

EDITORIAL

SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN TURBULENT TIMES

Eva CENDON

FernUniversität in Hagen, DE

Timo HALTTUNEN

University of Turku, FI

Kevin ORR

University of Huddersfield, UK

Email: eva.cendon@fernuni-hagen.de

Even before the pandemic forced us all online, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were having to respond to pressures that affected research, teaching, and even institutional organisation. The economic crisis and high levels of unemployment have forced HEIs to incorporate new forms of teaching and learning, and to enhance how HE can help citizens prepare themselves for an evolving labour market. This might involve, for example, the integration of microcredentials into existing courses or the recognition of prior learning. Moreover, the ongoing existential threat of climate change necessitates a transition to a greener economy, which HEIs must also support (Royo *et al.*, 2021). Hence, there are current and future issues that need to be tackled by University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) or University Continuing Education (UCE) in its different forms. This second volume of the European Journal of University Lifelong Learning (EJULL) addresses some of these issues and focuses on *Contemporary Issues in University Lifelong Learning* in this special edition on the [eucen](#) ULLL Open Fora 2021 ([eucen](#), no date).

eucen ULLL OPEN FORA

The [eucen](#) ULLL Open Fora is a series of short activities that takes place over the course of one month, highlighting four hot topics in each of the four weeks. [eucen](#) started this during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, in November 2020, when all in-person activities had been cancelled. The ULLL Open Fora provide a stage for short presentations and focused in-depth discussions, each week starting with a master class - an introduction to the topic by a well-known expert from academia, policy, or business sharing his or her insights. After short presentations on each subsequent day, the week concludes with a panel discussion on the week's topic with key stakeholders and presenters. A collection of papers based on the [eucen](#) ULLL Open Fora 2020 has already been published in the former [eucen](#) *eJournal of University Lifelong Learning* ([eucen](#), 2020).

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN UNIVERSITY LIFELONG LEARNING

The [eucen](#) ULLL Open Fora 2021 *Contemporary Issues in University Lifelong Learning* focused on four topics that were explored for their potential contributions to ULLL as well as vice versa, the reciprocal impact of ULLL on the topics. The topic *professionalisation in adult and lifelong learning* placed both adult educators and adult learning at universities at the forefront and explored ways in which professionalisation could be further promoted,

signalling challenges of quality development in the field. The second week's topic, *transitions towards new learning strategies*, focused on learning strategies being implemented in order to deal with global and systemic changes and to achieve long-term sustainability goals. Week three explored the topic of *designing flexible learning for adults* and was based on current trends for flexibility and criterion-based learning, all within the framework of the growing dialogue between ULLL and professional contexts. The final week focused on *diversity and inclusion in higher education*, starting from the assumption of existing inequalities in access and examining different HE systems and societies in which they function, including how obstacles to participation are experienced differently by different groups.

THE (HIDDEN) ROLE OF COVID-19

Our editorial on this EJULL starts with the final discussion, in which a panel of moderators of the Open Fora reflected on the topics and on "how does this all fit?" (eucen, 2021). They discussed outstanding, puzzling or troubling insights, what learning could be gained for universities and for university lifelong learning and, finally, what needs to be done.

Overall, all topics were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although not an explicit topic, the pandemic affected (and continues to affect) our professional lives in ULLL, in research, in management, and in teaching and learning. The pandemic found its way into *Contemporary Issues* – be it as a magnifying glass or as a catalyst (Käpplinger and Lichte, 2020), as disruption (García-Morales, Garrido-Moreno and Martín-Rojas, 2021), or as veiling other important issues.

Covid-19 and the topic of health outshone other topics relevant for dealing with our future(s) and with *new learning strategies* that need our attention as individuals, as institutions and as societies: The issue of climate change, the issue of migration, and reflexivity – all of them important for developing a sense of resilience. These topics are also key in developing ULLL that contributes to sustainable, democratic and inclusive societies.

As regards *professionalisation in adult and lifelong learning*, the pandemic acted as a magnifying glass, demonstrating an urgent need for more professionalisation of adult educators, including enhanced digital skills needed for adult educators in this challenging world.

The pandemic also served as catalyst for thinking outside the box when it came to the *design of flexible learning* for adult learners and looking at ways to facilitate this in more depth by integrating different perspectives. At the same time, it also helped highlight the blind spot that exists with respect to quality assurance, as there are (still) no universally applicable quality assurance systems in place for online learning and open educational resources.

Last but not least, with regard to *diversity and inclusion*, the pandemic cast its shadow on existing inequalities. Despite well-established policies in many countries to encourage participation in higher education, access still reflects deep social inequalities, which the pandemic has both exposed further and exacerbated.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Taking these reflections as a starting point, the discussion focussed on the learnings for universities and on their roles and responsibilities with regard to the different issues.

One important insight that emerged is the potential and responsibility of each and every individual at the university - every single person matters in achieving change. Still, the influence of institutional policies on how universities deal with diversity and inclusion cannot be underestimated. Furthermore, universities need to reclaim their autonomy in again becoming leaders in co-creation and taking risks with new learning strategies. This, in turn, leads to a third component: the dialogue that is needed between universities and the outer world, between researchers and practitioners, and between institutions and individuals. Flexibility is needed in order to design pathways and offers that are scalable and efficient/profitable, yet continue to meet the ongoing needs of learners of different ages, forms of employment, and developmental tasks, making learning available to all. This brings us to a broader task with regard to the societal and public role of universities: Providing equitable access to science and scientifically led knowledge construction and representing as well as demonstrating social sensitivity and solidarity with those who are in difficult situations.

