

Lifelong Learning and Power Relations and Structure

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Introduction

This article analyses the effects of LLL on power relations within universities; on teacher-student relationships and on relationships between universities and external sponsors. Whilst some changes are evident in the seven country studies, impacts on power and structure are so far limited. Here, we shall reflect on the changes in power relations and organisational structures that might be associated with the introduction of lifelong learning (LLL).

It is well established (Karlsson, 1995; Bleiklie *et al*, 2000; Bauer *et al*, 2000; Henkel, Kogan & Hanney, 2000) that national policy changes have affected institutional structures and academic autonomy. Institutions have increasingly taken power from the collegium, and internal structures have emerged to administer initiatives sponsored by central government. Lifelong learning could therefore promote power and structural changes. In pursuing this issue we will canvass the following themes: the effects of LLL on power relations within universities; on teacher-student relationships and on relationships between universities and external sponsors from employment and industry.

The Effects of LLL on Internal Power Relations in Universities

Even when the state strongly conditions how universities are run, academics are usually free to create, or at least interpret, nationally endorsed curricula in their own way. Did LLL lead to changes in structure and in power distributions within universities? National variations were considerable. Structures at the departmental level in Greek universities reflected power distributions that are not apparent elsewhere. In England, surpluses from successful distance learning in centres for management and law and order allowed considerable independence from university regulation. Business schools established as self-funding entities could become virtually separate universities. The Open University's modes of working were directed to promote LLL through distance learning, whilst its academic structures preserved traditional characteristics.

In English universities, LLL structures were not very evident; some believed universities needed a senior LLL role and an overseeing committee whilst preserving departmental responsibility. Departmental autonomy was acceptable where LLL was successful, but one chair of Council noted deficiencies in university power as follows:

Some departments have saluted LLL and others barely at all. Deans do not seem to have much control over totally decentralised, separate departments. The university must have a say in what departments do . . . For academics to say, 'oh that is a good idea but I won't take it up,' is not right. I would not want to interfere with an academic's freedom to research, but they must orientate their teaching towards new requirements.' 'Budget allocations need to be changed; when money goes to departments earned by research ratings or teaching loads, it's hard to say, 'we're going to pull money back from you'.

LLL could expose resentments between a 'centre whose staff are working and conferencing all hours, at week-ends, flying overseas — to generate a surplus diverted to other departments' 'whilst another with the highest research grade has few students and PhD students who enable lab work to be done for the research ratings to be achieved.'

LLL had not led to major changes in French structures. Tension between continuing education and other departments stemmed from failure to recognise what was involved in providing LLL. It could be confined to a specialised department, or spread over departments, with a central coordination unit. The more effective model could emerge only when LLL had become an institution-wide objective with effective support services. Individual initiatives did not lead to structural changes. Conservative attitudes in many social science departments prevented the adoption of an institution-wide strategy. Potential sources of tension, such as bypassing entry requirements based on prior diplomas (APEAL), curriculum diverging from traditional lines, new competing with traditional diplomas or pricing of LLL courses at their real costs, were expressed. Difficulties in introducing APEAL in main line teaching were raised by academics whose quality references lay in research without concern for adults' prior knowledge.

Initiatives to meet multiple adult demands need not be supported by institutional strategy; fragmented structures and weak management seemed to be responsible for the slow response to the demand for LLL. Some universities displayed weak commitment and seemed powerless to overcome institutional rigidities, whether due to the status of professors, the exclusive attention devoted to disciplines, or LLL's absence of status. Where the objective was shared by departments tensions were largely overcome. Otherwise LLL might not be part of the mainstream and be viewed with suspicion. It is clear from French examples that institutions did not gain power as a result of LLL activities and that academic power structures still predominated.

In Norway, the universities in Strategic Plans emphasised that continuing education (CE) as LLL was becoming more important and should be developed in close relation to research and initial education; this policy made it more acceptable to academics. As a consequence, leaders at all levels were also to be responsible for LLL. University leadership used information and incentives (i.e. funding academics to attend conferences) to get faculties and departments to be more active in CE. Two universities set aside funds for departments to develop courses; the others preferred to include CE tasks in the annual budget talks between central university level, faculties and departments. All four universities in the 1990s established Centres for Continuing and Distance Education as support and coordinating units, mostly positively evaluated by deans and heads of departments. Because of limited staff, some centres mainly assisted in developing

courses and transferred the running of courses to faculties or departments. Decentralised responsibility emphasised the connection between CE and initial education and increased departmental contact with these students. Some departments included permanent funding of administrative CE positions in their budgets. Besides income from fees, universities got governmental output-based funding also for credits earned by CE students. This stimulated activity; but some departments complained that they did not receive a fair share of the income as opposed to faculty and central level. Generally, there was agreement that LLL had not led to changes in power relations between university leadership, faculty and departments.

