



37th EUCEN European Conference

Transforming the University into a Lifelong learning University

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and Université Catholique de Louvain

26-28 March 2009

THE CONFERENCE

How can European universities move from a continuing education perspective into a Lifelong Learning one? How can our universities evolve and become Lifelong Learning universities whilst at the same time retaining their strengths in research, teaching and service to society? How can we transform this challenge into a fair process within the university and into a democratic process within society?

The objectives of the conference were to design the future Lifelong Learning University (LLLU), to validate prospective views, to discuss change strategies and to promote newly emerging practices.

The Conference was mainly based around results from the BeFlex project and preliminary findings of the BeFlexPlus project, synthesizing the state of play in University Lifelong Learning, examining the role of the Bologna process in promoting and exploiting flexibility in university curricula and identifying some best practices in regional learning partnerships between universities and other stakeholders.

The Conference was enriched with different academically reviewed papers, and the content was further enhanced with the keynote addresses from international experts. Contributions from the round-table panel and participants' discussions during workshops enabled focused discussion of the Conference theme.

During the three days, more than 150 people from 24 countries discussed these topics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For some years, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been the educational institutions most challenged by the lifelong learning perspective. In the recent weeks at the University Business Forum in Brussels, the Director of Business Europe stated that « universities must invest more in adult lifelong learning »; the representative of EUA added that lifelong learning has to become « a distinctive European feature » of universities and the draft Communiqué of Ministers responsible for Higher Education notes that “the lifelong learning perspective will shape the institutional practice of each higher education institution”.

Participants in the EUCEN Conference took stock of these new commitments and challenges posed by authorities and stakeholders. However, as experts and actors engaged for many years in this field, they recognise the distance that still exists between good intentions and concrete policies, between rhetoric and reality. They regret that lifelong learning is still seen as an objective among others (the draft Communiqué in particular refers to lifelong learning among other key issues: equitable access and completion, employability, student-centred learning, more mobility, international openness) and not as a structuring process. They called for concrete actions to move from principles to action plans at national and local level. They called for the following concrete actions,

Universities should:

- Intensify the reflection at all levels in HEIs on what it means to become a lifelong learning organisation in practice. Each HEI is invited:
 - to recognize and integrate LLL as an aspect of its institutional mission and culture;
 - to elaborate its own dynamic definition of a LLLU (Lifelong Learning University);
 - to develop a comprehensive and coherent strategy offering opportunities to ensure continuity in a time of more and more fragmented individual and professional lives and an increasingly fragmented knowledge society and social environment;
 - to implement its strategy in a participative, collective and cooperative way.
- Participation in the development of a LLL culture for all students and staff, offering comprehensive frameworks to re-structure fragmented knowledge, to create bridges and to promote – internally and externally - a learning attitude, fulfilling the special mission of universities in promoting reflection, tradition and innovation.
- Develop intensive and comprehensive scientific research in the field of LLL in order to support, feed and guide implementation of a LLLU.
- Build a learner centred educational model integrating pedagogical, organisational and financial dimensions.
- Exploit the opportunities offered by the Bologna Process (e.g. credit system, learning outcomes, recognition of prior learning and non formal and informal learning,...) to provide flexible learning paths and continuous guidance for the learners, to avoid fragmentation, to allow and encourage trans-disciplinarity and to ensure continuity and progression without dead ends.
- Increase the investment in services provided to learners: guidance and counselling, validation of non formal and informal learning, support programmes, e-learning, etc.
- Invest in staff development: managers (to guide the change), teachers (to elaborate the adapted provisions) and staff (in particular for those in charge of reception, guidance and counselling), involving stakeholders in these activities.
- Ensure quality assurance procedures take into account the diversity of “learners”, of the pedagogical objectives, and of the modes of participation.
- Communicate – internally and externally – their decisions and their results.
- Develop the concept of a “networked university” involving different stakeholders (other educational sectors, trade unions, professional bodies, companies and local authorities) in sharing knowledge and sharing teaching, in a cross-fertilizing approach developing a common language, belonging to the learners with no monopoly on knowledge activities.

The EUCEN Conference participants, recognising that this requires considerable investment of resources by the HEIs, ask the governments to support, assist and finance the universities in order to implement this transformation.