

University Lifelong Learning applied cases that inspire

COMPENDIUM OF CASE STUDIES

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Executive Summary

This Compendium of Case Studies has been developed within the framework of the SAMUELE project to document, analyse and disseminate exemplary practices in University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) across European higher education institutions (HEIs).

In response to the project's call for Case Studies, HEIs from 17 European countries submitted a substantial and diverse body of work spanning four thematic areas: Strategic Commitment and Vision; Structure and Organisation; ULLL Operations; and Impact and Engagement. The scale and depth of the responses are, in themselves, noteworthy. It is unusual to assemble such a structured and comparative body of institutional case studies focused specifically on ULLL. Together, these contributions provide a rare and geographically broad snapshot of how universities are embedding lifelong learning (LLL) within institutional strategy, governance frameworks, delivery systems and regional ecosystems.

Across the cases, several cross-cutting developments emerge:

- A shift from peripheral continuing education models toward institution-wide strategic integration of ULLL
- The growing adoption of modular, stackable and credit-bearing formats, including micro-credentials
- Alignment of ULLL with labour market transitions, regulated profession access, and professional upskilling and reskilling pathways
- Renewed emphasis on inclusion, widening participation, and civic and community engagement
- Strong emphasis on co-design and partnership with industry, public authorities and community organisations
- Recognition that sustainable ULLL requires governance reform, coordinated organisational design and long-term strategic commitment

Taken together, the cases demonstrate that ULLL is evolving beyond short-term professional updating to become a structural dimension of modern universities. It contributes not only to workforce development and regional innovation, but also to social mobility, institutional renewal and strengthened public engagement.

This publication is intended not only as a showcase of practice, but as a working resource supporting exchange, transferability and the continued strengthening of LLL ecosystems across Europe.

- For policymakers, it provides evidence of institutional innovation and responsiveness to European priorities on flexible learning, micro-credentials and LLL systems.
- For university leaders and ULLL practitioners, it offers concrete governance models, organisational approaches and implementation pathways that can inform institutional development.
- For researchers and academic communities, it presents structured examples of how LLL principles are operationalised across diverse European contexts.

Introduction

University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) is undergoing a profound transformation across Europe. No longer confined to continuing professional development (CPD) or outreach activity, it is increasingly emerging as a structural dimension of higher education that is central to institutional strategy, civic engagement, workforce transformation and social cohesion. In an era shaped by digital acceleration, demographic change, climate transition and geopolitical instability, universities are being called upon to serve learners not only at the beginning of adulthood, but across the full life course. The case studies collected in this Compendium provide concrete evidence of this shift.

In response to the SAMUELE Call for Case Studies, higher education institutions (HEIs) from 17 European countries submitted structured accounts of their ULLL models, reforms and innovations. The scale and thematic organisation of this response are significant. While lifelong learning (LLL) is widely referenced in European policy frameworks, comparative, practice-based documentation at this level of depth and diversity remains rare. The collection therefore offers a geographically broad and systemically varied snapshot of how institutions are embedding LLL within governance structures, pedagogical models and institutional missions. The cases are organised across four thematic areas that reflect the core dimensions of institutional transformation required to sustain ULLL:

1. Strategic Commitment & Vision for ULLL
2. Structure & Organisation of ULLL
3. ULLL Operations
4. Impact & Engagement

Together, these areas move from high-level strategic positioning to operational delivery and societal outcomes, mirroring the layered nature of institutional change.

Thematic Area I: Strategic Commitment & Vision

The first thematic area examines how universities conceptualise and formally position LLL within institutional strategy. The cases presented here demonstrate that sustainable ULLL requires more than isolated programme innovation; it depends on explicit strategic commitment, leadership endorsement and integration into long-term institutional planning. Across diverse national contexts, institutions illustrate different pathways to strategic embedding, from repositioning continuing education within broader knowledge transfer agendas, to developing whole-of-university LLL hubs, to aligning micro-credential frameworks with institutional mission and governance structures. Several cases emphasise the integration of ULLL within wider strategic frameworks, including university development plans, regional alliances, excellence initiatives and European cooperation agendas. Others highlight the role of LLL in renewing the university's civic mission, strengthening inclusion and widening participation, and responding to demographic and labour market change. In some institutions, LLL is being reframed not simply as an adjunct professional training offer, but as a structural mechanism for enhancing institutional relevance, social impact and long-term sustainability. A recurring theme across these contributions is that ULLL gains durability and legitimacy when it is anchored explicitly in institutional vision, governance structures and resource planning - and when it is aligned with research strengths, community engagement and evolving societal needs.

Thematic Area II: Structure & Organisation

If strategy provides direction, organisational architecture provides the enabling conditions. The second thematic area focuses on how institutions design governance systems, administrative processes, quality assurance frameworks and funding models to support LLL. Across institutional and national contexts, the cases demonstrate that organisational configuration plays a decisive role in determining whether ULLL remains fragmented or becomes coherent and scalable. The contributions illustrate a wide range of structural models: central coordinating units embedded within universities; foundation-based entities operating with academic oversight but administrative autonomy; whole-of-university continuing education institutions; cross-college transition architectures; and place-based civic partnerships. In several cases, dedicated governance arrangements were established precisely to overcome fragmentation, siloed faculty structures or slow approval processes. Many of the cases highlight the need to align modular, stackable and flexible provision - including micro-credentials and professional certificates - with existing regulatory, legislative and quality assurance frameworks. This often requires careful integration within national legislation, digital information systems and institutional approval procedures. Rather than dismantling traditional structures, institutions are adapting them to accommodate shorter formats, co-designed provision and flexible learner pathways. A recurring insight across these cases is that effective ULLL requires institutional agility supported by clear governance, coordinated service platforms and integrated digital infrastructure. Where LLL is supported by coherent administrative processes, shared service units and transparent funding models, it is more likely to achieve scale and sustainability. Conversely, fragmentation or overly rigid structures can limit responsiveness to labour market and societal needs. Institutions that demonstrate success in this thematic area do so not merely through innovative programmes, but through deliberate organisational design that integrates LLL into mainstream academic and administrative systems.

Thematic Area III: ULLL Operations

The third thematic area shifts the focus from institutional architecture to delivery and implementation. The cases examine how universities operationalise LLL through short-format and continuing education provision, interdisciplinary portfolios, blended and online delivery, and learner-centred pedagogies designed for busy adults balancing study with work and family responsibilities. Several contributions demonstrate how digital infrastructures and support systems - including end-to-end non-formal education platforms, integrated learning environments and data dashboards - enable more accessible and efficient learner journeys, from enrolment through to certification and quality monitoring. Others highlight innovations in learning design, including personalised learner support and structured self-directed learning, as well as co-designed and practice-connected formats that strengthen relevance and application. Across the cases, operational effectiveness is shown to depend not only on programme design but on the systems that sustain delivery at scale: fit-for-purpose quality assurance processes, integrated digital environments, and coordinated service supports. While modular and credit-bearing formats (including micro-credentials) feature in several examples, the overarching insight is that contemporary ULLL operations are increasingly defined by flexibility, responsiveness and continuous improvement. These developments reflect a broader shift from viewing education as a contained phase of life to understanding it as a continuous and adaptive process across the life course.

Thematic Area IV: Impact & Engagement

The final thematic area addresses outcomes, partnerships and systemic engagement. The cases in this section illustrate how ULLL contributes to workforce development, sectoral capacity building and access to regulated professions, while also advancing

inclusion for underrepresented and marginalised groups, including migrants, prisoners, individuals in recovery from addiction, and learners facing socio-economic disadvantage. LLL is positioned at the intersection of education, economic development and social policy, functioning as both a skills mechanism and a lever for social mobility and institutional reform. Partnership emerges as a defining characteristic across the contributions. Universities collaborate with industry and employers, public authorities, ministries, schools, health services, employment agencies, and community organisations to design and deliver programmes that respond to concrete societal needs. In many cases, institutions act as regional conveners or civic actors, embedding ULLL within broader ecosystems that include local government, voluntary organisations and professional bodies. These partnerships extend beyond programme delivery to include shared governance frameworks, coordinated funding mechanisms and national-level policy alignment. Several cases demonstrate impact not only at learner level but at systemic level. Structured progression routes, micro-credential frameworks, recognition pathways and qualification bridges enhance permeability between education and employment and strengthen trust in LLL systems. Others highlight personal transformation, confidence-building and professional identity reconstruction, particularly among learners navigating displacement, marginalisation or requalification. Collectively, the cases show that impact is multidimensional: it encompasses employment and professional outcomes, social inclusion and empowerment, institutional reform, and the strengthening of regional and national LLL ecosystems.

Cross-Cutting Developments

Across all four thematic areas, a number of cross-cutting developments emerge that together signal a deeper institutional transformation.

From Peripheral Activity to Structural Function

A striking trend across the cases is the gradual repositioning of LLL from the institutional margins to the strategic core. In many institutions, ULLL units historically operated as semi-autonomous continuing education centres - often financially self-sustaining but strategically disconnected from mainstream academic planning. The cases demonstrate a growing recognition that such marginal positioning is no longer viable. LLL is increasingly embedded in university-wide strategies, linked to research agendas, integrated into civic missions and reflected in long-term development plans. This repositioning requires leadership endorsement and, in several cases, cultural change. It challenges traditional assumptions about who the “typical” university learner is and expands the institutional understanding of academic responsibility beyond the more traditional initial entry, full-time student profiles. The implication is clear: ULLL is becoming a structural function of the modern university, not a supplementary service.

Modularity and Stackability as Systemic Redesign

A second dominant trend is the growing adoption of modular, stackable and credit-bearing formats, including micro-credentials. While these are often discussed as technical innovations, the cases reveal that their significance is structural rather than procedural. Modularity changes the architecture of higher education provision. It requires rethinking approval systems, quality assurance processes, workload models, funding flows and learner support structures. Stackability introduces greater permeability in the system, blurring previously rigid boundaries. Importantly, this approach shifts responsibility and agency. In several cases, learners are positioned not as passive recipients of predefined curricula but as active designers of their own learning trajectories. This shift has implications for academic identity, advising structures and institutional accountability. Rather than representing fragmentation, however, modular and stackable systems can be

understood as mechanisms for maintaining academic coherence within increasingly flexible and non-linear life courses.

Governance Reform as a Precondition for Sustainability

Many cases highlight that innovative programmes alone are insufficient to scale ULLL. Structural and governance reform emerges as a recurring theme. Institutions report the need to adapt academic approval procedures; costing and revenue models; workload and resourcing arrangements; data systems and learner tracking mechanisms. Without these reforms, ULLL remains dependent on individual champions or short-term project funding. Sustainable LLL ecosystems thus require alignment across the key institutional domains of strategy, finance, academic governance and external relations. This insight reinforces the view that ULLL is not merely pedagogical innovation; it is institutional redesign.

Partnership as Co-Production, Not Outsourcing

Across the cases, partnerships with industry, public authorities, regional ecosystems and community organisations play a central role. However, what is notable is the strong emphasis on co-design and co-production. Rather than universities acting solely as knowledge providers, several cases illustrate collaborative curriculum design processes, shared needs analysis and iterative pilot models. This signals a shift in institutional posture from supplier to strategic partner. Such partnerships increase responsiveness to labour market transitions and regional needs, but they also introduce complexity. Universities must balance responsiveness with academic integrity, short-term market demand with long-term knowledge development. The cases suggest that successful ULLL models achieve this balance through structured governance and clearly articulated institutional values.

Expanding the Meaning of Impact

Another cross-cutting insight concerns the broadening conception of impact. While employability and workforce development remain central, many cases emphasise additional dimensions including:

- Social inclusion of underrepresented and migrant learners
- Civic and community engagement
- Personal confidence and identity formation
- Community resilience

This expanded understanding reflects a holistic view of LLL. Universities are positioning themselves not only as economic actors, but as anchors of social cohesion and wellbeing. The implication is that evaluation metrics for ULLL must also expand. Traditional financial or enrolment-based indicators are insufficient to capture its full contribution. In many instances, the societal, civic and developmental value generated through ULLL may exceed its immediate financial return.

Cultural Shift and Institutional Identity

Perhaps the most profound cross-cutting theme is cultural. Embedding ULLL challenges long-standing academic norms including programme-centric planning, discipline-bound curricula and the primacy of initial degree education. Several cases explicitly acknowledge that repositioning LLL requires a shift in institutional mindset. This includes:

- Recognising adult learners as central to the university community
- Valuing flexible and non-linear pathways
- Integrating professional and civic engagement into academic identity

- Reframing the university as a LLL ecosystem

Such cultural shifts are gradual and often contested. Yet the cases collectively demonstrate that institutions are moving - albeit at different speeds and through different pathways - toward a more permeable and life-course-oriented model of higher education.

Structural Implications for European Higher Education

Taken together, these cross-cutting trends suggest that ULLL is not a temporary response to policy agendas or labour market fluctuations. It is a structural adaptation to systemic change. European higher education institutions operate in environments characterised by rapid technological disruption, extended working lives with increasingly non-linear career trajectories, migration and demographic diversification, and growing pressures for regional innovation and civic engagement. Within this context, the capacity to provide flexible, high-quality and socially responsive LLL becomes central to institutional sustainability and legitimacy. The cases presented in this Compendium demonstrate that ULLL is increasingly positioned as a foundational pillar of modern universities. Its future development will likely shape institutional strategy, governance, funding models and academic identity across Europe. This Compendium therefore serves not only as documentation of current practice, but as evidence of a broader structural transition within European higher education - one that will shape the future orientation, legitimacy and societal contract of universities across the continent.

Thematic Area I: Strategic Commitment and Vision of University Lifelong Learning

Details

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Description

The Center for Lifelong Learning (ZWW) is more than 50 years old and is the central institution for academic continuing education at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU). In its Mission Statement, the ZWW puts the learner in the centre:

“We consider learning successful when learners have acquired scientifically sound knowledge and skills that enable them to independently master challenges in their life and work contexts and strengthen their capacity to act.”

The learners are at the centre of the learning process: their professional interests, scientific work, transfer to practice, as well as their learning needs and expectations are the core interest of all our efforts. The teachers as professional enablers of individual learning processes support the lifelong learners with their professional, methodological and pedagogical competencies. This requires appropriate framework conditions and an atmosphere in which learning is tailor-made for the individual needs, enjoyable and feasible according to the learners' life cycle. Successful learning empowers learners to take control of their ongoing learning process, develop their own ideas and apply what they have learned in their work.

JGU sees itself as an integral part of society with which it works closely and openly; it perceives knowledge transfer as one of its primary objectives. As an open university, JGU has undertaken a broad spectrum of transfer activities over the past few decades; these range from standard forms of technology transfer through a wide range of vocational continuing education courses to numerous concepts designed to promote PUSH (Public Understanding of Science and Humanities). The university is also involved in numerous research projects dealing with knowledge transfer. JGU received national recognition for its transfer activities thanks to the success of the Mainz Research Alliance while competing for the 2011 “City of Science” title. In 2017, the university successfully underwent an audit by the Stifterverband¹; as a result, JGU plans to extend its knowledge transfer activities and to align them with a strategic focus.