In Germany, management and those responsible for continuing education showed commitment to national LLL policies which strengthened their positions in the face of those at universities who emphasised research. Government appeared to have influenced behaviour more than elsewhere. Most universities accepted continuing education as a major task. In the mid-90s, about 90 of some 315 universities had structures for continuing academic education, some involving a deputy rector or central committee with a central unit. Some universities might create 'disembodiments' i.e. self-sufficient structures. One university planned an International Institute in Lifelong Learning with other universities and the engineers' association. An initiative by universities in the state, promoted by federal and state governments, led to a European Center for Distance Learning. At another university, a state initiative resulted in a 'quality agreement', a development schedule demanded from universities (including staff reduction and quality and performance evaluation). The State, in return, promised financial planning security. A new 'model' of the university was developed, emphasising the importance of CE.

In about half the units surveyed, activities of university teachers were encouraged by signals of appreciation of non-traditional programmes and awareness of corresponding deficiencies. But there was no determined redefinition of programmes in line with the meaning of LLL. Faculties/departments with a firm concept for the development of continuing academic education, more rarely for LLL itself, represented about one fifth of the faculties/departments surveyed. Innovative programmes were based on two types of motivation: to secure survival in the face of retrenchment, and individual professors' ability to earn money for research and equipment. Universities not under threat were less likely to have a specific policy, but individual professors might commit themselves to new forms of study and non-traditional programmes.

On the whole, continuing education and LLL had no prominent status at German universities. Nor had power structures changed. No substantial restructuring affected the proportion of first-degree and continuing education courses. But some deans believed that structures and the balance of power would change if programmes were developed further because of a changing balance between study, research, and continuing education. The growing strength of private-law affiliated institutes would also represent a pressure. In all, however, structures and the balance of power had not changed fundamentally.

Structures for LLL provision in Greek universities were set by legislation. As most LLL programmes were new, structures were being formed. The problem was how to create flexible structures within rigid and bureaucratic ones. Yet the organisation seemed to function, mainly because LLL provision still occupied a

peripheral place in the universities. As such programmes were increasingly introduced organisational problems and fragmentation created pressure for a reform of university structures. LLL had an impact on conventional structures. The PSE were units parallel to departments, with a General Assembly of their staff. Most were inter-disciplinary, inter-departmental and inter-institutional. They introduced structures not answerable to departments to which they were parallel in power. Chairmen of PSE assemblies could administer significant funds. Units with new staff and up-to-date equipment were created; some members seemed to begrudge these developments and saw them as a potential force for disintegration, or as a threat to general assemblies. Students opposed them for various motives, including maintaining a *numerus clausus* and protection of their employment interests. Rectors interviewed emphasised, however, consensus for the acceptance of new courses and welcomed opening up to external challenges.

Other Centres for Continuing Education did not similarly threaten departmental structures; student numbers, compared to conventional programmes, were insignificant. They might have a secretariat or work under university committees, headed by a vice-rector. Post-graduate programmes were usually inter-departmental and coordinating units were created within departments. Some applied programmes were highly sought after so that such units wielded significant influence within coordinating departments. Yet, because organised within existing power structures, they did not create conflicts.

Although LLL in Greek universities was still in its infancy, new power structures and relations were being generated; larger scale provision could create significant shifts in structures and roles and from institutions to learners. Most faculty seemed to favour such changes provided they did not create clientilistic groups within the universities.

In Spain, LLL was often seen as alien to central university activities, and was treated similarly to external services or consultancies. It was left to institutional or individual initiative, market demand being the prime mover. Some universities, however, were defining areas of activities. Some were centralising management to improve the supply and organisation of courses, sometimes through the establishment of Centres to negotiate arrangements for training, oversee the signing of projects, and service professors providing training to companies. Some advanced distance education in developing areas, especially where Spanish was spoken. In universities with traditional structures, teaching staff provided the driving force to expand curriculum, create extra income, and bring training closer to the labour market. The courses created relationships with public authorities, companies and eminent figures in science. Some centres organised courses for a section of the student body, or an organisation requesting a specific course. Multinational companies (Ford and IBM) organised courses with a University.

