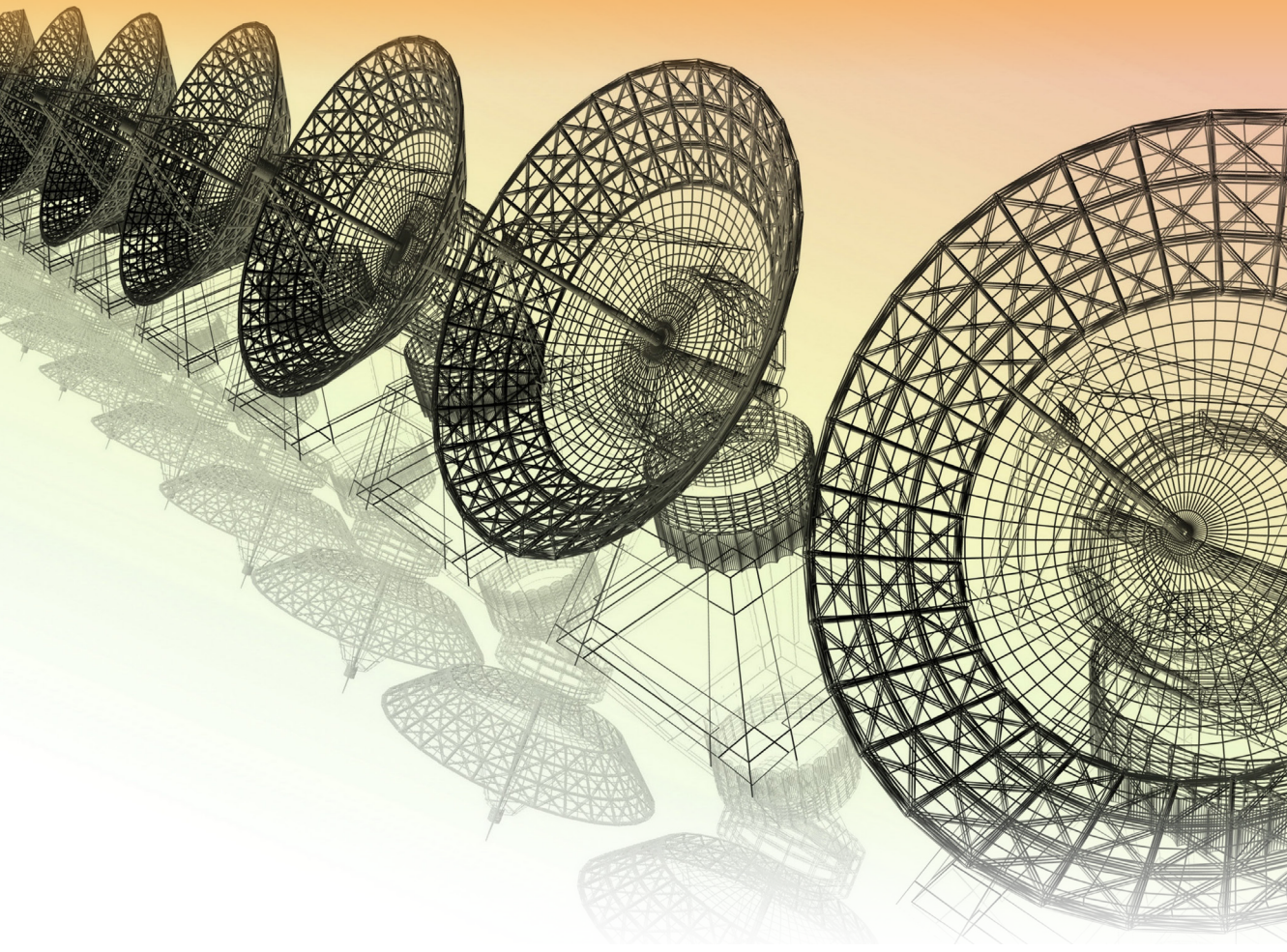


Towards an Institutional Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Higher Professional Education

FLLLEX Project Results and Recommendations



FLLLEX



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1. ABOUT FLLLEX	7
Partners	8
2. LIFELONG LEARNING	9
What do we mean by Lifelong Learning?	9
What is the role and impact of the EU?	10
From European policy to national implementation	10
3. PROFESSIONAL HEI: A KEY PLAYER IN LIFELONG LEARNING	13
Professional higher education's view on Lifelong Learning	13
Role of professional higher education in implementing LLL	13
4. POLICIES FOR IMPLEMENTING LIFELONG LEARNING	17
National policies for the implementation of Lifelong Learning	17
Policy hooks and HEI Freedom of Action	18
5. PARTNERS IN LIFELONG LEARNING	21
Lifelong Learners	21
Employers as stakeholders in LLL	25
Lifelong Learning providers	27
6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	29
Policy recommendations for EU and national governments	29
7. FLLLEX-RADAR	31
Goal and purpose	31
First findings of using the FLLLEX-Radar in HEIs	31
LITERATURE	33



1. About FLLLEX

“The Impact of Lifelong Learning Strategies on Professional Higher Education”, in short FLLLEX, is a European project supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union.

