



ALLUME

Pathways and Policies – Recommendations



Lifelong Learning Programme

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ALLUME: Pathways and Policies – Recommendations.

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APL¹	Accreditation of Prior Learning
BeFlex	“Benchmarking Flexibility in University lifelong learning in the Bologna Process”, project coordinated by EUCEN
BeFlex Plus	“Progress on Flexibility in the Bologna Reforms”, project coordinated by EUCEN
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
EUCEN	European University Continuing Education Network
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
LLL	Lifelong Learning
LLLU	Lifelong Learning University
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RPL	Recognising/ Recognition of Prior Learning
SIRUS	“Shaping Inclusive and Responsive University Strategies”, project coordinated by EUA
ULLL	University Lifelong Learning
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNFIL¹	Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning
VPL¹	Validation of Prior Learning
ZWL	Zentrum für Lehre und Weiterbildung; LLL unit at the University of Stuttgart

¹ Throughout this document, the term “Validation of non-formal and informal Learning” will be used, knowing that different terms exist and are used differently across countries.

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Introduction

The ALLUME project produced three main reports:

- An Executive Summary
- Publication: Pathways and Policies – Recommendations
- Publication: Tools and Results

This publication (*Pathways and Policies – Recommendations*) is intended for senior managers of universities, vice-rectors as well as regional national and European public authorities. After introducing briefly the project's main aims and methodologies, it presents the main results of ALLUME and gives recommendations for the creation of LLL strategies to achieve Lifelong Learning Universities.

It is accompanied by two additional documents:

The publication *Tools and Results* contains the technical results of the ALLUME project and targets practitioners and staff involved in the actual strategy creation processes on the ground. It comprises the three tools developed by the ALLUME project which will assist universities in the development of concrete ULLL strategies and actions by helping them to work on the process and the content of their LLL strategies through reviewing and extending their current LLL approaches.

The *Executive Summary* provides a concise overview about the main methodologies, products and recommendations of the project.

All documents are available for download under <http://allume.eucen.eu/documents>

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Project description

1. ALLUME – From “A Lifelong Learning University Model for Europe” to “Pathways for Lifelong Learning Universities”

In view of the importance of Lifelong Learning (LLL) as the backbone of the European Education and Training Strategy and the contrasting low commitment to LLL by universities, the main objective of the ALLUME project was to explore ways to increase the participation of universities in Lifelong Learning and to produce “A Lifelong Learning University Model for Europe”. This model was supposed to assist universities by providing guidelines based on the European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning published in 2008. However, during the project’s lifespan it became clear that the idea of a unique model, guidelines and a one-size-fits-all approach were outdated and not adequate given the diversity of universities, environments and the heterogeneity of LLL strategies and processes.

While the challenge of making the Charter and of making Lifelong Learning Universities (LLUs) a reality remains, the initial concept did not seem to match current circumstances. As a result, the project evolved from the aim of elaborating “A Lifelong Learning Model for Europe”, to the vision of developing flexible “Pathways for Lifelong Learning Universities”. Thus, the objective of ALLUME became to provide practitioners and (vice) rectors involved in LLL with a set of reflexive and inspiring tools that could help their teams to define and implement concrete actions to make the 10 commitments of the Charter a reality. ALLUME intended to contribute to this implementation process on the basis of best practices at work in universities having already built and integrated successful LLL strategies.

2. Approach

The project design of ALLUME combined research and assessment activities in the context of organisational development, with awareness-raising initiatives at different policy levels. This approach led to the proposition of policy recommendations for LLL practitioners and rectors and tools which were introduced to decision-makers in universities and promoted through key European networks in Higher Education.

The project’s methodology can be divided into the following areas:

1. Production of consortium case studies following a three-step methodology:
 - Step 1: Institutional analysis and first case study report
 - Step 2: Visits to the case study institutions and visit reports
 - Step 3: The final case study reports on the basis of the visitors’ recommendations and remarks.

2. Analysis of the case study results and design of draft supporting tools
3. Testing visits in the form of on-site visits in six universities in European member states not yet considering LLL as a priority

While working on the case studies and carrying out the testing visits, the diversity of the different strategies to implement a LLL University was highlighted and led to a questioning of the usability of the concept of a single set of guidelines, which would not be adequate for today's diversity and flexibility of processes. Thus, the approach passed from producing guidelines for universities to the concept of designing **flexible tools** which will help universities start and support a LLLU strategy process respecting a wide range of identified frameworks.

4. Discussion of the preliminary tools and results at the final event "Pathways for Lifelong Learning Universities?" in Barcelona in September 2011 with European organisations, institutions and networks

3. Products

- 10 case studies presenting progress in the implementation of LLL strategies in line with the 10 commitments of the Charter
- The 10 case studies presented in a an analytical grid
- Transversal Analysis of the Consortium Case Studies focusing on the content
- Transversal Analysis of the Consortium Case Studies focusing on the process
- Draft supporting tools for the testing phase in universities based in countries not yet considering LLL as a priority
- The universities' and evaluators' reports resulting from this testing phase, and a transversal reading
- 4 discussion seminars in Lille (FR), Malta (MT), Amsterdam (NL) and Barcelona (ES)
- 3 flexible tools
- A highly effective proven methodology including structured peer visits
- Two publications containing the final products and methodologies
 - Pathways and Policies – Recommendations
 - Tools and Results
- One executive summary

4. Strengths of the project

- Constant interaction with LLL stakeholders and decision-makers at European level through consultation seminars and the testing process
- Strong evidence of awareness-rising among end-users
- High adaption to end-users' needs of the final tools
- Highly positive feedback from the testing institutions about the set-up of the visits
- Confirmation of identified needs
- Visibility of impact of the project's results and supportive character of the developed tools
 - Inclusion of LLL as one of the fundamental principles of action in the draft of the West University of Timisoara's Charter
 - Embedding of University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) in the Zentrum für Lehre und Weiterbildung (ZWL) in the University of Stuttgart
 - Design of concrete ULLL strategies in the University of Stuttgart
- High impact on the partner institutions who guided the visits as independent experts
 - Mutual exchange of different LLL approaches and concepts
 - Additional learning experience
 - Highly valued benefits for both hosts and visitors

