Empowering European Universities with regard to SLPs

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About E-SLP Project

This report is published as part of the E-SLP project: European Short Learning Programmes. The E-SLP project is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and from 1 January 2018 until 31 December 2020.

Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) are a group of courses (units, modules or other learning building blocks) with a common subject focusing on specific needs in society which can be used as stackable elements of larger formal degrees targeting non-traditional and adult learners. The E-SLP project focusses on online, flexible and scalable SLPs in the European context.

This report is part of work package …. and was coordinated by ……

Partners

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1. Introduction

This document reports on three trainings conducted within the E-SLP project with the purpose of empowering leadership and university staff with the lessons learned, the experience and knowledge gained during this project lifespan in relation to Short Learning Programmes (SLPs), continuous education and continuous professional development.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak was not possible to organize and implement these training events in presence, both their preparation and implementation were handled online.

The universities partner involved in these activities were three: AGH-UST, in Poland, NADE and KTU, in Lithuania and KU Leuven, in Belgium. Per each of these an institutional need analysis has been carried out, and on its base a dedicated/personalized programme has been drawn.

This report is structured as follows, per each institution presents the (1) need analysis; (2) the programme and the event description; (3) conclusions and reflections derived from the discussions that took place during these webinars. .

2. The empowering event of AGH-UST

2.1. Needs' analysis for AGH leadership and staff

AGH-UST is a traditionally oriented technical university which implemented online learning as a complementary form. Therefore, the blended-learning mode is a main approach towards which the university is planning to return after the pandemic regulations are overruled. Moreover, as a technical university it provides practical classes to a great extent, such as labs or workshops that cannot be delivered online. Besides, online learning has been a part and parcel of AGH-UST's teaching and learning for around 20 years with more than 1300 teachers trained and more then 300 teachers delivering blended classes on a regular basis. For such a scale it was decided to focus on those teachers who are involved in programmes design and decision-taking, that is vice-deans for teaching, programmes' coordinators, and designers. Planning the seminar required therefore considering their needs, current legal and medical situation as well as an overall context of the institution.

The agenda reflected the needs and focused on blended-learning approaches from the programme-development perspective. The aspects of legal and organisational issues that need to be considered were covered, with a special focus on recognition of short programmes in the Polish perspective.

2.2. The seminar in AGH

The seminar was split in two days on November 5th and 6th, 2020 and organised on university's videoconferencing system. The event "Good practices and the action plan for blended learning

programmes" focused on describing the examples and drawing recommendations for programmes' designers. The first day concentrated on exploring and understanding the institutional strategy. The second day was more practice-oriented, aiming at delivering to participants measures to deal with the design of SLPs on institutional level and the engagement of the students on a course level. More in details, the following topics were discussed in the two days:

Continuing education and continuing professional development strategy at AGH;	Aleksandra Matukin-Szumlińska, COK AGH
Challenges and opportunities for the recognition of short learning programmes	Clare Dunn, Open University UK
Microcredentials in higher education, a European discussion (CMF)	Alessandra Antonaci & Piet Henderikx, EADTU
The European Maturity Model for blended education- EMBED	Piet Henderikx, EADTU
Workshop: Institutional development strategies for blended learning	Wouter Hustinx, PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts
Workshop: Blended course design with elements of gamification and engagement for the students	Alessandra Antonaci, EADTU

The seminar was opened by AGH-UST Prof. Jan Kusiak, Head of Centre of e-Learning and Agnieszka Chrzaszcz, deputy director of Centre of e-Learning. The first presenter, Aleksandra Matukin-Szumlińska from the Training Organization Centre (Centrum Organizacji Kształcenia-COK AGH) made an overview on the strategy and plan for continuing education and continuing professional development at AGH-UST, which is detailed in the next paragraph. Based on the institutional needs and the strong interest from the AGH leadership and staff, two experts from EADTU's service EMPOWER, were invited to intervene at the webinar: Clare Dunn, who presented the challenges and opportunities for the recognition of short learning programmes (SLPs) and the work carried on during E-SLP project, specifically in WP5; and Wouter Hustinx, who lead a workshop on Institutional development strategies for blended learning. Three other interventions were delivered by EADTU members, dedicated respectively on the connection of SLPs with the common microcredentials framework (CMF); the European Maturity Model for Blended Education (EMBED); and strategies to foster students' engagement in online setting.

2.2.1. The strategy plan of AGH university for CE, CPD and SLPs (Aleksandra Matukin-Szumlińska)

On the institutional strategy level, the following are the most important institutional priorities for AGH: (1) to deliver high quality education and (2) to provide the best position possible in the labour market to its students. The education's quality is tracked via constant measurement and a constant and comprehensive concern for quality at all levels of education.

Following the Bologna's process, AGH-UST offers:

- degree programmes—first cycle (bachelor or engineer, lasting 6/7 semesters, level 6 of the EQF) and second cycle (master, lasting 3/5 semesters, level 7 of the EQF);
- non degree programme – post graduate studies;
- other forms of education—trainings and special training programmes.

Among the *degree programme* AGH-UST provides also some sort of SLPs which are called UBPO-university's database of elective courses, delivered in three blocks of courses: (1) humanities and social; (2) languages and (3) innovation. These programmes have a size of at least 3 ECTS and are a total of 400 courses dedicated to all students independently from their nationality and course of study. Some of these courses are comprised in the study program, others not. In general, these are courses dedicated to degree students.

In relation to SLPs, the NAWA- the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange, promotes intensive short international educational programmes in the form of summer/winter schools, training courses or additional didactic offer. This type of programmes should last at least 30 to a max of 150 hours. According to NAWA, these short intranational programmes, called also SPINAKER, can run full time and in the form of online learning (in synchronous, asynchronous and mixed forms), supporting better international students and a flexible design.

In relation to *post graduate studies* in Poland there is a very specific legislation, these, as non-degree programmes, are intended for people that already completed higher education, who already have a full qualification correspondent to at least level 6 of the EQF. In Poland these post graduate studies shall last at least 2 semesters and enable to acquire at least 3 ECTS.

According to the Polish Qualification Framework (PQF), post graduate studies may allow to obtain also partial qualifications at level 6, 7 or 8 of the PQF. As degree programmes post graduate studies programmes curricula need to specify the learning outcome that need to relate to the special characteristics set in the ministerial regulation. A learner that complete post graduate studies gain a certificate (available in Polish and English), but it is not a diploma.

Post graduate studies are launched every year, up to now reach 299, 75 from 2020, but many have been suspended for COVID-19.

As far as student numbers is concerned, looking at the last 4 years, AGH can count 9738 post-graduate students (2321 in 2019) and 8582 post-graduate alumnae (2342 in 2019).

The main areas of education within post-graduate studies are:

- management and accounting;
- marketing, social media and humanities;
- computer and data science;

- physics;
- mathematics;
- environmental engineering and environmental protection;
- electrical and power engineering;
- mining and geoengineering;
- drilling;
- electronics and telecommunications;
- materials science and ceramics.

AGH offers also '*other forms of education*', specifically *training* and *special training programmes*. The latest last at least 30 hours and they are established to supplement and deepen knowledge, skills, social competences or to raise professional or scientific qualifications. The trainings instead need to be shorter than 30 hours and they pursue the purpose of allowing the student to obtain or supplement knowledge on a specific area.

Both training and special training programmes are not awarded with ECTS and at AGH, can be counted around 100 courses of this type. Part of this category are the trainings dedicated to 1st year students, called *prymusi*, which refer to languages' courses, training of pedagogical and didactical methods and a very special one dedicated to children (7/8 years old), which are part of the "*Akademia AGH Junior*".

The Polish legislation introduced 2 years ago the so called 'special education', a type of education that can be provided only by non-universities institutions (vocational schools). HEIs in Poland, such as AGH-UST, are not allowed to run this type of education. Special education courses last at least 3 semesters, provide to students ECTS and a qualification level 5 of the PQF/EQF. The learning outcomes of these courses need to be specified and need to be aligned to the 'special characteristics' set by the Polish Ministry of Education. A person that completes such special education receives either a *certificate of qualified specialist* or a *certificate of qualified technology specialist*.

2.2.2. Challenges and opportunities for the recognition of SLPs (Clare Dunn)

Clare Dunn, E-SLP partner representative, EMPOWER expert on SLPs and senior manager for recognition of prior learning at the Open University (OUUK), focused her talk on recognition, introducing the term and discussing its benefits. She also presented the structure of qualification adopted by the Open University and its recognition practices and finally made recommendations for the recognition of SLPs. The full intervention is available on EADTU's YouTube channel (shorturl.at/ehAFG) and on EADTU's SlideShare channel (shorturl.at/imIQZ) can be reviewed the full presentation. As far as specific details on the work done in relation to recognition of SLPs is concerned, can be found in Dunn et al.(2020).

