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Good practices in European Short Learning Programmes (E-SLP)

Innovative impact

The E-SLP project fosters collaborative inter-institutional curriculum designs. The outcome of these collaborations can be SLPs built from scratch or as puzzles (collection of existing learning building blocks). One of the consequences of international collaborative design is that it introduces distinct working practices and therefore requires teams to set innovative processes. It also brings opportunities from each institution to exchange policies and triggers new consensus. Furthermore, it requires harmonisation of recognitions and accreditations, which in turns prompts innovatory agreements.

In the long term, these innovations could conclude in a normalisation and generalisation of international and interuniversity programmes.

Introduction

European educational institutions are developing short programmes to meet evolving needs in society. New target groups, learning approaches or market requirements are triggering a demand for innovative short learning programmes. As part of the "European Short Learning Programmes" (E-SLP) project lead by the EADTU, we undertook, in 2018, a qualitative analysis of existing SLPs amongst the project's partners' institutions. This study concluded in a "Compendium of good practices" which details patterns of good practices in the design of SLPs. The project addresses the implementation of short learning programmes as a main part of continuing education / continuous professional development and lifelong learning policies.

About SLP

Short Learning Programmes (thereafter SLPs) are short academic programmes with a sequenced set of courses (units, modules or other learning building blocks) representing a learner's total study requirement and usually leading to an award on successful completion. Their main characteristics can be detailed as followed: an EQF Level between 4 to 8 (foundation, bachelor, master and doctoral level); a study time from 5 to 60 ECTS; an inter-institutional or joint recognition, preferably accredited and bearing some relation to formal degrees or to HEIs. For example, they can be used as stackable elements of larger formal degrees; with a common subject focusing on specific needs in society - they can be market driven; targeting non-traditional and adult learners who combine work and study or learn for personal development; online or blended learning programmes. They must be flexible and scalable.

Aim of the compendium of good practices

The "Compendium of good practices" has the objectives of establishing a state of affairs of the characteristics of the SLPs on offer, of identifying patterns of good practices and of assessing the improvements necessary in their design. The aim was to produce an index of good practices, which can be used as examples to inspire and structure new SLP designs.

Procedure and participants

In order to gather the information necessary to determine these good practices the participating universities (*Università Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO, KU Leuven, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Open University of University of Jyväskylä,*

Comparable examples

The recent EADTU report "The Changing Pedagogical Landscape" highlights the move of the European universities towards continuous education, Lifelong Learning and open education, enabled by new technologies and strategic positioning in a networked economy and society. It shows new modes at curriculum / programme level: "OERS supporting blended and online programmes; dual mode programmes; joint degrees with elements of online and distance education; regional mergers and curriculum collaboration/integration; and fully online programmes". Our project provides comprehensive examples of existing practices in curriculum design targeting these issues.

Henderikx, P., & Jansen, D. (2018). *The Changing Pedagogical Landscape: In search of patterns in policies and practices of new modes of teaching and learning*. The Netherlands: EADTU.

References

Buus, L., & Georgsen, M. (2018). A Learning Design Methodology for Developing Short Learning Programmes in Further and Continuing Education. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2018 (1), 8. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/jime.469>

EADTU (2016). Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) - *Between the European open and distance teaching universities on Short Learning Programmes*.

O'Neill, G. (2015). *Curriculum design in higher education: theory to practice*. Dublin: University College Dublin. Teaching and Learning.

Kaunas University of Technology, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Hellenic Open University, Universidade Aberta (Portugal), Anadolu University, AGH University of Science and Technology in Cracow, Poland, Open University Netherland) were asked to answer a written survey about the design practices of two SLPs of their choice. Thus providing information on a total of 22 SLPs. These SLPs were selected as they corresponded best to the definition adopted within the project.

The survey was elaborated to cover a broad range of design issues, which were selected from the project description. Further items were gathered from the following references: "[Quality Assessment for E-learning: a Benchmarking Approach](#) (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities - EADTU - George Ubachs)", "[Curriculum Design in Higher Education: Theory to Practice](#) (O'Neill, 2015)" and the "[JISC the Design Studio](#)".

The survey covered two main areas of inquiry: Short Learning Programme design and Learning Building Block design (LBB), a concept developed within the project referring to a separate and coherent self-content block of learning, organised around consistent learning outcomes. The programme design section of the survey focused on educational philosophy, learning and teaching strategies, programme structure and sequencing, while its second section dealt with instructional engineering parameters, support and contributors, as well as technical parameters.

Results

The "compendium of good practices" dresses a picture of the current situation of SLPs in Europe amongst participating partner institutions. The information gathered from the survey has enabled gaining specific information on practices, which we contrasted with the project's aims to reveal the good practices.

The "Compendium of good practices" shows design trends (focusing on target groups, flexibility / scalability, accessibility and innovation) and unique features, in existing short learning programmes, which make possible the reach of this project's goals. Amongst the most relevant patterns of good practices, which have emerged from this study, is the availability of a set of SLP targeting lifelong learners, thus answering to one of the project's priorities. The possibility of scalability of SLPs, by increasing or decreasing the number of learners, generally achieved through the organization of learners into clusters, is also recurrent among the documented programs. One noteworthy feature, which has come up, is the relation of a good number of existing SLPs with societal and market requirements. Many pedagogical teams call upon benchmarking and industry / ministry reports to insure the adequacy of their offer or involve key market actors into the design and delivery process. Market players engage sometimes in curriculum auditing and play an encompassing role ensuring the SLP relevance across time, by means of regular feedbacks and reviews.

The study also revealed patterns of good practices which include real situations and experiences, learners' reflexion and elaboration of new solutions, collaborations and peers / experts / tutors interactions in the design process. There is also a tendency to include non-formal and suggest informal learning activities in the learning process. A certification is generally issued, whether accredited or not, and in some cases recognised by other institutions. Certificates range from professional certifications, short programme certificates (certification of attendance or completion) to credit allocations.

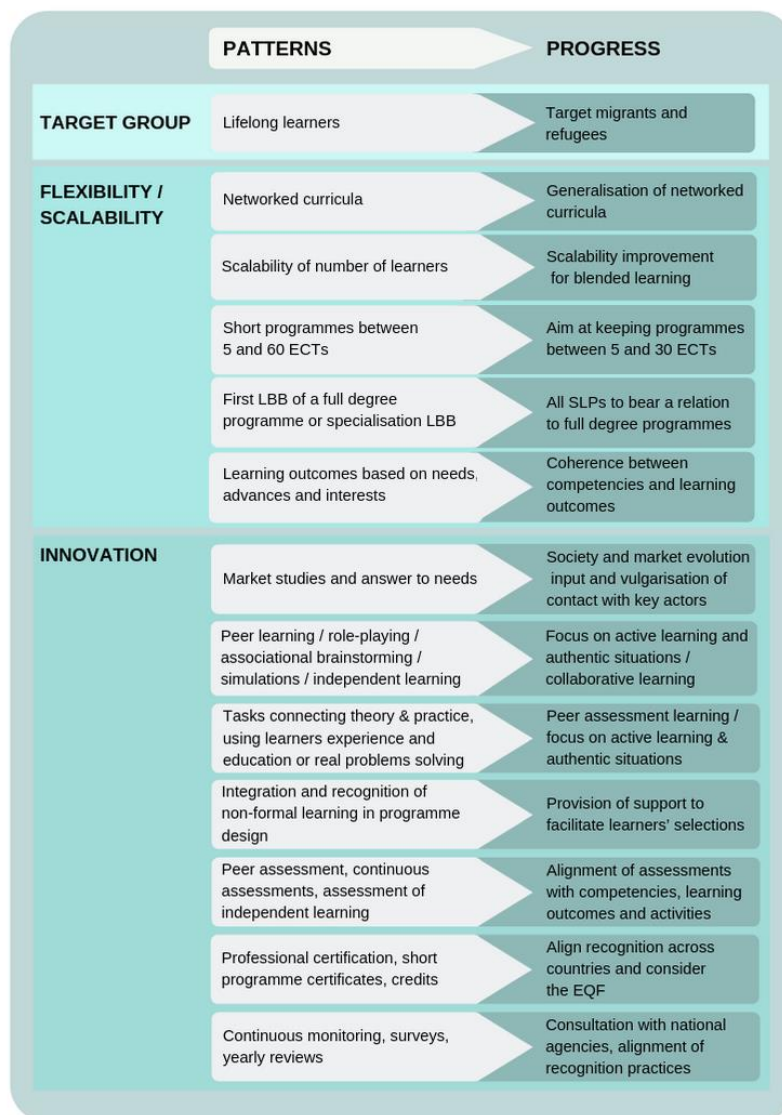
A prominent feature of the E-SLP project is the inter-institutional

Ubachs G. (coord.) (2016). *Quality Assessment for E-learning: a Benchmarking Approach (3rd ed.)*. The Netherlands: EADTU.

Ubachs G. (coord.) (2012) *NetCu Handbook: Guidelines for organising networked curricula*. The Netherlands: EADTU.

creation of SLPs. A few examples of collaborative approaches have emerged in the forms of partnerships, of the recycling of LBBs from other programs or of contents being reused from existing programmes with or without adaptation; however, inter-institutional co-creation is not yet a well-known practice.

Overview of patterns of good practices



Conclusion

The study has provided an overview of the current situation amongst partners through a selection of SLPs good practices. It revealed a promising background for advancement and helped to identify key issues related to improvements required to reach the project's objectives of co-design and delivery of inter-institutional SLPs for continuous professional development across Europe and beyond.