

GRID FOR A STRATEGY

UNIVERSITY OF GENT

1 VISION

- Analytical dimension: challenges, identification of drivers of change

Flanders in action (January 2009)

Pact van Vilvoorde

Competentieagenda 2010

Pact 2020

- Strategical dimension:

- Missions/statementst

Ghent University Association's Position Paper (November 2005)

Decree regarding the restructuring of HE in Flanders (April 2003)

Decree on the flexibilisation of HE in Flanders (April 2004)

The concept of lifelong learning has to be linked to the idea of “sustainable education”, i.e. education that takes into account aspects such as diversity, strategic connections, reciprocal responsibility, added value and learning to learn. Sustainable education is aimed at learning to find solutions for complex, uncertain and unpredictable problems that may occur now or... later, i.e. a lifelong. Hence, Ghent University Association and its member institutions, explicitly want to adopt a holistic view on lifelong learning, encompassing a whole range of activities and initiatives that have in common that they are situated at the “higher levels” of the qualifications frameworks but are not limited by structural, institutional or organisational boundaries.

Lifelong learning is a core element in the vision on education of Ghent University:

By means of its qualitative education, this university wants to prepare its students and graduates for lifelong learning. A positive attitude towards lifelong learning supposes that the student himself shows the necessary inquisitiveness, willingness to learn and auto-organisation to deliver the necessary efforts and time-investment. This is why room is created for independent learning, communication between students and teachers and

among students and to take on one's own learning process. Also the integration of ICT in education is given an important place. The university is also determined to continue along the taken route of Europeanization and internationalisation.

Also the Educational concept "Dare to think" refers to elements of lifelong learning: The sixth pillar [of the "Dare to think"-concept] stresses that creativity supposes lifelong knowledge development. Ghent University tries to educate students to academics possessing a dose of inquisitiveness, willingness to learn, learning strategies and auto-organisation. The educational programmes, from the beginning onwards, aim for the enhancement of the selfcontrol in the learning and independent thinking of students.

- Motivations
- Values

Sustainable participation in the knowledge society

Open access and social role

2 OBJECTIVES

Within Ghent University Association educational and learning methods are being developed that promote lifelong learning and contribute to a European Higher Education Area:

- the implementation and use of a digital learning environment (based on open source technology) will allow to provide over the internet information and learning materials and to optimise the guidance and communication between students and teachers. Such an association-wide learning platform has numerous advantages for students and teachers. Departments can jointly develop and simultaneously offer certain modules; guidance and assessment can be organised from a distance; students can plan themselves when and where to follow a course etc.

- a procedure for the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) will be set up, under supervision of a so-called "Validating Body". By validating practical experience through this procedure, the entry to higher education is broadened and it becomes possible to define individual learning pathways.

The Validating Body will develop a uniform, joint and documented quality assurance system.

Awaiting further regulation on the Flemish level, this procedure will be evaluated eventually leading to adjustments.

- Developing flexible learning pathways. The members of GUA already put in a great effort in making the learning pathways more flexible (e.g. by organising part-time pathways, modularising,...). Ghent University Association encourages its members to attune and to synchronise at short notice its initiatives and to eventually realise new activities. [...]

- To be able to cater for the changing needs of the knowledge society, the members currently develop a broad offer of continuous education initiatives. In a later phase, Ghent University Association will attune the continuous education policies.

- Lifelong learning within a continuously changing knowledge economy, implies a greater differentiation within the offer of programmes, e.g. the development of tailor-made programmes at the demand of third parties. Therefore, Ghent University Association develops special relationships with regional governmental and other relevant stakeholders and collaborates with umbrella organisations from the professional field

3 ORGANISATION

Ghent University Association established in 2003

This of course does not mean that the steps taken on the LLL-path were restricted to these offered in the framework of the Bologna-process (and the restructuring and flexibilisation agenda that go with it).

Since there was little need for the association and the institutions to take initiative in this, they took on the challenge in other areas of lifelong learning, in accordance with the holistic view on lifelong learning.

This means that also in the following areas initiatives were taken:

- Continuous education: which should be understood as (short) training courses for graduates, offering them novel information on a broad variety of subjects;
- Professionalization / Internal training initiatives for staff members: also the role modelling of the own employees is important; hence the professional development of the staff has increasingly gained importance over the last years;
- Links to external parties (contract activities,...) : especially important to increase the innovation potential (of the region) are the links with external parties, as well as individual companies and organisations as umbrella organisations (of employers, of employees,...) ;
- Initiatives for alumni: the last years, all institutions have shown an increased interest in setting up structural links with their alumni; not only as far as offering them possibilities for continuous education (see above) is concerned but also from a networking and binding point of view (treating alumni as “ambassadors”);
- Internationalisation: more and more it is believed that it is important to offer students chances to experience part of their lifelong learning path in an international context (e.g. an internship after graduation, structural agreements with foreign institutions for a top-up / specialised study, etc.)

