higher education and of direct relevance to the topic: A study commissioned in 2007, the results of which were published in 2009; a project on "Quality assurance in continuing higher education", conducted between 2010-2012 and resulting in recommendations; and a project "Recognition of nonformally and informally developed competences in higher education", which is ongoing at the moment we are writing this report and conducted in the context of the development of the national validation strategy, an objective of LLL:2020 as explained earlier.

Study on VNIL in Public Universities and a Position Paper from uniko

In 2007, a study on the topic of recognition of nonformal and informal learning in Austrian universities was commissioned by the Austrian rectors conference (today, Universities Austria or "uniko"), substantiated by the observation that most work done by then was coming from the sector of vocational education and training and not "with an eye on the needs of the universities". This study is relevant insofar, as it calls for a special terminology in the context of higher education as described in see chapter A and with its focus on the topic of university entrance examinations. Furthermore, the study informed a position paper issued by uniko on non-formal and informal learning, thus representing one official viewpoint of the university sector within Austrian higher education. Several points are worth mentioning in this position paper. It highlights the importance of qualified staff for validation, for consulating, evaluation of documents or portfolios. Also, it is mentioned that it would be useful to define general key competences relevant for studying at a university. For bachelor studies, it might be enough to have one institution (or certifying body) handling this process, whereas for master and doctoral level, the postion paper states that here, the competencies should furthermore stay within the university itself. Underlined is the position that in the case that there is an enlarged access planned, universities will need additional funding, as the evaluation procedures will cause more costs for the development of assessments and the related certifications, a higher level of administrative work.[38]

Quality Assurance in Continuing Higher Education (2010 - 2012)

In 2010, the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance together with several higher education institutions initiated a project with the topic "Quality Assurance in Continuing Higher Education".[39] The aim was to develop a joint understanding of quality in continuing higher education ("non-degree programmes", see chapter B) and develop recommendations for the design of study programmes in this particular field, with special attention on programmes leading to a master degree. The project was financed by the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research, the overall project coordination was done by the Austrian Agency

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[36] Definition given in the Principles and Guidelines on offers for Continuing Education at Public Universities, as 24th of February 2014 (adapted version of the previous document from 2009); quoted from the ECTS User's Guide: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation ,System and the Diploma Supplement, published by the European Commission, DG for Education and Culture, Brussels, from 14.02.2005, page 12.
[37] In the scope of this initiative, a working group was set up to develop a national validation procedure at the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (bm:ukk) and a relevant systematic analysis was conducted, published in Zürcher 2007.
[38] Universitätenkonferenz (2009)
[39] AQA - Österreichische Qualitätssicherungsagentur (2012): "Qualitätsentwicklung der Weiterbildung an Hochschulen"

for Quality Assurance. All together eight HEIs participated in this project: Five public universities, one private university and two universities of applied sciences, plus several external experts.[40] The project design was based on literature and document analysis, self reports from the participating institutions on the topic, several workshops and the formulation of recommendations or guiding principles, some of which we will highlighted here, as they are of central importance for dealing with the validation of nonformal and informal learning: For the project group involved, the following self understanding is the stated: "regular studies" (degree programmes) and programmes in continuing higher education leading to a master degree ("non-degree programmes") differ in their target groups and consequently, in the didactic and organisational design of the programmes. However, as the project group states, both types of studies should be designed similarly. Furthermore, master programmes in continuing education should not be treated as second-class-master, including the way their participants are seen.[41] It is one of the recommendations that as a rule for admission to such a master programme in continuing education a first degree (bachelor or diploma) should be required. For individuals with "high level professional qualification or competences developed outside the university exceptions should be possible, but need special explanation and need to be done in coordination with the internal quality assurance requirements, and ensuring transparency". The evaluation of these requirements can be done based on individual competences - for example by qualifications of the applicant or based on prior professional qualification equivalent to the bachelor niveau.[42] Furthermore, the recommendations address the differentiation between *ordentlich* and *außerordentlich* discussed earlier in this report (chapter B), as this is seen misleading in international contexts, especially for those programmes awarding a master degree.[43] Other recommendations link directly to the NQR, stating that for programmes leading to a master degree, they should be at least corresponding to the descriptors of niveau 7.[44] In addition, study regulations for master programmes in continuing education, in relation to study and assessment requirements should correspond at least to those of "regular" master programmes.[45] It should be noted that many of these viewpoints are reflected in the legal framework anyway, demanding from each curriculum for a study programme in continuing education which is awarding a master degree, that in order to make this happen, the programme must be comparable with the admission requirements, scope and standards of similar master degree programmes abroad. All in all, it is our impression that the results of this project are of relevance insofar, as it was the conducted with different types of HEIs, thus getting a better understanding of the particularities of the sector and the topic. However, much of the requests are reflected in the legal basis anyway and the problem is less in to lose regulations than in general beliefs on continuing education programmes (non-degree), which is especially the case within public universities. We belief that therefore, the recommendations are rather cautious than visionary - and still much oriented towards formal conditions, putting the quality argument in front of many possible innovative solutions, thus softening the political (and also the philosophical) potential of more flexible approaches in higher education than this is possible keeping "traditional studies" (and the idea of "traditional students") as main point of reference.[46]

