

# Lifelong learning at European universities

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## LLL 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.

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## Current and potential scope

LLL has been a declared mission of HEI for a long time // may not yet well visible, accessible and/or not fully recognised:

- ✓ LLL demand is harder to anticipate and plan for, and for most institutions, maybe not be a core task. How to articulate with/within the university missions?
- ✓ It requires different delivery formats, under different QA rules, funded differently ... .
- ✓ There is also an offer provided by commercial non-HE institutions.

At universities:

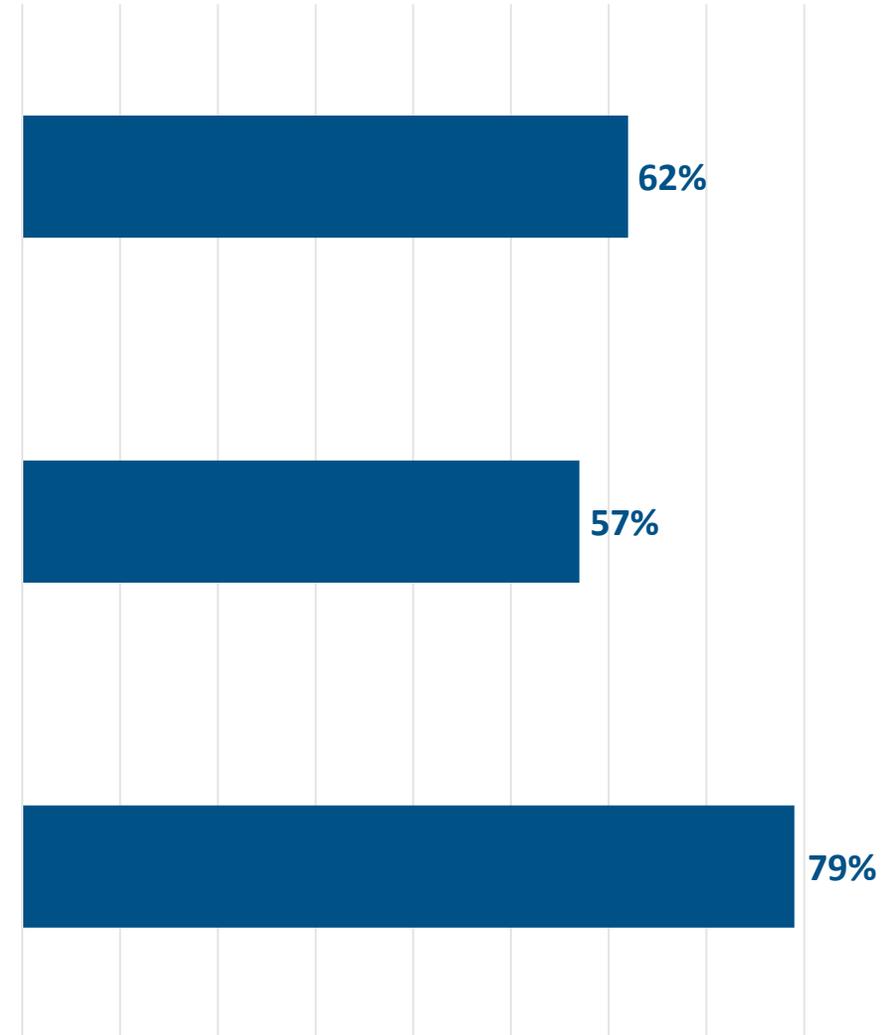
LLL takes place in  
a context of  
increased  
demand for  
flexible provision

Trends 2018. Q29

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

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

Growing demand for degree programmes provided under flexible arrangements.



■ Yes / To some extent

# Widening access and lifelong learning through digitally enhanced learning and teaching

Survey on pre-Covid situation  
April – June 2020  
368 responses, mainly universities  
All 48 EHEA countries

48%

Digitalisation has contributed to major transformation in widening access

49%

One of the main motivations for offering MOOCs is to reach out to new learner groups

