



TRANSFINE

TRANSfer between Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education

Phase 2

Country Studies ESTONIA

December 2002 - February 2003

Aune Valk, Aili Saluveer, Ülle Kesli, Kaja Karo (University of Tartu);
Terje Haidak, Anne Kivimäe (Ministry of Education and Research);
Eda Anton (Tartu Centre of Vocational Training)

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Aune Valk, Aili Saluveer, Ülle Kesli, Kaja Karo,
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Edited by Aili Saluveer

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University of Tartu, Distance Education Centre

Lossi 24, 51003 Tartu, ESTONIA

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SUMMARY and BACKGROUND

The given research has been carried out by the University of Tartu in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Research who supported with information, contacts and finances for additional personnel costs and organising conference (29 500 EEK).

Period: December 2002 - February 2003.

Workgroup consisted of 7 people:

- Aune Valk (University of Tartu)
- Aili Saluveer (University of Tartu)
- Ülle Kesli (University of Tartu)
- Kaja Karo (University of Tartu)
- Terje Haidak (Ministry of Education and Research)
- Anne Kivimäe (Ministry of Education and Research)
- Eda Anton (Tartu Centre of Vocational Training)

Participants:

The given spheres were subject to a thorough research:

- Voluntary and Youth Sector- 9 sets of questions + interviews
- General Education - 10 sets of questions + 30 representatives in focus group discussion
- Vocational Education - 16 sets of questions
- Higher Education - 16 sets of questions + 25 representatives in focus group discussion
- Adult Education - 10 sets of questions + interviews on the phone
- Employers and Social Partners - 5 sets of questions + 5 representatives in focus group discussion

Viewpoints of individuals and of governmental institutions and attitudes towards a uniform European system were investigated in the course of group work and panel discussion during the conference that also introduced initial results of research in Estonia. A follow up small survey was made among governmental institutions and individuals.

Methods of research:

- written sets of questions
- interviews
- meetings of focus groups
- group-work (in conference)
- panel discussion (in conference)

BACKGROUND

Starting the reform of higher education according to the principles of Bologna Declaration in 2001, Estonian Universities recognised the need for accreditation of prior formal learning. Being the second reform during last 10 years, it brought along many new qualifications that differed from the previous ones both in purpose as well as the length of studies.

Until 1992 higher education studies in Estonia lasted for 5 years, followed by studies for Candidate of Sciences. The highest degree - Doctor of Sciences was normally obtained only after decades of research. In the beginning of nineties new system: 4 years for Bachelor, 2 years for Master, and 4 years for PhD was introduced. Previous higher education diploma obtained in 5 years was made equal to new Bachelor education. Candidate of Sciences as well

as Doctor of Sciences got both the same rights as new PhDs. Introducing 3+2 system for Bachelor's and Master's degree opened the discussion again.

However, this is just one aspect that promoted the discussion around accreditation of prior learning and also work-experience.

Needs for working out regulations and tools related to Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL^{*}) are:

- increase in the number of adult learners in formal education (e.g. students acquiring higher education, not interrupting their work) - during last 6 years the number of students in Estonian universities has doubled from ca 30000 to ca 60000. Most of the new students are adults who felt that their education obtained during Soviet time is out of date and came to the university to continue and update it at the Master's level. There are also many people whose 5 years studies were interrupted and who officially have still secondary education. Many people had to exchange their jobs due to the big changes both in political as well as economic life. In a quickly changing society there are many other reasons why adult people with considerable learning and working experience have to come back to the universities;
- vocational schools were reformed into applied higher educational institutions - many previous vocational non-HE institutions were reformed to applied HE institutions that brought along need to enable transfer of studies between different levels of education;
- diversification of educational institutions - assessment/comparison of different certificates, diplomas and degrees (e.g. different diplomas as a result of reformed education, educational institutions of doubtful quality, studies completed abroad) and different experience and skills (e.g. recognition of knowledge/skills acquired independently as part of studies, taking an exam as an external student);
- more flexible curricula - during last 15 years university curricula have become much more open that gives an easier opportunity to take into account learning that is not exactly connected to the field of studies;
- establishment of the requirements for professional qualification and assigning a profession - in the job market one could follow two slightly opposite trends: on the one hand, great attention to official degree in some situations, on the other hand, valuing work experience more than university degree. (1) Many professions worked out or elaborated requirements for professional qualifications but several qualification requirements became more difficult to follow. In some public service jobs official degree (Master's degree) gave one 10% higher salary. (2) In many cases, employers value work experience more than university degree. Several reasons for that could be found: quickly changing job market; many leaders of SMS enterprises have not themselves completed university degree; due to the rather liberal rules, many new, not good quality, HE institutions have appeared during last ten years.

SUMMARY of RESEARCH

Short Survey of the Current Situation:

In Estonia APEL is applied in all spheres but the scope and aim of its application varies in different spheres. APEL is less used in general education, while employers use it most of all. In general, educational institutions recognise studies completed on the same or higher level of

* Refers to recognition of informal, non-formal as well as formal learning. If necessary the differentiation between different aspects of learning is made.

education. Studies on the lower level may be regarded as elective subjects or a test/exam must be additionally passed. As a rule, employers recognise formal (studies in educational institutions) and informal (independently acquired skills and work experience) education. From the point of view of personal development non-formal education is also recognised.

There are only a few cases when application of APEL is regulated by legislation. Mostly inner rules of an institution are taken into account. Rules of Admission and Regulations of Tuition are the main regulations in educational institutions. Documents of prior studies (certificates, diplomas, supplements), control of knowledge and skills (examination, test, practical work), portfolio, CV, recommendations, interviews are taken as the basis of accrediting prior learning but it depends very much of the sphere where APEL is used.

In **general education** (first of all - advanced studies, evening schools) studies abroad, music and art groups, sport and to certain extent (although it is very problematic) elective subjects from other institutions are taken into account. Government regulates APEL when people continue their unfinished education. The regulation establishes general principles for recognizing prior learning in the evening form or distance form of a basic school or gymnasium, but the exact procedure is not regulated.

In **vocational education** the tendency is to talk about accrediting secondary vocational education as a part of applied higher education, also recognizing preliminary vocational education and working experience as a part of practical training. Rules of admission to vocational institutions (incl. change of educational institution) and general requirements for national curricula of vocational, special and professional training make up the only national regulations for application of APEL.

In **higher education** the situation has become more flexible. APEL is applied when admitting people to a higher educational institution (HEI). (The requirement for admission is formulated: *...degree or its equivalent* - it is up to the HEI to decide which level is equivalent to the degree). They recognize formal education of the same level from other universities, continuing education as elective subjects and work experience as a part of practical training or additional requirement for admission.

The University Act and Act of Applied Higher Education Institutions regulate application of APEL to some extent but inner rules of educational institutions do the most of regulating in this field.

In **continuing education** APEL is mostly used to change the curriculum more flexible, i.e. tailoring it according to the needs of learners by changing modules, cancelling modules, etc.

Employers apply APEL for recruiting but also for raising qualification people and the requirements are regulated in the institution. Formal studies and prior work experience are first of all taken into account but they are also pointing out personal characteristics which are mostly considered in making final decision. Continuing education and personal development are very important for accreditation.

APEL is usually regulated by inner regulations of the institution. In some spheres national requirements have been established for employees, e.g. framework of requirements in teacher training. There are already many professional qualifications and rules for assigning qualifications, worked out nationally, but these are not compulsory. Different aspects are assessed for assigning a profession and ways of assessment are also much diversified.