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[40] pSee AQA 2012. The participating institutions were: a) five public universities: Donau-Universität Krems, TU Graz, Universität Innsbruck, Universität Klagenfurt, Universität Wien, b) one private university: MODUL University Vienna, c) two universities of applied sciences: MCI Management Center Innsbruck and Fachhochschule des BFI Wien (AQA 2012: 9)

[41] AQA 2012, p. 15

[42] AQA 2012, p. 32

[43] AQA 2012, p. 18

[44] AQA 2012, p. 19

[45] AQA 2012, p. 15

[46] There are several studies pointing out how heterogenous the group of "traditional" students in reality is - with a large percentage of full-time students also working and, which is even more interesting, as shown in a study conducted by Pechar et al, students doing qualified work differently from what is assumed usually as typical student jobs. Another interesting aspect is the high estimate of students with a handicap, chronic physical or phsychological illnesses which call for revision of the concept of a traditional student. See mostly Pechar et al 1998 and 2012, and Markowitsch et al 2014.

Recognition and Accreditation of Nonformally and Informally Developed Competences in Higher Education - Processes and Methods

As described earlier, action line 10 of the LLL:2020 strategy sets as a target that knowledge, skills and competences developed outside traditional educational institutions, as it is the case with non-formal and informal learning, can be certified and that with the help of the NQR as an instrument it will be possible to relate them to formal qualifications. Another aim is to evaluate formal, nonformal and informal "educational processes" based on their learning outcomes and to anchor the mutual recognition and validation of qualifications between institutions and different sectors as a basic principle.[47] Thus, one of the concrete measures of LLL:2020 is the establishment of a validation strategy for nonformal and informal learning until 2015, so as to make informally and nonformally developed competences visible and ready to turn into credit, no matter where these competences have been developed.

For the moment this report is written, there are three projects ongoing on the topic of validation of nonformal and informal learning, the results of which will feed into the development of the national validation strategy. One of the projects is conducted in the field of higher education with the title *Anerkennung und Anrechnung non-formal und informell erworbener Kompetenzen an Hochschulen - Verfahren und Instrumente* ("Recognition and Accreditation of nonformally and informally developed competences in Higher Education - processes and methods). It is funded by the Austrian Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and coordinated by AQ Austria, the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation. As the project has only very recently started, we can give here only a short summary on the underlying assumptions of the project and the intended results: based on an analysis of the legal framework for validation of nonformally and informally developed competences, the point of departure is that Austrian HEIs have already developed processes and methods of recognition, mostly in the field of continuing higher education and among universities of applied sciences. In this context, the project aims at extrapolating and exchanging information on practices already in place, furthermore, it is planned to develop jointly models for instruments and procedures for the recognition and accreditation of nonformally and informally developed competences, keeping in mind aspects of quality assurance. The project design will be similar to the earlier project on quality assurance in continuing higher education, which means there will be several workshops, analytical work, a final report on the project expected by the end of 2015 and a handbook/guidelines to be presented in 2016. Differently from the previous project, representatives from the whole sector (public universities, private universities, universities of applied sciences and university colleges for teacher training) will be involved in this project.

