



**National Quality Report: Italy**  
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## **National Overview of University Lifelong Learning (ULLL)**

### **The Italian Adult Education System**

The earliest Lifelong Learning (LLL) activities in Italy can be traced back to the 1970s when, under the pressure of the Trade Unions, any worker's "right" to attend Evening Schools with Courses of 150 hours leading to officially recognised certificates (generally Secondary School diplomas) was recognised. These activities were largely organized on a regional basis with the extensive involvement of schools. In subsequent years there was a continuous, albeit scattered and non-homogeneous, increase in Vocational Training and LLL activities, still on a regional basis, provided by public and private organizations: Centres for Professional Training, territorial Continuing Education (CE) Centres and Corporate Universities. Along with increasing users' demands, the LLL offer has changed and diversified. Year by year the organization of the Evening School Courses has gradually adapted to the new students' needs; and new didactic instruments, such as the use of technological means, the tutorship service and the acknowledgment of prior learning and experience, have been implemented. Thus, in the period 2003-2004 about 62,000 students, especially workers, applied for LLL Evening Courses.

In September 2003 Isfol (the Italian Institute for Vocational Training) published a comprehensive survey on the localization, structures and results of these Continuing Education activities. It pointed out that until 1995 the State Universities had been largely excluded from the process, apart from the three following important cases:

- 1) Università Popolare della Terza Età. About 40.000 elderly people took part every year in educational activities organised by the Italian Open Universities.
- 2) CUD (Consorzio per l'Università a Distanza), established in 1984 with the purpose of providing a Distance University System; whose members included universities, multinational companies and governmental Institutions.
- 3) NETTUNO, promoted in 1992 by the Ministry for University and Scientific Research (MIUR) in order to deliver Distance Learning Courses at university level. The model of Distance Teaching proposed by NETTUNO was a mix of traditional and distance methods.

## **Italian State Laws and Regulations on ULLL**

It was only from 1999 that, following the Bologna Process for the promotion of a European Common Area of Higher Education, University Continuing Education (UCE) has begun to play a significant role in Italian universities. This role emerged particularly after the re-organization announced in the Ministerial Decree n. 509 (DM1999) when the B/M/D system was adopted. Although no specific attention was given to UCE by this reform, the greater autonomy of universities, the increased flexibility of the HE system and the adoption of a credit system have helped to build up stronger structures for UCE. In fact since then most universities have established their CE Centres throughout the Country. The same law (n. 509) established that a University can recognise, through credits, certified knowledge and professional skills acquired in post-secondary training curricula “designed and realised with the concurrency of University”.

Law n. 144 of 1999 enacted the IFTS (Higher Education and Technical Training System) according to which each Region must provide Higher Education courses through a partnership including at least a school, a training agency (non-formal), a University, a local public authority and an enterprise. These kind of courses recognize prior non-formal Education Courses and previously acquired work experience and they release credits that can be used to access University curricula.

In 2001 regulation n.448 allowed Civil Servants, who had attended training schools in special disciplines (such as medical attendants, journalists, accountants, labour inspectors, police army and finance police) to gain academic credits, with no limitation and within an agreement between an individual University and the relevant Ministry, in order to obtain a University degree. This opportunity has been widely exploited and it has produced a remarkable increase in the enrolments and graduations (often before the end of the academic period scheduled for “traditional students”) But the subsequent fervent debate on the quality of the acquired credits and discrimination against the “traditional” students led in 2006 to Law n.262, which reduces the amount of credit to be gained by recognition to a maximum of 60 credits per student.

Universities have also made an important contribution to CE in the medical sector and Law n. 229/1999 has set up a structured national system of Continuing Education in Medicine (ECM) and Pharmacy. It is intended that all health operators should collect 150 ECM training credits (one day training is the equivalent of 10 credits) over a 3 year-period. Over the last seven years a large number of University departments and CE Centres have been accredited by the Health Ministry to deliver ECM.