4 ACTORS

- Internal/external

It has already been mentioned that Ghent University Association and its member institutions, explicitly adopt a holistic view on lifelong learning. This does not make it easy to earmark which jobs or which staff members are specifically dealing with “lifelong learning”.

Where possible, and especially for some “new” tasks assigned to higher education institutions and associations by law (see above) an indication has been given of the absolute numbers devoted to some specific tasks.

But in reality most of these tasks are broad and cannot fully be linked to “lifelong learning”. It gives however an overall indication.

For Ghent University the priority for the coming years is to set up a thorough internal debate on lifelong learning with all relevant stakeholders involved. This should eventually lead to more policy preparatory actions, resulting in a more coherent lifelong learning policy.

- Isolated actors/teams/ collective approach
 - a network of learning/study track counsellors that support students in their lifelong learning-path at the institution
 - people responsible for the intake of candidates in a variety of procedures:
 - the joint APEL-procedure
 - the common alternative admittance procedure
 - an IT-based system for the administration of study programmes and students that is able of dealing with the flexibility offered

5 DISCUSSIONS

- Risks vs. benefits
- Strengths vs. weaknesses
 - LLL embedded in mission/vision/strategy
 - But internal competition between partners
 - Not strong enough in WBL
 - Budgets too low
- Debates, conflicts
 - How broad, how inclusive, how holistic... do we have to look at lifelong learning?
 - Is it a blessing or a curse to have, to some extent, a governmental or even legal framework for lifelong learning?
 - Can we set-up a model which balances better the available resources (manpower, infrastructure,...) with the continuously increasing demand?
 - How can the association take on its role as a “network initiator” for lifelong learning?
 - How can we better make use of the media to bring about the LLL-message? Or is this not the role of higher education institutions?
 - Can we create levers for lifelong learning by changing towards another (more open, less monolithic) vision on higher education? How to proceed in this?
 - Even though the demand for innovation from an economical point of view is obviously increasing (urging for more skilled/better trained/... people), higher education does not (always) seem to be the logical partner for companies in this? How can we alter this?
 - At the levels of individuals, the current economical crises might stimulate them (e.g. unemployed people) to engage in lifelong learning. How can higher education institutions get involved in this on a more structural and vaster level?

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- Level and type of involvement

Association as a LLL organisation

6 DECISION

7 IMPLEMENTATION

- Key elements: infrastructure, human resources, organization
- Roadmap, workplans, timing
- Budget: costs – resources

But the basic principle of this Finance Decree is that it treats students as much as possible on an equal basis. This means that on one hand there is little incentive funding for specific lifelong learning initiatives (except for programmes for students who combine their studies with a job, see infra), but on the other hand it gives equal opportunities to all kinds of learners. This was already the basis of the Flexibility decree referred to above and is hence extended in the new financing system. Of course other activities also involve financial preconditions which have to be taken into account, e.g. if activities are set up for alumni, for the professionalization of the own employees of the institutions, at the demand of external parties or for the wider public.

- Evaluation: indicators

For lifelong learning to really get embedded in higher education, we need in the future some clear indicators that decision makers can use and of which they know they will be held accountable for. This is probably one of the key-issues, but the problem is that existing performance indicators will not be sufficient to cater for this. Lifelong learning is after all an extremely multidimensional concept. Hence, Ghent University Association and its member institutions want to caveat this issue urging for the development of such a system of multidimensional performance indicators (e.g. an “equalizer”-mechanism) which should allow for individual institutions to decide on their own priorities and to deliberately perform below average for one aspect but above for others.

- Management, leadership

Key decision makers are convinced of the importance of LLL (at least : pay lip-service to it)

8 PERSPECTIVES

- Further developments
That's why, for the future two other main issues arise:

1. what are the long-term effects of the quite recent legal initiatives (e.g. new Finance Decree, the Decree on the Qualifications Structure) and what other legislative initiatives can we expect in the (near) future?
2. will Ghent University Association and its member institutions develop initiatives that surpass further the governmentally proposed framework?

- Next steps

Finally, and although this is a very time- and money-consuming matter, it becomes more and more clear that investments in guidance and counseling, either at the level of individual (candidate) students or specific target groups, will increasingly become important at the level of Ghent University Association and its member institutions. Not only in terms of personal resources but also at the level of IT-support. As stated before, an IT-based system for the administration of study programmes and students that is able of dealing with the flexibility offered has been developed.

It will however be necessary to let LLL-activities in higher education fully evolve into a system that considers higher education studies as a phase in a learner's study track and that can hence also link to other evolutions inside (higher) formal education, but also regarding for instance non-formal education.

These will certainly be some of the key success factors for lifelong learning in the future, but the individual institutions all have their own elements they might want to stress