Recognition can be seen as the process of granting official status to learning outcomes and or competences which can lead to the acknowledgement of their value in society. Recognising prior learning provides a mechanism to 'certify existent human capital and foster personal career development'

Recognition has different benefits for different target groups:

- for students: it can support career progression, facilitates advancement to higher education and reduce duplication of learning;
- for institutions it can make them more accessible, increase recruitment, enable them to be more responsive to the labour market, and promote partnerships;
- for employers it can help in recruiting a more skilled workforce, enhancing employee satisfaction, facilitating the generation of ideas through reflection, and engagement in course development.

Recognition is approached differently by each institution, each institution is autonomous in deciding what prior learning can be recognised, this process is not governed by national policy. The Open University follows a modular structure, it provides courses that can be a size of 15, 30 or 60 UK credits. Despite the modular structure, students that are funded, tuition fee students, need to be registered onto a qualification to be eligible for funding. Self- funding students need to state an 'end goal' or qualification at the outset. Irrespective of funding route students module by module.

The Open University had several routes for prior learning to be recognised:

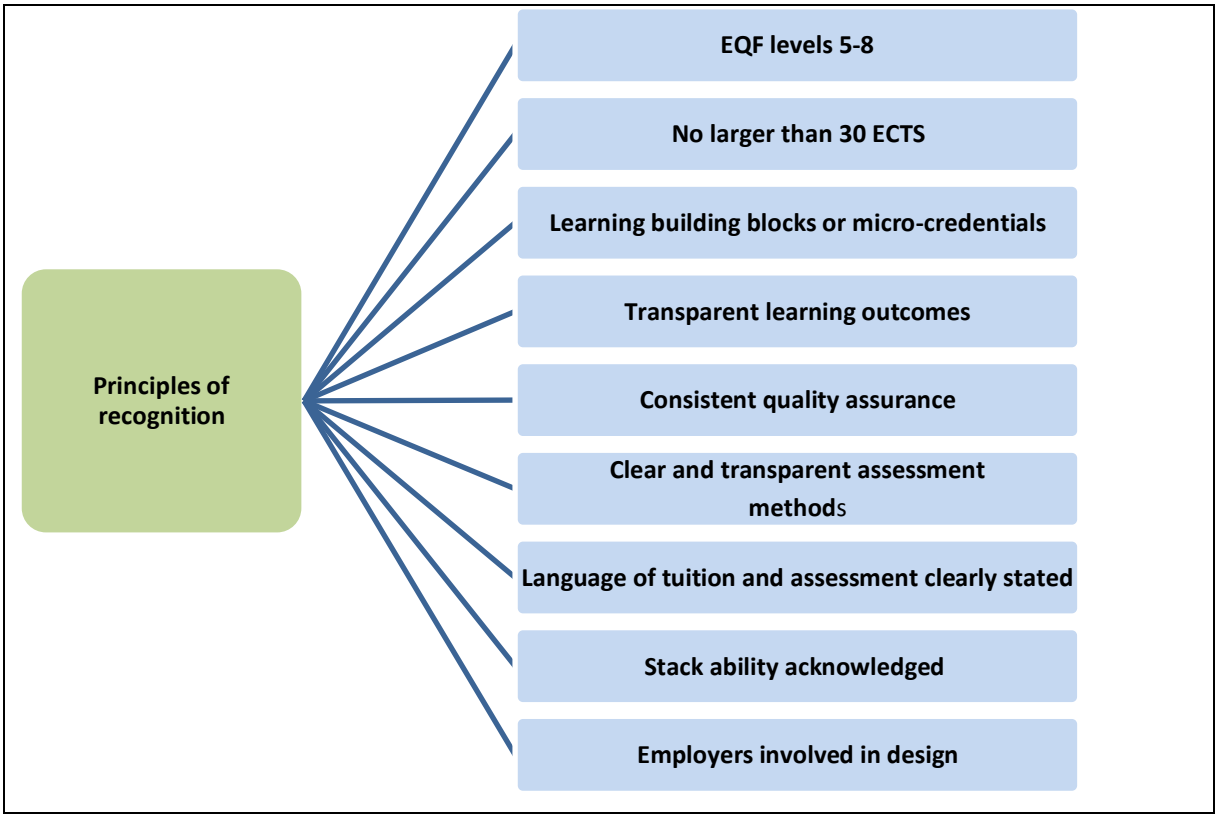
- Formal certificated learning
- Non-formal learning
- Informal experiential learning

The maximum proportion of credit which can be awarded against any qualification is two thirds. And they have a centralised area for processing applications for the recognition of prior learning.

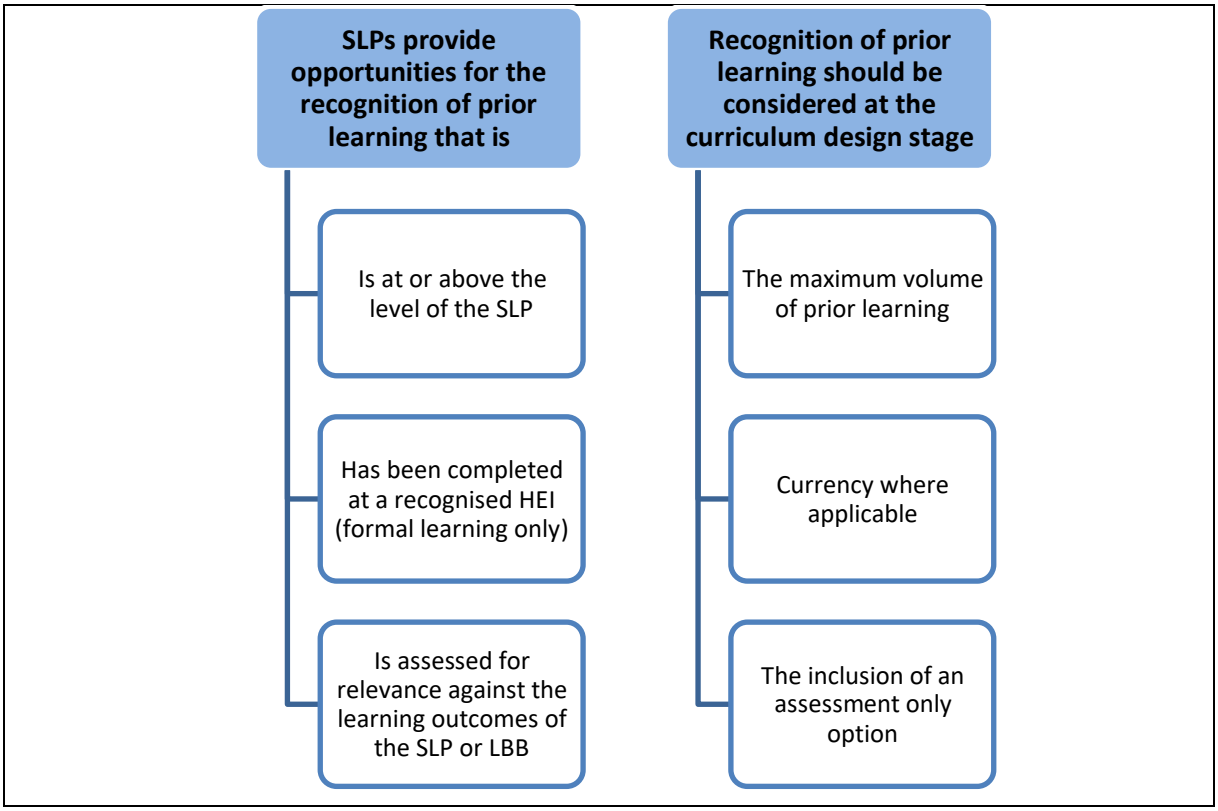
SLPs at The Open University are recognised in several ways:

- Recognising short non-formal courses in their undergrade module 'making your learning count';
- Enabling learners to count non-formal learning towards a qualification;
- Letting learners explore what they have learnt through these short courses;
- Personalised learning experience.

Recommendations for curriculum design:



Some key recommendations in regard to the recognition of prior learning:



2.2.3. *Microcredentials in HE: a European discussion (CMF) (Alessandra Antonaci)*

Alessandra Antonaci, EADTU's Programme Manager, E-SLP coordinator and EMPOWER expert on SLPs with Piet Henderikx, EADTU's advisor, focused their presentation on defining microcredentials, explaining the characteristics of the Common Microcredential Framework (CMF), and how this connects with SLPs. Finally, they framed the microcredentials movement in the European perspective. The full presentation is available at the following link: https://www.slideshare.net/secret/r43sZTN1EA91k4.