In general, main actors varied according to institutional style. The more traditional were driven by individual initiatives, whilst others were led by the central university.

In Sweden, university boards did not intervene on the content of education. Faculty boards determined course plans but departments were the working units. After negotiation, they received their 'orders', mainly through payment from faculty boards for agreed courses. They were encouraged to find other sources of funding, such as commissioned education, development work and research which resulted from departments or individual academic contact with prospective

commissioners or, occasionally, via the university or faculty boards as 'orders' or obligations.

The larger universities lacked initiative to organise these activities within a common framework, to define rules and appoint suitable personnel. A central unit could release academics from the burden of trying to keep to the rules without being too idealistic (sell the service too cheaply) or too entrepreneurial (challenge the academic norms). The allocation system gave credit for students in regular courses, and there was no move towards initial investment which eventually might create additional income. The departments were left to do what they wanted, within the not very transparent rules.

Some cases of academics overstepping the boundary between entrepreneurial and academic activity led institutions to give external activities a common framework, as recommended by the National Agency of Higher Education. Some institutions established units to ensure common standards for contracts, and to make them 'visible'.

Countries and universities thus varied in structures for LLL. The basic units were the prime movers, but there were new structural forms: vice-rector roles, committees, central units, or intra-departmental structures. Commitment was professed in many Strategic Plans. These changes did not, however, indicate substantial shifts in power; this might change if there were new resource distributions between study, research, continuing education and private-law institutes. Structures and key actors reflected institutional styles. The more traditional were driven by individual initiatives, whilst others were centrally led. Internal rigidities were the main obstacle to LLL advance.

Relationships Between Teachers and Students

There was some belief that LLL would invoke changes in teacher-learner relationships and weaken teachers' power, particularly if LLL were pressed on reluctant faculties. Those encouraging students' self-consciousness and 'flexible', 'independent and 'student-centred learning' believed relationships should change. Teachers should start from student perspectives, take account of their experience and pay attention to feed-back. Power could be transmitted through recognising students' own ideas. They were the agents of their own learning; all was negotiable even if the curriculum was not.

A different view was that education acculturates people into a way of thinking which means someone is making a judgement about how far you have done that. That is an unequal relationship; students are not customers as are people that buy cars. 'It is more the parent/child relationship. We do a lot try to make it more equal but it will never be.'

In Germany, in a new learning model, learner autonomy was to be redefined. Students were to decide when, where and what they learned. There would be changes in curricula, teaching methods and techniques. The elements of initial training, higher education and continuing education were to form a differentiated system of learning accompanying life. In an experimental programme, *Lifelong Learning*, being approved by the Joint Federal-State Commission, a model was to be designed and evaluated over five years. In continuing education programmes active forms of learning predominated. More knowledge was acquired independently in consultation with teachers and based on work experience. In

short-term programmes more conventional forms predominated; these were based more on job experience, and not leading students to independent work.

In Norway, developing distance education demanded clear structuring and co-ordination between teachers. 'Home examination' approximated evaluation more to work conditions, implying shifts from teacher power. In continuing education, participants' professional knowledge was valued in projects and discussions.

In Spain, LLL courses, seminars, work experience, projects and grants, improved student-professor relationships, as did those between professors and the world of work.

As perceived in Sweden, LLL learners were considered to already 'know'. Greater concern for quality strengthened their position. Although objecting to being regarded as consumers, their obligation and right to evaluate courses were at most institutions formally specified. Restricted admissions meant higher education was still more supply-than demand-led. Curricula were still dominated by the view that the regular students should adjust to what was offered.

Teacher-student relationships would thus be affected by changing patterns of curriculum, modes of transmission and evaluation. We can infer, although cannot demonstrate in detail, that these might ultimately alter power relationships.

Cooperation, Partnership and Behaviour in the Market

In several countries LLL implied stronger relationships with the labour market and some surrender of academic freedom to engage in 'the disinterested search for truth.' Much of this preceded and was independent of LLL. There was no clear evidence of power shifts from universities to outside bodies, although, as they increasingly depended on external resources, a shift was likely. LLL seemed likely to further increase the permeability of universities.

There was some questioning in universities whether they should be directly seeking to prepare students for employment; did not higher education in any case do that through advancing self-development? This attitude contrasted with government policy which advocated concern for economic needs. An instrumental position was that higher education should equip for employment, credential for particular occupations and provide basic skills which all graduates needed. A third position saw educational and work experience as capable of integration into a work-enabling and developmental process.

