

THE IDEAL LIFELONG LEARNING UNIVERSITY

As an intellectual exercise, we drafted the main features of a university that would be an ideal place for lifelong learning. We made use of the COMMIT partner reports and experience from other European ULLL projects as well as our practice in the home institutions. We accepted that we are not able to change the environment and our ideal lifelong learning university is designed so as to survive in a context more or less as we currently experience it.

■ Concepts

‘Lifelong learning’ and ‘social dimension’ would be as self-evident as ‘basic research’ or ‘degree studies’. Instead of the third mission, a great majority of faculty would see lifelong learning as one of the core values and guiding principles of the university.

■ University culture

The university leadership and the faculty would succeed in incorporating the lifelong learning values beside the fundamental academic values. The attitude towards change and reformations would be active, tolerant and determined. Crossing borders of scientific schools and educational fields would be highly respected. Open access, open data and open communication would concretize the idea of knowledge as a common good. Cooperation with various stakeholders of society would be active and recognized.

■ Building capacity

Research activities in the academic heartland would flourish. The entirety of all forms of education were seen as one entirety whose content and methods would be developed for versatile audiences. Expertise of lifelong learning would consist of specialized know-how on pedagogics (covering expertise and excluded groups), ICT-support, markets and service production. Lifelong learning would be a reality for the whole university staff.

■ Strategies, structures, steering

The organization would be clearly structured but sufficiently flexible. It would incorporate mechanisms and a responsive atmosphere that would bring in the influence of external stakeholders. The university leadership would document their support for LLL in a careful and well-argued manner. The decision-making structures and incentives were constructed notifying the needs of lifelong learning. The strategic process would link lifelong learning and the social dimension with other elements of the strategy and the entirety of the implementation plans.

■ Links to research and development

The university would search for a sharp profile in the regeneration of the procedures and practices of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning would tempt researchers of various fields, not only educational scientist but business economists, social scientists, legal scholars etc. Teaching would make concrete and everyday use of both research outcomes and participative research-oriented methods.

■ Pedagogical development

Learning would have a high priority in the institutional values. Teaching staff would see their role as expert facilitators of responsible students from various audiences. Prior learning would be recognized to the optimum so as to give room for new growth. New technology would serve the pedagogical aims and students’ needs. Finding ways to empower students to exploit their learning outcomes would be as essential as high-quality content of programmes.

■ Quality assurance

High academic quality, accordance to students' needs and relevance to society would be basic cultural assumptions. Taking care of quality would be a part of the faculty's everyday work, not an additional burden. Improving the strengths would be an as important viewpoint as correcting the mistakes. Evaluations and audits would be used skilfully to develop the strategy and functions of the university.

■ Finances and resources

The ideal would not mean endless flows of money but the possibility to finance innovative ideas to enhance lifelong learning. The proportion of basic vs. soft funding would serve independence in terms of vital investments. Services for new audiences were not seen as cash-cows, the educational drivers would be as relevant as the financial ones. Instead of complicated bureaucratic financial systems, universities were able to sell their services at a price without the necessity for cost-based reporting.

■ Political environment

The university would be active in influencing the national legislation and policies to support a proactive role of universities. It would also actively involve itself in local and regional strategic processes. Anticipatory approach would also serve the resource allocation and successful participation in research and development programmes.

■ Markets and stakeholders

The university would be skilful in finding societal spheres and market niches that would sustainably serve the needs of the stakeholders while implementing the institutional strategies. Instead of aiming at 'social impact' in the 'surrounding society', the university would see itself as an independent proactive actor building partnerships with other actors so as to find and fulfil its role in the local, regional, national and global context.

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