

Development and Management of University Lifelong Learning¹

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Introduction

The development of continuing education and lifelong learning activities at higher education institutions (HEIs) as part of their “third mission” has been given more attention within the institutions of late. The increased autonomy of HEIs forces them to find ways to improve their budget conditions, among these is leveraging university lifelong learning (ULLL) as an additional revenue channel. The significance of ULLL is as broad and open to interpretation as the meaning of ULLL to various institutions, which is to say that it ranges from “none” to “very” with every shading in between. Many HEIs understand their role as it pertains to their traditional two missions of teaching and research at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, but not as a provider of lifelong learning in a broader sense, with services geared towards adult learners. At the same time, market competition for continuing education is growing. These factors are forcing universities to rethink their programmes, to perform market analyses and identify strategic positioning and to establish core processes like post-graduate curriculum programme development or services for adult learners. This process can be the impetus for new competitive strategies that can open the way to a new organisational identity. The management and organisation of ULLL are crucial to its success. This chapter will discuss the range of ULLL offerings in Europe and will try to come up with a set of common definitions (macro level). How to find relevant content and what constitutes key factors for potential participants will be also discussed (micro level). The case of University Pécs in Hungary will be used to illustrate how a particular university established and supports its ULLL strategy within the European higher education area.

Diversity of definitions in Europe

Perhaps the strongest characteristic of ULLL is the range of its implementations—the differences between countries, within countries and even within faculties about what is considered to be ULLL.² What attracts this label is often related to administrative rules or regulations but these too are varied. Sometimes ULLL is characterized by the target group (e.g. returners, adults, second chance learners, working professionals); sometimes it is defined by the time, place or mode of delivery (e.g., all part-time courses, all evening or weekend classes, all open/distance/e-learning); sometimes by its entry requirements (e.g., open access); sometimes by the fee structure (e.g., all fee-paying courses, all courses priced according to the market, or special subsidy courses); sometimes by the teachers (e.g., taught wholly or largely by working professionals from outside the university); sometimes by the course characteristics (e.g., interdisciplinary courses, short and/or post-graduate courses, professionally-oriented courses, courses that do not lead to a state diploma). Masters diploma courses serve as a good illustration. At some

¹ Please use the following reference: Davies, P., Németh, B., Pausits, A. (2010) Development and Management of University Lifelong Learning. In: Huisman, J., Pausits, A. (eds.) (2009) European Higher Education Management and Development - Compendium for Managers. Waxmann p. 147-158

² Davies 2008, 2009.

universities all masters programmes— irrespective of content, objectives, target groups, free or fee-paying, subsidised or fully funded and so on—fall under the rubric masters degree programme; while at others, professionally-oriented masters, interdisciplinary masters, part-time masters or fee-paying masters are counted as part of ULLL. Sometimes, depending on the faculty or on the expertise currently available in the ULLL department, there is even a mix within one institution. From the outside this may look chaotic, but there is almost always a good institutional or administrative reason for the classification and often one designed to get the best deal for the learners either in terms of the teaching expertise, costs or flexibility. It could be argued that this is a result of the universities taking advantage of the new masters courses to innovate and provide flexible opportunities best suited to meet the needs of new target groups or individual learners. However, it is raising issues in many countries about the meaning of a masters degree and more broadly about the definition of ULLL. If it is defined too broadly, where it means everything to everyone, it is no longer a useful concept; if it is defined too narrowly, where too much is excluded, it constrains the space for rapid response to demand, for innovation and creativity and for addressing specific local, regional and professional needs. But if we cannot define ULLL, then how can we measure it, compare it, benchmark it, think about its impact and demonstrate accountability?

So is ULLL an activity—certain kinds of courses for certain kinds of people? If so, what kind of courses? Short courses, courses that do not lead to diplomas, open, e-learning and distance learning courses, special vocationally oriented bachelors or masters programmes? For what kinds of people? Adults (of what age and experience?), ‘returners’, ‘second chancers’, post-graduates, professionals, seniors? For certain kinds of purposes? If so, which? Updating of professional qualifications, transfers to new kinds of professions, or expansion of skills, such as management skills for musicians? All these definitions exist at European universities, but even they leave something out. What about young students straight from school—is LLL not for them? Shouldn’t they be learning to learn, learning to love learning, thinking about learning all their lives, acknowledging that what they learn at age 20 will not last the length of a modern career: shouldn’t they already be engaged in LLL? Wouldn’t it be better to describe LLL as the core of what it means to be a modern university in the 21st century? In other words, would it not be better to talk of lifelong learning universities (LLLU) rather than university lifelong learning (ULLL)?

