

# Recognition of lifelong learning – example from Estonia

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# Estonia, University of Tartu (UT)

1,4 mill people, 6 public and 5 private universities, + applied higher education institutions

UT - research-university. The biggest (18500 students) and oldest (1632) in Estonia.

11 faculties and 5 colleges

29% of students are Open University students – adults studying part time.

State covers costs of tuition for limited number of students. About 25% of full-time students and most (85%) of adult students pay themselves for their tuition.

The number of academic staff is 1200 and the staff in total 3000.

# Terms we use

- VÕTA – (direct translation of abbreviation) TAKE, accreditation of prior studies and work experience
- APEL and APL – accreditation of prior (experiential) learning

# APEL background: supportive factors

- 2 reforms of higher education in 10 years – hence degrees of different length and outcome
- Twofold increase in number of students during the last 6 years – mainly adult learners
- Syllabi becoming more open
- Increase in the importance of education and formalisation of this requirement
  - New qualification requirements in several areas (e.g. teachers)
  - Benefits connected with higher qualifications in public sector
  - International companies

# APEL background: inhibiting factors

- Quickly increasing economy, very low unemployment, lack of work-force in several areas
- Low formalisation and high flexibility of job market
- Small country: everybody knows everybody





# State-level actions

- University Law (January 2003), allows up to 50% of the Bachelor studies to be obtained through APL (accreditation of prior learning) and 50% of the applied higher education degree and Master studies through APEL (incl experiential learning). Since 2006 APEL is also possible in Bachelor studies.
- Access is not possible via APEL.
- Every university has to adopt its regulations for APEL
- European Social Fund + state money to support building the coherent system for all educational institutions, incl. counselling system



# University level actions

- APL and APEL is a joint system
- APEL principles approved by University Council, APEL regulations approved by rector
- APEL-juries and counsellors in each faculty and college – jury assesses a bigger group of subjects and the additional requirements for admission
- Assessment methods (portfolio forms etc)
- Recording results in study information system
- The activities are organised and supported by the head specialist for APEL working centrally

