

# **Desk research about learning outcomes for prior learning recognition to see recent situation**

## **Toolkit for RPL**

### **Task A1 – IO1: Learning Outcomes Report in structured matrixes**

#### **Report – Austria**

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## Main characteristics of the adult education and training system

### What is meant in the country when you talk about adult education?

In Austria, adult education is an area that is huge, greatly differentiated and constantly changing – perhaps even more so than all other areas of the education sector. Adult education holds an independent position in the Austrian educational system, both quantitatively and qualitatively. It furthermore comprises various actions, such as teaching, supervision of groups, counseling, guidance, education management and library services.

Educational activities referred to as “adult education” or “continuing vocational training” is mainly defined in terms of age and previously received education. If some initial (vocational) education or training has been completed and is followed by another educational phase, one usually speaks of adult education, continuing vocational training, further education etc.

### What is typical for adult education in the country?

In Austria, adult education and training is less a “system” and more a “field” with many different structures. This field is played on by various government institutions, NGOs and private institutions, with the majority of educational offers being provided by NGOs, institutions run by the social partners and commercial providers.

The government and its institutions usually only subsidize adult education rather than provide it. The federal act on the promotion of adult education and public libraries of 1973 (amended in 1990 and 2003) lists the institutions which may receive funds to provide adult education. These institutions provide public educational offers and have signed “target agreements” with the Austrian federation. This structure is the framework for steering adult education according to a model of governance.

For the past 20 years, one of the main topics of adult education has been professionalization. While providers of adult education can choose from a vast array of qualification offers, there is no

standardized training course for professionals yet. The last years have seen strong efforts to increase professionalization on an organizational level (e.g. Ö-Cert quality certificate for adult education providers) and on a personal level (Weiterbildungsakademie – Austrian Academy of Continuing Education, an institution which acknowledges and certifies competences of adult education professionals).

Another typical feature of the Austrian situation is that the entirety of extra-occupational training at universities and schools is widely not being seen as part of formal adult education (and therefore does not appear in the common statistics).

### **Legal basis**

In 1973, the Austrian parliament passed a federal law on financial support for adult education, libraries and government related institutions (Adult Education Promotion Act). In addition, there are federal laws on vocational matriculation examinations, on access to higher education and on mandatory school-leaving qualifications. Another important legal basis is article 15a of the Federal Constitutional Act, which allows the Austrian federation and the 9 federal provinces to form binding agreements on matters within their respective scope of responsibility.

Quantitatively, laws and regulations concerning the job market are very influential. The Labor Market Promotion Act, for example, contains regulations on the (further) education of employees, job seekers, migrant workers and persons with physical disabilities. Since 2011, Austria pursues a political strategy on life-long learning (LLL:2020), which is directed by a 'task force'. Several Ministries including the Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs provide annual evaluation reports to document how far the benchmarks are achieved.

### **Providers of Adult Education**

Austria boasts a vast and variegated landscape of adult education providers. Although there is no valid statistical data available, it is estimated that there are several thousand providers. The Ö-Cert website lists 1.107 providers (349 providers with 758 local branches)

who have received the Ö-Cert quality seal (as of 30th June 2015, List of Quality Providers).

These providers can be grouped as follows:

- NGOs (grassroots organizations and associations supported by public bodies)
- Institutions run by the social partners (the Chambers of Commerce, Labor and Agriculture and the trade unions)
- Institutions run by religious organizations
- Public and private libraries
- Institutions run by local authorities and municipalities (such as evening schools, the Federal Institute for Adult Education (Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung – BIFEB) and some community colleges)
- Commercial providers (companies and individuals/trainers)
- Companies which provide in-house trainings
- Institutions run by the political parties
- Institutions founded by the Labor Market Board (AMS)

## Finances

Continuing education is financed by companies, from public budgets (including labor market funds) and by the learners themselves, with companies constituting the major part. As there is no financial monitoring on a yearly basis we have to go back to numbers from recent years.