Problems:

- lack of awareness - people are not aware of their opportunities, they are not able to assess their experience/knowledge and offer it as their development/prior studies;
- tradition and attitude - suspicion and sometimes even opposition to alternative education of those who have acquired classical formal education;
- lack of regulations (or sometimes too strict rules) - there are no uniform grounds for the application of APEL. The limits of competence and responsibility are not clear and so people are afraid to make decisions. Inner rules are not always sufficient. Therefore the decision could be very subjective;
- problems with legislation - reforms in education have created (half-)dead ends, e.g. the requirement of passed national examinations for entering many higher educational institution (the system of national examinations started in 1996, people who graduated before can only apply to e.g. Open University), the new University Act (requirement to complete 50% of studies in the institution that issues a diploma, contradicting the Lisbon Convention), strict requirements for the academic staff of the educational institutions (there are not always flexible ways/ opportunities to meet these requirements);
- money - alternative education is dealt (not always consciously) with as a dangerous competitor to formal education. Application of APEL is time-consuming and there are no fixed financial sources. At the moment students are not charged for it;
- difference between diplomas/certificates with regard to their content, quality and level - different diplomas/certificates are not comparable as in different institutions the subjects are taught at different levels and scopes. One of the problems with prior learning is that the content and scope of those studies have not been pointed out.

European System:

On the basis of the results of research and the conference one can say that a system for the application of APEL is necessary. Regulations and tools, worked out in this framework, would simplify decision-making and increase awareness of potential users about their opportunities. As there is no uniform system in Estonia the attitude to the European system is positive. There was also an opinion that the system for Estonia should take Estonian context into account but the development and elaboration of Estonian system should be based on the European system.

European system should guarantee integrated approach to accreditation of learning (including formal, informal, non-formal education) and facilitate free movement of learners and labour force inside the country and between the states. The system, to be worked out, should take the situation in Estonia into account. It is important to regulate the limits for exceptions in our strictly regulated degree education and decide how the education acquired through APEL should be formulated/ indicated on the diploma.

System must

- be simple and understandable
- be transparent
- be available and open
- be applicable to all study forms and levels
- be mutually recognized
- be based on guaranteeing the required quality
- guarantee comparability of different certificates/diplomas/degrees and qualification requirements
- provide necessary tools for application of APEL (especially for informal education)

POLITICAL AND POLICY DECISION MAKERS

Research of government perspectives turned out to be rather complicated due to the lack of competence in this sphere (people were uncertain to give opinions) and elections to our Parliament (i.e. former government had finished its work, the new government has not been appointed yet). The following are the opinions of conference participants (including representatives of the Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Social Affairs) and members of work groups.

In conclusion one can say that the attitude is positive. It is necessary to have a system and rules for the application of APEL but there was no unanimous opinion whether one European system is sufficient or there is also a need for a parallel Estonian system.

As a result of group work (during the conference) the opinion was that the application of APEL

- is useful for the state, as it promotes the satisfaction of citizens (application of APEL promotes the development of people and their positive attitude towards learning: it is useful for the state when no-one's development is inhibited and no-one is cheated);
- finally enables saving of resources (e.g. study period is shorter, the time of absence from work is shorter, there is more time for the family, etc.);
- helps to avoid dead ends in education and find solutions (must be supported by legislation) for problematic issues;
- promotes co-operation between the educational institutions of the same and different levels;
- encourages people to learn and develop (e.g. participation in hobby groups gives a wider basis for the development and enriches people);
- decreases the number of unemployed people as people are more self-confident, motivated to continue studies, active to change jobs, establish their own companies, etc.;
- enables to assess the level and skills of people who come here as a result of free movement of people.

At the same time the application of APEL may also create some questions:

- How to plan work in the enterprise? How to ensure that work tasks are properly performed when there are many people who learn without interrupting their work?
- How to prevent people to over-estimate themselves? (There may be a problem that people refuse to do work that does not require high qualification.)
- How to ensure high quality of diplomas?

It was pointed out that the application of APEL must be supported by Estonian legislation. There is no uniform law but some legal acts have dealt with this sphere. It is difficult to estimate the time that elaboration of new laws may take but it may be 2 - 6 years.

SOCIAL PARTNERS: Employers and Foundation of Professional Qualifications

A. Current situation

- **Where?**

Employers apply APEL.

- **With what purpose?**

APEL is applied when recruiting people and also for enhancing qualification. It is used for finding contractors and partners to co-operate with.

- **What is being accredited/ recognised?**

Generally formal education (i.e. general, vocational, higher education and professional continuing education) is taken into account and as a rule there must then be a diploma or a certificate or the person is a student in the corresponding field (recognition often depends on the educational institution). Informal learning (work experience, skills / knowledge acquired independently) is recognised on the basis of assessing CV, letters of recommendation or actual work performance. Non-formal education (i.e. hobby groups or any other training not related to the profession) is considered as additional value. Personality (personal development assessed via psychological test and face to face conversation) is extremely important.

- **In what disciplines/ vocational domains/ sectors?**

APEL is applied in all spheres but it depends on the employer which subjects/ professions/ spheres are recognised and there may be big differences.

- **How is it being done, what tools are in use?**

Institutions have usually established certain requirements, often in written form, for those who want to apply for a certain position. Here some changes in favour of the applicant are possible. Personal characteristics, attitudes and suitability for the team play an important role in addition to education and prior work experience. Accreditation for maintaining the qualification usually takes place during discussion related to development. In some spheres of life (e.g. education, medicine) in addition to corresponding education, professional continuing education is also required. There are certain criteria for enhancing qualification and these are not easily changed. The centre of professional qualification has worked out professional standards and descriptions for professional qualifications (now there are 299 of them) and these form the basis for enhancing the qualification. European training programmes and requirements for qualification have also been taken for a model.

Application of APEL in various spheres has been regulated in different ways. There have been adopted qualification requirements for civil servants and the corresponding wage scale for every position. These are not compulsory for other institutions. The Act on Regulating Professions has been elaborated but this is not compulsory either. A certain procedure for assigning a concrete profession has been worked out/is being worked out and it regulates the requirements for assigning every specific profession and conditions for accrediting/ transfer. As a rule, professional qualification is assigned on the basis of submitted documents/certificates, passed exams (written or oral) and performed work. Higher the qualification applied for, bigger the importance of work experience. Application for professional qualification is voluntary.

- **Who is doing assessment?**

Depending on the employer and/ or position an assessment may be made by an individual (e.g. managers of units), *ad hoc* or permanent commissions (e.g. councils) or structural units

(e.g. personnel department, accreditation department). When qualification is enhanced then as a rule the direct supervisor of the employee makes an assessment based on developed criteria, then the decision of accreditation commission may follow and this commission also involves training and personnel specialists and a specialist in the given field. When official professional qualification is assigned, the applicant is assessed by the corresponding commission and the description of professional qualification and the procedure of assignment serve as a basis.

- **What structures?**

In general bigger institutions/ enterprises have developed a structure/ system within the institution for the application of APEL but its use depends on positions and institutions. In most cases personnel departments and accreditation departments deal with the application of APEL. But within the enterprise other structural units may also deal with it.

- **Is it a single or plural system?**

It may be either a uniform or a multilevel system depending on inner regulations of the enterprise/ institution. The decision is usually made on several levels and is in correlation with the importance of the given position (e.g. in one enterprise recruitment of a specialist may be on one level but in case of a leading specialist and a manager on two levels; in the other enterprise only one level decision is used in both cases).

- **What are the key current debates/ tensions?**

Determination of criteria, certain level of knowledge and experience and their assessment pose most problems for the employers. It is especially problematic for accreditation of informal learning. Personal characteristics and attitudes and suitability for the team may also start an argument.

- **What are the strengths and weaknesses of the present system (or can you foresee)?**

As there is no uniform system in this sphere it is difficult to point out weak and strong sides of the system. Nevertheless written criteria for assessment have been pointed out as a strong side. These criteria enable decision-making in recruitment and also managing one's own career/ development. These criteria should guarantee achievement of professional level, its maintenance and planning of one's career. Danger to make too big contributions to concrete criteria ("hard competences") may be seen as a weakness because individual development is then in the background. There is also a danger of being competent in a very narrow sphere and this may result in restricted flexibility and movement.

