

ALLUME – Pathways for Lifelong Learning Universities?

Report of the final ALLUME event, Barcelona, 12-13 September 2011

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CE	Continuing education
HEI	Higher education institution
LLL	Lifelong Learning
LLLU	Lifelong Learning University
ULLL	University Lifelong Learning

The final event of the ALLUME project was held in Barcelona from 12-13 September 2011 with more than 40 participants from approximately 20 countries. It presented a significant step for the project, not only in terms of dissemination activities, but also in view of comments and suggestions to improve or further develop the preliminary project outcomes. Thus, this event did not attempt to present the final results, but rather to involve LLL-stakeholders and political decision-makers in the discussion process about the improvement of the first results of the project. Like this, the project continued its objective to stay close to end-users' needs and to ensure high multiplication results, as well as to intend to foster mainstreaming by inviting representatives of key political players in view of Lifelong Learning (LLL) and higher education (HE).

During this 2-day event, the evolution of the ALLUME project became apparent. The project started with the idea of formulating "A Lifelong Learning Model for Europe" based on the ten consortium case studies, which outline the LLL-strategies and approaches of universities with relatively advanced LLL-approaches. Following the results of the ten case studies, a set of guidelines was developed and tested in six universities in different European Member States in order to validate these guidelines as a useful tool facilitating universities' strategic development. However, while working on the case studies and carrying out the testing visits, the huge heterogeneity of LLL-provisions in universities and their ways of implementing LLL became apparent, which showed the inadequacy of the guideline approach for nowadays environments.

Consequently, the ALLUME project moved away from the idea of defining "A Lifelong Learning Model for Europe" to the direction of outlining "Pathways for Lifelong Learning Universities", which would be flexible and dynamic enough to allow universities to adapt the tools developed by the project to be used according to their specific contexts and circumstances.

The outcomes produced by the project are the following:

- 10 case studies presenting progresses in the implementation of LLL strategies in line with the 10 commitments of the Charter
- 10 case studies presented in a grid
- 2 Transversal Analysis of Case Studies
- The production of draft guidelines 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
- Transversal analysis of the testing visits
- A publication consisting of two parts
 - Building your LLL University's capacity : consisting in practical tools and self-assessments for universities
 - Transversal analysis of case studies: Containing two distinct and in-depth analysis of the 10 initial case studies

OUTLINE OF THE EVENT

It was the overall aim of the event to familiarise participants with the background and tools of the ALLUME project and to receive their comments and suggestions on the products. While the first day offered interactive workshops with background information for the developed tools and LLL-strategies in higher education, the second day was dedicated to presentations and discussions around the preliminary outcomes and products of the project¹.

The main objectives of the event were the following:

- To validate the results provided by the case studies and the testing visits
- To discuss and verify the produced tools
- To promote propositions and recommendations for the implementation of LLL strategies and policies in universities
- To contribute to the dissemination of the project results

Thus, the first day started with the keynote speeches by Manuel Assunção, Rector of the University of Aveiro (PT) and former EUCEN President, and by Maria Luisa Garcia Minguez (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency - EACEA). These were followed by two workshops on the 10 commitments of the European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning and the BeFlex Plus recommendations, and on an exercise introducing the delegates to the strategy-as-practice approach, which was used in one of the transversal analysis of the consortium case studies.

In terms of sharpening the final project products, the second day was of greater importance as it dealt directly with the ALLUME tools and initiated some vivid discussions about their value and about future options of a follow-up project. Consequently, this report will mainly focus on the second day and on evaluations of the final products.

In order to better be able to capture the feedback by participants, a questionnaire² about the event was provided online. Until the 22 September, 14 delegates filled in this questionnaire. A brief overview of the feedback will be given in section "Results of the online questionnaire".

Like in the Consultation Seminar in 2010 the following European actors were invited:

- ALLUME testing partner
- Representatives of European Institutions
- Representatives of European Networks at university level, like the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)
- European social partners

As a result, this event was also an excellent opportunity for networking among the different LLL-stakeholder and to discuss follow-up options of the project. In general, the interest in such a follow-up was shared among delegates and many were eager to be informed about future developments.

¹ For the purpose of this event, a publication with the preliminary results of the ALLUME Project was distributed to all participants.

² Please see the annexes

SUMMARY OF THE DIFFERENT SESSIONS

The second day started with an introduction to the aims, methods and outcomes of the project, including an explanation about the project's transition from "A Lifelong Learning University Model for Europe" to "Pathways for Lifelong Learning Universities". This part was followed by a dynamic presentation of the self-assessment tool produced by ALLUME and reflections on the testing process as presented by the consortium partner Kari Seppälä in collaboration with the Edith Kröber and Gabriele Schaub, representatives of the University of Stuttgart which was one of the testing institutions.

