

## **Lifelong Learning: international injunctions and university practices**

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### **Introduction**

The aim of this article is to elucidate whether the international discourse on lifelong learning (LLL) had any influence on what universities are doing in this field. International trends will be examined on the basis of OECD, UNESCO, EU and Council of Europe policy documents. University practice will be based on an enquiry carried out in 28 universities in seven European countries in 1999–2000 in the framework of the project *Lifelong Learning and the University*, sponsored by the EU/DG 12.

Between the international policy discourse and university practice stands the **national layer** of policy-making, giving rise to two interesting issues: first, do national LLL policies respond to national traditions, needs and constraints, or to the consensus that emerged from international policy documents? And, second, to what extent do autonomous universities respond to national policies, given their administrative staffing and financial constraints and the attitudes of the academic staff?

Congruence and reciprocal influences between these three layers — **European, national and institutional** — are often taken for granted by policy-makers who tend to adopt a top-down approach whereby the ‘international’ discourse shapes national policies that would, in turn, be implemented by universities.

But the surveys of national policies and ‘good practice’ at the institutional level carried out in the framework of this project have shown that in some countries both national governments and universities have been involved in lifelong learning for many years, albeit under a different name. They can, therefore, claim anteriority. The history and present practice (and limitations) of universities also play a role in shaping national stances, which, in turn, influence the international discourse.

This article attempts to disentangle the array of reciprocal influences between these three layers of policy-making and to elucidate whether the international discourse has given rise to a new impetus in the field of LLL and/or contributed to change in existing practice.

In the second section, international trends will be examined on the basis of the major policy documents of international organisations. In the third, they will be cross-examined with university policies and practice. Conclusions will be found in the fourth section.

## International Trends

The concept of LLL emerged almost simultaneously in the Council of Europe, UNESCO and OECD in the late 1960s as 'recurrent education', 'adult education' or *éducation permanente*. The central idea was the same: the development of coherent strategies to provide education and training opportunities for all individuals during their entire life.

### *The Council of Europe*

The Council of Europe can claim some anteriority in the field of LLL. In the early 1960s, the concept of *éducation permanente* became the hallmark of its educational activities throughout the decade and the next. It was propagated as a '*fundamentally new and comprehensive concept, an overall educational pattern capable of meeting the rapidly increasing and ever more diversified educational needs of every individual, young and adult, in the new European society*'.

LLL was seen as part of a strategy to promote equal educational opportunities, but little was done to clarify its impact on existing education sectors in terms of access, organisation, content and evaluation. New programmes were launched and conferences were organised, but the momentum was diluted in existing programmes.

### UNESCO

UNESCO published the Faure and Delors reports in 1972 and 1996. Both were based on the discussions and findings of international commissions and couched in general and conceptual terms.

The first, *Learning to be* (UNESCO, 1972), was inspired by the insights gained by this organisation in the field of illiteracy in Third World countries and adult education. It provided a universal and humanistic vision of education, in line with its ideals, and gave rise to much discussion within individual countries and in regional conferences. Its impact, especially in developing countries, where national sources for inspiration are limited, should not be underestimated.

One generation later, the exercise was repeated by a commission chaired by Jacques Delors which was responsible for reporting on Education for the Twenty-First Century. The report, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (UNESCO, 1996), endorsed the humanistic and objective values of education, while giving due consideration to a new socio-economic context characterised by globalisation, technology and knowledge-based economies. After having identified the four pillars of education — *learning to be, learning to know, learning to do and learning to live together*, this report, which is much more explicit than its predecessor, provides some precepts for universities: '*higher education institutions should be diversified so as to take into account their functions and duties as centres of knowledge, as places of professional training, as the cross-roads for learning throughout life and as partners in international co-operation*'.

Both reports were intended to serve as a source of inspiration rather than as a guide for practical action. Their visionary intentions and precepts were not translated into global approaches of educational policies in member countries nor in the educational programmes of UNESCO itself. Their authors concede that

they are 'utopias', but add that they are 'necessary utopias' (Delors) to mobilise the dwindling energies of the education community or to convince decision-makers in countries with scarce resources to invest more in education.

Can they be more than a vision? Can they be transformed into a conceptual framework to reflect on education and a basic principle to drive fundamental change? The **Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning** (UNESCO, 1997), adopted at the fifth World Conference on Adult Education organised by the UNESCO Institute for Education in Hamburg in 1997, seems to answer this question positively. Its agenda is fairly clear about the need to improve access, conditions and quality of adult learning. The objective goes beyond literacy to include societal development (democracy).

The regional conference for Europe, held in Palermo, was perhaps the most explicit concerning the possible contours of LLL in higher education. It proposed a '*structured development of lifelong learning characterised by more institutional diversification, new policies of access to higher education, flexibility with regard to content, breadth, depth and duration of programmes, means of delivery, examination and validation*' (UNESCO, 1997).

