



Lifelong learning in practice at Leuphana University

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Vision

In the context of LLL/continuing education TSU strives to become a leader among the universities of Georgia in terms of offering superior quality, diverse and appropriate education programmes.

Mission

The Centre for Academic Development and Lifelong Learning aims to provide the general public with a possibility to use the university resources for professional and personal development, improvement of qualifications, acquisition of new professional skills, thus leading to the achievement of the major goal of the university.

Major goals of the Centre

- Goal 1:** Building on the university role and importance through the different services delivered to the general public by offering LLL learning programmes. This also leads to additional sources of funding for the university.
- Goal 2:** Organise the relevant qualification courses/training/seminars for the professional development of the academic and administrative staff of the university.
- Goal 3:** TSU participation in and close cooperation with international and national networks and organisations of lifelong learning.

The strategic development plan clearly responds to the European Universities LLL Charter: all the major activities of the Centre contribute to the design of adapted study programmes for attracting returning learners by strengthen the relationship between research, teaching and innovation by providing research-based LLL courses to the wider society. We also provide professional development courses, seminars, training to the academic and administrative staff of our university and, in so doing, try to act as a role model institution for lifelong learning.

TSU strives to implement this strategy gradually but progress is slow because of a lack of a legislative base for LLL in the country. During the implementation process we have also had to take into consideration risk factors such as a lack of interest and participation in the development of LLL programmes by the university departments and the faculty; inaccurate stereotypes on the operation of the Centre for Academic Development and Lifelong Learning; and the social and financial environment within the country.

Currently the Centre follows the main directives of the abovementioned strategic plan but the Parliament of Georgia is in the process of discussing a new law on higher education, that will naturally bring about certain changes in TSU regulations and hopefully the new regulations will be more flexible for the implementation of LLL principles and provide a clear definition of LLL programmes and terms for TSU.

3.2.5 Lifelong learning in practice at Leuphana University

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The socioeconomic framework for LLL in Germany

Leuphana's strategic decisions and concrete activities towards becoming a LLL university must be considered against the background of Germany's current socio-political and economic developments.

There is a constantly growing demand for qualified specialists and academics in the German job market, and thus also for systematic LLL opportunities. Companies need efficient talent management throughout the entire careers of their staff. This is increasingly important in the context of the ever increasing demographic shift in Germany. A particularly serious lack of manpower is predicted for jobs in mathematics, informatics, natural sciences and technology. However, considerable gaps are also foreseen in health and social fields, as well as in media, arts and social sciences. This not only applies to university graduates, but correspondingly impacts the level of skilled workers and specialists, for example qualified craftsmen and technicians and master craftsmen. This has resulted particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) struggling with a worsening shortage of specialists.

In order to close this gap in the German labour market, there must be an increase in the number of university graduates and the integration of non-traditional target groups by drawing the professionally qualified into academic types of education. Germany possesses an internationally renowned vocational training system which, in spite of its excellence, is only minimally linked with the higher education system. Gradually, the concept of an “open” university is becoming recognised and pursued in education policy, i.e. a facilitation of university entrance for these qualified professionals, as well as the recognition of professional or non-university earned competencies.

Lower Saxony is one of the German states that has taken a pioneer role regarding the opening of universities in recent years. In June 2010, a statutory framework for Lower Saxony’s concept for an open university was created through the amendment of Lower Saxony’s laws on universities. The essential changes facilitate not only the accreditation of competencies and the establishment of study programmes parallel to employment, but also the further opening of university entrance to professionally qualified applicants. The law provides that whoever has a vocational/professional qualification may now enter university studies related to their field after three years of working practice.

The development of LLL at Leuphana

Leuphana has reacted to the social and economic challenges. The university has recognised that continuing education/LLL provides it with a wide and attractive field of activity; and in order to meet the clear demand and widen participation in higher education, it has systematically developed specific flexible continuing education opportunities for new learner groups in full-time employment. Leuphana is also working towards the better interlocking of university education with other modes of education through its development of an “open” university concept. Leuphana’s new and innovative restructuring of recent years, with its unique study programmes and organisational model, have made it easy to meet the requirements of an LLL university profile.

Leuphana University was re-founded in 2007 with the mission to be a humanist, sustainable and proactive university for the benefit of society in the 21st century and to be a model for the future of German learning and research. The opportunity for change came when the University of Lüneburg was merged with a university of applied sciences and completely restructured. The new structure was innovative in Germany, allowing the university to deliver its unique trans-disciplinary degrees to different target groups. The range of studies is built around four pillars. While the College and the Graduate School offer full-time bachelor’s and master’s programmes, the Professional school is the main seat of lifelong learning (LLL) with a range of flexible bachelor’s and master’s programmes designed for professionals who want to begin or return to higher education alongside full-time work. Leuphana’s fourth body, the House of Research, focuses on questions with practical relevance for today’s society.

LLL activities at Leuphana

Leuphana’s LLL activities take place at three levels: concrete opportunities for those in employment, research on the theme of LLL and especially on the needs of the new target groups with relation to LLL and knowledge transfer, and LLL for the region and with the region.