Definition of Microcredentials—According to Cirlan and Loukkola (2020) a micro-credential is a certified short learning experience, offered by an HEI or other providers, designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge/ skills/competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or employability needs. Microcredentials are subjected to a quality assurance assessment in line with the ESG (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area) and have an explicit reference to defined learning outcomes at a specific EQF-EHEA/NQF level that will be achieved, the workload, expressed in ECTs; and to the assessment methods and criteria adopted (Cirlan & Loukkola, 2020). Microcredentials can be found in many shapes, such as badges, certificates, and many more. The CMF aims at harmonizing the current wide variation of certificates offered in higher education which leads to confusion among HEIs and outside academia. The CMF criteria are represented in Figure 1:

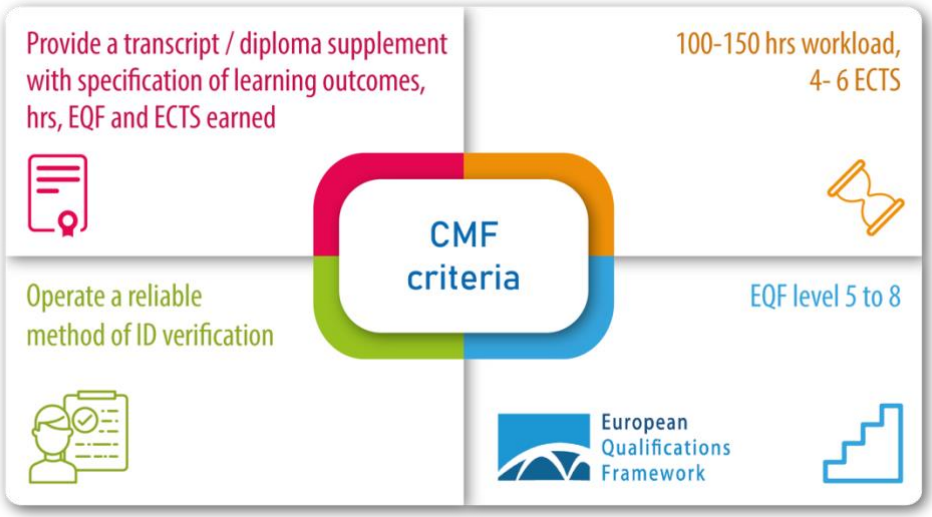


Figure 1-- The CMF criteria, retrieved from Antonaci et al. (2021)

These criteria are in line with the SLPs characteristics described in Melai et al. (2020).

As far as the European development of Microcredentials is concerned, it was highlighted the interest of the EU commission towards the topic. These are recognised as useful not only for professionals but also for regular students, bachelor, master, and PhDs, as they are complementary to the curriculum. In 2021 there will be a Council Recommendation, the purpose of this recommendation would be that

European actions will support building trust in microcredentials across Europe and aims at having all the necessary steps in place by 2025 for their wider use, portability and recognition[1].

2.2.4. The European Maturity Model for Blended Education- EMBED (Piet Henderikx)

Taking into account AGH-UST focus on blended education, Piet Henderikx, EADTU's advisor, presented the European Maturity Model for Blended Education, developed in the frame of EU project, coordinated by EADTU, called EMBED[2]. The full presentation is available on the following link: https://www.slideshare.net/secret/3KjmLoBLYTdIJ2.

The model in short:

- provides guidance s it is a conceptual framework for blended education
- It is stakeholders focused because it has been developed in accordance to progress markers provided by them;
- it is a multi-level maturity model of blended education, including micro-level (teaching and learning processes), meso-level (institutional innovation and enabling strategies), and macro-level (government policy and support structures).

More detailed information can be found in the above presentation and also in the following report: file:///Users/alessandraantonaci/Downloads/European%20Maturity%20Model%20for%20Blended%20Education.pdf

2.2.5. Institutional development strategies for blended learning (Wouter Hustinx)

Wouter Hustinx, EMPOWER expert on blended education, and Head of Research on educational innovation at PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts, in Leuven (Belgium), presented a case study: how blended learning has been introduced at PXL and how the instructional strategy has been developed to make this educational approach a success. PXL as AGH-UST is a technical university, therefore the lessons learned and presented by Wouter were of key importance for AGH leadership and staff.

In the following links can be found, respectively, the presentation delivered by Wouter, https://www2.slideshare.net/secret/NpML2wnv8Y949f and the video recording of his speech: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ou3q_3etChw&list=PLQaLHX3vKSZ69GBXqD2wu41zX7DIOtwfI&index=2.

PXL offers:

- Associate degrees programmes (Level 5 EQF)
- Bachelor programmes (Level 6 EQF)

[1] https://eua.eu/resources/publications/940:micro-credentials-linked-to-the-bologna-key-commitments.html
[2] https://embed.eadtu.eu/

- Master programme (Level 7 EQF)

And continuing education dedicate to post-graduate, teachers, and advanced bachelors.

It was part of the strategy plan 2015-2020 generating a concrete plan for the development and implementation of blended education. The need to invest on this pedagogical approach and methodology was due to the nature of the disciplines thought at PXL and the need of integration between technology available and didactics. In planning their strategy, the first difficult step was to define how many hours should have been delivered online and how many in presence. According to PXL strategy, 1ECTS in a traditional setting correspondent approximately to 10 hours of face-to-face teaching, in a blended scenario instead it is equivalent to 3 up to 9 hours of distance learning as 'a planned learning activity'.

The process applied at PXL to design a policy strategy at institutional level for blended education consisted of 5 stages:

1. Baseline measurement - 2014- no Maturity model available, soothes used the work/model of Porte W tall (Blended learning in higher education: intuitional adoption and implementation. Computer and edu)

    Definition of Key Performance Indicators- KPI

    Involvement of the teacher design team- 2 content experts, one pedagogical expert, 1 expert in tech and a program coordinator —important co- design for PXL, they follow the ADDIE model (branch, RM, 2009)

    Evaluation by a Peer juries

    Labels

Stage 1 consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted between 2015-2016, conducted by PXL educational staff involving program coordinators. Stage 2, to define the KPI, they started to give labels to the 3 programs' stages. Programs in stage 1 □ KPI 2 blended learning labels by 2020 (new blends). Programs in stage 2 □ KPI 6 blended learning labels by 2020 (new and existing blends). Programs in stage 3 □ KPI 50% blended learning labels by 2020 (new and existing blends).

Blended learning label on program level.

At stage 3 teacher design teams, they designed and re-designed courses in accordance with the principles of blended learning.

At stage 4 peer injuries, they needed to decide when the re-designed courses should get a label and how will they provide these labels. In order to do that they used a rubric with different criteria.

At stage 5 labels, they have created several labels for different achievements.

Wouter concluded his presentation by providing the status of October 2020. Their target was 72 labels, while they have achieved 151 labels and four more labels on program-level.

2.2.6. Blended course design with elements of gamification for enhancing students' engagement (Dr. Alessandra Antonaci)

Dr Alessandra Antonaci (EADTU) presented the workshop on engagement strategies for students using gamification. The workshop was interlay design in accordance with the AGH-UST's staff needs, who found themselves struggling with students' engagement during pandemic classes. The full presentation is available at the following link https://www.slideshare.net/secret/J1mCM4tHIv4SEi.

The outline of the presentation was the following:

- definition of 'Gamification';
- gamification: examples;
- the impact of gamification;
- gamification in Blended courses.

Then space was given to participants to experiment and discuss tools available and possible design solutions.

2.3. The key messages from the Polish empowering webinar

AGH-UST strategy is compliant with the Bologna Process recommendations by offering 6, 7 and 8 EQF levels degree programmes and short learning cycle programmes (for students from 18 years old).

Poland has a defined legal framework, defined by the Minister of Science and Education for post-graduate programmes, which allows the design and implementation of post-graduate studies with 30 ECTS. These programmes are an opportunity to gain qualification at work, however, it might be too time consuming for working learners, who might need to complete the study in a shorter, more condense, period of time. Consequently, the definition of a precise legal frame can be seen from one side an advantage because give structure, but from the other side, a block in flexibility and a constrain to develop more market-oriented offer at a university. There is a scope for development of training courses, which in fact are offered by the university, but they cannot be a part of coherent programmes.

3. The empowering webinar event in Lithuania- NADE and KTU

3.1. NADE/KTU needs' analysis

One of the main topics required by NADE and KTU stuff have recognition, accreditation, and quality assurance in relation to SLPs. Furthermore an interest was raised in relation to the design of SLPs and the lessons learned from the pilots conducted during E-SLP project. Among the topic cured by EADTU was mentioned the Virtual Mobility (VM) which is a topic that matches with E-SLP results and knowledge as all students, part of our pilots, have experienced VM.