Characteristics of a lifelong learning university

- Learning is shared, the distinction between teaching and learning is more blurred, students learn together, from each other and from people and activities outside as well as inside the university, i.e., universities are learning organisations
- Universities are open systems: accessible, supported, flexible, where it is possible for students to come in and go out at different points and in different rhythms
- Learning is valued wherever and whenever it takes place, the curriculum takes account of prior/other learning for entry, for part of a diploma, maybe for a whole diploma, and recognizes prior non-formal and informal learning
- Learning is lifelong and “lifewide”
- Learning is enjoyable and rewarding

- Assessment is based not just on unseen and individualised examinations, but on a range of assessment methodologies for different skills, knowledge and competences

How do we get from ULLL to LLLU?

To make ULLL a reality, universities need leadership and the idea of LLLU at the heart of their mission. Strategies and policies must include the involvement of stakeholders: regional authorities, employers, trade unions, professional associations and learners, as well as a language of communication to bridge these various spheres. The term ‘learning outcomes’ as a way of describing the curriculum is a useful starting point for this language of communication. Despite staff development becoming recognized as more important, at present there is neither a clear career path nor visible and measurable rewards and incentives for academic staff to engage in LLL. However, as universities have become more autonomous in recent years, with more control over their own management systems (within a national framework of quality and accountability), they now have considerable latitude for setting up an organisational infrastructure to promote LLLU. The 2008 Charter for LLL in Universities offers many recommendations for governments and universities.³

Organisation of ULLL

Strong competition in the HE market has compelled institutions to search for competitive advantages. HEI leaders have begun to pay more attention to services and to think of academic services as the third pillar of their institutions in addition to the teaching and research activities that are essentially de facto services for stakeholders. Moving to a service culture can contribute to the financial success of an HEI. To become service oriented, HEIs have to move away from being ivory towers and transform themselves into relationship-based organisations with an institutional culture and mission geared towards service. This new direction means that new products such as a master’s programme have to take students into account as one of the HEI’s stakeholder groups. The change in orientation from teaching to learning means that HEI processes are coordinated with the learning requirements of the students. Examples of this are e-learning or other ways of offering flexibility with regard to the time and place of learning. Institutions wishing to improve their services must begin by becoming more student-oriented, which includes making better use of students as external factors. Market analysis and curriculum development are other useful tools for HEIs in the process of overhauling their academic services.

The first thing to remember is that the discipline is no longer the starting point. This represents a real departure from tradition for programme designers and educators. Competences (learning outcomes) are the organizing principle of the LLLU curriculum, which has to determine what the exit profiles of graduating students should be and specify the set of situations that graduates should be able to handle. Competences can be based on real-life or work-related situations in a specific professional field or on the academic logic of the educational programme. Surveying the graduates’ exit profiles is a necessary first step to identifying the resources required to deal with different situations. The practices of educators as well as the learning methods of students—whether problem-based or action-based—must be appropriate to the situations awaiting students

³ EUA 2008.

after graduation. Post-graduate learning must be meaningful for the students and useful for their working environment, aspects that have been noticeably absent from higher education for a long time. In other words, choosing competence as an organizing principle for the LLL curriculum is a way to bring working life back into the classroom. According to Wesselink et al., the basic principles for a competence-based curriculum are:⁴

- Defined competences
- Competence development is continuously assessed before, after and throughout the learning process
- Learning activities are related to learning environments
- Knowledge, skills and mind-set are considered in learning and assessment processes
- Reflection and responsibility on the part of the students are encouraged
- The roles of teachers as coaches and experts are in balance

Most of the principles have to do with learning and teaching activities as well as university support services; however, the central issue is defining the relevant competences for the target audience and thus the desired learning outcomes of the teaching and learning programme. This part, namely how to identify the necessary competences, is the missing link in competence-based curriculum development. Because progress in the curriculum becomes critical from the perspective of process workflow and the institutional development chain, HEIs focus on improving internal processes. This procedural view leads HEIs to a well-developed set of organisational and legal steps. The following figure shows the curriculum development process at Danube University Krems:

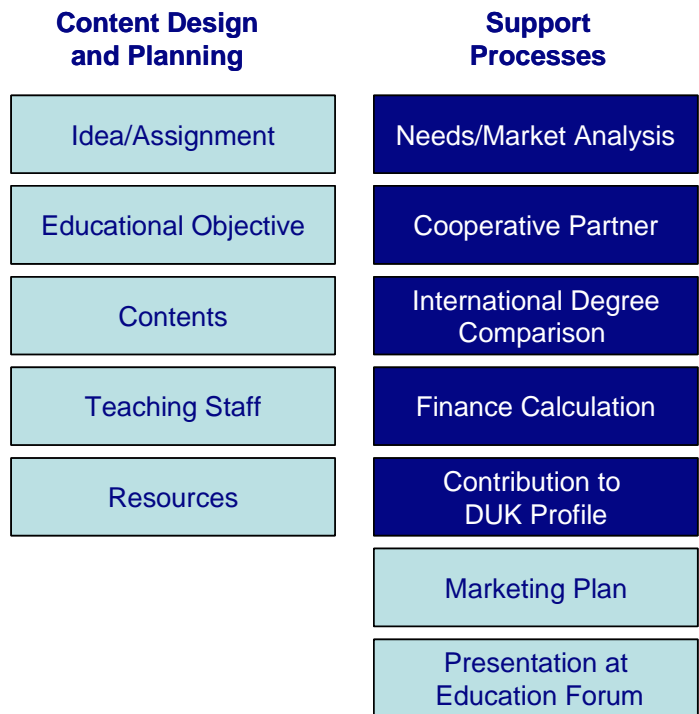


Fig. 1. Curriculum development process at the Danube University Krems, Austria⁵

⁴ Wesselink et al. 2007. p. 2.

⁵ Pausits 2008, p. 7.

Parallel to the content design and planning processes, the curriculum support processes assure market acceptance of a new curriculum. Moreover, in competence- and skill-based education, these support processes are critical factors for the re-conceptualisation of the curriculum at HEIs.⁶ The amount of managerial and administrative tasks increases during the development stage along with transparency, which is an important prerequisite for ongoing quality assurance. In other words, the content design and planning processes may be viewed as the input-oriented part and the support processes as the output-oriented part of the development process. If they want to improve processes, HEIs are forced to make them more effective and efficient.

In the case of Danube University Krems, the last stage of the formal curriculum development process is the presentation of the proposed curriculum to a formal review unit comprised of faculty from across disciplines. The positive effects of such an interdisciplinary crossover unit in ULLL were that people from different fields and departments of the university could contribute their experiences with curriculum development. The forum is used as an instrument of quality management and quality assurance as well as for benchmarking programmes at the university.

The programme has to adequately address the needs and requirements of its target audience. The shift from an input to a needs and outcome orientation takes place through a dual development process. Figure 2 shows the factors for the masters programme as well as the different fields and thematic issues for a market analysis survey. In addition to these results, the market analysis delivered other programme management findings related to such issues as pricing, mode of delivery, acceptable programme length, etc.

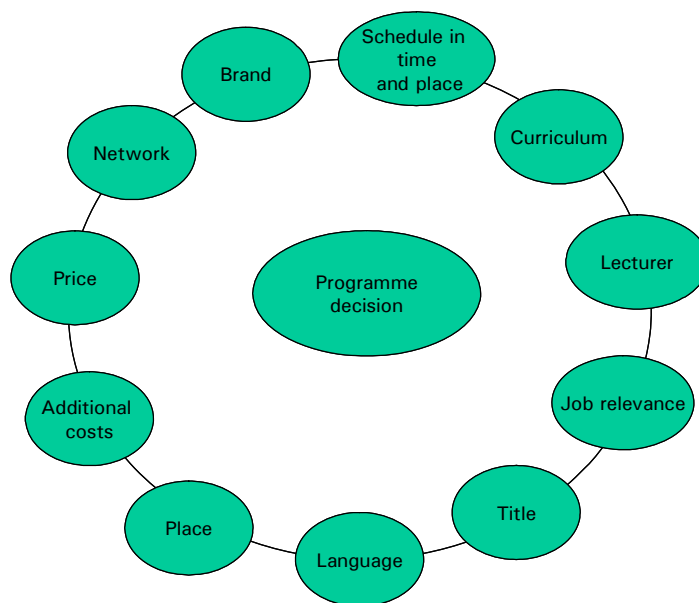


Fig. 2: Key factors for student participation in a postgraduate programme⁷

⁶ See Pausits 2008.

⁷ Pausits 2007, p. 8.

The organisational structure to support curriculum development (or other processes like market analysis) as well as run ULLL activities differs from institution to institution. Competition with institutions outside the HEI (including joint ventures with other HEIs and for-profit organisations) leads to differentiation in organisational structure and strategy and to the identification of unique selling points (USPs). State HEIs' main USP is the ability to award a degree or national diploma and trust in the state. What remains constant across HEIs is that service orientation and long-term relationships between HEIs and their clients will define the success or failure of ULLL.