The **World Conference on Higher Education**, held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris from 5 to 9 October 1998, is another recent attempt to incorporate lifelong learning principles into policies or proposals. It was the culmination of a preparation phase marked by five regional conferences held between 1996 and 1998. It was the first time UNESCO led a worldwide debate on higher education. References to LLL can be found in several documents prepared for this conference, usually as broad **guiding principles**, '*Contributing to the development of genuine lifelong learning is undoubtedly one of the major challenges and missions of higher education at this stage in history*' (UNESCO, 1998). LLL is also viewed as a context in which issues such as greater access to higher education, diversification, or flexibility must be approached.

## OECD

In the early 1970s, OECD launched its *Recurrent Education Strategy*, which can be considered as the forerunner of international prescriptions in the field of LLL. '*Central to this strategy was the spreading of educational opportunities over the individual's lifetime, to be available when needed, rather than have them concentrated in an ever-lengthening period of initial and often ineffective education. Not the least merit of such a strategy would be the possibility it provided of bringing together initial formal education, adult education and on-the-job training in one single framework and thus enable education and training to be attuned to the real needs of both the labour market and of individuals. Over the longer term, the application of such a strategy would require drastic changes in the organisation of all post-compulsory education, so far to allow for alternations between education|training and work with a guaranteed return to formal education when and for whom it was needed*' (OECD, 1994).

The strategy was strongly supported by the Swedish education authorities, which had backed the idea from the beginning. To a large extent, the concept of recurrent education was derived from the Swedish tradition of adult education and led to operational policies with far-reaching consequences in this country. The Swedish higher education admission scheme, which opened admission to

adults with work experience, and the Educational Leave Act of 1994 were two of them.

In other countries, the concept of recurrent education did not make much headway in the organisation of higher education because it was not translated into operational policies at the national level. In France, it collided with a major national initiative in the field of continuing education, namely the 'Delors Law' which, in 1971, established a tax exemption scheme to finance continuing education and training. This law created a huge demand for continuing education, which was partly met by universities (Jallade, 2000). In the UK, this period corresponded to the founding of the Open University whose initial objectives were primarily to widen access to undergraduate education. None of these national initiatives were directly inspired by the recurrent education philosophy.

By the mid-1970s, OECD shifted from this conceptual approach to more empirical analyses of concrete problems and bottlenecks in higher education: new admission procedures, modular curriculum structures, recognition of work experience, etc. In the mid-1990s, 'recurrent education' became 'lifelong learning', but the change was not only semantic. It implied two important changes *vis-à-vis* the former recurrent education concept (OECD, 1996). First of all, LLL insists on formal and non-formal learning in a variety of settings (at home, at work and in the community), while formal institutions were central to the recurrent education philosophy. As a result, the new discourse emphasises partnership or 'shared responsibility' in organising, managing and financing learning systems, while the role of the government was stressed in recurrent education.

Recognising that learning can take place in many places outside institutional providers is an attractive idea which has recently given rise to publications about **learning cities**, **learning regions**, etc. Developing networks and partnerships between stakeholders (i.e. individuals, employers, local community, etc.) at the local level to nurture a '**learning culture**' is a central concern of this approach (Kearns & Papadopoulos, 2000). The *motto* is **joint policy initiatives** which give a key role to partnership structures at the local level. The place and role of traditional providers within these networks are less clear. This new emphasis on '**multiple provision**' sounds like an echo to the calls for dwindling State responsibilities in the financing of education and for sharing the 'burden' with companies, individuals and other actors.

The second dimension that characterises the new concept of LLL is '**individual demand**', rather than 'social demand' which was central to the recurrent education philosophy. Adapting curriculum to peoples' abilities, interests and tastes, rather than the other way around, and calls for **student-centred learning** are central concerns of LLL. In recent years, this has received additional support from policies that stress adult education and continuing learning.

Whether these two new dimensions, namely **multiple provision** and **student-centred learning**, will better survive the test of 'real life' implementation than recurrent education 30 years ago is still unclear at this stage. Approaching the issue of **multiple provision** from an historical perspective may help to assess the chances of success. Thirty years ago, the attention of policy-makers was overwhelmingly drawn to public sector providers in the traditional sense. Today, private companies are part of the picture as VET

providers: company-based training, whether in initial (apprenticeship, *alternance* schemes) or continuing training, has gained full recognition. In that sense, it is correct to say that 'providers' are more diverse than in the past. Some other 'institutional' providers, i.e. local authorities, are key to adult education. But private companies and local authorities are also formal institutions. The difficulty lies in identifying and recognising learning that occurs **outside formal settings**, such as the home, the workplace or the community. The importance of the learning that takes place there (as most parents would know) is obvious, but it is not easy to make it a matter of public policy.