3.2. The webinar at NADE/KTU

It was split in two sessions, the first one took place on September 14th, 2020, and the second on December 2nd, 2020, in combination with ALTA conference.

The programme of the first day focused, from one hand on presenting the overall project E-SLP to the leadership and university staff of Kaunas University of Technology (KTU) and National Association for Distance Education (NADE) attending, and from the other hand on gathering from them an overview on the institutional and national strategy existing in Lithuania in relation to SLPs. The first meeting was attended by NADE and KTU representatives. Specifically, the head of the e-learning technology centre for KTU and NADE vice president; the head of the academic affairs dept at KTU; the head of the centre for excellence in learning and teaching at KTU, the responsible for distance education; technology enhanced learning experts; teachers and staff dealing with recognition, accreditation and microcredentials were presented.

The first day of the event was focused on 'getting to known' the organization and the strategy in relation to SLPs and microcredentials.

The kick-off of the webinar was up to the project coordinator, EADTU, that presented the project and its progress. Then the focus was switched to the institution representatives who did contribute with the presentation of the following topics: ECIU University Conceptual Framework for Microcredentials; KTU upskilling project - short programs for industry 4.0; EDU Lab; Short programs for Developing Teachers' Digital Competencies: Up2U project experience; and Risk-NET project experience in coordinating development of international program and MOOCs.

The second day of the webinar had a different focus, it was more on the lessons learned from co-designing, co- implementation and co- monitoring SLPs.

3.3. The presentations delivered during the NADE/KTU Event

3.3.1. Short programs for Developing Teachers' Digital Competencies: Up2U project experience (Gytis Cibulskis)

The slides presented by Gytis are available at the following link: https://www.slideshare.net/secret/Ny0oIu5fb1uKZT

As far as NADE/ KTU institutional strategy is concerned, Gytis indicated that KTU is attracting teachers on content creation within the internal School+ initiative, where teachers are invited to create short lessons and share them, this is done with the aim of creating a repository with short courses, in video format, that could be reused by other teachers. They are also looking into recognising these activities with credits or as competences. However, at the moment there is no support from the government on infrastructure development, but they hope to receive some funding for these trainings. Teachers are using more online short videos for students, especially for those who cannot come to Lithuania or who missed a lesson. They have some online study programmes, preparatory courses, and MOOCs. They also integrate blended learning and hybrid learning, meaning that part of the class is online, and part of the class on campus.

By completing the full course teachers received a certificate and credits, while for their e-courses were used badges and at KTU they have an official long and formal evaluation process for recognising nonformal education. At this point, they are looking into shortening this process.

With regards to short learning programmes and microcredentials at KTU would like to apply to an Erasmus mundus programme for facilitating the design and implementation of these formats.in this sense KTU is already working in MOOC based short programme. They would like that at university level MOOCs could be added to the ordinary programmes. At KTU they started preparing guidelines on how to prepare these MOOCs. The faculty of informatics applied for funding to create a lab to create these scenarios on how to make these MOOCs. One of the biggest issues is recognition issues. When a MOOC is implemented in the normal curricula, it should be either undergraduate or graduate level and really based on the study results, but usually, the MOOCs are designed for a more general audience. This makes it really challenging.

In Lithuania, many parties talk about short learning programmes and how to upskill and reskill Lithuanian citizens. There is a high need for formal qualifications of these short programmes. The results of the E-SLP project are very useful for the Lithuanian market.

3.3.2. *Online teaching during and post COVID-19 (George Ubachs)*

The COVID-19 pandemic has made universities switch to digital education and to reorganizing their campuses. Based on a survey run in May 2020 and analysed by the European Commission, 95,1% of the universities switched to online and distance learning, and 82.7% of HEIs have also handles online the students' exams. All institutions set-up massive support for organizing online lectures, tutorials and videoconferencing with diverse pedagogical approaches. At all levels, emergency decisions were made.

In the second wave of COVID-19, many universities wanted to keep students on campus, however this scenario was not applicable, Europe coloured red again and Universities allowed only half or one fifth of the students in their campuses.

Teaching staff felt this as a disruption, requiring an extreme workload to adapt to the situation.

Students started to manifest for the right of having quality education. Watching a video or following a lesion via zoom was no longer felt as a solution as it was in the first wave.

The effect of COVID-19 on education poses at least two key challenges for policymakers:

1. Measures should be taken to ensure that more vulnerable students will be able to make up for the learning loss they experienced during the lockdown. This should be done quickly and effectively to avoid that such crisis results in permanent education and economic inequality.
2. Given that there is the possibility that educational institutions may not be able to operate fully in person during parts of next academic year, alternative methods of delivering teaching and learning should be put in place.

What was experienced by the majority of the students and performed by the larger part of (traditional) teachers was online emergency teaching, to deliver professional online education are needed:

- Building on expertise and experience
- Methodologically designed education
- Well-considered digital didactics (research based)
- Interaction, debate, and dialogue can be done synchronous, but certainly also asynchronous without boundaries in online education.
- Activating education, engaging students
- Extending and enriching programmes by virtual mobility
- Safe software use

New modes of mobility:

- So far, neither virtual mobilities nor the virtual international classroom, while technically feasible, have become common practice in higher education. However, due to the pandemic, the EC allowed virtual exchange in replacement of physical exchange under the Erasmus+ mobility programme.
- While there is widespread agreement that virtual mobility cannot and should not replace physical mobility, there is the question of whether it can be exploited in a more systemic and strategic fashion to complement physical mobility and serve as an additional option to exchange and

collaborate. Therefore, a part of the sector perceives the current crisis as an opportunity to reflect and elaborate on renewed models of internationalization.

What is virtual mobility? *A set of activities supported by information and communication technologies, including e-learning, that realise or facilitate international, collaborative experiences in a context of teaching, training, or learning.* The core goal of any mobility is providing an international academic experience for students:

- Related to a formal course or curriculum
- Based on a bilateral or network/consortium collaboration and agreement

Education can be organised in a face-to-face, online or blended mode. So can international education and mobility.VM can be short term, long term, intermittent; synchronous, asynchronous; and multi-campus.

VM provides the following opportunities for students:

- Flexibility, accessibility for potentially all students
- Individual portfolio development throughout the study career
- Competence building
- Long-term and intermittent mobility
- Improving employability

Opportunities for staff:

- Enhancement of the quality of a course or curriculum
- Connecting educational networking with research networking
- Continuous professional development, learning form international colleagues
- Enhancing teaching skills and teaching quality
- Career development

Opportunities for institutions

- To expand the university's academic offer in an international context at scale, internationalisation of the curriculum, global teaching, transnational education, development collaboration.
- Innovative pedagogies creating an international experience for students.
- Enhancing the quality of courses and curricula.
- Networking with other universities in education and research, sharing teaching capacity
- Enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the university
- New approaches concerning alumni activities, continuous education and lifelong learning
- Reaching out to disadvantaged groups (migrants, refugees, etc.).

In conclusion:

- Education can be organized in face-to-face, blended or by online modes. This is also the case for mobility which always goes together with it. It can be short and long term, synchronous and asynchronous. ICT modes of teaching and learning amplify the potential of education and the mobility related to it.
- All forms of mobility can be offered separately or in a combination.

- None of the forms of mobility is an alternative for replacing the other. Each form is adding to the enrichment of education, offering students for the opportunity to learn international competences and skills.
- The sequence op physical, blended, and online mobility will be based on principles of international curriculum and course design.
- The European Universities Initiative and the OpenU-BLOOM hub will extend international education and international mobility.

After Corona: next steps:

- HEIs need to reconsider their own educational model, including professional digital education;
- Most urgently educate your staff in the use of digital didactics and understanding what quality in online education is;
- Evaluate and innovate your education repeatedly to enhance to its optimum

3.3.3. The European Short Learning Programmes project (Alessandra Antonaci)

The objectives and status of the project, the concept of SLP; its characteristics and the experience with the pilots was presented by the E-SLP project coordinator. More details are available here: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ClXWR6HDV9x5kLWYiGp8aJOJJoKSrbUo/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115237226140671142577&rtpof=true&sd=true

3.3.4. Microcredentials in higher education: a European discussion (Alessandra Antonaci and Piet Henderikx).

Background

The society in which we live in, is highly connected. Students in this society, thanks to the Internet, are used to have and share almost everything in real-time. Furthermore, this kind of society requires learning during our lifespan (LLL) for improving our knowledge, skills and competences, within personal, civic, social or employment-related perspectives.

Microcredential and short learning programmes (SLPs) represent a new format for the delivery of education. They provide an answer to the needs of learners in continuous education and continuous professional development.

Micorcredential definition

A micro-credential is a certified short learning experience, offered by an HEI or to other providers, designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge/skills/competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or employability needs. Microcredentials are subjected to a quality assurance assessment in line with the ESG (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area).

