

COMPASS LLL

COLLABORATION ON MODERN(ISING) POLICIES AND SYSTEMATIC STRATEGIES ON LLL

LLL-POLICY IMPLEMENTATION - TRENDS & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMPASS PROJECT

THE COMPASS PROJECT INTENDED TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE POLICY MAKING PROCESSES AT EUROPEAN LEVEL AND THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND IN UNIVERSITIES IN THEIR LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT AND PRESENTS CHALLENGES.



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List of acronyms

APEL	Accreditation of Experiential Learning
BeFlex	Benchmarking Flexibility in University lifelong learning in the Bologna Process
CDSFCU	Conférence des Directeurs de Service Universitaire de Formation Continue
COMPASS LLL	Collaboration On Modern(ising) Policies and Systematic Strategies on Lifelong Learning
DGWF	German Association for University Continuing and Distance Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
EUCEN	European Association for University Lifelong Learning
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LLL	Lifelong Learning
LLLU	Lifelong Learning University
LLL-Charter	European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning
RPL	Recognising Prior Learning
ULLL	University Lifelong Learning
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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Next to this brochure, a second publication was produced within the framework of the COMPASS project. This second publication (National Reports) presents the respective country reports, providing a deeper insight into the national situation and into governments' commitment to the LLL Charter.

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INTRODUCTION

Since January 2010, COMPASS (Collaboration On Modern(ising) Policies and Systematic Strategies on Lifelong Learning) has developed a strong network of national experts dealing with lifelong learning (LLL) in European universities. This one-year project consisted of 11 partners from different European Member States and has been coordinated by EUCEN (European University Continuing Education Network) and supported through the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission¹.

Key objectives of COMPASS were to analyse the current European state of play concerning University LLL strategy implementation processes at national, regional and institutional level, while promoting the wider and deeper implementation of the “European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning”. This Charter, drafted and published by the European Universities’ Association (EUA), was adopted by European universities as a basis for further development and implementation of European LLL-strategies and presented to the ministers responsible for HE in November 2008, in Bordeaux. The COMPASS project aimed at contributing to this process and to make lifelong learning (LLL) in universities a greater reality by bridging the widening gap between the policy-making process of LLL at EU level and the actions by various stakeholders.

More than two years after the Charter was presented and agreed, the huge diversity of LLL activities at the level of higher education (HE), as indicated by previous project results like BeFlex and BeFlex+, remains the case while only a few governments and institutions seem to have made significant progress in implementing comprehensive LLL-strategies. In fact, only a minority of universities have been fully engaged in the process of integrating LLL into their institutional missions and strategies. Thus, the paradigm shift to genuine LLL universities², as part of an overarching knowledge system for LLL, seems to remain a highly ranked issue on the policy agenda rather than a visible transformational change process of the higher education institutions.

The COMPASS partnership has tackled these challenges in four steps with a consortium of national universities’ associations and organisations for lifelong learning. Starting from the 10 commitments for HE institutions and governments included in the European Universities’ Charter on LLL, two surveys were undertaken with national institutions and governmental representatives. In addition, policy makers and providers at the European, national and regional level were consulted. These different sources, and relevant documents, provided the background for the individual country reports depicting the current state of the play of national LLL strategies.

These findings were subsequently analysed and discussed with the projects partners, their Ministries of Education and representatives of other educational services (e.g. Adult Education and VET associ-

¹ Call EACEA/07/09; Transversal programme KA 1: Policy Cooperation and Innovation

² In general, University Lifelong Learning can be said to describe one specifically defined and limited area or activity out of many within the university, whereas Lifelong Learning University embodies a completely integrated LLL concept within the whole university structure and mission. Thus LLLU is considered as a fundamental principle and concept defining a complete university.

ations). The progress of the project and its findings were discussed in Barcelona in September 2010 and the final dissemination event was organised to coincide with EUCEN's autumn conference in November 2010 in Lille. This involved more than 120 ULLL-experts, policy makers and social stakeholders.

On the basis of the results and findings of the COMPASS project, roadmaps and recommendations for comprehensive and coherent national strategies have been developed, which are intended for the national and European levels taking into account the topical European background of the EU 2020 Strategy³, the Council conclusion on education and training ("ET 2020")⁴ and the Leuven Communiqué⁵.