Calls for **student-centred learning** may also encounter serious obstacles at the implementation level. Today's educational policies are struggling with a rising demand for targets, norms, standards, nation-wide curriculum, national systems of competences, transparency, 'portability', etc. These are externally-set and intended for providers and bear little relationship with individual demand. The possible contradiction between these two trends is easily side-stepped by policy-makers, whether national or international, in their general drive for consensus. Occasional controversies between maintaining demanding standards of quality or adapting these standards to individuals surface from time to time.

Concerning the objectives of LLL, the OECD predicament is as comprehensive as it could be, '*accepting neither narrow demarcations between education and training, academic and vocational programmes, nor restrictions to learning opportunities in formal structures*' (OECD, 1996). Adopting broad policy objectives is certainly the best way for international organisations to gain support from all quarters and avoid being proved 'wrong' by critiques, but the costs in terms of operational effectiveness should not be underestimated, as the OECD experience with recurrent education has shown.

### *The European Union*

The European Union came later into the picture. Lifelong learning was mentioned for the first time in a major policy document, *Teaching and Learning. Towards the Learning Society* (1995) which was part of the follow up to the 1994 White Paper *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment*. It reflected the Commission's new approach to education and training in the light of the major changes in society, particularly the relation between education and employment.

This report identified five general objectives that should shape the work of the EU in the years to come, namely (i) encourage the acquisition of new knowledge: recognition of skills, mobility, and multimedia educational software; (ii) bring schools and the business sector closer together through apprenticeship/trainee schemes and vocational training; (iii) combat exclusion: second chance schools, European voluntary service; (iv) proficiency in three Community languages and (v) treat capital investment and investment in training on an equal basis.

These objectives were propagated and tested in a wide range of activities organised in 1996, which was designated by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament as the *European Year of Lifelong Learning*. Hundreds of events, such as conferences, seminars, and television programmes, were organised at all levels to promote examples of good practice. They culminated in December in a series of conclusions adopted by the Council of the European Union which, for the first time, delineated the contours of a wide-ranging LLL policy.

These guidelines are worth quoting exhaustively:

*Lifelong Learning initiatives should strike an appropriate balance between personal, cultural, civic and social dimensions, and economic and employment concerns. In addition they should also include democratic principles and human right values.*

*Each stage of education and training should contribute appropriately to the continuum of lifelong learning.*

*Lifelong learning must be based on a wide range of learning opportunities, allowing all individuals to progress in their education according to their social, cultural and economic interest and needs.*

*Initial education and training are fundamental to Lifelong Learning and should include, in addition to the core basic skills of literacy and numeracy, a broad base of knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences that will encourage and support learning throughout life.*

*Lifelong learning should aim to promote individual abilities, enhance employability, make the best use of available human resources talent as well as contributing to the promotion of gender equality, the elimination of social exclusion and the promotion of active participation in a democratic society.*

*Lifelong learning requires the development of flexible and innovative approaches to education and training including family involvement, in order to promote a sense of inquiry, initiative and motivation of individuals in the learning process.*

*Lifelong learning demands that individuals, as learners, take a greater sense of responsibility for their own education, training and personal development and in this regard appropriate guidance or counselling should be available to adult learners.*

*The continuum of Lifelong learning should have as central objective at all stages the promotion of equality of opportunity.*

*Collectively, individuals, institutions, enterprises, regional authorities, central governments, the social partners where appropriate, and society in general should, within their own areas of responsibility, create the conditions for, and engender a positive attitude to lifelong learning in all its aspects and minimise obstacles to participation in education and training and other learning activities.*

It is difficult to quarrel with these ambitious objectives. The drive for comprehensiveness should be understood as an attempt to seek broad consensus and support, but it deserves close scrutiny, especially when policies are translated into programmes. Three issues are worth mentioning to illustrate the gap between policies and practice, namely (i) lifelong learning vs. lifelong education, (ii) LLL for personal development or for employment, and (iii) target-setting vs. evaluation of good practice.

### **Lifelong Learning or Lifelong Education?**

The EU speaks of lifelong learning, apparently giving the concept the same meaning as OECD of a learning society, i.e. a society where learning takes place in many settings. But a recent Eurydice survey (EURYDICE, 2000) shows how difficult it is to implement this concept. After paying lip service to the importance of non-formal learning in diverse settings, the report concentrates on what institutional providers (and more narrowly on what providers under education ministries) do. True, traditional providers are asked to make their offer more flexible, to enter into partnerships, to be more responsive to individual demand, but they cannot be side-stepped by 'other settings'.

### **LLL for Personal Development or for Employment?**

Most EU policy documents on LLL stress its double rationale. There is a social rationale based on the need to enhance knowledge, promote active citizenship and develop a sense of belonging to the community, and an economic rationale which comes from the need to bridge the 'skill gap', to respond to changing labour market needs and to improve the competitiveness of companies. These discussions are familiar to those who still remember the policy discussions that took place in the 1960s at OECD and elsewhere about education as 'consumption' or/and as an 'investment'.