Microcredentials have an explicit reference to defined learning outcomes at a specific EQF-EHEA/NQF level that will be achieved, the workload, expressed in ECTs; and to the assessment methods and

criteria adopted. Each microcredential can be acknowledged by HEIs as, and via, recognition of prior learning (RPL).

The Common Microcredential Framework- CMF

The CMF responds to the question: *How to harmonize the current wide variation of certificates offered in higher education, which leads to confusion on matter related to recognition of these credentials not only within institutions but also outside academia?*

The CMF criteria and the SLPs characteristics are in line, indeed:

- SLPs consists of a coherent set of learning building blocks/microcredentials organised around steady learning outcomes, leading to an exam and ultimately to a credential/qualification
- SLPs vary in size, from 5 to 30 ECTS, and can reach 5 to 8 EQF level;
- A SLP is provided by a HEI;
- SLPs can be delivered in online or blende mode;
- SLPs can be stackable to a bigger programme such as an academic degree;
- A SLP credential is accompanied by a document that details the main characteristics of the programme and the achievements of the student;
- The quality of these SLPs is assessed by the internal quality assurance procedure of each HEI

Based on the latest development in Europe, the European Commission will work towards the elaboration of a European Approach to micro-credentials, to help widen learning opportunities and strengthen the role of higher education and vocational education and training institutions in lifelong learning by providing more flexible and modular learning opportunities. They are useful not only for professionals but can also complement the curriculum for students at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral levels. A growing number of adults, with or without a higher education degree, will need to reskill and upskill through more flexible alternatives than a full degree in order to overcome the gap between the learning outcomes of their initial formal qualifications and emerging skills needs in the labour market. While a growing number of higher education institutions, including European universities, are already working on the development of these microcredentials, a common definition and a common approach on their validation and recognition is lacking. In this context the commission plans to present a proposal for a council recommendation in 2021. The new approach to microcredentials should allow that:

- Learners find recognition for even small steps in continuing education/continuous professional development by awarding a qualification after successful completion;
- Learners are triggered to start learning paths towards a next milestone throughout their lives;
- A maximum of flexibility is offered in combining learning with the workplace;
- Qualifications are standardized and therefore endorsed by academia and employers.

3.3.5. *Pilot 5: the "Digitally competent educators" (Virpi Uotinen, Glória Bastos, and Leena Hiltunen).*

A practical example on co-design, co-delivery and co-managing a SLPs was presented by E-SLP experts. They, with the support of the WP leader and project coordinator, have developed the SLP: "digitally competent educator" which consists of three modules.

Module 1 Introduction to Digital Competences for Educators (5 ECTS)

Module 2 Teaching and Learning with Digital Resources (5 ECTS)

Module 3 Facilitating and Assessing Learners' Digital Competencies (5 ECTS)

At the time of the presentation the SLP needed still to be run. More details on the presentation can be found here https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1CZN3E7oZkBw8K5EOi6lE2Ja-piW8pi3Y/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115237226140671142577&rtpof=true&sd=true while for its assessment and pedagogical principle please consult the D6.1 and D6.2.

3.3.6. *The lessons learnt from the SLPs pilots: the cooperation model (Frederik Truyen).*

The key messages form this presentation was that to develop collaborative SLPs

- It is vital to share a common understanding of what a SLP is for each partner institution involved
- Define the connection of SLPs with the degree programmes offered by each partner institution;
- Delineate the target audience.

Because of the involvement of multiple partners institutions it is important to determine how the responsibility are shared with an Institutional agreement that need to cover also:

- Branding, marketing
- Copyrights

Pre-Conditions for a successful collaboration is having a shared catalogue of courses and (even if sound obvious) trusting the other partner attitude to work. To facilitate the collaboration would help if form the organization side is clear

- Who should take the initiative
- Who should be involved
- Guidelines on SLP deployment needed
- Top-down or bottom-up?
- Motivated professors
- Rector support
- Programme committee

The presentation is available here https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1T3u9ryMMqm0E886Lja_LWoYXFyn08sl2/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115237226140671142577&rtpof=true&sd=true

3.4. Key messages from the Lithuanian empowering webinar

KTU/NADE institute are keen in developing SLP and microcredentials programmes. Due to the long and structured process that characterize the institution there are not yet clear institutional guidelines and strategy but the E-SLPs results will be of key value for the Lithuanian partner.

4. The Empowering webinar of KU Leuven- Belgium

4.1. KU Leuven needs analysis

Based on the analysis carried on by EADTU the following topics satisfy the need of the institution and its personnel: m

- Recent developments of microcredentials in Europe and the Common Microcredential Framework
- How the above are linked with Short learning programmes
- Tech implementations
- Post corona strategy at KU Leuven in relation to continuing education and post-graduate trainin

4.2. The webinar at KU Leuven

The event was titled 'SLP and microcredentials in continuing education' and took place in December 2020 (specifically December 8th and 9th). The first day was more theory- based while the second one was more practical, with group discussions. The strategy and policy of KU Leuven in the context of lifelong learning was detailed by Professor Frank Baert and his presentation is available, in Dutch, via the following link: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/13aJ0yv0Ov5bvWyjgTOSoJzkUz71knlNa/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115237226140671142577&rtpof=true&sd=true

4.3. The presentations performed at the KU Leuven event

4.3.1. Recent evolutions microcredentials in Europe and the Common Microcredential Framework (Piet Henderikx and Alessandra Antonaci)

The full presentation is available here: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1REQnbiAyRNHjqWqRzxPB-Cu7W_GYDKEP/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115237226140671142577&rtpof=true&sd=true

The European scenario in relation to SLPs and microcredentials was detailed. The European Commission is working towards the development of a European Approach to micro-credentials, to help widen learning opportunities and strengthen the role of higher education and vocational education and training institutions in lifelong learning by providing more flexible and modular learning opportunities. While a growing number of higher education institutions, including European Universities, are already working on the development of these micro- credentials, a common definition and a common approach on their validation and recognition are lacking.

The CMF that make use of the Bologna tools can be an answer. With CMF, learners: find recognition for even small steps in continuing education; are triggered to start learning paths towards a next milestone throughout their lives; are offered flexibility in combining learning with the workplace; get qualifications that are re standardized and therefore endorsed by academia and employers.

Microcredentials and Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) represent a new format for the delivery of education. They provide an answer to the needs of learners in continuous education and continuous professional development. The criteria used on the CMF are in line with the SLPs characteristics.

4.3.2. Short Higher Education programmes – Case study E-SLP (Frederik Truyen)

A representative of KU Leuven and part of E-SLP presented the project to his colleagues, detailing its goals and achievements. A focus was dedicated to the lessons learnt from the pilots, WP6. More details can be found in the dedicated deliverables and presentation: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1dIA9PUQQE_t5ek0MNF9L-pZ_m7X1K9AC/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115237226140671142577&rtpof=true&sd=true

4.3.3. Case study Association MD Skills gap in Tech implementations health sector (Annabel Van Wanzeele)

The last presentation was given by Annabel Van Wanzeele. Annabel stated that the issue is that technological innovation in the healthcare sector slower is than expected. Despite a lot of technological solutions. Annabel went on and named the intended results of the so-called 'Experimental garden'. She said that they wanted to explore preconditions and success factors for the use of microdegrees in

an LLL policy for workers to lower the threshold to and within higher education. Next to that, they wanted to create a roadmap for co-creation processes with professional field partners. With this, they aim to map out necessary steps and points for attention in such a co-creative process and create ("blueprint") for HOI.

The second day of the KU Leuven empowering training was dedicated to the workshop and group discussions, Frederik Truyen (KU Leuven) opened the seminar and welcomed the attendees. It was used mentimeter to investigate the following questions/topics:

- Do you consider starting an SLP? Most people answered; yes
- Why SLP? Most people said to fill in the gaps of the dregrees programmes
- What are the most important aspects for SLPs? The audience answered: insufficient support and fear of extra workload
- Do you think Microcredentials should be important? Overall, the audience answered yes
- On which level would you develop SLPs/microcredentials? The audience answered 'Lifelong learning', 'Postgraduate' and 'MA level'
- Do you think there is a relation between postgraduate and SLPs? The audience replied and said: modularization as a step towards SLP, and a SLP can be a solid format for a postgraduate degree.
- Priorities:

1. Microcredentials as modularisation
2. Stronger certification and qualification framework
3. Collaboration professional sector
4. ECTS
5. MOOCs and online
6. Bridging programmes

After this interactive session, all attendees were divided into small groups and discussed one topic.

In the annex are reported the discussions carried in each group. While here is reported a short summary per each.