To this end, JGU developed its own transfer strategy in 2024.² The transfer of knowledge is identified as a fundamental aspect of this strategy. At JGU, the concept of knowledge transfer is understood as a strategic framework within which the ongoing pursuit of academic education assumes a pivotal role. Academic continuing education thrives on the mutual benefit and productive exchange between generally professionally experienced participants and research-based teaching. Consequently, the scientific continuing education programme at JGU can be regarded as a prime example of good practice in

¹ Stifterverband is a community consisting of around 3,500 dedicated individuals, companies and organisations from the realms of business, science and civil society in Germany. The aim of its work is to rethink and reshape education and science with a view to strengthening society's long-term capacity for innovation. cf. <https://www.stifterverband.org/english>

² See more on the website: <https://research.uni-mainz.de/transfer-strategy/>

successful knowledge transfer. Transformative research, defined as research conducted at the interface between science and practice, accompanies this knowledge transfer.

JGU has set itself the strategic goal of repositioning academic continuing education within this coordinate system of knowledge transfer and transformative research and broadening its scope. To achieve this strategic objective, JGU has implemented two significant initiatives that place academic continuing education at the core of the institution's broader educational mission and substantially augment its regional significance. In short, what makes our ULLL model innovative is its widened target-group access, grounded in research and designed to achieve an expanded outreach across the region and society.

1. First decision

The Senate of the university decided to expand the ULLL unit at Gutenberg-University Mainz and in consequence widen the target group of lifelong learners, from young adults and professionals to senior students and the concept of Learning in Later Life (LiLL). The new ZWW is named "Center for Knowledge Transfer and University Lifelong Learning" and shall broaden the perspective of ULLL by combining continuing education offerings with research-based studies and innovative practices. ZWW's work will be based on four main areas which will be strongly linked to each other:

1. Teaching (professionals, senior students, younger students, staff);
2. Research (concerning the different target groups, the corresponding didactics, pedagogy, labour market needs, geragogy, reflection of science, knowledge transfer and transformative research);
3. Projects (regional, national and European Projects) to pilot new and innovative ideas in a save space to later transform them into sustainable offerings;
4. Service & Counselling.

The biggest group of lifelong learners in the ZWW, the senior students, are offered seminars and these seminars are already accompanied by research about how elder people learn, what happens in the brain of elder people while learning and how this may prevent mental diseases. The most important question for the next decade concerning this target group of elder learners is how to close the digital gap between digital natives and the older generations. This is the reason why many projects deal with questions on digitalisation of daily life and how to onboard especially elder people to give them the chance to participate in social and daily life. As in the future ZWW will also address younger students there is the chance to launch projects e.g. by offering intergenerational courses for both groups of learners and pilot within projects innovative approaches and new ways of learning and teaching. By doing so we shall gain more and deeper experience in the field of Teaching and Learning for diverse target groups and may offer services to our faculty members and do counselling within and outside university in the field of knowledge transfer.

2. Second decision

This new model is transferable to bigger universities with a long tradition in PUSH (Public understanding of Social Sciences & Humanities), PURE (Public understanding of Research) and Third Mission or Civic University activities.

In the case of Gutenberg-University Mainz, this concept is embedded in a wider and longer lasting strategy: Mainz is located in the Rhine-Main-Region near the Frankfurt International Airport. This busy region with a lot of European Institutions is developing since more than 10 years a consortium of the three big universities located in this area: Gutenberg-University Mainz, Goethe-University Frankfurt and the Technical University Darmstadt. This group called Rhine-Main-Universities (RMU) has recently applied for

funds within the German wide national Excellence Initiative. The decision to enlarge the ZWW and to broaden the tasks and the target groups is part of the RMU-wide strategy on how to build up a stable and long-lasting communication between Research and Higher Education. ZWW as the oldest and biggest unit within the field of lifelong learning shall be responsible for building a bridge between RMU and the community.

JGU has two core strengths in knowledge exchange: LLL, which has been a strategic priority for more than 50 years, and high-impact biotechnology transfer. The Center for Lifelong Learning and Knowledge Transfer (ZWW) designs and delivers programmes in counselling, training, coaching, and internationalisation, in collaboration with the respective institutes at JGU. 7,000 annual participations in more than 300 programmes and courses makes ZWW one of the most successful LLL centres in Germany. Thus far, the Technical University Darmstadt and Goethe-University Frankfurt have not made LLL a strategic priority. In biotechnology, JGU builds on the pioneering work of U. Şahin and Türeci in RNA Immunotherapeutics. Funded by several hundred M€ in IP royalties from the BioNTech SARS-CoV-2 vaccine, the JGU spinoff TRON gGmbH conducts collaborative research on targeted therapeutic immune modulation. The city of Mainz is developing the biomindz Life Science and Biotechnology Hub beside JGU, aiming to attract 1B€ in private and public investment. JGU leverages its research strengths for knowledge exchange, exemplified by the ERC-supported work of H. Frey, who advances rPEG technology (multiple patents, joint work with Evonik) and E. Lemke, founder of Araxa Biosciences. Adjacent high-impact fields include AI, represented by S. Kramer, KILotse (AI pilot) for the Rhineland-Palatinate government, and quantum computing, represented by F. Schmidt-Kaler, co-founder of the spin-off neQxt.

Concluding remarks

By taking these two far-reaching strategic decisions concerning ULLL, JGU wants to gain more visibility, outreach and impact in the field of ULLL as a core task of JGU as a higher education institution. It is meant to position JGU as the (leading) university in the region and at a national level concerning knowledge transfer. However, it is not clear if the strategic aims will be reached by these measures, that remains to be demonstrated in the future.

What has become clear is the fact that this shift of ULLL from the margin to the centre requires more than just organisational adjustments and HR measures; it demands a different mindset and a cultural shift. The strategic decision challenges the 'conventional' perception of what ULLL is and does. By prioritising knowledge transfer as a holistic concept and pointing out the societal relevance, outreach importance and power of ULLL based on a learner-centred approach alongside JGU's and RMU's scientific excellence (see the RMU-consortium), JGU is breaking new ground.

Since these strategic decisions have been made quite recently it is not easy to predict whether the associated goals will be achieved. Nevertheless, these two far-reaching strategic decisions already differ significantly from conventional attempts to strengthen ULLL activities, make them visible, and move them from the margins to the centre of attention especially of higher education decision-makers and leaders.

Details

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Description

Innovation

Our model reimagines ULLL by introducing Short Advanced Studies (SAS): short, ECTS-bearing units designed to address needs that conventional continuing education formats (including existing short programmes) no longer meet in our increasingly dynamic knowledge and work environment. Global labour markets are rapidly evolving: digitalisation, automation and new organisational forms reduce the half-life of knowledge while increasing the demand for continuous, competence-oriented learning. Even some well-established short formats have proven too time-intensive, too specialised or too rigid amid these dynamics. At the same time, interdisciplinary problem-solving is becoming an essential skill, which is why learners increasingly require modular, practice-oriented learning opportunities that fit into their fragmented life and work schedules. SAS address these developments by offering academically grounded learning in small, structured units that are accessible without upfront commitment and irrespective of life phase, budget or workload. SAS are not simply short versions of existing programmes: they introduce a new form of participation in higher education that offers step-by-step skill building, bespoke learning to meet specific needs and a modular structure for participants wishing to build a meaningful, academically recognised pathway.

Within this course architecture, SAS operate at a granularity previously unknown in university-based continuing education. Between one and nine ECTS in scope, they constitute the smallest “micro-credentials”, allowing learners to access higher education through units tailored to their specific needs while fully embedded in established admission and quality frameworks.

Building on this format, our model gives learners more agency and responsibility: they decide which skills to build in which order and at what pace, creating personalised learning trajectories. For learners who wish to pursue a more comprehensive qualification, the model provides a recognised academic framework in the form of a Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS), structured through the CAS Portfolio of Competencies (“Kompetenzportfolio”) – a didactic approach widely recognised in higher education. The resulting balance between openness (SAS) and structure (CAS Portfolio of Competencies) combines flexibility, academic rigour and institutional recognition³. It requires learners to reflect on their pathway reporting on the logic behind, and professional relevance of, their chosen skills. The responsibility for coherence and stackability is thus being transferred to the learners themselves.

Beyond its didactic and structural architecture, the model strengthens universities aiming to support diverse learner profiles, including people with caring responsibilities, irregular

³ <https://www.hslu.ch/de-ch/wirtschaft/weiterbildung/cas/ibr/cas-kompetenzportfolio/>

work hours and shifting career paths. By offering short, recognised learning units, SAS adds a viable academic learning option. The format enables innovative didactic settings such as self-directed, hybrid or remote learning and allows for experimentation beyond conventional programme structures.

SAS can be combined across disciplines, allowing learners to develop skills profiles that reflect the complexity of modern work. Participants may, for instance, build expertise across domains including AI, finance, architecture and leadership within a single learning pathway. A shared university framework and ECTS-based quality standards ensure the consistency and stackability of such interdisciplinary routes. The model also reflects a broader paradigm shift within education from a single, contained phase to a lifelong continuum shaped by learners' evolving professional realities.

Ultimately, this is not simply a new type of programme, but a strategic redesign of how universities can structure, validate and recognise learning in a rapidly changing knowledge landscape.

Impact learners, industry and the community

1) Impact on learners

The model shifts continuing education from a teaching-centred to a learning-centred approach. Learners take responsibility for their learning paths and develop skills in self-directed, manageable steps that match their changing professional and personal lives. At the same time, the model offers flexibility: learners may select individual SAS or consolidate their learning into a CAS, even continue towards a consecutive Master of Advanced Studies (MAS), committing to LLL as a cumulative and self-steered process.

Without replacing established formats such as CAS or MAS, it enhances and reconfigures ULLL by initiating a shift from programme-centred structures to learner-driven pathways. Rather than adding complexity, this increases accessibility and transfers greater responsibility from the institution to the learners:

- 1) *From single-entry programmes to layered, stackable micro-credentials*
Traditional ULLL formats require early commitment to preset programmes. By contrast, SAS create an open learning marketplace in which learners select suitable ECTS-bearing units while responding to their immediate professional needs. SAS can be taken independently or combined into a recognised CAS via the CAS Portfolio of Competencies. This approach removes pressure to commit early while keeping qualification pathways open. It places learners, rather than institutions, at the centre of setting their learning goals and designing a learning pathway.
- 2) *From discipline-centred curricula to interdisciplinary, learner-generated pathways*
The model enables learners to combine skills across disciplines, reflecting the fact that innovations often emerge at the intersection of different fields. The modular nature of SAS allows learners to build interdisciplinary learning paths that are not predefined by the institution and may not formally exist as dedicated programmes. This increases their relevance and adaptability to future skill needs.
- 3) *From high threshold to flexible participation across life situations*
Many learners face structural barriers such as limited time, care responsibilities or irregular work hours. SAS addresses this problem by offering short, flexible learning units that can be taken independently. This makes them accessible for people unable to attend longer programmes. Participants aiming for a recognised qualification may consolidate selected SAS into an academically grounded skills profile using the CAS Portfolio of Competencies, ensuring flexibility without compromising quality.

Transferability

The model is highly transferable because it builds on the core principles of the European Higher Education Area, including: ECTS-based micro-credentials, competence-oriented assessment and transparent qualification pathways. Its innovation lies in the didactic and organisational architecture, and not in the introduction of new proprietary systems.

Successful transfer requires:

- 1) *Governance openness to modularity*
Institutions must be willing to move from programme-centred planning to modular systems that enable personalised SAS pathways and to transfer greater responsibility for learning and reflection to the learners within an academic framework.
- 2) *Shared quality standards for micro-credentials*
Standards for competencies, learning outcomes, workload and ECTS allocation are essential for coherence and credibility.
- 3) *Mechanisms for meaningful stackability*
HEIs require academic mechanisms that ensure micro-credentials can be combined into coherent and recognised qualification pathways. This involves guidance for the pathway's design and a formal validation of the unit's coherence and professional relevance within an institutional quality framework.
- 4) *Administrative capacity and readiness*
The administrative effort for a SAS is similar to that for a CAS: web presence, communication, information events, enrolment and quality assurance. Institutions must ensure adequate administrative capacity to sustainably scale such a system.

Long-term strategy

The model is embedded in the institution's long-term strategy for continuing education, which names LLL as a core mission. It provides a strategic framework for combining academic quality, practice orientation and broad accessibility within a coherent qualification architecture (SAS – CAS – MAS).

- 1) *Strategic alignment with the university's mission*
The model operationalises core institutional goals: making higher education more accessible, supporting learning across life stages and advancing skills-oriented education with practical relevance. It enables personalised learning pathways without compromising academic quality - a central element of the university's mission.
- 2) *Financial and operational sustainability*
SAS build on existing expertise and quality assurance structures. Their modular format allows for the university to respond directly to market demand: new SAS can be launched quickly, while formats with limited uptake can be discontinued without significant financial risk. This demand-driven flexibility supports efficient curriculum development and ensures a robust and sustainable continuing education portfolio.
- 3) *Future orientation and strategic capacity building*
The model positions the university at the forefront of European developments in micro-credentials, stackable learning and flexible qualification pathways. It strengthens institutional agility and provides a foundation for a more dynamic, responsive and future-proof educational landscape.

By institutionalising modularity and learner-centred educational journeys, the model also expands the university's capacity to innovate programmatically, develop new thematic areas and cultivate strategic partnerships.

Together, SAS and the CAS Portfolio of Competencies establish a LLL ecosystem in which higher education becomes more accessible, more personalised and more relevant for learners, organisations and society alike.

Details

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Description

Microcredentialial Dispute Resolution: Legal and Psychological Basis of Mediation as a Model of Tallinn University's Lifelong Learning Strategy

Tallinn University (TLU) has been offering LLL since 1976, when it began providing continuing education for school principals. With the restoration of independence of the Republic of Estonia in 1991, universities also became independent and were able to decide on the content and structure of their curricula for degree programmes. At the same time, continuing education gained momentum, reaching a new level at the turn of the millennium. At Tallinn University, continuing education has always been based on the curricula, and upon achieving the learning outcomes, adult learners are issued a certificate.

Since 1999, TLU has offered open education, which means that adults can take courses developed for students, but the purpose of their studies is continuing education. Starting in 2013, continuing education curricula were created on the basis of several subjects and offered to adult learners as a one-year university programme. Starting in 2021, TLU has been able to call these programmes microdegrees. At the same time, new microcredentialial programmes began to be developed. There are three types of TLU microcredentialial curricula: completely based on subjects (micro-degree); one part based on subjects and the other part based on continuing education modules (if over 50% of subjects then micro-degree); completely based on continuing education modules (micro-qualification).

In 2021, a microcredentialial curriculum *Dispute Resolution: Legal and Psychological Basis of Mediation* (29 ECTS) was created as a third model, consisting entirely of continuing education modules. In 2023, this micro-qualification curriculum was developed into a master's programme Alternative Dispute Resolution (60 ECTS), which means that the micro-degree continuing education programme now consists of master's level subjects. Between 2021 and 2024, 48 students graduated with a micro-qualification certificate, in 2025, eight students graduated with a micro-degree certificate, and ten students are currently studying. These numbers may seem small, but on an Estonian scale, the result is remarkable.

