



Lifelong Learning: Patterns of Policy in Thirteen European Countries

A Review of Lifelong Learning Policy & Practices in Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, England, Estonia, Flanders, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Russia, Scotland, Slovenia.

LLL2010 Sub-project 1: [Executive Summary](#)

Sub-project 1 Team:

**University of Surrey
University of Edinburgh
Slovenian Institute of Adult Education**

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Introduction

The Context

In the policies of the European Union, lifelong learning has been a means of achieving both competitiveness and social cohesion in an increasingly knowledge-based and globalised economy. Though the concept itself is far from new, lifelong learning's current policy incarnation dates from the mid-1990s (Field 2000); it has therefore coincided with a period of rapid EU expansion. When Austria, Finland and Sweden joined in 1995, the EU had 15 member states; today there are 25, with several others knocking on the door. The LLL2010 Research Project seeks to examine how lifelong learning has been understood and operationalised, focussing in particular on countries within the area of the EU's expansion. While the countries which are the subjects of our investigations include some long-standing EU member-states, the bulk are recent joiners – or in some cases, not yet members.

The concept and practice of lifelong learning in Europe has developed in close connection with wider, political, economic, and social forces. This is true at both EU and national levels. Although there is broad consensus across Europe that lifelong learning can both enhance economic competitiveness and help generate social cohesion and stability, understandings of the concept are subject to wide variation and have to be viewed in relation to specific national contexts.

For these reasons, the project has studied lifelong learning in 13 countries. These include a range of EU member states and others. They are drawn from three main geographical areas: Northern; Eastern and Central Europe. They have diverse political, social, and economic histories; their educational systems have also developed along varying paths. Their rich histories include many periods of convergence and divergence, however – especially over the past century. To take but three examples: in 1914 Ireland, Scotland and England formed parts of the United Kingdom; Hungary, Slovenia, and Austria formed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; while Estonia and Lithuania formed part of the Russian Empire. Today all are independent countries.¹ During the twentieth century, however, their histories have varied: Estonia and Lithuania enjoyed a brief period of independence between the two world wars, but were absorbed into the USSR in 1939; Hungary became independent from 1918, though it fell under German rule during the Second World War and into the Soviet 'sphere of influence' after 1945; Slovenia became an integral part of Yugoslavia; Austria remained independent after 1918, apart from a period of absorption into 'greater Germany'. Although educational policy and practice are not simply a product of history, we cannot make sense of the diversity of how lifelong learning has been understood and operationalised without an awareness of the diversity – but also the commonalities – of these national histories.

The LLL2010 Research Project

The LLL2010 research programme, which forms part of the European Commission's 6th Framework Research Programme, has a number of specific strategic objectives; these include:

- achieving a better understanding of the tensions between a knowledge-based society, lifelong learning and social inclusion in the context of EU enlargement and globalisation;
- analysing the role education systems play in the enhancement of lifelong learning – and in particular, the role institutions play in this at 'micro, meso and macro levels';²
- providing an analysis, based on evidence, of the adequacy of lifelong learning policies for different social groups (especially the socially excluded);
- developing policy proposals, relevant both to the EU and to national governments, as to how lifelong learning strategies can play a role in decreasing social exclusion – and what implications this has for other areas of social and economic policy;
- strengthening the international and multi-disciplinary research infrastructure in relation to lifelong learning; and
- developing transnational data sources.

¹ Apart from England and Scotland, which form parts of the United Kingdom: Scotland has a substantial element of devolved decision-making, with its own Parliament and government.

² See Appendix A for Glossary of terms.

The LLL2010 research project extends over five years (commencing in September 2005), and these questions will be addressed in various ways through a number of ‘sub-projects’. The present report covers the findings of the team only during the first Sub-project, ‘Review of Literature and Policy Documents’. Clearly Sub-project 1 is designed to address only some of the above objectives – it is, however, intended to provide a foundation for the entire research programme.

