

Lifelong learning policy and practice at European HEIs

Thérèse Zhang, Deputy Director for Higher Education Policy, EUA

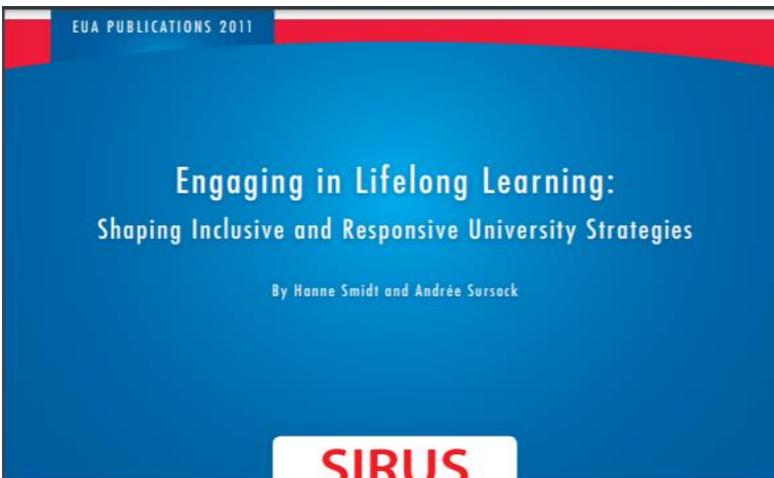
eucen Policy Talks
9 September 2020



The European University Association

- Established in 2001
- +/- 800 higher education institutions in 47 countries
- 33 National Rectors Conferences
- Voice of universities in policy making – European Higher Education Area and European Research Area
- Facilitates dialogue on higher education and research
- Range of services – sharing practices, institutional development

EUA's commitment on LLL



- Lifelong Learning Charter (2008)
- SIRUS project (2009-2011)
- Generic data from Trends series (most lately 2018 survey)
- Continued monitoring in several policy fields (e.g. EQF)
- 2019-2020: looking into how to revive the topic
- Hanne Smidt (co-author of the SIRUS report in 2011) conducted a series of interviews with 6 out of the 8 universities involved in SIRUS, to examine how the situation evolved and how.
- Discussed by the Secretaries Generals of EUA's 34 National Rectors' Conferences (NRCs)
- Participation to UNESCO's project on "Universities' contributions to LLL"

What does LLL mean in the higher education context?

Multifaceted and with different entry points (depending on country priorities and institutional profiles):

- Social emancipation and inclusion role: addressing a diverse student body (widening access, participation agenda) – has very much gained importance in the ongoing European policy discourses (EU, Bologna Process)
- Continued professional development role: offering specialisation or further education for professionals who are already proficient (or alumni).
- Community outreach role (or opportunity): collaboration with external partners (industry, schools, VET, or simply through including mature students or students who work)

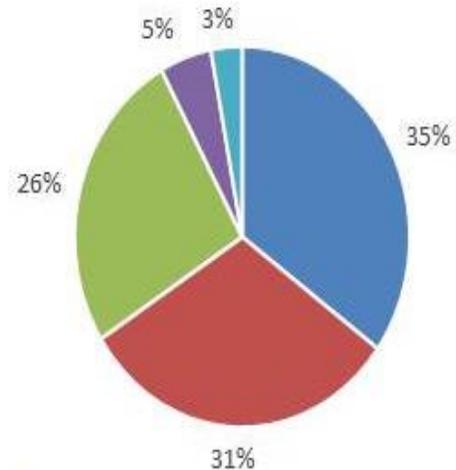


These three points do not necessarily interconnect at universities.

Recent trends:

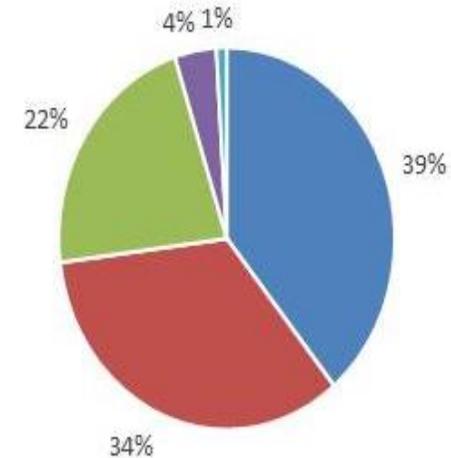
(1)
LLL seems to have gained momentum throughout years

T2003: Has your institution developed an overall strategy regarding Lifelong Learning (LLL) initiatives?