CASE STUDY : Empowering Lifelong Learning at the Faculty of Adult Education and HRD of the University of Pécs, Hungary

In the past ten years, the Regional Lifelong Learning Research Centre of the Faculty of Adult Education and Human Resource Development (HRD)⁸ of the University of Pécs has become one of the leading research centers for continuing education and lifelong learning in Hungary. When the adult education department gained faculty status in 2004, this was a significant step towards recognizing it as an academic field in its own right, as part of activities within higher education.

In 1999, the University of Pécs, via its Institute of Adult Education, became a full member of EUCEN (European Universities Continuing Education Network) and an associate member of EAEA (European Association for the Education of Adults). This openness to international academic and research environments was a clear signal that the university was trying to respond to some major strategic challenges surrounding higher education in Hungary. Since then, research groups from the institute have joined a great number of valuable EU-funded comparative research and development projects in the field of continuing education so as to learn how to monitor and cope with challenges of university management, quality assurance, curriculum development, LLL policy issues, marketing, finance and staff development. Their participation has also allowed them to build partnerships in an international community influenced by EU-initiatives.⁹

Therefore, the Institute of Adult Education joined the Thematic Network project of EUCEN (TheNUCE—Thematic Network in University Continuing Education) as the first continuing education project (along with the Socrates II programme) that Hungary was eligible to participate in. The input and commitment to that networking, within strict guidelines set forth in the Memorandum¹⁰, was the elaboration and analysis of quality assurance in university adult education so as to develop university lifelong learning with two on-going case studies. However, we were able to gain insight into methodology and tools used by university management.¹¹

After the turn of the millenium, many universities from the former socialist countries began to move towards making use of university continuing education to promote a rather holistic approach to higher education management and development. Networking through EUCEN has allowed the unit to capitalize on the international experience of TheNUCE partner universities in such extremely important areas as management of ULLL, policy for lifelong learning, regional development, organisational structures, e-learning management for lifelong learning, marketing,

⁸ HRD – Human Resource Development.

⁹ More details can be found at: www.eaea.org.

¹⁰ European Commission 2000.

¹¹ Jakab and Németh 2002, 2006.

staff development, financial management and future trends. The Institute of Adult Education and HRD hosted the 23rd EUCEN conference in Pécs with a title to match the challenging aspect of complex university management: *Teachers, Facilitators, Mentors or Managers? New Roles and Competences for Academics in a Lifelong Learning University*. The conference fueled debates about the roles and competences required to manage a higher education institution and emphasized the need for networking in university lifelong learning in Hungary and environs.¹² It is interesting to note that somehow most of the forecasted trends appeared in later EUCEN projects like BEFLEX or BEFLEX+ and Equipe and Equipe +, all of which strongly influenced current arguments over the theme of university lifelong learning.

The Institute and since 2004, the Faculty of Adult Education and HRD of the University of Pécs put a high emphasis on the development of high quality co-operation with non-university partners such as cultural organisations, museums, libraries, civic organisations and associations and local and regional councils among many others. The main driver for such engagement was university management's vision of changing lifelong learning at universities into university lifelong learning. Between 2000 and 2006, the Grundtvig Programme of the Socrates II project promoted initiatives where, for example, experts at various museums trained museum educators and developed curriculum for staff members, and in the process learned from them as well.

Between 1995 and 2006, the continuing education program for adult education was changed to encompass a B.A. in Adult Education (three years) and at least four different M.A. programmes (2 years each) of Adult Education, Adult Education Teacher, Library-Informatics Management, and Human Resources Management referring to the Bologna Process. That process has been a clear and essential outcome of the Bologna-process underscoring the importance of competence-based curriculum development.

In order to be able to follow the main trends in European continuing education within higher education, the institute joined Grundtvig projects like ALPINE (Adults Learning and Participating in Education)¹³ from 2001 to 2003 and TEACH (Teaching Adult Educators in Continuing and Higher Education) from 2003 to 2006.¹⁴ Those projects spurred a significant change on curricula, teaching and research orientation and methodology. The Faculty of Adult Education and HRD used those projects as research and development tools to aid in developing competence, to promote curriculum development and to integrate local and regional academic approaches into a national and international dimension.

Since 2003, the institute and the Faculty of Adult Education and HRD of the University of Pécs have been founding members of MELLearn, the Hungarian Lifelong Learning Network.¹⁵ So far, the MELLearn network has organised five national-international conferences to discuss key issues faced by higher education institutions applying, analysing, researching or developing lifelong education and learning programmes. What follows is an overview of the topics each year:

2005

APEL (accreditation of prior experiential learning)

Co-operation with non-educational organisations to develop human resources

¹² More conference and project details details can be found at: <http://www.eucen.org/>.

¹³ More information on ALPINE can be obtained at: http://www.qub.ac.uk/alpine/ALPINE/MAIN_PAGE.htm.