1. What makes the microcredentialial distinct in Tallinn University's LLL model?

The microcredentialial *Dispute Resolution: Legal and Psychological Basis of Mediation* represents a mature stage in TLU's LLL approach. It is not a course repackaged under a new label, but a structurally different educational model that integrates strategy, pedagogy, and societal impact.

Key distinguishing features

- **Interdisciplinarity by design:** legal frameworks and psychological understanding are integrated throughout the curriculum rather than taught separately.
- **Competence-based outcomes:** the aim is not knowledge acquisition alone, but the ability to analyse, manage, and ethically guide real conflict situations.
- **Academic recognition:** as a credit-bearing microcredential, it is stackable and connectable to further degree studies.
- **Societal relevance:** it responds directly to increasing workplace, organisational, and civic conflicts in contemporary societies.

This positions the microcredential as a core instrument of Tallinn University's LLL ecosystem, not an isolated training product.

2. How It Differs from Earlier Continuing Education and LLL Formats

From fragmented courses to a coherent learning pathway

Earlier continuing education often consisted of stand-alone courses, leaving learners to connect insights themselves. The microcredential introduces a designed learning trajectory, moving from understanding conflict dynamics to applying legal, psychological, and ethical mediation principles in practice.

From information delivery to transformative learning

Traditional professional training has been focused often on tools and techniques. This microcredential is grounded in adult and transformative learning theory, emphasising reflection on personal assumptions and professional roles, emotional and ethical awareness, learning through cases, simulations, and guided reflection.

From certificates to strategic credentials

Where earlier training often ended with a certificate of participation, the microcredential carries academic credit, contributes to formal qualifications, enables learners to build a coherent professional and educational profile over time. In short, the shift is from training as an event to learning as a strategy.

3. Impact on Learners, Organisations, and Society

The impact on learners is reflected in the fact that participants develop integrated legal and psychological mediation competence, advanced communication and emotional regulation skills, and a stronger professional identity as reflective and responsible conflict handlers. The result is durable professional capacity, not short-term upskilling.

The impact on the organisation is expressed in the fact that the organisation benefits from reduced escalation of conflicts, improved leadership and HR decision-making, lower legal and human costs related to unresolved disputes.

At a societal level, the microcredential contributes to strengthening mediation and dialogue culture, reducing pressure on judicial systems, enhancing trust in institutions and professional practices.

TLU thus positions education as a tool for social cohesion, not merely workforce development.

4. Integration into Tallinn University's Long-Term Strategy and Mission

TLU's mission emphasises socially responsible education, interdisciplinary knowledge creation, inclusive and flexible learning pathways. The mediation microcredential directly supports this mission by addressing real societal challenges, combining academic depth with practical relevance, supporting adult learners and professionals.

From the point of view of strategic priorities, the programme operationalises TLU's strategic goals related to future-oriented skills, lifelong and life-wide learning, learner-centred and competence-based education. It exemplifies how strategy is translated into concrete educational design.

5. Financial Sustainability: A Realistic and Strategic Contribution

Microcredentials are not positioned as a solution to structural university underfunding. Instead, at Tallinn University they function as part of a diversified and sustainable education portfolio.

Key contributions to financial sustainability:

- **New learner segments:** Fee-based microcredentials attract working professionals and adult learners who may not enter full degree programmes.
- **Learner progression and retention:** Stackable credits encourage continued study, strengthening long-term engagement with the university.
- **Partnerships and positioning:** Microcredentials support cooperation with public sector bodies, employers, and European networks, indirectly strengthening funding opportunities and institutional reputation.

Thus, financial sustainability is approached incrementally and strategically, not through unrealistic revenue expectations.

6. Transferability to Other European Universities

The value of this microcredential lies not in copying its content verbatim, but in transferring its design logic. Core elements that are transferable:

- interdisciplinary structure (law + psychology + ethics),
- competence-based learning outcomes,
- reflective and practice-based pedagogy,
- stackable, credit-bearing microcredential format.

Possible European implementation models align well with European priorities such as flexible credentials, LLL, and social impact.

- **Adapted joint programmes:** Universities localise legal content while maintaining shared pedagogical principles.
- **European microcredential clusters:** Different institutions contribute modules within shared frameworks (e.g. mediation, restorative justice).
- **Living labs for adult education innovation:** Using the microcredential to experiment with interdisciplinary teaching and assessment.
- **Public-sector professional development:** Tailored versions for schools, municipalities, healthcare, or justice systems.

7. Tallinn University's Potential Role at European Level

Rather than acting only as a provider, TLU can position itself as a model developer for interdisciplinary microcredentials, a quality framework holder, a trainer of academic staff in microcredential design and adult-learning pedagogy. This role is sustainable, credible, and aligned with European cooperation frameworks (Erasmus+, ESF+, Horizon Europe).

The microcredential *Dispute Resolution: Legal and Psychological Basis of Mediation* illustrates how Tallinn University's LLL model aligns with the university's mission of social responsibility and academic relevance; supports long-term strategic goals through flexible, future-oriented education; contributes realistically to financial sustainability by diversifying learning pathways; creates measurable value for learners, organisations, and society; offers a transferable model for European universities developing microcredentials. This microcredential is not just a programme, but a strategic template for how universities can combine academic integrity, societal impact, and sustainable LLL in a European context.

Details

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Description

Institutional Context and Vision

Adult Continuing Education (ACE) at University College Cork (UCC) represents one of the longest-standing and most deeply embedded models of ULLL in Ireland. Established in 1946 and building on adult education traditions dating back to the early twentieth century, ACE has consistently articulated a vision of LLL grounded in social purpose, civic engagement, and inclusion, alongside academic quality and innovation. Today, ACE supports approximately 3,000 adult learners annually across accredited and non-accredited provision, community education, enterprise engagement, and flexible learning pathways, positioning it as a significant and sustained pillar of LLL within the university. At UCC, ULLL is understood not merely as a response to labour market needs, but as learning for living – supporting individuals to participate fully in society, adapt to change, and flourish across the life course. This holistic conception places personal development, civic participation, cultural engagement, and social justice alongside employability and skills development. This reflects a deliberate strategic choice to position LLL as a public good rather than a marginal or purely commercial activity. ACE’s vision aligns closely with UCC’s identity as a civic university and with the city of Cork’s designation as a UNESCO Learning City, reinforcing the idea that LLL is a shared responsibility between universities, communities, employers, and policymakers. This values-led approach has directly informed the institutional proposal to establish Lifelong Learning UCC, a university-wide hub designed to embed LLL as a core strategic mission of the institution.

Innovative aspects

The ACE model is innovative not because of a single programme or technology, but because of its integrated, forward-thinking philosophy and its ability to scale values-led practice into institutional strategy. While many European ULLL models prioritise continuing professional development for already-advantaged learners, ACE deliberately reframes LLL as a civic, inclusive, and transformative mission, equally concerned with social participation, confidence-building, and access to higher education. In doing so, ACE positions ULLL as a mechanism for renewing the university’s social contract with society. ACE deliberately rejects a narrow “skills-only” understanding of LLL. While workforce development, upskilling, and reskilling are important, ACE places equal emphasis on learning that supports wellbeing, confidence, critical thinking, democratic participation, and social connection. This human-centred approach is particularly significant in a context shaped by rapid technological change, climate transition, and

social fragmentation. A defining feature of ACE’s practice is its sustained engagement with learners who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education, including people in prison, migrants and refugees, members of the Traveller community, and adults returning to education after long absences. Programmes are designed with flexible entry

routes, recognition of prior learning, tailored learner support, and strong community partnerships, enabling participation by learners with complex life circumstances. ACE's work is also deeply embedded in the social and cultural life of Cork and the wider region. Through active engagement with Cork Learning City and a wide range of community organisations, ACE contributes to a local learning ecosystem in which university expertise is shared as a public resource. This place-based orientation represents a significant departure from institutionally bounded or purely market-driven ULLL models.

Impact on Learners, Industry, and the Community

ACE programmes consistently support adult learners to rebuild confidence, re-engage with learning, and access higher education pathways that may previously have felt inaccessible. For many participants, ACE provision acts as a gateway into further study, including undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Qualitative learner narratives provide compelling evidence of impact. Participants from marginalised communities, including members of the Traveller community and migrant learners, frequently describe a shift from feeling that university was “not for people like us” to identifying confidently as UCC students. Learners report increased self-belief, renewed professional identity, intergenerational learning benefits, and greater civic participation. For many, the impact extends beyond employment outcomes to personal agency and social inclusion. ACE's sustained engagement with disadvantaged and underrepresented groups contributes directly to widening participation, social mobility, and inclusion. Its alignment with Cork Learning City amplifies this impact by embedding ULLL within a city-wide strategy for participation, resilience, and wellbeing.

Moving Beyond Traditional ULLL Approaches

Traditional ULLL models often focus on fee-based continuing professional development, short-term projects, or narrowly defined professional audiences. The ACE model moves beyond these limitations by:

- Treating LLL as a core public mission, not a peripheral or commercial activity;
- Prioritising equity and access, even where financial returns are limited;
- Embedding ULLL within civic, cultural, and social frameworks;
- Valuing partnership and co-creation with communities and learners.

Rather than positioning ULLL as an add-on to the university's core business, ACE frames LLL as a means of renewing the relevance, legitimacy, and societal contribution of the university itself.

Transferability

From a transferability perspective, many elements of the ACE and Lifelong Learning UCC model could be adapted by other higher education institutions, including:

- A holistic and values-led vision of LLL;
- Strong civic and community partnerships;
- Flexible delivery modes and learner-centred design;
- Recognition of prior learning and alternative access routes;
- Centralised coordination of ULLL activity.

The UCC experience demonstrates that leadership commitment, institutional alignment, and external partnerships are critical enabling conditions for successful transfer.

Institutional Strategy and Sustainability

In terms of sustainability, ACE's vision is embedded within UCC's long-term strategy through the proposal for Lifelong Learning UCC - a centralised structure designed to integrate flexible learning, micro-credentials, CPD, and community education across the university. This proposal champions a whole-of-university commitment to ULLL. ACE at UCC therefore exemplifies a strategically committed, socially embedded, and future-oriented model of ULLL. Its long-standing vision of learning for life has transformed individual learners and communities while also shaping institutional strategy and governance. The transition from ACE as a specialist unit to Lifelong Learning UCC as a university-wide hub demonstrates how ULLL can move from the margins to the mainstream of higher education. In doing so, UCC offers a compelling example of how universities can renew their social contract with society - ensuring that learning remains lifelong, inclusive, and transformative.

Details

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Description

1. Anchoring LLL in Higher Continuing Education

SUPSI has developed a **Higher CE–Anchored Lifelong Learning (Anchored LLL) model**, fully aligned with international LLL principles and rooted in the mission of a university-based Higher Continuing Education (CE) system. Rather than redefining CE as a generic offer for all publics, SUPSI anchors LLL in advanced professional learning and progressively extends its scope, formats and audiences.

SUPSI does not replace Higher Continuing Education with LLL. Instead, it evolves Higher CE into LLL through a differentiated and layered approach, while keeping advanced professional learning as its structural core. The primary target group remains professionals holding tertiary qualifications who seek to continuously renew, deepen and reconfigure their competences in order to remain active, responsible and employable across long and non-linear careers.

Building on this strong core, the Anchored LLL model expands learning opportunities through interconnected formats, flexible admission and validation practices, and a participatory governance logic. This layered structure allows LLL principles to be implemented in a sustainable way, ensuring coherence, quality and institutional identity while extending access across life stages and social contexts.

a. A multi-format architecture that functions as a single system

SUPSI's Higher CE-Anchored LLL model is structured around four categories of courses:

- **Advanced Studies+**: stackable, modular and certificated courses
- **Advanced Training+**: short, non-credit-bearing courses for rapid upskilling
- **Advanced Tailor Made+ programmes**: co-designed with employers and organisations
- **Advanced LLL+**: open-access learning opportunities for the broader public through public lectures, conferences and knowledge dissemination formats (micro-content, podcasts and blog articles)

What characterises this architecture is not the diversity of formats per se, but their intentional interconnection. Formats are designed to function as part of a learning system, allowing individuals to engage with SUPSI CE at different moments of their professional and personal trajectories and to re-engage over time as needs evolve. Learning pathways are therefore wide and non-linear, adaptive and cumulative, rather than limited to isolated educational experiences.

b. Flexible admission, validation and guided heterogeneity

SUPSI CE has formalised a flexible admission and validation framework that supports personalised learning biographies and non-linear career trajectories. This includes assessment of prior learning, personalised admission interviews, bridging modules and compensatory credits.

Heterogeneity is recognised as a resource when it enriches peer learning and knowledge exchange, particularly in interdisciplinary and management-oriented programmes. At the same time, clearly defined prerequisites are maintained in technically demanding or practice-based courses to ensure quality, safety and meaningful participation. Flexible admission and validation practices therefore widen access for non-linear trajectories while preserving coherence between learner preparedness and programme expectations.

c. A circular and participatory governance logic

The Anchored LLL model operates through continuous cycles of co-design, feedback and redesign involving different stakeholders among partners, alumni, Head of CE courses, trainers and participants. Digital analytics, surveys, peer reviews and focus groups feed directly into programme development and strategic decision-making. This circular governance logic supports both responsiveness to current labour market needs and anticipation of emerging skill demands, through close engagement with professional sectors and applied research activities. Governance, formats, digital tools and partnerships are thus integrated into a system that evolves through use and collective insight.

d. Dissemination as wide and extended learning

SUPSI uses conferences, public events and knowledge dissemination formats such as articles, podcasts, videos and short learning resources not only as communication tools, but as structured learning opportunities. This layer extends learning beyond the core Higher CE target and provides low-threshold access for the wider public. It supports community learning, civic engagement and inclusion, while keeping advanced professional learning as the model's structural core.

2. Impact

Impact on participants

SUPSI's Anchored LLL model supports learners in navigating long, wide and non-linear professional trajectories through modular and personalised learning pathways. Participants can enter the system at different points, progress across formats and re-engage over time as their needs evolve.

Flexible admission and validation practices enable access for professionals with diverse backgrounds and career paths, strengthening learners' sense of agency and ownership over their learning trajectories. By recognising prior learning and offering differentiated formats, the model supports continuous competence renewal without forcing linear or standardised pathways.

Impact on industry and professional sectors

Through Advanced Tailor Made+ programmes and close collaboration with employers and professional organisations, SUPSI CE responds rapidly to emerging skill needs. Co-design practices ensure alignment between learning outcomes and workplace realities, supporting the development of hybrid and interdisciplinary professional profiles.

Alumni networks and ongoing exchanges with professional sectors function as real-time feedback mechanisms, informing programme updates and the creation of new formats. This dynamic interaction contributes to workforce development and supports organisations in managing technological, organisational and societal change. At the same time, it acts as a catalyst for continuous learning capacity, fostering self-directed learning in line with core LLL principles.

Impact on the community and society

Beyond its core professional target, SUPSI extends learning opportunities to the wider population through accessible and structured learning activities. Conferences, public events and knowledge dissemination formats support community learning, civic engagement and inclusion, particularly for seniors, migrants and other groups facing barriers to participation in formal education.

Research in adult development indicates that sustained engagement in learning strengthens self-understanding, social connectedness and the ability to navigate complexity, factors associated with greater personal and relational resilience. By fostering continuous learning across life stages, the model contributes not only to employability, but also to individual wellbeing and social cohesion.