The results of COMPASS present a bridge between different national experiences on how to face the challenge of incorporating and of reinforcing LLL-strategies and trends in lifelong learning. The project succeeded in creating an evidence base for in-depth knowledge about the state of play and the difficulties and challenges in implementing ULLL strategies. It provides a platform for exchanging and sharing best practices and for enriching the discussion on regional, national and EU levels for future work plans and recommendations towards a European Lifelong Learning Area.

In keeping with the initial aim of bridging the gap between the policy processes in LLL and the actions undertaken by various stakeholders in this area, the shared experiences and transfer of best practices with national stakeholders, universities and other providers of LLL can be considered as an important starting point in this new direction. This approach also assists in continuing the promotion, development and implementation of systematic LLL strategies on a national and regional level.

In the following report, a brief transversal analysis on the current position of LLL policies in different European countries provides an overview of the political and legal framework of LLL, before briefly outlining possible trends, perspectives and challenges institutions are encountering in becoming real Lifelong Learning Universities. On the basis of this comparative overview, recommendations for improving LLL-strategies are suggested.

3 Commission of the European Union (2010), Communication from the Commission, Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels: 3.3.2010. COM(2010) 2020 final
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

4 European Council (2009), Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), Brussels: (2009/C 119/02)
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF>

5 Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009), The Bologna Process 2020 - The European Higher Education Area in the new decade. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for HE, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 09
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/leuven_louvain-la-neuve_communique%C3%A9_april_2009.pdf

TRANSVERSAL ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL REPORTS

The key objective of the national reports was to get a good overview and a clear picture of the overall national state of lifelong learning (LLL) in the higher education sector in each partner country involved in the COMPASS project. The members of the consortium undertaking the project outlined their national and institutional positions in terms of key policies, trends, success factors and challenges in relation to the implementation of the European Universities' Charter on Lifelong learning (LLL Charter)¹.

In the following section of the report, the results of the national commentaries are summarised in a transversal analysis. These results are intended to promote discussion of the policies at the regional, national and European levels. The analysis aims to show the key LLL policies and their evolution, taking into consideration the differences and similarities on a national scale. Priorities, success stories and threats as well as the future perspective are taken into consideration.

Key policies and implementation of LLL

In general, the competent government departments in the respective countries are aware of the LLL-Charter and some of them use it, or have used it, as a guideline for the development of LLL policies. Only in the United Kingdom (UK) and Switzerland, is the LLL-Charter of the European University Association (EUA) not seen as being of central importance to the government.– although in both countries it is known and seen as in line with their higher education sector's goals. In those countries where there is no active involvement of the Charter in policy formulation it can be observed that often separate guidelines have been worked out which are similar to the Charter's commitments. The case of Germany can be outlined as one example where the internal German policy has been influenced by expert circles and project groups dealing with the topic of ULL rather than by the Charter. For this reason representatives see the 10 commitments more as a confirmation of their own ideas than as something new.

Special promotional programmes to invite and promote more migrants to participate in universities, as part of an open access and inclusive learner society, seem to be among the most important best practices which support LLL at universities. In general, LLL concepts are independently and voluntarily defined and developed by universities themselves. In some cases, such as Finland, France and Portugal, the government is closely involved in leading the development of LLL strategies in the universities.

¹ European Universities' Charter on Lifelong learning:
<http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/eua-policy-position-and-political-declarations.aspx>

The extent to which the Charter is used for the formulation of national or university policies seems to vary substantially across Europe. While, for instance, in Austria the Ministry used the Charter in negotiations for the current performance agreement contracts with the universities for 2010-2012 (the universities had to declare how they were implementing the Charter and what they were planning according to their current strategy and development plan), the Charter still remains mostly unknown in the higher education sector of Spain and the UK. Despite the existence of scattered national LLL strategies, universities mostly define and implement their specific LLL visions and concepts independently based on the fact that they are in most countries autonomous and have to finance the LLL programmes themselves. This equally leads to several rather fragmented practices and approaches to LLL so that, in most cases, no clear or common national policy can be detected.