- **Are there any plans for further developments?**

Most answers consider further development important. There are usually plans to develop inner system of the institution and remain as flexible as possible. Today graduation from an educational institution does not automatically involve assigning a professional qualification and so there is a plan, carried out in co-operation with educational institutions, to offer graduates a possibility to take a professional qualification exam when graduating. The aim is to continue working out Estonian standards for professional qualifications and guarantee their comparability with the corresponding qualifications abroad.

B. Background: how have these arrangements emerge?

- **Where did the initiative come from?**

Generally the initiative has come from the management of the institution, in some cases from the employees.

In 1997 the development of the system of professional qualifications was started by the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and in 2001 Foundation of Professional Qualifications (Kutsekoda) was established to continue this work.

- **Who has led it?**

Employers have usually initiated the process and they also have taken part in working out standards of professional qualifications in co-operation with the Private Foundation of Professional Qualifications. It has to be pointed out that interest diversifies in different spheres.

- **Is it a top-down or bottom-up system?**

In most institutions it is a top-down system.

- **Why was it done this way?**

Institutions are interested in qualified labour force that is able to develop. So the institutions need a system that simplifies recruitment of new employees and provides them with adequate criteria to assess employees' development and enables employees to make a career.

- **How are the various stakeholders involved?**

The existing standards for professional qualifications form the basis for the curricula and continuing education programmes in many educational institutions.

- **What are the elements/building blocks of the system (credits, levels ...)?**

The elements of the system, when APEL is applied for assigning the qualification, may be the check of knowledge (e.g. oral/ written exam, interview), submitted documents (e.g. CV, portfolio, certificates) and performance of practical work. The balance between the elements is regulated by a concrete procedure for assigning a profession.

Institutions use the same principles but they deal with every case individually.

- **Is there a national framework of qualifications that APEL does/should map on to?**

Work groups (89) have set standards for 299 professional qualifications and on the basis of these it is possible to apply for a profession. As assigning a profession is not obligatory and it is not directly related to studies in the profession but at the same time to meet the qualification requirements it is necessary to complete certain additional training or work independently, one can agree that assigning a profession may be related with APEL.

C. European System

The employers think that there is a need to work out criteria for recognizing APEL in Estonia and also in Europe. We can say that state has started to create an official system by working out professional standards and professional qualifications and adopting laws on professional qualification. But there is no vision of the system in its entirety. People are aware of the need to create uniform principles and tools to simplify comparison of certificates/ diplomas issued in different countries. Attitude to a general European system is positive. The need for a uniform European system is first of all seen in relation to free movement of labour force after Estonia has joined the EU.

PROVIDERS OF EDUCATION

The questionnaires were sent to 18 higher educational institutions (6 public universities, bigger applied and private universities), 16 responses were returned. Two group discussions were conducted - one in Tartu (representatives of 5 higher educational institutions participated), the other in Tallinn (representatives of 11 higher educational institutions, Estonian ENIC/NARIC Centre and the Examination and Qualification Centre participated). Participants were very active and discussions were really interesting.

All vocational schools in Estonia received questionnaires, 16 of them returned answers. Institutions dealing with adult education returned 10 answers. Institutions dealing with general education returned 10 answers (from principals and assistant heads) and there were 30 people in the discussion group.

General situation, concerning educational institutions, is varied and the opinions also vary a lot. Some organizations are very rigid/ inflexible and they only recognize prior learning in the formal system of education, and even then only learning in certain institutions is recognized. But there are also some educational institutions which are really very flexible, they prefer individual approach to every case and try to accredit as much prior learning as possible. Arising problems are related to the guarantees of quality of education and possibility to check the level of prior learning.

Although there is no uniform system, most of the educational institutions recognize prior and experiential learning. Subjectivity in decision making causes many problems. Generally accepted norms and definite rules of procedure for the application of APEL are necessary. People are ready to co-operate in all the fields to achieve this aim.

A. Current situation

- **Where?**

Most of the educational institutions apply APEL to a certain extent. APEL is more applied in higher education institutions (universities, applied higher educational institutions) vocational schools and adult education. The situation may be regarded quite positive as although there is no system, APEL is a natural and everyday part of the learning process. APEL is very little used in comprehensive schools (general education) but special schools, evening schools and schools for advanced study recognise a bit more. These are mostly schools in towns; availability of non-formal education in the countryside is not so good.

- **With what purpose? What is being accredited? How is it being done, what tools are in use?**

In **higher education** APEL is applied when people are admitted to the institution, they want to continue the unfinished learning or change the university. For admission to master's and PhD studies are used flexible versions - there the degree or an equivalent level of education is required. Several institutions also take non-formal education into account when admitting people. *For example, the results of republican and international Olympiads add credits to the competition. Participation in the work of the Club of Young Sailors is taken into account for entering the Marine Academy. Working in the profession adds credits to the applicants who take the studied in Open University (ODL for adults).*

Learning in higher educational institutions is recognized for completing the curriculum but also continuing education may be accredited if it corresponds to the scope, content and level of the curriculum. Only a few universities recognize non-formal and informal education as

optional subjects (e.g. language training). Some specialities recognize work experience as additional bonus or as a requirement for entering, and practice during learning.

In general, results of learning and work experience must be proved with the respective documents (e.g. academic certificate, academic record, certificate with a scope and result of the passed course, portfolio, CV, letter of recommendation, certificate from the place of work). It is also possible to take an exam or a prelim to prove that a person has acquired the knowledge independently. When work experience is recognized as practice, a report about practice must be submitted and it is assessed what a person has learned from this work experience (external studies). Work experience, necessary for admission to the educational institution, must be proved with a certificate from the work place or CV.

Main tool for APEL is Estonian credit points system – all previous learning and work experience are counted to credit points (see detailed description of the system below).

Prior and experiential learning is recognized in **vocational education** mainly when admitting people to the school. In exceptional cases APEL is applied in the current learning process, e.g. if a certain course has been completed before and the same course is also in the elected curriculum. Work experience may be recognized as necessary practical training. Documents for recognition may involve certificates (academic records) where the scope of the subject and the achieved results has been fixed. In some cases the teacher of this subject may test the student's knowledge and on the basis of the result declare this subject completed.

In **general education** APEL is recognized when entering school or continuing unfinished studies, also as a part of learning. Study results, first of all formal education, are recognized when people continue unfinished learning. Only in a few cases non-formal education may be recognized as a part of studies.

Formal education must be proved with documents. Non-formal education need not always be proved, e.g. outstanding results in sport. As a rule, informal education is not recognized.

In **adult education** prior and experiential learning is accredited when entering educational institution and also as a part of studies. All those who answered, considered natural that prior learning and work experience were recognized when starting one's work.

Prior study results are usually recognized but these must be proved with the documents. As it is rather difficult to assess the process of learning then usually the final results are assessed. All the responded organizations recognize formal education in further studies. Recognition of informal and non-formal education depends on the character of training and the training institution.

As there are no official and uniform regulations for APEL, then assessment is very subjective. Each case is differently dealt with. A lot depends on the training project, training institutions and the learners themselves.

- **In what disciplines/ vocational domains/ sectors?**

In **higher education** the application of APEL depends on the curriculum. The application of APEL depends on the educational institution where prior learning was completed and also on the fact whether the respective curriculum has been officially accredited. Estonia is so small and the overview of institutions, teaching methods of lecturers and levels is either known or easily obtainable. In most cases only prior learning in higher educational institutions is recognized, but sometimes also continuing education is accredited if it corresponds to the scope, content and level of the given curriculum.

Practical experience or work experience is required for some professions. In such cases it is much easier to recognize prior experience, e.g. maritime affairs, aviation, medicine, pharmacy, business management, teaching, etc.

