Bilateral exchange programme at the Rural Paying Agency in the United Kingdom, 04. September 2017 - 29. September 2017 - Report

Introduction

Within the scope of the bilateral exchange programme I had the opportunity to apply for an internship at the Internal Audit (IA) of the Rural Paying Agency (RPA), Reading.

The goal of the programme was to get a better insight into the working practices of a comparable institution, to get to know relevant administrative structures and processes and to exchange views with foreign colleagues.

I had daily interviews with colleagues of the IA and experts of the most relevant units within RPA and of other institutions, namely the Welsh Government and the English and Welsh Certifying body. A visit of several days at the unit of RDP-Socio-economic measures in Exeter covered my concrete field of work completely.

Scope

- Structure and processes of RPA, work of the different units
- Working methods of the Internal audit of RPA
- Remit and methods of the Coordinating body
- Rural development programme – socio-economic measures
- Working methods of the Certifying bodies
- Working methods of the Technical inspection service
- Organisation of governmental auditing in the UK

These contents matched the scope of my work in Austria to a high degree which meant optimal conditions for an exchange. Getting to know other working methods concerning my specific area of work helped to exchange experience and good practice.

Results

Within the scope of the programme I could get a broad overview of the British structures and management of the agricultural funds and the cooperation of the different actors. This helped to gather intensive experience concerning organisation, working methods and processes of RPA and especially of rural development what covered my area of work completely.

In my opinion RPA is perfectly organised. The employees are highly motivated and work in a very professional way. The systems and processes of the administration of the funds and the schemes are comparable to those of AMA. Also the processes within Certifying body and Technical inspection service are similar to the ones in Austria as well as the good cooperation between PA, IA and Certifying body.

A fundamental difference – apart from „devolved government“ – is the strong governance approach with several layers of governance with regular meetings. These different levels of control and governance mean a lot of institutionalised meetings of different (steering) groups on different levels. But it also exists the opinion, that there are too many governance groups with no added value, too much time is needed to attend all the meetings in comparison to time for delivery.

A further difference is the organisation of governmental auditing in the UK with the institutions of GIAA and Defra group (with Defra Investigations Service). The many different audit institutions require that the Coordinating Body plays a very strong role. Furthermore a
consortium of certifying bodies and auditors is needed within the UK to provide a consistent approach of the 4 separate audit institutions.

PA has a pro-active approach with an accreditation and disallowance group with regular meetings dealing with all types of audit and administrating the risk register. The existence of a Compliance directorate shows the importance of this field.

In RD the collaboration between ESIF and the funds ESF, EFRE, EAFRD in England is very interesting. Local enterprise partnership in the Growth programme is unique in Europe. Wales has launched a new small grant scheme, less complex and with standard costs.

Remarkable is the specified HR computer system for declarations into several registers used for anti-fraud checks.

Concluding, the recruitment promotion for IA and Coordinating Body because of the rising tasks to be delivered is remarkable in times of budget constraints.

Personal result

In the four weeks of my visit I was confronted with a large number of information and new impressions. In the numerous interviews I could gather a lot of positive experiences and insight. I always felt welcome and the colleagues explained their scope of work willingly and detailed.

I could take a comprehensive and interesting insight into the English PA. Especially in the area of rural development as well as certification and internal audit valuable experience could be gained.

This kind of programme offers a perfect possibility to win a better insight into the working methods of a member state. Knowledge of the administrative processes of a comparable institution and the establishment of personal contacts mean a considerable asset. A further advantage means the improvement of the foreign language competence.

Thanks

On this occasion I would like to thank the team of my „guest unit“, who for four weeks took care of me and integrated me in their unit and especially my contact person who created the best conditions for the success of this programme.

I also would like to thank for the kind welcome to the RPA in Reading, the RDP-team in Exeter and the Welsh Government in Cardiff. The colleagues took their time generously to explain their remits and contents of work to me. This programme at the RPA was a unique experience and an excellent gain for me.