Impact summary

Overall, the Anchored LLL model contributes to employability, inclusion and active citizenship, while sustaining a community of learners who remain connected, engaged and capable of adapting to change over time.

3. Originality

In many higher education institutions (HEIs), ULLL develops through parallel programme lines targeting different cohorts, often resulting in fragmented offers with limited connection between formats, governance and learner pathways.

SUPSI CE has adopted a different approach. Rather than expanding CE through isolated initiatives or broad, undifferentiated access, it has developed the Anchored LLL model anchored in Higher CE. Advanced professional learning remains the structural core of the system, while LLL principles are implemented through progressive and differentiated extensions.

This approach shifts the focus:

- from fragmented offerings to a connected learning ecosystem
- from linear upskilling to adaptive, wide, non-linear learning trajectories
- from generic openness to guided and quality-oriented access
- from programme-centred planning to needs-oriented and system-wide design.

By embedding LLL within a Higher CE framework, SUPSI demonstrates how HEIs can expand access and societal impact without diluting academic quality, professional relevance or institutional identity.

4. Transferability

The Anchored LLL model is designed as a principle-based model rather than a context-dependent solution. Its transferability does not rely on specific national regulations or

institutional structures, but on an underlying logic that can be adapted to different higher education contexts.

Several elements of the model can be transferred or adapted by other HEIs:

- a multi-format architecture that combines advanced professional programmes, short non-formal learning courses and open learning opportunities;
- a differentiated and guided admission framework supporting personalised learning pathways;
- a structured co-design process covering the full cycle from ideation to delivery;
- data-informed governance mechanisms linking quality processes, stakeholder feedback and strategic decision-making;
- a circular interaction model connecting governance, formats, digital tools and partnerships;
- modular implementation, allowing institutions to adopt or scale components progressively.

Because the model is built on stratification rather than undifferentiated openness, institutions can adapt its level, scope and pace to their starting conditions, strategic priorities and available resources. This makes the approach applicable across diverse national frameworks while preserving institutional identity and quality standards.

5. Long-term strategy

The anchored LLL model is fully embedded in SUPSI's long-term strategic planning and governance structures. Higher CE is recognised as a core institutional function and is integrated into SUPSI's strategic and operational frameworks.

The model is aligned with SUPSI's Continuing Education Action Plan 2025–2028 and is coordinated through the Continuing Education Commission, which connects departments, mandate holders and affiliated schools. Quality assurance and strategic monitoring are ensured through the SGFC (Continuing Education Quality Management System), which links data collection, evaluation processes and continuous improvement.

As a self-financed Continuing Education system, SUPSI ensures sustainability through a diversified portfolio of formats and financial mechanisms including fundraising initiatives. Modular programmes allow differentiated pathways and target groups, while Tailor Made+ programmes co-developed with organisations provide financial stability and strategic relevance. Third-party funding and fundraising activities support inclusive and community-oriented initiatives, ensuring access without compromising quality.

The model aligns with SUPSI's mission as a University of Applied Sciences, integrating advanced professional learning, applied research and local community engagement. This ensures that the LLL ecosystem is not an isolated initiative, but a structural and sustainable component of SUPSI's institutional identity and future development.

Details

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Description

Abstract

In July 2025, the Center for Lifelong Learning at the University of Bari Aldo Moro obtained the global "PM+" certification, making it the first university centre in Italy to provide the "Problem Management Plus" intervention protocol for students and citizens with migrant and refugee backgrounds entering the Italian university environment. The "PM+" programme has provided training and certification to the first 38 *Problem Management Plus Helpers* in Italy.

The PM+ programme and the training path at UNIBA

"*Problem Management Plus*" is a brief psycho-educational intervention aimed at people with mild to moderate symptoms of depression, anxiety, or stress. It is a short-term therapeutic programme (5 sessions) that involves the implementation of an action protocol.

It is both therapeutic and educational through the application of several problem-solving and stress management strategies:

1. stress management
2. problem-solving
3. behavioural activation
4. strengthening social support
5. managing emotional well-being and orientation to the future.

The programme was developed by the World Health Organisation, promoted by UNHCR and delivered by *Mental Health and Psychosocial Support* (MHPSS). The University of Bari Aldo Moro, through its Lifelong Learning Center (CAP), participated in specialised training in PM+ and became certified as a provider of the protocol and training for the "*PM+ Helper*" role. The aim of this programme is to enhance the university's administrative services and create a specialised network for psycho-educational support for students, especially refugee students and those with migrant backgrounds.

The UNIBA CAP certification process

From November 2024 to March 2025, CAP participated in the certification programme offered by MHPSS (*Mental Health and Psychological Support*) and UNHCR. The programme included a selection phase, in which the University of Bari Aldo Moro was the only university to participate.

The activity involved participation in seven training phases:

1. PM+ training
2. Three-session practice with three practical cases
3. Implementation of the entire protocol (5 sessions) with two practical cases
4. Supervision of the sessions delivered by experts
5. Two Skills Assessments as an Expert Helper in PM+
6. Training for Trainers – training course to train other Helpers in PM+
7. Structuring a training plan for PM+ Helpers in your institutional body.

The training programme for establishing a PM+ Helper network at the university.

Global certification allowed CAP to provide 40 hours of pilot training to 38 individuals, identified and selected from among administrative staff. The training programme provided participants with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to apply the PM+ protocol as "PM+ Helpers" within the university context and within student services, with the following objectives:

- Increase student acceptance and the initial disorientation of adaptation
- Develop a psycho-educational support network, aimed at addressing the practical issues that often cause students to drop out of school
- Strengthen specific skills in learning services and facilitate the academic socialisation process, ensuring equitable access to LLL opportunities.

Applicability of the protocol in the context of LLL

The PM+ protocol was developed for people experiencing chronic adversity and displacement in low- and middle-income countries but is increasingly being used with refugees and asylum seekers in resettlement settings. The goal is to fill gaps in client support, complement existing structures, and help strengthen the graduated support system according to the "gradual assistance model", in order to enhance university services and support students experiencing emotional distress and coping difficulties.

The concept of LLL has undergone a radical transformation in recent years. Once confined to postgraduate professional training, it now represents the very foundation of the knowledge society. In this scenario, universities are called upon to transcend the rigid model of "initial training" and become a constant point of reference throughout every stage of adult life.

This evolution is closely linked to inclusion. In a globalised world, university classrooms have become a mirror of a multicultural society. However, formal access to courses does not automatically guarantee educational success. For students with a migrant background - whether international students, refugees, or "new citizens" (so-called second generations) - university can be a challenging territory, fraught with linguistic, bureaucratic, and, last but not least, cultural barriers.

Inclusion through Innovative Teaching towards an inclusive and social University

To address this complexity, the university system is adopting teaching techniques that move away from traditional lectures, which are often excluding for those who lack a thorough grasp of local academic codes. Teaching innovation thus becomes a tool for equity. The PM+ training programme has incorporated learning techniques that take into account different teaching strategies, respecting the students' level and the educational objectives:

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** This methodology is the cornerstone of modern inclusion. Rather than creating "special paths" for international students (which can be stigmatising), UDL involves designing materials and lessons that are flexible from the outset. Using multiple media (video, concept maps, podcasts) and diverse modes of expression allows students with migrant backgrounds to overcome the barrier of written language and demonstrate their skills through other channels.
- **Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL):** This technique allows students to work on joint projects with partners from foreign universities. For those with a migrant background, COIL transforms their transnational identity from an obstacle to an added value, allowing them to act as natural cultural mediators within the work group.
- **Service Learning:** This is a form of learning that combines academic study with community service. For migrant students, participating in projects with a social impact in the local area means not only learning technical skills but also building a sense of belonging and active citizenship, accelerating the integration process.

Supporting the Life Trajectories of Adult and Migrant Students

The creation of a PM+ Helper network allows for the development of university services that accommodate *flexibility*: students with a migrant background are often "student-workers" or adults returning to the education system for reskilling. In this regard, the university is innovating its formats:

1. **Micro-credentials:** Short, certified courses that allow you to acquire specific skills in a short amount of time. This format is ideal for those who need to update their professional skills without the time required for a traditional three-year degree.
2. **Recognition of prior skills:** One of the greatest challenges for migrants is the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad. The most innovative universities are developing protocols to evaluate not only formal qualifications, but also work experience and informal skills, converting them into academic credits (CFU).
3. **Blended Learning:** The opportunity to attend asynchronous lessons and participate in intensive workshops allows students to balance study with life and work demands, reducing the risk of dropping out of university, which is statistically higher among students of foreign origin.

A New Vision: From "Knowing" to "Knowing How to Be"

Ultimately, integrating LLL and inclusion transforms the university into a place of *empowerment*. It's not just about imparting knowledge, but about providing the tools to navigate an unstable job market. For a student with a migrant background, the university should not just be a place where they learn a profession, but a space where their personal history is valued and integrated into a new life plan.

This transformation requires a paradigm shift: teachers become facilitators, classrooms become laboratories for coexistence, and technology becomes a bridge to break down physical and cultural distances.

Conclusions: The future of the PM+ programme at the national level

The PM+ programme is enabling the University of Bari to envision the development of services that better meet the needs of young people and adults, rather than refugee students. This will strengthen the human capital and skills of the staff working in these services, while also working with the *government* to develop policies that effectively address labour market demands and the needs of this type of student.

The PM+ programme thus supports training and learning in terms of andragogy, on the one hand, and concretely supports students in developing their own resources and capabilities, on the other. The training programme is expected to be implemented nationally in the near future, involving national networks for LLL and inclusion (Manifesto of Inclusive Universities - UNHCR). The goal is to disseminate the best practices implemented at the University of Bari Aldo Moro, through the effective use of PM+ Helpers and the development of services that provide concrete support to students in developing a professional identity tailored to their dreams and aspirations.

Details

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Description

Co Designing the Future of Skills: A University Industry Partnership Model for LLL

What makes our ULLL model innovative or a good model?

Manchester faced a significant structural gap between its undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, its research excellence, and a dispersed offer for non-standard provision that falls under the LLL definition. This gap stemmed from tradition, culture, and the status quo, caused by incentive misalignment, legacy systems, short-term planning cycles and lack of strategic direction. Our innovation isn't just about new technology; it is about a rigorous, insight-led change in how we function as an institution and the flexibility of our provision. We used a specific strategic window, created by the launch of our Flexible Learning Strategy and accompanying Flexible Learning Programme (FLP). This was a three-year strategic change programme focussed on the exploration of flexible learning in the context of place, pace and pathway. It provided the resource, team and direction to explore how to enable LLL and make the case for future investment.

The Flexible Learning Programme provided an opportunity to realign the incentives, systems, and governance that support LLL. It also provided us with the opportunity to gather market insights and data, guiding where to focus and affording valuable time to explore how to deliver these programmes by developing a series of pilot and pathfinder programmes. The reality is that transformative shifts in large research-intensive universities rarely happen by accident; without strategic alignment, ULLL is frequently marginalised in favour of traditional degree programmes. Our challenge was to use the FLP as a deliberate institutional testbed to prove that non-standard learning could work and secure the strategic backing for it to flourish in our new 2035 Strategy.

Scaling LLL is difficult, and its inherent complexity requires a massive alignment of systems that usually outlasts a single year planning cycle or even a three-year change programme, as it spans all domains of operation and culture. We treated this initiation phase as a ten-year time horizon. This confidence is backed by the fact that the UK tertiary sector, the policy environment, and global sectors are moving decisively towards flexible modular and multimodal delivery. By aligning with these systemic shifts, we shielded the work from the annualised financial pressures that so often lead to short-sighted priorities. We addressed internal hurdles by categorising them into distinct priority areas:

- improving our knowledge of current provision
- improving our capabilities to respond to LLL opportunities
- developing civic, industrial and internal partnerships that enable LLL

This allowed us to tackle the critical friction between the need for an agile approach to developing LLL and our legacy systems, processes and policies.

In summary, our innovation lies not in a single programme, but in creating a time-bound institutional mechanism that realigns strategy, incentives, governance, and delivery to make LLL scalable in a research-intensive university.

How does your model impact learners, industry, and the community?

Our model focuses on the white space of mid-career professional development. It is important to distinguish this from traditional Executive Education which focuses on C-suite individuals and particularly on leadership and management programmes. Our ULLL offer targets the wider professional workforce's upskilling and reskilling needs, prioritising flexibility, affordability and alignment with strategic skills needs. We have turned the University into a living laboratory for skills innovation, directly supporting our aim of being a leading civic university for the 21st century and leaning into our strategic partnership in the UNESCO City of Learning recognition recently awarded to Manchester. Headline impacts to date are:

- £150,000 institutional seed funding leveraged across three Faculties for three pathfinder programmes
- 3 industry co-designed pathfinder programmes delivered with global partners
- Pilot cohorts of mid-career professionals engaged across AI, sustainability and net zero
- Reduced programme development lead-time through a repeatable co-design model
- Formal integration of non-standard provision into core academic approval processes

Impact on Industry and LLL: A central pillar of our approach is co-design with industry partners and employers. Our Pathfinder initiative is an innovative approach to co-design, enabling us to work with both our strategic industry partners and new partners to co-design innovative flexible non-standard programmes together. Using Google's design sprint methodology as a basis for this we have co-designed these programmes in an iterative approach with regular feedback and trialled the programmes with small pilot cohorts of industry learners, ensuring feedback ahead of launch. The Pathfinder programmes developed include the following partnerships and areas:

- **AstraZeneca:** *Viable AI in Complex Organisations*
- **Tesco:** *Making Net Zero Happen in Fashion*
- **Fujitsu:** *Digital Sustainability*

Across these pilots, we didn't just deliver content; we reduced programme development lead-time, developed knowledge on intellectual property and established a reproducible micro-credential/short course design process. These Pathfinders proved that when we act as a strategic partner, rather than just a vendor, the impact is profound. They allowed us to identify and address operational bottlenecks, specifically around costing models and academic resourcing, refining the blueprint needed to deliver professional learning at scale.

Impact on Community and Civic Growth

Our civic impact is visible; we were a strategic partner in the successful bid for Manchester to become a UNESCO City of Lifelong Learning and we are working together to address the region's digital skills needs. We have partnered with the Bank of England to co-design the "*Teach Economics*" programme to tackle regional economics teacher shortages, a programme that will be scaled across northern England and then nationally over 2026. We have also run a '*Wild Talks*' series of workshops with Manchester Museum

that focused on several public lectures being delivered online and in person. The aim was to open the doors of the University to a group of individuals that felt the higher education environment was inaccessible.

How does our model differ from traditional ULLL approaches?

Traditional approaches to ULLL are often bolted on to existing structures and not embedded in university strategy. At The University of Manchester, we are treating non-standard professional learning as a distinct priority, supported within our new Manchester 2035 Strategy⁴ which has a focus on flexible and personalised learning. We tackled the biggest hurdle, academic capacity by being transparent about resource needs, cost and income generation and developing a process to ensure early approval by Heads of Schools. Provision of seed funding across our faculties helped to remove prioritisation and resource barriers, proving that innovation doesn't have to break the existing workload model.