The FLLLEX project (Jan. 2010 - Aug. 2012) aims at identifying challenges and implications of the incorporation of Lifelong Learning (LLL) into European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), with special attention given to the recognition of prior learning and to different aspects of the management and services within higher education institutions. This project has the particularity of offering a specific insight on HEIs that mainly offer professionally oriented programmes and are engaged in applied and profession-related research.

A review study was carried out on the Intensity of Lifelong Learning Policy Implementation in FLLLEX Countries. As a result of this, a list of policy ‘hooks’ was defined that could legitimise strategic actions by HEIs in their attempts to grow and develop their involvement in Lifelong Learning. These policy hooks were incorporated in the FLLLEX-Radar, a self-assessment instrument for the implementation of LLL in professional higher education.

The FLLLEX project intends to support the HEIs in setting out the lines for an institutional strategy for Lifelong Learning. A starting point for such a strategy is to assess the role of professional higher education within the broader landscape determined by the national policies and as perceived by the stakeholders: lifelong learners, employers and other Lifelong Learning providers. To this end a survey of key stakeholders was conducted: Learners, businesses, and Lifelong Learning providers were asked about their expectations, motives and/or barriers to engage in Lifelong Learning. A website (www.flllex.eu) was developed in order to provide learners and institutions alike all the research material that was produced.

The first section of this brochure summarizes FLLLEX review on the broader context of Lifelong Learning, European and national policies and the implications for Higher education. The second section (chapter 4-6) gives an overview of the results of the project and is meant to serve as an introduction to the FLLLEX-Radar. This Radar is presented in a separate publication accompanying this brochure.

Partners

The project was initiated and supported by EURASHE, the European Association of Higher Education Institutions. It is coordinated by KHLeuven – Leuven University College and involves a consortium of 23 partners from 10 European countries.

The FLLLEX consortium consists of the following participating organisations and institutions:

Higher education institutions: Clydebank College (United Kingdom); Hanzehogeschool (Netherlands); IuT de Saint-Nazaire (France); KHLeuven - Leuven University College (Belgium); Laurea University (Finland); Letterkenny Institute of Technology (Ireland); Vilnius College (Lithuania); Yasar University (Turkey).

National Organisations for Profession-oriented higher education: L'Association des Directeurs d'IUT (ADIUT) (France); Council of Flemish Institutions of Higher Education (VLHORA) (Belgium); Council of Higher Education (YOK) (Turkey); Institutes of Technology Ireland (IoTI) (Ireland); Lithuanian Colleges Directors' Conference (LKDK) (Lithuania); Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (ARENE) (Finland); West of Scotland Colleges' Partnership (WOSCOP) (United Kingdom).

Structural Partners: BankuAugstskola (BA) (Latvia); Educonsult (Belgium); European Association for Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE); European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA); 3s research lab (3s) (Austria).

Advisory Board: Business Europe; Education International; European Students' Union.

2. Lifelong Learning

What do we mean by Lifelong Learning?

Definitions of Lifelong Learning (LLL) vary according to the perspectives and priorities of the policy makers at a given moment. But international organisations have provided a set of definitions that are widely used today.

The European Commission defined Lifelong Learning as *all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective*. It is about acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from the pre-school years to post-retirement (CEC, 2000) and this can occur in formal, non-formal or informal settings. According to the OECD (2004), Lifelong Learning has four main features:

- 1. A systemic view:** the Lifelong Learning framework views the demand for a supply of learning opportunities, as part of a connected system covering the whole lifecycle and comprising all forms of formal and informal learning.
- 2. Centrality of the learner:** this requires a shift in attention from a supply side focus (e.g. on formal institutional arrangements for learning) to the demand side of meeting learner needs.
- 3. Motivation to learn:** requires attention to developing the capacity for 'learning to learn' through self-paced and self-directed learning.
- 4. Multiple objectives of education policy:** the lifecycle view recognises the multiple goals of education (personal development; knowledge development; economic, social and cultural objectives) and that the priorities among these objectives may change over the course of an individuals' lifetime.

Glossary

Formal learning: occurs as a result of experiences in an education or training institution, with structured learning objectives, learning time and support which leads to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

Non-formal learning: is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of objectives, learning time or support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

Informal learning: results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of objectives, learning time or support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases, it is non-intentional.

Qualification: in the context of LLL, a qualification is anything that confers official recognition in the labor market and in further education and training, so a qualifications system includes all aspects of a country's activity that result in recognition of learning.

Initial education: knowledge acquired at primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions.

Continuing education: any form of education, either vocational or general, resumed after an interval following the continuous initial education (CEC, 2001).

What is the role and impact of the EU?

“*Making a European area of Lifelong Learning a reality*” is one of the four long-term strategic objectives of the EU education and training policies in the current framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020).

There has in fact been a **growing interest** in Lifelong Learning at European Union (EU) level already since the early 1990’s. Lifelong Learning is given a central role in both education and training and employment policies/strategies¹. EU education and training policies have especially gained impetus since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the EU’s overarching strategy focusing on growth and jobs. It recognised that knowledge, and the innovation it sparks, are the EU’s most valuable assets, particularly in light of increasing global competition. The Lisbon strategy has been followed up by “*Europe 2020*”, the EU’s growth strategy for the coming decade², with even more emphasis on education and training.