As a result of reforms in education curricula have changed a lot during last ten years. Due to that it is rather complicated to recognize prior learning even in the same field as there are differences in content and scope of subjects but also in assessment criteria.

For example, 10 years ago a student failed one of the final exams and left the university. Now the same university cannot award a diploma for the same curriculum, according to the present curriculum 90 per cent of exams and studies should be re-taken.

As a result of many reforms and changes in the requirements to professional qualifications, several educational institutions that offered secondary vocational education have become applied higher educational institutions. Some of them offer to their graduates' higher education within a shorter study period taking their prior learning into account.

For example, secondary vocational education may be recognized as 1/3 or up to 1/2 of the curriculum (of the same speciality) for higher education or applied higher education (e.g. pharmacy, nursing).

The application of APEL in **vocational education** depends a lot on curricula. All the responded schools recognize prior general education. Most of them recognize preliminary vocational training, vocational training, higher education and continuing education in the given profession that was completed in the educational institution. All the answers stressed that the application of APEL depends on the educational institution where the prior learning was completed.

In **general education** formal education of the same level is always recognized (e.g. changing schools). Recognition of non-formal education may concern only some subjects, e.g. physical training, art and music. The schools recognize the results in these subjects from hobby groups, e.g. music schools, sport schools, art schools. Some prior optional subjects (e.g. psychology, economy) may be recognized in gymnasiums and secondary schools.

- **Who is doing assessment? What structures?**

In **higher educational institutions** respective structural units (e.g. study department, dean's office), temporary or permanent commissions (e.g. commissions for curricula, studies, admission) deal with APEL. Only a few higher educational institutions let individuals (e.g. lecturer, head of the department, leading specialist, head of the study department, dean, vice-rector) make these decisions.

In **vocational education** there are many versions of recognizing prior and experiential learning. In general, an individual (e.g. teacher, head of the respective unit) deals with it, sometimes decisions are made by various structural units, temporary or permanent commissions.

In **general education** this kind of a system is missing and these questions are dealt with by the school management, assistant head, study council or the teacher of the given subject.

In **adult education** an individual or some people together deal with this question. Only a few organizations have established respective structural units.

- **Is it a single or plural system?**

In **higher education** there is usually a plural system, in a few institutions there is a single system.

In **vocational education** there is no clear system, it may be a single or a plural system.

There is no system in **general education**.

In **adult education** decision-making about the application of APEL may be on one or several levels.

- **How flexible is it?**

In **higher education** flexibility depends mostly on the attitude of the administration, the necessity, existing regulations and limits set by those regulations. As there are no clear regulations, everything depends on the person who makes decisions, so one can be very flexible or very rigid. A lot depends on the learner as well, e.g. how active the person is, how well s/he can prove prior and experiential learning.

In **vocational education** flexibility mostly depends on the principles set by the school's administration but also the activeness of the learner.

On the level of **general education** curricula are to great extent fixed by the state, schools can change to a rather limited extent. Some schools recognize non-formal education on the basis of agreement with the other school; some schools recognize it even without any agreement or documents proving prior learning.

For example, top competitive ballroom dancers did not have to participate in the classes of physical training and there was neither special agreement nor documents to prove it. In the other school the student received a school leaving certificate with just a satisfactory mark for physical training on it and also a diploma of the best young athlete of Estonia.

Evening schools give an opportunity to continue studies at the same stage where they were left unfinished. It is possible to study only a selection of necessary subjects. It may be enough to complete only the course of one subject when this was just the subject that did not enable transfer to the next form.

In **adult education** the system is considered to be quite flexible. Decision-making is subjective and depends on several circumstances.

- **Who owns the system - who are key players?**

There is no valid regulation for this sphere as of today in **higher education**. There is a provision in the University Act that the university may apply APEL as a part of curriculum. This provision comes into force on March 10, 2003.

Prior work experience is a requirement for applying for some positions and it has been provided by several legal acts, e.g. laws, regulations of the Government of the Republic and ministers. There are some inner regulations established by institutions (e.g. rules of admission, regulations of tuition, curriculum, and procedure for the transfer of credits) but in some higher educational institutions there are no regulations at all.

For example, according to Art. 20 of the Regulations of Tuition of the University of Tartu the University accredits prior learning completed in some other institutions.

In general, the system works for the given educational institution.

Key persons are usually the people who organize studies (e.g. vice-rector, dean, head of the study department, leading specialist, head of the department, sometimes also lecturers but as a rule a lecture does not make decision alone) and the administration of the educational institution.

In **vocational education** the system is regulated to certain extent by legislation (respective laws) and the school has to abide by them. In most schools APEL is not regulated by any inner regulations.

In **general education** the system is not regulated. Only the evening schools have got official regulations. Official regulations do not hinder the application of APEL but national curriculum determines optional subjects taught in comprehensive schools in Estonia. It is often easier for the student to choose the school than a concrete subject, i.e. if the student has elected other optional subjects then s/he should change the school instead of applying for the other subjects in the same school.

In **adult education** there is no regulated system.

- **What are the key current debates/ tensions?**

In **higher education**:

- Does it influence the quality of education when we recognize the exams, passed in other institutions? How to check the achieved level?
- Should accreditation of prior learning depend on the institution where it has been completed? Which institutions should be preferred?
- What kind of non-formal and informal education and to what extent should be accredited?
- Which work experience and to what extent should be recognized?
- How to prove that a person has learned something from his work experience (e.g. working teachers and their pedagogical practice)?
- How to present/register APEL on the academic certificate?
- Morally and temporally outdated prior learning (e.g. the so called “ideological subjects” taught during the Soviet period; subjects outdated if compared to the present scientific achievements). Does work experience in the given profession prolong the time when prior learning may be considered valid?
- Problems related to the changes of curricula when credits are transferred.
- During last 10 years reforms in education have established different degrees that vary in length and result. How to compare these and confirm them to each other?
- In higher education accreditation of prior learning depends on the scope of subjects, marks, a teacher and a higher educational institution. This approach would be called into question if APEL is widely used.
- Traditionally educated people are suspicious and they are not willing to recognize alternative education.

In **vocational education**:

- The correspondence of accredited prior learning and experience to the set requirements is the main problem.
- The curricula change so quickly, although the scope may remain the same, that there are big differences in the content of studies.

There are no problems in **general education** as the discussion for the application of APEL in comprehensive schools has not started yet.

In **adult education**:

- How is prior learning and work experience recognized at workplace?
 - It is problematic to find out attitudes to recognition of continuing education and re-qualification courses that have been completed outside the system of formal education.
 - Continuing education, completed in the universities, and non-formal education, are clearly preferred while accrediting optional subjects, when compared with adult education.
- **What are the strengths and weaknesses of the present system (or can you foresee)?**

Strengths:

- enables to continue studies in another school
- the existing institutional systems are reliable and trustworthy
- clear regulations for recognition of learning (in case of similar and accredited curricula and public educational institutions)
- some specialities have a clear national or international regulation
- as Estonia is so small there is an overview of educational institutions, teaching methods of lecturers and levels
- a learner benefits most by saving time, money and other resources
- as adult learner's experience is recognized, it creates motivation for further learning
- school's right to make decisions enables individual, friendly and flexible approach to every case
- decisions are made collectively (in some schools)
- sharing and accrediting experience in training enriches learners and trainers

Weaknesses:

- absence of national regulations, definite and generally accepted agreements and legal basis
- without regulations schools are alone responsible guaranteeing the quality of APEL and level of qualifications
- APEL is very subjective and this causes suspicion and tension in learners and those who offer training
- In some cases regulations are too restrictive/ narrow, the process of decision-making is too rigid and long; or the regulations are insufficient and unclear making assessment in more complicated cases really difficult
- difference between circumstances is so big that it is complicated to establish national regulations, various spheres are really peculiar and very different
- circle of training institutions has enlarged, at the same time there is no complete overview of the level of teaching, acquiring and assessing in new institutions
- curricula change very quickly, prior learning has become outdated
- subjects, modules and curricula lack aims, described in details, so we can speak about completion of a curriculum, i.e. subjects, but not achievement of the set aims
- expenses related to APEL are big and training institutions suffer losses as at present; learners do not pay for APEL
- work experience acquired abroad and learning in some specialities are not recognised in some cases
- every institution recognizes prior learning in a different way
- non-formal education moves too close to formal education as this is assessed according to the criteria used in formal education, real necessity is not considered

- problems with legislation - reforms in education have created (half)dead ends, e.g. the requirement of passed national examinations for entering the higher educational institution, the new University Act (requirement to complete 50% of studies in the institution that issues a diploma, it is in conflict with the Lisbon Convention), strict requirements for the academic staff of the educational institution (there are not always flexible ways/ opportunities to meet these requirements).

