

EDITORIAL

LEARNING FOR IMPACT IN A CHANGING WORLD

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Societal change, whether gradual or disruptive in character, has an impact on the kind of research expertise and knowledge which professional organisations, communities and learners need. At the same time, with their research, expertise and knowledge, universities have their own impact in this changing world. Professionals working in different spheres of society have to continuously develop and adapt their expertise to continue making a societal impact. Universities have - and feel - more and more the responsibility to make their expertise and the results of their research available where it is needed and for those who are in need of it in a more inclusive way, and in so doing they are generating a broad societal impact. With these reflections in mind eucen organized together with Utrecht University on 2nd June 2021 an online Experts Seminar entitled *Learning for impact in a changing world*. With this online Experts Seminar, we also celebrated the 30th anniversary of eucen. The topic of the Expert Seminar and the celebration of 30 years of eucen were a perfect stimulus to restructure and further develop our eucen *eJournal of University Lifelong Learning* and transform it into the current ***European Journal of University Lifelong Learning*** for researchers, managers and practitioners. We understand our journal, which has already been published regularly for five years, as an interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral journal that takes the different nature of practices of university lifelong learning (ULLL) as its central focus. This approach provides a forum in which to address policy questions, and for the development of theory and the dissemination of innovative practice in the field of ULLL. Following this understanding, we did some developmental work by broadening the scope of papers to be invited, thereby reflecting the diversity of roles and interests of our readership in university lifelong learning across Europe and beyond.

In the following paragraphs, we will outline the main theme of *Learning for impact* and make a few remarks on where we stand as universities. We will then introduce our approaches to the main theme and the different types of contributions we looked for. Finally, we will present an overview of the structure and content of this issue, that includes the main outcomes of the Expert Seminar. The thematic framework is set by the metaphor of *acting at the agora* elaborated in the opening paper based on the keynote contribution of Marieke van der Schaaf, and *on the future of the societal impact of universities* and the role of UCE in it as addressed in the concluding interview with Mirko Noordegraaf, drawing on insights from his keynote presentation.

LEARNING FOR IMPACT

While university lifelong learning embraces learning in a very broad sense, including the social, cultural and economic development of communities and the region (EUCEN, n.d.), university continuing education in a narrower sense, or continuing education for professionals, aims at supporting both professionals and adult learners as well as supporting the organisations and the domains in which they work. *Learning for impact in a changing world* highlights the role of university continuing education in enabling professionals to perform in a dynamic societal context to the best of their abilities and throughout their careers. Furthermore, in dealing with a changing environment it is important for professionals and their organisations to be resilient in order to handle the intense dynamics of society and the pressures that come with it. At the same time university continuing education intends to enable professionals to perform in a way that is satisfactory and meaningful for themselves too.

The recent experiences with the Covid-19 pandemic underline the urgency for both professionals and for universities to be resilient and to use their full potential for continuing education to enhance their adaptive capacity and resilience. The pandemic already accelerated calls for more initiatives in this domain, both on the European level and within several sectors (see for instance Pearson, 2020; Van der Graaf *et al.*, 2021; EAEA, 2021; Panteli & Maier, 2021). At the EU Social Summit 2021, held in Porto during the Portuguese EU Presidency, the Council of the EU signed the so called *Porto Declaration* in which the member states underlined the need for unity and solidarity in the fight against the pandemic and reaffirmed to work towards a social Europe. In point 8 of this declaration they state:

We will put education and skills at the centre of our political action. The green and digital transitions will bring enormous opportunities for European citizens but also many challenges, which will require more investment in education, vocational training, lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling, so as to stimulate employment transitions towards sectors where there is a growing demand for labour (EU Council, 2021).