At the operational level, the choice between **LLL** for personal development, i.e. foundation skills, adult literacy courses and cultural undertakings of all kinds, and lifelong training (**LLT**) which focuses on career-related training and employment-related skills, has profound implications for the design of programmes. In this connection, the European winds blow in various directions and it is not always easy to figure out which side will win.

In a recent paper (ELC/018/99EN, 1999), jointly prepared by the Directorate-General for Education and the Directorate-General for Employment, the employment rationale prevails. *'In 2000, LLL will continue to be at the core of the development of the Employment Guidelines... And progress is expected from all Member States in translating the agreed objectives into concrete measures and targets in their 2000 NAPs (National Action Plans)'*. With these strong words, the chances that **LLL will become de facto LLT** (Lifelong Training) are quite high. The paper goes on to stress LLL in the context of 'skill gaps', labour market change, employment policy, labour mobility, etc. LLL becomes an instrument of the EC employment strategy, as proposed in the annual Employment Guidelines (EU, 2000), which are due to be incorporated into national action plans (NAPs). In this perspective, LLL is reduced to three forms of training, i.e. (i) initial VET, (ii) continuing vocational training, and (iii) further and higher education and training.

In the **Memorandum on lifelong learning** recently issued by the European Commission (EU, 2000), the reference to employment considerations is much less strong. The six key messages emphasise 'basic skills to participate in the knowledge society', learning participation, guidance, 'bringing learning opportunities closer to learners through ICT', etc. Despite the initial claim that 'promoting active citizenship and employability' are two equally important aims of lifelong learning, the paper stresses the supply side rather than the demand side.

Hence, in a large organisation such as the Commission, it is only natural that the DG for employment emphasises LLL for employability and demand, while the DG for education leans towards the learning side. Avoiding clearly-cut policy choices is part of the political game of consensus-seeking that is inherent to international policy-making. When it comes to resource allocation and implementation of policy statements, however, choices are unavoidable and recent history has shown that they owe more to institutional and financial constraints than to policy statements.

### **Target Setting or Collecting/Evaluating Good Practice?**

Beyond this discussion about objectives, the two papers mentioned above venture into the difficult challenge of implementing LLL. Two methods are proposed: 'target setting' and/or 'identifying and developing good practice'.

**Target setting** is an important feature of policy-making: '*Quantitative targets help to focus policy objectives, mobilise key actors for the success of the strategy and are a prerequisite for a credible multi-annual assessment of the policy outcomes*' (ELC/018/99EN, 1999). Hence, the Commission's inclination towards it. Nobody will quarrel with the usefulness of target setting whenever it can be done technically and accepted politically. A Task Force was created to measure LLL, but this is difficult and time-consuming in such a diffuse, highly heterogeneous context. Present attempts to build LLL indicators are expressed in such broad terms (e.g. educational attainment of the workforce aged 25–59) that they cannot be used for policy purposes. They are severely constrained by the availability of statistics. Progress in this area depends on several surveys, essentially the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD-CERI, 1999) and the EUROSTAT Continuing Vocational Training Survey, and will be very slow.

It is also crucial to collect, evaluate and disseminate '**good practice**' in the field of LLL. EU thinking is not very advanced in this area, probably because nobody has yet elaborated the criteria that good LLL programmes should meet. One may live for a time with 'informality', but, at some point, criteria and indicators of quality will be needed to assess whether education programmes deserve to be called LLL programmes. Identifying and evaluating 'good practice', if possible with a transnational dimension, could be the way ahead for the EU in a field as ill-defined and heterogeneous as LLL.

The EU Memorandum is keen to maintain the door open to both 'targets/indicators' and 'good practice'. Discussions on this document are taking place among national governments, NGOs and all interested parties and will continue until autumn 2001.

### **National and University Policies: the facts**

In this section, we shall analyse how far the policies carried out by universities in the seven countries reflect the policy statements made by international agencies. We shall report on the opinions of people interviewed in our research about the influence of international and national policies on policies at the university level. Our survey shows that institutional responses to LLL do not entirely reflect the influence of international policies.

Countries could be broadly aggregated in three groups. In the first (Sweden and UK), LLL is part of the main-stream of the university system. In the second (France, Germany, Norway and Spain), it is developing as an outgrowth of university continuing education. In Greece, it is still incipient and is being currently developed as a response to deficiencies in higher education provision.

