

# AQUA-TNET3

Promoting innovation and a European dimension through Lifelong learning in the field of Aquaculture, Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Management – Thematic Network

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**Title:** *Implementation of EUA charter of lifelong learning*

**Workpackage(s) concerned:** WP 5

**Nature of deliverable (Report, Service, Product, Demonstrator, Event, Other: Questionnaires, Workshop)**

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M 24	M.Eleftheriou	XXX	XXX

**Dissemination level:** PU, in parts RE (questionnaire results).

<b>PU</b> Public	<b>X</b>
<b>RE</b> Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
<b>CO</b> Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

**Indicate any document related to this deliverable (report, website, ppt etc and give file name)**

## **SUMMARY**

The subgroup circulated an initial short report on *Implications of implementation of EUA Charter on Lifelong Learning in Month 12*

The findings from two important EU projects formed the basis of this initial report, but as their conclusions were rather depressing (shown later in Annex 1), the network's members did not feel encouraged to even attempt a task that was seen by these two well-funded projects, as requiring funds, resources and massive local and political will before any real progress could be made in implementing the EUA Charter of Lifelong Learning.

Universities are reluctant to commit to those actions of the Charter such as "*adapting study programmes to enhance widening participation*", catering for "*a diversified student population*" and "*providing appropriate guidance & counselling service*". Especially when governments do not appear eager to engage in their commitments, such as "*recognising the university contribution to LLL as a major benefit to individuals and society*" and "*promoting social equity & an inclusive learning society*".

### **Objectives:**

One of the subgroup's main tasks was to support the EUA Charter for Lifelong Learning, by informing the AQUATNET network of the details of the Charter, and how it has been or is being implemented in the EU, with a view to sharing best practice in this area perceived as important before the start of the current financial crisis. Towards this end, the subgroup focused its attention on two important and well-funded EU projects (SIRUS & ALLUME) which dealt specifically with the implementation of the EUA Charter in European universities, and disseminated their findings to the network.

### **Rationale:**

The EUA actively promoted emphasis on the lifelong learning agenda by developing the "*European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning*" in 2008 (EUA 2008). The Charter is a call for European universities and governments, together with the social partners and other stakeholders, to support the lifelong learning agenda, and to assist Europe's universities in developing their specific role in this context. The Charter places all types of higher education – formal, non-formal and informal – within the framework of lifelong learning.

Two EU-funded projects, SIRUS (with a partnerships representing 29 universities) and ALLUME (with a partnerships representing 10 universities with 6 additional 'testing' partners) which were undertaken in order to show how the European Charter for Lifelong Learning could be implemented, are briefly described here. Their findings show clearly why, in the present economic situation, so few new developments seem to have taken place (Bengtsson 2013).

### **Results:**

According to the *Trends 2010* report (Sursock and Smidt 2010), provision of accredited lifelong learning is rare:

*“In the majority of European countries, lifelong learning is considered as a set of activities provided outside mainstream education, in relation to which Bologna tools such as learning outcomes and academic credits are only rarely defined or attached” .*

However, in the survey carried out by Subgroup A to determine the extent of lifelong learning provision policy in AQUA-TNET partner institutions, there was a fairly even split: 54% indicated that they did have such a policy, while 46% admitted that they had no such policy. But that in itself shows a noticeable difference from the *Trends* results.

*Trends 2010* (Sursock and Smidt 2010) stated that the development of institutional lifelong learning strategies that support all educational provision in a lifelong perspective evolves very slowly evidenced by the fact that data from *Trends III* (2003) showed that 35% of institutions stated that they had developed an overall lifelong learning strategy while six years later, only a “negligible increase to 39%” had occurred.

Perhaps because of the greater integration and cooperation of the AQUA-TNET partnership which includes organisations, research organisations and industrial partners as well as universities, there is a greater awareness of the need for more flexible learning pathways involving lifelong learning provision and also for recognition of prior learning, which has long been one of the pillars of the Bologna reforms.

The results of the subgroup A survey indicated that AQUA-TNET had in fact played a significant role in bringing together all stakeholders to ensure that there was a flow of information and knowledge transfer to partners. AQUA-TNET’s long-term approach succeeded in transmitting at least some of the concepts promoted in the Charter for Lifelong Learning.

**Teams involved:**

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**Geographical areas covered:** not applicable

## **Annex 1**

### **EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES CHARTER ON LIFELONG LEARNING**

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#### **The SIRUS project findings**

Most universities go through a three-step sequence in developing an institutional LLL strategy involving an adaptation stage, an organisation stage (where strategies are put in place) and finally a cultural stage (where universities adopt a new way of thinking, a LLL culture and a shared vision across the institution).

SIRUS hoped that, by looking at the positioning of LLL in different types of European higher education institutions, to demonstrate different ways of incorporating LLL activities into institutional portfolios. The SIRUS project therefore gave an opportunity for a diverse group of universities to develop and enhance their strategic LLL approaches through interactive discussions with colleagues from across Europe. Specific goals were to test the implementation of the ten commitments adopted in the European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning; to support universities in developing, embedding and enhancing lifelong learning strategies; and to ensure wide dissemination of existing best practices.

