The “European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning”: challenges for universities

The case of Ghent University Association

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1. Introducing the European University Association (EUA)
2. The European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning
3. The Charter and Ghent University Association: how are the challenges dealt with?
European University Association
at a glance

- 800 individual university members in 46 countries
- 34 National Rectors’ Conference Members
- Independent voice for the university sector:
  - policy dialogue (focus: EHEA and ERA)
  - projects and surveys, e.g. TRENDS V – focused on LLL for the first time
  - services to members, e.g. Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP); Council on Doctoral Education (CDE)
Towards a European knowledge society

- European universities have three core missions:
  - Teaching & Learning
  - Research & Innovation
  - Knowledge Transfer & Service to Society

- After a decade of major reforms the time has come (back) to focus more specifically on **lifelong learning**, building on existing achievements
LLL and the European knowledge society

- Lifelong learning as a response to the challenges of:
  - The demographic transformation of Europe
  - The increasing speed of globalisation & the pace of technological change
- Widening access and expanding participation – underpinned by strong economic arguments
- Taking account of developments in other regions – Europe needs to be competitive in this area as well
- Systems & HEIs need to cater for a greater diversity of learners
What is Lifelong Learning (LLL) ?

- An amalgam of concepts requiring clarification:
  - retraining & skills updating for those with prior training
  - ‘catching-up’ for those who have missed out on initial (higher) education
  - cultural enrichment for ageing populations
  - continuing education for specific needs & in different modes: part-time, evening classes, weekends, online programmes etc
  - Balancing economic productivity & self fulfilment
- Universities must reconsider their role & their approach, taking account of their specific missions & profiles
LLL in the context of ongoing reform processes

- A national but also a European challenge:
  - increased mobility of students, young researchers & migration of workers seeking employment

- The Bologna Process:
  - new academic structures, flexible learning paths, new tools enabling the recognition of prior learning
  - LLL already a priority but requires further attention

- The Lisbon Process & the ‘modernisation’ agenda:
  - focus on LLL
  - university autonomy & the reform of governance structures
LLL Charter for universities

**Process:**

- Invitation from Prime Minister Fillon, Dec 2007
- Broad consultation with stakeholder organisations
- Adopted by national Rectors’ Conferences, EUA Council, 4 July 08
- Further discussion with universities & stakeholders: EUA Autumn Conference, Rotterdam, October 2008
- Engaging with governmental partners during the French Presidency – Bordeaux Ministerial summit, 25/26 Nov 2008
European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning

European Universities commit to...

1. Embedding concepts of widening access & LLL in their strategies
2. Providing education & learning to diversified student population
3. Adapting study programmes to enhance widening participation
4. Providing appropriate guidance & counselling service
5. Recognising prior learning
6. Embracing LLL in quality culture
7. Strengthening research/teaching links in a perspective of LLL
8. Consolidating Bologna reforms designed to promote flexible learning environments
9. Developing partnerships at all levels to provide relevant programmes
10. Acting as role models of LLL institutions
European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning

Universities call on governments to commit to:

1. Recognising the university contribution to LLL as a major benefit to individuals & society
2. Promoting social equity & an inclusive learning society
3. Including LLL objectives in their national QA systems
4. Supporting the development of appropriate guidance/counselling
5. Recognising prior learning
6. Removing legal obstacles that prevent potential learners from responding to LLL opportunities
7. Ensuring the necessary autonomy & incentives
8. Encouraging partnerships, especially at regional level
9. Informing and encouraging citizens to take advantage of LLL opportunities offered by universities
10. Acting as role models in relation to their own employees
But there is much to be done...