Presentation of the self-assessment tool & reflections on the testing process

This joint presentation was divided into five parts:

1. ALLUME assessment tools
2. LLL in the University of Stuttgart
3. How the tools were used in Stuttgart
4. Reflection on the exercise and the tool
5. Some ideas on the future

The flexibility of the tools was stressed once more as they can be applied by various actors for self-study or supported processes and as they open doors for various approaches. All outputs were situated in their relation to each other, which was very helpful to understand the complete scope and structure of the products. The products presented in the publication distributed to all participants were interconnected in the following way:

- Tool for positioning by benchmarking and self-assessment, which is the main document for formulating strategies and thus helps universities to find out "where they want to go"
- Exercise for the definition or revision of an institutional strategy processes, which shows universities how to strategize and which elements to consider
- The two transversal analysis of the initial consortium case studies, which could be understood as examples of good practice in certain areas and show universities "what they want to achieve"

In the following presentation, the tool for positioning and self-assessment was further explained as well as possible situations in which it could be used. Kari Seppälä remarked that not for all these areas an overall LLL-strategy was necessary. Thus, the tools would leave enough scope for universities to decide which approach to take.

One of the most valuable parts of the presentation in view of the impact of the visits and areas for improvement was the feedback given by the representatives of the University of Stuttgart and by the objective expert Kari Seppälä).

In terms of recommendations for further work with the tool for self-assessment these were:

- Adaption of the tool to the specific needs of the university, which can mean focusing on concrete parts only, but working on these, e.g. very specific commitments, in depths (carrying out a SWOT analysis for different stakeholders in view of specific commitments)
- Prior preparation was seen as necessary
- Involvement of institutional experts, colleagues dealing with LLL, at the first steps and only **later involvement of general leadership**

- Time spent on working with the tool as a sensible investment as the direction and vision of an institution is crucial and this time-investment should be seen in relation of establishing and benefiting from a developed strategy

According to the representatives of the University of Stuttgart, the testing visits showed a clear impact:

- Development of five action steps based on working with the tool for self-assessment of which two steps were already put into place in the Zentrum für Lehre und Weiterbildung (ZLW, LLL unit at the University of Stuttgart)
- Embedding ULLL in the vision of the ZWL
- Learning experience of how to derive concrete LLL-strategies

Some discussions about clarifications and options to offer this process as a consultancy or mutual benchmarking and networking activity followed.

Round table discussion by the partners about their testing experience

Two partners of the ALLUME consortium chaired the round table discussion where the testing partners from the universities of Maribor, Stuttgart, Timisoara, Bolzano and Zilina gave a short resume of their testing processes. The analysis of the visits was crucial for the ALLUME project and the development of the tool for positioning and self-assessment as they outlined limitations, gaps and stated areas for improvement. They also demonstrated that all areas of the complete process – people, products, partnership and finance – would have to be taken into account in order to establish a successful LLLU.

During the discussion round, the concept of the testing visit with the objective expert was praised and some aspects of the tool for positioning and self-assessment were discussed. The major topics included:

- Stronger focus on internal communication/networking aspects for the self-assessment tool (without forgetting the influence of external aspects)
- LLL as crucial potential in the role of knowledge exchange at an internal and external level
- Opening up commitments as moving from “student-centeredness” to “learner-centeredness”, including e.g. staff (portfolio) development
- Opening up quality assurance processes and discussions on future directions of universities to include a broader environment and different stakeholders and not only university practitioners, researchers and rectors; this factor should be considered in possible new projects

Results of the transversal analysis of strategizing – Perception by the partners

In this session, the transversal analysis of the initial ten consortium case studies based on the strategy-as-practice approach was presented. The results of this analysis were confirmed by the perception of the consortium partner universities.

The analysis, or at least a focus on concrete parts of the categories and meaning units identified, can be a useful tool for universities who are eager to improve their LLL-strategies.

The aim of this analysis was to show certain elements which all case studies had in common. This, in turn, could be used for revising the tools for ALLUME or for a follow-up project.

Application of the tool for self-positioning to the consortium's case studies: Discussion on positioning

The next presentation also focused on an additional analysis of the initial ten case studies due to the wealth of information. This work also aimed at defining common paths used in the different LLL-approaches developed by the universities and formulated different models depending on various sections like for example the vision, mission and goals, organisation and actors.

It was argued as in the presentation about the self-assessment tool and experience of the testing visits that the tools would have to be understood as a “recipe” and that depending on the area, LLL-activities could also take part without being related to an overarching LLL-strategy. It was also shown that commitments of the European Universities’ Charter on LLL provided a first focus and starting point for developing strategies, but that strategic change also required additional inputs.