D) ENGAGED UNIVERSITIES

As it has been described in the previous chapter, there is currently a national project ongoing in Austria, collecting and discussing practices of VNIL in higher education, looking both at instruments and processes at the institutional level. As this is an ongoing project, which only started in 2015 and will develop over the next months, this report is not informed by the observations and outcomes of this project serving as source for the development of the national validation strategy. Therefore, we will present in this chapter three examples for recognition of nonformal and informal learning, two of them (competence portfolio in Graz and wba) being often mentioned as best practice in the context of national country reports, as the case within the project observal-net or in the context of the European Inventory of validation of nonformal and informal learning. With

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[47] bm:ukk, bm:wf, bm:ask, bm:wfj (2011), p. 45

these examples, we intend to highlight a) approaches in the area of continuing higher education and b) examples of collaboration between different types of institutions. A general observation is that despite the existing legal framework allowing for the recognition of nonformal and informal learning in HE in Austria, notwithstanding its ambivalence, one can see that the topic and practices as such are still underrepresented. We had the impression that approaches for VNIL are rather prudent, especially when it comes to HE education in general and university continuing education in particular.

Danube University Krems - Prior and Current NIL Learning in Continuing HE

Danube University Krems was established as an institution dedicated solely to the area of "continuing higher education" (as discussed earlier - referring to the specific form and term of "außerordentliche Studien"), founded in 1994 and awarded the status of a public university in 2004. Differently from the other public universities, Danube University has its legal basis mainly in two laws: the University Act from 2002 as well as its own Federal "Law of the University for Continuing Education". As to the later, it defines "continuing higher education" as the main mission of the institution, while research is mentioned as contributing to the teaching and learning[48]. It is the only public university in Austria offering exclusively courses in continuing higher education - both on the level of short programmes (or "non-degree") as for master programmes ("degree programmes").[49] This focus on study programmes in continuing higher education is reflected in the profile of its students: the average age of its currently 8200 students is 40, of which more than 56% have at least 10 or more years of professional experience. There are currently 30% foreign students enrolled from altogether 91 countries, even though the largest share of these foreign students comes from Germany.[50]

At Danube University, recognition of nonformal and informal prior learning ist relevant in at least two respects: *(1) during equivalence evaluation*, to gain access to a master programme in continuing higher education, if the applicant does not have a university entrance qualification and/or first university degree; and *(2) to recognize relevant prior learning*, to integrate it into a study programme and as such, shortening it.

Recognition of nonformal and informal learning prior learning: integrating into study programmes

Differently from 1, which is relevant only for continuing higher education, the second form is relevant both for recognition of NIL in "regular" studies and continuing higher education. As already described in chapter B, according to UG 2002 § 78, it is possible to recognize "prior learning" or learning achievements from activities ("scientific" or "artistic" activities) at "business establishments", "non-university establishments", or plainly "institutions outside the university", provided that such activities (or one could say "learning") gave "preparatory scientific training" or "artistic pre-vocational training" and that this is matching the aims of the study programme.[51] Furthermore, such recognition should lead to the shortening of the programme, in line with § 59 UG 2002. These paragraphs apply also for continuing higher education. Within the university act, there is no further specification on the extent to which such prior learning can be recognized and integrated. However, since the change in the university act 2009, the master thesis itself is *per se* excluded from this option to integrate prior learning, which has been possible before. According to internal regulations at Danube University, this form of recognizing prior learning can make up to

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[48] See DUK law 2004, § 4 (1) "Die Universität für Weiterbildung Krems ist berufen, der im Zusammenhang mit Weiterbildung stehenden wissenschaftlichen Lehre und Forschung zu dienen" (...) and (...) "(2) Die Universität für Weiterbildung Krems erfüllt im Rahmen dieses Wirkungsbereiches insbesondere folgende Aufgaben: 1. Entwicklung und Durchführung von Universitätslehrgängen; 2. Wissenschaftliche Forschung zur Unterstützung der Lehre in den Universitätslehrgängen; (...)"