In these strategies we notice a shift in the EU’s focus for Lifelong Learning from an initial inclusive life-wide definition to more emphasis on employability, (occupational) skills development and (upward) labour mobility. This perspective is clearly articulated in one of the flagships of the Europe 2020 strategy, the ‘*Agenda for new skills and jobs*’ initiative (CE, 2010), which highlights the need to upgrade skills and to boost employability. In a report on the implementation of this Agenda (CE, 2011), the Council notes that:

*“Progress has to be made to improve the **identification of training needs**, increase the labour market relevance of education and training, **facilitate individuals’ access to Lifelong Learning opportunities and guidance**, and ensure smooth transitions between the worlds of education, training and employment. Achieving this calls for **closer collaboration and partnerships** between public services, education and training providers and employers at national, regional and local level. The transition towards learning outcome-based qualification systems and greater validation of skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts are also of great importance in enhancing employability.”*

From European policy to national implementation

While EU policy in the area of Lifelong Learning has developed intensively over the last several years and its potential in influencing national policies has grown, it must be noted that EU policy initiatives in the area of LLL can only ever go so far. It is still up to individual national governments to translate EU initiatives on a national and sub-national level.

¹ See the Work Package 1 report “National and European policies for the implementation of LLL” for a more detailed description.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020>

Explicit Lifelong Learning strategies have been developed by a large number of EU countries. According to the latest report on the implementation of the ET2020 framework (EC2012), tools such as the European and national qualification frameworks, mechanisms to validate non-formal and informal learning and lifelong guidance policies have been implemented by a large number of EU-countries and their use shows that barriers for cooperation between education sectors can be overcome.

However, it is evident that **major gaps still exist in ensuring that current EU policies are developed and implemented at a national level.** The ET2020 implementation report concludes that *‘for the majority of Europeans, Lifelong Learning is still not a reality’*. Important obstacles to LLL are limited learning opportunities inadequately tailored to the needs of different target groups, a lack of accessible information and support systems and insufficiently flexible learning pathways (e.g. between VET and higher education). Overcoming these obstacles requires serious investments and reform in higher education.



3. Professional HEI: a key player in Lifelong Learning

Professional higher education's view on Lifelong Learning

In the previous section we highlighted that Lifelong Learning is seen as a powerful driver for economic growth in providing the highly-qualified workforce that Europe needs to advance research and development and equips people with the skills and qualifications they need in the knowledge-intensive economy. EURASHE – representing European institutions for professional oriented Higher Education – includes both this economic and developmental dimension as well as the social dimension in its view on Lifelong Learning. EURASHE advocates Lifelong Learning as ‘a leading principle for the creation and development of the EHEA’. For societies, LLL contributes to extending knowledge and skills and to creating new skills and transversal competences. For individuals, LLL is a major source to be flexible towards societal and professional changes or to pursue personal desires for the mere reasons of personal development and growth:

The rapidly changing labour market and the increasing impact of information and communication technologies requires a more flexible and mobile population. In view of the global ageing of the world population, technical, professional and academic knowledge will continually have to be updated. LLL will then be the organic and essential part of the learning process at every level and in every sector of Higher Education.

Our vision for 2020 is that in the entire EHEA, a system of linked and progressive cycles, which permits any qualified person to enter and exit HE irrespective of age and educational profile is implemented. We urge governments to ensure the provision of adequate investment and legal support for LLL as one of the most liberating tools to realise a more equitable society as one of the strongest movers towards prosperity and economic growth (EURASHE, 2012).

The Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, cooperating in the Bologna process view Lifelong Learning as obtaining qualifications, extending knowledge and understanding, gaining new skills and competences or enriching personal growth. They stress that Lifelong Learning implies that qualifications may be obtained through flexible learning paths, including part-time studies or work based routes. In their 2009 Leuven declaration the responsibility for widening participation in Higher Education is also stressed as a dimension in Lifelong Learning.

Role of professional higher education in implementing LLL

Professional higher education has a **key role** to play in implementing European and national policy's regarding Lifelong Learning for the knowledge society.

Higher education is directly addressed in the strategic objectives of the ET2020 framework “Making Lifelong Learning and mobility a reality”. This framework not only calls for *“a lifelong approach to learning and for education and training systems that are more responsive to change and more open to the wider world”* but also for *“the establishment of more flexible learning pathways, including better transitions between the various education and training sectors, greater openness towards non-formal and informal learning, and increased transparency and recognition of learning outcomes”*.

The main point emanating from this ET2020 framework and other European policy statements is that Higher Education Institutions play an important role in supplying training actions to non-traditional adult students. According to an EADTU project on University Strategies and Business Models for Lifelong Learning (Watkinson and Tinoca, 2010), this implies a consequent need to invest more decisively in drawing those publics. This can be done through the creation of guiding services, the diversification of training supply, the development of distance education, the adoption of new pedagogical strategies, the development of distance education and implementation of new methods for assessment and validation of competences.

“(Lifelong) Learning in higher professional education should focus on the ability to critical thinking and on acquiring transversal skills using knowledge from one subject in another”

However many obstacles remain when it comes to implementation. For instance, the above mentioned USBM report states that HEIs seem to be failing to address the Lifelong Learning agenda by not being sufficiently open to providing courses for students in later stages of life. It also notes the lack of accreditation/certification mechanisms, the absence of ICT competences or the insufficient use of e-learning within HEIs. Other obstacles are linked to the choices made by other stakeholders in Lifelong Learning. For instance, the fact that employers tend to choose commercial providers of education that offer predominantly non-formal education in specific areas.