“The process of evaluation was extremely important for our institution. We discovered that we are actually better than we thought. We were able to isolate the weak points in our system and we are going to improve them. The cooperation in the international levels gives institutions new perspective and changes the paradigms for problem solving [sic].” (Feedback from one of the testing institutions)

Project Partners

EUCEN (Coordinator)
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University of Gent (BE)
Catholic University of Louvain (BE)
University of Tartu (EE)
University of Brest (FR)
University of Malta (MT)
InHolland University (NL)
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University of Zilina (SK)
University of Bolzano (IT)
University of Maribor (SI)
West University of Timișoara (RO)

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Context: the required evolution

1. The recent Evolution²

During the past decades, as shown for example in the BeFlex³ and BeFlex Plus⁴ results, many universities have developed very wide and diverse “Continuing Education activities”, dedicated to adults and people having interrupted their education process: implementation of degree and non-degree programmes, for professional, personal or civic needs or purposes, development of guidance and counselling for the adult learners, intensification of the validation of non-formal and informal learning for admission or for exemption for parts of the course, increasing flexibility in the learning pathways, and so on. Universities have been invited and supported in these developments by successive declarations of the conferences of European Ministers of Education.

In 2009, it was obvious that in the global movement for LLL, universities have to go one step further than continuing education or adult education development. In April, the Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, emphasised in particular widening participation, student-centred learning but also the implementation of LLL policies. This communiqué raised the question of how to implement LLL within the universities towards 2020.

On the basis of the BeFlex Plus⁵ results, the EUCEN Louvain-la-Neuve/Leuven Conference in 2009, recommended the implementation of a “**Lifelong Learning University**”. The characteristics of this “LLL University” were described and 10 recommendations were proposed in order to achieve it. At the same time, EUA launched a charter⁶ for lifelong learning including 10 commitments from universities to achieve the development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies, with a set of matching commitments for governments and regional partners.

The question resulting from these developments is now “**How to implement a Lifelong Learning University in practical, concrete terms?**” The objective of the ALLUME project was to help the universities, in a concrete and practical way, to elaborate a vision, mission and action plans dedicated to adapting their own organisation and leadership in order to **become a LLL university**, in short to **develop a lifelong learning strategy within their institution**.

² A historical review is given in the Annex of the Document ‘Tools and Results’ available under <http://allume.eucen.eu/documents> (last accessed on 28/10/2011)

³ Please see <http://www.eucen.eu/beflex.html> (last accessed on 27/10/2011)

⁴ Please see <http://www.eucen.eu/BeFlexPlus/index.html> (last accessed on 27/10/2011)

⁵ Please see the website <http://www.eucen.eu/BeFlexPlus/index.html> (last accessed on 27/10/2011) for further information

⁶ Please see the website http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/EUA_Charter_Eng_LY.pdf (last accessed on 27/10/2011) for a full outline of the European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning.

Starting from the BeFlex Plus recommendations and EUA commitments, ALLUME examined how 10 European universities are currently developing a LLL strategy: the project analysed the way to do it (strategy-as-practice, the process of ‘strategizing’ within each university); it analysed the content of these 10 strategies (strategy as a result of a process), identifying similarities and differences; and on the basis of these results, tools for strategy elaboration have been designed and tested by 6 additional European universities.

Before examining the LLL strategy, it is worthwhile to define the main concepts used in the ALLUME project – i.e. the distinction between University Lifelong Learning and a Lifelong Learning University. The definitions are given in the following paragraphs.

2. What is ‘University Lifelong Learning’ (ULLL)?

The BeFlex definition of University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) has been used in ALLUME.

“ULLL is the provision by Higher Education Institutions of learning opportunities, services and research for:

- the personal and professional development of a wide range of individuals – lifelong and life wide;
- and the social, cultural and economic development of communities and the region.
- It is at university level and research based; it focuses primarily on the needs of the learners: and it is often developed and/or provided in collaboration with stakeholders and external actors.”

(Davies, 2007, p. 35)

The main advantages of this definition are that it is first inclusive but also potentially measurable as it encompasses a number of characteristic that could be translated into indicators and thus used to measure ULLL.

3. What is a ‘Lifelong Learning University’ (LLLU)?

As the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué of Bologna Ministers suggested, the universities have to move one step further and implement LLL fully within the HE Institutions. It means considering LLL as a culture at the core of the future 21st century university and creating a Lifelong Learning University (LLLU). The design of this future LLLU was discussed during EUCEN’s 39th Conference in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve⁷. The debates concentrated on the questions: How can European universities move from a continuing education perspective into a Lifelong Learning one? How to integrate LLL within the University’s strategy, structure, organisation and pedagogy? How can the European universities evolve and become Lifelong Learning Universities whilst at the same time retaining their strengths in research, teaching and service to society?

The main characteristics of a LLLU have been outlined.

⁷ The recommendations of the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve EUCEN conference are available on http://www.eucen.eu/policy_statements (last accessed on 27/10/2011)

A Lifelong Learning University is a university where:

- **Learning is shared:** the distinction between teaching and learning is more blurred, students and staff learn together, from each other, and from people and activities outside the university as well as inside it.
- **Learning is valued wherever and whenever it takes place:** it includes the validation of prior, non-formal and informal learning – for entry, for part of a diploma, may be for whole diploma; the curriculum takes account of prior and other learning.
- **Assessment is varied:** a large range of assessment methodologies are built and used for different skills, knowledge and competences.
- **Learning is lifelong and lifewide:** how to learn lifelong, at any time of a personal or professional pathway is a learning objective, included in the 'learning outcomes'.
- **Learning is enjoyable and a rewarding experience.** (Davies, 2009, p. 19)

In this perspective, a LLL University is an **open system** - accessible, supported, flexible, permeable at the boundaries, operating with a range of different rhythms, acting as or becoming a **learning organisation**.

