

Switzerland

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Introduction

The Compass project has been discussed by the National Network Swissuni (the 10 Universities plus 2 Federal Institutes of Technology). The EUA Charter has been disseminated to Universities thanks to the project COMPASS. The members have underlined the difficulty in answering the Compass questionnaire due to the specificity of the Swiss university continuing education system. On final, 5 Universities fully completed the questionnaire.

2 tendencies are reflected :

- The majority of the University Centres of continuing learning, the CRUS¹ Head of the Bologna Coordination Group, the Universities of Applied Sciences for Western Switzerland (HES-SO) are acquainted with LLL commitments. The EUA Charter helps to reflect on LLL but is not integrated within a strategy either at a federal and cantonal level. However the EUA Charter is used, for example at the University of the development of LLL quality measures in continuing education.
- In view of the proposed federal law on continuing education, several associations and trade unions. Swiss Federation of continuing education, Swiss Continuing Education Forum Western part, Federation of employers, Swiss Federation of Trade Union, have issued recommendations similar to those of the EUA Charter.

University education policy in Switzerland

Due to the federal system, Switzerland has 26 cantonal ministries of education. The implementation of the Bologna process is coordinated at the federal level by the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS). The policy and strategy are defined by each University. Charters or strategy plans such as the ones from the University of Geneva mention measures concerning LLL. Each University has a Continuing Education Center.

National state of play concerning the implementation of LLL

The results of our research indicate that a debate on LLL takes place today in Switzerland,

- In the professional education and vocational field (Copenhagen process), the various social and political partners will be consulted on the future law on continuing education. The LLL issue benefits from this current Swiss context.
- In the academic field (Bologna process) Switzerland participates in the European Conferences of the Education Ministries. Decisions and standpoints are followed attentively. However no explicit LLL policy or strategy intended for Universities have yet been defined at a federal

¹ Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities

level.

University LLL measures and actions

Nonetheless, LLL recommendations, measures and action are applied such as: NQF, Quality Assurance, comparability, permeability of diplomas (vocational/academic) and transparency. Many LLL practices exist : VAE, admission for non-holders of the prerequisite diploma, comparability of diplomas, individual curricula, blended learning. Six Universities have deployed measures to facilitate access to undergraduate programmes. VAE is offered only at the University of Geneva since 2008. Since 2010 the University of Geneva and the Universities of Applied Sciences for Western Switzerland have established a partnership to develop the VAE system. These LLL actions are strongly linked to the strategy of each University.

The active role of University Centres of continuing education

The Swiss Higher Educational system makes a clear distinction between the undergraduate and graduate diplomas (BA/MA) intended for young students and the CAS/DAS/MAS² (postgraduate level) offered to adults. The organisation of the BA/MA courses is not foreseen for adults (lack of flexibility). There are very few interfaces between BA/MA and Diplomas of continuing education.

In this context, the University Centres of continuing education (UCE) play a central role in the development of professional curricula. The flexibility of the courses and their relevancy, the analysis of employers' and employees' needs, a quality process, teaching and learning methods focused on the student, the importance of a partnership with stakeholders, are part of LLL measures. The courses dedicated to professionals are offered to various audiences and develop innovative approaches. For professionals, to be trained, requires individual initiative. However, in the majority of cases, employers build on their employees careers' development plan and finance the training costs (entirely or partly with money and/or time).

Quality development culture

Tools such as DS, ECTS, are increasingly used. Even if the uniformity between diploma equivalences, part time studies and training in blended learning exist, these measures can be further developed to follow on with strategies of each University. Process of accreditation has been initiated on MAS diplomas through the Swiss Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ) by the University of Geneva, other processes of international accreditations are led in several Universities.

The role of the network SwissUni is essential to define a coordinated policy and to provide quality recommendations in the field of University continuing education. Being the interlocutor of the CRUS for the implementation of the Bologna process it participates in the discussion initiated on LLL. SwissUni has collaborated with the Swiss Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ) for the development of a quality process development for the CAS/DAS/MAS curricula.

Recommendations

To support the LLL development in Switzerland on the basis of LLL EU Charter, 6 recommendations are proposed :

² CAS Certificate of Advanced Studies – DAS Diploma of Advanced Studies – MAS Master of Advanced Studies

1. A political willingness to implement LLL in the higher education system at federal and cantonal levels (laws, policy and strategy of the University)
2. Integration of the LLL concept in the students' curriculum (individual pathway)
3. Information, appropriate guidance and counselling services
4. VAE and flexible curricula
5. Description of competencies and learning outcomes in each curricula
6. Development of innovative courses for professionals with NTI

The comparison with the commitments of the EUA Charter underlines the importance of a political and financial support in the LLL actions. The LLL implementation is engaged in a progressive process but Switzerland needs a policy and strategy on University LLL to match the challenges of a global society and develop a LLL University.