Further education spending			
	Companies	Public institutions	Private institutions
Euros	1,341 M €	547 M €	937 M €
in %	44,7%	19,4%	33%

## State-of-the-art of the recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning

### Recognition of adult education in Austria

The recognition of and assessing credit for non-formal and informal learning and the related competences and qualifications are addressed by the framework of the strategy for life-long learning in Austria (LLL:2020). The target for developing a cross-sector strategy for the validation of non-formal and informal learning was reached in autumn 2017. It complies with the Council's recommendations from 2012.

Formal educational qualifications from the primary, secondary, vocational and higher education sectors have traditionally been highly regarded in Austria. This is not least due to the highly distinctive and diverse formal and legally defined opportunities for accessing higher education (university entrance qualification exams, vocational matriculation examination, and apprenticeship with school leaving examinations). University entrance is additionally possible with a completed professional apprenticeship, including relevant professional experience.

Even though competences acquired through informal means – e.g. at the workplace, in one's free time or in the course of volunteer work – have not yet received sufficient attention or recognition, the concept of life-long learning outside of institutionalized and formalized learning spaces has gained a significant degree of attention in Austria.

Attention is being paid not only to formal means of knowledge transfer, but also to a range of individual learning pathways.

With its Strategy LLL:2020, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research is pursuing the following targets over the long term:

- Promotion of broader societal awareness of the importance of competences regardless of the learning context
- Removal of barriers to education and simplifying entry into the educational and training system and acquiring educational qualifications later in life
- Improving the openness of the Austrian education system

- Increasing the appreciation of competences gained in non-formal or informal contexts

An example of an effort to support all people working in the field of adult education (e.g., trainers, counselors, librarians, educational managers) for whom no single formal vocation exists is the Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich – WBA). This academy, which collaborates with all major adult education providers in Austria, sets standards in the form of a curriculum, and people can undergo a process of validating their formally, non-formally and informally acquired competencies. The recognition is validated in a two level process, graduates achieve the WBA-certificate and as a next step the WBA diploma if they comply with the requirements of the curriculum.

Important developments of the last years were:

- “Initiative Erwachsenenbildung”: A joint initiative of the federation and the provinces for the promotion of basic formal degrees for adults, which enables youths and adults to resume their education for free.
- Academy of Further Education (WBA): Checks, recognizes and certifies competences of adult education professionals according to defined standards.
- Ö-Cert: A quality framework for institutions (see quality system / insurance)
- National strategy on lifelong learning “LLL:2020” (see legal basis)

## Description of the recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning process

In the last decade, the acknowledgement of competencies has become a major aim of Austria's lifelong learning strategy. Different procedures and instruments were developed to this end, for instance an instrument following the Swiss model of chance qualification (Chance Qualifikation - CH-Q), a competence assessment model ("Kompetenzenbilanz") and a competence management system for people with a migration background in Upper Austria that also follows the model of CH-Q. None of these instruments is yet formally implemented in the Austrian educational system for recognition and assessment.

The recognition of competences acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning is of significance with regard to the admission or the certificate required for admission to a degree program as well as concerning the act of crediting which leads to shorter study periods.

Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (WBA, <https://wba.or.at>) is a validation system for the qualification and recognition of adult education. Qualifications are recognized according to set standards based on qualification profiles.

Launched in 2007 WBA acknowledges prior learning results and offers guidance and counselling as far as the acquisition of missing skills is concerned.

Learners can submit competences and practical experience acquired in various ways and with different types of proofs. These supporting documents are assessed on the basis of the WBA qualification profiles and then acknowledged. Lack of competences can be made up by attending further courses or by submitting further evidence. WBA graduates receive a recognised WBA certificate or diploma.