## **The Italian University Continuing Education Network**

On May 21<sup>st</sup> 2004 the Italian University Continuing Education Network (*Coordinamento Nazionale per la Formazione Continua Universitaria*, CNFCU) was informally established in Catania. Its purpose is to monitor, implement and promote University Continuing Education activity in order to define operative Lifelong Learning strategies on an integrated territorial cooperative basis. The Network, based on an internal regulation, is directed by a Steering Committee (President, Vice-President and 5 Representative Members), a Representative of the MIUR (Italian Ministry for University and Scientific Research) and a Representative of CRUI (Italian Rectors’ Conference). In the attempt to outline the wide and diverse national LLL panorama, each University makes its contribution by presenting its policy, tools and good-practice in ULLL.

## **ULLL Quality Assessments**

In 1998 (Decree Law n.204/1998) a national Committee (CIVR, *Comitato di Indirizzo per la Valutazione della Ricerca*) was established to ascertain the Quality of Research in individual Universities. In September 2007 the Committee, comprising 7 Italian and non-Italian Members, was officially reconfirmed to be in charge of this process and appointed to evaluate University

Research carried out in the period 2004-2006. A significant fraction of the Funds supplied by the Ministry for University and Scientific Research will be distributed to the different universities based on the CIVR's evaluations. An analogous national Committee (CNVSU, *Comitato Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Universitario*) was appointed to evaluate the premises and quality of the didactics provided by the different Universities and degree courses. Recently the Government has decided that the two Committees should be unified in one (ANVUR, *Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca*). New academic staff posts will be assigned taking into account the evaluations of ANVUR.

Many degree courses are applying to obtain the "Chemistry Eurobachelor Label", a certification of Quality Assurance awarded to University modular programmes of 180 credits (150 should deal with chemistry, physics, biology or mathematics) that comply with precise criteria of European standards. Hopefully this policy of Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Providers will be applied in the near future also to UCE.

Recent guidelines on LLL (17th March 2007) approved by MIUR state, *inter alia*, that ANVUR should also evaluate the quality of UCE offered by the different universities

### **Future ULLL Policy**

Most of the 77 Italian Universities are State Universities providing state diplomas (not diplomas of the individual University). Possession of an officially recognised Secondary School diploma is necessary in order to enter a University and this can be viewed as an obstacle to the implementation of UCE in Italy. In fact up to now only a small fraction of the total CE activities have been carried out in Universities. Furthermore, there is not a tradition of quality assessment for Schools and Universities. Once a new University has been approved and recognised by the pertinent government Ministry it is assumed that good quality education and research will continue to be provided by that University from that time on.

Undoubtedly in the past few years a process has started aimed at improving CE delivery and leading to a new and better-qualified employed workforce. However it is necessary to strengthen and concentrate the numerous efforts made so far in the common direction of a harmonised and shared system of reference criteria. The definition of clear and precise benchmarks will facilitate the assessment and acknowledgement of relevant and verifiable skills acquired formally or experientially.

The overall picture of Italian ULLL reveals a very heterogeneous and complex development, reflecting differing scales of priority and strategies of accomplishment. The quality systems range from cases of high level organization and provision of CE courses to examples of scanty attention and results. However there isn't yet a nationwide coherent and well-structured system able to assess the quality of the different CE activities and providers. In order to improve the performance and investment in Continuing Education initiatives, it is necessary to carry out an analysis of the users' specific demands and then foster a strong cooperation among schools, Universities, local authorities and enterprises. Thus the passage from education to employment and vice versa will turn out to be easier and faster.

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## GLOSSARY

ANVUR	National Committee for the Evaluation of the University System and Research
B/M/D	Bachelor/Master/Doctorate
CIVR	National Committee for the Evaluation of Research
CNVSU	National Committee for the Evaluation of the University System
CUD	Consortium for the Open Distance University
ECM	Continuing Education in Medicine
ISFOL	Italian Institute for Vocational Training
MIUR	Italian Ministry for University and Scientific Research
Università Popolare della terza età	University of the Third Age