Our primary differentiator is the bespoke-to-open pipeline, providing a two-stage approach, which allows us to focus on co-design but reuse of both our programme design and content within other relevant programmes improving efficiency, allowing us to rapidly scale the learning. The stages are:

1. **Bespoke:** We co-design a high-value, partner-informed programme for a single employer. This stage ensures market relevance by understand industry needs and piloting with a learner cohort.
2. **Open:** We take the high-quality core content (videos, materials, assessments) and design and repackage it into scalable open micro-credentials and short professional learning programmes.

How transferable is our model?

We believe our model is highly transferable because we have separated the supporting infrastructure from the local context, where resource to support these programmes sits and is allocated.

What can be copied (The Replicable):

- **Frameworks to support micro-credentials:** We have developed guidance to support the design and delivery of micro-credentials and a quality assurance process to support their approval.
- **Costing Model:** Our robust business-to-business costing model enables us to fully understand the cost base of these programmes from programme design through to evaluation.
- **Seed Funding Logic:** Using targeted funds to protect academic time and prove the concept to develop pilot programmes founded on new teaching and learning-industry partnerships.
- **Making the non-standard-standard:** Ensuring non-standard provision is guided by and reports into core academic committees.

⁴ <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/about/manchester-2035/full-strategy/>

The key transferable insight is that institutions do not need to replicate Manchester's scale but can replicate the logic: create a protected strategic window, fund academic time, and treat ULLL as core business rather than marginal activity.

What must be locally interpreted (The Contextual):

- **City-region relationships:** Our specific link to the Greater Manchester devolution context, key business groups, local skills plans and devolved adult education budget.
- **Research-to-curriculum themes:** Themes like digital trust (Digital Futures⁵) and digital sustainability (Sustainable Futures⁶) have direct links to our specific research platforms.
- **Strategic Partners:** The University has 24 strategic partners, and these provide a wealth of opportunity and focus to understand their professional learning needs.

The lesson for others is that while you can copy the strategic opening logic and the Bespoke-to-Open pipeline, the content must lean into the unique priorities of your own region and research expertise and platforms.

How is your model integrated into the institution's long-term strategy?

LLL is now a core Leap in our Manchester 2035 Strategy. We will provide a single front door for our partners, moving us away from the fragmented approach of the past. To make this sustainable, we are focusing on disciplined, contract-led models that formally recognise academic time and embed non-standard learning into core academic decision-making. This ensures sustainability by embedding LLL within existing governance, workload recognition, and financial processes rather than relying on time-limited project funding. By proving these concepts now, we have created the strategic space for LLL to flourish over a ten-year horizon.

What we're still working on

As with any institutional change programme, these challenges reflect scaling and maturity rather than viability or commitment. As a proof-of-concept, we see unresolved challenges not as risks, but as the next phase of LLL development. Whilst there is absolutely growing interest in these areas, one of the consistent challenges is academic resource, particularly when we cannot model the professional learning into workload models because requests are ad hoc and usually require a more agile response, due to external demands.

Manchester's experience shows how research-intensive universities can move LLL from the margins to core business, not through pilots alone, but through deliberate institutional initiative and strategic programmes. We are now actively fulfilling our vision "to be a learning partner for life", from Manchester for the world⁷.

⁵ <https://www.digitalfutures.manchester.ac.uk/>

⁶ <https://www.sustainablefutures.manchester.ac.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/about/manchester-2035/full-strategy/>

Details

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Description

This case study describes the case of the University of Porto (U.Porto), with a focus on the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences (FPCEUP), structured around the area of Strategic commitment to ULLL of the SAMUELE project. The organisation of ULLL at U.Porto is based on a governance model that combines the centralisation of structures and processes with pedagogic, research, administrative and financial autonomy at the faculty/school level. The U.Porto ecosystem includes 15 faculties/schools and various legally independent entities that provide greater flexibility in management and closer proximity to external stakeholders.

Introduction: A Future Vision for a Faculty Open to the World

In an era in which universities worldwide face demographic challenges and a growing demand for professional upskilling, the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto (FPCEUP) has proactively integrated ULLL at the core of its strategic identity. FPCEUP is a leading higher education institution in Portugal, with the highest national demand in its scientific fields: psychology and education sciences. The 2023–2026 FPCEUP's Strategic Plan, developed through a collaborative and widely participatory process, sets out an ambitious vision, summarised in the motto: "Teaching & Research Excellence: for a Faculty Open to the World, Inclusive and Diverse, promoting High Quality Teaching based on Excellent Research and with Social Impact".

Within this framework, ULLL is a central pillar for realising this vision, enabling us to serve new publics and strengthen its impact. The following sections detail how this commitment translates into potential innovative, impactful and transferable ULLL model.

Strategic Commitment to ULLL: Embedded in the Mission and Vision

For ULLL to generate lasting value, it must be deeply rooted in an institution's long-term strategy. At FPCEUP, the ULLL model is the expression of an explicit strategic commitment, designed to respond directly to structural challenges such as the "decline in the school age population", which compels us to seek "new" audiences and to invest in LLL. This focus is proactively embedded in the strategic objective "To diversify the offer of advanced, specialised and continuing education", which guides resource allocation and priority setting.

This alignment goes beyond FPCEUP, functioning as a tangible enactment of university's broader vision. The University of Porto's 2030 Strategic Plan promotes a "University without walls", aspiring to be a "University open to society, businesses and other key stakeholders". The FPCEUP ULLL strategy is therefore a key driver for achieving this institutional ambition. In addition, the FPCEUP model is fully consistent with major European agendas such as the Erasmus+ programme, "European Strategy for Universities" (EUGLOH Alliance) and the "Horizon Europe" programme, aligning with

global priority challenges such as “Health” and “Culture, creativity and inclusive society”. This multi-level strategic integration guarantees the sustainability of FPCEUP model, ensuring that ULLL is leveraged as a central area of FPCEUP mission rather than as a peripheral initiative.

Innovation and Differentiation: A Model Beyond the Traditional

In a rapidly changing society, innovation in ULLL is a strategic imperative. FPCEUP’s model stands out from traditional approaches by integrating ULLL in a systemic and dynamic way. FPCEUP’s main innovation is the creation of a coherent and agile learning ecosystem, built on several key pillars.

An integrated strategy is at the core of the FPCEUP approach that lies in creating “structures and processes that make it possible to develop an integrated strategy for degree awarding and non-degree awarding programmes” as well as offering specific training addressing community’s needs including those working in social, educational and cultural contexts. Under the framework of the PRR – Recovery and Resilience Plan, funded by the EU, it was possible to diversify this offer in terms of target audiences and topics. This integrated strategy is aiming fostering high value synergies between degree programmes and ULLL.

FPCEUP is also committed to the “innovation and digital transition of teaching and learning models (e.g. face to face, blended, online)”. This is a strategic commitment to flexibility and accessibility. An example is the development of Erasmus Blended Intensive Programme courses, which combine short-term physical mobility with virtual components, offering an innovative international learning experience. Intensive Programmes are also promoted within EUGLOH. CIIE’s Laboratory for Digital Experimentation and Research in Education (LabDERE), a laboratory for the development and dissemination of methodologies and knowledge in education with a focus on digital technologies, their possibilities and challenges, pursuing intersections with areas of social intervention and the arts, is also an example of this commitment towards pedagogical innovation and digital transition.

Applying the principle of the “Teaching and Research Excellence Binomial” to ULLL is a deliberate strategic choice. This synergy ensures that FPCEUP ULLL provision is not only practice oriented but also underpinned by the outcomes from the activities of FPCEUP research centres, Centre for Research and Intervention in Education (CIIE) and the Centre for Psychology at the University of Porto (CPUP). This approach creates a distinctive value proposition for FPCEUP learners, who gain access and co-create knowledge with direct applicability.

These features position FPCEUP at the forefront of ULLL, creating a more resilient, integrated learning ecosystem with greater responsiveness.

Details

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Description

Innovative aspects

The SYLABE (SYnergies LABoratoires Entreprises: Synergy Laboratories Companies) programme was designed to bring together university activities with a socio-economic focus: vocational training, technology transfer, entrepreneurship and business creation.

Conducted for 10 years (I'll focus here on the 2019-2022 edition, the last one), it was built as a process bringing together audiences around a common theme: "Entrepreneurship with data", "Energy and territory: what opportunities?", "Towards responsible finance", "Public health, prevention, and innovation".

The programme was conducted according to 3 phases:

- Upstream: definition of the most relevant themes with the academic community (research and training councils) and prospecting (identification of researchers, companies, and entrepreneurs involved in one of the themes)
- Conference: selection and support of various participants (researchers, teachers, entrepreneurs, and business representatives), communication with the potential public (business networks, employment centres, web, social media), logistics, etc.
- Downstream: monitoring of networking connections (participants registered in advance via a networking platform), support in defining and developing a joint research programme, professional training, or business creation project.

Impact

For the 2019-2022 (3rd edition) of the programme: 6 SYLABE events welcomed more than 600 participants in total, including employed individuals (unemployed, entrepreneurs, professional development, or employee retraining), representatives of 13 major corporations (including Engie, Microsoft, SNCF, Airbus among others), 19 start-ups, and 17 academics participating in the various events.

It enabled the creation of 29 start-ups supported in our incubator, was followed by the organisation of 68 workshops opened to participants and focusing on aspects identified during the various events. These welcomed 1328 participants, 29% of whom were job seekers and 22% of whom were actively engaged in a career development project.

It also gave way to 2 intellectual property registrations resulting from connections made during the programme, 35 career retraining projects supported by our university and 4 "intra-company" training programmes related to the deployment of new technologies.

Difference from traditional LLL

The most innovative aspect of the programme clearly lies in the desire to bridge the gap between traditionally separate fields within universities: training, research, and entrepreneurship.

Indeed, these diverge in several respects: they do not fall under the same structures (laboratories, faculties, incubators), the same production methods (research project, curriculum development and support for business creation), and do not fall under the same objectives (intellectual property, certification or degree, or financing and business registration).

However, they pursue common objectives: maintaining the competitiveness of companies in a global economic context, addressing needs in terms of skills developments in a context of technological and ecological revolution, supporting projects to encourage return to employment or the development of new markets for companies, etc.

Transferable aspects

The structure of our universities, and more broadly the European Qualification Framework, directly establishes a link between training and research at all levels of our activity. The thematic organisation of the SYLABE programme allows to promote and present them to an audience interested in the evolution of technologies and the skills associated with them.

However, certain aspects of such a programme require special attention, starting with the nature of the relationship with socio-economic actors. Technology transfer and involvement in joint university/company research programmes are perceived as immediately strategic. Human Resources management, on the other hand, sometimes seems to be approached differently, in a rush and referring to existing professional frameworks or job description.

As for entrepreneurship, it seems to be handled in several ways: sometimes supported by the company, in the form of intrapreneurship (a project developed with the support of the employer, or even within the company), it can at other times it can be left to the discretion (and financing) of the employee as part of a career change.

Thematic Area II: Structure and Organisation of University Lifelong Learning

Details

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Description

Introduction and Context

CBS Executive Fonden has developed an integrated ULLL that connects research, executive education, and practice through long-term collaboration with organisations. The approach is designed to position CBS Executive Fonden as a space *where practice meets research to develop the leaders of tomorrow* to turn complex, long-term challenges into sustainable business solutions.

Rather than treating LLL as a portfolio of isolated leadership programmes, CBS Executive Fonden operates ULLL as an institutional learning ecosystem where executive education, industry partnerships, faculty development, and research activities are deliberately interconnected. Learning is understood as a continuous, practice-based process that creates value for individual executives, organisations, as well as academic communities.

This case study presents the ULLL approach through four illustrative programmes: (1) Executive Leadership Development (ELD), which inspire and integrate CBS' talented researchers into executive teaching; (2) Leadership for the Future, a research-driven programme for senior executives developed through the CBS Leadership Think Tank, combining think tank research with practical leadership experience to translate academic insight into actionable leadership practice in complex contexts; (3) a long-term collaboration with Kemp & Lauritzen (K&L) combining a PhD project with executive education and organisational interventions to generate business impact and cultural transformation; and (4) the Service Excellence Leadership Academy (SELA), an executive diploma programme focused on personal leadership, business development and customer driven innovation, exemplifying the model's pedagogical approach through experiential, reflective, and practice based learning. The programmes are used as examples of a coherent ULLL approach rather than as stand-alone cases.

What Makes the ULLL Approach Innovative?

Governance Logic: From Structure to Practice

The ULLL approach is built around a cross-cutting governance logic. LLL is not located within a single faculty or treated as a peripheral activity, but operates across academic units, professional domains, and societal sectors. This structure allows CBS Executive Fonden to address challenges that cut across multiple disciplines and cannot be solved within traditional academic silos.

The starting point for new learning initiatives is demand-driven rather than supply-driven. Programmes are shaped by the challenges organisations and leaders face in practice. Academic expertise is mobilised around these challenges, positioning ULLL as an integrative institutional function that complements faculty-based education and research.

A Systemic and Ecosystem-Based Approach

The approach is designed as an ecosystem that links learning at three levels:

- **Individual learning**, where participants develop reflective, ethical, and action-oriented leadership capabilities
- **Organisational learning**, where insights are translated into new practices through applied projects and experimentation
- **Institutional learning**, where engagement with practice continuously informs research agendas, pedagogy, and faculty development.

This logic is visible across programmes. Leadership for the Future and SELA focus on individual leadership development while requiring participants to work on real organisational challenges. The collaboration with Kemp & Lauritzen embeds learning at the organisational level through long-term interventions. ELD supports institutional learning by strengthening faculty capacity for executive education.

Research-Based and Practice-Driven Learning

A defining feature of the approach is the tight integration of practice and research. Learning activities are grounded in contemporary research while generating new empirical insights from real organisational contexts.

In Leadership for the Future, research developed through the CBS Leadership Centre and a cross-sector think tank is translated into learning processes where academic insight is combined with the practical experience of senior executives. Participants engage with real leadership challenges through dialogue, reflection, and action learning, drawing on perspectives from both academic research and the practical experience of senior executives.

The collaboration with Kemp & Lauritzen demonstrates this integration over time. Executive education modules, organisational interventions, and a PhD project are deliberately connected. Research informs practice, while data and experiences from the organisation feed back into academic work, allowing learning and impact to accumulate rather than remain episodic.

SELA exemplifies research-integrated and practice-driven learning by embedding academic frameworks directly in participants' own organisations through Action Learning. Research provides the analytical perspective, while the participants' learning journey is driven by real leadership and service challenges, creating continuous feedback between theory, practice, and behavioural change.

Faculty Development as a Core ULLL Mechanism

Unlike many ULLL approaches that focus primarily on external learners, CBS Executive Fonden explicitly includes faculty as lifelong learners. Faculty development is therefore a core element of the approach.

Through the Executive Leadership Development (ELD) programme, early- and mid-career CBS' researchers develop the skills needed to teach experienced executives. ELD combines workshops on executive learning, co-teaching with experienced faculty, and action learning in executive classrooms. This approach strengthens pedagogical quality, supports diversity among executive faculty, and builds long-term institutional capacity for LLL.

Learning Design and Pedagogy

Across the ULLL ecosystem, learning is experiential, reflective, and closely connected to practice. These principles are operationalised through a shared pedagogical logic, exemplified by SELA.