- LLL means changing mindsets

- Communicating to society & individuals the overall goals of ongoing European reform processes is crucial

- What does a ‘Lifelong Learning University’ look like?
The Charter and Ghent University Association

- Policy paper under development
- Linked to political challenges in Flanders/Belgian ("VIA")
- Basis = Challenges from EUA-charter and actions undertaken at the level of Ghent University Association
Embedding concepts of widening access & LLL in their strategies

- “Specific entrance procedure” for persons without a secondary school leaving certificate
- Linking programmes between professional Ba and Master courses
- Top-up programmes for “subdegrees” (to pBA)
- Specific supportive initiatives for underprivileged groups (“diversity policy”) → see next slide
Providing education & learning to diversified student population

Specific supportive initiatives for underprivileged groups ("diversity policy" – with extra financial governmental support):

- Mentorship
- Ambassador-projects
- Language support ("academic Dutch")
  - Screening of students, of course material etc.
  - Crash courses
  - (Peer-)Tutoring
Adapting study programmes to enhance widening participation

- Developing specific programmes for working students (with extra financial governmental support: 1.5x)
  - Distance learning / e-learning
  - Blended learning

- Planned cooperation with Open University (NL) for development of professional BA-courses (dual learning, incl. work-based learning)
Providing appropriate guidance & counselling service

- Institutionally embedded systems at institutional, faculty or department level (i.e. first point of contact for all students):
  - **guidance** services: supporting students in making the right choices (in their “study/learning track”)
    \[\approx\text{increased flexibility / individual choices}\]
  - **counselling** services: supporting students in their study method, dealing with stress,…
- Reorienting at association level: “correcting” a primarily “wrong” choice (also after semester 1)
Recognising prior learning

- Difference: RPL and RPEL
  - RPEL ("experience"; ≈ informal and non-formal) = one of the legal responsibilities of associations
    - Strong qualitative procedure (assessment of portfolio + reflection; interview, test)
    - Overall number remains low
  - RPL ("qualifications"; ≈ formal learning)
    - = responsibility of institutions
    - leads to exemption of courses → individual or sometimes standardised shorter study programmes
Embracing LLL in quality culture

- Current situation
  - Internal quality assurance
  - External quality assurance: visitation & accreditation of *traditional* study programmes

- Proposed new quality circle:
  - Moving towards internal *quality culture* (embedding quality in all relevant areas)
  - Leads to a change in the external quality dimension → proposed:
    - Quality audit at institutional level (≈ check culture)
    - Small scale at programme level
Strengthening research/teaching links in a perspective of LLL

- Strong link between *innovation* and participation in LLL
- Enhanced focus on innovation (through research and education):
  - “Ghent BC”: big in creativity
  - Science parks in East- and West-Flanders
  - Seed money for promising spin-offs
- ↑ research potential of university colleges:
  - “academisation” (of MA)
  - project-based research (of prof-BA)
- Strong focus on science communication
- Creation of 5 doctoral schools
Consolidating Bologna reforms designed to promote flexible and creative learning environments

- A changed learning paradigm!
- More and more: curricula have become
  - Competence oriented (≈ link to employability)
  - Student-centred (≈ demand driven)
  - Flexible (see earlier)
- Now: investing in adapted learning & teaching strategies:
  - Institutionalise recurrent individual demands
  - Invest in staff training
- But also adapt administrative supportive mechanisms
  - Administration of curricula and student(track)s
Developing partnerships at all levels to provide relevant programmes

- Developing structural cooperation with:
  - Centres for Adult education (official, publicly funded)
  - Other providers of learning for adults
    - Some (semi-) official
    - Others: private

- International Strategic alliances
  - Develop project-based concrete cooperation
  - Active with ‘Euregional’ partners (Nord-Pas de Calais; Zeeland/Groningen; Kent)

- Link to Social-economic regional councils (SERR) and Regional social-economic Negotiating Councils (RESOC)
Acting as role models of LLL institutions

Idea = to create an “open impact network”, i.e.

- Unite all relevant stakeholders in the LLL-field
- Respect e.o. autonomy and identity
- Facilitate mutual cooperation on the basis of trust and understanding
- Stimulates access to novel knowledge → innovation → learning society
- Create a transparent “learning ladder”, facilitating professional and personal growth
- Generating new concepts
  → To be further developed in “closed”, smaller networks (ad hoc)
Thank you for your attention!

For more information:
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