While it would be invidious to imply any priority among the research objectives, underlying several of them a more general concern may be discerned: how is EU policy being received, understood and operationalised in a range of Central and East European countries? The countries in question are those of the EU’s newer members and aspiring members, which until some fifteen years ago, had been governed for several decades by communist party-led regimes. This is evidently a matter of some importance in the formation of a new Europe. This is not, of course, the only issue with which LLL2010 is concerned; nor is LLL2010 able to deal with all aspects of this question (lifelong learning is only one aspect of social and educational policy; and there are several Central and Eastern European countries which LLL2010 does not consider). Nevertheless, countries studied provide a rich range of evidence for the exploration of these matters; and a sound basis for comparison both among the various countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and between these and a number of more established EU member-states.

Lifelong Learning & the EU

While some have argued that the concerns of lifelong learning stretch from cradle to grave in general the term has been applied to learning which takes place after the initial phases of education has been completed.³ Lifelong learning may have emerged as a policy concern in the 1990s, but its history can be traced back in many European countries at least to the 18th century (c.f. Jarvis & Griffin 2003) – though chiefly under the label ‘adult education’. Education, and adult education in particular, were of course intellectual and popular movements strongly linked with the Enlightenment; adult education’s history is, in many countries, therefore closely entwined with that of ‘Enlightenment projects’, not least socialism.

Every country’s system of adult education has been the product of specific national traditions, but there have also been strong international trends and influences. The post-1945 evolution of adult education is inseparable from the social, political and economic context of the Cold War. Often strongly influenced by socialist ideas, adult education formed a significant feature of the apparatus of many communist-led states in Central and Eastern Europe; western European social democracy also typically saw a role for adult education. The term ‘lifelong learning’ itself, however, was rarely used. Faure’s UNESCO report (1972) adopted and promoted the subtly (but significantly) different term ‘lifelong education’. Lifelong learning as it emerged in the 1990s – especially in the Delors UNESCO Report (1996) – has frequently been criticised as having dropped Faure’s humanistic concerns, in favour of a narrow vocationalism: ‘human resource development in drag’ as Boshier (1998) put it. It is hard to avoid the view that, in the formation of lifelong learning during and since the 1990s, OECD influence has been marked. Since its White Paper *Education and Training: Towards a Learning Society* (1995), and the “European Year of Lifelong Learning” (1996), the EU itself has become an influential opinion-former.⁴ In March 2000, the Lisbon European Council set out lifelong learning as a vehicle for delivery of a key EU objective: to become the world’s most dynamic knowledge based economy. While competitiveness has been a constant theme of Commission statements on lifelong learning, social inclusion and citizenship have also frequently been prominent.

A key concern of the LLL2010 research is to investigate how lifelong learning, now a key element of EU policy, is conceptualised and operationalised in a range of countries. As remarked above, the project gives some priority to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, but a range of (chiefly Northern) countries are also included. The territories studied also include two states which are not members of the EU (Norway and Russia), three regions which are not in themselves states, but which have substantial internal autonomy (England, Flanders and Scotland), and length of EU membership varying from a founder member (Belgium) to a current accession state (Bulgaria). The largest country studied (Russia) has a population one hundred times larger than the smallest (Estonia). This diversity is ensures that the research questions will be pursued across a large spectrum of societies.

³ It is notoriously difficult to make precise and universally applicable definitions of different phases and types of education. The definitions used in this report are to be found in the Glossary (see Appendix A).

⁴ The Commission has also, of course, used lifelong learning as a vehicle for strengthening European identity, through programmes such as ‘Leonardo da Vinci’ and ‘Socrates’.

Economic Change & Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning may have emerged as a discourse in the 1990s for principally economic reasons, but within the European Union context it has been asked to carry progressively more political 'baggage'. Establishing the EU as a dynamic, knowledge-based economy has continued to be key, but the growth in the size of Europe has meant this function must be performed on a much wider scale, and in a more diverse range of economic environments. Economic changes have been central to the development of lifelong learning, and while many of these stem from globalisation and the conditions of late-modernity, some relate more specifically to the transition from centrally-planned to market economies in Central and Eastern Europe.

