

Editorial

BERIT ASKLING & JEAN-PIERRE JALLADE

In this issue, we report on the results of a recently completed international project on *Lifelong learning: the implications for the universities in the EU* whose aim was to identify and analyse the extent and nature of the involvement of European universities in this field. It included policy analyses, the examination of basic statistics and case studies at four universities in each of the seven participating countries. The project is one of the few empirical studies on lifelong learning that has been conducted in universities in EU countries. The partners gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the European Commission for the project which was coordinated by the Centre for Social Morphology and Social Policy (KEKMOKOP) of the Panteion University for Social and Political Sciences, Athens.

The first phase of the project produced a **genesis of the concept of lifelong learning** in the seven countries. Based on official policy documents, research work and literature overviews, it provided the project group with an historical perspective on the development of a lifelong learning policy in each country and with basic information on national higher education systems. The results of this phase were published in an earlier issue of this journal (*European Journal of Education*, Vol. 35/3, September 2000).

The present issue focuses on the **institutional responses** of universities to the calls from policy-makers at the international and national level in favour of lifelong learning, defined as: '*those novel forms of teaching and learning that equip students (learners, individuals) to encounter with competence and confidence the full range of working, learning and life experiences*'. At the operational level, lifelong learning programmes or courses were defined according to the following criteria:

- access policies aimed at encouraging adults to return to university,
- new concepts of curriculum/content,
- alternative modes of delivery to secure flexibility in provision,
- new accreditation, quality assurance and certification procedures.

A related aim was to identify and analyse the **obstacles and problems** which universities in the EU are experiencing with developments and prospects of lifelong learning, including the implications for their structures and functions at present and in the immediate future.

The seven national investigations were conducted within the same theoretical and methodological framework. They led to seven national reports:

Lifelong learning in Swedish Universities, a familiar policy with some unfamiliar system implications, *Berit Askling and Rita Foss-Fridlizijs*, October 2000

Lifelong Learning: The Implications for Norwegian universities. A survey of policies and practice,

Ellen Brandt, NIFU, December 2000

Lifelong Learning: UK policies and University Practices,

Maurice Kogan, Mary Henkel and Caroline Healy, Centre for the Evaluation of Public Policy and Practice, Brunel University

From Continuing Education to Lifelong Learning: A survey of current practice in four French universities (also available in French), May 2000,

Jean-Pierre Fallade, with *Jacques Denantes, Jean-François Germe et Jean-Michel Saillant*

Lifelong Learning at Universities in Germany, in particular at universities in the narrow sense. A report on the situation,

Irene Lischka, Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg, June 2000

Lifelong Learning: The implications for Spanish universities

José-Ginés Mora and Amparo Gomez

Lifelong Learning: The implications for the universities in Greece

Nikos Kokosalakis & S. Koniordos

In addition, **three cross-country, thematic reports** dealing with the implications of LLL for (i) change in concepts and organisation of knowledge, (ii) power relations and university structures, and (iii) the interplay of international policies, national policies and university practices, were also prepared in the framework of the project:

The implications of Lifelong Learning for Concepts of Knowledge and Their Organisation in Universities,

Barbara Kehm, Mary Henkel & Berit Askling, December 2000

Lifelong Learning and Power Relations and Structures,

Maurice Kogan & Ellen Brandt, December 2000

Lifelong learning: University Policies and International Policies,

Jean-Pierre Fallade & José-Ginés Mora, November 2000

This issue presents a series of articles which are abridged versions of these national and thematic reports. Empirical material was collected in the selected case universities (four in each country), including documents profiling the universities with regard to policy, mission statements, plans of activities, and structural characteristics, data concerning specific LLL programmes or other study activities in departments and centres of recurrent education/lifelong learning and interviews with key actors at each university. Readers who are interested in the full text of these reports are invited to get in touch with their authors.

As is often the case with the dissemination of results drawn from European research projects, the final reporting rests on a process of multi-stage synthesising of the material originally collected and of the policy lessons identified. In this project, the evidence collected at course or department level had to be synthesised at the university level, then at the country level, and finally reduced to journal

article format. Inevitably, this leads to a gradual impoverishment of the lessons drawn, as local and institutional circumstances are blurred in a desperate attempt to abide editorial constraints.

For this reason, it was found impossible to do justice to the **synthesis report** for the whole project, **Lifelong learning: The implications for the universities in the EU**, Nikos Kokosalakis & Maurice Kogan, March 2001, in a short journal article. It is therefore not published in this issue.