Although some countries such as the United Kingdom and Finland have relatively advanced LLL strategies, it can be observed that the implementation of LLL concepts in the missions and strategies of universities is not yet fully achieved in any of the European partner countries. It was criticised in many of the respective national commentaries that LLL mentioned in the policy papers of the universities often remains a rhetorical statement. Consequently, one of the main problems can be seen in the low priority attached to LLL and the resulting slow progress. By highlighting common obstacles, but also good practices in national policies, COMPASS has been able to clarify existing ULLL policies in Europe. Such an approach permits the formulation of some common recommendations at a later stage in the report.

Trends and future perspectives

Looking at the future development of LLL, in many respects the trends seem to be quite contradictory. In the UK, the LLL-Charter probably will not have a significant impact at the government level and LLL in general faces a difficult future as a result of heavy budget cuts and the priorities in higher education policy. Nevertheless, the statistical participation rate in lifelong learning activities in general, and in widening access, etc. shows that the UK is one of the leading European countries². In Austria, Spain and Switzerland, the future of LLL in higher education seems to be rather optimistic with the hope of an implementation of LLL in the policies of governments and universities in the near future. In France, one of the main changes in the future is likely to be that the influence of the government decreases step by step and regional actors take over responsibility for the realisation of LLL structures. In Finland, as well as in almost all other countries, the influence of the economic sector on education becomes more and more obvious. What is clear is the need for flexibility to face the changes in the labour market. New solutions are likely to be applied to the educational system through a common target-oriented strategy for the production of LLL.

Threats and challenges

The economic crisis with all its consequences was identified as one of the main threats to the implementation of LLL strategies on a national and institutional level. In particular, the cuts in public fi-

² Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training. Indicators and benchmarks 2009: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/report09/report_en.pdf

nances are set to have a big impact on programmes in the higher education sector. This might oblige universities to prioritise certain fields, such as the traditional field of research, which could be disadvantageous for the further development of lifelong learning. Moreover, some countries face special funding problems as their university lifelong learning (ULLL) activities are, for example, excluded from public funding - this is the case in Portugal.

It can further be observed that ULLL in general, and the LLL Charter in particular, are not generally seen as a priority in national policies, which is another hurdle to surmount. If LLL is not seen as a central priority, the general availability of public national funding for this area may also be problematic. In short, the lack of sufficient finance is at the centre of threats to LLL. For this reason, one of the main challenges is to find new funding models for the implementation of LLL concepts. The HE sector is more and more forced to focus on fulfilling the demands of the labour market with a major consideration being the employability of students. Therefore, there is a trend towards a more important focus on young and talented students to enhance a university's (economic) competitiveness and reputation for research. Thus, ULLL shifts towards a business and customer-orientated continuing education programme and the wider social and cultural benefits of learning are being overlooked. However, in view of future demographic changes, universities have to find new access options for lifelong learners, including vocational learners. As a consequence, clear Recognising Prior Learning (RPL)/Accreditation of Experiential Learning (APEL) procedures increase in importance.

The lack of integrated and coherent initiatives in LLL at the national level can be counted among the major challenges for some countries that are not so advanced in this area. Such initiatives are important for implementing the EUA Lifelong Learning Charter and raising the levels of lifelong learning activities in higher education. Apart from partnerships at the policy level, collaboration with enterprises and with research, innovation and teaching often also lack commitment and need to be improved. In the same line of thought, many universities still seem to be too rigid and inflexible in view of future challenges, and this is a further factor hindering progress. In some cases, national laws and regulations are also proving to be a barrier to improving LLL activities and practices because they do not allow full and associate professors to work on LLL courses or in other ways present obstacles.

Generally speaking, many countries and universities have a range of theoretical principles and visions concerning ULL, but they have not yet been put into practice. The current processes and progress with the different aspects of the Charter seem to be too slow and tenuous, largely because lifelong learning is not widely considered to be a high priority at the present time. Consequently many initiatives merely receive lip service rather than positive commitment.

Final remarks

According to the results from the questionnaire, most institutions claimed that they were in general aware of the LLL Charter (83% in the questionnaire), but only 27.6% of the institutions confirmed that they have actively worked with the Charter. In the case of the national and regional governments there seemed to be less awareness concerning the Universities' Charter for Lifelong Learning. It is arguable that if the commitments in the Charter are to be incorporated in national policies, this usually happens because recommendations made by experts (working groups, expert circles, consultation) point in a similar direction. So generally speaking, ULLL needs more awareness, lobbying and, to put it simply, more 'marketing' to politicians, university leaders and the wider public.

ULLL networks have acquired a positive role in policy development at institutional and national level. LLL concepts can be defined as independent and voluntary since they often depend on the universities themselves. However, the implementation of these concepts within the strategies of universities is by no means fully achieved and remains more at the level of rhetorical statements than real and effective strategies. Lack of financing can be considered as a transversal issue between all the institutions. Universities are expected to develop their ULL role but at the same time budgets have been cut and resources for lifelong learning have been reduced.

Lifelong learning is becoming ever more essential in today's world and the involvement of different stakeholders is now an important part of the educational scene. On the basis of the challenges that the present study highlights, ULLL needs further development, recognition and a strategic relevance in European higher education institutions (HEIs). Moreover, ULLL would benefit from evaluation and feedback-structures and processes, from new partnerships and cooperation with local and national authorities, providing attractive programmes. Many universities are becoming more flexible, but there is still a lot of work to do, considering the differences between the states and within countries.

The various national reports produced as part of the COMPASS project showed a set of similar challenges faced by numerous stakeholders despite their different national and regional contexts. Common questions on how to develop new funding structures, how to introduce more flexible learning pathways, and how to use the LLL Charter for focusing more attention on LLL and raising it up the political agenda, show the need for collaboration between universities and different stakeholders at all levels, local regional, national and European. At the same time, governments and ministries need to be fully involved and take part in the realisation of a modern strategy on LLL. The insights resulting from the compilation of the COMPASS national reports will thus be a useful tool and source of information for future strategic innovations in lifelong learning in European universities.

TRENDS AND POLICY CONTEXT

The ministers responsible for higher education in the countries participating in the Bologna Process declared, ‘In the decade up to 2020 European higher education has a vital contribution to make in realising a Europe of knowledge that is highly creative and innovative. Europe can only succeed in this endeavour if it maximises the talents and capacities of all citizens and fully engages in lifelong learning as well as in widening participation in higher education’¹.

Against the background of the demographic challenges of an ageing society, and the need to update and develop skills in line with economic, social and technological developments, the European Council adopted in the last decade a new strategy framework for co-operation between European member states. The main aim is to realise a joint reform of the education and training systems, taking into account the current economic crisis as a common challenge but at the same time trying to reach quality and efficiency of education. In order to reach this objective it is extremely important for LLL to move from rhetoric to reality across Europe and this is where the implementation of comprehensive LLL strategies on regional and national levels comes into place. By outlining the respective national situation of LLL, obstacles to this objective can be identified and possible recommendations can be brought forward.

The future direction for European lifelong learning policy is at the present stage based on three main documents: The Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, the Education and Training 2020 policy, and the EU 2020 Strategy. The core ideas of these major policy papers in the field of LLL will be examined first before formulating specific recommendations based on the key requirements of these European LLL strategies and on the insights gained through the COMPASS project.

1. Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué

This declaration by the ministers responsible for higher education in the 46 countries involved in the Bologna Process was formulated to describe progress with the Bologna Process and to highlight future directions. For that purpose, specific objectives were determined to ensure that widening of participation and LLL are seen as integral parts of the education system. LLL takes a crucial position in this Communiqué on the common ground of adequate organisational structures and effective funding systems.

In terms of LLL, widening participation, transparency and flexible learning paths are seen as tools to achieve public involvement and higher quality. Regarding the implementation of LLL policies, the need to establish strong partnerships with public authorities, HE, students, and employers and

¹ Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009), The Bologna Process 2020 - The European Higher Education Area in the new decade. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009, p.1

employees is stressed as well as the need for Recognising Prior Learning (RPL)/ Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) on the basis of learning outcomes. A further specific issue is the development of national qualifications frameworks in coordination with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

2. Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020)²

The EU Council adopted a new strategic framework for co-operation between EU member states in 2009 to reform their education and training systems. Henceforth, cooperation in education and training involving all stakeholders will receive a strong impetus in strategic terms.

In the ET 2020 member states agreed to intensify their cooperation in education and training. This should notably be the result in the implementation of LLL principles (in cooperation with member states, social partners, experts) through flexible learning pathways between different education and training sectors and levels while reinforcing at the same time the attractiveness of vocational education and training.

ET 2020 confirmed the initial aim of COMPASS, consisting in making LLL and mobility a reality. Among the declarations made in the ET 2020 flexibility will become the key word to ensure a new educational system responsive to change and open to the wider world. On the other hand, cooperation is described as essential because the new educational perspective cannot any more be linked exclusively to the national level, but must be considered in an interactive and shared perspective in order to increase quality and efficiency.

3. Europe 2020 Strategy: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth³

Apart from the current financial constraints, current and future policies need to integrate the demographic challenge of social ageing and the increasing speed of technological progress, which will mean a higher demand for a well-educated labour force, which will have to be able to keep pace with technological developments. Due to European demographic developments, this will ultimately result in the need for more LLL provision.

In the new European strategy – EU 2020 – these issues are tackled next to equally important challenges of the 21st century. The goals of this strategy are divided into the areas of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, which are divided into specified flagship initiatives as programmes requiring special attention.

² European Council (2009), Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), Brussels: (2009/C 119/02)

³ Commission of the European Union (2010), Communication from the Commission, Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels: 3.3.2010. COM(2010) 2020 final, p. 12

Under the heading of smart growth, LLL is mentioned in general to be fostered as roughly “50% of pupils reach medium qualifications level but this often fails to match labour market needs”⁴. Consequently, a more integrated approach in their first educational cycle has to occur while offering options and ways for LLL to upgrade personal and professional skills. Under the flagship initiative “Youth on the move” in this category, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is explicitly stressed⁵.

LLL receives a stronger focus under the section on inclusive growth, which is defined as “empowering people through high levels of employment, investing in skills, fighting poverty and modernising labour markets, training and social protection systems [...] It is about ensuring access and opportunities for all throughout the lifecycle.”⁶ Reinforcing LLL strategies is especially mentioned in combination with a lack of skills. While in the next five to ten years the demand for high qualifications will rise dramatically, those of low qualifications will fall, which explains the need for acquiring additional skills in the future. Consequently, implementation of ULLL has to improve and access to ULLL has to widen substantially as a serious criticism is that until now mainly the more educated benefit from LLL opportunities.

These aspects are all included under the flagship initiative “An Agenda for new skills and jobs”, which also calls for a closer cooperation between member states, social partners (e.g. trade unions, enterprises) and experts to create more flexible learning pathways in line with increasing flexible working cycles.

In order to meet these goals, it is necessary to have strong leadership, commitment and an effective delivery mechanism to change attitudes and practices. EU targets are translated into national targets and trajectories to reflect the current situation of each member state and its part of a wider EU effort to meet these targets. In addition to the efforts of member states the Commission will propose an ambitious range of actions at EU level designed to lift the EU into a new, more sustainable growth path. This mix of EU and national efforts should be mutually reinforcing. The COMPASS project demonstrated a new important effort on collaboration on modernising policies and systematic strategies on LLL, but this partnership should be now oriented in the EU 2020 direction.⁷

4 Commission of the European Union (2010), Communication from the Commission, Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels: 3.3.2010.

5 Commission of the European Union (2010), Communication from the Commission, Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels: 3.3.2010. COM(2010) 2020 final, p. 13

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

6 Commission of the European Union (2010), Communication from the Commission, Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels: 3.3.2010. COM(2010) 2020 final, p. 17

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

7 COM (2010) 2020 final, p. 12

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The COMPASS project has produced a large amount of data as a result of the surveys, interviews with government civil servants, universities and other key sources, analysis of documents and assessment of information from other sources. As part of the COMPASS project a number of recommendations have been formulated and this section of the report outlines these suggestions. Some similarities can be seen between these recommendations and those that were made as part of the BeFlex+¹ project on Benchmarking Flexibility in University Lifelong Learning in the Bologna Process. Any such similarities will be noted where they are evident.

The main aim of the recommendations is to indicate ways of making progress in improving lifelong learning in European universities. The analysis and recommendation which follow take a constructively critical view of what has so far been achieved and what has yet to be done.

Results and Recommendations for a better implementation of LLL strategies

The three European policy papers (EU 2020 strategy, Education and Training 2020 and the Leuven Communiqué) stipulate that LLL, and in particular participation in HE, must become an integral part of the education system in order to cope with the continuing demographic change and the need for people to update and develop their skills in line with changing economic and social circumstances. Policy makers, representatives, governments, local authorities, institutions need to be involved in securing this objective.

Definition

Starting from the project's findings and from the discussion between the COMPASS partners, the first need is to ensure common agreement on the meaning and understanding of lifelong learning. The common understanding is the ideal ground to develop LLL policies and strategies: from this point on it is possible to collaborate on modernising the LLL system. Government representatives and LLL practitioners should find out common strategies. What steps can be taken in this direction? What existing tools can be used to achieve this objective?

This can be seen in close relation to Recommendation 1 of BeFlex+, which encouraged the intensive reflection on all levels of HEI on the meaning of the Lifelong Learning University (ULLL) and the elaboration of university specific LLL definitions. However, the COMPASS recommendation goes one step further by extending the joint attempt of a valid definition to the political decision-makers.

¹ The BeFlex+ Project, whose aim was to examine the progress of universities in Europe in evolving into Lifelong Learning Universities (ULLUs), formulated ten recommendations to help European universities completing this transformation. Furthermore, training materials were produced for managers and practitioners on 5 topics: institutional change, curriculum in partnership, regional collaboration, diversity in ULLL, and RPL – all key to shifting from the rhetoric of much higher education policy to the reality of Lifelong Learning Universities.

Recommendation

The concepts and understandings of LLL should be discussed between practitioners and (vice) rectors of universities AND with political decision-makers to reach a common basis for further change and improvement. In that respect, already established instruments like the BeFlex+ recommendation or the LLL Charter should be taken into consideration as they can provide useful input and sharpen the discussion.

Position of LLL

The call for a central position for LLL in university's missions needs to sit alongside enhanced visibility of LLL instruments. Challenges of the 21st century such as social ageing and new labour market needs mean LLL will gain more importance within the next 5-10 years. This is already clearly acknowledged in the EU policy papers mentioned above. As a consequence, it becomes clear why LLL will have to occupy a central position within university policies and practices.

There are already many existing instruments in the area of LLL, which are able to improve and facilitate further LLL initiatives, but they have to be used and stakeholders as well as policy-makers have to be aware of them. The political importance of the LLL Charter is well illustrated by the example of Austria, where it was used to shape the National Strategy on LLL. This use shows that it has sufficient political weight to shape new reforms on the way to a LLLU. In general, it should be a concrete instrument addressed to governments and institutions but at the present stage it can be considered more indicative than effective.

Recommendation

LLL has to be better promoted within in and outside of universities. In that sense, major structural reforms and initiatives like the Bologna Process or the European Qualifications Framework need to be reinforced and key instruments like the European Universities Charter on LLL have to be better communicated to and within universities and governments, which should be invited to apply the commitments and to set-up their own action plans for the further development of LLL in higher education.

Funding

The lack of financial support is a shared barrier between states and institutions, due to, in particular, the economic crisis. In some countries fees for lifelong learning in universities have become a real obstacle. Funding is becoming one of the main problems in terms of developing lifelong learning in higher education and discussions around best practices are trying to find out solutions applicable to this problem.

Recommendation

Sound financial support and more funding sources need to be established to reinforce and improve LLL practices and strategies.

Integrated concept

It became apparent in some of the national reports during the project that LLL policies and strategies, even within universities, still remain fragmented as some aspects are not included in the general LLL strategy.

Recommendation

Universities should aim at developing more integrated strategies involving LLL according to the holistic definition of LLL as formulated under BeFlex+. Moreover, more efforts should be made, if possible, to streamline existing national practices to try to create a more level playing field.

In that respect, it has to be stressed that some universities have to get engaged in a process of re-thinking.

Recommendation

Universities have to adapt to the societal, economic and technical background of the 21st century. This requires a process of rethinking and re-organisation of priorities to include and improve LLL strategies to reply to the increasingly flexible labour market needs and flexible learning-working models.