We conclude that Lifelong Learning represents a **paradigm shift** that requires in turn a cultural shift within higher education. While traditional educational institutions have been primarily concerned with transmitting knowledge, modern learning opportunities and the LLL-approach put emphasis on the development of individual capabilities and personal learning competencies. At the heart of the Lifelong Learning concept is the idea of enabling and encouraging people ‘to learn how to learn’. (Lifelong) Learning in higher professional education should focus on the ability to critical thinking and on acquiring transversal skills using knowledge from one subject in another.

When enhancing the engagement in LLL in combination with a more student centred learning paradigm of education, the institution will also need to offer *professional development of the teaching staff*. A much more diverse student population will naturally require continued professional development of the teachers. In relation to this it will also be necessary to make reasonable agreements (in terms of freedom, professional development, salary and engagement in decision-making) with the teaching staff in order to enhance the attractiveness of working on the abnormal working hours which teaching in LLL often will require. (ESU, 2010)

Hence, Lifelong learning implies a shift from traditional education institutions to a diverse field of traditional and modern learning opportunities that are more process and outcome oriented. (*FLLLEX Work Package 1 “National policies for the implementation of Lifelong Learning”*).

The ET2020 framework therefore encourages HEI’s to reform themselves to reinforce their efficiency and quality. HEIs need to be open for cooperation and establish partnerships on all levels; with public authorities, with other HEIs and other educational levels (VET) and with social partners, particularly employers.



4. Policies for Implementing Lifelong Learning

National policies for the implementation of Lifelong Learning

The FLLLEX project identified Lifelong Learning provision in higher education in the 8 partner countries under scrutiny and identified gaps in implementation of European Lifelong Learning policies. Readers are invited to consult the results of the survey (Work package 1) for a detailed analysis. The most commonly found gaps are:

- Lifelong Learning is still not a horizontal priority in some countries;
- Inadequate funding support to learners (i.e. paid educational leave) and lack of diversification (i.e. public and private support schemes);
- Lack of flexibility in access and forms of learning (i.e. absence of part-time programmes);
- Limited mobility between education and training systems and levels;
- Absence or limited recognition of prior learning (i.e. access to information, guidance);
- Difficulty for learners to combine work, family and study;
- High drop-out rates.

Of course the situation varies a lot from one country to another and from one institution to the other. For instance in Scotland or Turkey we can observe a divide between newly founded universities and traditional ones as regards the recognition of prior learning.

The review resulted in a comparative matrix in which the progress and implementation of Lifelong Learning policies was marked for each of the countries participating in FLLLEX. The matrix may be helpful for contextualising the experience of individual academics and administrators in HEIs as they attempt to engage with the Lifelong Learning agenda.

The matrix clearly outlines that certain characteristics which promote Lifelong Learning are interlinked and when present enable the participating countries to achieve the EU benchmark for adult participation in Lifelong Learning³. For example, large disparities exist among the 8 countries with Finland, Scotland and the Netherlands having the highest ranking characteristics. All three countries also perform well above the EU benchmark. At the same time, several countries score very poorly in the presence of characteristics which promote Lifelong

³An average of at least 15 % of adults (age group 25-64) should participate in Lifelong Learning.

Learning. Turkey and Lithuania are among the worst performers, with such low scores also broadly linked to participation rates in Lifelong Learning.

A Comparative Matrix for Intensity of Lifelong Learning Policy Implementation in FLLLEX Countries

Characteristics	Countries							
	Ireland	Belgium	Lithuania	Scotland	Turkey	Finland	Netherlands	France
Legal framework/ legislation	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Participation rates	2	3	3	1	3	1	1	3
Funding and investment	3	2	3	1	3	1	1	2
Flexibility and access to learning pathways	3	1	3	1	3	1	1	3
Link between education and work	2	1	3	1	2	1	1	2
Transparency of qualifications system	1	2	2	1	3	1	1	2
Public awareness and perception of LLL	2	1	2	1	3	1	1	2
Link with wider EU developments	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	2
Involvement and support of key stakeholders	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	2
Information and guidance for (potential) learners	2	1	2	1	3	1	1	2
Recognition of all forms of learning	2	1	3	1	3	2	2	1
Cost of Education – support/ initiatives	3	1	2	1	3	1	1	2
EU Benchmark for LLL (2010=12.5%; 2020=15%)	7.1%	6.8%	4.9%	19.9%	1.8%	23.1%	17.0%	5.58%

Key: 1 = Adequate, 2 = Partial, 3 = Insufficient

Source: FLLLEX, Work Package 1

Policy hooks and HEI Freedom of Action

What strategic actions can individual HEIs – or small groups of HEIs - take to overcome the gaps that are described above and to develop their involvement in Lifelong Learning? A key to answer these questions may be found in the so called policy hooks that were defined as a result of the FLLLEX project. By ‘hook’ we mean a state or EU policy, directive or piece of legislation that legitimises activities by a HEI. The following table considers the policy ‘hooks’ in the context of the freedom of action, we believe, an individual HEI could exert in their implementation.