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Synthesis of results

1. Results of the qualitative transversal analyses on LLLU Strategizing and Strategies⁸

Two distinct qualitative transversal analyses of the 10 consortium case studies (or self-assessment reports) were conducted within the scope of the ALLUME project:

- a. Qualitative transversal analysis of LLLU strategizing (process)
- b. Qualitative transversal analysis of LLLU strategies (content)

These two analyses aimed at identifying common and diverging elements in the process of developing and operating LLL strategies and in the content of these strategies, since these elements may be transferable to other HEIs and will assist them in formulating, reinforcing or implementing their own ULLL/LLLU strategies.

a. Qualitative transversal analysis on LLLU Strategizing (Process)

This analysis was carried out in order to identify common and differentiated elements in the universities' processes of strategizing, on their way to elaborating a strategy to become a LLLU. For this purpose, a systematic and mainly qualitative 'case study' research methodology was adopted including content analysis of the text, the identification of 'meaning units' to saturation, the classification and counting of occurrences of the meaning units in the text⁹. A five dimension framework was built on the basis of the Strategy-as-Practice approach developed by Whittington (Whittington, 2003, pp. 117-125) and was used for classification. The analysis was conducted by two researchers and the outcomes were validated by the project consortium.

The experiences of the project together with the analysis were the cornerstones for the 'Tool for Self-Analysis (Process)' developed to support other universities on their route to becoming a LLLU and to reinforce their own LLLU strategizing.

⁸ The term "strategizing" as used by Whittington (e.g. Whittington, 2003, pp. 117-125) refers to the process of doing strategies. A more detailed explanation is given in the ALLUME publication 'Tools and Results' in section "Transversal analysis on the LLLU strategy process", subchapter "Strategy-as-practice – Whittington"

⁹ A complete description of this analysis is given in the accompanying report 'Tools and Results' in the section "Tools for Self-Analysis and Benchmarking"

The LLL strategizing framework used for this analysis is based on the following questions:

1. Why does the process of strategizing begin? What are the external/internal drivers of change?
2. Who does the formal work of strategizing? Who are the internal actors? What are their roles: Are they doers, influential persons, researchers, decision makers?
3. How is the process of strategizing done?
 - a. What is the process' characterisation? Formal or informal?
 - b. What level of development? Described in 4 steps: analysis, design, implementation, evaluation
4. What are the tools and techniques used for strategizing?
5. How are the products of strategizing communicated?

The main results are summed up in the following¹⁰:

1. The Drivers for LLLU strategizing

Regarding the context, the most important external drivers for the 10 universities were

1. the society pressure on the Universities' duty ("being socially aware and socially active") and
2. the legislation (national, regional, local policies).

The national or regional economic situation and structure was also identified as impacting – negatively – on the LLL strategizing.

The major internal drivers for the 10 cases were the awareness of the necessity to widen access ("their mission") and to take demand into account ("growth of the volume of LLL or number of adult learners"). Some previous experiences in LLL, a culture of LLL and changes in internal organisation are also identified as internal drivers, but less intense than the first one, except for one university where organisational and structural change were considered positively in the LLL strategy process.

When comparing the balance between internal and external drivers for each university, it was observed that for 5 universities, the significance of external drivers exceeds the internal ones. For 3 universities, the internal drivers were more important than the external ones. For two universities, there was an equal balance of the two.

¹⁰ The complete analysis of the results is available in the accompanying report 'Tools and Results' in the sections "Transversal analysis on the LLLU strategy process" and "Transversal analysis of LLL strategies – content"

The detailed analysis based on strategy content concluded:

- Regarding the context and the drivers of change, the 10 universities divided into two groups:
 - In the first group were universities in countries where national policies exist to create a LLL framework or at least a LLL environment to meet current and future economic and social needs. This national framework influenced or was followed by HE policies embedding a more or less precisely defined LLL perspective. This general environment seemed to create the best conditions to help universities develop LLL strategies at institutional level. It seemed to be a pre-condition or at least a strong facilitator.
 - In the second group were universities that insist on the evolution of the economic context which has created a favourable climate to open LLL perspectives but these universities are as yet mainly focused on continuing education. The lack of national policies relayed at HE level seems to be a factor limiting the perspective and not facilitating institution-wide initiatives.

2. The actors in LLLU strategizing

In this qualitative analysis, the internal persons who were participating in strategizing were the heads of a specific LLL structure: they were identified as the major doers in 8 universities.

Among the influential people in strategizing, globally, the dominant one was the head of the specific LLL structure in 5 universities, while the Rector (or Vice Rector) was also identified as playing an influential role in strategizing. The commitment of the Rector or of the teaching council/committee (or LLL council) appeared to be important in the decision phase of strategy making.

The external actors were mainly identified as government bodies (at national or regional level) and they appeared mainly as influential people or decision makers. In one self-assessment report, their role appeared to be both positive and negative.

It was observed that in 5 universities, internal strategizing was a more collective process than in others where fewer individuals were involved. Furthermore 4 of these 5 universities were also involving more external actors in their strategizing than the others.

In conclusion, there is a relationship between the 'collective' characteristics of LLL strategizing (internally and externally) and the level of development of LLL activities within universities, as indicated by the development steps or within the self-assessment reports. It would be worthwhile to strengthen this hypothesis in future research.

The detailed analysis based on strategy content examined the internal relationships between the actors. The results are the following:

The level of implementation of LLL strategies in universities seemed to be linked to the level of involvement of internal actors and suggests 3 different configurations of internal relationships:

- Continuity and structural links between the top management, the Councils/Senior Committees, the heads of faculties or heads of academic programmes and the unit in charge of LLL in 4 universities. One university used the notion of “learning community” or ‘learning organisation’.
- Continuity and structural links but which were currently in a fragile state or under construction with an interesting attempt to involve the whole community, or where the links were not yet possible due to the small number of people involved. This was the situation in 3 universities
- LLL preoccupation was limited or concentrated on isolated academic staff, or separated services developing more or less independently their own policy. This was the situation in 3 universities.

Diagram 1 shows the three configurations of Internal relationships.

Diagram 1. INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS CONFIGURATION

First configuration

- Commitment of the top management
- High level of involvement of academics
- Dedicated Services
- Strong relationships with external partners
- Staff development

Second configuration

- Conviction of the top management, but among other preoccupations
- Limited involvement of academics
- UCE Services playing a central role in the development of the reflection and implementation
- Limited or problematic relationships with external partners

Third configuration

- No real commitment from the top management
- Involvement of academics limited to the activities initiated by the UCE Service
- Separated Services
- Strong relationships with external partners

3. The LLLU Strategizing characterisation and development steps

The most important informal elements playing a role during the strategizing process within universities were identified as:

1. interaction with society (enterprises, public bodies, loose cooperation,); and
2. mobilisation or motivation of the university members, willing to increase accessibility to LLL.