#### *Sweden*

In an international perspective, Sweden has the strongest claim to have been in the forefront of policy thinking on lifelong learning. From the beginning, adult education played a central role in the rise of the modern Swedish nation. It emerged as an important political and cultural phenomenon in the early 1900s. Many Swedish observers believe that international LLL policies, and especially those developed by OECD at the end of the 1970s, were shaped by the Swedish policies, rather than the other way around. Leaving aside this issue of anteriority,

one may, therefore, expect a close match between national and international policies. The structure and organisation of Swedish higher education already feature many of those characteristics that in other systems are defined as non-regular LLL arrangements and activities.

Improving equity and social equality has been embedded in the Swedish adult education policies. New access policies were established many years ago for those who did not have upper-secondary education and were over 25 years of age. Various categories of applicants formed subgroups in accordance with their school background and were allocated places in proportion to the number of applicants in the groups. This system deliberately aimed at opening higher education to older 'non-traditional' students and to those who had not entered or completed upper secondary school (mainly students with a non-academic family background). This policy is now being questioned in the light of the low enrolment rate of young people in higher education in relation to international trends.

Separate courses, part-time courses and evening courses were introduced in the regular provision in order to meet the demands of older, non-traditional students. They are open to both non-traditional and traditional students. New modes of delivery were sought and efforts are underway to submit the contents of curricula to pedagogical and intellectual rethinking. Commissioned courses are a relevant part of the LLL-oriented activities in Swedish higher education.

In recent years, the highly centralised and nationally coherent higher education policy was replaced by a more decentralised policy-model that allowed for greater institutional autonomy. The economic and social pressure to secure 'relevance' of courses increased, while state funding decreased, leading to greater dependence on external funding. Competition among institutions for students as well as for education and research assignments grew. There were demands for curriculum changes to adapt contents to distance-education, commissioned education and competence training. There were also clear signs of an interest-shift within state policy from the public to the private spheres of society. Finally, economic considerations, largely modelled on assumptions about the governance of 'industrial' enterprises, were given precedence at the conceptual and rhetorical level to analyse 'academic' goals and efficiency.

Awareness about LLL seems to penetrate all operational work in universities. But neither government, nor the institutions go beyond the traditional and well-established LLL policy and activities (with their roots in recurrent education). In order to do so, well-established principles of public education must be challenged. In addition, the new demands for cost-awareness do not support a shift from provider-oriented to consumer-oriented provision of programmes and courses.

## *UK*

Different strands of lifelong learning in Britain have existed for a long time under different names (Liberal Education, Adult Education, Continuing Education, Continuing Vocational Education and Continuing Professional Development). In its earlier forms, the emphasis was on human values. As from the 1980s, it shifted towards economic instrumentalism, national competitiveness and individual employability.

There is, however, little evidence that British policies on lifelong learning are responding to international developments. Although the foundation of the Open

University coincided with early discussions at OECD about recurrent education, its initial objectives were primarily to widen access to undergraduate education. The concept of lifelong learning was not embodied in government policies until the mid-1990s. The UK participated in the European Year of Lifelong Learning initiative but selected objectives that reinforced the economic instrumentalist agenda that it had been espousing since the late 1970s.

Even by the end of our study, LLL policies remained largely rhetorical. Financial incentives for higher education institutions to widen access were introduced only recently. There is still no clear policy on the financing of part-time study. Institutions, while increasingly incorporating lifelong learning into their missions, did not usually regard it as a key policy framework. Although many participated in a range of EU programmes, European policies on LLL had made little impression. Income generation was a major driver for institutions.

Within this scenario, however, there were developments of LLL themes. Many polytechnics had continued to offer part-time and evening courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, although the Open University provided the majority of part-time provision at undergraduate level.

There was growing emphasis on continuing vocational and continuing professional education: up-dating or re-training. Graduates and professionals returned for top-up courses or longer programmes to improve their knowledge and skills or acquire new skills or qualifications for new roles and new careers. Some courses were the outcome of partnerships forged with industry that were increasingly encouraged by both government and institutions. A significant move in advanced provision was the rapid growth in universities and polytechnics of part-time courses leading to Masters' degrees. Unlike undergraduate courses, they could demand the fees the market could bear.

Institutions were, however, relatively slow to fully exploit opportunities to promote flexibility in student patterns or modes of study. Increasing interest in distance learning and new teaching technologies was to some extent supported by national and institutional incentives, but not systematically. Modular curriculum structures and credit accumulation and transfer systems can facilitate the participation in higher education of different populations at different points in their life. However, many universities continue to offer degrees on a non-negotiable basis and within set time frames, although modular courses, sandwich courses, summer schools and short courses are part of current provision. The 'need to put learners before structure' (Fryer, 1997) has been only partly accepted.

Normative education theories in which learning replaces teaching and the focal point is the learner rather than the providers or teachers are increasingly evident in UK higher education, although far from universally accepted. More strongly embedded in undergraduate but increasingly, too, in postgraduate education, is the concept of transferable skills.

Overall, lifelong learning policies, both international and national, have constituted an indirect and relatively uncertain influence on policies and practices at institutional level.