In SELA, participants work with real service and leadership challenges from their own organisations, test new behaviours between sessions, and reflect on outcomes in a psychologically safe learning environment. Leadership for the Future applies similar principles through action learning projects focused on navigating strategic leadership dilemmas and complex organisational challenges. ELD applies the same logic internally by treating faculty development as experiential learning. This shared approach ensures coherence across programmes while allowing adaptation to different audiences and contexts.

Impact on Learners, Industry, and the Community

Impact on Learners

For learners, the approach emphasises long-term development rather than short-term skill acquisition. Participants strengthen their ability to reflect on leadership practice, make ethical judgements, and act effectively in complex and uncertain environments.

In Leadership for the Future, participants gain capabilities for navigating complexity, managing paradoxes, and exercising leadership judgement under uncertainty, enabling them to address the complex challenges facing future leaders. In SELA, sustained changes in leadership behaviour and service practices extend beyond the classroom, as participants strengthen their personal service leadership and translate learning into tangible organisational and business impact.

Impact on Organisations and Industry

Organisational impact is built into the design of the approach. Learning activities are anchored in participants' organisational contexts through action learning projects and collaborative initiatives.

The long-term partnership with Kemp & Lauritzen illustrates how ULLL can support organisational development over several years. The collaboration has contributed to tangible changes in practices related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and culture, while also generating academic knowledge. By combining research, practical organisational insight, and executive education, the ULLL approach supports organisational change that goes beyond what can be achieved through traditional consulting interventions or formal policies and procedures alone.

Societal and Community Impact

At a societal level, the approach contributes to addressing broader challenges such as sustainable development, social inclusion, and the future of leadership. By bringing together participants from different sectors, CBS Executive Fonden creates shared learning spaces that support cross-sector dialogue and collective sensemaking.

Insights are disseminated through research publications, open events, alumni networks, and policy-relevant forums, extending impact beyond individual programmes.

How the Approach Differs from Traditional ULLL Models

Traditional ULLL approaches often focus on short, modular courses aimed at individual upskilling. CBS Executive Fonden does operate a portfolio of short, upskilling-focused leadership programmes, the overall approach emphasises continuity, integration, and co-creation.

Programmes such as Leadership for the Future and SELA are designed as learning journeys rather than isolated courses. Participants are expected to apply learning in practice between sessions and return with experiences that shape subsequent learning activities.

The collaboration with Kemp & Lauritzen illustrates how ULLL can be built around long-term partnerships rather than one-off engagements. Finally, the integration of faculty development through ELD distinguishes the model from approaches that treat executive education as detached from the academic core.

Transferability to Other Higher Education Institutions

The ULLL approach is transferable provided it is adapted to local institutional and regional contexts. Key transferable elements include:

- Cross-faculty coordination that complements faculty-based ULLL activities
- Demand-driven programme development informed by practice
- Action learning and real-world projects as core pedagogical elements
- Faculty development as an integral part of LLL
- Financial models that balance commercial programmes with organisational value.

Potential challenges include entrenched faculty-based governance structures and cultural resistance to demand-driven approaches. Successful transfer therefore requires both organisational change and cultural alignment.

Integration into Long-Term Institutional Strategy and Sustainability

The ULLL approach is closely aligned with long-term strategy. By linking executive education, faculty development, and research, the approach supports academic renewal and institutional relevance.

Financial sustainability is supported through long-term partnerships rather than transactional programme delivery, as illustrated by the collaboration with Kemp & Lauritzen. Social sustainability is addressed through a consistent focus on ethical leadership, inclusion, and responsible management across programmes such as SELA and Leadership for the Future. The ELD programme supports CBS' long-term strategy for LLL by inspiring and integrating talented CBS researchers into executive teaching, strengthening institutional capacity for continuous learning across academic careers.

Conclusion

CBS Executive Fonden's ULLL approach demonstrates how LLL can be organised as an integrated, practice-connected ecosystem. By linking programmes, faculty development, research, and long-term partnerships, the approach enables universities to play an active role in addressing complex organisational and societal challenges. Going forward, CBS Executive Fonden continues its strategic focus on continuity and integration by e.g., developing customised learning journeys across its extensive executive- and board leadership programme portfolio to support leaders across the entirety of their lifelong learning requirements.

Details

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Description

Our ULLL model is for a partnership of local universities, local government and other public/voluntary sector bodies to collaborate to enable and deliver non-formal LLL in our locality on a specific topic focus (climate literacy and action for sustainability).

Since 2019, De Montfort, Leicester and Loughborough Universities (DMU, UoL and LU) have worked together with partner organisations towards a vision of all key sectors and stakeholders having the knowledge, motivation and local support they need to enable action on climate change.

During this time, we have trained and supported schools, small businesses, voluntary groups, social enterprises, arts-based charities, business-support agencies, the regional economic development agency and local citizens, harnessing expertise within our local universities.

Our main approach has been adopting and adapting a pre-existing learning intervention (one-day 'Carbon Literacy Training'), which addresses the causes of climate change, possible relevant actions and includes action planning for personal and collective initiatives. As well as engaging with all types of organisations locally, we have also developed specific carbon literacy courses for small businesses (the key employers in our locality) and textile-trade organisations (a key local industry). Beyond Carbon Literacy, we have developed and delivered a wide range of tailored content, including accredited training for small businesses, short webinar sessions and interactive workshops for voluntary groups.

Despite having no core ongoing funding to achieve this mission, our delivery has progressively increased in scale by harnessing a blend of large-scale national funding alongside internal small-scale funds to continually develop new initiatives and provision.

Innovation and Strength of Model

Our work is innovative as it is relatively rare, both in the UK and globally, for a place-based partnership to work together over the long-term with a focus on engaging all local stakeholders on climate change action via a range of educational interventions.

Our key strength is the sustained involvement of relevant local partner organisations and the leadership role adopted by local universities, which might not typically see civic education beyond enrolled students on taught courses as part of its purpose.

With so many sectors and audiences to reach, a collaborative approach is essential to achieve widespread engagement and build momentum so that more and more people and organisations get on board. Working through a range of local and regional networks to

bring partners together (predominantly the 'Universities Partnership' of the three local universities and local government partners), our provision is co-developed to address local needs. For example, this includes training for school students, staff and governors delivered by the city council and two universities in 2020, harnessing students as co-trainers. Our 2021 training for staff and leaders at our regional enterprise partnership led on to 2022 training for business advisors across our region, who were supported to embed these issues into their business support services.

Difference to traditional ULLL approaches.

Conventional ULLL methods would focus predominantly on the provision of taught courses to enrolled learners ('formal learning'). This might involve a range of provision (undergraduate, masters, short courses, in-person or online) but would routinely be delivery to meet a market-based need for students to enrol.

The distinctive approach adopted here is an evolving offer of non-formal learning, harnessing research, innovation, consultancy and other routes to enable delivery. Through an action-orientation, such as pledges made within carbon literacy courses or follow-on mentoring sessions to support action planning, our interventions also foster conditions for informal learning through actions and reflection.

To illustrate scope, details of key specific projects are as follows:

- 2020: Schools Carbon Literacy. NGO funded, led by City Council.
- 2020-2022: Voluntary Sector climate action toolkit. £5k internal funding, DMU-led working with City Council.
- 2021: Enterprise Partnership Carbon Literacy and Action Planning. £15k consultancy, DMU and UoL.
- 2021-2022 SME and Business Advisor climate training. £80k regional regeneration funding, led by local chamber of commerce with DMU and UoL.
- 2023: Leicester City Football Club carbon literacy, free, DMU-led.
- 2023: Development of carbon literacy for small businesses and textiles organisations. £4k internal funding, DMU, UoL with local consultancy.
- 2023-25: Voluntary sector carbon literacy courses. £2k internal Universities Partnership fund
- 2024-2025: Multi-stakeholder engagement on governance (DMU) and business training (UoL). Part of £2.5m innovation-funding project led by Leicestershire County Council.
- 2025-2028: Community engagement on energy projects. £120k regional doctoral research funding for projects responding to community needs.
- 2025-2028: Voluntary sector climate action training and support. £1.5m, DMU-led, voluntary sector support funding.

A further £1.5m proposal is under review for nature-based education on climate action for voluntary/community bodies, involving all local universities and Leicestershire's voluntary action agency.

On the latter point, our new 'Leicester Environmental Action and Future' (LEAF) project combines both these roles, with DMU facilitating quarterly action-learning reflective sessions with voluntary sector project partners, to consolidate informal learning from experience. This is combined with non-formal learning through training provision and convening knowledge-sharing events. This again offers a departure from traditional ULLL where universities are positioned as experts transmitting knowledge – in this case, we bring a core contribution around skills for reflection and learning from experience.

Impact on learners and community

For learners receiving training and support, our evaluation indicates increased knowledge on the causes of climate change and commitment to personally and collectively take action. Actions will vary by sector, ranging from charities creating climate-focussed arts initiatives and our regional development agency embedding net zero as a priority in decisions on major infrastructure, such as Leicester's new climate-positive bus station. With hundreds of learners trained from every key sector and active collaboration with all organisations supporting organisations (in the public, private, voluntary and social enterprise sectors), our reach has been significant and highly impactful.

Beyond our locality, our course for SMEs has been shared with over 150 organisations in the first 18 months since its launch in February 2024, with users ranging from a roofing business, local councils and a training consultancy.

As a next stage, we are upscaling our offer by piloting Biodiversity Literacy Training with universities and key partners in 2026, seed-funded by the Universities Partnership.

Transferability

The key transferable element is the place-based or 'civic' commitment to education for local people and organisations on a matter of relevance to all (in our case, climate change). From this commitment and a collaboration between universities and other key actors that can play a part in delivering this, priorities can be identified, funding opportunities explored and educational activities delivered.

In this case, our work has been embedded within two partnership initiatives: hosting a Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) in Education for Sustainable Development and running a theme group focus on Environmental Sustainability within the Universities Partnership civic university collaboration. The former (established since 2007) established the vision for regional collaboration for sustainability education; the latter (established in 2022) brought strong commitment from all 3 local universities and local government.

In the UK context, as detailed above, we have found a range of rationales for providing resources to enable this work, ranging from large-scale grants for research/innovation, large-scale grants for voluntary sector projects, economic development funding to aid businesses and small-scale internal funds within universities.

In another setting, it could be plausible and desirable for place-based non-formal civic education to be delivered through partnership over the long term via sustained funding from regional/national government. In contexts where long-term resourcing is scarce, our case study offers a model for combining commitment, local networks (between individuals and formal partnerships between organisations), ongoing engagement with learners to identify needs/priorities and an ethos of pragmatically seeking resources to deliver on agreed priorities.

In this way, our experience in the Leicester area in the UK could be transferable to many contexts around the world.

Long-term strategic integration

All three local universities and our upper tier local authorities (Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland) have co-created the 'Universities Partnership'. This is a 'civic university partnership', committed to universities seeking to identify and address the needs of their locality. This is a long-term commitment, adopted at a high level by each university vice-chancellor and local council leader. A board with local council representatives steers the

initiative; a manager and assistant are employed across the partnership to support delivery and university staff convene stakeholder groups across five priority themes (including 'Environmental Sustainability' to design and deliver projects.

Strategic commitments are also reflected within universities. For example, at DMU 'Partnerships with Purpose' is one of four pillars of the University's strategy and Sustainability is a cross-cutting theme. Sustainability is given high priority due to DMU hosting a global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) hub for SDG 11, 'Sustainable Cities and Communities'. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is one of three key priorities for the sustainability theme, and due to DMU's role as an RCE chair, ESD is understood as extending beyond the university to include education for local people, places and organisations.

Details

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Description

This case study provides an overview of Munster Technological University's (MTU) approach to LLL including its inclusion within the university strategy. The case study describes the unique aspects that support the needs of learners, industry and the community as evident through examples of practice.

The model of ULLL in MTU is a decentralised one which operates through faculties and departments who have committed to developing and delivering micro credentials and major awards which are of interest and relevance to those in the workplace and those who attend the university part time. The commitment of the university to LLL is evident within the strategy (MTU, 2022) under the theme of Learner Education and Experience. MTU is committed to providing learners with lifelong and life-wide learning opportunities for their personal and professional development. Key performance indicators have also been identified by management to ensure the university delivers on this mission. The strategy of the university is very much informed by the Technological University (TU) Act, 2018 (Irish Statute Book, 2018) which requires MTU to effectively and continuously collaborate with external stakeholders to inform and deliver high quality, relevant education, training and research. This has continued to influence teaching, learning and assessment, especially curriculum development within the university. To complement the requirements of the university under the 2018 Act, an *inclusive curriculum framework for a sustainable future* was devised to support the vision of leading 'transformation through education' (Munster Technological University, n.d.).

Through the university strategy and curriculum development framework the university considers and aligns to the 2018 European Reference Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 2018) and how these are embedded in the responses to enterprise LLL needs. The framework defines eight essential competence areas needed for personal fulfilment, employability, and active citizenship. The framework also makes reference to the Sustainable Development Goals which 'affirm that education for sustainable development is an integral element of quality education' (European Commission, 2018). Adopted by the Council, the framework guides education systems to foster competence-based, lifelong, and life-wide learning.

Lifelong, life wide learning and sustainability are woven through the policies of the university including those related to admissions, access, universal design, recognition of prior learning and equity of access and participation to embed these values in the university practice. This also aligns with initiatives outlined in the Global Citizens' Strategy 2030 for Ireland and the wider EU.

In addition to informing what we do and how we do it through policy and strategy, since 2011, MTU has had a central unit to stimulate, support and curate LLL opportunities between enterprise with university faculties, departments and subject matter experts. The

MTU Extended Campus (MTU Extended Campus , n.d.) codifies engagements for the university under three pillars.



Figure 1. Codification of Engagement Activity

The workforce development pillar incorporates the many facets of LLL across the university. In doing so, it is proactively responding to the need for upskilling of future talent as given in Ireland’s National Strategy for Higher Education 2030. The process of engaging with enterprise for LLL is cross disciplinary and inter disciplinary which enables the system to respond with agility, responsiveness and responsibility in an ever changing and evolving environment. To effectively support this practice of sustainable LLL the university, through the Extended Campus has developed a process which incorporates stakeholder engagement, change and project management.

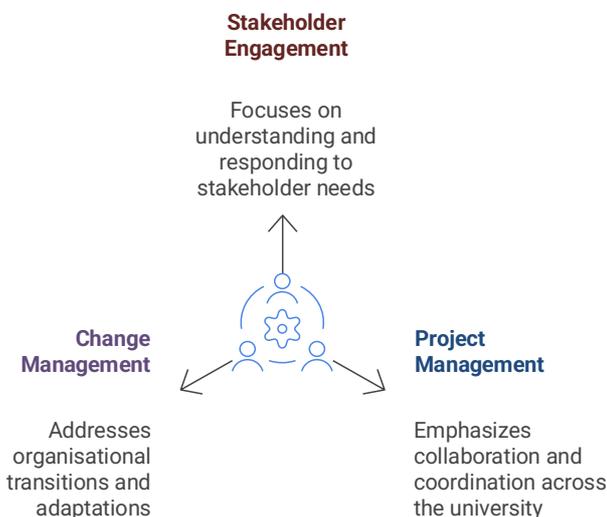


Figure 2. Managing Engagement Strategy

Stakeholder engagement includes engaging with internal staff and those external within enterprise. According to (Singha & Singha, 2024, p. 17) ‘cross-disciplinary partnerships and collaborations become essential cornerstones for sustainable education’. In MTU the Extended Campus conducts an internal and external stakeholder analysis to gauge enterprise expectations and the extent to which the university can respond. In developing LLL solutions to enterprise needs, the university is focused on creating strategic partnerships. Relationship theory in LLL suggests that significant, positive, and trust-

based connections are foundational to effective learning, development, and personal growth across a lifetime. In order for these to be successful balancing stakeholder priorities and expectations within resource limitations is crucial (Grunwald, et al., 2024).

