
OVERALL NATIONAL COMMENTARY/SPAIN

Lifelong learning in the universities: Where we come from?

Lifelong Learning in the Spanish university system started in the 80's and has been increased and enhanced from the 90's, adjusting to the training demands of the new student profiles that deviate in age and motivations from the traditional university students: young people between 18 and 24 years studying full time. In the last decade the ULLL has greatly increased the number and type of programs and services: professional postgraduate programs for graduates, specialized courses for professionals, customized training for companies, job placement services and career development, language courses, cultural expansion for the elderly, etc.

ULLL programs had been developed voluntarily by universities and had been self-financed basically through income from student fees.

ULLL has only very recently been integrated into the institutional policies and documents of governments and universities, although up to now, on a whole, they are still only documents that haven't been put into practice.

The implementation of the LLL Charter. National and Institutional Stage. Where we are now?

The strategy of the Spanish universities regarding lifelong learning is basically oriented as part of their Third Mission, like an external activity, mainly addressed to the labour market, through training of professionals. Other lifelong learning programs such as courses for the elderly or language courses, are not considered as proper continuing education, and do not participate in a joint strategy.

Although the universities develop a huge number of continuing education activities, overall, the concepts of widening access and lifelong learning have not yet extended to the First and the Second Mission of the university, and don't have a central position in the institutional strategies.

The LLL Charter is virtually unknown by most universities and authorities with responsibility in the higher education sector, although most of their commitments have recently been incorporated in the national legislation and policies.

Where are we going?

Key policies and trends.

University Strategy 2015: It's designed to modernize the universities and to bring about structural and cultural change in the Spanish university in the horizon of 2015. Bringing to the forefront a set of actions articulated around four strategic themes, and situating University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) as one of the two axis of the teaching mission.

MECES. (Spanish Higher Education Qualifications Framework) It will be applicable as from the second half of 2010. The introduction of this tool into the Spanish Higher Education System will involve structural and management changes, particularly related to the recognition of prior learning, nowadays very poorly developed in our country.

P3- UNIVERSITY OF ROVIRA I VIRGILI (ES)

Educational Objectives for the decade 2010-2020. ACTION PLAN 2010-2011: Establish a set of goals for improving education, among which are: the regulation of continuing education in universities and the development of a program to promote it, a new model of aid including grants and scholarships to widen access for the population with fewer economical resources, and strengthening guidance and counselling services to students.

These policies and action plans show a clear trend towards the incorporation of lifelong learning in the institutional strategy of governments and universities, and describe the tools to expand and facilitate access for adults and workers. But at present they are only plans, and it is unclear how far their implementation will be financed during the next years.

Success factor

Legislation changes.

The most noteworthy advances in university policies related to LLL have occurred in the legislative field, with the new law, "LOMLOU", amending the Universities Act; three executive orders related to the overall organization of the university education, the academic recognition of the ULLL courses, new ways of access to the university for adults, recognition of prior learning, and the constitution of the council to develop the Spanish Higher Education Qualifications Framework.

Networking.-The creation of the Commission for Lifelong Learning within the Universities' General Management, in which our national ULLL network (RUEPEP) is very active, and has elaborated a guide on lifelong learning in universities. This guide has already been approved by the Council of Universities, and is being used by universities to organize its lifelong learning programmes and its adaptation to the EHEA.

Developing partnerships at local and regional level

Most universities have developed strong partnerships with public and private companies as well as local and regional governments and other stakeholders to develop lifelong learning programmes and services.

Threats and Challenges

The funding of the Spanish University System, needed to develop a Lifelong Learning Strategy, is faced with the reality of the economic recession, especially hard in Spain. Faced with the deteriorating economic situation, the Spanish Budget for 2010 reflected the required austerity by the European Commission, and it seems it will be like this for the following years.

The huge rate of unemployment in Spain (20%) difficult the access to university lifelong learning programmes, as they are financed with revenue from tuition paid by students.

Moreover, this situation may also attract people who need retraining or upgrading their skills to enhance their employability, and encourages universities to develop new programs and methods specifically designed to improve their professional profile, and adapt the university programmes to engage returner adult learners.

Changes in legal and cultural framework in recent years, aimed to modernize the higher education system and develop universities lifelong learning programmes, are a great help to complement the commitments of the European Universities' Charter on LLL.