Group 1 discussed the priorities of KU Leuven, which are mainly develop a quality offering for students and teachers who want to pursue professional development. Furthermore, it is important that the university connects better with the professionals/labour market. Group 2 defined that the priority of KU Leuven is to shorten the post graduate degree that at the moment has a size of 20ECTS, maybe too long. Group 3 pointed out that at KU Leuven by using Post graduated programme is difficult to translate it in micro credentials, new study and guidelines are needed. Lastly group 4 discussed the same question and draw the key messages reported in the next paragraph.

5. Key messages form the KU Leuven event

What priorities do you see for (Association) KU Leuven?

The Flemish degree on higher education has defined the notion of postgraduate programmes, awarding ECTS credits and a certificate. Postgraduate programmes must be registered in the Flemish higher education programmes register.

It was expected by the government that Flemish higher education institutions would jointly elaborate a national accreditation system for the entire sector of continuing education and professional development. However, after 20 years, this did not happen yet. Nevertheless, the KU Leuven Association has built such a framework for internal use to create some coherence. It foresees (1) postgraduate (credit awarding) programmes (postgraduaten - PGO); (2) continuous education with certificate (permanente vorming met getuigschrift - PGO, not credit awarding); and (3) continuous education with a certificate of attendance (permanente vorming met attest van deelname - PVA).

This structure has been already subject for internal discussion (2009, 2011). It still has felt that the current legislation on postgraduate programmes is a barrier for coherent institutional policies.

The offices for continuing education are also observing an increasing demand of teaching staff for organising short continuous education/professional development around one subject area (something like a microcredential), responding to professional needs. This is rather new.

As current European policies on microcredentials and continuous education will come on the table of national ministers (Council Recommendation, 2021, see the document on the European Education Area 2025, 30 September 2020), this will be an opportunity for the Flemish Minister of Education to review the decree for higher education in this respect.

The “flexibilization” aspect in the decree for higher education was mainly meant to facilitate access of working adults to higher education, combining work and study, providing credit and examination contracts for students (for the uptake of single course or a group of courses). Next to this, institutions received 50 % extra funding for these adult students.

Whereas this is certainly a very valuable (and rather unique) policy approach for adult student funding, this has nevertheless not led to a substantial increase of the participation of adult students in Flanders. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning is between the lowest in Europe. There are a few reasons for this:

- continuous education and professional development in this degree didn't start from a comprehensive vision on continuing education. In the meantime, the needs for continuous education have increased in all European countries, requiring flexible and scalable approaches, making the sector an important area of provision next to degree education.

- institutional responses were to some extent conditioned by the limitations of the decree, as the (surplus) funding for adult students was restricted to enrolments for courses in degree education and the integration of the same courses in postgraduate programmes was not funded;
- the funding of continuous education is a challenging issue;
- institutions up to now only partially invested in dedicated services for continuing education (eg comparable with “extension schools”). The focus on continuous education as a main area of provision was missing.

At the institutional level, the new European priorities and developments might be an opportunity to reconsider the field and to position the (Association) KU Leuven with regard to continuous education. A blueprint for further development might also inspire and support the Minister of Education preparing a response to the Council Recommendation, 2021. As a frontrunner university in the area of continuing education and professional development, it is important to start with this in an early stage.

Preconditions, obstacles, financing, underlying business model, ESF, Flemish and European policy

It is important that new notions like “microcredentials” and “short learning programmes” are well defined.

On the European level, it is agreed that both are defined in the context of *formal* education, leading to academic credits, and linked to one of the EQF levels. Both provide a certificate supplement. Both are quality assured by institutional quality assurance mechanisms.

Non-formal learning and professional experience can be recognised through procedures as defined in the ECTS Guide and formally adopted by the Flemish government and KU Leuven..

Microcredentials in the CMF framework are defined as a new qualifications after coherent programmes of 4-6 ECTS (100-150 hrs of study). They can be accumulated in short learning programmes and recognised in degree programmes. Microcredential programmes can be building blocks in a modular structure (stackability).

Most *short learning programmes* entail programmes from 5 to 30 ECTS. Most European universities organise undergraduate and postgraduate certificate programmes from 20 to 40 ECTS under different names: Undergraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Certificate, Certificate of Specialisation, Certificate of Expert, Certified Professional Programme, Focus Diploma, Micromaster, Nanomaster, etc…

In the context of KU Leuven, the many postgraduate programmes (at least 20 ECTS) can be considered as short learning programmes. They deliver ECTS and a certificate under the conditions of Flemish legal regulations. Next to this, KU Leuven is organizing continuous education/CPD programmes

awarding a non-credited certificate of at least 90 hrs (PVG, no ECTS awarded) and other continuous education/CPD programmes with a certificate of attendance only (PVA).

This is a complex structure, (partially) due to the fact that only formal postgraduate programmes are recognised by Flemish regulations (see above). Participants asked for more clarity and a revision of the system.

Non-credit awarding continuing education offering a certificate (PVG) at the Association KU Leuven might be impacted by the development of microcredentials. This also should invite KU Leuven and furthermore the government to a revision and renaming of the continuing education and professional development offerings.

As a side remark, it was noticed that the name “postgraduaten” is not appropriate anymore in view of the “graduaten” more recently created at level HBO5.

Collaboration and co-creation

In continuous education, collaboration with the world of work is very important in order to make a programme relevant for professionals. Certainly when OPOs (credit awarding courses from a formal degree programme) are used, this adds an important dimension.

The two ESF projects (Micro-degree in Health Care, Association KU Leuven; Microcredentials in Distance Education - for IT and for Teacher Training) both are a good example of co-creation.

In both designs, (CMF) microcredentials and SLPs are combined in a modular approach.

Co-creation can mean many things: needs analysis, input when setting objectives, advice on the curriculum, participation in seminars, involvement of students in real life projects or internships. Eventually also co-teaching, although this is a rather exceptional case, eg in an earlier programme on social mediation (SHH).

Short learning programmes often adopt existing credit awarding courses from degree programmes, although at KU Leuven they provide in most cases new courses. New parts of a programme can also consist of seminars are courses oriented to professional practices involving practitioners and employers.

Tensions between higher education provisions and the private sector

There is a growing competition in continuing education between the higher education and the private sector (eg NCOI-Kluwer).

It is important that the Association KU Leuven has a clear position on this, promoting formal ECTS awarding continuing education combining an academic and professional orientation, which can be valued in academia as well as by employers.

Also,the other offerings in continuing education (PGV, PVA) are needed to raise the quality of competences of (alumni) professionals in order to cover the needs of the private and public sector, eg regarding digitalisation, health care, teacher training).

The question was raised if the government would continue funding continuing education as it might consider that individuals will benefit from it in their further careers. However, in this respect we differ from Anglosaxon countries where higher education in general (also bachelor and master degree programmes) are considered as a commodity rather than as a public good (paid for by tax payers), contributing to the collective development of society.

In certain areas, high education institutions don't seem to have a monopoly anymore. This is one more reason to show their (academic) added value.

Teaching staff should be encouraged to deliver continuing education, also by internal business models. An institutional culture should be created avoiding that staff would be hired by the private sector, while the institution invested as well in their expertise.

More efforts should be made to communicate the offerings to the general public and the professionals, raising awareness about the continuing education provisions in higher education.

Blended and online offerings

The Association KU Leuven is continuously looking for innovative pedagogies and new types of organisation of continuous education in order to fit to the life conditions of learners, especially learners at work. Personalised and flexible education is needed. To meet the needs of the economy and society, provisions need also to be scalable. Blended and online education would contribute to this as already experienced in programmes in the Association KU Leuven and at other universities (eg TU Delft; University of Edinburgh).

6. References

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Melai, T., van der Western, S., Winkels, J., Antonaci, A., Henderikx, P., & Ubachs, G. (2020). *Concept and role of Short Learning Programmes in European Higher Education*. https://e-slp.eadtu.eu/images/Concept_and_role_of_SLPs.pdf

7. ANNEX

7.1. The Groups discussions

Group 1: Chaired by Ewout Decraene (KU Leuven)

Common question:

Which priorities do you see for KU Leuven?

- Petra: We also attach credits to this and this is experienced as very attractive. Certainly when completed and the fact that it can be started modularly.
- Permanent training vs master and bachelor: post grad, bama etc.

Collaboration with professional sector. But are they concerned about credits? It is important for them?

