

AUCEN – Austrian University Continuing Education and Staff Development Network

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A history of the network

The first initiative was started in 1996. In the course of the implementation of the UOG 93 (Universities Organisation Act) in March 1996, the then Vice-Rector for Continuing Education and Human Resources Management at the University of Agricultural Sciences Vienna invited colleagues from other universities to a round table to exchange experiences and to explore the potential of university continuing education and staff development. The round table developed into a network. In 1998 the name AUCEN and the aims and guidelines were established and a representative as „Spokesperson“ designated.

AUCEN is a forum for the common interests and specific needs of both subject areas, university continuing education and staff development. From October 2002 to January 2005, the AUCEN Office was provided with staff resources financed by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture to coordinate and advance the network. Up to October 2005, AUCEN was an informal network of universities for universities. Since then, AUCEN is a registered, formal association with its office financed by the member universities.

The organisational structure of AUCEN

AUCEN has its own statutes and regulations as required by Austrian Association law. Its Steering Committee is composed of six professionals (three working in university continuing education, three in university staff development) from different member universities. The members of the Steering Committee are elected by the General Assembly for a period of two years.

Externally the AUCEN network is represented by a Spokesperson and a Vice-Spokesperson. AUCEN has a permanent office, currently at the Center for Continuing Education at the University of Graz. The day-to-day business is managed by a part-time administrator

(7 hours per week). At least one General Assembly is held per year as part of the usually semi-annual „AUCEN Meeting“.

Membership

Membership is institutional only and all public Austrian universities are potential members. Each university nominates and delegates representatives for university continuing education and university staff development. Membership is subject to a fee. AUCEN currently has 17 members.

Aims and activities

AUCEN depends on the commitment and the voluntary contributions of its members and their willingness to share experiences and good practice. It is up to the members to form task groups to work on specific topics of current interest. These results are presented at the network meetings and provide impetus for both subject areas. AUCEN members are also invited to contribute to work groups of other stakeholders such as the Austrian University Conference (Uniko) which has recently published a document on „Principles and recommendations to the university continuing education programmes“ (January 2009).

The basic aims and the scope of activities are presented in the following AUCEN Mission Statement:

AUCEN Mission Statement

Knowledge-based societies are faced with the challenge of organising Lifelong Learning. For universities, this means providing differentiated learning programmes for target groups in different phases of life. Lifelong Learning has an impact on the competencies, profile and role of the university staff in

terms of teaching, research, and services and, consequently, on staff development. Furthermore, Lifelong Learning requires a change in and a broadening of the picture of the student. As a platform, AUCEN deals with the organisation and design of the required transformation processes.

Continuing Education offered by Universities

Next to research and teaching, Continuing Education is a central task of the universities and covers a wide range of activities. In promoting Lifelong Learning, continuing education offers various formats and programmes for different target groups in order to establish a fruitful interchange of research-based „state of the art“ with the requirements of practice. Continuing Education offered by universities includes activities that make the university accessible to an interested public.

Academic programmes awarding a range of certificates/degrees up to international master's degrees are aimed at graduates of higher education institutions and practitioners with adequate professional experience. The interaction of theory and best practice facilitates university continuing education programmes. Tailor-made programmes for specific target groups, e.g. „corporate programmes“ for companies and public institutions, complete the spectrum.

Staff Development at Universities

The university as an organisation of experts has the key task of providing access to, developing, and communicating knowledge and art. To achieve this task, the know-how and the creative potential of the university staff is a central factor; this is why staff development at universities is of great importance. Staff development facilitates the achievement of the organisation's goals and is the responsibility of the administration of each individual department/unit. The central unit for staff development assists and gives advice to the administrators and develops target-oriented measures. These measures need to comply with the strategic goals of the universities and the ensuing objectives for the organisational

units, as well as with the development options and goals of the university's staff.

