

# **Valuing Learning from Experience (VaLEx ) project**

## **Socrates- Grundtvig project 2003-2005**

### **Rationale**

The Socrates project Valuing Learning from Experience(VaLEx) will build on the work of our previous Socrates-Grundtvig project 'Social Inclusion Through APEL: the Learners' Perspective' which enabled both an investigation of the extent of APEL activity in a number of different settings across Europe, and an exploration of the response of learners to that experience. The project raised issues regarding the need for change if APEL is to have a more inclusive and valued role as the project revealed limited APEL activity generally within the UK and across Europe. One of its main findings is that most learners benefiting from APEL opportunities are 'traditional' learners, leading to the conclusion that the potential of APEL to support processes of social inclusion within the lifelong learning agenda is not being realised.

The project recommended that more emphasis be given to the 'transformative' dimension of APEL in order to widen participation in lifelong learning by non-traditional groups of learners, enabling them to develop new 'learners' identities'. This new project, VaLEx, therefore aims to develop APEL's potential as a reflective and analytical tool to make explicit the connections between non-formal learning situations and formal learning opportunities. The collaborative product which emerged from the previous project, the Learners' Guide 'Making Experience Count', will serve as a starting point for VaLEx, to be further developed into a pedagogical tool which will be field-tested and evaluated with learners from hard -to-reach groups in each of the 8 partner countries.

The project will also endeavour to articulate with some of Transfine's (<http://www.transfine.net>) objectives in as much as this project seeks to develop and pilot a European working model for the recognition of experiential learning based on pedagogical and adult guidance principles, while seeking to have experiential learning accredited within existing national and European credit frameworks.

The eight partner countries in this project have differing experience of APEL which will provide appropriate contexts to develop a European approach.

### **Project Partners**

Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland, UK (Project Co-ordinator)  
University of Stirling, Scotland, UK  
University of South Brittany, France  
Free University of Brussels , Belgium  
Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland  
University of Turku, Finland  
University of Tartu, Estonia  
University of Warwick, England, UK

## **Aims and objectives**

The project aims to pilot, in selected European countries, a model of APEL that targets hard-to-reach learners drawn from traditionally socially excluded groups who lack successful experience of formal learning and self-confidence as learners, or who are excluded for reasons of ethnicity, migration, disability or some other social or economic factors.

The project's aims will be carried out over two years through the following objectives:

1. to review and carry out an analysis of existing learning and teaching strategies underpinning the implementation of APEL in the partner countries (this will be informed by the findings of the project TRANSFINE (objectives 1 and 2 phase 1));
2. to develop an APEL model supported by pedagogical and guidance tools for adult learners, including professional guidelines for academic and front line staff, adapted to diverse learning and cultural/ national contexts. The Learners' Guide will be further developed (as part of the guidance tools) as a multi-media learning product, adaptable to diverse learning contexts;
3. to target specific hard-to-reach groups, using existing and new local partnerships with formal and non-formal educational providers;
4. to pilot the pedagogical and guidance tools developed by partners with these targeted groups;
5. to evaluate the tools' effectiveness in responding to learners' needs, and ability to fit in with diverse national contexts, and amend them as required;
6. to disseminate the model and supporting learning products to appropriate national and European networks.

## **Pedagogical approaches**

Through the comparative analysis of APEL practices and the partner institutions' learning and teaching approaches, the project will seek to build a working framework that will reflect the transformative potential of the APEL process. By transformative we refer to the potential within APEL to help learners to recognise, not just the learning they have already achieved, but their potential as learners, thus revealing a 'human capital' (their capacities as individuals, learners, workers and citizens), in a way not possible if only using traditional methods of assessment. It is the reflective process, underpinning APEL, which can enable the recognition and valuing of skills, knowledge and understanding which can be gained through informal learning experiences. Through reflection, the discourses of the everyday can be translated into the discourses of learning. Learners are encouraged to challenge their often narrow perception of what constitutes 'learning'.

Central to the process will be a guidance approach enabling individuals to:

- Identify learning from personal and professional experience through a personal biography route;
- Recognise personal and professional skills and attributes, the 'capacities' ;
- Carry out written analysis of learning in terms of knowledge and competences through supported tutoring;
- map out a personal and educational/ career plan.

The model will also include introductory professional guidelines for staff responsible for the management/ implementation of the APEL process in HEIs, bearing in mind that this may constitute in many countries a the recognition of the role of advisers similar to the French model of the 'VAE accompagnateur' .