[49] In 2014, the university established PhD studies, which currently (March 2015) are in the process of accreditation.

[50] http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/de/universitaet/ueberuns/zahlen/index.php (accessed 14th of January 2015)

[51] See § 78 UG: "(...) wissenschaftliche Tätigkeiten in Betrieben oder außeruniversitären Forschungseinrichtungen, die eine wissenschaftliche Berufsvorbildung vermitteln entsprechend der Art der Forschungstätigkeit und der Forschungsprojekte der betreffenden Forschung" bzw. "künstlerische Tätigkeiten an Institutionen außerhalb der Universität, die eine künstlerische Berufsvorbildung vermitteln können."

max. 25% of a study programme, and it can also be done based on an individual evaluation followed by a substantiated explanation of the director of the programme for which the recognition is done.[52] Criteria for recognition of prior learning including nonformal and informal learning, cover the following aspects: only credits positively evaluated by the other institutions can be recognized and that the institution from which these credits are transferred is a formally recognized HE *or* non-academic educational institution as defined in paragraph 78 UG 2002. Another prerequisite is that the institution where credits (certificates) were issued, has to be able to show documentation of its educational offers over several years (not specified, how many years). This rule does not apply for newly founded institutions. All in all, the results should be recognized and transferred if they are equivalent to results foreseen in the curriculum for which the individual is asking for recognition, which means that the point of reference are the learning outcomes of the study programme. Another important aspect stated in the internal regulation is that prior learning should be "in line with state of the art in the respective scientific field".[53]

Recognition of prior nonformal and informal learning in the context of equivalence evaluation

As described above, admission criteria for continuing higher education, including those leading to a degree, are settled by the respective institution and for each particular curriculum. In practice, this means that there are master programmes in continuing higher education, where admission criteria cover not only a university entrance qualification and a first university degree, but also a number of years of professional experience, often also in defined areas relevant for the master programme. In practice, this produces a varied picture, including both master programmes in continuing higher education, where admission is only possible with a first degree, as well as there are master programmes in continuing higher education, where individuals can apply for admission without a university entrance qualification or a first degree. In this case, the university has regulations and procedures for matching competences needed for successful studying, which is an individual evaluation of qualification equivalence[54]. At Danube University, as a general principle, the assessment of applications for study programmes is done by the academic director of the master programme in question, which until 2014 included also the evaluation of qualification equivalence. However, in summer 2014, this process was slightly restructured in those cases, where the individual does not possess a BA degree and / or university entrance qualification. In these cases, the assessment continues to be done by the course director, his/her observations and recommendation as the documentation of the application and equivalence assessment are then cross checked by the vice rectorate for teaching and learning / continuing university education, where the final decision of admission is taken. For all other students in continuing higher education - for example, short programmes leading to the certificate of "academic expert"[55], but also for shorter programmes like "certified programs", this change in the process does not apply and the admission of students is conducted within the respective departments as usually.

Process for the individual equivalence evaluation at Danube University

The process consists of the following steps: Before the actual application for a certain master program, it is possible that the student sends his/her documents to the director of the master programme for a *pre-check* whether admission is feasible given the individual situation. For *application*, the prospect student sends all relevant documents to the department offering the master programme in question, where documents are collected and stored, in line with the provisions from the internal Quality Handbook. This is followed by the actual *evaluation of application by the director of the master programme*, followed by an

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[52] See guideline for recognition of study achievements (Richtlinie für Anerkennung von Studienleistungen), section 3; version published in the information bulletin of the university nr. 86/2014.
[53] Before the revision of the guideline in 2014, there was a limit to results from prior learning dating back more than five years, except for credits issued by the institution itself.
[54] German: "Feststellung der gleichzuhaltenden Qualifikation"
[55] German "akademische/r Experte/in", a specific Austrian type of academic certificate in continuing higher education, if the amount of ECTS of a programme is at least 60 ECTS.