Even if some informal elements play a role in the strategizing process, the process appeared to be dominantly formal and formally organised within universities. For 8 universities, a 'formal' process was initiated on basis of the following elements:

1. collaboration with external bodies and entities (closed or formal contracted partnerships with enterprises, governmental bodies);
2. correspondence with the global university strategy;
3. part of the university mainstream (in a holistic way). Some universities have created specific groups or councils for formalising the strategizing process and in one there was a strong link with research in strategizing.

The results show that the majority of the universities were active in the implementation phase: 4 universities had developed a collective strategizing approach as mentioned before. The most frequent element concerning implementation is the adaptation of university provision: the variety in the services offered and the flexibility of training pathways. The second one was the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

4. The Tools and Methods used for LLLU strategizing

For this part of the analysis, a distinction has to be made between the tools and methods used as LLL implementation strategies and those used during the LLL strategizing process.

The most frequent tool used in the LLL implementation by the universities was identified as informal learning and the associated validation procedure (APL, RPL); the second most frequent included 'special services to learners', i.e. a support programme for adult learners, guidance...).

However, the most frequently used tools during the LLL strategizing were respectively

1. public fund allocation,
2. external funding and
3. use of a strategic plan.

At least 4 universities mentioned explicitly the (intense) use of a strategic plan.

Concerning the methods used during the LLL strategizing, the results are more diverse: the triangle approach (research-education-innovation), budget control (cost management or self-financing), network reinforcement, a decentralised approach were identified within 8 of the 10 universities.

The monitoring of quality – more dedicated to LLL implementation – appeared to be important in 3 universities and very important in a further 2. Specific strategy methods (for example, benchmarking) were scarcely mentioned.

5. The LLLU strategizing product communication

Little information concerning strategizing communication was available in the case studies. Events and conferences appear to be the most used way to communicate about the LLL strategizing product (LLL strategy).

b. Qualitative transversal analysis on LLLU Strategies (content)

The qualitative transversal analysis of LLL strategy focuses on the content of the different ULLL strategies developed by the 10 consortium partners. It is mainly an in-depth interpretation, organisation and comparison of their differences and similarities in order to identify common elements, which play a significant role in the elaboration of ULLL strategies and which might be transferable to other universities eager to improve their LLL strategies.

Like the analysis on the strategizing process, this analysis used the questions of the Strategy-as-Practice approach developed by Whittington (Whittington, 2003, pp. 117-125) as a point of departure for formulating new questions focusing on the content of LLL strategies, concerning vision, motivation, values, challenges and implementation perspectives.

On the basis of these new questions the content of the cases studies collected from the 10 universities in the ALLUME partnership was reorganised by one researcher in grids¹¹.

The “rewritten” versions of the case studies were validated by presenting them to the 10 partners in order to receive their feedback, comments, reactions, additional information and finally their agreement. The revised versions were then analysed transversally searching for elements in common or different from one university to another in order to address the following questions:

- What elements play a significant role in the elaboration of a strategy or contribute to the preparation of a strategy in each university?
- What key issues could be part of guidelines for other universities?

To this end, the strategy content analysis focused on:

1. Vision¹², mission¹³, motivations and values
2. Challenges and objectives
3. Organisation
4. Discussions about LLLU strategy – paths to change
5. Implementation perspectives and necessary conditions for the pathways

The analysis structured on these 5 axes identified some similarities between university strategies but also showed significant differences between them. It therefore demonstrates there are different models of potential or real implementation of LLL strategies in universities.

¹¹ For the different grids, please see have a look at the ALLUME webpage where the grids can be downloaded: <http://allume.eucen.eu/documents> (last accessed on 27/10/2011)

¹² Vision: Defines the desired or intended future state of the institution in terms of its fundamental objective and/or strategic direction in a long term view.

¹³ Mission: Defines the fundamental purpose of the institution, basically describing why it exists and what it does to achieve its Vision.

1. Vision, mission, motivation and values

Regarding the missions, motivations and values there was more commonality in the commitments reflecting an evolution of the conception and the role of universities in the society:

- All 10 universities underlined the evolution of the traditional **missions** of the university tending to provide better services to individuals (of all ages), to companies and to society in general; and a leading role in implementing a knowledge based society and contributing to sustainable development
- The **motivations** are mainly to contribute both at the development of individuals and society and the adoption of a more learner centred approach
- The **values** are based on the responsibility of the university: to develop citizens free and able to progress, to face new challenges, to contribute to the society, and to implement quality culture and sustainability.