### *Norway*

In Norway, LLL is seen as an international trend that gained importance in the 1990s because it was launched from Europe. However, some think that it

originated in Nordic countries during the 1960s and 1970s and was transferred to the rest of Europe. As one dean put it, 'Norway and the Nordic countries have been a driving force in what has become EU and OECD policy.' Interviews in the four universities showed that reports of international agencies are studied and sometimes taken into account in formulating plans. Still, many believe that the influence of international policies on the universities has been mainly indirect, through national policies with the recent Competence Reform.

Norwegian governments have been concerned about second-chance higher education for almost 30 years. Since the 1970s, access to credit-giving higher education has also been open to those with vocational secondary schooling, or a combination of age and work experience. This, however, had to be supplemented with examinations in five basic secondary school subjects; admission tests were not used. These regulations also applied to continuing education; hence, adults without formal qualifications could not take examinations and did not receive credits. In late 2000, access to credit courses became open, including recognition of competences from work. Non-credit continuing education courses may be open to all, but are usually targeted at professions.

Although governments stated that continuing education was important, they also demanded that universities give priority to initial education when there are many applicants. As regular student demand increased massively in the late 1980s, it was not possible to develop continuing education without charging fees. At present, universities charge fees, differentiated according to market, for distance courses, commissioned courses, non-credit courses and continuing education of maximum 30 credits (90 ECTS). Continuing education was explicitly stated as a legal responsibility for all higher education institutions for the first time in the 1995 Act on Universities and Colleges. Some thought that this would influence institutional strategies and that continuing education would become a larger part of university activities, as important as initial education and research.

Norwegian universities have a diversified offer of LLL and their plans include further diversification in courses and programmes. Modules and credits bring flexibility; project work is used for active learning. LLL courses are delivered as evening courses, summer courses, short day-time courses, intensive weekly courses, distance courses, off-campus commissioned courses, etc. Modes of delivery are mixed, but regional meetings are part of most distance education courses to counteract drop out. Much continuing education is developed in cooperation with professional associations, school authorities and other employers. In that sense, it is demand-led. Despite public declarations on the general goals of LLL, professional training seems to be the most important goal of current LLL activities. In traditional courses, the presence of many mature part-time students is positive in terms of LLL development, but it has an adverse effect on university efficiency measured in credits obtained.

### France

In French universities, as in the German and Spanish ones, LLL is an outgrowth of *formation permanente* or *formation continue*.

Thirty years ago, when the *éducation permanente* movement was strong and pervasive, the objective of equity prevailed. The call for 'second chance' learning was reflected in the opportunities offered by universities to prepare adults who

had not passed the secondary school-leaving examination to have access to university. Legislative attempts were made to give access to higher education to people with significant work experience. As a result of the major difficulties on the employment front during the 1980s and 1990s, the equity objective was progressively abandoned in favour of more career-related objectives in many universities. Some observers said that the ideals of *formation permanente* had been 'hijacked' by continuing professional training.

LLL at the university level does not seem to owe much to international policy statements. In the late 1960s, it was very much a grass-root development engineered by some politically-motivated individuals who were either suspicious of OECD initiatives in recurrent education or considered them too ambiguous and far-fetched. These people, who acted as militants for the cause of *éducation permanente*, were more interested in promoting new practice than in global policies. In a way, the Delors law was the French reply to OECD policy proposals in favour of recurrent education in the early 1970s. Although it was not designed to benefit universities in the first place, but to finance continuing education opportunities in general, universities were able to compete with other suppliers and benefit from it.

Unlike initial higher education, which is provided free of charge, universities can charge fees for LLL courses. Continuing education students finance all or part of these tuition fees thanks to various legislative windows opened by the Delors law. This may explain the professional orientation now adopted for many of these courses, whether in private sector fields such as engineering, computer sciences and business administration, or in public sector disciplines such as education.

All course directors try to adapt the curriculum to demand and courses are often rated according to the number of applicants. There is little doubt that new curriculum concepts emerged as a result of 'sticking' to new trends in job content and work organisation. In a way, French universities have proved very responsive to demand. But adults may also enrol as normal students in degree-level courses, in which case they are submitted to the same obligations and regulations. Many senior and retired people do so for reasons of 'personal development'.

Significant efforts have been made in French universities to make the supply of LLL more flexible, whether in terms of curriculum concepts, alternative delivery or certification. They are often supported by individual promoters who complain that they have to swim 'upstream' within an institution that does little to support them. The issue is both institutional and financial. The institutional challenge consists in organising, strengthening and harnessing these limited and often fragile experiments in the framework of a university policy. In other words, the challenge is 'mainstreaming'. Of the four institutions surveyed in this project, only one, the University of Science and Technology in Lille, could claim to offer fully-fledged, coherent university LLL.