invitation of the applicant to an interview conducted along a guideline and followed by an evaluation of the competences. If the outcome of this subject-specific evaluation from the viewpoint of professional requirements of the master programme is "negative", the application is denied. If "positive", but also in case of doubts, the director of the respective master programme issues a "request for admission to the master programme". This document includes the application form "individual assessment for admission" ("Individuelle Zulassungsprüfung"), ending with a recommendation of the programme director, whether the student should be admitted or not. Furthermore, the document "granting admission to the master programme" ("Studienplatzerteilung") is created and these are, together with the application form, CV, letters of intent, copies of degrees etc. are forwarded to the *Center for Student Services (SSC) for a formal check*, covering the completeness of the application file and whether the regulation of notarization, requirements towards the institutions issuing degrees of the applicant as well as country specific requirements for assessing documents have been respected. The file is then forwarded to the vice rectorate of teaching and learning / continuing higher education, where the evaluation of the programme director is reviewed based on the documents provided, followed by the decision whether the student is admitted or not. In the case of negative evaluation, the applicant is not admitted. Also, it is possible that additional requirements are defined for the applicant to meet admission criteria.

The individual admission assessment form accompanying the process covers the following sections: *1) information about the applicant* (name, date of birth, nationality); *2) information about the master programme* in question (title, registration nr. of the programme, name of the degree according to the curriculum, nr. of the information bulletin, in which the curriculum was published); *3) information on the admission criteria* according to which the applicant is supposed to by admitted, as stated in the respective curriculum; *4) statement from the director of the master programme*, including information on the interview with the applicant and the applicants documents, whether there is clear proof of the existing qualification of the candidate for equivalence and that he/she will be able to master his/her studies, also based on the competences demonstrated during application, in relation to the envisaged learning outcomes of the master programme in question. This part of the document includes all information on additional learning agreed to be necessary during the application process, it ends with a statement whether the candidate can be admitted or that admission is seen critically and additional evaluation should be done by the vice rectorate of teaching and learning / university continuing education. *Section 5 covers the vice rectorates decision* (admission/no admission), signed by the vice rector herself. *Section 6 ("annexes") includes relevant information and documentation* brought in by the candidate to proof equivalent qualification, including the university entrance qualification, relevant professional experience (specifically stated with leadership positions) as well as information on relevant education and training, informing about the type of training/education as well as the type of provider and the duration. Here, it should be noted that for all these statements, proof should be given, the mere mentioning in the CV is not considered to be enough. This part of the form includes also a section for the outcomes of the document assessment conducted by SSC and its conclusion: whether documentation is acceptable or insufficient from a formal point of view.

General aspects in the individual admission assessment for evaluating qualification equivalence

According to estimates of the vice rectorate, approximately 800 students, which is a share of 10% at Danube University went through this evaluation of qualification equivalence, of which about one half did not have a university entrance qualification, whereas the second half is in the possession of a university entrance qualification, but not of a first university degree.

During a revision of the evaluation process in summer 2014, relevant for applications as from winter term 2014/15, the following criteria have been highlighted by the vice rector for teaching and learning/university continuing education: Of central

relevance is that for admission to a master programme competences should correspond niveau 6 of the European Qualification framework (EQR), to which bachelor is referenced. Furthermore, niveau 7 for competences at master level should give orientation - and here, more precisely, the ability to write a master thesis is at stake. The evaluation of competences developed and relevant to demonstrate equivalence should be based on professional experience and education and training, which needs to be proven, furthermore, based on the interview with the applicant and, if relevant, outcomes of assessments. Criteria as 4 or 8 years of professional experience are seen as rather general admission criteria, which should not automatically lead to the statement of equivalence, but need individual evaluation. In this process of evaluation, the academic director of the master programme in question plays a pivotal role, providing the perspective of the academic field, knowing the requirements of the master programme. He/she should link the observations from the evaluation to the EQR niveau and state also, if there are subject specific documents or other proof relevant for the master programme in question. In addition to standard instruments for evaluation described above (providing information in the application process being the basis for the application interview based on a guideline), there is a variety of additional instruments used in practice, like competence charts or e-portfolios. Also, there are several modes of supporting students without university entrance qualification and / or first degree: for example, pre-camps or extra courses are provided to develop skills in doing research, research methodology and writing.[56]