- Yes
- Yes, we are in the initial stages
- No, but we are planning this
- No, we do not see the need for this at our institution
- N.A.

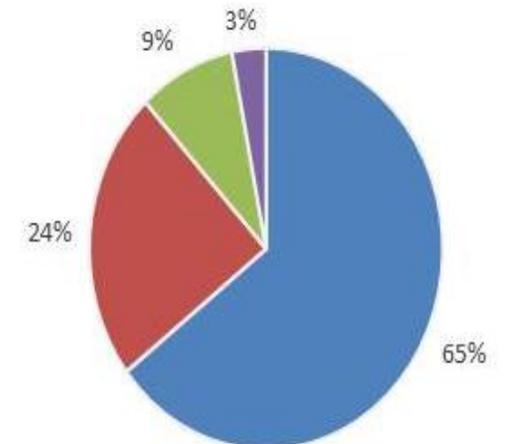
T2010: Has your institution developed an overall strategy regarding Lifelong Learning (LLL) initiatives?



- Yes
- Yes, we are in the initial stages
- No, but we are planning this
- No, we do not see the need for this at our institution
- N.A.

...2...

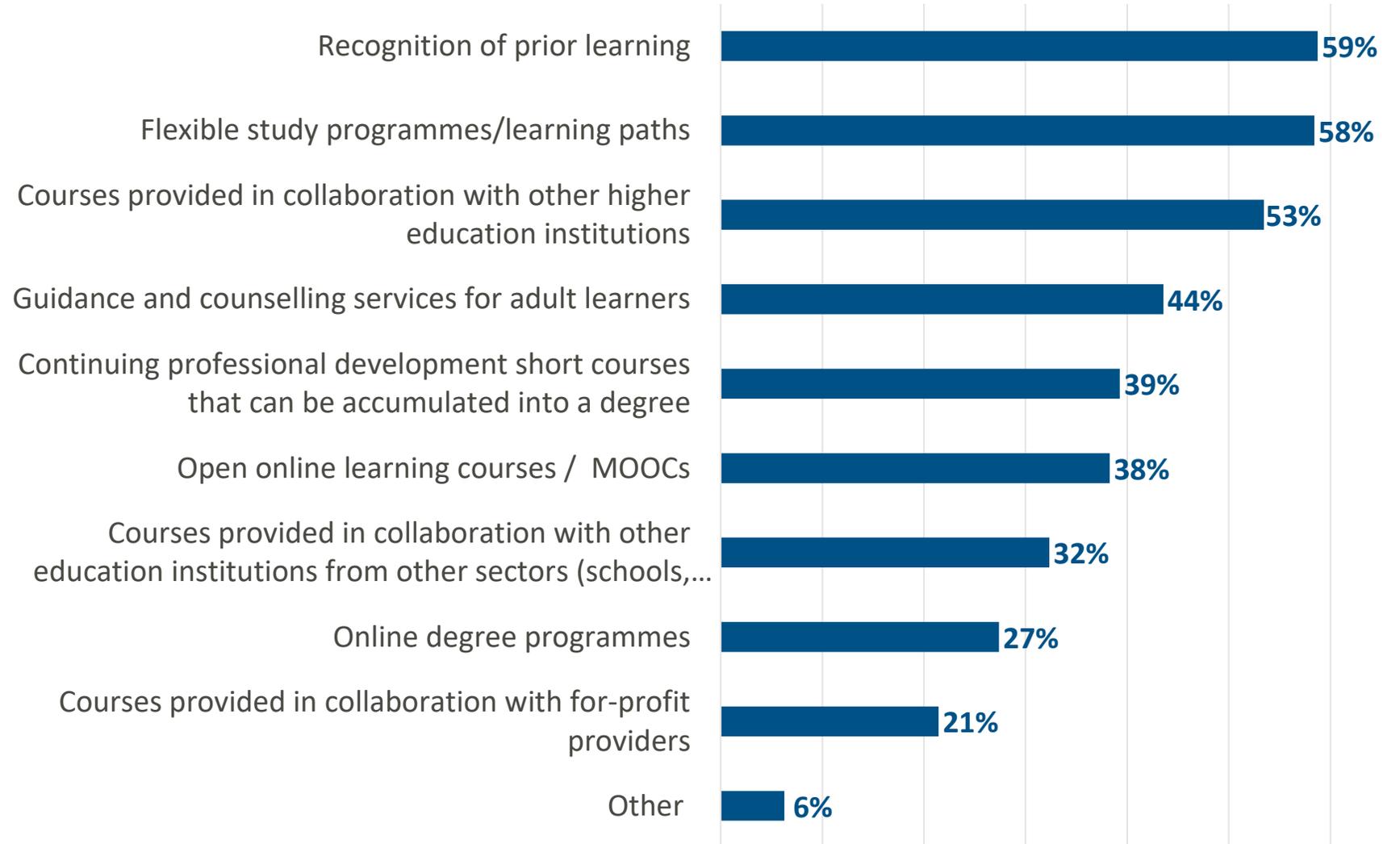
T2015: Does your institution have a strategy regarding lifelong learning (LLL)?