¹⁴ TEACH is fully described by: Atanasova et al. 2006.

¹⁵ MELLearn and its activities are described at the following site: www.melllearn.hu.

2006

Adult education and training functions of higher education

Higher education and the economy

Training of adult educators

E-learning in adult education

2007

Adult education experiences and opportunities for higher education

2008

Lifelong learning networking co-operation of higher education institutions as regional knowledge centers

2009

Strategies, technologies and methods of the learning and knowledge societies

Distinguished faculty researchers of adult education and lifelong learning participated in these conferences; they presented their research papers on numerous occasions and published them in the conference booklets. Due to its involvement in the preparatory management activities of those national conferences and project meetings, the Faculty of Adult Education and HRD potentially has brought a wider European and international perspective to Hungarian modes of thinking about university lifelong learning.

From 2005 to 2007, the LILARA project (Learning in Local and Regional Authorities)¹⁶ focused on issues that affect learning in local and regional councils or at companies, associations and networks, etc. The PENR3L project collected some European universities that were researching and developing local and regional communities through the support of Observatory PASCAL,¹⁷ an international research network of universities and governments (local, regional and some national). The partnership with PASCAL led to the Faculty of Adult Education and HRD hosting the annual international PASCAL conference in Pécs in September 2007,¹⁸ and the University of Pécs becoming an official member of Observatory PASCAL in 2008 to expand its knowledge of fields like social capital, place management and lifelong learning.

At end of this case study, it must be pointed out that by becoming active members of EUCEN, EAEA, PASCAL and MELLearn, the University of Pécs and its Faculty of Adult Education so far have been able to keep up with the main trends and handle the challenges in university lifelong learning, especially in the field of university adult and continuing education and research. Researchers and experts at the university are regular participants in the monitoring programmes of the European Commission's DG Education (e.g., the Action Plan on Adult Learning or the Institute of Lifelong Learning of UNESCO on the CONFINTEA process). Organisations and conferences—like the TEMPUS 3LUC (Lifelong Learning in University Context)¹⁹ in Croatia from 2006 to 2007, the Danube Rectors' Conference at Eötvös University in Budapest in September 2008 and summer schools dealing with University Lifelong

¹⁶ LILARA project is available at: <http://www.lilaraproject.com/>.

¹⁷ More to be found on Observatory PASCAL at: <http://www.obs-pascal.com/>.

¹⁸ 'Lifelong Learning in the City-Region' PASCAL Pécs Conference at: <http://www.pascal2007conf.pte.hu/>.

¹⁹ More on Tempus 3LUC can be obtained at: <http://www.grad.hr/tempus3luc/>.

Learning—provide a means for the regular exchange of experiences and information with other universities.²⁰

An important milestone was reached in the fall of 2008 when, eight years after the Memorandum, the European University Association (EUA) issued its Charter on Lifelong Learning using EUCEN's BEFLEX and BEFLEX+ recommendations.²¹ We believe that an essential part of university lifelong learning is to inform people about the impetus behind the rise of lifelong education and learning, to learn from its almost century-old history and at the same time, to remind people involved with higher education that change is the essence of organisational learning when one is trying to respond to the challenges of managing a university of lifelong learning.²²

Reflection, future perspectives and challenges

ULLL is a complex theme enriched with different perspectives at the system and institutional levels. Space constraints did not permit a discussion of ULLL at the individual level, i.e., how academics react to the idea of adult learner programmes and manage the additional workload stemming from ULLL activities. However, this individual perspective should be taken into account by people involved in the development and management of ULLL. The variety of implementations across Europe and institutions as well as the different organisational structures supporting ULLL activities, as well as the competitive environment are three major factors that force the institutions to identify their own strategy and USPs. Given the expansion of LLL with new offerings especially in the area of executive programmes, HEIs are realizing the importance of professional service management and the development of support processes in order to be able to meet expectations of the parent HEI for profile building and additional funding. To gain a competitive edge, HEI administration must become less rigid and make the move to an entrepreneurial and adaptive environment. In some cases, ULLL units have been the forerunner of modern market-driven HE management. By learning how to be a market player from the ULLL units, HEIs can subsequently apply this expertise to the development of core processes of undergraduate education: curriculum and product development, international relations, quality management and development, new forms of teaching and learning. Being proactive in the quest for LLLU is elemental to the long-term success of the HEI as a whole.

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²⁰ Danube Rectors' Conference in Budapest 2008 website: <http://drc.elte.hu/>; DRC summer school: http://www.drcsummerschool.eu/summer_school.

²¹ EUA 2008.

²² Németh 2003.

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