Economic change has been more stark and radical for formerly centrally-planned economies. Transition to new types of economic and democratic structures in these countries has created demand for new types of work and specialists; a widely-held perception is that lifelong learning can be effective in producing a workforce that can meet the new economic challenges. At the same time, the move from planned to market economies generated unemployment rates which such countries had not previously experienced. Emerging private and service sectors were often unable to provide enough jobs to compensate for major industrial decline. Having said this, there are considerable variations in rates of economic activity and types of employment opportunities between new member and candidate states. See Chapter 4 for further detail.

Lifelong learning may, then, play a valuable role in modernising formerly planned economies. But if the need to modernise post-communist economies is unavoidable, lifelong learning has also been expected to play a role in revitalising western European economies. All countries have of course been subject to globalising processes, with radical change in labour markets and increased international competition. Increased flexibility, and demand for a more highly skilled workforce, has meant that individuals' life courses are far less stable and determined. Within the Northern European countries, economic recession during the 1970s and 1980s played a significant part in reorienting educational systems towards more vocational models: the central economic imperative for lifelong learning has been to meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy.

Lifelong Learning, Citizenship & Social Inclusion

There has, then, been a marked neo-liberal theme in lifelong learning in Europe. The EU's rhetoric on lifelong learning has, however, always stressed the need to overcome social exclusion – it has always recognised that in a dynamic capitalist economy, there are losers as well as winners. Often – more positively – the rhetoric has gone beyond this, and actively promoted social inclusion, cohesion, and the need for a wider and fuller active citizenship. Despite these aims, however, there is a widespread perception that social inequality is on the increase. This may be particularly pronounced in the post-communist countries: one of the strengths of their previous societies was success in widening educational participation and reducing inequality. The introduction of market forces into education appears to have exacerbated inequality – more highly educated people have proved more able to adapt to changing market conditions.

The energetic promotion of active citizenship emerged as an EU priority in the late 1990s, slightly later than lifelong learning itself, but was rapidly assimilated into policy statements on the latter. Although a notoriously slippery term, active citizenship was seen as both necessary to economic success – the 'learning citizen' would adapt in the flexible world – and contribute to European governance – active citizens would engage with, and generate trust in, political institutions at all levels. Not only did it appear in policy statements: various programmes have been introduced to promote active European citizenship and civic participation, and these incorporated measures of non-formal and informal lifelong learning.

Demography & Migration

While economic and political change are clear factors driving the perceived need for lifelong learning, demographic change has also had a major impact. In each country studied, there has been a reduction in the percentage of the population of 'working-age', as a result of falling birth rates, rising life expectancy and – in several cases – emigration. This has generated discussion of how employment levels among the working age population can be maximised, and whether older generations can be re-trained to enable them to remain economically active. Lifelong learning has been seen as an important way in which this can happen. For instance, in Norway it is believed more workers would work until the official retirement age if they had greater

competence in ICT: increasing such skills for older workers is therefore seen as key to enabling people to work longer, increasing the proportion of the population which is economically active.

The post-communist economies have been particularly hit by emigration and a 'brain drain'. Changed economic demands have necessitated a workforce with new kinds of skills. (The problem of emigration by more highly-skilled workers appears to have been a particular issue in two non-EU member states, Bulgaria and Russia.)

In Western European countries, immigration is a more pertinent issue. The Republic of Ireland is a particularly interesting case, having moved over a relatively short period – following a period of sustained economic growth – from being a country of net emigration to one of net immigration. In western European countries, immigration is often seen as a way to address 'skills gaps' and demographic deficits. However, pronounced immigration presents its own set of problems, particularly in relation to social inclusion and cohesion; lifelong learning is often seen as having a role here too.

Aims & Methods

Aims of the Report

Although there is a broad consensus within Europe that lifelong learning has an important part to play within the context of the current scale of economic and social change, there are widely varying understandings of the concept. There is also diversity in delivery, with variation at national and regional levels and for specific social groups. In the light of economic change and transformations within group and individual identities as a consequence of globalisation, the Sub-project has undertaken comparative research on the development of lifelong learning policies and practices.

