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**7. INCREASING LIFELONG LEARNING IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION:
SUPPORTING THE TEACHING CHANGES**
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SUMMARY

Implementing the concept of lifelong learning is a major challenge for the future of higher education institutions. They will have to adapt the content and formats of their teaching to face the following quadruple challenge:

- the evolution of teachers' role and mission;
- the emergence of new learning and knowledge legitimisation processes;
- the integration of disciplines and thematic contents;
- the implementation of organisational and pedagogical innovation.

This paper puts forward the view that these new orientations should take place at the European level. Inter-university co-operation is a strategy and a first-choice tool to put together the means and expert skills required to undertake the necessary adaptations. Exploiting the skills and expertise previously acquired in community education programmes should not be overlooked; neither should the reflection and experimentation on teaching carried out over the last three years by the Erasmus Thematic Networks. The experience acquired (1996-1999) provides a significant means of mobilisation and innovation to help meet the lifelong learning challenge, subject, of course, to the necessary acknowledgement and support of the higher education authorities.

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INTRODUCTION³

As the century draws to a close, the future of higher education in Europe and worldwide appears to raise unprecedented interest. International organisations like UNESCO and the European Commission have, in the last few years, published analyses and statements targeted at public authorities, drawing their attention to the urgent need for fundamental reform. The years 1997, 98 and 99 in particular were marked by major political commitments based on the previous reflection, groundwork and practical achievements of educational stakeholders (teachers, students, researchers, administrators,...). These statements define the context and strategic framework of the future. The European Commission's 1997 communication "Towards a Europe of Knowledge", the universal declaration on higher education adopted in Paris in October 1998, the joint statements issued by Education Ministers gathered in Paris and Bologna in May 1998 and June 1999, respectively, all stress the new expectations and challenges to higher education and share the common purpose of reflecting new requirements, considering new modalities of public authority intervention and demanding effective short- and mid-term measures.

As an introduction to the "F2000" conference and as a supplement to Professor Thomas's contribution, the aim of this paper is to raise specific questions on the consequences of the priority given to the lifelong learning concept on the contents of university syllabi and to discuss the appropriateness of mobilising European means to support these changes. It proposes that we should capitalise on the gains of university co-operation in Europe, which have greatly intensified over the last decade, thanks to the various community education programmes. In particular, it proposes capitalising on the results from the pilot actions carried out over the last three years by the European Commission through the ERASMUS Thematic Networks.

CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION⁴...

The political consensus currently emerging in most developed countries not only in Europe but worldwide involves four main orientations. It reasserts that higher education is an essential component of cultural, social and human development of individuals, communities and nations, with special emphasis on the political dimension (the consolidation of peaceful and democratic societies) as well as economics (graduate employability, links with the job market). It includes the act of educating and training as a long-term process to provide learners with the optimal means and arrangements adapted to their lifelong learning. It underlines the appropriateness of creating an open space for teaching and training beyond state boundaries, with a concern for solidarity, efficiency, performance and respect for diversity and differences. Lastly, it recommends improving the mechanisms of higher education management by updating management practices and establishing forward looking and strategic thinking at the state and institution levels.

Beyond these general policy statements, it is crucial above all to consider the conditions for their implementation and the means to be mobilised to achieve success. More specifically, referring to the context and stakes within the European Union, careful analysis of the work proposed by the Commission, or more recently by the Ministers of Education in the June 1999 Joint Statement, raises four types of problems:

- The capacity to handle change and apply future-oriented management, within the framework of a true governance, is a crucial challenge for our institutions, which have to set up means and procedures for systematic strategic planning (target definition, means identification, follow-up and the assessment of the results), whereas the policies implemented are often historical and rarely stem from rational and voluntary approaches;

³ The views expressed in this paper are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission or the Thematic Network co-ordinators.

⁴ The term "university" in this paper refers to any type of higher education institution, regardless of its status.

- In an open, newly competitive space where education is regarded as an international marketable product⁵, national forums are no longer appropriate to carry out that strategic reflection even if they remain the legal and organisational reference;
- The structural, organisational, managerial and financial evolution of higher education is a necessity, as underlined in a number of recent analyses and whose main aspects were outlined by Professor Thomas in the first introductory paper to this Conference; and
- Education/training syllabi should be adapted to reflect the development of knowledge, the emergence of new needs, the recognition of new learning and knowledge validation processes, as well as the introduction of new pedagogical tools and the growing involvement of non-university providers (private and profit-making institutions, in particular).