Up to date adult education in Austria is still a heterogeneous field and difficult to compare, WBA sets standards and fosters the professionalization of the Austrian adult education. It does not offer further education programmes itself but accredits suitable courses offered by various institutions throughout Austria. Practical



experience is a prerequisite for a certification by WBA. Its working system can be defined in 5 steps. These are:

- Reviews and acknowledges competences of adult educators according to defined standards.
- Awards a two-stage degree with certificate and diploma.
- Supports the transparency between adult education, university education and continuing education.
- Acknowledges educational offers without being an education provider itself.
- Continuously contributes to the professionalization and the increased quality of adult education.

During the developments and ensuring the quality standards, it constitutes an important step towards the professionalization of Austrian adult education enabling those taking part in its certification process to obtain a certificate or diploma widely recognized within the profession.

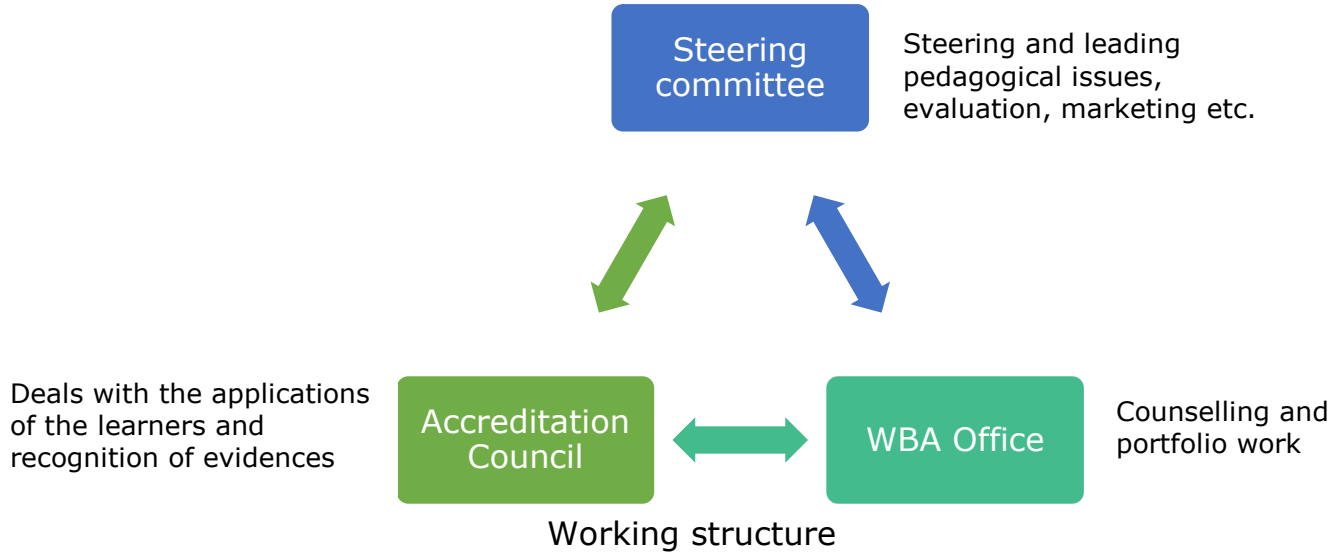
WBA is supported by all ten major Austrian adult education umbrella organizations (called as KEBÖ-institutions) recognizes formally acquired competences as well as competences that have been obtained in non-formal or informal ways.

This RPL certificate / diploma include the following specifications:

- It is a trans-institutional, European oriented adult education qualification.
- It can be acquired whilst working and gaining practical experience, without a predetermined time limit.
- It acknowledges competences that have already been obtained and also those acquired non-formally and informally.
- It fosters professional further development and positioning in the job market.
- It enhances the identity as a profession in the sector.
- It provides the opportunity as certified/graduated professional.

## Prerequisites

A completed vocational education (eg. apprenticeship) or a school qualification, above compulsory secondary school level is required. Hands-on experience in the sector must be proven.



The recognition process can be divided into three stages:

1. **Status quo evaluation:** After registration and payment of the fee for the status quo evaluation, candidates have access to their login area to fill personal online portfolio. They submit relevant proofs to their online portfolio and send a copy via post to WBA. One of the advisors handles the proofs, comparing them to the set of standards for the qualification profiles.

