



FLLLEX: The Impact of LifeLong Learning Strategies on Professional Higher Education

Progress Report 1

Public Part

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Executive Summary

The FLLLEX project addresses the challenges and implications of LifeLong Learning incorporation into European higher education institutions. How flexible are those institutions when it comes to LifeLong Learning? Hence: FLLLEX. LifeLong Learning opens up a multitude of new possibilities for higher education institutions but the impact on the organisation as such remains understudied. What is the role of higher education in the wider landscape of LifeLong Learning? What are the institutional changes for the future? What strategy can the project propose to other higher education institutions and what policy advise to European and national players?

The FLLLEX project (The Impact of LifeLong Learning Strategies on Professional Higher Education) is an EU funded project in the framework of the Transversal Programme, Key Activity 1. It has started on the 1st of January 2010 and will run until 31st of August 2012. The consortium includes 24 partners from 10 European countries.

This report presents the preliminary results of the project.

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1. Project Objectives

This part of the report focuses on the objectives taking into account what has been achieved at the time of the intermediate report. Thus the report shows that the effectiveness and the efficiency with which the activities have been implemented.

The FLLLEX project has set ambitious goals. To achieve those, the project is run by the partners over nine WPs.

The objective of the project is to identify challenges and implications of LifeLong Learning (LLL) incorporation 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. HEIs remain a preferential partner in most countries for the governing bodies responsible to implement the national goals of LLL. HEIs have a particular role to fulfil in the landscape of lifelong learners, businesses and business training providers. The project would like to assess this role within the wider landscape of LLL, as determined by the national policies and as perceived by the institutions themselves.

The approach focuses on a system analysis of professional higher education practice and habits within different European countries. The focus is on an institutional rather than on a policy level and attention is given to the comparison among practices in LLL education across the European Union. The project takes into account challenges in implementing a LLL strategy (mainly for HEIs) and examples of good practice. It will be concluded by drawing general conclusions and by suggesting policy recommendations at various levels (institutional, regional, national, EU).

At the level of European and national policies, FLLLEX :

1. Has evaluated existing policies, both at the European and the national level, has tracked their current implementation in the concerned countries and has identified incongruences between national policies and implementation activities of HEIs.
2. Has identified what is meant by “lifelong learners” and “lifelong learning” in the various national policies. It has specified if specific groups within the lifelong learners are targeted by those policies, by the business training providers and the HEIs. It hopes to increase the attention of the stakeholders for the inclusion of those groups and stimulate the participation of underprivileged groups in society.
3. Has evaluated the impact national educational strategies of LLL have on the respective HEIs of that country. Via participation in the project FLLLEX allows national policy makers to get first-hand information on differences between both, good practices and suggestions and recommendations for future policy changes proposed by the FLLLEX consortium.

4. Allows a panel of experts to develop recommendations which will undoubtedly lead to policy developments in the countries investigated.
5. Promotes the exchange of diverse national LLL policies and strategies among the project partners and the benchmarking of individual HEIs. It leads to the increased transparency of the Members States' education system.
6. Has developed and implemented several surveys focusing on different stakeholders and their expectations from lifelong learning. It acts as such, as one of the interim surveys between the Adult Education Survey (2005-2008) and the next AES. This allows the development of a supply of comparable data, to serve future analyses of the lifelong learning phenomenon.

At the level of HEIs, FLLLEX intends to :

1. support a European area for lifelong learning through the multiplier effect in the dissemination activities, the benchmarking among various European HEIs, and the development of a common framework and definitions related to lifelong learning.
2. stimulate bench-marking among the HEIs. Good practices will be disseminated to different EU countries.
3. help HEIs to indicate which strategies they have (and have to) developed to address all groups involved in lifelong learning, and in particular the underrepresented groups.
4. increase the awareness of the difficulties HEIs and other training providers face in the implementation of lifelong learning strategies. This will definitely lead to improvements in the national policies, suggestions for future European policies, more performing quality assurance processes of lifelong learning programmes in the participating HEIs, and closer cooperation between business, business training providers and HEIs to the benefit of the lifelong learner.
5. contribute to a further improvement of the quality assurance of the implementation of lifelong learning in HEIs throughout Europe through the development of a self-assessment tool. The tool will be made publicly available in the form of a number of workshops and a publication.
6. assess the degree to which HEIs possess a policy on RQ/RPL and an instrument to implement it and thus attract lifelong learners.