Underlying organisational issues are generally perceived as strategic by university officials and politicians in power, who retain the direct means to mobilise themselves around those issues. In contrast, educational contents, in their discipline or thematic dimensions, are often neglected in policy discussions, as they are often regarded as the exclusive prerogative of teachers and scientists, who are very anxious to preserve their freedom and independence in that respect. It is nevertheless obvious that the concept of lifelong learning will never be translated into operational benefits if appropriate means for in-depth reform of education practices and syllabi are not implemented. The strength of higher education establishments lies in their capacity to generate skills, expertise and knowledge. Reflections on teaching practices should therefore address the fundamental question of the role and standing of higher education institutions in the lifelong learning process.

... A PEDAGOGICAL AND HUMAN CHALLENGE

Regarding educational activities, *stricto sensu*, implementing these amounts to a dual pedagogical and human challenge. Four major changes are going to transform teaching, all of which will involve teachers, the main actors.

Changing the role of teachers

Lifelong learning leads to curriculum evolution and also to changes of role for those men and women who are in charge of teaching. It is also accompanied by a changed perception of the teaching profession. Teachers are no longer just the holders, producers (thanks to research activities) and the dispensers of knowledge. Their activities are shifting towards education design, the production of pedagogical tools and media, the organisation and the formatting of multiform and complex pieces of knowledge. Their steering and catalytic functions require new co-operative qualities, leading to dialogue with their peers and teamwork, in contrast to the current widespread individual ethic of higher education⁶. This tendency is all the stronger as the obligation to innovate pedagogically implies teamwork and partnership.

The relationship with learners should take their new characteristics and expectations into account. It is necessary to listen in order to advise, stimulate and guide them along an individual curriculum. This responsibility is all the greater as professional advancement is no longer the learner's sole motive; their aims are increasingly heterogeneous and changing. The teacher-tutor becomes a key link or go-between to the resource centres that the universities have become.

University teachers must also agree to share their roles with other staff. No longer the sole contributors, they must fit into networks and develop, among other things, relations with companies

⁵ e.g. : The United States would like to include education bids in the next World Trade Organisation talks (Le Monde, 7 September 1999).

⁶ This change is perfectly summarised by our Anglo-saxon colleagues' saying: "*from the sage on the stage to the guide on the side*".

and the job market as a whole. Indeed, in an organisation where work in itself is a source of knowledge and where activities are increasingly "intelligent", companies tend to repossess retraining, if only because an increasing proportion of training activities is carried out in the workplace. Teachers now are those who validate the knowledge acquired at work and formalise it within a context where collective solutions are increasingly difficult to propose. This mission is all the more important as new ways of initiating and accrediting diplomas, acknowledging and validating training and previous work experience are being developed and implemented.

New learning and knowledge legitimisation processes

The status of knowledge is undergoing deep upheaval in our post-modernist society and higher education institutions are especially involved in this. For one thing, the status of scientific truth and knowledge is questioned and put into perspective by new philosophical trends which question the scientism and positivism inherited from the Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century and which modelled modern university institutions.

On the other hand, the modes and places of skill and knowledge acquisition are becoming more varied and complement one another: formal systems and skills are acquired through professional practice or by individuals on their own initiative. Knowledge accreditation processes are also evolving. Pragmatism, which claims that knowledge is valid if it is useful and used, tends to take precedence at the moment. It leads to a professionalisation of education and highlights practical and concrete knowledge acquired personally and individually. In addition, employees are increasingly involved in the selection of their own training objectives and methods.

Under these conditions, higher education is no longer the only way to validate knowledge and skills, especially because the conditions and assessment criteria are also evolving. The task is no longer just to assess knowledge but also the know-how and know-how-to-be in an operational environment where economic partners may also become assessors. The ability to carry out a project and to analyse the conditions of its implementation, together with its failure or success have become determining criteria. Gradually, contextual or situational intelligence is being recognised as conceptual intelligence has been.

