

Lifelong learning and the EHEA agenda

EADTU position paper on the Bologna Process and EHEA

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The emerging higher education landscape in Europe and the US shows three areas of provision¹:

- Degree programmes
- Continuing education and continuous professional development programmes
- Open education, including MOOCs and open educational resources

Continuous education (CE), continuous professional development (CPD) and open education are cornerstones in *lifelong learning*.

In view of the needs in society, the developments in these areas must be urgently integrated in the Bologna Process and the European Area of Higher Education.

Degree education

Degree programmes are the backbone of the educational offerings of a university. The Bologna process and the development of the EHEA had already a large impact on degree education: programmes are innovated, qualifications are largely harmonised and comparable; quality and accreditation are assured; mobility and international collaboration have increased; students have more opportunities during their studies and in their later lives.

Continuous education and continuous professional development

So far, continuous education (CE) and continuous professional development (CPD) have been quasi left out of the EHEA framework, although the EU and national governments consider this an important area of provision in higher education. In the Bologna process, the sector seems to have reached the level of a consented discourse, not of a coherent vision and implementation.

Continuous education and continuous professional development should grow faster, due to demographics and to the shortage of qualifications on the labour market

The sector of CE/CPD should grow faster, due to the needs of the labour market and of the knowledge society at large. These needs become even more urgent as demographics evolve towards declining figures in the active population².

¹ Haywood, J., Connelly, L., Henderikx, P., Weller, M. & Williams, K., *The changing pedagogical landscape – New ways of teaching and learning and their implications for higher education policy*, European Commission, Education and Culture, The EU Bookshop, 2015. See: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f43a8447-7948-11e5-86db-01aa75ed71a1>

² European employment indicators. See: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_indicators_-_employment



Due to circumstances in many Europe regions, even large parts of this active population don't attain qualification levels which match with requirements in the knowledge economy.

This is also demonstrated by the failing participation rates in higher education in many countries and even more in lifelong learning across Europe (ET2020 objectives, the Education and Training Monitor)³.

This even more the case for disadvantaged people and migrant people.

Improving qualification levels is essential to meet the growing demand for a highly skilled labour force in the EU⁴. A sense of urgency in universities and government is needed to raise qualifications for the economy of today and even more for the future.

Innovation in the economy requires large scale provisions for continuous education and continuous professional development

Innovation will require new competences and a continuous flow of knowledge between universities and enterprises⁵. Professional organisations and alumni ask for coherent updating programmes, supporting longer working lives. Medium-skilled workforce has to be upgraded to higher education-level job requirements, meeting the demand of companies and to stay away from unemployment.

Upscaling continuous education and short learning programmes

One can already see front-runner universities planning short learning programmes online⁶ (continuous education/CPD at the foundation, postgraduate bachelor and master level) to meet national and even international needs, upscaling participation, offering flexible opportunities for students at work and broadening the outreach of higher education provisions across Europe⁷.

However, in general the response of the universities should be accelerated. Most university initiatives for CE/CPD are still small, not scalable and not flexible enough to face the ambitions of the EU and to respond to the needs of the economy and of society at large. Universities are not able to position continuous education and continuous professional development in their provisions, as they don't have the right business models and structures in place.

Also, many governments fail in developing coherent vision and strategies, activating and stimulating universities in order to upscale CE/CPD provisions.

³ The Education and Training Monitor. See: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor_en

⁴ See analysis Eurostat. : http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_indicators_-_employment

⁵ See: The renewed higher education agenda, European Commission, 2017, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1496304694958&uri=COM:2017:247:FIN>

⁶ This is corresponding with two priorities of the Digital Education Action Plan of the European Commission. See: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/education-technology_en

⁷ See institutional policies at the University of Edinburgh, TU-Delft, the Open University in the UK, UNED in Spain, the "Universités Numériques" in France.



To be effective, universities need university extension structures to organise CE/CPD, combined with scalable and flexible online solutions, next to traditional face to face CE/CPD and lifelong learning.

Harmonization and comparability of awards

Last, but not least, there is an issue of harmonisation and comparability. Continuous education/CPD courses and programmes are organised at all higher education qualification levels and in all sizes: preparation courses, foundation level, post-graduate bachelor and master level short continuous education programmes, varying from 3 to 60 ECTS or even more). They lead to a range of qualifications: e.g. credits for courses, certificates or diplomas and also (post-)bachelor and (post-)master degrees. Generally, these qualifications are not comparable across Europe and even not within member states. They should be fit into the European Qualification Framework in order to create comparability and clarity in academia and for employers. Some universities have already developed good practice in this respect.⁸

Open Education

Universities recognise that open educational resources and MOOCs are an increasingly important area of provision in the higher education system. MOOCs contribute to the digital innovation in higher education. EADTU supports fully the statement of the European MOOC Consortium (EMC).

MOOCs contribute to the core mission of universities by:

- sharing education with all citizens by open accessibility in a context of lifelong learning (*open education*),
- transferring and valorising innovative knowledge to enterprises (*continuing education, CPD*)
- integrating MOOCs as an enriching learning experience in blended degree education (*bachelor, master and postgraduate programs*).

MOOCs also strengthen the participation in knowledge created at other universities as part of virtual and physical *mobility schemes*.

⁸ See the University of Edinburgh, the Open University



Proposal

The development of continuous education / continuous professional development and MOOCs should be stimulated and activated by national governments as part of the Bologna Process and the EHEA, in order to accelerate strategic developments in lifelong learning in all European countries.

Next to initial education (bachelor-master), continuous education programmes / continuous professional development and MOOCs at all higher education qualification levels should be part of the European Higher Education Area. Member states should align and engage in order to respond to the needs of society and to harmonize provisions and qualifications in these sectors.

Increasingly, universities organise these programmes in blended and online formats, using more effective pedagogies, resulting in a cost-effective deployment and in a flexible and scalable access for learners.

This is needed in view of the massive needs on the labour market in all sectors.

Collaboration with the world of work (professional organisations, companies, training institutes, employment services) should be sought to ensure a European outreach of courses, meeting the needs of the economy and the quality of growth.