- Jo van boscche: he follows. The priority is to develop offerings for all students, but primarily for professionals who want to continue training. Embedding within master or bachelor?
- Maybe not the most suitable path. Companies do not worry about it: it is more important to develop a range that meets demands from the professional field. Strongly committed to digitization and online offering to this audience.
- Sara Lievens: We receive questions from study programs that are not in the credit system to add certain credits to the study program. Especially courses with a foreign union such as summer schools. It needs to be valued somewhere. Until now, this has been lacking except for postgrads. All other courses have a lot of variation, there is no clear idea about how much / what a course is worth.
- Jo: understandable to students, not to professionals
- Petra: molarity is especially important for professionals, they don't have the ability to free up that much time in a year. Dividing it into modules for each year would make it feasible and combinable for many people. An attractive combination with the online component.
- Jo: We are already doing this. It is possible to split a postgraduate over three years.
- Petra: Yes, but not everywhere
- Brigitte: Credits restriction in time?
- Sara: Credits remain valid for life unless the subject is outdated to such an extent that further training is required.
- Jo: Within our courses, tax subjects: limited shelf life due to changing legislation. Lifelong credits seems very difficult for such courses in that respect.
- Petra: At open universities also lifelong unless outdated subject matters. But at the same time: how long does that remain valid if you transfer to other study programs? We do notice that

credits are often accepted when people start new training, they are seen as previously acquired competences. But can be questioned in areas such as IT or those that are closely linked to legislation.

- Sara: Of course, the institution where an exemption is requested always makes the assessment.
- Birgitte: As an association you can of course make agreements about this.
- Petra: Do those agreements exist? Or is that in the twilight zone? What do we still see as a priority? Collaboration with the professional sector: how do you estimate this? For our daily practice, but perhaps more difficult or less self-evident for other departments?
- Liesbet: From my perspective I would say this is less of a priority for us. But when I hear what you all are doing, perhaps it is precisely the need to give the faculties a better insight into possible collaborations with professional partners. So, when I come back to the question we were asked: these kinds of initiatives are very instructive, many faculties would benefit from information about the basic context, conditions and options for making their own selection. For example, we would look more at a modular system with which you as a bachelor can acquire credits. Already exists, but further elaboration possible. So especially information and support are a priority at the moment.
- Sara: More clarity about terminology. At the moment, all kinds of study programs are mentioned that have the same background / condition framework, making it more difficult to estimate where similarities and differences lie.
- Jo: Collaborating with the professional field is self-evident for us. I think we are very close to whatever is in POC / PUC. We coordinate with education committees where people from the professional field are, try to meet their demands. It is also for them that we organize the training. Within PMA, for example, prevention advisers, environmental coordinators, so it is logical that we look at the professional field. Training courses are an extension of the odyssey offer, so it is logical that we also look at the professional field there.

Specific question:

Strengthen certification and qualification

Certification is key, but cannot be based on nothing: it must be valued and recognized as part of the core assignment. A strong certification framework cannot do without funding

- Petra: with a post grad you will receive a kind of diploma instead of a certificate of participation. You can obtain TOV bachelor or master through modular construction, you will receive a certificate for each course you pass. Appreciated by people who are not pursuing a degree, just that specialization. They can take the training without a full diploma. Evidence of knowledge is often required, so it is very important. Often it does not go further than a certificate of participation, so this is in many cases not enough.
- Jo: We use the agreements made regarding certification within the association. Certificate for continuing education. Certificate for training with evaluation, without evaluation a certificate of participation.
- Petra: Are there courses without a certificate that are substantively so demanding that they require a certificate?
- Sara: Many organizers give a certificate, but we currently have no insight into this. We only see what is delivered via SAP. Continuing education with a certificate is provided by the faculty, but otherwise this is at the discretion of the organizer, subject also other names. So perhaps attention should indeed be paid to that as well. According to the certification framework, it is only possible if there is evaluation attached to it, then attached to program guide (pvg or not). Putting training in a program guide is disadvantageous for the organizer, so it certainly plays a role in this.
- Petra:. Is there a need of certification in the professional sector? Quality is of course important, but would it make it easier for the professional world if we introduce certification? To what extent do professionals find this necessary and important? Does the student find this important? Maybe better map out first. Does this have a real impact on application? Have to question this.
- Sara: Quality assurance is currently lacking. No framework outside of postgraduate degrees. No control at the moment, but of course we assume that our teachers are doing a good job
- Petra: There are quality measurements, but in different ways. Should this be formalized?
- Sara: Don't usually stand for extra admin
- Sara: This depends entirely on the target group. Some target groups attach different value to certification
- Birgitte: certificeren gaat in twee richtingen: in welke mate kunnen wij credits aanvaarden zonder certificering?
- Petra: Also within an international framework, how can we embed permanent training in this? They often work with such systems. What if we want further cooperation?
- Birgitte: Only education or private?

- Petra: And then what is an educational institution?
- Each country has its own approach and philosophy. English approach is different from FR, for example. Many big differences internationally.
- Sara: What we also get more often is the question to open up opos as a PVA: so you used to have the stature of a student, no longer exists, so people who were interested but did not take an exam. That is not a professional training, but mainly pensioners, for example. With those credit contracts, those barriers have become high. Can we not offer this as permanent education? Eg 21st century lessons where people can connect purely for interest
- Petra: great need of people, in addition to pensioners, who want to do individual courses. Where can we go to take such free lessons without exams? There are still many possibilities there. Most importantly, we should come back to free student system to take x number of credits. I do notice that people bump into the pattern in which the course is embedded. Online opportunities? We are making the switch anyway, and there are some possibilities for such cases. There are certainly opportunities here for this short educational story as well. If we go back to modularity, we have to focus more on this to meet demand.
- Sara: Take advantage of OPOs out there. Little work or energy to open it up to others.
- Brigitte: E-learning and microcredentials, there are also aspects to this. Copyright and all, can the association support us in this? Much fear about "what is coming our way here?"
- Petra: When I look at e-learning, what do you have in mind? Not a fan of MOOCS herself: after 15 minutes the attention drops. Research happened. Self-interest in virtual classes, webinars and team environment are more interesting I think. Longer sessions are of course much heavier. At the moment, of course, of necessity, but not ideal. Blended or hybrid, we have to think even further and exchange ideas. Open universities are ahead of this because they were working on this long before corona. The online offer is currently in any case still free and too limited.
- Sara: We can take advantage of this from everything that happens during regulaar training. Eg Learning lab etc. Can be used for lifelong learning after adjustments.
- Petra: We have built up an enormous amount of expertise among colleagues by completely switching to fully online. Experiments are being carried out with other concepts such as cherry classes etc. It is a matter of trial and error because it had to go quickly, but practice makes perfect.
- Jo: My concern at the moment: we use many different platforms interchangeably, especially for participants and students this is difficult. At a certain point we have to make choices about this and formalize it.

- Petra: important to analyse how the student experiences this. At the moment it seems to make little difference in terms of interaction, but experience is of course a very difference. Can't see each other, for example.
- Jo: where do we focus on digitally, and where live? How do we make the choice in terms of this mix, what works better digitally and what works better offline, where does that interaction add value?
- Petra: it saves time for students due to relocation and co, but regression of registrations due to screen fatigue.
- Sara: without obligation, easier to get out.

Group 2: Chaired by Frederik Truyen (KU Leuven)

Common question:

Postgraduate degree (usually 20 ECTS) is often too long, and we should still be able to give some kind of credible certification to short units.

- Are we exploiting the potential association?
- Working in groups to find out how we strengthen LLL, can we learn from each other? Good examples in all universities of applied sciences, but not that structural
- Now informal networks around topics
- No overarching policy frameworks
- Question: where are the gaps? Offer is very wide
- Need for consultation within subdomains and cooperation within Flanders
- Taking a step back: organizations do often have different interpretations, much more multidisciplinary work
- Framework, financing, legal framework: not flexible
- How to facilitate multidisciplinary aspect?
- Problems with uptake postgraduate: too difficult, too long, despite market demand
- Switched to webinars - example cooperative entrepreneurship
- No clear project, no system, no university strategic plan
- What is the position that HE wants to occupy in the space of LLL?
- What is the unique place in relation to commercial activities?
- There is no funding in return, so it is not a real priority
- Who pays? Payment plans?
- Need for a master plan with financing with input from the business community (also think of tax shelter)
- Problem for employers to invest in personal development
- What can the universities do? Ensuring commitment to LL is also part of the engagement.
- Now it is voluntary and must also be self-sufficient.

Group 3: Chaired by Ilse Op de Beeck (KU leuven)

1.1. Common question:

What priorities do you see for (Association) KU Leuven?