After approval by the accreditation board (called status-quo-evaluation), candidate has option for the certificate or end the recognition process.

2. **WBA certificate:** After the status-quo-evaluation, candidates clarify with their personal advisor the requirements for a successful qualification as a certified professional have already been fulfilled and which is still missing. Thereafter an education plan is established.

The candidates are missing qualifications. The advisor provides support with regard to the selection of appropriate offers.

The certification workshop is a three day assessment including a test on theory. Attendance is compulsory.

During the assessment, competences of the candidates are assessed. The certification workshop has examination.

After the attendance of the certification workshop and the submission of all the missing competences, a WBA certificate is awarded. Candidates have option for the diploma.

3. WBA diploma: Candidates subsequently fill their competence gaps. Again the advisor provides support in the selection of appropriate offers.

In order to graduate with a diploma, candidates have to write a thesis that is project-based or related to their practical experience. Candidates present substantiate reflexive competence with respect to their practical experience.

The practical experience or project-based thesis can be submitted in two different ways:

- a) Candidates submit a practical experience or project-based thesis written in the context of an continuing educational course. A prerequisite is that the submitted thesis is expertly appraised and that it meets the required WBA standards. After an examination by an external expert the thesis is either acknowledged or rejected.
- b) Candidates compose a written thesis. An expert guides him/her through the writing process and appraises the thesis when completed. The accompaniment and appraisal is carried out by an external expert and is subject to the payment of a charge of € 250.

The final oral exam (called colloquium) constitutes the last step towards graduation. When all of the competences have been completed and approved by the accreditation board, candidates can take the final exam. During the "colloquium" they present their thesis and describe their relevance to their work. The members of the commission pose questions concerning the written

thesis and lead a discussion on topics of relevance to professional area.

At the end of the exam the WBA diploma is awarded.

Processes of recognition (WBA Certificate) are:

1. Portfolio work for identifying competences
2. Comparing competences with WBA curricula
3. Status quo evaluation
4. Guidance (but no courses provided)
5. Handing in of further proofs
6. Certification workshop
7. Degree

Its average duration is 8 months.

## Conclusions

*"The acquisition of knowledge in classic education institutions such as schools and higher education institutions is complemented by learning at non-formally organised learning facilities. Acquired skills and competences are recognized and certified as qualifications regardless of where they were obtained, and are equal to non-formally and informal education processes.*

*The consistent orientation towards learning results provides people who have acquired important competences outside of school and higher education institutions with greater possibilities in education and their careers and lead to the permeability of the education and further education system."*

*Vision of the 10th action line of the Austrian Lifelong Learning Strategy1.*

There are good applications inside the Austria for the recognition of prior learning for the non-formally and informally acquired competences. Main responsible organization is Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (WBA) and it applies 7 main process for the certification (as basic degree) or diploma (as specific degree) but there is a limitation for the learning outcomes and competences because WBA's certification or diploma work is limited for teachers/trainers, counselors, educational managers and librarians/informational managers.

Educational Theory	Teaching Skills	Social Skills
Practical Experience	Educational Management Skills	
Certification Workshop	Counselling Skills	Personal Skills
	Library and Information Management Skills	

Required competences of WBA diploma for teachers/trainers, counselors, educational managers and librarians/informational managers

This project can increase the EQF based RPL needs for the following procedures to use in Austria:

- Integration into adult education strategy
- Develop suitable quality assured procedures
- Ensure transparency
- Develop regulations and provide information
- Define the responsibilities
- Ensure documentation and monitoring
- Transfer information to consultants
- Provide applications
- Interact positively with applicants

Project's outputs can significantly shape by the developments in Austrian and European education and social politics according to the following topics:

- Lifelong learning
- Professionalization
- Quality assurance
- European and national qualification frameworks
- Governance