

The European university continuing education network, **eucen**, position on University Lifelong Learning promoting the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development ¹

Today, the role of universities in the promotion and development of lifelong learning as a humanistic, holistic and sector-wide focus to learning has been strongly recognised both in employment and in society by many policy makers, stakeholders and civil society groups.

However, **eucen** (European University Continuing Education Network) realises that it will have to move lifelong learning beyond purely economic and social aspects and establish a particular platform to address the global challenges of learning and education which societies are facing.

Message: **eucen** and its member universities share a common conviction that while lifelong learning has an important role to play in achieving all of the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030, it is at the heart of Sustainable Development Goal 4 ², which aims to develop inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, especially **through university programmes and collaborative actions for higher learning**, so as to respond to economic, societal and environmental realities and challenges.

From **eucen**'s point of view, the Sustainable Development Goals do not simply challenge us to support universities in becoming more aware of the new and changing learning needs of individuals and of communities across Europe, and in responding to these with accessible educational and training programmes using new technological and collaborative learning approaches.

They challenge us also **to reflect on the important social responsibility to bridge quality education and training with each and all relevant Sustainable Development Goals:**

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² <https://en.unesco.org/education2030-sdg4/targets>

- to realise better health and well-being
- to develop skills, attitudes and values for employment and entrepreneurship
- to form stable and sustainable social, civic and community life
- finally, to build on direct SDG4 contexts to develop lifelong learning in HE services and public concerns, while recognising that other SDGs will provide the context and articulate the ultimate goals in the development of many lifelong learning programmes.

As a network of European universities and professionals working together and learning from each other to improve and to innovate in the field of lifelong learning, **eucen feels confident in asserting that the challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be successfully addressed and answered without university lifelong learning since most SDGs rely on educated citizens and educated communities in order to achieve progress.**

Conclusions 2017: Arising from its 2017 Policy Talks, based on inputs and reflections from distinguished participating experts, policy advisers and representatives of specialist international organisations on issues of an inclusive and equitable society, on challenges of relevant work skills and measures of active citizenship, participatory democracy and evidence-based knowledge, **eucen has come to specific conclusions on lifelong learning, quality education and sustainable development goals:**

- **integrated action by HEIs is crucially needed in order to respond to SDG4 and other relevant SDGs** through concrete steps:
 - university lifelong learning has to contribute to the promotion of the UN's sustainable development goals and, especially, to quality education through the commitment of higher education institutions to the social dimensions of higher learning and to collaborative actions across educational sectors;
 - university lifelong learning has to reflect and integrate current issues in education for sustainable development (ESD) and trends reflected by the global network of learning cities and smart city specialisations in connections with SDGs;
 - universities have to support the widening of access to sustainable concepts and practices in education, and also the introduction and conscious use of SDGs in curricula where relevant, and based on individual and community needs;
 - **eucen** supports the position of most member universities that SDGs ought to be advocated in more explicit forms; therefore, university lifelong learning has to reflect sustainable learning environments;

■ **eucen puts quality, professionalisation and skills development into focus:**

- **eucen** offers practitioners and researchers the possibility to upgrade, widen and specialize their expertise and professional capacities by accessing **eucen** activities, resources and programmes;
- universities and stakeholders have to intensify university activities in lifelong and life-wide learning in order to improve employability and also to foster social and civic integration;
- universities have to act as particular VET providers with specific focuses in skills development, based on research and development, via inter-sectoral HVET³ and HCVET⁴ projects; universities engaged in lifelong learning have specific roles in developing and intensifying the “joy of learning” and in proposing innovative methods for learning in diverse environments (e.g. at work, at home, volunteering posts, leisure, etc);
- higher education institutions must promote transferability of training into the workplace through specific methodologies in curriculum design in workplace learning; they also need to underline the role of validation of prior learning in order to emphasize the collection and sharing of valuable knowledge;
- universities have to support the capacity-building of adult and lifelong learning professionals;
- universities have an important role and responsibility in building relationships between and bringing closer formal, non-formal and informal learning; and, at the same time, in balancing purely economic outcomes with outcomes which address wider social issues;

■ **eucen highlights the role of evidence-based knowledge and information for the exercise of active citizenship in a multi-cultural world:**

- **eucen** understands active citizenship and participatory democracy as barriers against populism and xenophobia. In order to be able to exert oneself in the practice of citizenship, critical thinking is a key skill in our current media-dominated world; HEIs and lifelong learning universities have a crucial role in developing critical questioning, in practicing analysis and validation of information sources, in learning how to discern reliable information from rumours, sound bites and slogans, and in promoting evidence-based information and research-based knowledge.

³ Higher Vocational Education and Training

⁴ Higher Continuous Vocational Education and Training

eucen has determined that lifelong learning in and with higher education is both a human right and a public good which is key to promoting quality sustainable development in education, and a condition for the realisation of a better world for society and better work environments.

University lifelong learning is an integrated part of the lifelong learning domain and forms part of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). It is however an under-represented area of higher education activities and therefore its position needs to be strengthened and better recognised.

eucen understands that university lifelong learning supports developing capacities for social and personal development, while incorporating training of skills and capacities for effective and better regarded work. **University lifelong learning**, through **eucen**'s activities, **should include "Education for Sustainable Development" and "Global Citizenship Education" as two key concepts of today's lifelong learning focuses.**

eucen has determined that university lifelong learning ought to guarantee equality of access to provision as well as educators' academic and professional development.

