



Case Study template

A) General Part

General	
Case Study Title	Prior knowledge recognition for re-entering study programmes
DIALOGUE thematic group	Learning & Guidance
Date of the case study	May to December 2006 (research), 2007/2008 (practice)
Contact Information	
Name of the institution	University of Primorska, Faculty of Management
Location/country	Slovenia
Size of the organisation/ Number of academic/research and non-academic/administrative staff	Situation in November 2011 Academic/research staff: 81 Administrative staff: 35 Students: 1076
Website	www.fm-kp.si , www.upr.si
Abstract	
Key words	prior knowledge recognition
Please provide a short abstract of the case study	The case study presents the project of developing and implementing prior knowledge recognition in higher education. The case focuses especially on the inclusion of practitioners in the final phases of the project, where they cooperated in designing and improving the proposed practice of recognition and afterwards in implementing the adopted recognition procedure in practice.

B) Specific Part

The following part depends on each thematic group, outlining strengths and weaknesses of the chosen situations.

1. Context:

Please present the general background ("landscape of experience") of the activity and in which institutions, organisations, units or sectors the case took place.

The case presents a project that aimed at implementing prior knowledge recognition and validation of LLL at university level in Slovenia. Bologna reforms were being implemented at the time and part of those was the possibility of prior knowledge and LLL recognition in order to (re)-enter study programmes. Though a part of the general public was aware of this possibility, most people were unaware that prior knowledge recognition was legally possible and that higher education institutions were implementing it as part of enrolment activities. Very few people actually knew about such options in foreign countries; this knowledge was mostly based on friends' experience. LLL was, on the other hand, quite popular, predominantly at secondary level. 17,9% of the adult population were included in different LLL activities at the time. Different institutions offered 773 programmes and courses of secondary and vocational education and 119 programmes and courses of post-secondary and tertiary education. After full membership in the EU, several policy documents at national level followed EU orientation towards establishing a knowledge society. Among these were:

- Act on adult education; dated 2003 (*Zakon o izobraževanju odraslih*)
- Higher education act; novelties dated 2004 (*Novela zakona o visokem šolstvu*)
- Resolution on the national programme of adult education in the Republic of Slovenia until 2010; dated 2004 (*Resolucija o nacionalnem programu izobraževanja odraslih v Republiki Sloveniji do leta 2010*)
- National report on modernisation of the national education and training system aimed at realization of 2010 objectives; dated 2005 (*Nacionalno poročilo o posodobitvi sistema izobraževanja in usposabljanja usmerjenega k uresničevanju ciljev do leta 2010*).

The main policy objectives were:

1. to improve general adults' education,
2. to rise accomplishment in education and to set the base standard to 12 years of successfully attained education,
3. to improve employability,
4. to improve possibilities and inclusion in education.

The first phase of the project was oriented to an analysis of LLL at national and international level as well as to studying existing research and practice in prior knowledge recognition in selected EU member countries. Conditions and possibilities of implementing a prior knowledge recognition model at national legal and policy level were studied. UP FM designed the project

that was funded by the government so as to include different stakeholders: policy makers, companies (namely the economic sector), and adult educators. Two consultation seminars were organised with all stakeholders in order to disseminate research findings and scan the (interested) public's readiness and willingness to adopt such a model.

The second phase of the project aimed at improving access to education and adapting higher education (formal) practice to LLL concepts as well as to labour market's (changing) needs. Its second objective was to bring formal education (especially on tertiary level) closer to needs and possibilities of learners.

A model for knowledge recognition was developed based on findings from first phase and it was pilot tested in collaboration with a company from the faculty's local area.

2. What are the objectives and purposes of the concrete action?

The main purpose of the project was to promote lifelong learning and through lifelong learning facilitate and improve (re)inclusion in higher education.

A lot of people dropped out of higher education mainly due to lack of time caused by employment or family up-bringing. However, changes in political and subsequently economic structure and system led to a renewed need for formal education. Since most of the study programmes have changed, re-starting the „old“ programme was impossible for most people and they would have to enrol regularly in first year regardless of the study already done. With the introduction of knowledge recognition, former university „drop-outs“ were given an opportunity to valorise previous formal and non-formal education as well as experiential learning in order to enrol into second or even third year of an appropriate study programme.

The action described was designed so as to facilitate candidates in preparation for knowledge recognition and on the other hand to train practitioners in all the procedures. For this purpose, practitioners were included in some phases of research, as well.

3. How does this activity combine insights from research and practical hands-on experience?

The key connection between research and practice in this case is in the process of knowledge recognition. This process contains all or at least most of the findings from research: what kinds of knowledge to recognise, how it should be presented and recognised, to what extent recognition may take part. Besides this, practitioners involved with the later recognition process were involved in last phase of research as well, so they could actively contribute to establishing the recognition process. This way, not only did the practitioners learn from research findings, but researchers also got an immediate feedback on the implementation they proposed. This was then slightly moderated in order to apply as well as possible to the “real world” where it should operate. Additionally, a rule book was prepared and adopted by the faculty senate to serve as normative regulation for the process of recognition.

4. Does the institution/sector/unit provide instruments (e.g. ICT or human resources) for the implementation of the concrete action? Which tools were applied?

This project was initially stimulated by the institution – Faculty of management. For funding, the research group applied to a national call for project proposals and was successful in receiving enough funds to conduct the research as well as for organising different learning and disseminating events. The school's management provided all necessary resources for implementation: human resources (practitioners' salary), space for meetings and forming a committee for recognition. The first few candidates participating in the implementation of the pilot testing were exempt from paying the fee for recognition, while further candidates were (and still are) charged some administrative costs. Consultations regarding the process are free of charge.

After pilot testing and some moderations, recognition of prior knowledge is still actively applied before enrolment and during studies at the present time. A candidate issues an application for knowledge recognition to the students' office. The application consists of the candidate's personal data, a brief CV and subjects of recognition (full study year of selected courses or a single course or part of a course). The candidate is then appointed to a counsellor for recognition that gives him/her all support needed. The candidate has to prepare a portfolio that includes all certificates of formal and non-formal education as well as description and evidence of experiential learning. The latter includes work and voluntary experience, hobbies, and any other endeavours that may lead to achieving or enhancing competences. The portfolio also includes the candidate's CV and motivation for re-inclusion to studies or the reasons for applying to recognise the selected course. The committee, a member of which is also the candidate's counsellor, studies the application and the portfolio and decides whether the candidate may be granted enrolment to the desired study year or may be recognised for the desired courses. The committee may invite the candidate to a hearing or asks him/her to prepare a presentation on a selected subject to prove the claimed competences. Rarely the candidates are denied admission or recognition, though it may occur in a case in which either the portfolio or the presentation is badly performed, and the candidate does not prove meeting the necessary requirements for recognition.

5. Best practice/ Bad practice:

What kind of results were obtained? What do you consider to be the innovative or interesting part of this concrete action?

What are the barriers (potential and effective) to the full implementation of this action and what are its benefits?

In which sense can this action be useful for DIALOGUE?

Within the project, five people were included in the recognition process. Two of them enrolled

in study programme to continue studies (one of them in second, one in third year). One candidate decided to change the study programme and enrolled in a different school; the fourth candidate was already a student at the faculty and got two courses recognised. The fifth candidate decided not to re-adopt studies. The three candidates that continued studies at the faculty were satisfied with the opportunity and found recognising useful not only regarding enrolment but also regarding organizing all their experience in one place. They kept filling their portfolio with new experience. The research group lost track of other two candidates.

After pilot-testing the recognition process, it was offered to the public. Since the first year of implementation of recognition in 2006, 643 applications for different kinds of recognition were filed in and 541 were positively answered with recognition. The table below shows the data in further detail.

Type of recognition	Applications	2010/2011	2009/2010	2008/2009	2007/2008	2006/2007
Formal education	Issued	41	45	25	40	62
	Approved	29	33	18	26	41
Non-formal education	Issued	9	7	18	19	33
	Approved	6	4	13	11	21
Experiential learning	Issued	42	55	66	114	61
	Approved	42	55	66	113	61

Figures show that the communication, namely the dialogue between researchers and practitioners in this case was quite successful. It resulted not only in improving the firstly suggested model of recognition, but it helped implementing the recognition system. Practitioners being included in the final process felt more involved and thus strived more for the process to succeed. On the other hand, researchers were able to see the results of their work immediately and were able to improve it during real-life testing, which is not often the case in management in education research.

However, after five years, we can see a decrease in applications. One of the employees who worked as a counsellor left the faculty and part of the recognition process was adopted by the students' office. On the other hand, we are not a very large community and it would be unreasonable to expect numbers to grow constantly because a lot of the people interested tried the process in its first few years.

Nevertheless, another success is the spreading of the model to other faculties and the other two universities in Slovenia. Even though the legislation allowed such a system to be introduced as soon as in 2004, it took some time for other institutions to approve of the idea and its implementation.

6. Are researchers and practitioners directly linked in this activity?

- If yes, how are they linked and what are the communication and interaction processes?
- If they do not communicate directly, how are findings from research connected to



practical activities and vice versa?

During the project, researchers and practitioners were directly linked. They met on meetings where they exchanged ideas and commented on the work in progress and gave suggestions for further developments. After the implementation of the project's results, the interaction process was stopped. The practitioners were well instructed in their work and could easily carry on the knowledge recognition process on their own.

Perhaps in a few years a need will emerge to improve or change the recognition procedures and researchers will be included in the process once again. However, for the time being, the link is interrupted.

7. Which elements would you identify as easily transferable to other institutions in different regional and national contexts?

The described approach could be transferred to any similar process in higher education and in other sectors. The key aspect or good practice in the presented case lies in combining research with the practical aspects of a specific problem. In research it is often the case that even though findings are interesting and could contribute a lot to the implementation or improvement of certain practice, they often prove to be less useful in real life. However, in practitioners' reality, many of such findings simply can't be implemented: they are either too complicated, too expensive or not in compliance with specific aspects of the environment (such as legislation, human resources, infrastructure, or even social acceptance). This is why, we believe, especially in applied problems, inclusion of practitioners is not only a good suggestion, but a necessity.

8. Recommendations for dissemination:

Briefly identify the most important points in the case study for other ULL managers and practitioners – these may include risks as well as benefits.

Please formulate some recommendations for the dissemination on the basis of the case study addressed to the working group and other partners.

General recommendations can be extracted from the text above, nevertheless we state some here, as well:

- Including practitioners in end phases of a research project can be not only very useful, but a compulsory element especially with applied problems.
- Practitioners often have a much more "down-to-earth" view of the problem and implementation of solutions than researchers, as they consider different aspects than researchers.
- A good way to include practitioners is workshops, where they can present their experience and test the proposed solutions or discuss the findings.
- It is often the case that practitioners have actually a lot of theoretical knowledge about their field of work, but they express it in a "non-scientific" way. Focus groups are a good method to collect such knowledge.



9. Additional information. E.g. bibliography, website, publications, reports

Project report and dissemination materials are in Slovenian language and are not available online; they are only available in libraries. Here are some articles in English:

Gomezelj Omerzel, Doris and Nada Trunk Širca. 2007. The motivation of educational institutions for validation of non-formal and informal learning. International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement Book of abstracts / 20th Annual World ICSEI Congress, January, 3-6 2007, Portorož, Slovenija; [edited by Mateja Brejc].

Gomezelj Omerzel, Doris, Katarina Babnik and Nada Trunk Sirca. 2006. Validation of non-formal and informal learning at the level of higher education: stimulating the lifelong learning.

Research on education, edited by Marina-Stefania Giannakaki [et al.], Athens: Athens Institute for Education and Research, p. 741-755.

Gomezelj Omerzel, Doris, Katarina Babnik and Nada Trunk Sirca. 2006. Recognition and validation of workplace learning; confronting the challenges to improve the attainment of formal education. Advancing business and management in knowledge-based society, proceedings of the 7th International Conference of the Faculty of Management Koper, University of Primorska, 23-25 November 2006, Portorož, Slovenia, p. 313-322.

We are intending to put your case study on the website.

Please tick here if you do not wish to see your case study published on the project's website