

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF UNIVERSITY LIFELONG LEARNING IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

INTERVIEW WITH JÁN FIGEL, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE



1. What do you think are the big issues - the social, economic and cultural trends - that are going to shape the context of University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) policy and practice over the next 10 to 15 years.

The big trends I see are globalisation, technological progress and demographic change, each of which impacts on the labour market and intensifies the need for good LLL policies. Globalisation is confronting us with competition from the new emerging economies. Technological progress will force us to intensify our efforts to update the skills of our workforce. People should be able to obtain the skills required for introducing and applying new technologies. An ageing population will lead to a smaller workforce and the necessity for people to work longer. Migration can only partially remediate this and has consequences of its own. With upgraded skills it will be more rewarding for older people to keep working. At the same time people should get the opportunity to combine working and private life in a balanced way.

2. What do you think is the role of European Associations and networks, and in particular EUCEN, in engaging with these trends?

European Associations, and EUCEN in particular with its comprehensive network and its focus on lifelong

learning, have an important role to play in awareness raising and dissemination of good practice. I would like to congratulate EUCEN on its jubilee and the pioneer role it has played in promoting lifelong learning at university level! I would like to encourage the EUCEN members to intensify their efforts. Universities need to be made aware of the necessity to open their doors to new types of learners, both in their own institutional interest and in order to better serve society.

3. How do you see the role that universities, and in particular university lifelong learning departments, can play in addressing these issues at regional and national level?

Universities will have to re-define their role and the contribution they make to lifelong learning. Not only in order to update the skills of an ageing workforce but also to stimulate the demand for lifelong learning activities within their curricula. Universities and in particular lifelong learning departments will have to contribute to a much greater extent to the provision of demand-driven learning paths, which are both flexible and of high quality. The education offer should serve new types of learners with specific and individual learning needs. Adaptability to a changing labour market is needed as job security is decreasing, even in academic professions. New, learner-centred learning to learn and skills

related elements would enhance the motivation of people to engage in lifelong learning.

If the European objective of achieving a 12.5% rate of adult participation is to be reached by 2010 it is necessary that each year 4 million more adults take part in lifelong learning. This objective can only be reached if more universities develop clear lifelong learning strategies, which correspond systematically with regional, national and international needs. Lifelong learning departments in particular will have to intensify their cooperation with trade and industry and other stakeholders such as research centres, health care institutions, ministries, insurance companies, guidance and counselling services and other organisations.

4. How can the Commission help us to do this?

I think the Commission can help in three ways. Firstly, the Commission contributes by influencing the policy agenda in favour of lifelong learning and by challenging the Member States to live up to the commitments they made in the framework of the renewed Lisbon Strategy: the New Partnership for Growth and Jobs.

Secondly, the Commission helps in a very concrete manner through its programmes, the existing ones and the upcoming Lifelong Learning programme (2007-2013). By funding

projects which aim at the realisation of a European area for lifelong learning, Universities are enabled to pool their expertise and know-how. These projects and the programme as a whole aim to reinforce the contribution of lifelong learning to social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue. The more universities use the new programme, by submitting high quality applications, the closer we will come to the realisation of the principle of lifelong learning which is to be utilised by 12.5% of the working population by 2010.

Thirdly, I would like to draw your attention to other Community funding possibilities where lifelong learning plays an important role and notably the European Social Fund, where 12 billion Euro for lifelong learning have been earmarked for the period between 2000 and 2006. For the period 2007 – 2013 new funding possibilities are foreseen in order to contribute to the transformation of educational systems so that lifelong learning can become a reality for all: the European Social Funds will support actions towards the design and introductions of reforms in education and training systems with a view to raising their responsiveness to the needs of a knowledge-based society and lifelong learning.

I count on EUCEN and its members to actively explore all these opportunities and I wish you every success.

*Ján Figel
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and Culture
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