1. Programmes for new target groups

Leuphana offers flexible continuing education to professionals and people with vocational qualifications. So far, programmes are available in business and health and social care fields. The programmes aim to help relieve the labour market shortages of skilled workers.

New target groups demand new types of programmes. The Leuphana Professional School offers bachelor's and master's programmes as well as certificate courses parallel to work. Sustainable approaches to learning allow students to keep on learning, return to learning and learn flexibly, even long after entering the workplace. Not only do these programmes represent a unique opportunity for learners, but they can also generate a long-term income source for the university.

The master's programmes, currently designed for leaders and managers in business as well as in social organisations, last from three to five semesters (60-90 credit points). The bachelor's programmes are targeted at specific vocational groups. These programmes are for students with non-academic vocational/professional educational backgrounds and with varying levels of qualifications in their field. Open access allows advanced placement based on individual assessment of prior learning.

Course content is scientifically based, trans-disciplinary and designed to be immediately transferable to practice in the students' working life, for example, using authentic case studies. Teaching staff are experienced in business and professional fields as well as in academia and research. They strive to integrate students' perspectives into teaching content. Study parallel to work is facilitated by blended learning methods and after-work contact hours, IT support for e-learning and a supportive learning environment.

The Professional School tries to create an environment that is most conducive to learning. Although students study partly off campus, they are treated as individuals, for example, they are offered individual coaching. To ensure high quality in continuing education there are regular evaluations and accreditation procedures.

2. Researching how to deliver LLL to new target groups

There is a lack of research on the learning needs of new target groups and how to attract them. These questions are being researched by Leuphana's Institute for Performance Management (IPM), which works in close cooperation with the Professional School. The IPM's research team are networking with adult education providers plus employers to identify the demand for closely tailored academic programmes for specific professional and vocational groups, providing a bridge between vocational, adult and higher education, degree programmes which the Professional School could then offer for these new groups.

The IPM is also exploring how to create learning environments to suit the needs of non-traditional learners better and how to support non-traditional learners in their studies. What makes them successful learners? Why do so few non-traditional students use existing alternative university entrance paths? How can we create a bridge between their prior experience and work-place learning and university studies? The Professional School is trying to create an 'open university' with flexible entryways and accreditation of prior learning to widen university participation while maintaining academic quality. The research project 'Open University Lüneburg' is developing accreditation models for prior vocational learning and learning acquired outside of traditional education in order to offer advanced placement on degree programmes to those without formal higher education entrance qualifications.

Leuphana is also working with European universities and organisations to learn from their approaches to opening access. The IPM is leading the European project 'Opening Universities for Lifelong Learning' (OPULL), which is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Science (BMBF). This project is a strategic partnership between four European universities (Leuphana University; Open University, UK; University of Southern Denmark; University of Helsinki) researching different approaches to widening participation in higher education. Each institution contributes its expertise to answering the research questions. Good practices from the partner countries are being identified and integrated into an overall European model for open universities.

3. Bringing LLL to the region

The Professional School also offers separate master's programmes tailored to in-company management training needs, allowing companies to offer their staff academic continuing education which is truly responsive to the changing workplace and economy. In addition, its "Knowledge Transfer Centre" and "Innovation Assistance Unit" were set up to enable the transfer of knowledge to companies in the region.

To strengthen the research and development potential in SMEs and to produce highly-qualified graduates, Leuphana is working to create new jobs in fields with secure futures through continuing education, knowledge transfer, business start-ups and innovative research cooperation, with a wide variety of current projects in the university's different fields of expertise. For example, the Institute for Performance Management's project 'Performance management in medium-sized enterprises' is creating a long-term innovation network of managers and owners of SMEs, to support them in developing personnel and management strategies to strengthen their business development.

Diversity management as a future task for LLL

Commitment to LLL is part of the overall institutional strategy. LLL is interpreted and implemented in many different ways in different parts of the university. Because LLL is primarily interpreted as serving new target groups, the Professional School was planned as the central provider for LLL in the university. Within the process of developing LLL programmes, and triggered by the SIRUS discussions, Leuphana has outlined its commitment to LLL according to all 10 points of the EUA charter.

An LLL commitment results in a greater diversity of students, which, in turn, changes the culture of the university; when students in traditional educational pathways see those who have returned to continuing education from professional life and realise that they can remain flexible throughout their lives they begin to see their career and learning paths as one.

In the future, in order for German universities to welcome new target groups and the increasing diversity of learners on campus, diversity management will become a central challenge. Leuphana has to consider how best to create a living LLL culture with a shared understanding of what this means throughout the university. In an LLL university, this is reflected in the infrastructure, in the types of programmes and entrance procedures, in the teaching content and methods, the quality assurance arrangements, the focus and commitment of teaching staff and emphasis on research based learning. The commitment is also reflected in the types of cooperation that exist with other universities and with businesses and organisations in the region. LLL goals should also be included in the university's business plan. In this way, it will be generally visible right through from student services and service structures up to decision-making at the highest level.

3.2.6 Weaving the university into the fabric of the region – University of Camerino

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Threading the Needle

The comparison between strengthening ties with regional stakeholders and textile design may seem hackneyed, but, upon closer inspection, one perceives the degree to which many university initiatives are isolated strands that could change the design of lifelong learning were they to become part of the regional