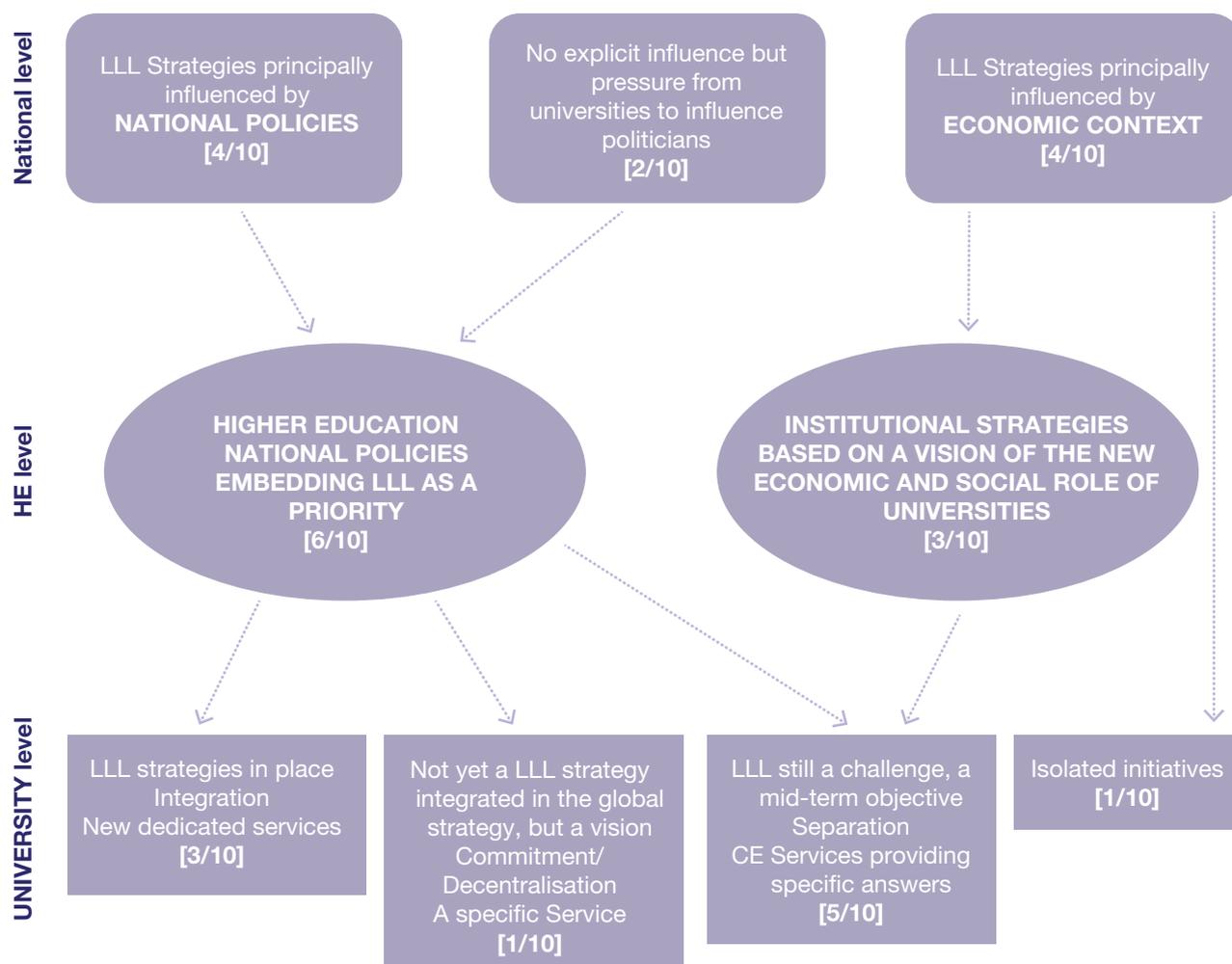
Linking together the missions, motivation and values with the external context and drivers mentioned in section *The drivers for LLLU strategizing* above, it was possible to identify 4 types of institutional positioning regarding LLL strategies:

- Universities where LLL strategies are more or less in place, aiming at an integration of initial and continuing education and offering new services trying to meet the needs of more diversified learners;
- Universities not yet having an explicit strategy but having a vision of the future, showing intentions, exploring different approaches. They demonstrate a real commitment but delegate to a specific internal service the role of convincing people and implementing the process;
- Universities where to define and to put in practice a LLL strategy is still a challenge, a mid-term objective. They are in discussions; some take initiatives but without real impact. For the moment they entrust the Continuing Education Service(s) with this mission asking them to provide the relevant answers.
- Universities reporting only on isolated initiatives taken at faculty level or individual level.

During the dissemination meeting in Barcelona, participants mentioned a fifth situation of universities (not represented in the ALLUME partnership) where LLL may be happening and seen as important in some contexts but where the senior management of the university has decided that it is not an appropriate element of the global strategy of the institution, giving priority to traditional missions of the University, particularly research.

Diagram 2 represents the 4 types of models identified in ALLUME project.

Diagram 2. KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING LLL STRATEGIES IN UNIVERSITIES/IMPACTS ON UNIVERSITIES/ARTICULATION OF THESE KEY FACTORS



Legend: [x/y] = number of universities in this category/total number of universities cases

2. Challenges and objectives

Despite the different visions expressed by the 10 universities, they referred in more or less the same words to the key challenges that universities have to face now:

- To meet the needs of both individuals and society is the most important challenge.
- In order to meet these various needs, universities have to increase close relationships with their environment, elaborate new policies, and provide new services both to the individuals and to the society.

This means that universities will be obliged:

- to develop student-centred provision and arrangements;
- to provide new services for mature students, for instance LLL guidance, validation of formal, non formal and informal learning;
- to increase diversification and flexibility of programmes ;
- to give more space to multi-disciplinarity and inter-disciplinarity.

Bringing about these changes also requires the development of a culture of quality and the organisation of staff and management development and new management structures.

Diagram 3 presents schematically the challenges and the objectives expressed by the 10 universities.

Diagram 3. CHALLENGES AND OBJECTIVES



3. Organisation for LLLU implementation

The institutional organisation presented in the 10 self-assessment reports (case studies) reflects the evolution of traditional ‘University Continuing Education¹⁴ Services’ (whatever they are called) in universities. There were 3 types of organisations:

1. ‘Traditional’ University Continuing Education Services, acting as separated units, but diversifying the services provided and enlarging their range of provision and programmes offered;
2. Co-existence of 2 units (found in 2 universities): one in charge of non-degree programmes (short courses, certificates, specific programmes for adults,...) and one in charge of access and participation of mature students (usually called “returners”) in academic programmes;
3. Units offering a range of services to adults or mature students in a LLL perspective.
4. The two first types of organisation are more in a separation perspective, the third one in an integration perspective. But the landscape is becoming more complicated due to the multiplication of actors involved.

New issues and discussions about organisation have appeared:

- Centralisation vs decentralisation. Universities already having a LLL strategy are encouraging decentralisation, helping faculties and internal departments to develop their offer for both young and mature students, in academic programmes and in short training courses. Centralisation concerns quality assurance, coordination of programmes and new services to learners.
- Articulation between units. In universities having established two units in parallel (one dedicated to academic programmes and one dedicated to short training courses) the challenge is to establish coordination between the two units in order to create the conditions for a LLL strategy
- The increasing role of Councils/Committees in designing LLL policies at university level [5 of the 10 universities], together with the commitment of Rectors (5 of the 10 universities). Thus there seems to be a progressive move from a peripheral vision and conception of UCE to a more central approach based on the elaboration of a LLL strategy. Integration: The integration of initial and continuing education in a LLL perspective is based on the combination of two factors: decentralisation (responsibility for programmes and products placed on faculties and internal departments), and the provision of new services dedicated to reception and access, guidance and counselling, validation of formal, non formal and informal learning
- Staff development: increasing role of UCE units in the elaboration and promotion of training programmes for staff playing a role in continuing education and LLL.