FOUR CLAIMS

What are the main messages of the [eucen ULLL Open Fora 2021](#)? Furthermore, what needs to be done? The call to action can be encapsulated in four claims made by the panellists in the final discussion that affect university lifelong learning at its heart and that are reflected in the contributions of this volume of the journal:

- Writing lifelong learning into the current development of the curriculum while valuing what students bring with them.
- Making learning a transformational experience for our students and being campaigners for lifelong learning within our institutions.
- Supporting critical thinking and reflection – and making the university a place to be by cultivating a culture of lifelong learning within.
- And last, but not least: Keeping the human touch, resilience and some craziness to achieve change within our institutions.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONTENT

Our journal aims to reflect the diversity of our members and our readership and their various perspectives on ULLL, be they managerial-, research, or practice-based. Therefore, we include *research papers* that draw on theoretical debates or empirical research, contextualized within current national and international policy debate, developing the theoretical base of the field or report on significant research done. Contributions showing and illustrating *innovative practice or short papers* provide another perspective. They offer a closer look at certain practices, approaches or projects that are either in progress or have been completed, and critically reflect upon their impact within the university or beyond. And finally, we include *discussion papers*, presenting informed opinion and reflection on new trends, current research or policy developments within or connected to ULLL. We are, therefore, delighted to have in this issue a small, fine selection of seven articles: three research papers, one short paper, two innovative practice articles and one discussion paper. They are connected by the different perspectives and experiences they offer: from university actors and the professions, from companies and practitioners as well as from adult learners. They draw on manifold methodologies, from international surveys to longitudinal life course enquiry, merging climate-fiction with future studies methodologies and combining auto-ethnographic approaches with critical race theory. Crucially, they also highlight the role of emotion.

Picking up on the topic of resilience and the need for developing scenarios for sustainable futures(s), especially in urban environments, the short paper of *Christine Roussat and Valentina Carbone* explores sustainable development from a perspective of climate-fiction. In their explorative research, the writers bring theory and fiction into dialogue and provide the readers with a novel methodology to examine alternative future scenarios in the age of climate change.

The next two articles focus on the role of professionalisation in adult learning in higher education. *Vanessa Beu and Regina Egetenmeyer* examine the topic of international collaboration in higher education from a perspective of professionalisation in adult education. While presenting a specific approach in their innovative practice piece, the writers identify both the affordances that contribute to and the underpinning causes that hinder HEIs from achieving their internationalisation goals.

Taking a closer look at adult learners in higher education, *Elise Glass's discussion paper* explores the role of educational programmes in HE as a distinct means of professionalisation of practitioners. The paper focusses on reflective practice in degree programmes in the field of education. She invites us to reflect on what practitioners actually learn in these programmes and how this learning may differ from other forms of professionalisation.

The connection between professional context and university lifelong learning is discussed in the following two research articles. *Jane Wormald* examines enablers and restrictors in navigating careers in England, through partaking in university continuing education. The author brings attention to the lived experiences of adult learners in UCE through a longitudinal life course enquiry. With this narrative approach, we come to understand the delicate balance between investing in professional development, managing daily life and making ends meet financially. Keeping with the topic of professionalisation, *Alfredo Soeiro, Karel de Wever and Dirk Bochar* explore practices in continuous professional development in the engineering profession. Harvesting data from a survey conducted with members of the community of the federation of engineering professional organizations (FEANI), the authors portray the needs and practices of the engineering community, and analyse attainment of different forms of continuous professional development for a more robust and effective university lifelong learning delivery.

Diversity and inclusion are reflected in this volume with two articles. In their innovative practice piece, *Carne Royo and Timo Halttunen* study inclusion in universities through the perspectives of ethnicity, gender and socio-economic background. Based on experiences of a European development project, they reflect on the importance of aligning dissemination and mainstreaming activities in projects to institutional strategies on equality, inclusion and non-discrimination for social impact. In keeping with analysis on individual accounts about participating in education, *Lilian Nwanze-Akobo* reflects in her auto-ethnographic research paper on two contrasting experiences in creating critically inclusive classrooms. The author argues that techniques used in the classrooms by educators can serve either to facilitate inclusion or further deepen the disadvantage and systemic exclusion experienced by non-traditional students. With this paper, the writer contributes to the salient discourses of inclusion and diversity in education.

Our *Journal* concludes with three questions by *Timo Halttunen to Karen Ferreira-Meyers and Maureen Andrade*, where they discuss the topic of drivers for flexibility in ULLL. Presenting two different settings, one from Africa, and the other from the United States, the discussants explore experiences of universities in transition to hybrid and online learning due to the global pandemic. These realities provide us with an interesting viewpoint to understand how different HEIs across the world were able to develop instructional plans for staff development and uptake online learning during these unexpected circumstances.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of our journal and that it is stimulating and inspiring for you – as the work on this edition was for us. We thank all our authors for their insightful contributions and all our reviewers for their support in making these articles shine even more brightly.

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