The purpose of the report is to review how lifelong learning is being conceptualised and put into operation across a range of countries in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. We investigate the nature of the educational and lifelong learning regimes in each country, and how they are changing. It considers how far lifelong learning has entered the policy rhetoric in each country, and in what forms it has done so – in particular, how far it has been shaped by the European Union's thinking, or by national or other influences. It considers how far rhetoric and practice diverge in each country. Lifelong learning can occur in all areas of social life: we therefore also consider how far the actions of different areas of policy and government support it, or hinder its development.

The sub-project applies a comparative documentary analysis of approaches to lifelong learning. Through analysing national policy documents and addressing lifelong learning in participating countries, the aims included: to critically assess the concept of lifelong learning at various levels; to investigate and develop a typology of different policies and initiatives across the countries; to map the range of initiatives to encourage the participation of socially excluded groups in lifelong learning.

This chapter on methodology explains the approach taken in more detail, and explains the structure of the report.

Research Development

The full project team met for the first time in Tallinn, Estonia, in September 2005. During this meeting, the main elements of a questionnaire on national policies and legislation were devised. This was subsequently refined, and circulated. The participating national teams completed their respective questionnaires in time for in-depth discussion at the second preparatory workshop, held in Edinburgh in January 2006. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information on national policies for lifelong learning in all the participating countries and provide an outline framework for comparisons.

A distinctive feature of the research was the diverse project team, which reflects not only all the countries studied, but also a range of disciplinary and research specialisms. In discussions, a range of theoretical perspectives and distinctive national histories emerged. Each of the teams made presentations based on the content of their questionnaire at the Edinburgh meeting, and following this there was debate on the purpose, rationale and structure of the national reports which each team would submit.

During the course of this discussion, it was agreed that the national reports should aim to discover strategies and policy measures for the implementation of the lifelong learning concept, and to consider policy recommendations relevant to each country. Compiling them included consideration of national policy documents and academic literature. There was also a separate analysis of documents at EU level. The national reports were submitted in April 2006, and analysis of them formed the principal basis for this comparative report.

The national reports were substantial documents, comprising typically 7,000-10,000 words (though one was nearer 13,000). Each contained the following chapters:

- Introduction: Historical background to Lifelong Learning
1. Theoretical Perspectives
2. Influence of Conceptualisations and Drivers on Lifelong Learning Policy and Practice
3. Understandings and Operationalisations of Lifelong Learning
4. Significance of Key Concepts in Lifelong Learning Policy
5. Legislation and Policy
6. Main Patterns of Provision and Participation

7. Broader Social Policy and Lifelong Learning
8. Effectiveness of Lifelong Learning Policies
9. Policy Recommendations

The report on EU policy followed a similar structure.

Research Questions

Research questions for the sub-project had been specified in the programme of research for the entire project. However, during a two-day meeting of the Sub-project 1 co-ordinating team held at the University of Surrey in May 2006, the national reports were examined in detail to uncover general themes, comparisons and contrasts. For clarification, and to ensure they flowed more effectively, the SP1 co-ordinating team reviewed, slightly rephrased and introduced some new ordering to the original research questions (the original research questions, and the phrasing actually used, are provided in Appendix D). These research questions provided the structure for this comparative report, with each being discussed largely in the relevant chapter as follows:

- (a) Which different lifelong learning concepts are included in:
 - EU level policy documents? (Ch. 5)
 - National policy documents (Ch. 6)
- (b) Which national policy measures focus on lifelong learning? How significant is lifelong learning in national policy rhetoric? (Ch. 7)
- (c) What concrete initiatives and public sector policies have been implemented at each level of the education system? (Ch.8)
- (d) Is education policy effectively co-ordinated with labour and social policy on matters related to the development of lifelong learning? (Ch.9)
- (e) What barriers exist to effective co-ordination across these different policy fields? (Ch. 10)
- (f) To what extent is lifelong learning allocated a merely residual role in national policy-making? (Ch. 11)

The SP1 co-ordinating team then undertook analysis of individual sections of the national reports in order to address the research questions. The national reports have therefore been the basis for this comparative report. However, the Report begins with a brief consideration of theoretical perspectives which have informed our understanding and analysis of lifelong learning.