¹⁴ In short UCE for University Continuing Education

4. Discussion about LLLU implementation strategy – paths to change

The discussions during LLLU strategizing arise from universities' key questions for the future. They concern mainly the way to implement LLL strategies, evaluating or measuring the chance of success and the impact factors. In the 10 self-assessment reports (cases studies) three levels of discussions were identified on the implementation of LLLU strategies and ways or paths to change:

- A first group underlined the **necessary change in university culture**:
 - The LLL perspective introduces a new level of complexity in universities: universities have to think globally their educational strategy, to consider initial education and continuing education as a unique process (it is still a challenge), to promote cooperation instead of competition, to be more committed with services provided to learners
 - Universities have to set up a new equilibrium between their traditional missions
 - Some progress has been registered in some universities that have taken time, opened the floor to discussions and debates, developed pilots and initiatives
 - Sustainability from the beginning of any reflection - the institutional dimension and not only the individual dimension

- The second group presented a **list of issues** that have to be addressed and solved before a LLLU strategy can be implemented
 - Lack of awareness of colleagues
 - Resistance from colleagues
 - Lack of interest or commitment from the top management, LLL is not a priority
 - Lack of technical resources, of pedagogical design competences
 - Competition with other missions
 - Putting together local and/or individual initiatives

- The third group identified **funding as a pre-condition**
 - Necessity of setting up a new funding model despite the crisis

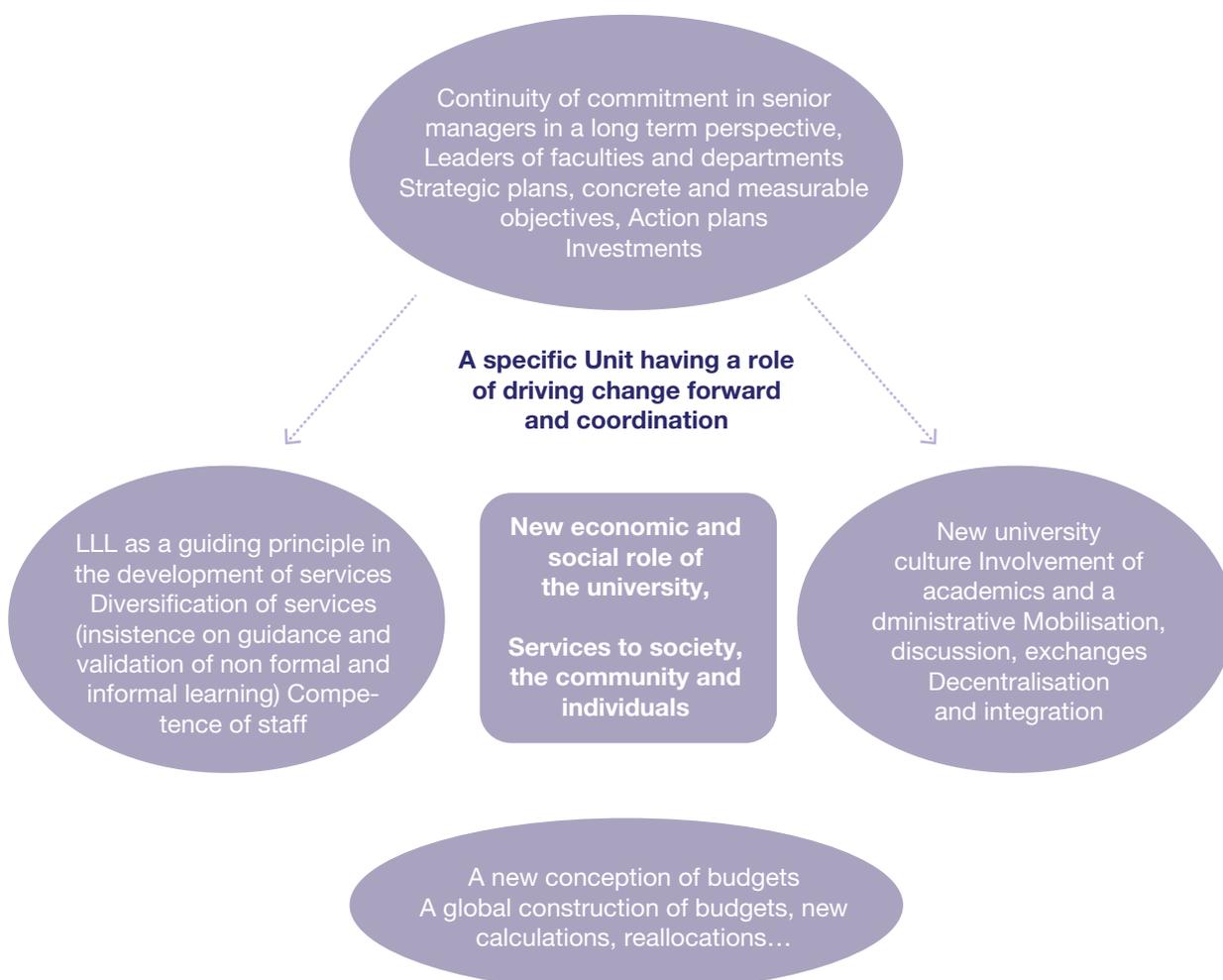
5. Implementation perspectives and necessary conditions on pathways

The transversal analysis focusing on the content of current developments identified 8 conditions for implementing a Lifelong Learning University (LLU):

- A shared vision of the future: the new economic and social role of universities: services to society, the community, individuals
- Sustainable commitment of senior managers, heads of faculties and departments, the existence of strategic documents, plans,...
- A strong specific unit having a role of driving forward change and coordinating developments
- LLL as a guiding principle in the development of university services to learners
- Diversification of services, priority given to guidance and counselling
- Competence of staff
- Creation of a new culture by communication, discussion and debate
- Decentralisation and integration

Diagram 4 represents and structures these priorities.

Diagram 4. NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR A LLLU IMPLEMENTATION



c. Conclusion on the two transversal analyses

The two transversal analyses on self-assessment reports (10 university partners' cases) performed in ALLUME showed different levels of implementation among our partnership, but also different ways or paths to develop a LLLU strategy (Diagram 1) and different visions and objectives in their LLLU strategy.