The framework conditions crucial for supporting the successful development of lifelong learning were funding and legislation. Only 12 of the 18 SIRUS countries believed such ‘supporting legislation’ was in place and only 4 countries had specific funding for the development of lifelong learning activities. Many of the universities also pointed out that their respective governments had been slow to respond to the commitments in the EUA Lifelong Learning Charter. Universities agreed that for successful implementation, both support from the university leadership and the proactive engagement of staff was crucial. Partnerships and cooperation with other universities and also with non-university partners, including the private sector, were identified as another strategic priority for the success of LLL.

#### **The ALLUME project findings**

ALLUME’s main objective was to find ways of increasing university participation in lifelong learning and to produce “A Lifelong Learning University Model for Europe”,

intended to assist universities by providing guidelines based on the European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning (2008). However, it became clear that the idea of a unique model or a one-size-fits-all approach was not only out-dated but seriously inadequate, given the diversity of universities, environments and the heterogeneity of LLL strategies and processes. ALLUME therefore diverted its main impetus towards the development of flexible "Pathways for Lifelong Learning Universities" in order to tackle the diversity in LLL strategies, and tried instead to find ways for universities to develop flexible "Pathways for Lifelong Learning Universities" as one method of tackling the diversity in LLL strategies. ALLUME produced a useful methodology from 10 case studies based on structured peer visits, with essential tools for self-analysis and benchmarking. The ten case studies were presented in workshops in Brussels and Barcelona (2011). The final results were published both online and in print (<http://allume.eucen.eu/documents>):

- Pathways and Policies: the main findings of the two transversal analyses on content and on process, as well as recommendations addressed to strategy deciders in universities like (vice) rectors and regional, national and European public authorities
- Tools and Results: the three flexible tools for self-analysis and benchmarking, the two transversal analyses in full length and background papers addressed to LLL-practitioners.

### **Conclusions from SIRUS and ALLUME projects**

The rather depressing findings from SIRUS could certainly be a consequence of the severe financial climate throughout Europe, in which European universities have had to make many severe cutbacks. It is not surprising therefore, that universities are reluctant to commit to those actions of the Charter such as "*adapting study programmes to enhance widening participation*", catering for "*a diversified student population*" and "*providing appropriate guidance & counselling service*". Especially when governments do not appear eager to engage in their commitments, such as "*recognising the university contribution to LLL as a major benefit to individuals and society*" and "*promoting social equity & an inclusive learning society*". However, even the rather promising findings from the ALLUME project do not appear to have been taken up by European Universities as the present financial situation does not warrant the taking up of costly new programmes, no matter how worthy the aims and the ultimate benefit to society.

## **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING**

Lifelong learning has been on the European agenda since the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996, and its importance has been highlighted in the Bologna Process, the Lisbon Strategy and EU 2020. Nevertheless, the integration of lifelong learning strategies into the mission of higher education institutions is still marginal across Europe even if lifelong learning activities (e.g. part-time studies, continuing education, professional up-grading, children's and senior universities) have formed an important part of universities' contribution to societal development. Some progress did occur up until 2008, led by the EUA, its Charter on Lifelong Learning, and some European-wide related projects which made a valiant attempt to embed and develop LLL in their activities and curricula.

While there is absolutely no dispute that formal education is an essential part of lifelong learning, there is also no doubt that the acquisition of knowledge, skills and wider

competences at the workplace, is also important. The European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), a ET 2020 initiative, intended to bridge education and the labour market, aims to carry out its European-wide job-matching remit with qualifications directly linked to lifelong learning courses described in terms of learning outcomes (ESCO Launch, Oct.2013). Yet from the *Trends 2010* report (Sursock and Smidt 2010) it is evident that a more systematic development of flexible learning paths to support lifelong learning is needed, supported by some hard evidence as to what the current state of play in European universities is.

Lifelong learning needs to be implemented in such a way that all users can fill their gaps in lack of knowledge and skills. All of the surveys referred to here note that the challenges are different depending on the role of the individual: university teachers, students, employees and employers.

Challenges for teachers:

- Courses need to be designed more in line with the needs of industry and stakeholders
- There should be dialogue and interaction between teachers designing LLL courses and EU Technology Platforms
- Courses should be designed to meet the needs of post-graduate students
- Courses should be updated according to the needs of the industry
- Teaching, learning and assessment methodologies need to be improved
- Courses should be more flexible, including courses in e-learning, which would allow workers to acquire or update the skills necessary for the company
- The system should change in order to allow the recognition of previous experience

Challenges for students

- Students should be encouraged to enrol in those courses such as generic skills and other short courses which can improve their performance. LLL courses can fill these gaps.

Challenges for employees

- LLL courses are an effective way to improve workplace skills

Challenges for employers

- Allow employees to update knowledge concerning, i.e., legal requirements, in particular new European legislation
- Improving employees' knowledge and skills can result in improving company efficiency.

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