AUCEN promotes Continuing Education and Staff Development at universities

- at policy level – through involvement and lobbying at national and European level in order to establish favourable conditions for University Continuing Education and staff development at the universities
- at institutional level – through networking and professionalisation of the experts and administrators involved in continuing education and staff development at the universities
- at content level – through quality development in continuing education and staff development

In addition to this Mission Statement, AUCEN has also published a Mission Statement specifically regarding University Continuing Education. This Mission Statement was agreed at the 12th Meeting of AUCEN on 11 March, 2002:

AUCEN Mission Statement University Continuing Education

After research and teaching, university continuing education is the third key task of Austrian universities. Through university continuing education, individuals with academic and/or adequate qualifications can participate in universities' learning processes and can continue their academic studies, thus stimulating the influence of experience and approaches from outside on the universities, in the same way the universities influence various professions and areas of life. Besides qualifying individuals, university continuing education contributes to professional cooperation, the formation of groups with common interests, and networking. Consequently, university continuing education also stimulates society to react to these processes.

Special characteristics of university continuing education are:

1. Relation to Research of International Standard

University continuing education has the advantage of being able to offer a learning process based on the latest internationally recognised standards of knowledge and competency in a particular field. As experts in the field, providers of university continuing education take part in international research; they are able to offer insights into the development of knowledge and to impart research competency as required.

2. Reflexivity in a Social Context

Academic knowledge is critical and reflexive as it questions the conditions of its formation and effects. This reflexivity asks where the knowledge comes from and what it is for. It also asks questions about subjective implications and social situations. Reflexivity is also the most reliable form of mediation between theory and practice: the differences between theory and practice are not rejected or disavowed, but considered a benefit for both learners and teachers in the learning processes. Reflexivity requires candour and freedom in situations of teaching and learning.

3. Common Principle

Learners and teachers see each other as partners in a common process of teaching and learning: the experience and the knowledge of both parties involved are part of the process right from the beginning. This creates a system that is constantly being improved through the interaction of the persons involved.

Activities

In general, AUCEN's activities focus on the following areas:

Communication and Dialogue

AUCEN is a platform where persons responsible for continuing education and staff development at Austrian universities can exchange their experiences. Both sub-

ject areas shall be advanced and professionalised jointly and in a division of labour, also at international level. AUCEN is an active member of the task force „Instruction“ of the Austrian University Conference (Uniko) and of the Lifelong Learning Advisory Board for Universities of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research.

Development of Quality and Quality Assurance

To develop and assure quality standards is a constant challenge. Members of the AUCEN network work on the advancement and assurance of quality criteria in both subject areas.

Common Forum for University Continuing Education and University Staff Development

University continuing education and university staff development address different target groups. The common interest is to exchange experiences and ideas and to strengthen the position of both subject areas through joint strategies.

Contribution to New Developments at the Universities

Since the Austrian universities became autonomous at the beginning of 2004, university continuing education and staff development at universities have played an important role. The AUCEN network pursues joint strategies and stimulates the implementation of new concepts.

The work programme 2009 was decided at the 24th AUCEN Meeting in November 2008 and encompasses the following:

- Quality Assurance in University Continuing Education
- Collective Employment Contract and Quality Assurance in University Staff Development
- Strategic Development of AUCEN

International cooperation and projects

AUCEN has close links with EUCEN, the European University Continuing Education Network. Members of AUCEN regularly take part in EUCEN activities, such as European conferences (and within these, the National Networks Meetings) and projects. Information on topics on the European agenda is distributed via AUCEN to the network members, feedback of AUCEN members is fed into the work of EUCEN. Through the Center for Continuing Education at the University of Graz, AUCEN was involved in the Grundtvig Projects EQUIPE (European Quality in Individualised Pathways in Education) and EQUIPE Plus. Within the framework of these projects, it was possible for AUCEN members to participate in expert workshops on quality development of university lifelong learning. AUCEN functions as a dissemination, valorisation and exploitation forum for best practices in European developmental work. Through its members, AUCEN also has links to other relevant international and European networks.

Informations

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