On the financial front, the limitations of the Delors law may have been reached. National education authorities should recognise that flexibility to encourage returning adults to enrol in LLL programmes means extra costs to the institution and that these cannot and should not be met exclusively by learners or their sponsors. In other words, appropriate incentives should be given to universities which are willing to engage in internal re-organisation in favour of LLL. Seen from this angle, international policy papers on LLL seem too global to French practitioners who struggle with day-to-day issues.

*Germany*

In Germany, LLL continues to be primarily understood as continuing academic education, which has been on the agenda of higher education policy for many years. However, its institutional implementation has been slower than expected. In most cases, traditional courses and degrees are still predominant and LLL is not a very integrated part of the way German universities see themselves.

Most German States apply regulations whereby adults who have practical job experiences but no traditional higher education qualification can have access to standard first degree courses. Requirements include minimum age (23 or 25), an apprenticeship diploma and corresponding job experience and success in the university admission test. However, these adults are considered as regular students and do not benefit from specific provisions or support measures.

With regard to continuing academic education outside regular (first) degree programmes, there is much more flexibility and diversity of admission. Admission requirements vary, as do the individual forms and contents of these programmes. Those who attend these courses must have already obtained a first professional qualification and usually have practical job experience as well. The first professional qualification need not have been obtained at a university, but could have been obtained at a vocational school or in the dual vocational training system.

Continuing education in universities is divided into two main streams: general and professional. The second is the more traditional form and constitutes the bulk of existing provision. Yet professional continuing education, despite its diversity of programmes, has a low status. Many LLL activities are carried out by professional associations, often in collaboration with university teachers; they are oriented towards the demands of the labour market and the individual needs of professionals and workers. In contrast, the main orientation of most university LLL courses tends to be supply-driven, since many institutions are not allowed to generate any income from such courses and teachers will not receive additional remuneration or a reduction of their regular teaching load from their university. Hence, the prospect of a close match between supply and demand is unlikely.

The traditional forms of teaching and learning (disciplinary courses oriented towards central areas of research and teaching) have influenced LLL activities to a certain degree. Few continuing education programmes are conceived and offered in modules but continuing education programmes are very problem-oriented and have often been conceived in such a way that competence to solve specific professional problems is acquired. However, as regards short-term provision, i.e. incomplete programmes but individual courses or seminars and more conventional forms of teaching and learning predominate. Since it is generally assumed by university teachers that students have already acquired a certain ability for independent study and acquisition of knowledge, this issue is not in the foreground. As most university continuing education programmes address former university graduates or professionals who are able to acquire knowledge autonomously, the issue of 'learning to learn' is not seen as a serious problem. Still, at the conceptual and policy level, it is relatively prominent in debates.

Only certain actors in the German universities participating in the study were aware of EU policies on LLL. In most cases, it was mainly the heads of the units for continuing education and management (e.g. pro-rectors for study and

teaching) who knew about EU policies to promote LLL. The positive thrust of LLL supported by related government and state policies did not make all actors aware that rejecting LLL would be considered 'politically incorrect'. On the other hand, the Federal Government was more aware of state policies on LLL.

In addition, there are some strong external influences. A kind of 'voluntarist corporatism' seems to have been at work. Federal educational policy has long been influenced by the recommendations of national educational committees that discuss issues of continuing education and more recently LLL in German universities. There are recommendations on how to improve its administrative, legal, and financial conditions. In the 1990s, these committees proposed to reduce the curriculum in undergraduate courses in favour of a shift towards specialisation in later phases of life either through specialisation within the profession ('learning by doing') or by continuing education accompanying professional work. They recommended in particular that basic skills and key qualifications be imparted to ensure independent learning and the application of existing knowledge to new situations in work and life.

### *Spain*

In Spanish universities, the term continuing education is used instead of LLL. The central idea is that it complements regular, nationally-regulated programmes and degrees. LLL activities involve catering for the needs and the dynamic nature of modern society. Hence, they focus on specialisation and the updating of skills and on the methodologies and knowledge that professionals need to carry out their duties more successfully. LLL is also seen as professional retraining and a means by which knowledge that meets labour market needs can be transmitted. This may reflect the need to give flexibility to higher education provision, which does not focus enough on the real needs of the labour market. The main idea that underlies the concept of LLL in Spanish universities is that it must meet those needs. LLL activities are market-oriented and provide additional resources to both the institutions and academics involved in them. Universities recover the full costs of LLL programmes through tuition fees and the teachers receive extra payment for organising and/or imparting this type of programme. The high cost of university LLL is a great obstacle to participation.

Professional training, up-dating knowledge or providing practical skills are the main aims of LLL in Spanish universities. These aspects are in great demand both by students and the labour market. As provision depends on demand (only courses with enough demand are maintained), programmes are student-centred (in fact, client-oriented). As a consequence, LLL activities cover a broad range of themes and approaches. They can be considered a good example of diversification, flexibility and alternative forms of delivery.