There is no single way; universities are likely to use different methods and tools. A single model does not exist; instead there are different approaches linked to the university vision and objectives, to the economic and social environment, to the internal and external actors, to the influence of partners, to funding, to regulations.

On the basis of the institutional vision and of the national policy dimension four types of LLL strategies (Diagram 2) which lead to different modes of organisation from 'separation' to 'integration' (section i.3 Organisation for LLLU Implementation) have been identified.

However some key elements appear common to all partners:

- the objectives and the expected results;
- funding and the necessity to elaborate a new funding model in each institution;
- a cultural change in the university, moving from an academic vision to a new conception of the role of the university offering services to society, the community, and individuals, based on research ("societal interaction with research and education");
- the identification of similar problems that colleagues have to address in order to promote a LLL strategy in their respective institutions.

Another key element seems to be the necessity of providing new services, more focused on guidance, counselling, mentoring, and validation of non formal and informal learning.

This requires from universities the creation of units in charge of pushing forward change, implementation and coordination of these new approaches and activities. All partners stated that to be successful in LLL, universities must engage the support and mobilise heads of faculties and departments and colleagues, combining centralised piloting with decentralised and individual responsibility. This also requires monitoring and updating the defined strategy taking into account the emerging results, the organisation's plasticity and reactivity, and better anticipating change and evolution in the environment.

Diagram 4 sums up the necessary conditions for LLLU implementation.

2. Tools for Self-Analysis and Benchmarking

This section gives a short description of the three tools developed by the ALLUME project to support universities with concrete actions in the development of their own LLL strategies. A full detailed account of the tools - the templates and the results of their use in the project - can be found in the accompanying report Tools and Results.

The three tools gather the knowledge about LLL strategies in place at different middle-sized European universities and, following the analysis of their strategies, present mechanisms to facilitate the strategy developing process of other higher education institutions (HEIs). These tools were developed based on good practices at work in the area of LLL (strategies) in 10 universities from 8 different European Member States and on the insights and suggestions for improvement obtained in 6 testing visits to institutions with less advanced LLL strategies.

The majority of the 6 testing universities welcomed the idea of the testing visits and considered the tools as interesting. Thus, the validation of the tools in the testing process showed that they are useful for supporting universities which have already started to develop LLL processes and that they can have an impact.

Following up the results and impact of the testing some months after the visits took place, the supportive character of the process and of the guidelines became visible:

- » Inclusion of LLL as one of the fundamental principles of action in the draft of the West University of Timisoara's Charter
- » Embedding of University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) in the Zentrum für Lehre und Weiterbildung (ZWL) in the University of Stuttgart
- » Design of concrete ULLL strategies in the University of Stuttgart

a. Objectives of the tools

The tools intend to be reflexive in nature and to provide support to universities and other actors in the field of learning at academic level (EQF level 6 – level 8), such as policy makers, research institutes, commercial enterprises offering learning opportunities, representatives of labour unions representing the individuals.

They support a reflexive approach to the development of a lifelong learning culture within universities and for the design of a lifelong learning strategy adapted to the specific needs of each university. They also assist in the practical implementation of lifelong learning by inviting universities and other LLL-actors to formulate concrete action plans, connected to (for example):

- curriculum development, enhancing guidance and counselling
- renewal of the student recruitment strategy, reaching for new audiences
- construction of a quality system or launching a quality charter (e.g. learning achievement, graduation rates, relevance for employment, Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning)
- conducting an institutional, field-specific or thematic evaluation
- designing the corporate governance of the social interaction of the university
- planning of the staff development activities, both to foster lifelong learning in the institution as well as for their own individual lifelong learning
- institutional relations (e.g. partnerships, networks, resource sharing, problem-solving assistance)

The online publication Tools and Results¹⁵ includes full detail in a format ready for use in strategy-working processes.

b. Structure of the tools

The ALLUME project developed 3 distinct tools:

1. Tool for Self-Analysis (Process)

This tool works with the strategy-as-practice approach developed by Whittington and invites universities to analyse in detail their way of doing strategies. In this way, it helps to identify key (internal and external) actors involved in the strategizing process and facilitates identifying the single steps undertaken in making a strategy. This tool has a strong internal organisation focus.

2. Tool for Self-Analysis (Content)

This tool assists universities in getting a strategic overview about their current LLL-strategy, mission, vision and goals. Furthermore, it invites institutions to select 3 key priorities for the next years and to work in detail on them, leading to a revision of the current LLL-strategy and the formulation of an action plan.

3. Tool for Benchmarking against the European Universities' Charter on LLL

This tool invites HEIs to benchmark their performance and engagement against the 10 institutional commitments of the European Universities' Charter on LLL and define its own objectives. A set of examples of good practice for each commitment helps the user in understanding. It is recommended to use this tool in combination with the Tool for Self-Analysis (Content) in order to get more ideas for LLL priorities (especially the sections 'Revising your LLL strategy', 'Benefits' and 'Action Plan').

¹⁵ Please have a look at <http://allume.eucen.eu/documents> (last accessed 27/10/2011) for the downloadable versions of the two ALLUME publications

5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Following the results of the two transversal analyses explained above and the experiences gained and topics discussed during the testing visits, various recommendations could be developed for senior managers of universities, vice-rectors as well as regional national and European public authorities on how to organise and initiate the further development of LLL strategy processes and contents.

1. From Continuing Education within Universities to Lifelong Learning Universities: a major cultural and organisational change

To move from a continuing education perspective to a lifelong learning one is a major cultural and organisational change, as it impacts on the whole institution.

A LLL university acts as an open system and a learning organisation. It means flexible structures, permeable at the boundaries, and networked in partnerships with different stakeholders.

In a LLL perspective, the learner-centred approach promoted by the Bologna reform is extended to a wide diversity of people: putting at the centre of the learning process all the ‘students’ – at any time of their life (personal, working or social life), with a diversity of experiential background and a variety of knowledge, know-how and competences. Furthermore involving them in the evaluation of their own learning is a paradigm shift like a ‘Copernican’ revolution for the universities. It questions the where and how knowledge is produced and validated. It transforms university practices, their usual ways of producing and transmitting knowledge and organising teaching. It transforms their attitudes and values.