2. Project Approach

The FLLLEX project is divided into nine work packages. All work packages follow in a chronological order (except for WP 2-4 which run simultaneously) and aim to contribute to one or more of the projects objectives. This part of this report expands on the state of the work packages at the time of submitting the intermediate report.

Assessing the impact of LLL on HEIs starts with a good overview of the different strategies concerning LLL, RPL and WBL in the concerned countries. This has been done in WP 1. Definitions are provided for the further project on lifelong learners. Having assembled the policy and expectations of the involved States, a survey has been started on the expectations of the other stakeholders in LLL: the learners (WP 2), the businesses (WP 3) and the business training providers/higher education institutions (WP 4). Differences and matching goals in relation to the national policies have been identified. This information will serve HEIs in better defining their role within the LLL landscape. In order to assess if the HEIs match up with the expectations of the different stakeholders, a draft self-assessment tool has been prepared in WP 5 based on the crucial indicators for LLL as defined by the other stakeholders in the survey. It focuses on policy, curricular aspects (design, flexibility), management of programmes, RPL, internal processes (academic – administrative), student counselling, quality assurance, and others if identified during the process. The results of the self-assessment of the tool (as carried out by each institutional partner in WP 6 in 2011) are about to be reviewed by a panel of experts, one of whom is connected to a policy-making body within the concerned country. This is WP 7. The goals of the last three WPs are to provide benchmarking for the individual institutions, to test the tool before further dissemination in Europe and to gather information for broader policy proposals of LLL. On the basis of those results a package (including self-assessment tool, good practices and policy advice) is being developed which will be distributed by the national organisations in the consortium among their members (WP 8). The overall management of the project is carried out from within WP 9. All through the project dissemination has already been started up through the various partners of the project.

WP 1 is a review of 'National and European policies for the implementation of LLL'. The review attempts to identify the main drivers behind and underpinning successful engagement in lifelong learning at State and sector level. The WP primarily uses existing data sources in the form of a high/meta level review rather than rely solely on primary research. A second part of the review attempts to synthesise EU/International experience in engagement with LLL at a high level. Where possible the review identifies trends in international policy developments surrounding LLL and matches these against developments within the EU. Within the EU it is clear that there is great variability in engagement with LLL processes with some countries demonstrating significant levels of involvement as represented by participation rates in LLL whilst many other countries show rates less than a quarter of those countries noted above. The review focuses in particular on the countries dealt with in WP 6.

WP 2 is a 'Survey of expectations of LifeLong Learners'. This survey and an outline of the expectations of potential and existing learners is made in view of lifelong Learning. The WP started by drafting a typology of lifelong learners based on an extensive literature research. Several target groups of lifelong learners have been identified. The expectations of those different groups towards LLL were then listed and

compared to the matrices which summarize the national policies (see WP 1). Both the typology of learners and the expectations determined the make-up and the choice of indicators of the self-assessment tool in WP 5 because HEIs have to identify to which type of lifelong learners they wish to cater their activities. This choice influences the policy, management and structure of the concerned institution.

The lead partner of those WPs has developed a questionnaire, drawing on his former experience, to gather data on lifelong learners. The networks of all partners of the consortium have been used to contact the lifelong learners.

WP 3 deals with a 'Survey of expectations of businesses'. A survey was made of the expectations of a selected number of businesses and enterprises. As they form the second leg in the triangle of learners, enterprises and educational organisations, (being both HEIs and business training providers), their input is necessary and crucial to evaluate the impact of existing strategies of LLL programmes. A questionnaire was developed. Elements considered were: training of staff dealing with work placements, WBL, relation between vocational training – work placements – businesses,... Interviews have been conducted via telephone and data have been collected via a questionnaire.

WP 4 deals with a 'Survey of the (business) training providers'. This WP is making a survey of the expectations and experiences relating to Life Long Learning for business training providers and the higher education institutions.

WP 5 is developing a self-assessment tool. The WP has prepared so far a draft of this tool to be applied by higher education institutions to assess the implementation of lifelong learning strategies within their own institution. The results are being benchmarked against the respective national policies and with the other participating European institutions. The tool has been constructed on the basis of indicators for LLL which were identified in WPs 1 to 4. Achieved results are a matrix of national policies, a typology of lifelong learners, an overview of their expectations and of those of other stakeholders. The tool thus includes indicators which assess those elements within the HEIs. The self-assessment procedure is focusing on how LLL strategies make an impact on: policy, curricular aspects (design, flexibility), management of programmes, delivery of courses, RPL, marketing, staff policy and management, internal processes (academic – administrative), student counselling, quality assurance, financial aspects and others if identified during the process.