- Post graduated programme as a term not known in the Anglo-Saxon world - sometimes even rather negative connotations - micro-credentials can be a solution - very often the question of what Post graduated programme is - also a precarious international status
- Vives Post graduated programme where you could take modules separately - follow full program for number of ECTS - what if you follow modules from Post graduate separately - also ECTS?
- Administrative processes are not yet in line with this - what timeframe to tackle the concrete realization of microdentials
- Supply Association: as an outsider sometimes difficult to understand what can be followed - using cooperation as strength, not in competition and to invent the hot water themselves and have everything distributed
- Eg. Vives has a good offer in certain topic, why others still invest and an organization that costs a lot >>> need more complementarity, micro-credentials than useful to weigh the modules (level differences between courses) and to put together packages / courses (starter package >> advanced packages >> expert; therefore need for intake: check certain prior knowledge / admission requirements) >>> will require stronger pathway guidance - there is an open field for association to better frame this
- Quality must certainly be linked to this
- It is also possible to join forces for pieces that happen face-to-face
- Kind of uniformity (for providers and buyers) and a clear framework needed. Now sometimes search.
- Greater flexibility> <challenge in terms of drop-out rate
- Also make clear where support is possible - give priority to this! Often in practice something "that is added". Provide sufficient FTEs
- Is there anything in return for the teacher (something to include in their file / evaluation)? What to link to this in order to motivate people more to join this as a teacher? (incentive)
- Clear proposals could also be something for VDAB, but do not include this >>> association
- Teaching for people from the field >>> sometimes require completely different teachers for certain questions that come from practice

- As an association it is important to valorise our knowledge ourselves - emerging competition from the business world >>> we must also be able to offer flexibility and tailor-made training
- Who do they want to reach with micro-credentials? Also attract foreign students? Foreign universities can also aim for Flanders. MicroMasters also evolves.

Group 4: chaired by Piet Henderikx (EADTU)

Common question:

What priorities do you see for (Association) KU Leuven?

The Flemish degree on higher education has defined the notion of postgraduate programmes, awarding ECTS credits and a certificate. Postgraduate programmes must be registered in the Flemish higher education programmes register.

It was expected by the government that Flemish higher education institutions would jointly elaborate a national accreditation system for the entire sector of continuing education and professional development. After 20 years, this never happened. Nevertheless, the KU Leuven Association has built such a framework for internal use in order to create some coherence. It foresees (1) postgraduate (credit awarding) programmes (postgraduaten - PGO); (2) continuous education with certificate (permanente vorming met getuigschrift - PGO, not credit awarding); and (3) continuous education with a certificate of attendance (permanente vorming met attest van deelname - PVA).

This structure has been already subject for internal discussion (2009, 2011). It is still felt that the current legislation on postgraduate programmes is a barrier for coherent institutional policies.

The offices for continuing education are also observing an increasing demand of teaching staff for organising short continuous education/professional development around one subject area (something like a microcredential), responding to professional needs. This is rather new.

As current European policies on microcredentials and continuous education will come on the table of national ministers (Council Recommendation, 2021, see the document on the European Education Area 2025, 30 September 2020), this will be an opportunity for the Flemish Minister of Education to review the decree for higher education in this respect.

The “flexibilisation” aspect in the decree for higher education was mainly meant to facilitate access of working adults to higher education, combining work and study, providing credit and examination contracts for students (for the uptake of single course or a group of courses). Next to this, institutions received 50 % extra funding for these adult students.

Whereas this is certainly a very valuable (and rather unique) policy approach for adult student funding, this has nevertheless not led to a substantial increase of the participation of adult students in Flanders. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning is between the lowest in Europe (see the ET 2020 benchmarks). There are a few reasons for this:

- continuous education and professional development in this decree didn't start from a comprehensive vision on continuing education. In the meantime, the needs for continuous

education have increased in all European countries, requiring flexible and scalable approaches, making the sector an important area of provision next to degree education.

- institutional responses were to some extent conditioned by the limitations of the decree, as the (surplus) funding for adult students was restricted to enrolments for courses in degree education and the integration of the same courses in postgraduate programmes was not funded;
- the funding of continuous education is a challenging issue;
- institutions up to now only partially invested in dedicated services for continuing education (eg comparable with “extension schools”). The focus on continuous education as a main area of provision was missing.

At the institutional level, the new European priorities and developments might be an opportunity to reconsider the field and to position the (Association) KU Leuven with regard to continuous education. A blueprint for further development might also inspire and support the Minister of Education preparing a response to the Council Recommendation, 2021. As a frontrunner university in the area of continuing education and professional development, it is important to start with this in an early stage.

Specific question:

Preconditions, obstacles, financing, underlying business model, ESF, Flemish and European policy

1. Definition of terms

It is important that new notions like “microcredentials” and “short learning programmes” are well defined.

On the European level, it is agreed that both are defined in the context of *formal* education, leading to academic credits and linked to one of the EQF levels. Both provide a certificate supplement. Both are quality assured by institutional quality assurance mechanisms.

Non-formal learning and professional experience can be recognised through procedures as defined in the ECTS Guide and formally adopted by the Flemish government and KU Leuven..

Microcredentials in the CMF framework are defined as new qualifications after coherent programmes of 4-6 ECTS (100-150 hrs of study). They can be accumulated in short learning programmes and recognised in degree programmes. Microcredential programmes can be building blocks in a modular structure (stackability).

Most *short learning programmes* entail programmes from 5 to 30 ECTS. Most European universities organise undergraduate and postgraduate certificate programmes from 20 to 40 ECTS under different names: Undergraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Certificate, Certificate of Specialisation, Certificate of Expert, Certified Professional Programme, Focus Diploma, Micromaster, Nanomaster, etc…

In the context of KU Leuven, the many postgraduate programmes (at least 20 ECTS) can be considered as short learning programmes. They deliver ECTS and a certificate under the conditions of Flemish legal regulations. Next to this, KU Leuven is organizing continuous education/CPD programmes awarding a non-credited certicate of at least of at least 90 hrs (PVG, no ECTS awarded) and other continuous education/CPD programmes with a certificate of attendance only (PVA).

This is a complex structure, (partially) due to the fact that only formal postgraduate programmes are recognised by Flemish regulations (see above). Participants asked for more clarity and a revision of the system.

Non-credit awarding continuing education offering a certificate (PVG) at the Association KU Leuven might be impacted by the development of microcredentials. This also should invite KU Leuven and furthermore the government to a revision and renaming of the continuing education and professional development offerings.

As a side remark, it was noticed that the name “postgraduaten” is not approriate anymore in view of the “graduaten” more recently created at level HBO5.

2. Collaboration and co-creation

In continuous education, collaboration with the world of work is very important in order to make a programme relevant for professionals. Certainly when OPOs (credit awarding courses from a formal degree programme) are used, this adds an important dimension.

The two ESF projects (Micro-degree in Health Care, Association KU Leuven; Microcredentials in Distance Education - for IT and for Teacher Training) both are a good example of co-creation.
In both designs, (CMF) microcredentials and SLPs are combined in a modular approach.

Co-creation can mean many things: needs analysis, input when setting objectives, advice on the curriculum, participation in seminars, involvement of students in real life projects or internships. Eventually also co-teaching, although this is a rather exceptional case, eg in an earlier programme on social mediation (SHH).

Short learning programmes often adopt existing credit awarding courses from degree programmes, although at KU Leuven they provide in most cases new courses. New parts of a programme can also consist of seminars are courses oriented to professional practices involving practitioners and employers.

3. Tensions between higher education provisions and the private sector

There is a growing competition in continuing education between the higher education and the private sector (eg NCOI-Kluwer).
It is important that the Association KU Leuven has a clear position on this, promoting formal ECTS awarding continuing education combining an academic and professional orientation, which can be valued in academia as well as by employers.
Also the other offerings in continuing education (PGV, PVA) are needed to raise the quality of competences of (alumni) professionals in order to cover the needs of the private and public sector, eg regarding digitalisation, health care, teacher training).

The question was raised if the government would continue funding continuing education as it might consider that individuals will benefit from it in their further careers. However, in this respect we differ from Anglosaxon countries where higher education in general (also bachelor and master degree programmes) are considered as a commodity rather than as a public good (paid for by tax payers), contributing to the collective development of society.

In certain areas, high education institutions don't seem to have a monopoly anymore. This is one more reason to show their (academic) added value.

Teaching staff should be encouraged to deliver continuing education, also by internal business models. An institutional culture should be created avoiding that staff would be hired by the private sector, while the institution invested as well in their expertise.

More efforts should be made to communicate the offerings to the general public and the professionals, raising awareness about the continuing education provisions in higher education.

4. Blended and online offerings

The Association KU Leuven is continuously looking for innovative pedagogies and new types of organisation of continuous education in order to fit to the life conditions of learners, especially learners at work. Personalised and flexible education is needed. To meet the needs of the economy and society, provisions need also to be scalable. Blended and online education would contribute to this as already experienced in programmes in the Association KU Leuven and at other universities (eg TU Delft; University of Edinburgh). This will be further discussed as time was too short..

European Short Learning Programmes

Project Number: 590202-EPP-1-2017-1-NL-EPPKA3-PI-FORWARD

Project Duration: 36 months

Start date: 01-01-2018

End date: 31-12-2020

Coordinator: European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU)

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