Based on this transversal analysis, the following prerequisites for a successful implementation of LLL-strategies were identified:

- Shared vision of the future
- Sustainable commitment of top managers
- Strong specific unit initiating actions and giving impulses
- LLL as guiding service principle
- Diversification of services
- Competence of staff
- Creation of new culture through communication, discussion and debates
- Decentralisation and integration

The main topics of the dynamic discussion, which followed this presentation, were:

- The present analysis as a starting point for developing new tools rather than an end in itself as universities usually know which direction to take, but need strategies and tools to support them achieving their goals
- Transition and flexibility were outlined as paramount characteristics of universities to adapt to external circumstances and be able to innovate
- Inclusion of further discussion of decentralisation and centralisation in the ALLUME tools as according to the situation the one or the other might be preferable
- Question of generalisation of results: the current case studies did not allow for generalisation of results as they present ten specific cases on a self-chosen basis (e.g. the “Laissez-faire” approach of universities selling LLL activities was not included)

During this session, the possible scope and ideas for a potential follow-up project were also discussed. Suggestions included to consider the national level as well and to include more case studies, to develop recommendations or suggestions, to work on reinventing LLL-funding or to open the project up to include learners’ environments and other stakeholders in quality assurance as mentioned during the round table discussion.

Pathways for Lifelong Learning Universities!

This last session saw two very vivid and challenging presentations. The first one argued for LLL as an ethical and moral concept and the diversity of visions of LLL on the one hand, while the second urged all participants to question current ways of learning and teaching and the conception of universities calling for rethinking and opening up current university and LLL structures.

The project coordinator closed the event thanking the consortium, the commitment of the testing partners and of the external evaluator as well as the vivid participation of the audience in discussions.

Results of the online questionnaire

The participation rate in the online questionnaire was limited to 14 people out of 41, which results in a response rate of only 34%. All of the respondents stated that they would be interested in a follow-up project and all except for one could extend their professional contacts. In general, participants indicated that the workshops provided good learning opportunities as 13 out of 14 indicated that they learned some or a lot in the workshops and 12 thought that they would be able to apply some of the ideas. The overall organisation of the workshops was evaluated as well or very well and workshops met participants' expectations.

Regarding the comment sections, two participants explicitly praised the event, while three provided some suggestions for contextual improvement. It was stated that there was still a big potential for growth in the areas touched by the conference, that the positioning and constraints to implementation due to various circumstances could have been more thoroughly researched or presented. It was felt by one participant that the workshops did not provide a solution for implementation of LLL-strategies, but that the approach of the testing process and the way of embedding the EUA Charter commitments in the tools were interesting.

Although the overall feedback was quite positive, it can be seen that there is still a need for sharpening the ALLUME products and for finding proper tools and solutions for assisting institutions in practical questions on implementation. Furthermore, more research would be needed on competing interests and external factors influencing strategies and the space for decisions and actions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FINAL ALLUME PRODUCTS

During these two days, the products developed for the ALLUME project were very well presented to the audience involving them actively and triggering highly interesting debates. Although it was not possible to work in depth with each of the single tools, major insights into improving the final publication and ideas for possible follow-up projects could be gained.

The distinction of the publication into two parts – a practical one and a technical/background one – seems to be a sensible idea to follow. It should be considered to mention the testing institutions more clearly as the testing process was at the heart of the project.

Apart from some technical improvements, like including the executive summary in the final report and including acknowledgements, recommendations on how to use the different tools should be included in the section "About this document". These recommendations were given in the presentation about the tool for self-assessment and experience of the testing visits and should include:

- Description of the overall structure of the publication and connection between the different parts (practical part and analysis)
- Adaption of the tool to the institution's specific needs, which may mean focusing on some specific section in depth
- Involvement of institutional LLL-experts in the working sessions
- Awareness of time-investment necessary for this working process and its relation with the overall benefit of developing a strategy / improving a specific service

It could also be worthwhile to mention some of the impact the working process had for the testing partners' institutions to trigger more interest among the target group for the guidelines and to underline their usefulness and practicality.

Depending on the time and budgetary resources available, it could be considered to further include elements on the internal communication and networking strategy in the tool for self-assessment and positioning as mentioned by participants.

Regarding the analysis, the question of generalisation of results should be treated in the introduction and a restructuring (e.g. attaching the tables as annexes to the document) could be considered.

Some of the other suggestions articulated like a stronger opening up of the tool including more stakeholders and the broader environment as well as considering analysing more universities' LLL-strategies, would certainly go beyond the current project resources, but could be considered for a follow-up project.

Furthermore, the areas of improvement received by the feedback questionnaire clearly show the need for a further sharpening of the tools. This would, however, exceed the current scope of the project and could rather be undertaken in a follow-up project. It also shows the difficulty of developing effective and tools for implementing strategies.

Another very interesting idea for a follow-up project could be to create consultancy services or network activities/mutual benchmarking based on the concept of the testing visits and a further development and sharpening of the products and experience of the ALLUME project as the set-up of the testing process was regarded as very successful and beneficial to the visiting experts and visited institutions.

All in all, it has to be said that this final project conference proved to be extremely useful in view of further suggestions for sharpening the end results and for developing new ideas for potential projects based on ALLUME. Furthermore, the two additional analyses produced clearly exceeded the project's initial scope and added value to the outcomes.



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ANNEXES

- List of participants
- Event questionnaire (template), available via <http://allume.eucen.eu/node/78>
- Feedback received from the questionnaire