Transversality and integration of disciplines and themes

The public's increased demand for educational quality and adaptation to their needs will make education and training change its targets, form and contents. Ongoing changes involve most disciplines at all educational levels.

Although the emphasis is often focussed on the vocational aim of education, it should be borne in mind that scientific, technical or management disciplines are not the only ones concerned. The development of the humanities and the cultural or artistic disciplines is also going to expand, arising not only in the business sector (where ethics is an obvious example) but also from a growing demand from an increasing number of people seeking new social links. These include active pensioners whose education level is increasing and buying power is high in our western societies (e.g. the University for the Elderly). Another aim of lifelong learning is to promote social integration and personal achievements of citizens, vocational or not. This "citizen" dimension, potentially applying to everyone, should not be underrated in the current provision of higher education institutions.

Higher education teaching is going to have to accommodate an increasing number of youngsters who have access either through the normal channels or through the implementation of the so-called "second chance" channels, that give them access to higher education without necessarily having to complete their secondary school curriculum. This trend is going to reinforce the move towards considering undergraduate education as an integral part of basic education and will upset the ways of countries where higher education has traditionally been elitist.

Higher education must also adapt specialised subject teaching as well as setting up specific syllabi to meet the demand for knowledge updating and adaptation. The need is to take scientific and technical advances into account, as well as including the emergence of new qualifications, the development of new economic activities with high intellectual input and changes in work organisation inside companies. University education indeed must keep ensuring knowledge transfer and organise the dissemination of research results.

Doctoral training and research cannot escape such changes. The doctoral thesis is no longer just the entry ticket to an academic career but should also give access to the wider job market. In that respect, the range of subjects (vocational scope), the programme funding (multiple external co-operations) and the organisation of part-time research work are all evolving.

Within this overall context, educational priorities point to :

- the orientation of teaching towards problem solving skills, to help learners mobilise their resources and skills and confront diverse and constantly evolving working situations. Knowledge is no longer sufficient; skills must be operational and situations must also to be learned;
- developing integrated, multidisciplinary and contextual knowledge, to confront complex situations (either vocational or not) or to take up the challenge of new societal demands (e.g. sustainable development).
- reinforcement of the teaching of basic knowledge and methods. These skills should not be sacrificed but should, on the contrary, become a prerequisite to the changes described above.

Organisational and pedagogical innovations

It is also worth debating the contribution of educational technologies, whatever they are, towards the performance and quality of educational systems. The amateurish approach, which prevailed for a long time, can no longer provide appropriate solutions alone. In particular, investment in cognitive and pedagogical sciences addressing higher education should be increased and above all the link should be improved between research findings and their practical exploitation. These activities should also be related to teacher education, where the stakes are considerable. This also applies to the training of university teachers.

Without dwelling on a subject widely studied elsewhere, it is worth mentioning the need to consider the curriculum and programme changes required by information technology, which provides flexibility and easier access to education. In that area, education techniques often lag behind vocational or home practices. Fundamentally, higher education has to acknowledge and propose a wider range of learning methods, from personal study to distance learning, via tutorship and on-site training.

From the point of view of organisation, the development of part-time education, the alternation of work and learning periods and modular courses is aimed at proposing diversified, flexible, consistent and progressive courses assigned for each individual's personal and professional skills and assets. It will then be necessary to reassess and question the higher education approach and classical pedagogical progression, which favour the deductive method by giving priority to theoretical and logical thinking. Instead, pedagogies based on experience and reality should be devised, to bring a new dimension to practical knowledge and then to conceptualise it.

... A EUROPEAN COOPERATION CHALLENGE

Implementing new educational and training strategies, developing new pedagogical tools, reorganising and adapting institutions, all raise new problems and create new needs: the need for information and references to other practices, other realities, other experiences; the need for analyses, confrontations and critical comparisons; the need for tools and methods to tackle new problems and envisage

alternative solutions; the needs for experiments to test and select new combinations and new material and pedagogical tools; the need for channels of communication to spread, try and compare experiences and good practices; the need to bring together, to animate and exchange, and to co-ordinate in order to achieve greater cost effectiveness, etc...