Recognizing formal, non-formal and informal learning: "prior" is key. Some thoughts on current NIL

For the context of Austrian higher education, it can be stated that "prior" learning is key, either recognized during equivalence evaluation for admission, or in order to avoid doubling in study programmes, when knowledge, skills and competences are already developed through learning outside the HEI. What is rarely mentioned in the discussion, if at all, is the integration of current nonformal and informal learning into formal learning as a proxy, as possible with internships or practical sessions. This is interesting insofar, as for example at universities of applied sciences in Austria, internships are obligatory for bachelor studies and diplomas[57]. This could be seen as an approach linking learning outside the institution with formal learning, as it is fully integrated in the curriculum, whereas the skills and competences are developed in the "world of work". This aspect is also highlighted in the already mentioned position paper of the uniko on principles and recommendations in continuing education at public universities, stating for quality standards in this field that "ECTS also cover those parts of study programmes related to the professional activity (for example, internships, observations and analytical work on professional processes etc.), if these are part of the curriculum."[58] Another example is the didactical principle at Danube University with its central understanding of its students being "professionals" with a rich experience, and the link between work and studies as a prerequisite for the programmes ("reflective practitioner").[59]

Competence Portfolio Model from the University of Graz

Another interesting example mentioned as an Austrian case study in the framework of "OBSERVAL-net" is the Competence Portfolio Model ("Kompetenzportfolios") developed by the Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer at the University of Graz. Central to the approach is the idea that an individual biography is a lifelong learning process of competence development. Here, competences are understood as "not only acquired during school, studies and vocational training, but also

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[56] Cf. meeting protocol of the regular round table of study programme directors at Danube University, 8th of October 2014

[57] See FHStG § 3 (2) "(...) Within the framework of the University of Applied Sciences bachelor degree programmes and the University of Applied Sciences diploma degree programmes the students shall be required to attend a practical course on the job, which shall constitute a relevant part of the training. The period of studies shall not be extended by the duration of the practical course."

[58] Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz (2014), p. 3

[59] German "didaktisches Leitbild", see http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/de/universitaet/ueberuns/didaktisches-leitbild/index.php

during leisure activities, family duties, work and internships."[60] In order to give visibility to such competences, workshops are conducted for students to identify and describe their competences, a process which is supported by an online platform. Furthermore, the approach aims not only at documenting and formulating competences developed in different environments, but also to describe the transfer and application of competences between different environments. An special role in the application of the competence portfolio play so called "competence portfolio coaches": they support students in their process of self-reflection, to reconstruct their daily activities and reflect on the different learning pathways.

Within the University of Graz, the model was so far adapted for language teachers at the Language Centre of the University ("*treffpunkt sprachen")*, or, to give another example, at the Institute for Business Education. Here, the model was adapted towards the "eCompetenceDevelopmentPortfolio" and is embedded in the curriculum of the master programme "Business education" and used during in several semesters throughout the course. But also outside the university several partner institutions are applying the model, both in higher education, but also outside. Examples from higher education are the University of Applied Sciences Carinthia (UoAS Carinthia) and the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz. The UoAS Carinthia uses the approach within the continuing education course "Pedagogy for professions in the health sector", where the model is integrated in an accompanying course for the professional internship students have to take. As such, it is used for the development of a personal competence profile as educationalist, supporting students reflection on their personal teaching competences during their professional internship. At the University of Music and Performing Arts, the model is applied in the context of career services as a tool for creating an artist's portfolio.[61] Examples from other sectors are the Federal State Government of Styria, but also some higher vocational and general education schools.