University continuing education is about learning as well as about learners: it is about connecting knowledge and insights from research with the professions that apply this knowledge in practice; it is about connecting research on learning with practitioners in learning; and it is about connecting the academic domain with associations of professions and other stakeholders in society (de Viron, 2014). However, universities still have a lot to learn on how to facilitate this impact and how to implement this responsibility into their daily business. To empower professionals, universities need to be more creative in responding to the evolving needs of lifelong learners for expertise, education and training, to prepare them for the challenges of transforming and newly evolving professions. When we look at continuing education practices at universities in Europe, despite many innovative initiatives, the mainstream of activities and programs seem primarily to consist of alternatives for degree programs or of courses building upon earlier obtained degrees. In a way this is surprising. Already in the *European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning* from 2008, European universities committed themselves to provide education and learning for a more diverse population of students:

European universities will respond positively to the increasingly diverse demand from a broad spectrum of students - including post-secondary students, adult learners, professionals who seek to up-grade skills for the workplace, senior citizens taking advantage of their increasing longevity to pursue cultural interests, and others - for high quality and relevant higher education throughout their lifetime (EUA, 2008, p. 5).

Universities still have to learn to increase their impact, to learn how to respond to the demands of professionals and alumni for training and inspiration, to learn how to contribute to the value retention of diplomas in a transforming labour market, to systematically contribute to a knowledge-intensive economy, to strengthen the social impact of research, and to co-create knowledge and deepen initial training in collaboration with social partners.

Hence, they need to work along these three lines: firstly, universities need to expand and diversify their offer of formal and, above all, shorter-term non-formal education for professionals, gaining experience from the full breadth of faculty and interdisciplinary research and expertise in the development of different forms of education for and with different target groups. Secondly, universities need to work on embedding education for professionals in the organization and in work processes as a regular part of their primary process, from the assignment of administrative responsibilities to quality assurance and the organization of support. Thirdly, universities need to work on strengthening knowledge and knowledge circulation about all facets of continuing education. University continuing education is more and more becoming a testing ground. The possibilities for a varied and sometimes hybrid offering of formal and non-formal education are unlimited, and can strengthen the connection of universities with social challenges and the diverse sectors of society (Cendon, Atabarut & Royo, 2021). It is a testing ground that allows universities to transcend the divides between research, education and social impact.

FUTURE, CHANGE AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

With the above perspective on university continuing education and learning for impact in mind, we looked at different levels, spheres and stakeholders, from the impact of societal change on the labour market and ways professionals learn, to the organization of knowledge circulation, to what it takes to fulfil a meaningful role in this as universities. In order to focus and to structure our analysis we started with focussing on three angles that the reader also will see reflected in the contributions to this issue. The first angle is the *impact of societal change*. What impact does societal change have on professions and professionals? What new performance is demanded from them, what do they need to learn and how can university continuing education adapt to respond to those needs?

The second angle has to do with the *future of education*. Although we cannot predict the future, as universities we can try to look into the seeds of time and prepare ourselves for different conceivable futures of which we see the indications already in the present. What are the new pedagogies we might need, how will innovative and future-oriented teaching and learning take place, and where does the workplace fit in? How can university continuing education function as an innovation laboratory and what do future representations of professional learning look like? How can we support learners to become both adaptive and reflective practitioners?

The third and final angle was looking at the impact from the perspective of *professional practices* in university continuing education. Here questions arise about how to organise and embed university continuing education in our institutions. Key in this domain is creating a sustainable relationship between research, university continuing education and professionals' practices – in the public as well as in the private sector.

Starting with this issue of our *Journal* we aim to expand the kinds of papers we include, thereby reflecting the diversity of our members and readership, their perspectives on university continuing education, and the connections they make between UCE and other parts of the university as well as to society. In this way, *research papers* contribute primarily to the body of knowledge on UCE. They are drawing on theoretical debates or empirical research, contextualized within current national and international policy debate, which develop the theoretical base of the field or report on significant research done. Contributions showing and illustrating *innovative practices* in university continuing education provide another perspective on UCE. They offer a closer look at certain practices, approaches or projects that are either in progress or have been completed, and critically reflect their impact within the university or beyond. And finally, we will include *discussion papers*, presenting informed opinion and reflection on new trends, current research or policy developments within or connected to university lifelong learning. All of them, in their respective ways,

contribute to an evidence-informed foundation of university continuing education. We are, therefore, delighted to publish in this issue one thematic paper, four research papers, two innovative practice articles and two discussion papers.