- **Are there any plans for further developments?**

Higher educational institutions plan to specify the existing regulations or work out new regulations for APEL. Establishment of counselling and information system, to inform and encourage interested people, has been under discussion. There is a need to establish the centre for certifying teachers and this could be on national level. Some higher educational institutions have chosen wait-and-see tactics.

In **vocational education** many schools have planned to introduce a special procedure for APEL and this must be included to the regulations of tuition.

In **general education** there is a need for definite agreements between the schools. There could be a national regulation as well.

In **adult education** flexibility was stressed in relation to APEL. The fixed system for the transfer of credits, when learners change institutions, is expected. A uniform system could avoid several problems related to continuing one's studies and could create opportunities for lifelong learning. Readiness to co-operate with various educational institutions is very positive.

B. Background: how have these arrangements emerge?

- **Where did the initiative come from?**

In **higher education** the administration of the institution has taken the initiative but also learners have participated and the ideas come from conferences, seminars, specialists, state and life itself.

In **vocational education** the initiative for applying APEL has come mostly from the administration, in some cases from learners or employees. According to some answers initiative has come from professional associations, EU requirements for regulated professions.

In **general education** the initiative came in most cases from the administration.

In **adult education** administration of the institution took the initiative but as a result of co-operation learners also contributed. In addition employers were mentioned and also the EU requirements for qualification that have created a need for the given system.

- **Who has led it?**

It is hard to generalize as in various organizations it is very different.

- **Is it a top-down or bottom-up system?**

There is no uniform system. Prior and experiential learning is accredited bottom-up and also top-down. The criteria for decision-making are very subjective and depend on the training institution. As there have been neither national regulations nor general norms worked out then the work of a system depends on training and participating people. The role of training institutions in recognizing prior and experiential learning is remarkable. As the systems for APEL are so diversified even inside training institutions, it is impossible to point out definite parts or stages of the system.

- **Why was it done this way?**

As there are no regulations for the application of APEL then the training institutions have established some inner procedures sometimes to protect their own or the learner's interest.

- **How are the various stakeholders involved?**

Public schools are obliged to issue the academic certificate about the scope of subjects learned and results of passed exams. Sometimes it may be complicated to get certificates from the previous educational institutions.

Although there is no uniform system many training institutions recognize prior and experiential learning. Problems are caused by subjective decision-making and that is why generally accepted norms and definite procedures for the application of APEL are looked forward to. For this purpose different educational institutions are ready to co-operate. APEL is seen as a natural and general principle in educational institutions that establishes a basis for continuous education.

- **What are the elements/building blocks of the system (credits, levels ...)?**

When prior and experiential learning is accredited, the scope of learning and the acquired level (result) are important. The level of teaching, assessed on the basis of trainers and training institutions is also significant.

Since 1992 there is Estonian credit points system used **higher education**.

Upon acquisition of a subject the student is awarded credit points. One credit point (CP) is a unit of volume of tuition corresponding to 40 hours or one week of student work including classroom work, independent work and testing of competence.

The nominal study period is the time provided for meeting the requirements of one curriculum. The volume of curriculum per one nominal study year is 40 credit points.

Tuition in the University is conducted in the basic course program (a general term for diploma, bachelor's, general medical practice, dentistry and pharmacy programs) and in master's and doctorate programs. In addition to specialist education, specialities of teacher and specialist doctor are provided. The volume of the diploma program is 120-160 CP. The volume of the bachelor's program is 120-160 CP. The volume of the master's program is 40-80 CP, whereas, including the bachelor's program, it must not be less than 200 CP.

The volume of the doctorate program is 160 CP.

- **Is there a national framework of qualifications that APEL does/should map on to (if so, get details)?**

In **higher education** Art. 291 of the University Act provide time difference in periods of nominal studies for various Bachelor's and Master's degree courses. (It is called learning based on integrated curricula for Bachelor's and Master's degree.) *For example, teaching of doctors, veterinary surgeons (six years), pharmacists, dentists, architects, civil engineers and class teachers (five years).* The same principle is repeated in the Regulation of the

Government of the Republic No 258 of 13 March, 2002 on standards of higher education but no other exceptions in degree courses are provided.

The Regulation of the Government of the Republic No 381 of 22 November 2000 on teacher training requirements provides requirements for training teachers (nursery school teacher, class teacher, basic school teacher, secondary school teacher, and teacher of general subjects in vocational schools, teacher of professional subjects in vocational schools, lecturer, hobby group teacher, teacher in special schools).

In **vocational education** requirements of qualification for certain professions have been worked out and these may be proved by passing examinations. These requirements have been worked out by the Centre of Vocational Training and respective ministries in their area of administration (e.g. police, rescue board, interior defence, border guard, shipping, etc.).

C. European system

- **What would the reaction be to a Europe-wide system?**

Most of bigger higher educational institutions are interested; the European wide system is regarded useful. Uniform principles, understandable rules and good tools are expected.

A uniform system could increase flexibility and mobility.

The European system is supposed to help to overcome local problems, to promote co-operation and facilitate agreements. At the same time national peculiarities should be taken into account.

Increase in awareness and dissemination of information, establishment of a reliable support and counselling system are regarded very important.

Some higher educational institutions have chosen wait-and-see tactics.

- **Would the key stakeholders be able to recognise learning that was acquired outside the country?**

Learning completed abroad is sometimes even more willingly recognized than learning completed in Estonia. In general, there must be documents to prove it.

- **Would they expect/need the learning acquired outside the formal system in their own country to be recognised in another country?**

Mutual recognition is very important. When it is widely spread and there is a clear and understandable system then the answer is - yes.

- **Are there any legal obstacles to a Europe wide system?**

As APEL is not regulated by any legal acts there is no prohibition to use it either.

For example, according to the Regulations of Tuition of the University of Tartu (section 20) the university recognizes prior learning and learning completed somewhere else.

At the same time there is one amendment to the University Act (coming into force on 10 March 2003) that may become problematic. According to this amendment prior and experiential learning may be recognized up to 50% of completing the curriculum.

Stricter educational requirements for the personnel of higher educational institutions may hinder recognition of non-formal education.

- **Are there any cultural, political, economic obstacles?**

- It is really difficult to establish the uniform assessment criteria, accepted by all the educational institutions.
 - There is a fear that the quality of education may get lower and diplomas with a doubtful value appear to the market.
 - Suspicion and unwillingness to recognize alternative types of learning by the people with classical formal education may be an obstacle.
 - Training institutions are not sufficiently motivated to recognize and organize alternative education; they are considered dangerous competitors with regard to formal education.
 - Elaboration and introduction of new regulations requires additional resources, e.g. money, labour force, training.
 - Awareness of people is very low.
- **What problems would be posed by using something like ECTS as the basis of a Europe-wide system?**

It could be a suitable basis as many higher educational institutions use it to certain extent. From 1.09.2006 Estonian higher education programmes must be in conformity with the ECTS rules (according to the new University Act).