The Advisory Board has closely overseen the development of this tool because it forms a crucial aspect of FLLLEX. Specific attention has been given to the appropriate approach to the guidelines formulation, the difference between mandatory and optional elements in the tool, the expected scope and structure of the output of the self-assessment procedure and those of the review panel. The draft tool has then be presented by the lead partner to the individual institutions in a kick-off meeting of WP 6 together with a brief handbook on the methodology to be used in the self-assessment to be carried out by the pilot HEI. After the testing and reviewing the tool will be made available to other interested parties in WP 8.

WP 6 uses the tool developed in WP 5. The outcome of this test is an internal evaluation report for the institution reflecting the degree to which the institution is ready to and has already been able to implement LLL strategies.

At a contact seminar in Helsinki, the lead partner of WP 5 set out the principles and methodology of the self-assessment. The contact person within each institution was responsible for gathering the data in the self-assessment and the production of the internal evaluation report. The lead partner of WP 6 is preparing an overall summarising report in cooperation with the lead partner of WP 5 and the advisory board. Both the summarising and the institutional reports form the basis for the work of the panel of experts in WP 7.

An external panel of experts will review in **WP 7** the applicability of the self-assessment tool and the its achieved results in 2011. Furthermore, and in close cooperation with the Advisory Board, the panel is to use the results from WPs 1 to 6, to compare existing national policies against perceived tasks, and to assess the degree of implementation of those policies within the selected HEIs.

The expert panel for each site consists of a number of fixed members and of variable members. Since each institution will be visited by a panel the composition is as follows:

1. One relevant expert from the institutions in WP 6. (Consortium partners may participate in several panels but not as an official member and at their own expenses. Each partner is to provide the project coordinator with a list of three destinations, in order of preference.)
2. Relevant external experts with proven expertise in LLL. (The experts will be proposed by the lead partner. The experts must fit the profile of LLL expert as determined by the Advisory board.)
3. LLL experts or policymakers in the countries concerned, attached to the relevant ministries. (These experts and policymakers are to be proposed by the project partners for each country.)

The combined results of WP 6 and 7 will affect the finalisation of the draft self-assessment tool before it is distributed to other interested parties. This distribution will take place during WP 8 which focuses particularly on the dissemination of the results. Three outputs will be prepared: (1) a pre-conference volume, (2) a 'road-show' package for presentation to interested staff working on implementing policy at a HEI, and (3) a conference where interested parties (partners, EC,...) are invited and where the 'road-show' package (train-the-trainer) is presented. During the whole duration of the project smaller dissemination actions have already been launched to prepare the large-scale dissemination.

To ensure the project management, **WP 9** focuses on the general coordination and daily management of FLLLEX. The general administration and the financial reporting are done by the lead partner. The lead partner is responsible for timely reporting to the EACEA and for the smooth transfer of intermediate results to the other partners. He is closely involved with each lead partner of the other WPs in the preparation of seminars or other meetings between participants. He organises all meetings and is responsible for the external communication on FLLLEX. To support the management of the project and in order to guarantee a systemic approach to the project, an external party (Educonsult) regularly evaluates the project and assists the lead partner in implementing changes where necessary. The general outline of FLLLEX is guarded by an Advisory Board.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

To date, the FLLLEX project has been able to present only limited validated results. There are, however, a number of interim results and reports available.

All publications and reports can be found at:

<http://flllex.khleuven.be/Homepage/Reports-Publications>.

A final report for WP 1 has been published: 'National Policies for the Implementation of Lifelong Learning'. It provides a detailed analysis of both European and eight national Lifelong Learning strategies/policies. It concludes by observing that 'while much policy has been developed at a high level in Europe on lifelong learning, while much analysis has been undertaken of its growth and development at national level (...) and while some work has been undertaken on the experience of individual learners and teachers as lifelong learners and teachers (...), comparatively little work has been undertaken on the strategies, actions and structures used by individual HEI's that link policy with practise.' The authors of the report proceed by drafting a comparative matrix 'showing the progress and implementation of the difference policy issues surrounding lifelong learning in the participating countries of the FLLLEX project.' They also identify what has been termed 'policy hooks'. These are links between (national) policies and HEIs practice responses created by the policy maker

The outcomes of the work packages 2 to 4 have been postponed until June 2010 but will then be available on the website. The report of WP 2 will identify obstacles for lifelong learners to participate in various LLL activities. The report of WP 3 will provide answers as to why businesses engage in the LLL programme, the major driving forces for a business to participate in LLL, the main expectations businesses have of the LLL programme and their relation with HEIs. The report of WP 4 will deal with other LLL organisations, other than HEIs, with the implications of LLL policies on those organisations, their relationship with higher education institutions, their target public, their expectations of national policies...