- Yes
- No, but we are in the process of developing one
- No
- Other/N.A.

Source: EUA TRENDS

(2)
There are measures commonly offered to lifelong learners



(3)

LLL takes place in a context of increased demand for flexible provision

Trends 2018. Q29

Growing demand for short-term (non-degree) learning opportunities, with a certificate upon course completion.

62%

Enrolment to flexible courses or programmes has increased in the past 3 years.

57%

Growing demand for degree programmes provided under flexible arrangements.

79%

■ Yes / To some extent

(4)
... and increased strategic use for digitalisation and more specifically digital learning

| | |
|--|---|
| Increased acceptance/more strategic approaches to e-learning | 87% |
| Boosted education provision through e-learning | 74% |
| Blended learning used in regular teaching | 36% fully 51% to some extent |

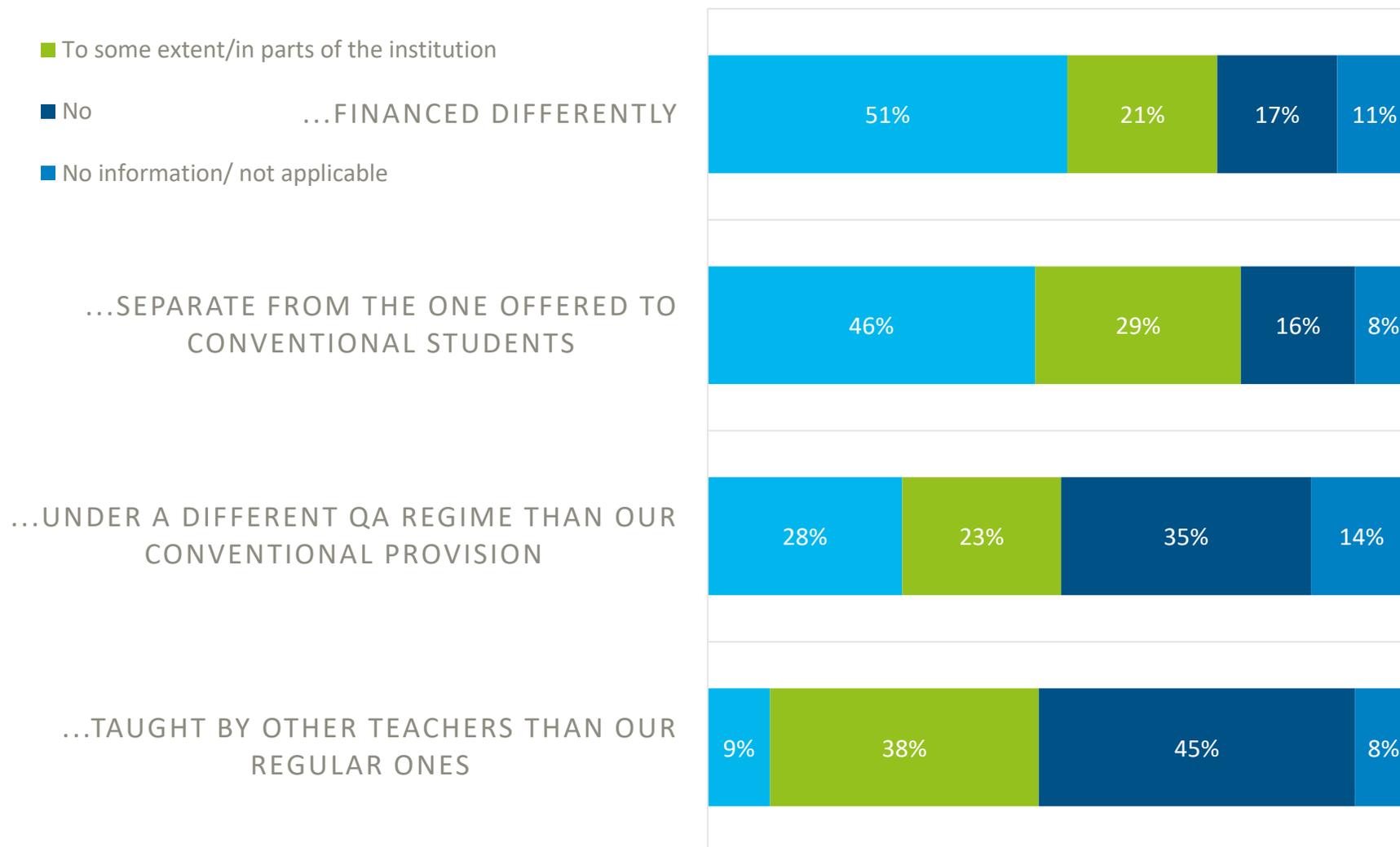
Trends 2018. Q25, Q29

LIFELONG LEARNING PROVISION IS...

(5)
 Still, mostly an education offer separate from the traditional, full-time degree education offer

Source: Trends 2018

- Yes
- To some extent/in parts of the institution
- No
- No information/ not applicable



Possible enablers for LLL at institutions

- On the European policy side:
 - EU policies and instruments: EQF, ESCO, Professional Recognition Directive, Skills Agenda
 - Bologna Process: LLL & Social Dimension
 - Recognition: Prior learning, automatic recognition
- General policy discourse focus more on skills (upskilling, reskilling), rather than lifelong learning, as a way to connect education and employability.
- Significant progress on awareness of (and provision for?) needs of disadvantaged populations (widening access and participation, diversity of student body, staff)
 - At national level (e.g. BE FL)
 - At European level (e.g. becoming a stand-alone chapter for the new Erasmus programme regulation)
- Decreasing demography: developing LLL in some countries is a way to reassess the mission of higher education (from shaping youth into professionals/citizens to contributing to society at large at all ages, etc.).

Challenges

- Making or relating it to the core mission of the institution:
 - May be by driven by individual staff – marginal within the institution (not systematic)
 - How to relate to the whole institution: dedicated structure, with its own staff, legal regulations, IQA/AQA and financial model.
- Currently legal frameworks would require installing a full-cost, demand driven approach – in an institution that is commonly public, non-profit, and state-regulated.