The influence of international policies on the development of LLL in Spanish universities seems to have been limited. Whilst a majority of those interviewed stated that they knew nothing about European policy statements, some knew about European programmes, agreements and other types of relationships with foreign universities and companies. In one university, almost half the interviewees believed that international policies favourably influenced LLL and in another some believed that LLL had helped to obtain resources through projects, subsidies and grants (Lingua, Leonardo, Socrates).

According to interviewees, the influence of national policies on LLL at the university level was almost non-existent. Universities knew about courses that were organised through agreements with other national institutions but had no knowledge of nation-wide policies. Some interviewees believed that national initiatives (principally related to employment development) had a negative influence because they were ill-adapted to participants' needs, since their aim was to obtain funds for trade unions and business organisations. Nor were those interviewed aware of the existence of regional LLL policies, although education is the responsibility of the regional governments.

### *Greece*

In Greece, the introduction of LLL at university level was part of the government's wider economic and development policy and a response to EU educational policy. Most of the funding came from the EU and this motivated many institutions to become involved. The implementation of LLL in Greek universities was intended to deal with the problem of the very high demand for higher education. Less restrictive access policies were the main motive.

Many programmes (considered as LLL because of the different modes of access) have the same goals as general education. But there are also programmes that focus on professional and vocational training. However, the main objective of LLL seems to be to promote access and new opportunities for those who were unable to enter higher or vocational education.

LLL activities in Greek universities seem to be excessively regulated by the government and still too supply-driven. Most programmes are traditional in their form of delivery, although they are not organised in the same way as regular programmes. The Open University is one exception. At present, links with non-traditional providers and new forms of learning are not developed. The idea that universities must only be a public service seems to be refraining these types of activities.

In Greece, it seems that the policy reports and missions of UNESCO, the Council of Europe and OECD influenced the formation of LLL policies. University officials took account of their implications for their institutions. LLL policies in the universities followed a clear top-down process with international organisations at the top. The most direct influences emanated from the strategies and missions adopted by the EU over the last ten years, as was clearly stated by most of our respondents.

A characteristic of Greek universities is their dependence on the Ministry of Education. It was only after 1996, the year adopted for LLL (PSE) by the EU, that efforts to open the system to non-conventional programmes started to gather momentum. By law, PSE created new organisational structures in parallel to conventional ones. They could only be established with the approval of the departmental General Assembly. Proposals must be put forward by departments and submitted to the Minister for Education for approval and must be very detailed.

### **Conclusion**

In the last decades, international organisations have developed intensively the concept of LLL. UNESCO, OECD and the EU have defined and extensively disseminated policies in favour of its development.

The effect of these policies and recommendations has been uneven. With the possible exception of Greece, few university leaders recognise the direct influence of these policies on their internal LLL activities. Sweden, and to a lesser extent Norway, claim anteriority in policy-thinking. In the other countries, no 'straight policy line' stretching from policy statements and reports at the international level down to university practices can be evidenced. This is equally true for an 'advanced' LLL system, such as that of the UK, which can afford to take a relaxed look at international policies, and for the incipient Greek system where internationally-inspired LLL activities are geared to solving a specifically Greek problem of overly restrictive access policies. Greece provides an interesting example of 'nationalisation' of international injunctions.

However, two important conclusions emerge. Despite the efforts at the international level to maintain a delicate balance between the two main objectives ('economic' and 'social') of LLL, present practice in European universities clearly shows that the labour market/employment/career development objective has taken precedence over the personal development/second chance objective. This is particularly true in France, Germany and the UK. When there is trouble on the employment front, the 'political correctness' of international reports stands little chance to win over harsh realities.

Introducing international LLL concepts sometimes collided with national and university practice. The cost-finance aspect is a case in point. In Germany, Norway, and France, where LLL activities were promoted in a national context of free initial education, their costing and pricing are clearly an issue. In Germany, the development of LLL seems to be constrained by the zero-tuition fee policy that was adopted; in Norway, fees are gradually being introduced; in France, continuing education students are charged tuition fees but benefit from a range of financial mechanisms to fund them.

Some may welcome these breaches in the sacrosanct principle of free tuition in France and Norway, others may not and will support the German stance. What is clear, however, is that these changes were not intended by the promoters of LLL at the international level who seldom bother to work out the financial (and institutional) implications of their policies.

The same point could be made about the possible conflict between LLL development and the drive for institutional efficiency. Reaching out to returning adults has a cost for institutions that neither international reports, nor governments like to acknowledge. It may also impair efficiency, measured by credits awarded at a time when universities are urged to promote it. In their desperate search for consensus, international policy-makers avoid raising these embarrassing questions, leaving university leaders struggling with the contradictory policy statements that are imposed upon them.

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