Summary

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the issues discussed in the various chapters of the report, then make some provisional recommendations relating to policies on lifelong learning. Finally, we point to issues on which further research is required.

Theoretical Perspectives

Lifelong learning in Europe has developed recently in the context of late modern trends in global capitalism. This has created new opportunities for some, but also social and economic exclusion for other social groups. In this context, lifelong learning has been viewed as a generator of human capital, of social capital, and as providing opportunities for individuals to develop both economically and personally.

Understandings of lifelong learning within the countries studied in this research have been shaped by specific historical, economic and social developments. The post-communist societies tend to view lifelong learning more as a way of enhancing economic growth, whereas in countries with longer traditions of market economies it is seen as a means to build upon development in the face of increasing global competition. There is also a social control dimension to lifelong learning, and this may be exacerbated by tendencies to make learning compulsory in various ways.

We have not yet been able to identify a comparative typology which adequately reflects the diversity of approach in lifelong learning. The welfare models developed by Esping-Andersen and Castles have proved inadequate for various reasons, as discussed in Chapter 4. Those typologies that have been developed do not generally cover Eastern and Central European countries, while Björnaváld's (2001) typology on lifelong learning focuses narrowly on non-formal education with an emphasis on methods of assessment. This leads to the danger of developing a typology focused on the human capital aspect of lifelong learning.

Population Trends, Labour Market & Participation

The analysis of published statistical data on population, the labour market and participation in lifelong learning served to contextualise the more qualitative evidence obtained by the national research teams (see Chapter 4). It is clear that employed people with higher levels of education are likely to participate more in further learning and training than those with lower levels of education. There is regional variation in access to education between cities, towns and rural areas. It is clear that those employed in the public sector are more likely to be able to access training than those in the private sector – despite the fact that, *prima facie*, the private sector is likely to be more affected by global market forces, and its workforce therefore in greater need of training to meet the needs of a knowledge-based economy. Employed people have greater access to education and training than the unemployed and the economically inactive; however, unemployed people are more likely to participate in longer, more intense levels of training than those in employment.

Post-communist countries seem to have witnessed increases in inequality of access to education since their transition to market economies. Although women are more likely to participate in formal education broadly speaking, within vocational training programmes there are greater numbers of men. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that younger people are significantly more likely to participate in education and training than older age groups.

As in all the countries, the lifelong learning concept that prevails in EU policy documents is that of the knowledge society which depends on learning citizens being required to engage in a continual process of re-skilling in order to contribute to economic development. Overall, learning objectives are primarily treated as means for enhancing employability and combating unemployment.

However, current and forthcoming initiatives such as *Grundtvig* (2006), *ESF* (2007-2013), and the *European Year of Equal Opportunities for All* (2007), show a great commitment of the EU to address the areas of equal opportunities and social capital more generally. Areas related to social capital enhancement receive significant attention in policy documents, though this attention is not always reflected in funding resources available for these areas (e.g. *Grundtvig*). Furthermore, in most countries learning opportunities are still more accessible for the young and highly qualified.

Greater policy co-operation and co-ordination between the EU and national levels, facilitated by the EQF framework and an enhanced OMC, will contribute to moving the slogan “lifelong learning for all” towards reality.

Application of Key Lifelong Learning Concepts

There are differences in the extent to which the various concepts related to lifelong learning (*learning citizens, learning cities/regions, learning organisation*) feature in national policies. The knowledge society features strongly in all thirteen countries. Most of the country policies also mention learning organisations. There is less evidence of the learning citizen and learning cities/ regions. For an overarching EU definition of lifelong learning see Chapter 5 (pp. 37-38). By and large, the concepts associated with lifelong learning are viewed as associated with adult or post-compulsory learning.