- **What sort of time frame could be envisaged for linking the existing arrangements (or creating new ones) with a Europe-wide system?**

A few years.

- **What negotiations might be necessary and with whom for a Europe-wide system?**

- agreements between and inside different educational organizations in Europe
- agreements between Ministries of Education in Europe
- national agreements and regulations + financing (government)
- agreements between educational institutions of the same level (administrations)
- agreements between educational institutions of different levels (administrations)
- agreements to guarantee high quality (all levels)

- **What are the attitudes of the decision-makers and what steps might be needed to convince them?**

Most of the bigger higher educational institutions are interested. A uniform system and common principles are considered useful. They are ready to co-operate with other educational institutions.

The Ministry of Education is active and interested in the development of this sphere, and ready to support.

The first steps should be agreeing of general principles and then developing inner regulations for APEL.

The system must remain flexible because then both, learners and educational institutions, benefit from it. The system must be transparent/clear, rules must be understandable. Good tools, introductory seminars and training would be of great help.

The European system is expected to contain generally accepted norms, tools and definite rules of procedure, the local experience must be comparable with the others. It is important to take local (national) circumstances into account.

It is vital to change the mentality, to focus on output, not on input.

YOUTH SECTOR

A. Current situation

- **Where?**

Most of those who answered the questions have experienced that prior learning is recognized. So we can say that APEL is used in youth work.

- **With what purpose?**

Recognition has taken place in youth movement, mostly inside youth work and recruitment, less in entering educational institutions. The respondents have determined “inner movement” also as movement to formal education in youth work and employment.

- **What is being accredited?**

On the basis of the examples provided by the respondent's one can see that participating in youth work, i.e. studying is mostly recognized. As the form of the document that assesses prior learning, its results, description and formalization is not sufficient, it has not been widely recognized in youth work.

- **In what disciplines/ vocational domains/ sectors?**

Most of all accreditation takes place in informal education and in the spheres of activities of recognized institutions or programmes (e.g. training in recognized training institutions, exchange of young people and other initiatives in the framework of international programmes).

- **How is it being done, what tools are in use?**

Generally accreditation is based on documents (document to prove attending the training, written certificate about the programme, certificate about completing the curriculum, letters of recommendation, letters of intent). Sometimes skills must be proved by actual performance of tasks (practical work) or the samples of work must be provided or there are several stages before a person is employed, exams must be passed, people are interviewed.

- **Who is doing assessment?**

The submitted documents or performed work is generally assessed by

- a person responsible for recruiting new employees;
- a group formed by the managers of organization/project;
- a manager personally.

- **What structures?**

No existing structures were mentioned for assessment or application of APEL in youth work.

- **Is it a single or plural system?**

There is no uniform system in the given sphere.

- **How flexible is it?**

No uniform system.

- **Who owns the system - who are key players?**

No uniform system.

- **What are the key current debates/ tensions?**

The main problem is lack of awareness and recognition of youth work, there is no recognition of its essence and values as a separate sphere. APEL in youth work is difficult because creation of a standard for measuring and assessment is not easy. It is also difficult to compare the standard with the other standards (used in formal education).

- **What are the strengths and weaknesses of the present system (or can you foresee)?**

Strong side of APEL in youth work means aspects related to benefits for the young person in the field of personal development and future perspectives. Both in Estonia and Europe practical experience supports creation of this accreditation system.

The main **weakness** is insufficient recognition of youth work as an independent sphere. Weakness is also uneven quality and unprofessionalism of youth workers. In youth work clear aims must be set, focus must be on improvement of youth work, enhancement of awareness and quality of content, and the people involved must be better qualified.

- **Are there any plans for further developments?**

Some institutions have plans to use APEL in youth work, e.g. setting developmental aims for the organization, development of quality requirements, carrying out a research.

B. Background

Practically there are no uniform regulations for APEL in youth work. The respondents did not point out any form of the system, but some referred to some regulations. These regulations have been initiated by the same organization or the higher/ supervising organization.

C. European system

There is a clearly indicated need for APEL on the local and also European level.

The existing European system could be of some support in the development of the Estonian system.

INDIVIDUALS

An individual uses APEL and is aware of the importance of APEL in the higher educational institutions. The other field where APEL is necessary is employment. There are also some other fields where people use APEL but they are not aware of it, they do not do it consciously.

APEL is most often used in acquiring education, finding a job, enhancing one's qualification or maintaining it and designing one's career.

Problem:

An individual is not always aware of all the opportunities for the application of APEL. This problem is especially acute in voluntary youth work.

Strengths:

1. APEL is useful for an individual.
2. APEL enables to economize time in formal education (e.g. a person with a full-time job was able to graduate a university within the time limits of a nominal study period only because his prior learning was recognized by the university to a great extent).
3. APEL enables to economize money in formal education. An individual should not pay twice for equivalent knowledge (e.g. language school has provided a very good command of the language and the person should not re-learn it in the university).
4. Higher self-esteem of a learner and an employee.
5. Positive experience with APEL facilitates motivation for lifelong learning.
6. Opportunity of being more competitive in labour market.
7. Possibility to substitute education with prior work experience when hired.

Weaknesses:

1. APEL in formal education, in case there are some regulations, is too bureaucratic (i.e. a person has to submit the documents to too many structural units of the university).
2. Regulations concerning APEL are often not clear. The levels of decision-making are very different and the person does not know where to apply to.
3. Bad regulation of APEL causes insecurity/instability. Everybody is afraid to take responsibility and recognize prior and experiential learning.
4. At present the document is more important than competence. The content of learning or a diploma should be regarded more important.
5. Informal education is recognized only in recruitment interviews or enhancement of qualification.
6. Non-formal education is recognized only to a limited extent.
7. Work experience of the adult learner is not sufficiently recognized in formal education.
8. In certain fields work experience does not compensate lack of education (e.g. teachers must have higher education and even 20 years of work experience do not compensate this). There is no good solution to the given problem now.
9. Lack of a uniform system for recognizing APEL causes instable solutions and decisions (e.g. two people have graduated the same faculty at the same time and they enter different faculties of the other university but only one can transfer the credits).

Further development. European System.

1. Uniform systems of APEL and assessment criteria are necessary in Estonia and also in Europe.

2. These must not be normative acts but rather main principles, common grounds and recommendations for the application of APEL nationally and later in the whole Europe.
3. The first level may involve agreements concluded between educational institutions of the same level and after it moving to the other levels.
4. It is necessary to create a basic system of recognizing work experience.
5. Prior learning should be recognized as work experience. People acquire skills (e.g. communication skills, presentation skills, skill to plan one's time) while learning.
6. Tools for recognizing informal education and for measuring the development of an employee in the course of working should be offered.

REGULATIONS

According to the national regulations it is possible to apply APEL in some cases but it has not been regulated in details. If there are any regulations for the application of APEL at all, then these are inner regulations for the given institution. The following table includes the most typical examples of national and inner regulations.

National Regulations

<i>Educational institutions</i>		
University Act	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=214987	The law provides the right to recognize student's prior learning in a university or an equal institution abroad, if the national priority is given to these specialities, but it does not regulate a detailed procedure.
Applied Higher Educational Institutions Act	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=215321	The law provides the right to recognize student's prior learning in a university or an equal institution abroad, if the national priority is given to these specialities, but it does not regulate a detailed procedure.
Vocational School Act	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=215541	The law provides the right to recognize prior learning (knowledge) and skills, acquired according to the curriculum of preliminary training, as part of the curriculum when the student continues studies in the other school. This law does not regulate a detailed procedure for it.
Basic School and Secondary School (Gymnasium) Act	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=214557	The law provides the right to finish the basic school and gymnasium in the evening form or by distance learning or as an external student. No regulations for recognizing prior learning.
Conditions and procedure for learning in the evening or distance form of a basic school and gymnasium and finishing the basic school or gymnasium as an external student (regulation of the Minister of Education)	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=238166	The regulation establishes general principles for recognizing prior learning in the evening form or distance form of a basic school or gymnasium, but the exact procedure is not regulated.
Standards of Higher Education	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=237479	Standards of Higher Education establish necessary general requirements for higher education in Estonia and regulate the issue of licensing of institutions providing higher education and the document is one of the fundamental instruments for the accreditation of curricula.