These approaches betokened different assumptions about relationships with economic organisations. In all seven countries, universities sought to strengthen market relationships, particularly in LLL type courses. But the relationship was negotiative rather than coercive. There may have been shifts in values rather than a shift in power, other than that entailed in an offer of resources in return for service.

Responsiveness had to be matched with calculation. A factor in the British OU responses was 'is this course going to last given the investment put in it? Is it going to appeal to a wide range of people rather than simply meet the philosophy of lifelong learning.' Some English clients were said to come 'with a shopping list of expectations ... this will fit our management development programme. They may not want people who will question the company's modes of operating with willingness to walk away from the contract.'

Client demands affected some courses: a public sector Master's was remodelled for new audiences; an 'entrepreneurial' MSc was designed with

Glaxo Wellcome for graduate trainees; a technology centre had links with Ford and Jaguar. An OU partnership with IBM in 17 countries provided courses at work, and residential courses in Brussels. A mentoring scheme matched job-seekers with employees from a range of enterprises. Some academics willingly embraced these connections in the belief that work-related learning succeeded most when individuals' aims and goals referred to those of the organisation. Employment-educational reflexivity was important because many changed their career several times. One firm, Rover, wanting people to return to learning, gave Individual Learning Accounts to be spent on what the employee wanted. A university computer-based scheme enabled students to identify the skills needed and the computer indicated the courses to take. Another university's Faculty-Employers Advisory Board invited employers employing Arts and Humanities graduates to talk twice a year. A Master's course invited critique from students to be shared with the collaborating company. There was inter-institutional collaboration, between universities, local companies and local FE colleges. The OU had partnerships with over 300 organisations, a close relationship with a range of media producers and collaborated on credit transfers.

In France, in several courses, the curriculum resulted from joint efforts involving course managers and industry. In one case, four of eight courses had been initiated and/or designed with employers. A course for production engineers was based on core competencies identified by seven major companies. In another institution, many of teachers had experience in and maintained links with industry. Courses using professionals from industry employed to teach must have affected curricular concepts. Courses maintained dialogue with representatives of the profession to ensure relevance.

In Germany, the business world was the customer of educational services. There was agreement that LLL activities had positively affected relationships between the university and its social environment. Both sides expressed growing interest in collaboration in economic and training relationships. Two universities gave courses in association with other universities, companies and organisations. In others networks had grown with other universities, public and private organisations and with foreign universities.

Employers' groups and trade unions enjoyed high status and their recommendations on education and science policy were heeded. Committees for higher education shared views with employers' federations and employees' associations. In the nineties, a *Concerted Action for Continuing Education* was initiated, headed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Interest groups elaborated common positions and made recommendations on the development of continuing education, in which practical experience and attitudes employer attitudes were attributed particular importance. Industry's demands to German universities can be summarised as: intensification of dialogue with industry; transparency through marketing of education; practice relevance of organizational structures; emphasis on solutions to specific problems; flexibility and consideration of the persons addressed, and programmes in conformity with the market.

Large companies usually had contacts, mainly through personal connections, with universities and could buy expertise or continuing education as needed, although most also had their own continuing education institutions. Small and medium-sized enterprises were particularly interested in short-term courses,

because they could not afford day release. They sought prompt responses to needs, although universities might be unable to change arrangements quickly. One university stated that whilst continuing education must respond to client needs, they must remain true to their own image; programmes must spring from normal content and standards maintained. In fact, universities behaved only slightly differently from how they generally did. Presentation and advertising and observation of competing programmes were beginning to be part of university practice.

Some programmes were initiated centrally; for example, one continuing education course for teachers was developed under the aegis of the state Ministry. Close relationships developed between individual faculties/departments and individual schools and professional organisations. Topical or requested subjects were included in continuing education events. Market-oriented behaviour can be seen in private-law institutions for continuing education in faculties/departments needing the income which entered markets where there was strong demand and for which high fees could be charged.

Greek universities' partnerships for teaching or research were limited. The late development of the economy did not encourage active involvement in economic life until recently. There was an ideological assumption, too, that education was a matter for the state, that universities were state institutions by Constitution; any entrepreneurial dealings aroused suspicions of privatisation by the back door. Only recently did the introduction of new courses cause partnerships to form. But inadequate state and EU funding and the need to be involved in socio-economic life were creating a climate conducive to engagement in partnerships. Leading members of all the institutions investigated favoured entering partnerships. Most saw them as necessary and inevitable.