A test version of the self-assessment tool is currently available to the participating project partners of FLLLEX. It is being tested within WP 6 until June 2011. A critical review of the tool and the process will allow to publish an improved version in November 2011.

The site review in WP 7 will further allow to produce a report with policy issues towards the European Commission on LLL and its implementation.

Obviously, the outputs for WP 8 have not yet been developed.

4. Partnerships

The FLLLEX consortium exists out of 24 partners from ten different EU countries. Eight HEIs have been selected together with the national organisation representing them as full partners. The project was initiated and is supported by Eurashe which allows further structural contacts with organisations such as EUCIS, the BFUG and other. Three Associated Partners form part of the Advisory Board. The external evaluation is carried out by Educonsult.

The partners have been chosen in such a way that all stakeholders are involved and that a large and strong dissemination of the outcomes is ensured up from the very beginning. By involving key HEI, national and European organisations of HEI and of certain target groups (e.g. the students) and of certain key strategic topics in HEI (ENQA on QA), the foundations are available to implement a high quality tool that will be on the one hand largely valued by all the stakeholders concerned and on the other hand broadly disseminated (and used) by all those partners.

Higher Education Institutions

- Cardonald College (United Kingdom)
- Hanzehogeschool (The Netherlands)
- IUT de Saint-Nazaire (France)
- KHLeuven - Leuven University College (Belgium)
- Laurea University of Applied Sciences (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)
- The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO raad) (The Netherlands)
- Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (ARENE) (Finland)
- West of Scotland Colleges' Partnership (WOSCOP) (United Kingdom)

Structural Partners

- Banku Augstskola (BA) (Latvia)
- Educonsult (Belgium)
- European Association for Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) (Belgium)
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) (Finland)
- 3s research lab (3s) (Austria)

Advisory Board

- Business Europe
- Education International
- European Students' Union (ESU)

5. Plans for the Future

The FLLLEX project will publish the interim results of work packages 2 to 4 in June 2011 at its website.

The site reviews of the HEIs in combination with an evaluation of the self-assessment tool will get underway in May 2011. It will lead to a report on the status of lifelong learning in the various HEIs, to proposed improvements for the self-assessment tool and to policy advice. The report will be publicly available in November 2011.

Based on this report, and the other reports of FLLLEX, the items for the final conference in April 2012 will be prepared. These include a pre-conference volume with policy advice and project results; an improved self-assessment tool; and a 'train-the-trainer' package for HEIs as to how to use the tool and the results obtained. Further dissemination will take place through the national organisations involved. They will organise events or trainings during 2012 where the tool will be presented. A further workshop at the EAIE 2012 (Dublin) is also envisaged.

In the future a new project may be introduced to focus on the link between the use of the self-assessment tool for lifelong learning by HEI and the QA policies developed within those HEI. This study would also analyse how countries integrate into their QA mechanisms the attention given and the concrete efforts done by HEI to enhance lifelong learning.

6. Contribution to EU policies

Lifelong learning has been and is at the heart of education in the EU for more than two decades now. However, during the past years not enough attention has been given on how HEIs can contribute to enhancing lifelong learning and in this way contribute to the further development of the knowledge society in Europe.

The present project will definitely make a major contribution to HEIs developing a lifelong learning policy by making available to those HEIs a tool which on the one hand enables them to assess what is already being done as to lifelong learning in the HEI and on the other hand makes suggestions and recommendations on which further steps can be taken by HEI to develop strong and comprehensive lifelong learning policies towards the future.

The FLLLEX assessment tool will thus contribute to the implementation of the EU strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020") which is a follow-up to the earlier Education and Training 2010 work programme launched in 2001.

The approach recognises that high-quality pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher and vocational education and training are fundamental to Europe's success. However, in a rapidly changing world, lifelong learning needs to be a priority – it is the key to employment, economic success and allowing people to participate fully in society.

Thus the FLLLEX project contributes to the implementation of the ET 2020 long-term strategic objectives of EU education and training policies which are: Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

The partners to the FLLLEX project assume that the use of the assessment tool by many HEIs across Europe may have a major impact on the role for HEIs in promoting concrete policies and strategies to make lifelong learning a tangible reality in higher education.