Employers

Professional Qualifications Act	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=26716	The law provides general principles for proving professional qualification but not a detailed procedure for it.
Procedure for Assigning	Received from the Center of	The document regulates the exact procedure

Professional Qualifications: I, II and III level in providing services	Professional Qualifications (Sirje Murre) on 6 February 2003.	for assigning a professional qualification in the sphere of providing services.
Standards of Professional Qualifications	http://www.kutsekoda.ee/page_standard.html	Standards of professional qualification establish necessary general requirements for the education, experience, knowledge and skills; also personality traits for those who apply for the given professional qualification.
Law on Recognizing Professional Qualification Acquired in a Foreign Country	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=215849	The law provides general principles for recognizing professional qualification acquired abroad.
Procedure for comparing a qualification, acquired abroad, with a qualification required in Estonia (Regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs)	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=205321	The regulation provides a procedure for comparing the qualification (acquired abroad) of a health care worker with the required qualification in Estonia. It also provides requirements for the documents that are necessary to prove the qualification.
Framework requirements for Teacher Training (regulation of the Government of the Republic)	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=240627	The regulation provides concrete requirements for teacher training which are in accord with the compulsory continuing education for teachers.
Conditions and procedure for the certification of teachers (regulation of the Minister of Science and Education)	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=237895	The regulation provides necessary general requirements for education, experience, knowledge and skills and personality traits for those who apply for the certain professional rank of a teacher.
Requirements for the certification of the main groups of police officials (regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs)	https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=22795	The regulation provides necessary general requirements for the education, experience, knowledge and skills and personality traits for those who apply for the positions in the main groups of police officials.

Inner Regulations of the Institutions

<i>Educational Institutions</i>		
Rules of Admission of the University of Tartu	http://www.ut.ee/oppimine_siss_eastumine_Sisseastumisinfo,1.html	The rules establish exact conditions, with regard to prior and experiential learning, necessary for entering the University.
Rules of Admission of the Marine Academy	http://www.emara.ee	The rules establish exact conditions, with regard to prior and experiential learning, necessary for entering the Marine Academy.
Regulations of Tuition of the University of Tartu	http://www.ut.ee/tootamine_dokumendid_REGULATSIOONID_JA_DOKUMENDID,9.html	The regulations establish the right for recognizing prior and experiential learning in the University of Tartu but do not provide the exact procedure for it.
Regulations of Tuition of the Medical School of Tartu	http://www.med.edu.ee/	The regulations establish the right for recognizing prior and experiential learning in the Medical School of Tartu but do not provide the exact procedure for it.

Audentes Mainor University. The procedure of Transition from other schools	http://tallinn.audentes.ee/?ay=ylikool&id=4	A specified procedure for those who want to come (to be transferred) to the Audentes Mainor University from other higher educational institutions.
The main principles, conditions and procedure of APEL in the University of Tartu (the Draft has been elaborated, the Council of the University should adopt it in April 2003, it will come into force in September 2003)	Received from the Director of the Open University of the University of Tartu Aune Valk on 26 September 2002.	After coming into force the amendments will be made to the Rules of Admission of the University of Tartu and the Regulations of Tuition of the University of Tartu to regulate exactly the application of APEL in the University of Tartu.
The Procedure of transfer of Subjects (credits) taught in the Department of General Education of the Faculty of Education of the University of Tartu	http://www-1.ut.ee/pedagoogika//Pedagoogika.html	The exact procedure for the application of APEL, elaborated by the Department of General Education of the Faculty of Education of the University of Tartu.
Employers		
Guidelines for the Academic Staff of the University of Tartu	http://www.ut.ee/tootamine_dokumendid_REGULATSIOONID_JA_DOKUMENDID,37.html	The guidelines provide general principles for tasks and duties of the academic staff.
Guidelines for the Chief Specialist of the University of Tartu	http://www-1.ut.ee/personal//	The guidelines establish tasks and necessary qualities to perform the tasks of the chief specialist.
Guidelines for the Specialist of the University of Tartu	http://www-1.ut.ee/personal//	The guidelines establish tasks and necessary qualities to perform the tasks of the specialist.
The Main Principles of the Staff Policy of Hansapank Eesti (Hansapank of Estonia)	http://w.hansa.ee/est/tuletoole_poliitika_poliitika#varbamisprotsess.html	The document formulates the general principles of policy with regard to the staff of Hansapank Eesti.
The Main Principles of the Staff Policy of Eesti Ühispank (Union Bank of Estonia)	http://www.eyp.ee/pages.php3/01050406	The document formulates the general principles of policy with regard to the staff of Eesti Ühispank.

Elaborating APEL system at the University of Tartu Process and draft of the regulations

University of Tartu initiated creating its APEL system in 2001. The draft of the system was ready by Spring 2002. In June 2002, an international conference on APEL, was held in Tartu with the help of THENUCE network. This conference and the example of the system at the University of Tartu initiated several discussions in other universities as well as in the Ministry of Education, brought along 4 new projects in the same field. By February 2003, Tartu University together with the Ministry of Education has completed a survey covering APEL practice, attitudes etc across Estonia in all sectors (within Transfine project). The new version of the University Act (approved in the end of January 2003) allows now 50% of the HE curriculum to be obtained with APEL. The system that was elaborated at the University of Tartu is approved within the University by all bodies except the final decision by the University Council that was waiting for the University Act.

The system will be in 4 parts: (1) basic principles as a statements of the University Council, (2) part in the Admission regulation, (3) part in the Regulations of Tuition, (3) Rector's order for criteria and management of the system. Most probably it will be approved in the end of April 2003.

See the draft of the system below

Accreditation of Prior Learning and Work Experience (APEL) in the University of Tartu, draft

I. Principles

- 1.1. The University recognises prior learning and learning that have been completed somewhere else and working experience (experiential learning) as a part of fulfilment of the curriculum and of qualification for admission.
- 1.2. The aim of APEL is to broaden the learning opportunities, provide opportunities for life-long learning, lessen the barriers between formal and non-formal educational systems, enhance students' mobility, link studies up with work, change learning more flexible and open for new target groups by recognising education acquired at different times and in different educational institutions. APEL strengthens relations of the university with other organisations and enables the University to react to changes in the labour market in a more flexible way.
- 1.3. The prerequisite for applying APEL is evaluation of the acquired knowledge and prior learning on the basis of learning outcomes irrespective of the form, place and detailed content of learning.
- 1.4. The university observes operating quality requirements and standards when applying APEL.
- 1.5. By recognising APEL 1/2 of the requirements of the University curriculum may be fulfilled.

II. APEL and Admission to the University

- 2.1. Accordance with the required qualification for taking Master's or Doctoral degree courses (programs) has been regulated in the following way:
 - 2.1.1. The applicants who have the university diploma (ülikooli diplom) or education from the applied educational institution (rakendusõrgkooli haridus) or vocational

higher education (kutsekõrgharidus), Bachelor's degree, who are Diploma - Specialists (spetsialisti diplom) or whose qualification acquired by prior learning and work experience is equal to at least Bachelor's degree with a three year nominal study period are entitled to apply for Master's programs.