In a context where an open space for education and training is being outlined, where public funding is restricted, where competition is increasing, a national framework is no longer adapted to meet the challenges and find the necessary means. The concept of a European strategy is obvious and is gradually imposing itself on policy makers and operators. The observation is not a new one. In the past decade it has triggered a variety of initiatives such as the creation of non-profit organisations in charge of promoting the idea of co-operation (e.g. Association of European Universities and the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences); on a different scale, the European Commission education programmes have also developed.

However, it has to be acknowledged that, interesting as they may be, such initiatives are still not sufficient, in relation to the current issues at stake. The Haug Report presented during the Education Ministers' Conference in Bologna, in June 1999, confirmed the need to promote a co-ordinated approach that would take disciplines into account and proposed a few ways ahead. Likewise, the European Commission has among its future plans the creation of pilot, innovative, transnational projects, creating European networks with a view to bolstering the sharing of expertise and concepts. Studies are also expected to improve comparisons between policies and systems in Europe and to identify innovative approaches more effectively. It has to be remembered that these initiatives have arisen in a context where higher education pedagogical research is particularly underdeveloped in the great majority of Member States.

EXPLOITING COMMUNITY ASSETS...

The lifelong learning idea has been a priority of the European Community for more than a decade. From 1989, with the Social Charter of labour's fundamental rights which set that principle, to 1998 and the adoption of guidelines for employment by the European Council in Vienna, the political priority was implemented in the new wave of community actions (reform of structural funds, second phase of the Leonardo programme, etc.).

In education, the White Paper "Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society" reaffirms the principle of wide and permanent access to knowledge. Its Objective 1 ("encouraging the acquisition of new knowledge") has already resulted in a few achievements in the framework of Leonardo and Socrates. A set of pilot projects on the development of automated tests for skills and knowledge were initiated, with a view to developing validation prototypes⁷. These projects are part of a wider design to recognise knowledge and skills acquired outside educational systems (self-assessment tools, corporate training support, and management tools) and may lead to the development of pedagogical material better suited for such specific needs. They address students who want to acquire additional knowledge, young people who are deprived of the possibility to improve or widen their knowledge for their personal benefit or to enter the job market, and employees seeking additional training and updating. A decisive step has been taken with the approval of the new Grundtvig action in the context of the second phase of Socrates.

Regarding higher education, a number of community co-operation assets can be taken into account and put to use in future planning. Organisational frameworks and tools have been developed and tested in recent years which can serve as a basis to initiate, reinforce and accompany new actions:

⁷ A variety of areas have been selected. In Socrates : law, geography, environmental sciences and nutrition sciences, biology, chemistry, water resources-environment, adult learning, languages, statistics for engineers; in Leonardo : mathematics, physics, written expression, informatics, mapping of skills, banking, customer service, skills in industry.

- Institutionally, for example, there is the creation of the NARIC network, the setting up of the national agency network for the management of the Socrates and Erasmus programmes. It is also worth remembering the introduction of the Socrates institutional contract, as a preferred instrument to implement local community partnership policies; and
- Pedagogically, it is worth mentioning the studies conducted on the "diploma supplement", the European Credit Transfer System, the curriculum development and European module activities, etc.

A pilot programme, which has been in operation for three years, known as the Erasmus Thematic Networks, offers interesting possibilities to support these developments at the level of the discipline.

... AROUND AN ACCOMPANYING SYSTEM, THE ERASMUS THEMATIC NETWORKS

In view of the complexity of the task ahead, the challenge before us implies, on the one hand, intensifying initiatives and projects within universities and developing European co-operation, on the other. However, it may be necessary to set up a support system to help universities and Member States make their organisational and pedagogical innovations.

To be effective, such an interface at the European level should fulfil three prerequisites: the involvement and participation of both the actors (teachers, students) and the educational institutions; providing relative independence and autonomy for them to act; and giving guidance encompassing not only institutional issues but also the discipline and thematic contents of curricula.

On the basis of the last three years' experience, the Erasmus Thematic Networks appear to have all the qualities required to form the basis of such a system and to support the move ahead. Indeed, their success is the direct result of the original combination of a tool, an approach and a framework.

A tool...