The interpretation of the concepts varies. Scotland, England, Estonia and Lithuania stress the human capital aspect of the *learning citizen*. Ireland, Slovenia and Norway focus more on the social capital and personal development aspect. Where human capital is emphasised, this is also seen as a mechanism for social inclusion (though later data raises questions as to how effectively it serves this role).

There is less variation in interpretation of the *knowledge society*: the focus is generally on development of human capital. The less used concept of *learning cities/regions* has been interpreted in two ways: providing the individual with access to learning (Norway); or as community regeneration where the focus is on disadvantaged groups (England). When this concept features, it is typically linked to development of regional provision, or decentralisation of learning opportunities. Finally, the concept of *learning organisation* is found in most countries, but emphasis varies between individual organisations’ duty to provide education and training for their employees and nationwide structures to support companies in offering employee training.

In examining how these concepts are used, there is no clear divide between ‘old’ EU countries (and Norway) and the new member states, post-communist, states. For example, as mentioned above, Lithuania, Scotland, England and Estonia seem to have a strong emphasis human capital in their use of the concept the learning citizen, whilst Ireland, Norway and Slovenia stress social capital more. We have not yet found a general explanation for this; however, it does suggest that the local conditions in the post-communist countries vary along a range of dimensions, so that the way EU policy measures (for example) will be implemented will vary. Whilst there is likely to be variation in interpretation, EU definitions of the concepts have clearly had an influence on all states; this is perhaps especially so in some of the new member states where the definitions have been adopted relatively uncritically.

Focus of National Policy Measures

There is a general trend across the countries of lifelong learning policies to focus on labour market issues, but there seem to be differing reasons for this. Post-communist countries tend to see lifelong learning as a way to enhance their economic development, whilst countries with established market economies place greater emphasis on maintaining economic performance and overcoming skills shortages. Increasing the employability of marginalised or disadvantaged groups is also viewed as enabling people to function more fully in society, and lifelong learning is seen as an important way of achieving this. In several countries, the receipt of welfare benefits is increasingly being tied to participation in training programmes.

In practice, of course, policy areas are often not mutually exclusive. Policies on education may appear to be geared towards economic outcomes, and social policies such as those on gender are often closely tied to the education system. However, there are variations in emphasis in how different policy areas have focused on lifelong learning in the various countries studied.

Several countries lack a national qualifications framework (see Section 8.3) and there is an overall lack of recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Further, systems to encourage the acceptance of prior learning as a means of accessing further education are generally not well developed or implemented in practice.

Initiatives & Policies at Different Levels of the Education System

With regard to different levels of educational systems and lifelong learning, there is strong emphasis on policies and strategies in relation to employability in all countries. A smaller number of countries also show

evidence of strategies that focus on active citizenship or personal development. Development of literacy skills and ICT only feature in a number of instances. There is evidence that most countries are working on accreditation frameworks or have adopted in ECTS in higher education. However, these frameworks are only well developed in a few countries and access to accreditation for learning achieved in a range of different settings is also limited.

Co-ordination of Lifelong Learning

In theory lifelong learning policy comes within the remit of ministries of education in the majority of countries, though there is dual responsibility with labour or employment ministries in a small number of countries. In practice employment policies are a strong driver in shaping lifelong learning strategies, which are seen as contributing to a highly skilled and adaptable workforce for the knowledge society. It appears that in several of the post-communist countries division of responsibility between different agencies is unclear and that this leads to some confusion in the policy formulation and implementation. Lack of a clear lifelong learning strategy is seen as a barrier to effective co-ordination in many countries.

The importance of employment policies can also be discerned in the way it relates to lifelong learning and social security policy. In this area lifelong learning strategies are considered of importance in enabling social inclusion. In some Northern European countries (e.g. Ireland) the emphasis on lifelong learning as a mechanism for dealing with disadvantage is clearly expressed; in other countries such as England and Scotland it is considered a means of moving those on social welfare into work through developing relevant skills. In general social policies are often linked to labour market policies; a number of countries mention that projects focussing specifically on social inclusion through skills development to enhance employability have been supported by the European Social Fund (ESF).