All in all, it can be said that even though emphasize is made to the different opportunities and positive aspects to use the approach for career counselling, for job applications and such, there are some examples where the model supports the recognition of competences developed "outside" the institution, being it from prior nonformal or informal learning, internships along studies and alike. The model appears strongly as a tool for reflective learning - no matter if past or current - embedded in HE curricula, thus bridging in the framework of the respective curriculum knowledge from "outside" and inside the institution based on reflection.[62]

wba Diplomas in Continuing Higher Education

An example of particular interest is linked to the often cited best practice example for the validation of nonformal and informal learning: the Academy of Continuing Education (Weiterbildungsakademie "wba"), existing since 2007 and which was awarded the Validation Prize 2013 in the framework of the Observal-net project, considered to be one of the most innovative and promising initiative in the area of validation of nonformal and informal learning.[63] In a nutshell, wba recognises formal, non-formal and informal learning of individuals working in the sector of adult education. Based on a framework curriculum providing what is seen as professional standards, they get credits for their skills and competences. Competences are documented in an e-portfolio and missing competences can be acquired at different educational establishments for adults. It should be noted that the wba itself does not offer courses, but accredits courses from other organisations of adult education. Apart from so called "status-quo evaluations", individuals can opt for either the wba certificate "certified adult educator" or the

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[60] Authors translation. "Kompetenzen werden nicht nur während Schul-, Studium- und Ausbildungszeiten erworben, sondern auch Freizeitaktivitäten, Familienarbeit, berufliche Erfahrungen und Praktika tragen zum Kompetenzerwerb bei." Cited from project website http://portfolio.uni-graz.at/doku.php?id=portfolio:ueber, accessed 8th of July 2014

[61] http://portfolio.uni-graz.at/doku.php?id=portfolio:partner, accessed 19th of January 2015

[62] See previou foot note, cited from project website; See also the description of the Austrian case study from 2013, available under http://www.observal-net.eu/content/austria-case-study-2013-competence-portfolio-model-university-graz, accessed 19-09-2014

[63] European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014), p. 16

wba diploma "graduate adult educator", covering the specialisation in one of four fields of adult education: teacher/trainer, education manager, counsellor and librarian[64]. Until August 2013, there have been 1.095 status-quo evaluations carried out and 633 wba certificates and 152 wba diplomas were issued.[65] The validation approach of wba has been described elsewhere in detail[66], therefore, we would like to outline here only the most relevant aspects linked to the topic of recognition of nonformal and informal learning in higher education: Both the certificate and the diploma are acknowledged in the continuing education master programme "Adult education/Continuing education" at the University of Klagenfurt in the following ways. The diploma can serve as a recognized prerequisite for the admission to the programme; furthermore, up to 15 ECTS can be recognized from either the wba certificate or diploma, which leads to a shortening of the study programme.[67] Thus, prospect students have the chance to integrate in university studies also skills and competences developed prior to and, more importantly, outside higher education including competences developed in their practice as professionals.

E) ASSESSMENT

As to the general impression on the stage of validation non-formal and informal learning in higher education in Austria, this seems rather in the very beginning and so far, much related to the sector of continuing higher education programmes and the universities of applied sciences. Other examples are position papers from stakeholders like uniko, showing that at policy level (for example, as uniko for the public universities) clear statements are given, especially to mention here the national LLL:2020 strategy with explicit reference to validating non-formal and informal learning, including in HE. Also, a national validation strategy is underway, but this process has only started. Given all this, we would see the following challenges for the aspirations to put the validation of non-formal and informal learning into practice in Austria:

1) *Differentiation between "regular"/"degree-programms and "non-degree" programmes in Austrian HE,* which is an issue of "recognizing" different forms of HE on its own. One might think that Danube University, being specialized in continuing HE, could be in a leading position to push further developments to implement more flexible pathways, but instead the university so far is applying a rather prudent approach. This is highly linked to a specific problem of ensuring the university's own reputation of being a real "university". In any case, it should be stressed that given the the differentiation between "ordentlich" and "außerordentlich" is not only misleading in international context, but also within the national context.