Thematic Networks are a tool for analysing and debating disciplines and themes at the European level to promote prospective thinking and to stimulate pedagogical innovation. Seven major areas⁸ have been explored, all potentially connected to issues related to lifelong learning. These activities involve teaching, scientific and institutional aspects as well as the relationship with the economic, social and technical environment of education. Basic education is far from being the sole concern of the Thematic Networks and many tackle issues related to new forms of teaching.

(i) Comparative analysis of educational policies and systems

This is one of the major objectives of Networks, consisting of building up a common data and reference base; it has already produced a number of compilations and national monographs. Universities and public authorities can find there original material on higher education evolution and functioning (system organisation, the educational offer, diploma validation procedures, pedagogical syllabi and practices, new tools, etc). These studies provide useful data to promote and fuel reflection and to identify promising experiments and practices.

(ii) Analysis of the context and of society's and the job market's requirements

Two dialectic approaches are prioritised. The first one aims at identifying and analysing societal, economic and technical changes in order to determine which higher education changes should be implemented in any given domain. The second approach deals with the role and contribution of higher education in the ongoing transformation of European society.

⁸ For more information, see Ruffio (2000).

(iii) Production of teaching material

These activities include preparation, revision, translation, production and dissemination of innovative teaching material. Certain projects emphasise the innovative character of the contents; others are more specifically oriented towards innovative tools and teaching methods; others favour learning steps and knowledge validation.

(iv) Implementing new training programmes

These activities, already included in the Socrates/Erasmus institutional contract, clear the ground for future initiatives or contribute directly and substantially to new project design (European Masters, short training sessions, etc).

(v) Developing tools to stimulate European co-operation

These consist of lists of databases, directories, who's who in institutions, training programmes on offer, research themes, community tools (ECTS, diploma supplement); the tentative definition of a minimum syllabus at the European level for certain disciplines or themes; the consideration of foreign language teaching methods, multilingualism and multiculturalism.

(vi) Development of tools to facilitate information exchange

Many initiatives have been taken in this area: Network internal bulletins, Web sites, Internet forums, virtual resource centres, and the publication of scientific or pedagogical articles and journals.

(vii) Organising institutional co-operation

Establishing contacts and setting up formal networks between either individuals or institutions constitutes an activity *per se* for Networks and contributes to the long-term development of higher education restructuring in Europe. A future institutional representation of European Universities at the discipline level is emerging through the Networks. A number of them operate within or in partnership with university associations.

An approach and a framework...

Thematic Networks favour the comparative approach and a meso-institutional method involving intermediate levels of higher education institutions (faculties, departments, institutes), where the reality and unity of teaching are expressed. It also relies on the direct involvement of university teachers and students.

Additionally, it is a framework which secures official recognition and provides financial means to support highly diversified initiatives. It encourages university geographical and institutional opening to non-EU countries and the civil society. It stimulates the development of partnerships outside higher education (with companies, non-governmental organisations, etc...). It promotes cohesion in the higher education teaching system by linking university and non-university institutions and permits the exploitation of their experiences and previous relations for co-operative purposes. These networks are currently working on a transnational scale taking into consideration the complexity and diversity of teaching systems.

CONCLUSION

Implementing the concept of lifelong learning is a major challenge for the future of higher education, which will have to adapt the content and form of its teaching.

The overall context requires that these new orientations should be envisaged at the European level. Inter-university co-operation is a strategy as well as a preferred tool to put together the means and the expertise to undertake the necessary developments.

Exploiting the experience from previous community education programmes may provide useful insights. This is the case for the support system set up three years ago in the form of the ERASMUS

Thematic Networks in order to promote prospective reflection and pedagogical innovation. Experience from 1996 to 99 has shown that there is significant potential for innovation and mobilisation to match the challenge of lifelong learning.

In the future, higher education managers will have to consider these issues and test this analysis before committing themselves to this objective. Their support is necessary to validate the tools and produce effective and recognised instruments of European higher education policy. The F2000 Forum initiated by the European Commission provides an opportunity to debate and disseminate to the various interested parties the recommendations for and the prerequisites of an ambitious policy. This should also fuel future debates that the new community initiatives will undoubtedly provoke within the Member States.

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*RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES
FOR EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES*

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*IMPLEMENTING CHANGES IN
INSTITUTIONAL AND DISCIPLINARY
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