External stakeholder engagement is coordinated by the Extended Campus with internal departments in networking and dissemination events such as learning clinics. These events are designed to stimulate knowledge, awareness and understanding of the full catalogue of LLL opportunities available with the university. The format of the learning clinic includes having university staff available at a time and place convenient for employers and employees to discuss learning needs including how the prior learning of an individual can be valued to enable access, advanced entry, module exemptions and awards. The process of going out into the workplace and community to promote what the university has to offer makes the university more accessible to those who may not have engaged in formal education in some time.

The approach of the university to working with enterprise for the purpose of LLL and in particular in responding to specific skills mismatches and deficits is to engage in stakeholder analysis. This involves listening to the needs of the employer and the individuals through exploratory meetings with staff from across the university. Solutions vary in format and duration from individual modules, micro credentials of 10 to 60 ECTS and full academic awards. In the current higher education environment stackable short courses are more desirable by those in enterprise.

In listening to the needs of the enterprise, solutions may be existing off the shelf or customised offerings which are co-developed and delivered by the university and the enterprise. This flexibility and agility are achieved within the quality assurance mechanisms and academic rigour of the university. As a publicly funded university we endeavour to make responsible judgements which includes ensuring that any LLL course is financially viable in the short to long term.

The with internal staff to determine the capacity and willingness to respond to external requests for LLL solutions.

In the experience of MTU, project management and change management are also necessary in engaging with enterprise for the purpose of LLL. Project management is required to ensure that both the internal and external partners remain engaged and focused on creating solutions for workforce needs. As previously mentioned, these are through interdisciplinary and cross disciplinary teams and can also be inter-organisational. As the higher education and enterprise environments are continuously changing and evolving in and out of sync with each other processes and systems need to be in place to support the changes as they occur.

The system and model of enterprise engagement for LLL in MTU is unique in that it has a central unit to stimulate, coordinate and curate the interactions. The agility and responsiveness of the university to customised solutions is embedded and supported through the policies, strategies and procedures of the university. A whole of university approach is taken in responding to requests from enterprise. The central unit coordinates the interactions and ensures that the right people and those best placed to respond to a LLL request are around the table with the enterprise. This makes the university accessible to those external.

The model as developed by MTU is transferable however it does require an investment by an institution in terms of policies, procedures and processes. It also requires resources to adequately support and value enterprise engagement and LLL.

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Description

UWK as Continuous Transformation of ULLL

The UWK (University for Continuing Education Krems): An incomparable ULLL organisation joins forces with EU.ACE to form a European alliance for the collaborative dissemination of ULLL.

The path from a continuing education institution to a public university is a unique one. What can we transfer from this USP, and what opportunities do Austria and Europe have to commit to the future of continuing education in their democratic systems? The European University for Academic Continuing Education (EU.ACE)!

EU.ACE is a powerful university consortium focused on the development of innovative tailored LLL paths as an integral part of the Bologna system and the European Education Area, designed to respond to the demands of the 21st Century society and the labour market.

Ten partner universities have joined forces in the EU.ACE consortium to promote the strategic development of ULLL in the European Higher Education Area. Coordinated by the University for Continuing Education Krems and initiated together with its French partner Le Cnam – the oldest ULLL provider in Europe – the international consortium brings together universities from Western, Northern, and Southeastern Europe with a special focus on the Danube region.

In 2025, the University for Continuing Education celebrated its 30th anniversary, having already undergone an eventful institutional development. Since its opening in 1995, the University for Continuing Education Krems has developed into the leading public university for continuing education in Europe. It can claim to be the only public university for continuing education in the German-speaking world. Therefore, it can concentrate 100% on part-time, academic continuing education and, on this basis, even offer Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's degrees and, newly, psychotherapy training, which is now regulated by university law in Austria.

In teaching and research, the UWK uses its expertise to tackle social challenges. Since a university is characterised by the fact that its teaching is based on research, the continuing education university has understood from the outset and persevered in establishing continuing education professorships in all subject areas and major disciplines of a university. Strong regenerative medicine and outstanding evidence-based medicine, which also includes Cochrane Austria as the national representative of the international non-profit organisation Cochrane, are just one example of the strength of its own research and social impact. Since 1993, this network of health professionals has been committed to ensuring that decision-makers in the field of healthcare have access to scientifically sound

and independent information. The breadth of scientific disciplines represented at the UWK also covers the entire spectrum of cultural studies, economics, technical sciences, and educational research. The latter has a degree of expansion that allows it to implement the PhD programme “Interdisciplinary Studies of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning” (iCELL).

UWK’s research makes the range of courses on offer both strong and broad in terms of disciplines. The disciplines can also work together in an interdisciplinary manner on a compact campus and align themselves with the common strategy of offering innovative, high-quality, and socially effective research-led continuing education courses.

Since its foundation in 1995, the UWK has been operating as a public university for continuing education, but it was only with a change in the law in 2019 that it was fully incorporated into the University Act 2002 (UG), which ensured its formal equality with other federal universities. Previously, it existed under its own federal law (UWK Act 2004) and in 2004 was granted the right to appoint its own professors and now has the right to award doctorates and degrees.

With the amendment to the University Act passed in 2021, continuing education studies in Austria were reorganised. For prospective students, this means that there are now even greater flexibility and more options for learners. The University for Continuing Education Krems welcomes the reform package for continuing education at universities and has been taking advantage of the new opportunities since the 2023/2024 winter semester by implementing permeability and equivalence. The reform package for continuing education at universities has standardised the framework conditions for continuing education studies in Austria and integrated them into the Bologna structure (bachelor’s – master’s – PhD). In addition to master’s programmes, there are now new part-time continuing education bachelor’s programmes. Furthermore, individuals who have completed a continuing education master’s programme are generally also eligible to pursue doctoral studies.

The equivalence of academic degrees allows for permeability between standard and continuing education programmes. Completion of a continuing education bachelor’s programme entitles students to pursue a master’s degree in continuing education as well as a (standard) master’s degree at other universities. Continuing education degrees such as Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Engineering, Master of Arts, Master of Science, and Master of Engineering are given the suffix “(CE)” for “Continuing Education.” The suffix (CE) ensures the visibility of continuing education programmes and supports the certification of specialised expertise.

Continuing education programmes in cooperation with non-university educational institutions conclude with a “Bachelor Professional” (BPr) or “Master Professional” (MPr) degree. Non-formal and informal learning outcomes (without a certificate) can be credited. In accordance with Section 78 of the Austrian University Act (UG), professional or non-professional qualifications can also be recognised after validation of the learning outcomes.

Even without a high school diploma, but with proof of the prerequisites required in the curriculum of the relevant continuing education bachelor’s degree programme and several years of relevant professional experience, all new bachelor’s degree programmes in continuing education can be taken. Bachelor Professional programmes can even be designed for certain relevant vocational school degrees and relevant training programmes.

A continuing education programme leading to a Bachelor Professional (BPr) degree can also be taken without a high school diploma, provided that the applicant has a relevant professional qualification or several years of relevant professional experience.

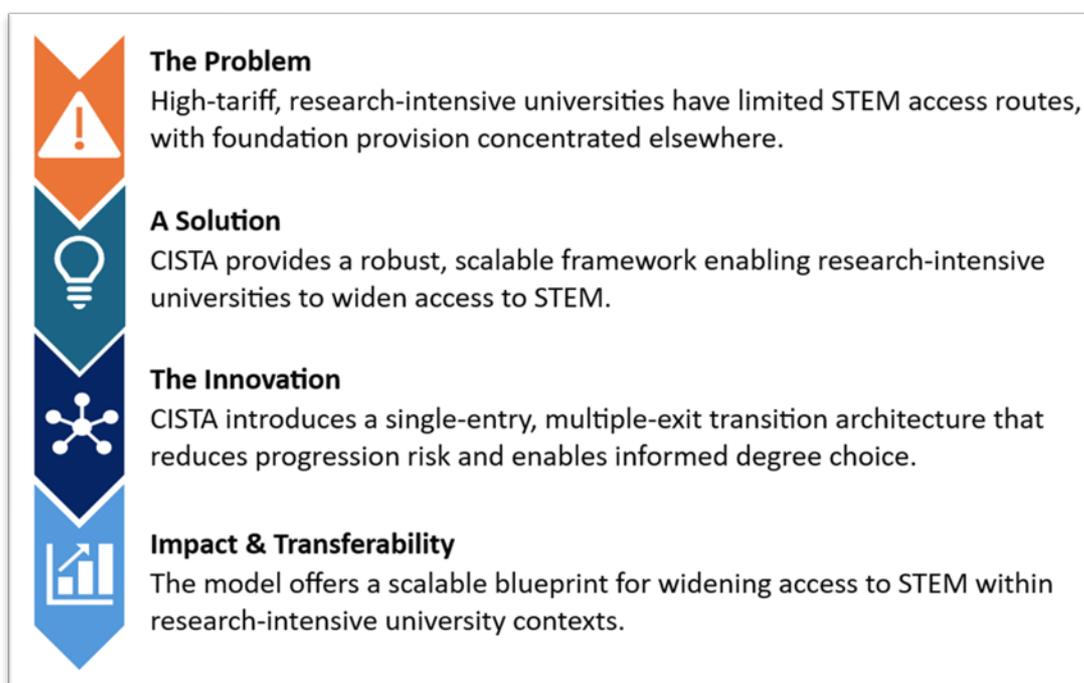
The USP of the UWK is precisely that ULLL does not need to be integrated into the institution, as ULLL is what defines the university. There is no transfer problem; the university pulls together and consists 100% of ULLL. Credits, validation, and tailored responses to the shortage of skilled workers are provided flexibly without giving learners only a short-term perspective: ULLL offers vertical and horizontal permeability for all who come. Following the flexible and rapidly implemented amendment of 2021, the HBB Act (2024) is now in place: Federal Act on Higher Vocational Education. Federal Law Gazette for the Republic of Austria, effective February 28, 2024. Apprenticeship qualifications are being upgraded, and new occupational fields are being opened up, and once again, learners at the UWK are welcomed with new opportunities!

Details

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Description

Overview



Although the UK has seen a marked increase in foundation-year enrolments since 2011/12 (DfE data summarised in HEPI, 2024), growth has been concentrated in non-STEM subjects and lower-tariff contexts. Only around 4% of foundation-year students study at high-tariff institutions (HEPI, 2024). Evidence suggests this pattern reflects structural characteristics rather than learner demand, with access constrained by institutional design rather than academic capability. Devolved governance, discipline-specific admissions and pedagogical cultures shaped by disciplinary norms contribute to persistent inertia in widening access to higher education (Kandiko Howson, Cohen and Viola, 2022).

This case study presents the Cross-Institutional STEM Transition Architecture (CISTA) model (*Figure 1*), a single-entry, multiple-exit transition model developed within a high-tariff, research-intensive UK university. CISTA addresses structural fragmentation while maintaining academic standards, disciplinary integrity and institutional coherence.

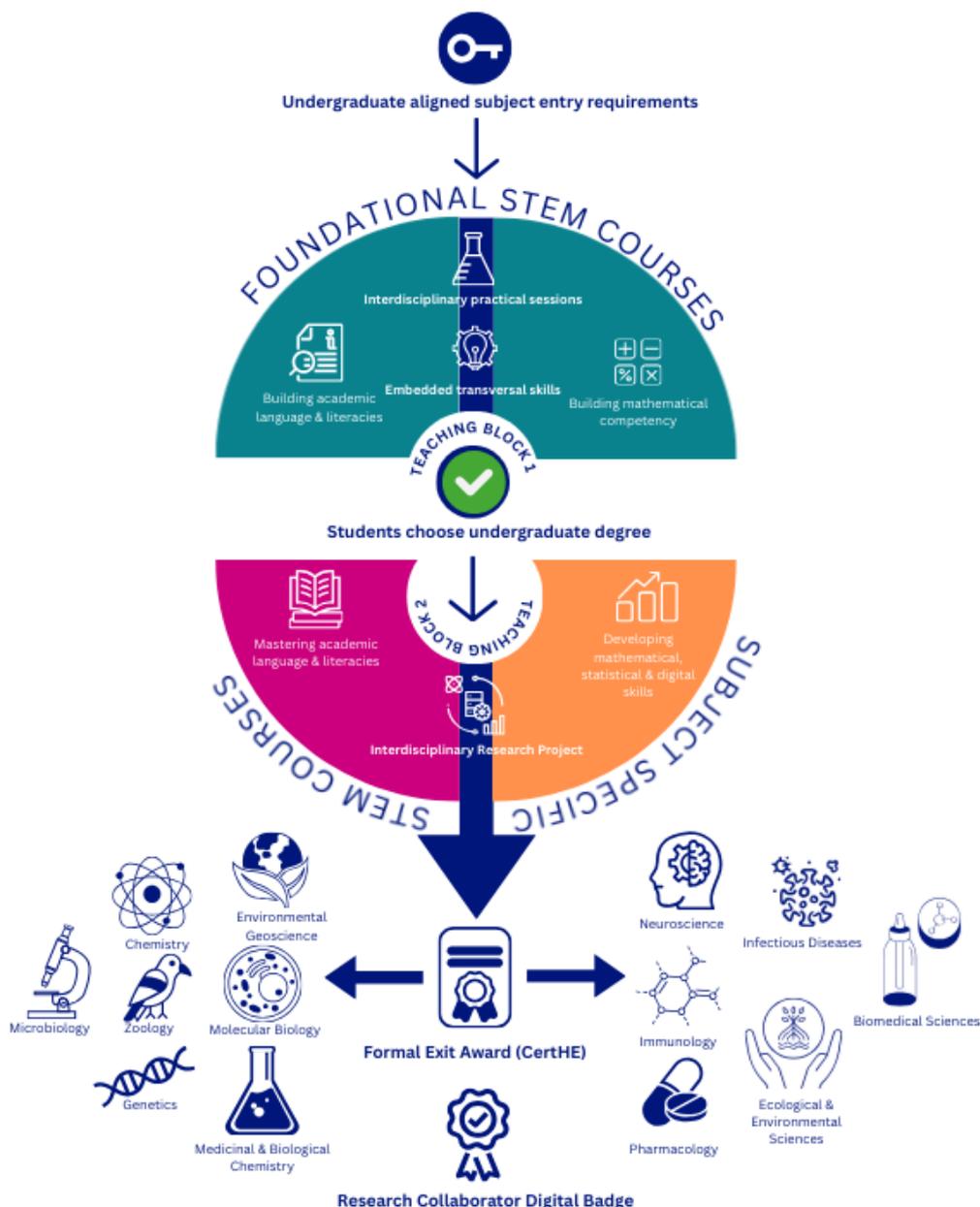


Figure 1. CISTA single-entry, multiple-exit STEM transition model.