- 2.1.2. The applicants who have a five-year university education (Diploma -Specialists); Master's degree; medical doctor's education; dentist's education; pharmacist's education; 200 credit points (credits) from teacher training or whose qualification acquired by prior learning and work experience is equal to at least Master's degree with a five year nominal study period are entitled to apply for Doctoral programs.
- 2.2. If the applicant for the Master's or Doctoral program, despite the right to apply for the degree course, finds it difficult/impossible to compete with the other applicants' qualifications that are comparable with the more suitable qualifications, the faculty has the right/possibility to offer the applicants additional study opportunities/ other additional conditions to acquire the competitive qualification.
- 2.3. Evaluation and accreditation of qualification acquired by prior learning and work experience and finding it sufficient to be admitted may be done in the following cases:
 - * prior studies make up at least 3/4 of the amount of minimal credit points required for the admission to the given level (90 credit points for Master's program and 160 credit points for Doctoral program)
 - * final project defended at an earlier level/ other conditions for graduation is comparable with the qualification needed for applying or in addition to prior qualification the applicant has worked in the given speciality, done research, passed additional professional courses, etc. (*e.g. the applicant has Bachelor's degree acquired during a four year nominal study period in Estonia or education equal to Master's degree acquired during a period less than five years in any other country and the applicant intends to apply for Doctoral program*).
- 2.4. On the proposal of the dean the commission is established for evaluation and accreditation of the applicant's prior and experiential learning. If the qualification is regarded sufficient for admission to the University, the certificate is issued to the applicant that proves the applicant's right to apply for certain specialities in the University of Tartu.
- 2.5. The procedure to consider APEL as a part of meeting the required qualification for admission is described below.

III. APEL as a Part of Fulfilment of the Requirements of Curriculum

- 3.1. Accreditation of prior learning (in a different speciality) in the University of Tartu.
 - 3.1.1. Prior learning (in a different speciality) in the University of Tartu is evaluated and credits transferred on the basis of the student's formal application.
 - 3.1.2. Credits may be transferred from the prior level, if their level corresponds to the requirements established in the curriculum
 - the studies, completed within four years (nominal study period) with a Bachelor's degree and Diploma -Specialists are accredited, if possible, as a part of 3 + 2 Master's program;
 - the prior studies of students who have passed Master's program in 4 (5) + 2 system are accredited, if possible, as part of Doctoral program.
 - 3.1.3. The total amount of credit points received at different levels/specialities must not, after transfer, be smaller than the required sum (or 2/3) of credits of nominal amounts in the given curricula.
- 3.2. Accreditation of learning completed in other higher educational institutions
 - 3.2.1. The student of the University of Tartu who wishes to learn in any other higher educational institution during the studies submits an application to the Dean of the

Faculty according to the procedure established in the Regulations of Tuition for the visiting student/student studying abroad.

- 3.2.2. Prior studies (learning) in other higher educational institutions (incl. abroad) are evaluated and accredited for fulfilment of the requirements of curriculum according to the given procedure.
 - 3.2.3. Studies in the other educational and training centres may also be evaluated and accredited.
- 3.3. Accreditation of experiential learning
- 3.3.1. The university evaluates and accredits experiential learning that has been related to the speciality while fulfilling the requirements of curriculum.
 - 3.3.2. Experiential learning is taken into account
 - in apprenticeship
 - in subjects related to acquiring practical skills
 - as an exception in other subjects but then the necessary tests have to be passed
 - as an additional condition in credit transfer (if the transferred credits are dated, subjects passed in smaller volumes,)

IV. Procedure of Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning

4.1. Liability

- 4.1.1. Study Department/Open University is responsible for general coordination of the procedure of APEL and provides counselling in the issues concerning APEL.
- 4.1.2. The dean of the faculty /director of the college is responsible for carrying out APEL.
- 4.1.3. There is at least one person in every faculty/college who is responsible for counselling in the issues related to APEL with regard to different specialities.
- 4.1.4. The head of the chair/ lecturer of the given subject is responsible for credit transfer.
- 4.1.5. The dean of the faculty/director of college/head of department is responsible for credit transfer for a bigger group of subjects. The ad hoc commission is established, if necessary.

4.2. Student's /applicant's application for APEL

- 4.2.1. The applicant for APEL submits a formal application to the dean of the faculty/director of college/head of department and points out:
 - the aim of the application (fulfilment of the requirements of curriculum, meeting the qualification requirements for admission)
 - the target of evaluation/accreditation (subjects, credit points)
 - the basis (prior learning, experiential learning).
- 4.2.2. Original documents certifying prior learning/ experiential learning, e.g. certificates, copies of transcript, documents describing the content of studies; some other documents required by the commission for APEL /lecturer responsible for APEL are attached to the application. Other documents may include documents certifying accreditation of prior curriculum, etc. The applicant is liable for the correctness of documents.
- 4.2.3. The applicant compiles a portfolio (following the provided instruction) if there is a need for it, (e.g. accreditation of experiential learning; prior studies/learning in the educational institution which has not concluded a contract with the university to accredit the prior learning automatically) or receives the guidelines for the examination to be taken / conversation.

4.3. Evaluation and accreditation of prior and experiential learning

- 4.3.1. The application of the student is considered either by (it depends on the volume of the accredited subject/experiential learning)

- the lecturer of the given subject
 - head of the department/ assistant dean or the ad hoc commission.
- 4.3.2. For evaluating prior and experiential learning the following is taken into account:
- level of prior educational institution
 - accreditation of curriculum that involved the prior learned subject
 - suitability of prior and experiential learning to the curriculum
 - time of prior learning.
- 4.3.3. For the evaluation of experiential learning the acquired knowledge and its correspondence to the curriculum are taken into account.
- 4.3.4. Unimportant differences in the volume of prior studies (difference up to ¼?) and in the components of what one has learned, difference in the form of testing are not sufficient reasons to deny credit transfer.
- 4.3.5. The student is given a written confirmation about the results of evaluation within one month, it includes the names of the accredited subjects (group of subjects), volumes, grades (???), volume of the parts of curriculum and subjects that have to be passed.
- 4.3.6. The lecturer /commission responsible for APEL may require additional material and/or passing the examination/prelim/ performing practical tasks, etc.
- 4.3.7. The applicant is informed about the reasons for not satisfying the application partially or entirely.
- 4.3.8. The lecturer/ head of the commission responsible for accreditation endorses the application to prove accreditation of credits and the accredited subjects are added to the Study Information System.
- 4.4. Transfer of credits from prior and experiential learning to the Study Information System and transcript.
- 4.4.1. The credits for the accredited subject (group of subjects) are transferred to the Study Information System pointing out which subject (subjects) is replaced by these credits in the curriculum.
- 4.4.2. The original name of the subject, name of the lecturer, volume of the subject, result of testing and, if possible, the original code of the subject are transferred to the Study Information System.
- 4.4.3. The credits/subject with the original attributes (incl. result of testing, independent of the form of testing in the curriculum) are transferred to the transcript.
- 4.5. The decisions of APEL may be contested according to the procedure provided by the Regulations of Tuition.

V. Financing

- 5.1. The submission of application for APEL is not free it consists of the fee for submitting the application and additional fee for every credit point. The amount of the fee is determined by the Rector.
- 5.2. Transfer of credits is free of charge in the following cases:
- transferred credits have been received in the University of Tartu
 - credits of up-dating courses (taken in the University of Tartu) are transferred if these are suitable to replace the given subject, taking into account its content, volume and level
 - the student has received a prior consent of the faculty to learn in the other higher educational institution
 - the contracts concluded between the higher educational institutions have provided so.

VI. Quality control

6.1. To guarantee uniform level of APEL in the university, APEL is brought under central control, i.e. at least once a year the commission, established by the Vice-Rector, looks through the decisions related to APEL and the people involved share their experience.

Application

1. Development of structure for APEL and training people.
2. Development of formal applications, portfolios and instructions.
3. Development of evaluation procedure and including it to the Regulations of Tuition.
4. Training counsellors.
5. Training appraisers.
6. Entry of results to the Study Information System
7. Regular seminars for sharing experience and introduction of the principles and practice of APEL.