65%

Mature and adult students are the main target of online learning

81%

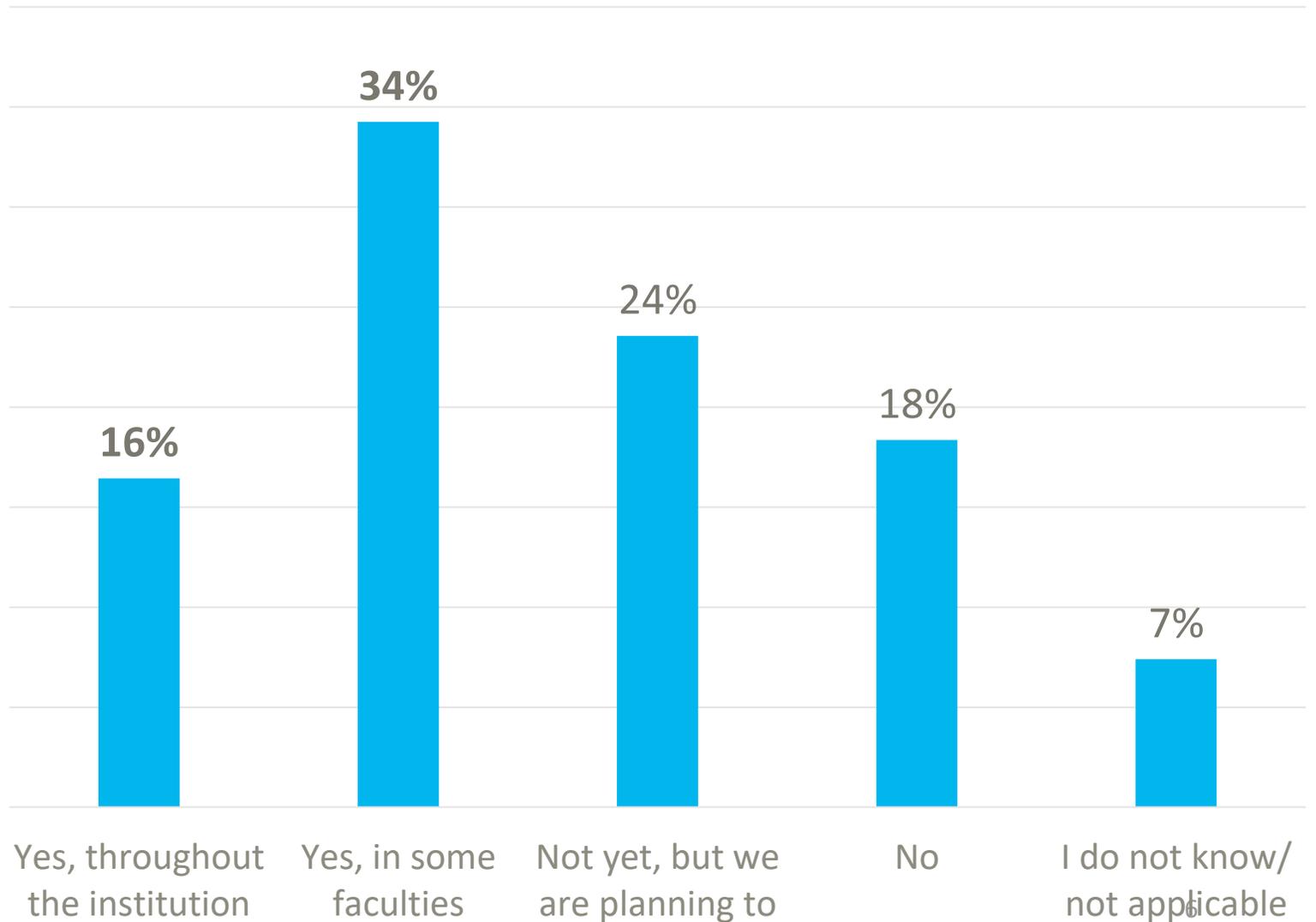
Widening access through digitalisation is a strategic development priority

**DIGI**HE

# Short online courses (non-degree) that earn certificates, micro-credentials or badges

50% offer short, non-degree online courses

- Target: lifelong learners
- Most frequent online offer (more than MOOCs)
- Half of institutions  $\leq 10$  courses





## The European Commission

A **micro-credential** is a small volume of learning certified by a credential.

In the EHEA context, it can be offered by HEIs or recognized by them using recognition procedures in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention or recognition of prior learning, where applicable.

A micro-credential is designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills or competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs.

Micro-credentials have explicitly defined learning outcomes at a QF- EHEA/NQF level, an indication of associated workload in ECTS credits, assessment methods and criteria, and are subject to quality assurance in line with the ESG.



A micro-credential is a proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards.

The proof is contained in a certified document that lists the name of the holder, the achieved learning outcomes, the assessment method, the awarding body and, where applicable, the qualifications framework level and the credits gained. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards.

## Stakeholders perspective

### Policymakers' perspective

- increasing need for upskilling and reskilling
- need for flexible and inclusive learning paths

### Higher education institutions' perspective

- a way to provide targeted and specialised training
- increase their visibility and reputation
- increase their responsiveness to students' and labour markets' demands
- experiment with new pedagogies and technologies

### Learners' perspective

- an entry mechanism to a degree programme
- a way to acquire interdisciplinary knowledge and skills
- a way to more flexibility in planning their studies

### Employers' perspective

- micro-credentials may help them to better understand specific skills of a prospective employee
- may serve as on-job training

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## The European and national policy level

- General policy discourse focus more on skills (upskilling, reskilling), as a way to connect education and employability.
- New Skills Agenda and European Education Area may present opportunities to refocus on LLL?
- Several initiatives: individual learning accounts, new Europass, upcoming Council Recommendation on adult education, a new European framework for micro-credentials
- Different member states have different processes / approaches / funding models in place for LLL, and not all of them recognise the HE contribution.

## The European and national policy level (2)

**Role of HEIs and other stakeholders/providers in LLL:** what kind of cooperation between institutions (different types), business and society at large

### **Funding 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.
- Funding for higher education mostly based on accounts of full-time degree students (min. number of ECTS per year), with limitation in age

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)

## Challenges (from universities' perspective)

- Not only employability: about citizenship and culture – to ensure that resilience of individuals and societies, able to cope with and drive change, in a societally acceptable, human-centric fashion.
- Validation, recognition of prior learning and stackability (into a degree)
- Difference of pace in changing short-term provision and degree programmes
- Making or relating LLL to the core mission of the institution:
  - May be 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, QA and financial model.
- Problem of identifying demand, coordinating the offer across the HE sector / internationally (digital provision): e.g. several institutions develop offers targeted the same learners.

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## As a way to conclude:

The role of validation and recognition:

- How to reach a « parity of esteem » between different routes into HE?

The role of respective actors:

- How to balance regulations and institutional autonomy? A policy vision and strategy, and leeway and support for HEIs?

The role of « learning »:

- How to making learning visible, self-reflective for students, and part of a LLL perspective?

# Thank you for your attention!

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