All had formed partnerships abroad or at home with public institutions, voluntary and non-government organisations and the private sector. The governing body of the Centre for Continuing Education included representatives from the Technical Chamber of Greece, the Confederation of Greek Industry and the Workers Confederation. There were partnerships with other academic institutions and with the Mathematical Society for its members' continuing education, an agreement with the electric power company to provide courses, and banks and shipping companies. The infant Open University agreed a course for employees of the Bankers' Union, and plans for expanding provision for employees of public and private organisations. Cooperation was envisaged between the university and its partners in forming curriculum content.

Greek universities had been funded almost exclusively by the state but now were to be given financial autonomy. They were obliged to enter market relations, without losing their public character. Funds came to them through mainly via research and little through teaching. Universities had committees administering such funds. The rectors and deputy-rectors interviewed did not see any danger of dependence to firms or economic agents by doing so. Yet, few respondents seemed to realise the need for change in structures and relations if they were to operate efficiently within the market while maintaining their academic character.

In Norwegian universities, most continuing education courses are offered on the open market with fees, but an increasing number of courses is sold to employers as commissioned or contract courses for employees. Several courses are 'tailor-made' as the content is developed in collaboration between department(s)

and employer, based on existing courses and research. University staff had experienced the collaboration as between different, but equally valuable partners. To succeed in the open market, contact with employers, graduates and professional associations were necessary. Committees for continuing education had members from the world of work. The Norwegian University of Science and Technology had reorganised faculty and department boards, responsible for policy on education and research, to include members from industry and the public sector.

In Swedish policy, the focus was changing from the public to the private spheres. There was privileging of 'strategic' cognitive fields, especially within natural science and technology, and industrial collaboration-partnerships directed especially towards small and medium-sized companies. There was also privileging of economic motives modelled on assumptions about 'industrial' goals and efficiency, related to 'academic' goals and efficiency. There were signals about the need for universities to become more flexible, and to increase external funding. State and municipal authorities still heavily dominated funding sources. Involvement in partnership and the market presupposed networking and brokerage and that mutual interests could be translated into practical orientations. As 'translation' differed in every case considerable flexibility was needed.

Swedish universities were undergoing re-organisation, with holding companies and centres for technological innovation, and units for lifelong learning activities. Most were multidisciplinary. Particularly, new universities, formerly colleges with strong regional support, sustained an interest in the regions, to which they were expected to contribute. There was a mixed picture of engagement in external activities. There was a willingness to engage in them for economic reasons, but also as a moral obligation of academics to society. Yet, the double messages caused hesitation: earn money but not too much, broaden the areas of contact with society, but give priority to regular students.

Thus, in all systems there were attempts to strengthen relationships with potential clients. Universities had a wide range of arrangements with external organisations. Whilst many academics were willing to negotiate collaboration and partnerships, some were unwilling to abandon critical perspectives in favour of them. Increasing influence over departments providing LLL courses was inevitable but likely to be exercised through the *quid pro quos* of an exchange and market relationship. The evidence of client exercise of power, in the sense of exacting particular behaviour unilaterally, is virtually non-existent.

Conclusion

There are emerging changes in power relations, and evidence of increased permeability to external influences rather than power shifts. Change is likely because LLL assumes that client groups will seek knowledge relevant to non-academic concerns and will find reference groups beyond academia in the economy.

The extent of change is determined as much by the enduring structures as by the characteristics of LLL itself. LLL practices and intentions do not differ greatly between countries or universities. But constitutional contexts vary from centralised regimes to systems which allow universities to develop LLL at their own volition. The exercise of influence ranges from legal requirements to participate in LLL to financial inducements or exhortation and persuasion.

In some countries, changes in structures and power relationships, and visible structures for LLL, are evident: Germany, Greece and Sweden, for example. Elsewhere, such changes are seen as necessary; reluctance to structure LLL, as in some countries, comes from academic reluctance to yield power or engage in new style activities. In some systems, there are effects on teacher-student relationships, although of uncertain extent and more intended than practised. Such changes would involve a shift in values among practitioners who pride themselves on expertise rather than on their interactivity.

Finally, on whether universities have yielded some of their authority to external customer groups, not long ago universities were regarded as sacred territory concerned only with the disinterested search for truth. Now virtually every university is responsive to external demands for services, from either social principle, as explicit in the Swedish case, or from the need to sell services in order to survive. We have noted structural developments accompany these changes, but for the most part the two sides are in a negotiating, exchange and market relationship in which resources are given in return for market-defined but specialist services.

Thus, we cannot say that LLL has brought about large shifts in power, although in some countries it has brought about some changes.

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