For individual HEIs the type or intensity of response to a particular policy hook will vary depending on the extent to which it believes it has freedom of action in the policy matter. For example, it would be unreasonable to expect an individual HEI to fund individual Lifelong Learning students in the absence of such provision by the state. In contrast, if the state has designated a particular set of institutions as being responsible for workforce education and provided resources to do so, it would be expected that this would be reflected in the mission and strategy statements by the said institutions as this matter is entirely within their control.

Policy 'hooks' and Institutional Control or Freedom of Action

Policy 'Hooks'	Freedom of Action by Individual HEI	Observation
Legal framework/ legislation	Limited	
Participation rates	Limited	
Funding and investment	Limited	
Flexibility and access to learning pathways	Limited/Moderate	Depending on the legal arrangements governing the access, transfer and progression of students individual HEIs may have opportunities to enhance progression pathways
Link between education and work	Moderate	Depending on the mission of the HEI some opportunities exist to enhance the link between education and work
Transparency of qualifications system	Moderate	Where member states have introduced qualifications frameworks and enabling regulations/policies HEIs have significant freedom of control to publicise these developments
Public awareness and perception of Lifelong Learning	Significant	Individually or collectively through representative bodies HEIs can widely promote public awareness of Lifelong Learning
Link with wider EU developments	Significant	Individual HEIs have tended not to get involved in EU wide projects and other developments. Such involvement potentially greatly enriches the Lifelong Learning agenda within an HEI
Involvement and support of key stakeholders	Significant	Many opportunities exist at no cost to involve wide ranging groups of stakeholders into the Lifelong Learning agenda
Information and guidance for learners and potential learners	Significant	Many opportunities exist for individual HEIs to significantly enhance the information flow to potential learners
Recognition of all forms of learning	Significant	RPL and APL are EU wide policy requirements and individual HEIs should have policies and practices in place to accommodate this aspect of Lifelong Learning
Cost of Education – support/ initiatives	Moderate	Although funding policy is outside the remit of HEIs, where LLL is regarded as of strategic importance flexibility exists to design counselling, guidance and mentoring initiatives that are low or no cost

However, the relationship between high level policy and institutional action or strategy is seldom as clear cut as noted above and the degree of control or freedom of action is not as simple as 'it is possible' or 'it is not possible'. More likely the degree of freedom depends to a significant extent on how far a HEI is prepared to push the boundaries (Thorn, 2011). The practical implication of this is that for matters over which a HEI has a high level of freedom of action, even if its country implementation is weak, it may nonetheless undertake supportive activities.

Policies for Implementing Lifelong Learning – Key findings:

Certain characteristics which promote Lifelong Learning are interlinked and seem to directly influence the participation rates Lifelong Learning.

Although national policies have a huge role in the intensity of Lifelong Learning, HEIS have a high level of freedom of action.

Individual HEIs should investigate the policy hooks in order to define on which aspect they have freedom of control to undertake supportive activities for Lifelong Learning.

5. Partners in Lifelong Learning

The analysis in the previous chapters shows that HEIs do indeed have opportunities to take initiative on providing Lifelong Learning. A next step in defining strategies for Lifelong Learning is to better understand the needs and expectations of other stakeholders in Lifelong Learning. The following sections summarize the findings of FLLLEX research on the needs and expectations of stakeholders in LLL: adult students as Lifelong Learners and employers. The research included also a mapping of other training organisations that can be seen as offering Lifelong Learning. A more detailed analysis of the results can be found in the according work package reports on www.flllex.eu.

Lifelong Learners

A survey was conducted with lifelong learners who are studying at HEIs and are concurrently in employment. The survey focused on obtaining knowledge about the situation and the expectations of lifelong learners. A web-based questionnaire was designed and distributed in the countries of HEI project partners in the FLLLEX project: Belgium (Fl), Finland, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Turkey and United Kingdom (Sc). The lifelong learners were asked about their studies, their motives to study and possible barriers to engage in LLL.

Typology of learners

To better understand and analyse the motivations and expectations of lifelong learners the survey used the typology of adult learners in formal education as proposed by Hefler and Markowitsch (2010). They reason that participating in a formal education program – as opposed to pursuing non-formal education – is a life-course altering decision, as it means a temporary reorganisation of the adult students' time frames as well as a potential change in their portfolio, self-awareness and professional prospects. It is crucial, therefore, when conducting research into formal adult education, to link participation in formal adult education to an individual's career development and developmental issues.

In the context of the FLLLEX survey, this life-cycle approach of Hefler and Markowitsch is used to better understand the student's motivation to re-enter formal education.

As can be seen in the table, five main types of Lifelong Learners are identified. The first three types are Lifelong learners with ***focus on education:***

- **Completing**, with sub-type “finishing” (working while completing formal education without particular connection of work and education) and “entering” (being hired in late phases by an employer in need of graduates)
- **Returning**: re-entering HE and revising a temporary transition from learning to work
- **Transforming**: significant transformation of an existing career pathway and/or individual development.

Two other main types of Lifelong Learners can be discerned with the **focus on work**:

- **Reinforcing** an existing career pathway (use offers of formal HE to solve developmental issues or to support progress within the chosen line of occupational/professional development)
- **Compensating** for shortcomings of an existing career pathway.

Motivations to study and differences for learner types

The most important motive to study is to advance prospects for personal growth (62%). But students also study to gain knowledge and skills in a special field of interest (55%) and job-related reasons also play an important role for the students (51%).