CONTENT AND CONTRIBUTIONS

In the introductory thematic paper *Marieke van der Schaaf, Stefan van Geelen and Berent Prakken* address the need for transformation in higher education to facilitate expertise development. The authors discuss learner agency and adaptive expertise in the interface of future professionals and their organizations. Examining these processes in the field of health, they compare the need for multi-disciplinarity, innovation and flexibility through the metaphor of acting at an agora.

Expanding this perspective of the roles of universities opening up for the outside world, *Eva Cendon, Dorothee Schulte and Anita Mörth* examine in their research paper the relationship between university continuing education (UCE) and social innovation. The authors ask if and how UCE can be both a boundary spanner and an innovation lab for Higher Education. They propose an innovation matrix to analyse ways in which UCE could successfully operate as a driver for innovation.

Christina Ipser, Gregor Radinger, Sonja Brachtl, Filiz Keser Aschenberger, Günther Schreder, Nicole Hynek and Lukas Zenk move the analytical focus to the experiences and learning conditions of adult learners. The authors investigate physical learning spaces appropriate for both individual and group learning, by using an interdisciplinary approach combining architecture, education, and psychology, methodologically framed by a mixed methods approach.

Through a systematic literature review, *Filiz Keser Aschenberger and Thomas Pfeffer* explore the rarely studied topic of research literacy in UCE. The authors point out a gap in scholarly research on research literacy. Furthermore, they bring to our attention the lack of a comprehensive and holistic concept of research literacy, not only for continuing education, but also for higher education at large.

In the next article, *Nicole Ondrusch, Sahnas Premnavas and Julia Schönbrunn* raise the topic of virtual collaboration and teamwork in higher education. Addressing the sudden digital transformation in education during the COVID-19 pandemic, they present a method called working-out-loud (WOL) originally used in companies as a means of engaging students and guiding them towards cooperative, appreciative, reflective and profitable co-operation.

Partnerships with companies and non-governmental organizations are seen as a way of increasing the responsiveness of education institutions. By examining partnerships in the context of vocational education and training and higher education, *Pieter Moerman* in his innovative practice piece uncovers the underpinning power relations that may affect how successful public-private partnerships are in improving the skills and knowledge of the workforce.

Turning back to interaction between students and teachers, *Mahsa Fischer, Nicole Ondrusch and Kerstin Steimle* introduce their research on advancing virtual collaboration through peer coaching. They present a case study utilizing a train-the-trainer concept, and suggest that student engagement can be supported in a virtual classroom through sharing teaching and coaching roles among junior and more senior students.

In the following discussion paper, *Boudewijn Grievink* addresses the question of public-private partnerships with a focus on the recent development of Erasmus Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs). He analyses partnerships in the piloting phase of the new programme, and examines how CoVEs bring together employers, educators and other

stakeholders to contribute to the regional skills ecosystem. Based on his analysis, he delves into the key questions on how to organize such partnerships and how to ensure their sustainability.

In his analysis of the English higher education landscape, *Kevin Orr* turns our attention to the serious decline in part-time mature students in the country over the past decade. By analysing the competitive education context in England, he argues that this unintended decline of short-cycle courses is a consequence of broader structural changes in HE and not just the policies of a few universities or a single funding measure.

Our *Journal* concludes with three questions by Eva Cendon to Mirko Noordegraaf. They discuss the key topic of the Utrecht Expert Seminar 2021, the societal impact of universities. Mirko introduces us to the Utrecht University approach to societal impact through the perspectives of societal learning, advice, interactions and co-production. He suggests that it is crucial for universities to invest in continuing education, especially in times of change.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue of the *euken Journal* and that you will gain valuable and thought-provoking insights either for your research in university continuing education, your practices as managers or teachers, or for your strategies as part of the university management responsible for university continuing education. Finally, we would like to thank all authors for their valuable contributions and our reviewers for their efforts to make this issue a rich and high-quality endeavour.

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