National Articles

In their article, *Berit Askling* and *Rita Foss-Fridlizi* argue that in Swedish higher education many of the general LLL policy elements were already prevalent in the 1970s and also operationalised in structure and practice. However, despite extensive deregulation, the universities today do not use their space of action to provide non-regular activities in ways that go beyond the traditional and well-accepted definition of lifelong learning and challenge established principles of a public (and free of charge) educational system.

Norwegian universities have a strong tradition of continuing education. *Ellen Brandt* examines university strategies for continuing education in this country, stressing new curriculum concepts, alternative modes of delivery and changes in access policies. She then addresses the issue of cost and finance for LLL activities in a country where no fees are charged in initial higher education.

The situation in the UK is examined by *Mary Henkel* who studies the place of lifelong learning in the aims of universities, how policies and structures have been established to support it and to what extent it is reflected in curriculum concepts. She also considers how well the Open University has adapted to changing definitions of lifelong learning and whether the concept has exerted influence on the three other universities in the sample.

Jean-Pierre Jallade reports on existing provision of LLL courses and programmes in the four institutions surveyed in France. In his article, LLL courses are defined according to four criteria: (i) access requirements should leave room for accreditation of prior learning and experience, (ii) course contents should be centred on learners' needs, which may depart from traditional disciplinary lines, (iii) alternative modes of delivery should be proposed to students, and (iv) innovative modes of certification should be adopted. He then examines the financial and organisation constraints faced by French universities in promoting LLL.

The situation in Germany is analysed by *Barbara Kehm* and *Irene Lischka* who examine the various forms of lifelong learning, i.e. open access, continuing education, interdisciplinary approaches, cooperative arrangements, quality assurance and certification.

LLL activities (mainly in the sense of continuing education) have witnessed remarkable developments in Spanish universities, as *José-Ginés Mora* reports in his article. They are seen as complementary to regular course provision with a strong emphasis on skill acquisition to enter the workforce and on specialisation and updating of knowledge. LLL brings some flexibility to the rigid curriculum of regulated course programmes and diplomas. It is very much market-oriented and left to the initiative of individuals within institutions.

Lifelong learning provision is a new development in higher education in Greece. *Nikos Kokosalakis* examines its various aspects, i.e. programmes of

elective studies, post-graduate programmes, continuing education and distance learning courses, pointing to the direct influence of EU strategy, missions and policies on Greek developments, while stressing the limited autonomy of Greek universities vis-à-vis national policies.

Thematic Articles

In their thematic report on concepts of knowledge and its organisation, *Berit Askling, Mary Henkel and Barbara Kehm* argue that changes in the concepts of knowledge and teaching, identified in the national reports, could be seen as more general, involving changes in the general social and political embedding of universities rather than internal changes in lifelong learning and regular activities.

What are the effects of LLL on power relations within universities, on student-teacher relationships and on relationships between universities and external sponsors? This is the subject taken up in the thematic paper prepared by *Maurice Kogan* who reflects on changes in organisational structures that could be associated with this new mission assigned to European universities.

In their thematic article, *Jean-Pierre Fallade and José-Ginés Mora* attempt to elucidate whether the international discourse on lifelong learning had any influence on government policies and university practices in this area. Congruence among these three layers of policy-making, European, national and institutional, is often taken for granted, but national traditions and institutional constraints contribute to 'screen' the international gospel when it comes to implementation.

To complete the above picture of LLL in European universities, we are happy to include an unsolicited article by *Ari Antikainen* on LLL in Finland.

Some Notes of Caution

Before reading these articles, one must remember that LLL, the key concept of the project, is riddled with ambiguity in its conceptual and operational dimensions. It figures in policy documents in all countries at national and institutional levels, but its meaning is vague and diffuse. The current rhetoric of international and government policies is a far cry from the complexity of the concept of LLL and the problems of its implementation.

There is an array of multiple and conflicting definitions of LLL that makes any kind of operationalisation a tricky issue. At the operational level, the content and morphology of LLL vary according to the structure and the historical development of higher education in each country. Even within the same country the meaning and content of the term may have shifted over time (continuing education, recurrent education, adult education). At the same time, different terms have been used for the operationalisation of almost the same kind of phenomena.

From the national studies in the project, we draw the conclusion that there is strong support — at a conceptual level — for accepting the ideas of lifelong learning, but these studies also indicate that the structural and contextual embedding of LLL in higher education practices varies between countries. What

in one country might be a novel, non-traditional, and non-regular activity, might be part of the regular and well consolidated activities of all higher education institutions in another. But in almost all countries, LLL has a relatively low status. In European universities, institutional and academic 'survival' and prestige depend on research and scholarship outcomes, and to some extent (due to national resource allocation systems) on the institutions' capacity to attract students to full-time courses. This may account for the (still) relatively low practical impact of lifelong learning policies on national university systems and their limited ability to induce radical changes.