Finally, **university lifelong learning for eucen** is a tool and a method to connect people, both in local and global dimensions, to collect and share valuable knowledge and skills via lifelong learning opportunities for all.

eucen and its member universities are convinced of the need to pro-actively and continuously engage with issues around the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Education 2030 Framework for Action. This will enable our organisation to respond to challenges of quality education and learning in a profound way.

Conclusions 2018: Based on the discussion during the **eucen** 2018 Policy Talks focusing on *Balancing social cohesion with economic necessities - promoting cultural diversity and sustainability in university lifelong learning*, **eucen** has come to further conclusions on particular aspects of lifelong learning and sustainable development goals:

- **eucen** calls for greater awareness of cultural diversity of migrants and refugees in relation to active citizenship, but also the historically shaped context of 'pluri-culturalism' in most European countries and the role of ULLL in learning how to integrate cultural diversity in the following:
 - Students and HE academics have an opportunity to learn from each other about their diverse ways of being, while all HEIs' staff and units need to foster the internationalisation of academic and additional services;

- University lifelong learning is flexible and thus has major potential to be used as an innovation laboratory for HEIs in general;
- Academic and research objectives and interests often diverge from political goals and HEIs have the responsibility to raise awareness on social needs;
- universities must help learning neighbourhoods to promote active citizenship to develop integration and collaborations;

■ **eucen asserts the importance of recognising the status of research-based knowledge and evidence-based information, as compared to the continuous flood of often untrustworthy or biased information and stories which currently permeates our society.** How to combine a tweet and reflexive thinking? Given the increasingly rapid pace in automation and digital transformation in different sectors, particularly in the field of information and communication, **eucen Policy Talks in 2018 developed some initial responses:**

- Universities have a responsibility to research and to develop new knowledge, and yet, they also have to have the right to fail;
- As well as good experts, we need passionate citizens animated by personal purpose;
- Learning to learn will accelerate HEIs roles to provide valuable education and training in order to balance innovations and change with traditional values;
- The role of universities and in particular of ULLL is more than ever to provide education and training at the same time as enabling dissemination of academic and scientific knowledge.

■ **eucen demonstrates new perspectives for universities in relation to providing accessible effective skills development at a time of rapid change in the competence regime and decline of welfare by being influenced by issues such as:**

- HEIs face challenges around facilitating the dissemination of ‘universal knowledge’ versus ‘specific skills’ training, and in finding a balance between the two; overly-specific education and training curricula may result in the loss of sustainable employment and result in people rigidly depending on their current employers with reduced opportunities for occupational mobility;
- Universities, through research, can identify real trends in the job-market, identify skills-needs and the impacts of occurring skills-mismatches and, moreover, provide ‘healthy’ and efficient ways of addressing these;
- University lifelong learning, in this respect, is a promotor of innovation to involve relevant stakeholders;
- Trust is essential together with a set of values which help those engaged in work-based learning to develop necessary skills and competences in university lifelong learning programmes.



APPENDIX

Background and motivation for the position paper on ULLL promoting the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁵ and the Education 2030 Framework for Action⁶, **eucen** decided in Autumn 2016 to organise a series of policy talks sessions starting in spring 2017 focusing on university lifelong learning through collaborative action so as to help better health, economic growth, social cohesion, inclusive and equitable quality education, employment, sustainable consumption and production, and also environmental awareness. The **eucen** Policy Talks in Brussels on 25 April 2017 had the following title:

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development The Roles of University Lifelong Learning through Collaborative Dialogue

This event aimed at providing an international forum to discuss how lifelong learning within universities and/or higher education institutions can both embrace and influence the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Steering Committee of **eucen** decided in 2017 that these discussions should aim at developing some key policy development actions, and give visibility to the work which **eucen** and its member universities undertake in their commitment to quality education, and, more directly, to lifelong learning, by focusing on the social dimensions of participation and performance in lifelong learning.

eucen, during its twenty-six years of existence, has consistently emphasized the necessity and importance of university lifelong learning in the changing roles and responsibilities of higher education when trying to progress towards making quality education a reality.

Therefore, **eucen** has identified its allies, partners and key stakeholders in raising both participation and performance in lifelong learning, whether taking place in formal, non-formal or informal contexts.

⁵ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

⁶ http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdq4-2016-en_2.pdf

eucen, at the same time, has called for the active participation of its members not only through project-based⁷ development work and conference activities⁸, but also in other specific kinds of activities (e.g. initiatives, research, lobbying, etc.) to form and reform universities to meet the needs of university graduate and post-graduate students, together with non-traditional learners seeking personal and professional development, and to expand their knowledge and skills to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving societal and economic environment.

eucen provides a specific forum for innovation and for the dissemination of good practice in the field, and a platform for collaboration and for the development of lifelong learning action-research. It promotes dialogue between researchers and practitioners, engages in political and institutional lobbying, and publishes an eJournal of ULLL, etc.

⁷ ALLUME <http://allume.eucen.eu>
COMMIT <http://commit.eucen.eu/>
HE4u2 <http://he4u2.eucen.eu>

⁸ **eucen** website <http://www.eucen.eu/conferences/>
eucen Studies website <https://eucenstudies.eucen.eu>