## Target groups

The APEL model will be piloted in each partner European country, using local partnerships with relevant organisations/ institutions or employers. The range of contexts will allow for comparisons not only across nations, but also across types of learning contexts. The local organisations will include:

**Glasgow** CU: Anniesland College: refugee learners on a vocational programme;

**Stirling**: Falkirk College of Further and Higher Education: community-based learning centres for adults with no formal qualifications;

**South Brittany**: ANPE (National Agency for the Unemployed); Mission Locale ( Association helping young adults 18-26, who are socially excluded and who have stopped studying);

**Brussels**: regional 'insertion', training agencies and local employment agencies. The target groups are mainly adults who have quit the education system, either in employment or unemployed.;

**Turku**: Turun AKK (Turku Vocational Adult Education Centre) - unemployed people , people with learning disabilities, ethnic minorities;

**Tartu**: Estonian Foundation of Viually Impaired - Disabled people (visually impaired) and Tartu Folk University - people from minority ethnic groups;

**Dublin**: Target groups include childcare workers from mixed ethnic backgrounds who have recently started living in Dublin;

## Key project outputs

### APEL model

A pedagogical model based on a range of experiences across the partners, consisting of a set of learning tools will be developed using ICT whenever possible, or in ways which will facilitate their use on-line. However, these tools will also be designed for a one-to-one or group situation, based on evidence that a mixed mode of delivery is more effective for new or diffident learners.

These tools will be directed at three different groups:

#### (a) Learners, as identified previously

An APEL toolkit, expanding on the existing Learners' Guide, and using partners' expertise, will map an entire process of APEL, with different strands and options to suit diverse needs and circumstances. For instance:

- Initial enquiry for APEL: introductory questionnaire to assess nature of APEL claim: will include basic personal information regarding previous educational and professional history, paid/ unpaid experience and formulation of a potential trajectory ;
- Supporting material to suggest prompts about individuals' biographies: examples of personal histories/ case studies, a framework to help learners to identify, for instance, personal attributes, attitudes and values, skills - decision-making, problem solving, social skills, and knowledge- factual, conceptual, experiential ;
- self-directed tutorial on diverse forms of writing: reflective and analytical writing; self-evaluation; and portfolio building;
- personal development and career planning exercises;
- introduction to the national education/ credit system to increase understanding of pathways and progression routes (particularly useful to refugees).

**(b) teaching / advising staff**

- pedagogical tools designed to facilitate reflective learning, self-awareness, analytical thinking and competence-mapping;
- professional guidelines on APEL/ VAE information and advice, active listening skills, helping learners to build a career /personal development plan and personal biographies, group dynamics, advocacy and negotiation skills for advisers, training on equal opportunities issues, both in paper-based and electronic format.

**(c) support/ front-line staff**

staff development guidelines to support the generation of first-time enquiries from new learners and operate in a learner/ client centred environment, to include active listening skills, open questioning, record keeping and monitoring, negotiation and communication skills, training on equal opportunities issues.

**Audit of current practices** across each of the partner countries

- learning and teaching strategies for APEL;
- administrative and academic structures for APEL implementation;
- information and guidance practices for adults and hard-to-reach/ non-traditional learners;
- integration within national credit systems;
- strategies at institutional and national levels.

**Final report**, which will present and consider the following:

- national case studies;
- recommendations for a European-wide approach;
- evaluation of the benefits and outstanding issues associated with the piloting of the APEL model;
- potential for integration within institutional, national and European qualification frameworks.

**Implementation of the outputs**

The project's outputs will be used by partners within the context of their institutions. Depending on their current state of development in the implementation of an APEL process, they will either use the outputs to enhance their existing practice in the promotion, and successful implementation, of APEL, or use the outputs to introduce the process within their institutions. At the University of Stirling for instance, it is envisaged that the APEL toolkit, and the professional and staff development guidelines will give substance to a fledging development in the practice of experiential learning assessment, in terms of:

- APEL advisory service;
- APEL enquiry process and development;
- negotiations with academic community regarding credit .

## Dissemination

A variety of strategies for dissemination will be adopted:

- one of the outcomes of the project will be the transformation of the Learners' Guide to APEL into multimedia formats designed to make distribution wider and easier;
- the project team already has existing links with members of the TRANSFINE team and these links will be exploited to the full when considering issues of dissemination of the outcomes and products of the project;
- existing networks within each country will also be used to disseminate information about the ongoing work of the project and final products and outcomes of the project;
- additional strategies for dissemination will be discussed by the partners on an ongoing basis and initiatives for local seminars will be considered and encouraged;
- an existing APEL website (<http://cril.gcal.ac.uk/SOCRATESSite/home.html>) will be updated to include access to new products and reports from the VaLEx project and methods to promote the status and availability of this website will be further investigated;
- the team also propose to encourage the use of networks established amongst local organisations in each of the countries to spread information and awareness about final products and outcomes and the benefits of APEL generally.

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