Barriers to Implementation of Lifelong Learning

In some countries there is clearly some confusion over responsibility for the development of lifelong learning and/or lack of a strategy. This seems to be a particular issue for the Czech Republic, Hungary and Russia – all countries with recent transitions to market economies. In other countries (see Chapter 10 for examples), coordination seems to be weak between different key agencies, leading to different interpretations of how lifelong learning should be implemented. However, whilst confusion over responsibility (and lack of strategy) seems to lead to lack of policy initiatives or limited development, weak coordination may lead to important, but more piecemeal, initiatives.

Overall, where there are competing demands between agencies, the strongest players are generally labour policy makers as many initiatives (see e.g. Chapter 9) are focused on the developing human capital. However, Flanders and Ireland seem to have developed mechanisms to allow for development of initiatives in relation both to work and to social cohesion. Both are small countries, one is at 'the centre of the EU' and a founder member, the other is a more recent member state, one has centralised coordination, the other stresses the need for decentralisation. This suggests a clearly developed lifelong strategy which sets out the responsibilities of key agents is a prerequisite for the development of lifelong learning but that the coordination of those responsible needs to be sensitive to local contexts.

Lifelong Learning: A Residual Role?

Throughout the countries, lifelong learning has been promoted as a key way to address large-scale economic and social changes. In many cases, however, the reality is that it has been implemented with a relatively narrow focus, and that the broader principles espoused within policy discourses have more seldom been followed by concrete initiatives. This narrow focus makes it very hard for all the objectives of lifelong learning to be achieved. However, in many countries, the development of lifelong learning policy – and therefore many specific initiatives – are very much in their infancy.

This does not imply that there are no examples of successful implementation of lifelong learning policies, or of its addressing broader concerns: previous chapters have outlined areas where policy-making has indeed focused on various aspects of lifelong learning.

Conclusions & Recommendations

In this section, we make a series of recommendations which arise from the research. It should be stressed that these are made at the outset of a major research programme, and are based on formal documents; therefore many, if not all, should be regarded as provisional rather than firmly established. The role of the remaining LLL2010 sub-projects will be to investigate these further, on the basis of deeper primary empirical research.

Typologies of Welfare & Lifelong Learning

Well-established models and typologies of welfare regimes do not provide a sound basis for distinguishing the characteristics of lifelong learning regimes. Their weaknesses in this regard relate both to their failure to provide a clear account of variety in post-communist social policy regimes, and from the specific character of lifelong learning at the interface between social policy and market.

The Importance of National Contexts

Our research strongly suggests that the diversity of national context means that a single model of lifelong learning across the EU is unlikely to be achieved. While a common policy may be encouraged by the Commission, and may lead to significant national policy developments, these will be strongly influenced by national context: institutional, political, social, ideological. Although many countries will be strongly influenced by the EU, they will – consciously or unconsciously – ‘pick and choose’ between different EU priorities.

Balance between Vocational & Non-vocational Lifelong Learning.

In general, we found that lifelong learning policies are more strongly orientated toward vocational than non-vocational aims. There was some criticism of the effects of this across several countries, and we would argue for the importance of lifelong learning in the development of social as well as human capital.

Diversity of Approach in Post-Communist Countries

There is significant diversity in approaches to lifelong learning in post-communist regimes. Although a tentative explanation may be sought in different educational traditions, institutional arrangements, and socio-economic developments, we have no settled view at present on how this may best be explained.

Impact of Globalisation

It is clear that the increasing reach of the global market-place is placing intense pressures on many economies and societies. Among its effects are intensified disparities of income, wealth and power. Lifelong learning is often seen as providing a mechanism for addressing some of these problems. However, in general, patterns of lifelong learning appear to reflect, rather than challenge, these inequalities.

