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Recognition of workplace learning at HE institutes in Eastern Finland

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ITÄ-SUOMEN YLIOPISTO

The project

- The University of Eastern Finland (coordinator), Savonia University of Applied Sciences, North Karelia University of Applied Sciences and Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences
- The **aim** of the project has been to support and develop practices related to the recognition and accreditation of prior learning (RPL), particularly linked to skills learned in working life
- The project was started on June 1, 2010 and will be finished on June 30, 2012
- The project is funded by the European Social Fund Programme together with the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for North Savo.



Methods

- Staff education and training
- HE institutions' network for the development of the RPL processes from the viewpoint of working life and workplace learning
- Pilot projects :
 - University of Eastern Finland: School of Computing, Department of Business, Nursing Science and Translation Studies as well as Language and Communication Studies
 - Savonia University of Applied Sciences and North Karelia University of Applied Sciences : Business Economics as well as Social and Health Care
 - Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences: Business Economics.



Target groups

- The teaching staff, tutors, study counsellors, heads of departments and training programs, curriculum developers, supporting staff and study administrators
- Students as lifelong learners
- Working life stakeholders



Outcomes

- Good development practices:
 - The development of the RPL processes as a network of HE:s supports the student's possibilities to mobility between different HE:s and working life (eg. Knowledge exchange, equal treatment)
 - As the basis for the development of RPL process in an institution , the existing practices and RPL-related processes were mapped
 - Supports the committment of the personnel involved in the RPL-process
 - The developed processes and practices are connected to existing teaching, counselling and assessment practices



Outcomes...

The processes need more testing in practice, but so far we have learned that:

- The work based learning is not always "prior"
 - Many HE students work during their studies -> Are they learning something relevant related to the learning outcomes of the program?
 - To support the recognition, the recognition process can be attached to the study counselling process during the studies
- Discussing and assessing the student's prior experiences and prior learning in the beginning of the studies as part of the study counselling increases the student's motivation towards the studies and decreases the risk to leaves studies at an early stage



Outcomes; The working life connection in RPL

- The project set basis for the collaboration between the working life actors and HE institutions in recognition of workplace learning:
 - The RPL –practice is yet unfamiliar to companies and employers (see Pasanen 2011, Mikkeli UAS)
 - The employers highlighted the importance of sufficient theoretical knowledge
 - The employers identified competence areas where work based learning could be assessed and recognized, e.g. human resources, IT, management, communication, project work
 - The employers see that RPL can have positive effects to workplace
 - e.g. better motivation, new ways of thinking and doing, the recognition of competences and development needs
 - Competence based testimonials



Outcomes; Power of the group

- At workplace, the learning and recognition of learning happens often in social interaction of small groups: "The members of the same group or team at a workplace, usually have no trouble recognizing the knowledge, skills and abilities of **other** team members
 - But they have trouble recognizing their **own**" (Ukkola 2011)
 - > "Could **You** help?"
 - In many cases, we have only learned to recognize the things we can **not** do or do **not** know
 - The sense of competence is not the same thing as actual competence (as an ability to apply the learned in practice)
- Do we (HE:s) have here something to learn?
 - E.g. in the pilot projects, teaching in a small group was used to assess the prior learning

Challenges; A future challenge is a wider – a grass root level - implementation of the recognition of work-based learning:

- The attitudes and RPL-skills of individual teachers
 - The value of project's pilot experiences
- The content and the structure of HE -curriculum:
 - The work based learning is often "hidden" and the curriculum (especially in the science University) does not recognize it
 - Often the "generic" competences are hidden, however true and intended, outcomes of the courses (e.g. specific learning method is chosen because it simulates the working life demands)
 - Fragmented structure; The recognition of small course units does not speed up the studies
 - Creates just more "spare time" in the study plan
 - Practices for the recognition of larger modules should be developed
 - The criteria and methods for assessment of work based learning
- The international framework

After the project...

- With well described RPL processes and tested practices, in the future, it will be easier for HE institutes to discuss the possibilities in the development of recognition of workplace learning with stakeholders
- The need for the development of the curriculum work, from the RPL point of view, can lead to better response to the expectations of the working life
- The HE institutions of Eastern Finland will continue the development in collaboration as a network
- The project found some answers and new ways to do RPL and we got forward as institutions, but in many cases the question remains: **How to reveal and recognize the, often hidden, knowledge, skills and competencies – “How to lift the iceberg” ?**



A Publication (in press)

- A Publication (in press) that focuses on experiences gained in the project:
 - I Starting points for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning
 - II The role of student counselling and assessment in the recognition and accreditation of prior learning and
 - III Procedures for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning in different educational and scientific fields.
- PDF and other materials of the project:
 - www.uef.fi/ahot