2) *Fragmentation of the HE system in Austria and linked to this the reputation of a "real HEI"* is another "challenge". Here, different types of HEIs have not only a different legal basis and struggle with different forms of being recognized as more or less relevant institution in HE ("higher" or "lower" levels of HE – in terms of more or less academic HE instead of different forms and framework conditions for HE. The Pedagogical HEIs are a case in point for this; unfortunately, different legal frameworks, legal and financial conditions are perpetuating this functional differentiation even further, as that of differentiation of reputation and (academic) credibility.

3) *Ensuring quality for HEIs working under market conditions* is another challenge, closely linked to the first and the second point in the context of continuing higher education in Austria, which might be highly relevant also for countries where tuition fees are an important basis for the income of the institution. Biased by the problem of tuition fees: A fear is that through the

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[64] European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014) p. 15 f.
[65] European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014), p. 24
[66] Elaborated descriptions of the wba approach can be found in the wba case study for the European Inventory on validation of nonformal and informal learning 2010 provided by Prokopp & Loumi-Messerer 2010b as well as in the recently published country report on Austria, see European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014) and in Steiner 2010.
[67] See information material of the study programme available under http://www.uni-klu.ac.at/ulg/eb/downloads/ULG_EB_Folder2013.pdf, accessed 29-1-2015

validation of nonformal and informal learning from outside the formal educational context, this could be misused by the institutions to make profit (selling qualifications, "diploma mills").

4) How to do validation professionally, especially under the aspect of "quality" and thus, ensuring reputation and trust in the professional standards of the institution doing it, seems highly relevant to us: Who is involved in validation processes within an institution and how can processes be set up in a way that knowledge about approaches or methodologies to validate non-formal and informal learning is well anchored in the institution? What sort of trainings for the development of HR are provided (or not)? It is our observation that this topic is highly connected to personal beliefs on what higher education is supposed to be, how things should be done (or not) and consequently, we think that a profound training (or qualification) is needed at institutional level, covering not only procedural, legal or political aspects, but reflection on "knowledge": Where it comes from, how it is developed; in sum: a good portion of learning theory.

5) Ensuring resources (financial resources) Costs and resources related to the establishment of validation procedures should not be underestimated: This aspect was raised in the uniko position paper, mostly related to the question of how to organize validation processes in a *professional* way, to ensure financial resources for assessments and certification, including the administrative work involved.[68]

6) Reflection on the value of knowledge, skills and competences from outside academia. One general challenge seen in Austria as elsewhere might also be an issue in Russia: Even if the "political will" and legal frameworks are existing, to recognize (validate) nonformal and informal learning in higher education takes still a lot of communication and time to make this change. To make this more clear: What is often overlooked is the question on what is at stake? Is it the discipline, the institution and its reputation, the academic, the individual student? If both academic staff and administrative staff from within the HE institution actually belief themselves in the approach of validating competences developed non-formally/informally. This struggle can be found within public universities, when there are special departments responsible for continuing higher education and their relevance and reputation in relation to the rest of the university, but also, as the case with Danube University being specialized as a whole institution for continuing higher educatinon, and its relevance and reputation in relation to the other institutions (universities). The same is relevant for the acceptance from the world of work: Whether the idea to "combine" or put in line skills and competencies developed outside university education with (formal) higher education would sound reasonable. In all these cases, emphasis is on knowledge (skills, competences) developed *outside academia* being "good enough" or "equally good" to be combined with "academic knowledge" and even more, with an academic degree.

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[68] Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz (2009), p.2

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ACRONYMS

AQA	Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance
AQ Austria	Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQR	European Qualification Framework
FHStG	University of Applied Sciences Studies Act
LLL:2020	Austrian Strategy for Lifelong Learning LLL:2020
NQR	National Qualification Framework
UG	University Act
uniko	Universities Austria	Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz
UoAS	University of Applied Sciences