The Importance of Labour Conditions

It is clear that labour market conditions are central in defining the nature of lifelong learning in any particular country.

Strategy & Administrative Co-ordination

Several national reports commented on the lack a coherent strategy for lifelong learning, and viewed this as a key weakness. In some countries, the establishment of a lifelong learning ‘task-force’, or coordinating body has been on the political agenda, but has yet to be realised. In general, however, one of lifelong learning’s attractions (its relevance to a range of policy domains) also presents inevitable problems of co-ordination and overlap between ministries and agencies, official and unofficial. Problems of co-ordination may be made

more complex by the involvement of private sector concerns in an often highly marketised sector, and there is some evidence that it is especially problematic in large countries, countries with different systems of education between regions, or countries with marked differences in economic situations or learning opportunities between urban and rural areas.

Better and more integrated involvement of social partners and stakeholders, and an effectively articulated lifelong learning strategy, may play a role in overcoming problems of co-ordination.

Lifelong Learning & Social Inclusion

There is widespread acceptance, at least rhetorically, of the need to address problems of social exclusion through creating (and ensuring wider access to) better learning opportunities for disadvantaged and marginalised groups. However, there are significant differences in approach. Some governments and policies seek to address social exclusion through community-related lifelong learning, but the more common approach is to assume that the key to overcoming exclusion is to ensure the excluded have the capacity to return to employment. The evidence is that insofar as the latter strategy is intended to address inequalities, it has limited success.

There is clear evidence that new opportunities to learn are accessed disproportionately by the already better-educated. This tendency may be exacerbated by increased private sector basis of lifelong learning provision.

Efforts should be made to achieve greater consistency and reliability in gathering and reporting of data on social inequality. Few countries currently gather and report such data in relation to access to lifelong learning.

Lifelong Learning & Ethnic Minorities

Lifelong learning clearly has a particular relevance to ethnic minorities, who are often disadvantaged by reason of linguistic and other culturally-based sources of exclusion. While we found evidence of concern about exclusion of ethnic minorities, and policies designed to address the needs of particular minorities in various countries, we were also struck by the absence of robust quantitative data about learning provision for these groups, and about its take-up.

Lifelong Learning & Gender

Although women are relatively more successful in much lifelong learning as well as in formal education systems, they appear to be unable to maintain this advantage in the labour market. We suspect this may be because welfare regimes are relatively ineffectual in supporting women's involvement in employment.

Recognising Non-formal & Informal Learning

It is clear that, in many countries, arrangements of recognising informal and non-formal learning are weak. Connections between institutions of formal, non-formal and informal education need to be enhanced, effective qualification frameworks developed. (There is, however, a need to consider whether accreditation discourages some from entering learning; and whether this applies disproportionately to specific social groups.)

Workplace Learning

Evidence is that learning in the workplace tends to be accessed disproportionately by the already relatively highly skilled, and by public sector employees. We would endorse the need for stronger official support and promotion of learning in the private sector, and efforts to ensure that this is not disproportionately restricted

to highly skilled workers. The development of effective mechanisms for paid educational leave is also important.

ICT & Lifelong Learning

Many countries recognise that they lag behind international levels of IT literacy, and see overcoming this as important in the quest for economic competitiveness and personal development. This requires not only developing better ICT structures, but also ensuring equity in access to such training.

Issues for Further Research

The research in this first sub-project has provided a substantial volume of evidence about lifelong learning policies in a number of countries. Some conclusions appear clear. However, it has also raised a number of issues for further inquiry, and it is to be hoped that these can be addressed during the remainder of the project. These include, for example:

- The development of a *robust* typology of lifelong learning policies and practices that includes all aspects of lifelong learning and all countries covered by this project.
- The impact of national history, and institutional structures, on patterns of lifelong learning.
- The extent to which the size of a country affects the ability of its governments to develop, maintain and manage a strategy for lifelong learning.
- What lifelong learning strategies could contribute most effectively to addressing a range of types of social exclusion.
- Whether, and if so how, lifelong learning can contribute to the construction of a European identity.