Types of learners in FLLLEX survey:		
	Frequency	Percentage
Completing	137	12%
Returning	100	9%
Transforming	353	31%
Reinforcing	177	15%
Compensating	388	34%
Total	1155	100%

Based on their answers, the majority of the respondents in our survey can be characterised as *transforming* (31%) and *compensating* (34%) learners. This implies that for this majority there does not seem to be a strong relationship between their current job content and the study.

Looking at the motivations in more detail we can clearly see the differences between the types of learners:

Completing Learners are highly motivated by extending their knowledge and skills in a special field of interest (82,5%), receiving an academic title (75,9%) and gaining knowledge and skills for everyday life (48,2%).

Returning Learners are motivated to increase their chances of finding a job (100%).

Transforming Learners are highly motivated by advancing prospects for personal growth (100%) and increasing chances of finding a job (77,3%).

Reinforcing Learners are highly motivated by advancing skills essential for the job (93,2%); further motives are to gain knowledge and skills in a special field of interest (56,5%), to increase chances of finding a job (49,2%), to gain a promotion (49,2%), to receive an academic title (46,3%), and to avoid job loss (40,7%).

Compensating Learners study to increase their motivation (98,7%), to advance

prospects for personal growth (95,1%); furthermore to gain knowledge and skills for everyday life (45,9%).

Although the survey was limited in scope, this result shows that HEIS have to adapt to a diverse public. It is interesting to learn more about this various types of lifelong learners in order to adapt learning provision as much as possible to their specific expectations and needs.

A typology of lifelong learners

Focus	Main Type	Sub-types	Description	Relation Contents / Tasks	Start: before / after joining career
Education	Completing	Finishing	Working while studying without particular connection of work and education	Insignificant	Before
		Entering	Being hired in late phases by an employer in need of graduates	Strong, clearly visible relation	Before
	Returning	Returning	Returning to education and overruling a temporary transition to work	Insignificant	After
	Transforming	Transforming	General transformation using education as a basis	No relation	After
Work	Reinforcing	Pro-gressing	Progressing in the current field by at least one step on the educational ladder	Strong, clearly visible relation	After (exceptional: before)
		Adapting	Making one step in the current field, in parallel to an existing one not relevant in the field	Strong, clearly visible relation	After
		Specialising	Completing one programme as a specialisation	Strong, clearly visible relation	After
		Peaking	Completing a formal programme designed for experienced professionals in the field	Strong, clearly visible relation	After
	Compensating	Compensating	Compensating the restriction of an existing pathway	Insignificant	After

Source: 3s research laboratory

Key elements for participation

Recognition of prior learning

The recognition of prior learning was a critical factor to start the study for 27% of the respondents and for another 33% it was one of the factors among others. However for most of these respondents the 'prior learning' considered seems to be a prior qualification of formal education and not prior learning based on work experience.

Employer support

Overall, the most frequently provided kinds of support are flexible working hours (59%) and the use of company-internal resources (46%). With respect to the types of learners we notice that Reinforcing Learners tend to receive more support from their companies than the other types of learners. This may be due to the strong, clearly visible relation of the content of the study with the tasks at the workplace.

Finance

For over half of the respondents financial support was a factor for importance influencing the decision to start the study. 60% feel sufficiently informed about the possibilities of financial support. The respondents got (rather) satisfying advice about the possibilities of financial support from their HEI (48%). To support Lifelong Learning for working adults the respondents wish for more allowance for employed students, and/or tax relief for HEI from public authorities (both 54%).

Expectations of learners

Generally, respondents are satisfied with their actual study (86%). The students are (rather) satisfied with the personal contact with students (90%) and teachers (81%) as well as with the professional knowledge of the teachers (80%). However, the respondents would like to have more flexibility when job-related requirements increase. More specifically 40% of the respondents would prefer timetable adaptations for employed students and 70% would prefer to study with use of e-learning. When attending educational activities at the HEI, most learners prefer classes during the day (80%) instead of evening (40%) or weekend (24%) classes.

Limitations

This section presented a synthesis of the survey results. We would like to stress that the survey addressed only students who already participate in higher education and who defined themselves as lifelong learners. Hence, barriers for others who may wish to engage in Lifelong Learning but are not able to participate were not included. For future research it would be interesting to also investigate the needs and expectations of this – hard to reach – target group.

Expectations of Lifelong Learners – Key findings:

HEIs will have to identify which type of lifelong learners they wish to cater their activities towards, as this choice will influence the policy, management and structure of the concerned institution. The typology of learners can serve as a useful frame for understanding these different types of learners.

There indeed tend to be differences between the identified types of lifelong learners, and their motives and needs. The majority of learners in the FLLLEX survey took on a study to advance prospects for personal growth.

LLL-students demand for flexibility in their study programme and for more incorporation of e-learning in instruction. At the same time the majority is satisfied with personal contact with students and teachers.

Employers as stakeholders in LLL

A survey of the expectations of employers (mainly in the profit sector) was conducted to gather information on motives and methods for supporting participation in higher education among their employees. To this end, a web based questionnaire was developed and distributed by the partners in the eight participating countries and used for interviews conducted by phone or in person.

A total of 111 companies responded to the survey, but there turned out to be large variations in response rates per country (from only 1 or 2 responses in Finland and France to 20-24 participating businesses in Ireland, the Netherlands and Turkey). The small sample size and underrepresentation of certain countries have to be kept in mind when interpreting the results of the survey.