Quality assurance

HEIs are expected to develop their own quality assurance strategies and procedures, taking into account their autonomy. ULLL as a whole should be part of the internal quality assurance of universities and should also be included in quality assurance on a national scale. Quality assurance systems should take into account the specific traits of ULLL.

Policy makers expect HEIs to steer the process for the change that is needed, building partnerships with the external world, and finding their own funding models. For this reason the introduction of individual learning plans should be made obligatory, and study loans and other support systems should be developed. Adequate organisational structures are part of the recommendation proposed. These structures are related to the quality of guidance systems, to the new ways of learning, to the accessibility and quality of provision as well as to the transparency of information.

Recommendation

In addition to the quality assurance of programmes, adequate training of personnel in guiding and counselling activities should be provided. This has to be in line with an adequate infrastructure for these counselling services, such as appropriate opening hours and the scope of the service provided. These aspects are crucial to offer high quality services to all qualified potential students.

Flexible and creative learning pathways

The further implementation and mainstreaming of informal and non-formal learning, recognising all forms of learning, is a key priority, ranked high both by universities and governments while remaining underdeveloped at present in higher education systems. The necessity for greater flexibility has not been recognised and understood as a relevant means by several countries.

Recommendation

Universities should be encouraged to create flexible and creative learning pathways through the widening and consolidation of RPL/APEL and new learning methods (e.g. e-learning). Furthermore, they should adopt more to the needs of the learner and develop and use modern e-learning technologies for effective learning. Greater openness towards non-formal and informal learning is essential as is an increasing transparency and recognition of learning outcomes.

Indicators for recognition of prior learning (RPL)

The call for appropriate RPL measures has already been voiced in the LLL Charter and in the BeFlex+ Recommendations. The COMPASS findings go beyond the mere call for enhancing RPL by demanding valid indicators for RPL.

RPL seems to be a priority of the systematic strategies on LLL. HE policies propagate the need to implement RPL but on the other hand there are no indicators applicable to measure the achievement of the LLL Charter Commitments.

Recommendation

In order to effectively implement the LLL strategies, it is necessary, through indicators for RPL, to follow national policies and to feed European reflections. These indicators are key elements to make the Charter a real and effective tool..

Internal and external cooperation

In line with some of the BeFlex+ recommendations, internal and external cooperation of universities was stressed in the COMPASS findings and European policy papers. By developing external partnerships with enterprises in the wider sense (business, third sector, trade unions, etc.), universities will enhance the employability of their graduates. Possible cooperation can take place in the development of courses and programmes, teaching and learning methods and RPL. In the same way, it is highly important that universities cooperate effectively by linking research, teaching and innovation to improve LLL strategies and programmes. Better internal cooperation does not only benefit programmes and integrated strategies, it also improves external cooperation.

Recommendation

Universities are encouraged to improve internal cooperation between research, teaching and innovation as well as external cooperation with enterprises in the wider sense (businesses, vocational training, third sector, trade unions, etc.) to facilitate an integrated LLL approach and more coherent programmes as well as better employability of students and a better orientation to the needs of the labour market.

In the course of the COMPASS project, the particular role of stakeholder organisations like EUCEN in feeding the debate on LLL and supporting and initialising concrete actions became evident. As a European association EUCEN plays a key role in raising awareness concerning its project outcomes, activating its own members and partners of the network. While it is also necessary to have politicians on board to implement LLL concepts, the added value of stakeholder organisations lies in their own ground experience and their links to various experts and institutions which includes civil society organisations as well as enterprises. This evidence was also highlighted in the surveys carried out for COMPASS.

In addition, the benefit of organisations like EUCEN consists in their links to other projects and their close collaboration with other organisations working in the area of University Lifelong Learning (ULLL). Cooperation and established links should be strengthened exploring the potential to pool resources to increase visibility and to disseminate project results.

Learning from the COMPASS project, the last recommendation will be suggested:

Recommendation

Pooling resources in stakeholder organisations is crucial to gain more leverage in the area of lifelong learning. To achieve a wider outreach, higher visibility and a bigger impact of results, mutual learning and exchange of information and experience through close cooperation among all stakeholders should be strengthened - within the network and beyond, taking place across different stakeholder organisations.

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