

DGWF 5-point strategy document to the EU-Initiative Report on “Academic further and distance education as part of the European lifelong learning strategy”

About us:

According to its statutes, the aim of this registered non-profit association is the promotion, coordination and representation of continuing and distance education backed by universities and other institutions of the higher educational system. Part of this is also the promotion of research and lecturing in this field. The German Association of Continuing Education and Distance Learning (DGWF) is recently paying increased attention to the role of new media in its fields. The DGWF is not only an association that represents its members. It is also a working group, practising numerous public tasks, especially in the field of information and counselling. Part of this is, of course, an engagement in the further extension and improvement of the continuing education facilities of its members, and also the attempt to influence processes of decisions in the field of educational politics in the direction of better general conditions for a further development of the supply of scientific continuing education.

The DGWF tries to achieve these aims by:

- editing publications (information and documentation)
- organizing conferences, workshops, meetings and symposia
- offering advice to institutions and individuals
- providing recommendations and comments
- carrying out investigations and project work
- featuring publications of its own: Journal for University and Continuing Education (twice a year), proceedings, monographs and anthologies

Themes to be discussed on European political level (EP)

For a better understanding: The importance of ULLL (University Lifelong Learning) in Germany (equivalence of VET and ULLL and a better mutual interlocking and understanding)

Academic Continuing Education (or ULLL in the European Context) is offered by universities. This makes the difference between ULLL and other courses or seminars in the field of LLL. The ULLL target groups are normally academics, who already have a degree. Academic Continuing Education also addresses - target groups with interest in scientific based knowledge. Academic Continuing Education may as well be offered in the field of Vocational Education Training as well as part of the so called “Third Mission” of the Universities: with no direct link to the labour market. Academic Continuing Education is offered in different formats: daily courses, evening-Lectures or intensive Courses/ Summer Schools. The clearly preferred format is part time or distance learning due to the fact that they are flexible and compatible formats for working people. Academic Continuing Education normally leads to academic degrees (European wide standardized and awarded with Credit Points); but also certifications under degree level or mere certificates of participation are offered.

Claim I: Academic Continuing Education and VET as equivalents

It is of high importance that Academic Continuing Education and VET are recognized as equivalent. The distinction between Academic and Professional Continuing Education only refers to the kind of training but not on quality or valence. Academic Continuing Education is a driving force and instrument at the same time for a better linkage between different education systems. It is part of a concept of an “Open University” and leads to more equity and permeability in the education system.

Nowadays we have the VET sector in Germany on the one hand and the Academic Continuing Education sector on the other hand. This situation is very similar in other European countries as the debate shows (see e.g. EUCEN: European Universities Continuing Education Network <http://www.eucen.eu>)

The big target is to overcome the sectorial segregation and to integrate the Academic Continuing Education and the VET. The DGWF aims at a better linkage and intersectoral cooperation between the Higher Education sector (ULLL) and the VET sector. One instrument to achieve this aim is the mutual recognition of (also non-formal and informal) learning.

Claim II: Academic Continuing Education is and has to remain a non-commercial governmental task

The DGWF took up a clear position in reference to the information and announcements of the EU (see 19th July 2016¹): Academic Continuing Education is besides science and teaching without any doubt part of the universities' governmental task "[...] for more and better skilled human resources." The DGWF recognizes exactly this as the core task of Academic Continuing Education. This means that Academic Continuing Education is not commercial. ULLL in Higher Education System means more than a mere professional qualification.

The fact that people have to pay for Academic Continuing Education does not mean that it is a pure commercial thing. Citizens have to pay for governmental services without assuming that these services are commercial.

Claim III: The funding of ULLL should be part of the big European funding programmes

ULLL in the above mentioned sense does not show up in the EU Fundings today. There is a funding for VET. But as VET is not seen as part of the Higher Education Sector (and therefore also not as part of ULLL) universities may not apply. But the importance of Academic Continuing Education is increasing. It should be an aim of the EU to promote ULLL, with respect to the labour market and the demographic change, and especially because Academic Continuing Education is an „add on“ within the Higher Education Sector, that is not funded sufficiently today.

Claim IV: European wide Control of Quality and Introduction of European standards are necessary

In the age of digitalization ULLL is globalized. This requires quality management systems and quality control. Conventions like TTIP or CETA impose new standards. German Universities have to credit up to 50 % of non-university achievements. However in England a professional training in Germany is completely recognized, so that a seven month study at a university is sufficient to obtain a Bachelor's Degree. Yes, we do have the EQF and the NQF but up to now the handling of the recognition of prior learning especially in the field of ULLL shows a very wide range of how the different European countries practice the EQF / NQF. Here certain benchmarks

of quality (content, work-load etc.) are necessary to be established and to agree on.

Claim V: ULLL as part of the European Digitalization Strategy

ULLL is frontrunner and pacemaker of a digital education by using digitalization to open new ways of access to Higher Education: flexible studying formats enable especially working people to combine work, family and social life.

¹ (Commission Notice on the notion of State aid as referred to in Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2016/C262/01), see chapter 2.5. "Education and research activities", (31).