- Problem of identifying demand, coordinating the offer across the HE sector / internationally (digital provision): e.g. several institutions develop offers targeted the same learners.
- Bears the potential to change the whole university structure: programmes, staff capacity, funding (who wants to fund education in the future? etc.).
- In many countries: funding for higher education mostly based on accounts of full-time degree students (min. number of ECTS per year), with limitation in age, and not adapted to address LLL. No overall scheme for valorising learning throughout lifetime (like in SE).
- Rise of informal, non-degree learning (MOOCs and other open learning format): How to measure it – show the contribution of universities and show impact.

Outlook (to conclude)

- Concept and needs of LLL has changed since 2008.
- Learning as a continuum, but structures not necessarily adapted to this.
- Dominant model in higher education = still the traditional full degree. How to offer in addition opportunities for LLearners, to allow diverse and flexible learning re time, place, learning goals, through small packages throughout lifetime?
- Shorter, more flexible provision of learning, with or without (clear) connection to degrees.
- LLL – seen as one of the multiple missions, or at the conjuncture of all missions (education, research, third mission)?
- Institutional profiling: The provocative question = Is it for all institutions? Sometimes perceived as competing with other actors.

Outlook (to conclude)

LLL for universities as part of an ecosystem and policy environment, at local, national and international levels. Three key areas to address:

- (a) Role of HEIs and other stakeholders in LLL:** what kind of cooperation between institutions (different types), business and society at large.
- (b) Who will pay:** challenges for LLL cannot be solved by HEIs and Min Educ. Other ministries, municipalities, industry, individuals should also contribute. Contributions from employers in the continuing education context is one thing, but public funding is critical for addressing LLL in a holistic way.
- (c) How to create a large basis for a steering system for LLL at national level** (cross-sectorial: education, employment; and involving all stakeholders + governmental level)

For policy makers: this means pulling out a truly holistic vision of lifelong learning, across (different) policy areas (education, employment, social inclusion) and with due understanding of how other areas contribute.

Thank you for your attention!

@euatweets

@therese_zhang

Follow us on:

