

The Austrian Initiative for Adult Education

1. Definition

In 2012 the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education arose from a cooperation of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and the nine Austrian provinces. Its objective is to enable adults who lack basic skills or never graduated from a lower secondary school to continue and finish their education. The innovative approach of this project is due to two characteristics. First of all, the implementation of consistent quality guidelines for courses of this program in all parts of Austria and, secondly, the fact that all courses are free of charge as a result of national funding and – since 2015 – an additional co-financing by the European Social Fund (ESF).

2. Background

Although the level of qualifications has been rising gradually over the last decades, the amount of low skilled people in Austria is regarded as being too high. The results of PIAAC indicate that more than 17% of the inhabitants – nearly one million people out of the population of nearly 8 million – have poor literacy skills. Further studies show that there are still nearly 250.000 people whose qualifications in regard to reading, writing, calculating and the use of technical facilities are not sufficient for their employment or their participation in everyday life. Every year about 3.700 Austrian teenagers (nearly 4%) finish their compulsory education without qualifications. It is estimated that the target group for second chance education at lower secondary level amounts to 220.000 people. These numbers include people speaking German as their first language as well as those who use German as their second language.

3. The Project's Progress

The Initiative for Adult Education was formed on behalf of the government program 2008-2013 after nearly three years of negotiations and concept development. During this process the partners were representatives of the ministry and the nine Austrian provinces as well as experts of adult education. They achieved a legal agreement of the ministry and the Austrian provinces in regard to the financing as well as a document describing the projects' intentions, the quality standards and the main structure and procedures during the realization. The agreement was signed in 2011. The first program period from January 2012 to December 2014 provided a budget of 50 million Euro to fund courses. The outcomes provided by monitoring and evaluation demonstrated the fulfilment of the objectives in regard to the numbers of participants, the meeting of their needs and the satisfaction of all parties concerned. Therefore a second program period from 2015 to 2017 has been established and yet intensified by the means of co-financing



by the ESF. Therefore the available funds for this three-year-period have been increased to 75 million Euro.

4. Program

The Initiative for Adult Education is to cover two program areas: Training of basic skills and lower secondary education. The target group of the program area concerning basic skills consists of people who didn't have the opportunity to gain such skills, irrespective of language, birth or potential graduations. The main quality guidelines of this program area refer to the individualization of the courses and the adaption to the needs of adults. One of the most important merits of the Initiative of Adult Education in this context has been the development of a framework directive for the adult's training of basic skills, which is the first one of official character in Austria.

The target group of the program area of the lower secondary education consists of people without a graduation at this level. The curriculum focusses especially on compulsory education for adults. In addition to the training of various subjects a clearing-period at the beginning and counselling in regard to the transition into work or to further education at the end are very important parts of this program.

5. Accreditation – Quality Criteria

Austrian institutions that want to take part in the program of the Initiative of Adult Education have to apply for an accreditation and provide evidence on the following three quality criteria. Firstly, they have to fulfil general requirements for an educational establishment, secondly they have to hand in an appropriate concept of their program and thirdly they have to prove the qualification of their trainers and counsellors in accordance with the guidelines of the Initiative for Adult Education.

6. Program management

The accreditation group, consisting of six adult education experts, surveys the quality of applications in regard to the Initiative's quality guidelines. In case of a successful accreditation the institution then applies for funding. The approval depends on the balance of the various courses of the different program areas and the different target groups in the particular region. An approval is granted if the guidelines are met and the program fits the needs of the participants in the region where it is conducted (which means that funds are only granted when there is a need and a target group for the accredited offer).

Institutions taking part in the Initiative's program commit themselves to continuous monitoring and evaluation. A monitoring board supervises the process and the results. By this procedure the Initiative expects to gain further knowledge about the specific problems and advancements of adult education.



The Initiative's Viennese office serves as a communication platform and supports the partners. A steering committee consisting of the region's and the ministry's representatives and social partners supervises the project's strategy and design.