The ALLUME project, as well as previous ones (BeFlex, BeFlex Plus, SIRUS...), have shown that this is a profound and major change for the culture, the structure and the organisation of the universities – a paradigm shift.

As any cultural change, **the evolution towards a LLL University requires time and awareness**: time to change the mentality and perspective, time to agree on a common vision; awareness because consequences and implications have to be taken into account. **The university should elaborate a new strategy including LLL in its core whilst at the same time, retaining strengths in research, teaching and service to society, and being watchful of the future of its institution as a human organisation. Consequently, work has to be done in terms of awareness-raising of the importance of LLL among colleagues and the leadership, fighting lack of interest to promote LLL (strategies).**

These two elements – time and awareness – have been clearly demonstrated in the ALLUME case studies.

2. The LLLU strategy process: how to become a LLL University

“Strategy is about how to reach a desirable future”(Durand Th., 2008). LLL strategy is about how to become a LLL university. To help leaders and managers, strategic tools have been developed to handle and to reveal the complexity of their environment. The strategic tools are guiding instruments in strategic thinking, strategic decision making and strategic implementation processes.

However, universities have to know when they are ready to develop and/or improve their LLL strategies and when they want to dedicate time to perform this task as it is a labour-intensive process¹⁶. The time dedicated to the development of a strategy has to be seen in terms of benefits derived from an overarching strategic framework.

While strategic goals and objectives may vary from university to university, depending on their capacities and on their specific environment, the practices and activities which lead to an elaboration of the strategy – the ‘strategizing process’ – may be similar. The methodology used is transferable. For this purpose, a part of the ALLUME analysis has adopted the ‘Strategy-as-Practice’ approach.

Traditionally, strategy was seen as something organisations have: the roadmap. *But we recommend the strategy-as-practice approach which views strategy as something that is done within organisations (Whittington, 1996, 2006).*

The main findings concerning the LLL strategy process, emerging from the ALLUME results, can be summed up in the 3 following recommendations:

a. From a tacit, un-expressed, isolated and un-diffused strategy to an explicit, formulated, shared and communicated strategy

Depending on the internal context (the vision of the university) and on the external context (legislation, government support), different forms of LLL strategies have been identified in the ALLUME case studies and testing visits.

Independently of the position, role or function of the people involved in the ‘strategizing’ process, this strategy should be made explicit, well-formulated, and shared as much as possible with colleagues, with other institutional units’ representatives, with leaders and rectors, with external visitors, and to communicate it effectively internally and externally.

The place of discussion and exchanges during the conception and elaboration of the LLL strategy has been identified as crucial. Priorities and findings must be discussed. The role of internal communication in creating internal partnerships and internal supporting networks has been highlighted throughout the strategizing process and for initiating institutional and cultural change.

¹⁶ Please see the publication Tools and Results, subsection ‘Tools and Results’ for further examples of alternatives to strategic frameworks, which is accessible via <http://allume.eucen.eu/documents> (last accessed 27/10/2011) for download

ALLUME showed clearly that internal communication and networking processes developed into a major concern. While other EUCEN projects have often (quite rightly) stressed the importance of opening up institutions to external stakeholders and of developing external networks, **the work on developing strategies now also requires stronger attention to and deeper analysis of internal organisation and communication processes.**

b. Recurrent and collaborative work within the institution

The strategy process or ‘strategizing’ should be a continuous process due to evolution in the internal or external environment: the action plans may be revised or adapted, the goals may be changed. The strategy process is also a collective task growing around a common vision of what a LLL university is and a common understanding of the challenges.

Different ways of initiating collaboration in LLL strategizing have been identified

- Top down: decision of the rector or the rector team to become a LLL university
- Bottom up: development by some practitioners who would like to insert LLL catalyst within the university, considering it as their mission, with or without an official support of the leadership
- Middle – Bottom – Top : decision of faculty’s dean or LLL director to implement LLL University principles within their spheres of influence, acting as a pioneer unit.

This recurrent and collective work can start at different levels of the university’s organisation. There is no single ‘best way’ or ‘unique pathway’ in these different modes. Instead, universities have to adapt their LLL strategy process to their specific circumstances, using the available tools and techniques and have to decide on the approach to be used and on concrete actions.

Nonetheless, applying the ‘System Theory Principles’ on the strategy, we can say that the sum of individual strategies is less than a system-wide strategy. **In this perspective, independently of the way of initiating the LLL strategy process (top-down, bottom-up or middle-bottom-top), the LLL strategizing should be undertaken at an institutional level and it should be inscribed, formally registered, in the university structure.**

c. Leadership to pilot the change

“Multiple leadership is required to pilot the change inside complex organisations” (Vas 2011, Eisenberger et al, 2002; Skogstad et al, 1999). **As complex organisations, universities should identify the diverse leaders, each having different roles in order to involve them in this LLL strategizing process.**

d. Sustainable commitment of senior managers, vice rectors, head of faculties, LLL council etc.

Although it may not be necessary to involve the leadership in the first exercises and first orientations about the future LLL processes, the ALLUME testing visits demonstrated that their support has to be ensured for further deepening of the processes and the embedding of LLL as a global institutional principle.

Once the diversified leaders have been identified and involved in initiating the LLL strategizing process, **we have to recommend to universities to secure the commitment of senior managers, vice rectors, etc in order to obtain a sustainable development. This goes hand in hand with the creation of strategic documents, concrete and measureable objectives and plans making the commitments binding and with identifying a shared vision of the future.**

e. Usage of the tools developed by the ALLUME project

A wide range of tools now exist to support these developments in universities; there is no need to begin strategising by designing tools. The tools developed as a result of this project provide a tried and tested starting point for this process

3. The need of guidance and support in LLLU strategy process: an experts network for LLLU strategizing

As practiced and noted during the ALLUME project, the ‘external eyes’ play an important role in the LLL strategy process. Discussing the LLL strategy content and process with colleagues from other universities is a real opportunity to refine or strengthen the vision, to revise or adapt the action plan, to become aware or to understand the weaknesses, to identify the new challenges or simply to reformulate them more clearly.

We therefore recommend to universities to initiate or revise their LLL strategy process and to invite support from other external LLLU ‘strategisers’ at national and international level.

We further recommend that EUCEN launches and develops a network of experts and expertise in order to assist universities in finding suitable partners/supporters in these pathways to Lifelong Learning Universities.

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