Despite the efforts undertaken by FLLLEX-partners to reach enough businesses we note that *employers* do not seem to attach much importance to respond to questions regarding Lifelong Learning in higher education. *HEIs* on the other hand do not seem to have strong partnerships with employers, at least not on the level where decisions on training for employees are made and at least not to the extent that employers are willing to participate in a short interview.

Survey findings

Types of support

The companies encourage their employees to get a degree from college or university by offering information about the supply of higher education (40%) and by creating individual career plans (40%). Employees who attend higher education are mainly supported by the provision of flexible working hours (70%), educational leave (51%), financial aid (49%) and the permission to use company-internal resources (32%).

Educational development policies

Almost 60% of the responding employers have a policy or guidelines for the participation of their staff in educational activities. Less than half (45%) of the employers have a defined budget for educational programmes, with great differences between countries. In most cases initiatives for participating in higher education come from organisation and employees together (39%).

Return on investment in LLL

When asked about the effects of staff education and training activities about 1/3 of the participating companies observed significant improvements of skills and expertise (35%) as well as a raised satisfaction and more involvement by the employee (34%). Further effects of higher education were gains in efficiency (18%) and the development of innovations (16%).

Obstacles for providing training

High costs for study was the most frequently mentioned obstacle for supporting further education (47%). Other perceived barriers are the absence of replacements for the employees undertaking higher education (34%) and the mismatch between the companies' needs and the available offers of higher education (18%).

Partners/Learning providers

The businesses that responded to the survey tend to mainly select university colleges (51%), as well as private consultants (50%) as a partner in employee development, followed by universities (40%). About half of the respondents (55%) report that they have a cooperation agreement with a nearby university college. Organisations that do not cooperate state simply that such a cooperation or agreement never has been proposed by the HEI (72%). In Turkey 50% of the respondents

Employers as stakeholders in LLL – Key findings:

There is a huge potential of progress in the development of partnerships between HEIs and companies. The territorial dimension is a key element and it is crucial to better understand the needs of nearby companies.

Employers in general seem not to be aware the offer (or possible offer) of HEI in Lifelong Learning. They are not familiar with the qualification systems and don't seem to know the differences between formal and non-formal learning. HEIs have thus to raise awareness on the fact they can provide flexible learning provisions by adapting to their learning needs and to that of their employees.

Companies support their employees undertaking formal education due to the desire to upgrade their workforce. Hence, in developing partnerships with businesses a HEI should tailor his offer and information strategy to both the needs and professional development policies of the company as well as to the motivations of individual learners.

The creation of better links between HEIs and the labour market should be one aim in the attempt to improve prospects for LLL.

mention that cooperation with the nearby university college is too expensive; in other countries this reason is hardly mentioned.

Lifelong Learning providers

HEIs as innovative knowledge centres have a huge potential in serving the society and businesses, not only through the co-creation of knowledge and carrying out (practice based) research but in the first place through the core-business of a HEI: providing (formal or non-formal) education and through providing appropriate guidance and counselling for the students. However, in order to be able to position themselves and define their role within the landscape of Lifelong Learning Providers, a HEI needs to be aware of other players in the field. A definition of a HEIs role and unique selling point can serve as a starting point for making strategic decisions, e.g. which target groups of lifelong learners the institution should focus on and – on a higher level – which ways of cooperation should be sought on a regional, national and international level.

As part of the FLLLEX project, an attempt was made to describe the landscape of Lifelong Learning providers (LLL) in the 8 partner countries. Subsequently interviews with selected LLLP's were carried out to define characteristics of different types of providers. The FLLLEX-research focussed on providers of post-secondary education or training for adults (23+), who could be seen as competitors or partners for the HEIs.

A first conclusion is that the Lifelong Learning market is very complex, various and country-, region- and culture-related. Taking into account that LLL encompasses a few hour non-formal training to a several years long diploma accredited programme, it is very difficult to identify, describe and distinguish all relevant training providers in the scope of Lifelong Learning. The providers include – next to HEIs - also professional and trade associations, other non-profit and community-based organisations, economic development associations and private commercial providers (Cantor, 2006). Even within formal higher education the organisation of continuing higher education is characterised nationally and internationally by a great diversity of models (Knust and Hanft, 2009).

Based on the interviews a characterisation was made of five main types of Lifelong Learning providers:

- Higher Education Institution
- Adult centre
- Private training provider
- Public provider specific group focused
- Sectoral organisation

They differ in legal status and funding mechanism (private/public and with or without subsidies), target group and scope of learning (general or specific), qualification (accredited or non-accredited programmes) and geographical scope (regional or national).

HEIs position amidst other LLL-providers – Key findings:

The landscape of Lifelong Learning providers is complex and very country specific.

HEIs should list other players in the (regional) field in order to benchmark themselves with respect to provision of LLL or to find partners for a joint offer. The presented categorisation of LLLP's may serve a HEI in determining different sorts of other providers.

HEIs should identify and communicate their own unique selling points in providing LLLP, for instance by offering accredited programmes leading to widely known qualifications or by offering a combination of a learning offer tailored to the companies' needs and carrying out practice based research as a potential to become partner with businesses as innovative knowledge centres.

6. Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations for EU and national governments

Based on the findings and experiences in FLLLEX and related projects, we can make the following policy recommendations for the European Union and national authorities to actively support the further implementation of Lifelong Learning within higher professional education:

- **Support the development of coherent and balanced national lifelong strategies to develop flexible and effective education and training systems.**

Today segmentation persists (e.g. inflexible learning pathways between VET and higher education) and Lifelong Learning is insufficiently implemented through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The following concrete tools are highlighted as particularly important to face these challenges and to implement a competence based approach:

- Validation of prior learning;
- European qualification frameworks for Lifelong Learning;
- Development of teaching and assessment methods in line with the competence approach in all sectors and levels;
- Capacity-building and ownership of policies by stakeholders including higher education institutions.

- **Need for investment in Lifelong Learning**

National government should investigate the most effective forms of financing the further development of Lifelong Learning. Currently the costs involved with participating in LLL are an obstacle for both individuals and employers (especially SME's). HEIs are reserved to develop specialised programmes and instruction for lifelong learners when the return on investment is not clear. A broad reflection involving all stakeholders is needed to identify efficient ways of sharing the financial burden and finding new sources of finance. Tax deduction seems for most countries a promising instrument for increasing participation on individual level (Falch and Oosterbeek, 2011).

- **Use of policy hooks**

National government can increase the impact of their LLL policy by creating/devising clear policy hooks and communicate these to HEIs. This makes it possible for the HEI to practically implement the policy into its daily practice. As shown in chapter 4, national levels which have fully implemented the policy proposals by the EU also tend to have larger participation rates in LLL.

- **Support the development of partnerships**

EU policy calls for partnerships between education and social partners. This policy is for example emphasised again in the proposals for the new ‘Erasmus for All’ programme. However, experiences in FLLLEX show that partnerships between HEIs and social partners are still not common in HEIs.

- In order to support partnerships between employers and HEI, employers need to be **informed** on the possibilities of LLL (and its financing) and also on the structure and benefits of the Bologna Process. Elements such as the EQF and NQF and procedures of RPL within the framework of LLL currently are hardly known outside the world of education.
- National and regional governments may consider initiating and participating in partnerships themselves by forming regional LLL centres.

- **Adapt definition of LLL to clarify communication**

In order to focus policies and to clarify terms for communication to the different stakeholders and thus attract more learners, EU may consider updating its definition updating its definition of LLL. The term ‘Lifelong Learning’ is comprehensive but very wide-reaching, may often be understood in different ways in different countries and may evolve as contextual factors change (Eurydice network, 2010). We propose to provide different definitions on LLL adapted to the different profiles (background and motivation) of learners and forms of education.

7. FLLLEX - Radar

Goal and purpose

Throughout this publication the findings of the FLLLEX project and resulting recommendations for HEIs are listed. To assist HEIs in implementing LLL and in defining or further developing an institutional strategy, a self-assessment instrument has been designed: the *FLLLEX-Radar*. The goal of the FLLLEX-Radar is to develop an analysis of the current situation for Lifelong Learning provision in higher education institutions. At the same time the self-assessment (by means of focus group discussions) aims to open dialogues with stakeholders and other groups of interest on Lifelong Learning provision. The main priority of the use made of the FLLLEX-Radar is to promote discussion and food for thought through analysis of different strategic areas linked to the development of Lifelong Learning in the coming years.

The FLLLEX-Radar is organised according to 4 core dimensions that serve as boundaries for the assessment:

- A description of the broader context
- Lifelong Learning provision at the HEI (current situation)
- Institutional policy (preferred situation)
- Quality assurance in the institution

The FLLLEX-Radar, including a step-by-step user guide, is presented in a second publication accompanying this brochure.

First findings of using the FLLLEX-Radar in HEIs

Within the FLLLEX project eight partner institutions carried out a self-assessment with a first version of the Radar. These pilot-assessments were to test and ameliorate the instrument before further dissemination in Europe, and to gather information for broader policy proposals on Lifelong Learning. The results of each institutional self-assessment were reviewed by a panel of experts.

The results of the institutional self-assessment exercises carried out in the FLLLEX partner institutions offer evidence that these professionally oriented higher education institutions are making significant progress in incorporating and developing the approach to Lifelong Learning that is promoted within the 'Europe 2020 Strategy' and the ET 2020 Framework.

Feedback from the institutional self-assessment reports, the Expert Panel Reviews and key staff in the participating institutions indicate that the tool displayed a general fitness for purpose in terms of supporting informed self-assessment of policy and practice in the incorporation of Lifelong Learning in an institution of professional higher education. All participating institutions remarked positively on the tool's capacity to stimulate discussion that led to an accurate indication of the organisation's current situation with regard to the incorporation of Lifelong Learning. The use of focus groups was, generally, perceived as a positive feature in facilitating the input of perceptions and opinions of core stakeholders in the process – management, teaching and support staff, learners and consumers, external collaborators and key influencers in regional development.

The outcomes of the pilot were used to improve the FLLLEX-Radar and the introductory information for users. The resultant effect is a framework and setting for transparent and inclusive discussion and reflection on the institution's current position as a starting point for further development of institutional strategies for Lifelong Learning.

We hope that many HEIs will follow the FLLLEX partner institutions and dare to take on the challenge to assess their current and preferred policy and practice in implementing Lifelong Learning in Professional Higher Education.

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