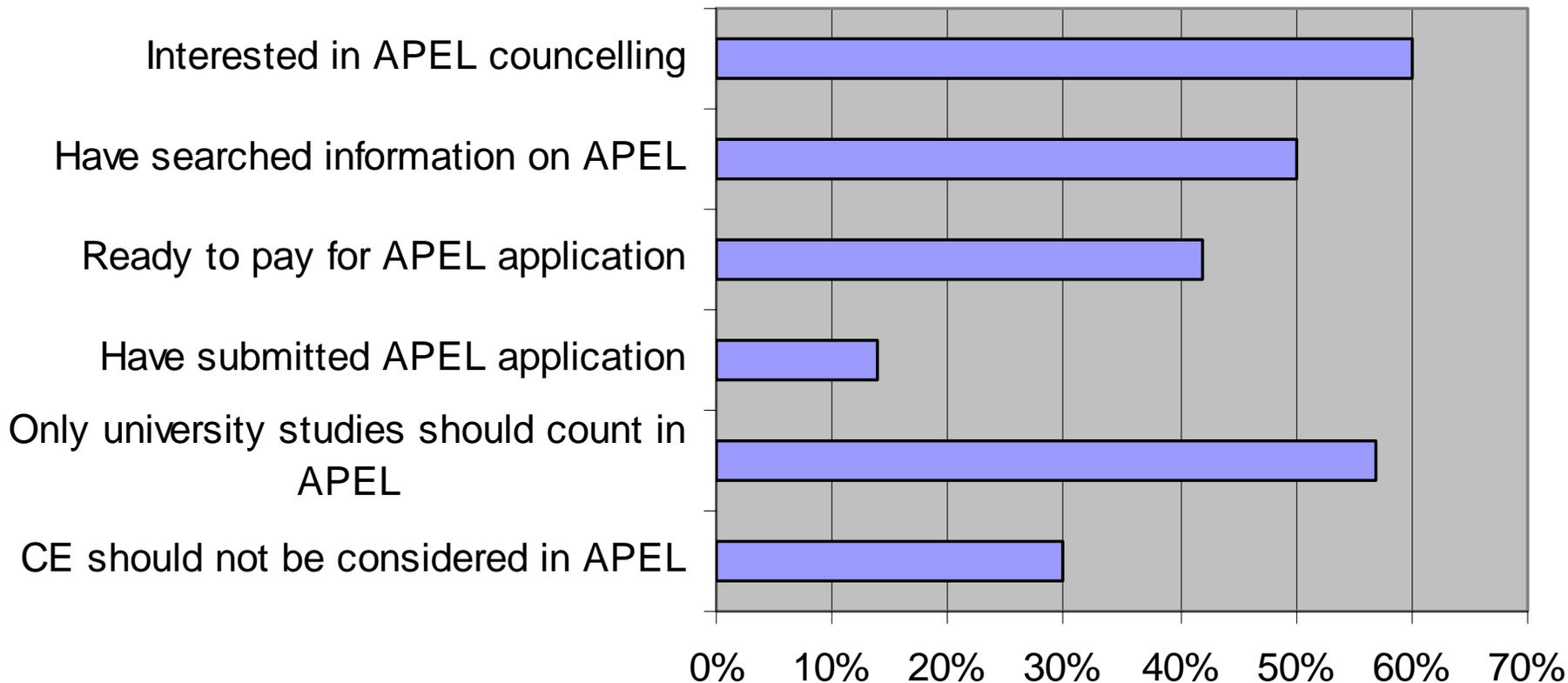


# UT APEL statistics

- In the academic year 2005/2006 there were altogether 2010 (2004/2005 – 1544) applications for AP(E)L, incl 46 for accrediting of work experience.
  - 1/3 small (less than 6 ECTS credit points) – decided by the teacher
  - 2/3 big (more than 6 ECTS) – decided by the jury
- Most of the applications were fully accredited, partly were accredited 124 and non-accredited 37 applications.

- Altogether ca 3,5% of all credit points delivered by the university were got via APEL
- 1/4 of all applications have been agreed in advance. Agreement is made usually in the framework of e.g. ERASMUS contracts or academic mobility between Estonian universities.
- For entering to Master's studies and fulfilling the prerequisites there were 176 applications, 118 got positive answer.

# Study among interrupters in 4 public universities (351 respondents)





# Challenges for APEL

- Traditional values of universities: The compatibility of research-based teaching (process is important!) with APEL
- Autonomous teachers, trend to compare subject to subject, “Not invented here” - attitude
- The process of describing programmes and courses in learning outcomes is not finished.
- Lack of time and energy among academics: Too many reforms!
- Finances: Entrepreneurial university and APEL



Diversity and change are the keywords that describe what universities face nowadays. A remarkable part of the change knocking on university doors is lifelong learning. As described by European University Lifelong Learning Network (EULLearn), lifelong learning is seen on the one hand as an opportunity to meet the needs of individuals, employers and institutions, and on the other as a challenge to find ways of meeting those needs. As stated in the Aims and Objectives of EULLearn: "Making these changes while maintaining the best of the present university tradition (teaching based on high-quality scholarship and research, and high levels of academic integrity, for example) will present a major challenge to Europe's universities."

This book sets out to summarise one of the most interesting practices of lifelong learning: APEL, the recognition and accreditation of prior experiential learning. APEL as the formalisation of what people have learned in informal settings prior to university access is stressed by the European Commission as an important educational principle as well as a tool that can help Europe build a diverse knowledge-based society from the bottom up.

In some countries, discussion on APEL has gone a long way and now travels hand in hand with practice. In others, certain types of practice are burgeoning, but there is a lack of discussion and a need for basic principles of action. Universities often give us discussion, but do not always accompany this with actions. Recognising this, the book is an attempt to give a structured overview of what looks like a mixing palette of colours rather than a finished picture: a rich, varied, highly promising and often incomparable patchwork of differing experiences, provisions and regulations. By sharing good practice and widening the theoretical understanding of APEL, more universities will be encouraged to develop provisions of their own, thus increasing their educational offers and contributing to spreading the word in their countries.

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# Recognising Experiential Learning

PRACTICES IN EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

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# Thank You!

For obtaining the book or further information

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