What makes this ULLL model innovative or a good model?

CISTA is a deliberately designed institutional transition architecture that reduces risk in learner progression to undergraduate study while preserving academic standards. Within this architecture, risk is managed through explicit academic entry and exit routes, aligned assessment across courses, and the cumulative development of discipline-specific knowledge alongside embedded transversal skills (Tinto, 2012). Operating across multiple Colleges, the model establishes a single admissions entry point with structured progression routes into a wide range of undergraduate STEM degrees, directly addressing fragmentation arising from devolved governance in research-intensive universities. CISTA conceptualises STEM transition as a capability-building ecosystem (Appendix A) that supports learner agency, scientific identity and informed progression decisions. This aligns with research positioning transition as a developmental process of becoming rather than induction or remediation (Gale and Parker, 2014).

Structural components: coherence and a reduced-risk learner journey

Admissions and progression requirements were co-designed with academic and professional service leads from receiving Schools to ensure alignment with Year 1 undergraduate expectations, rather than functioning as stand-alone provision. Such institutional coherence is critical to effective transition and reduced attrition (Loya, 2012). This structural coherence particularly benefits learners with limited prior laboratory access, narrow subject combinations or non-linear educational histories, who are more likely to be disadvantaged in selective higher education environments where expectations and progression routes are less explicit (Tinto, 2012).

Achievement is recognised with or without onward progression. All learners who complete the programme receive a formal Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) awarded at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 7, alongside a digital research capability badge recognising collaboration, scientific communication and inquiry practice. This reflects ULLL principles by valuing learning across multiple destinations.

Programme architecture: alignment, standards and capability development

Programme-level coherence is achieved through shared PPOs (PLOs) aligned to SCQF Level 7. These outcomes shape curriculum design and assessment across all courses, ensuring cumulative, developmental learning rather than siloed accumulation. Assessment is integrated across courses to reduce duplication, enhance feedback literacy and support conceptual transfer. Research on learning communities and cooperative learning demonstrates that such structures strengthen belonging, academic confidence and interdisciplinary learning, particularly during complex transitions (O’Sullivan et al., 2019). This architecture supports readiness for progression into SCQF Level 8 undergraduate study while enabling a smooth, non-overloading transition through a coherent programme of learning.

Pedagogical components: interdisciplinary learning and identity formation

All learners undertake a shared first semester encompassing core STEM concepts, academic literacies and interdisciplinary laboratory work. This mitigates disparities in prior schooling, avoids premature specialisation and enables informed, agency-driven progression decisions (*Figure 1*). Flexible early curricula are widely recognised as effective in widening participation and supporting STEM transition (Gale and Parker, 2014).

Interdisciplinary laboratory learning exposes learners to authentic scientific practices within a single pathway, supporting conceptual transfer and early scientific identity formation (O’Sullivan et al., 2019). Transversal competencies, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, digital literacy and learner autonomy, are explicitly mapped across the programme. This design responds to sector evidence that learners who are disabled, from widening participation backgrounds, or navigating unfamiliar academic systems can face persistent barriers where learning, assessment and institutional processes lack transparency or consistency (Office for Students, 2025).

Why this constitutes a strong ULLL model

CISTA’s innovation lies not in individual components but in their intentional integration within a single transition architecture aligned across admissions, curriculum, pedagogy and progression. In doing so, it reframes STEM foundation education from remediation to a capability-oriented ecosystem supporting learner agency, multiple positive destinations and institutional coherence, outcomes central to ULLL agendas.

How does the model impact learners, industry and the community?

Although the first full cohort will commence in 2026, the institutional implementation of CISTA has already generated measurable impacts at learner, staff and institutional levels through its staged, cross-College design.

Through consultation with receiving Schools, a shared set of priority Year 1 STEM competencies including numeracy, programming, scientific writing, precision measurement and critical thinking, has been embedded across the curriculum and assessment framework. The shared first semester, integrated assessment and interdisciplinary laboratory learning support learners to develop these capabilities before making high-stakes progression decisions. Through engagement in authentic laboratory and inquiry-based practices, learners are positioned as active participants in disciplinary knowledge-making, supporting early scientific identity formation.

CISTA has generated new cross-disciplinary communities of practice involving Teaching Fellows, technicians, EAP specialists and STEM academics across multiple Colleges. Joint curriculum design, laboratory planning and assessment alignment have strengthened shared understanding of undergraduate expectations, reduced duplication and increased confidence in progression decision-making. A co-design-led implementation approach has supported academic ownership and sustained engagement in the design and delivery of the foundation programme.

At institutional level, CISTA establishes a single, clearly articulated STEM transition route within a highly devolved institution. It supports coordinated admissions, consistent applicant communication and unified progression decisions across-Colleges and Schools, while informing strategic investment in shared SCQF Level 7 laboratory capacity. By widening access to STEM for international, widening participation and adult learners, the model supports diversification of future STEM talent pipelines. It also strengthens permeability across the higher education ecosystem, particularly between foundation, undergraduate and LLL provision.

How does your model differ from traditional ULLL approaches?

Traditional foundation-year provision in research-intensive universities is commonly shaped by devolved governance, resulting in discipline-specific programmes with constrained progression routes, variable approaches to transversal capability development, and limited formal exit recognition (Kandiko Howson, Cohen and Viola, 2022). In practice, this often means foundation study operates alongside undergraduate provision rather than as a coherent transition into it. A comparative summary of key structural and pedagogical differences between CISTA and typical foundation-year provision in research-intensive universities is provided in Appendix B.

CISTA responds by reframing foundation-year provision as an embedded, institution-wide transition architecture (Appendix A). Rather than multiple parallel entry points, a single-entry, cross-College structure establishes shared expectations and formally agreed admissions, curriculum and progression routes across receiving Schools. This reduces progression risk and supports effective transition into undergraduate study, while preserving disciplinary autonomy and enabling scalability.

This architectural shift enables programme-level coherence. Shared PPLOs shape curriculum and assessment across all components, embedding interdisciplinary learning and transversal capabilities within disciplinary contexts. Modular accumulation is replaced by cumulative, developmental learning aligned to undergraduate expectations, supporting a smoother, non-overloading transition for learners.

Pedagogically, CISTA moves beyond narrowly preparatory or deficit-oriented models. Learners engage in research practice and interdisciplinary learning from entry, positioning them as emerging scientists rather than conditional entrants. This supports identity formation, belonging and agency—factors strongly associated with positive transition experiences in STEM. Through this integration of structure, curriculum and pedagogy, CISTA transforms foundation provision from parallel access routes into a coherent institutional transition system aligned with ULLL principles.

How transferable is your model?

CISTA is transferable because it is built on adaptable design principles and collaborative processes that enable coherence while retaining disciplinary autonomy. Core elements, including the single-entry, multiple-exit architecture, shared semester 1, integrated assessment and formal exit awards, can be adapted across disciplinary and institutional contexts.

Transferability is further supported by a staged implementation process based on stakeholder consensus, curriculum analysis and co-creation, offering a replicable approach for institutions with devolved governance. The model has already been adapted for a second STEM pathway, demonstrating scalability beyond its original context.

The staged implementation process supporting adaptation across devolved institutional contexts is shown in *Figure 2*.

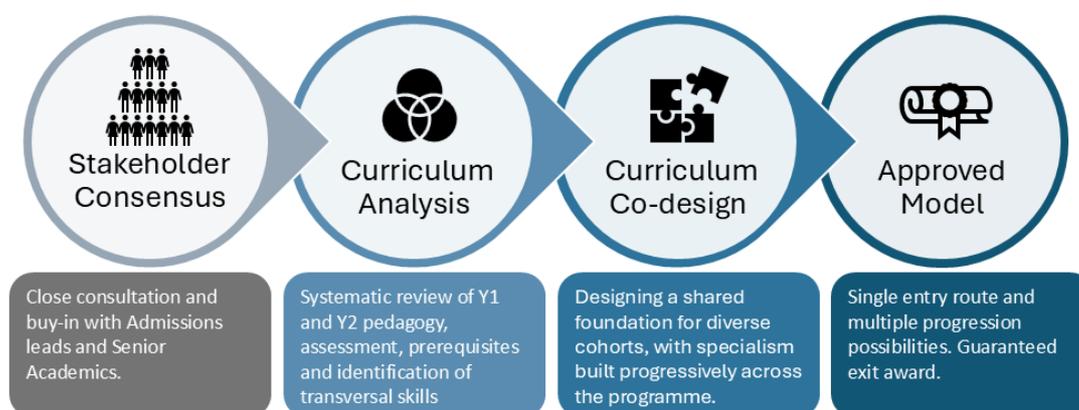


Figure 2. CISTA staged implementation and transferability model

How is your model integrated into long-term strategy and financially sustainable?

CISTA is embedded within core university systems and aligned with strategic priorities for ULLL. Integration within admissions, assessment, timetabling, quality assurance and digital learning systems reduces operational risk and supports continuity. This positions CISTA as a permanent component of institutional learning infrastructure.

Financial sustainability is supported through pathway-scale delivery. Financial modelling indicates a positive operating return, enabling reinvestment in permanent staffing, technical support and laboratory infrastructure.

Conclusion

CISTA addresses a recognised sector gap: the limited availability of STEM Foundation-Year routes within research-intensive, high-tariff universities (HEPI, 2024). By integrating

admissions, curriculum, pedagogy and progression within a single transition architecture, the model reframes foundation provision from remediation to a capability-building ecosystem supporting learner agency, scientific identity and multiple positive destinations. Replication across two STEM pathways demonstrates scalability and transferability, positioning CISTA as a tested, scalable blueprint for widening access to STEM higher education.

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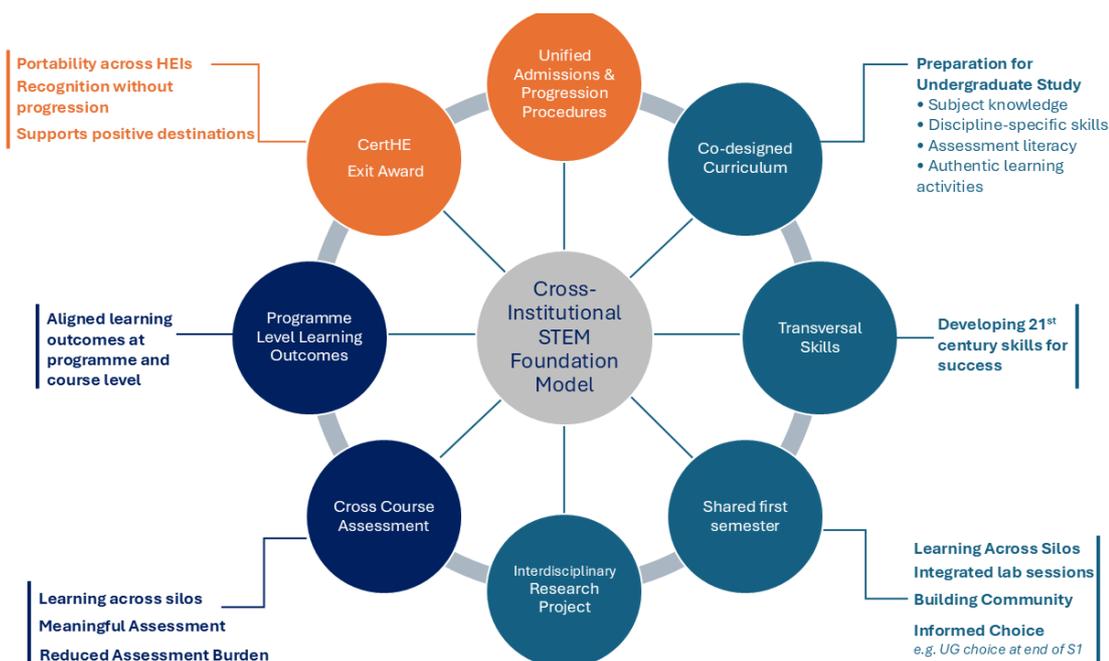
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Appendix A



This illustration provides an overview of this integrated architecture, illustrating how structural pathways (orange nodes) programme-level design (dark blue nodes), and pedagogical approaches (teals node) operate together as a unified system to support equitable access, progression and success.

Appendix B

Feature	Cross-Institutional STEM Transition Architecture (CISTA)	Typical High Tariff, Research-Intensive Foundation Year
Progression Scope	Single foundation year leading to >30 undergraduate degree routes across two Colleges within a unified admissions and progression structure.	Multiple foundation programmes, each feeding into a small number of degree routes.
Exit Award (post-foundation year)	Formal CertHE (Level 4) for all students who successfully complete the programme, providing portability and recognition without progression.	None. Most FYs do not confer a recognised qualification; outcomes are typically a transcript only.
Embedded Practical Research Project	All students complete an independent research project , formally recognised through an institutional digital badge evidencing transversal skills, with eligibility for national STEM awards .	Independent research projects are not typical in foundation programmes. Skills recognition is generally limited to internal study-skills modules without formal validation or external award routes.
Transversal Skills	Transversal skills are surfaced through curriculum analysis and embedded across all courses in alignment with institutional priorities.	Independent courses or modules dedicated to academic skill acquisition.
Assessment strategy	Cross-course assessment , intentionally breaking disciplinary silos and strengthening synthesis, application and transfer of knowledge across contexts.	Predominantly modular, isolated assessments with limited integration across subjects..
Institutional Co-Design	Co-designed across all receiving undergraduate programmes , involving academics, professional services, technicians and students to ensure alignment with Year 1 expectations.	Typically designed and delivered by a single department or unit , with limited engagement from receiving Schools.
Learner Agency & Risk Reduction	Mid-programme choice based on demonstrated capability and student interest; CertHE reduces learner risk and supports positive destinations.	No mid-programme choice; high-stakes single progression route ; no recognised exit award.

This table provides an illustrative comparison between the Cross-Institutional STEM Transition Architecture (CISTA) and features commonly reported in high-tariff, research-intensive university foundation-year provision. The “typical” column reflects published sector analyses and publicly available information; it does not imply uniformity across all programmes, nor does it account for local innovations that may exist but are not widely documented. The comparison is indicative rather than exhaustive and is intended to highlight the distinctive design features of CISTA within the broader landscape of STEM transition routes.

Details

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Description

What Makes the FCUE Model Innovative

The Formation Continue UNIL-EPFL (FCUE) is a joint foundation created by two leading Swiss universities – the University of Lausanne (UNIL) and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL) – to offer a shared platform for ULLL. By uniting a comprehensive cantonal university with a federal institute of technology, FCUE leverages complementary academic strengths to deliver an enriched portfolio of interdisciplinary programmes that significantly expands the offerings of each institution.

The Foundation embodies the principle that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts through an innovative ULLL model built on key features:

- A bi-institutional structure that externalises LLL from traditional faculty silos, enabling agile decision-making while upholding rigorous academic quality.
- A unique collaboration between an engineering school and a comprehensive university, generating interdisciplinary programmes across science, technology, management, law, health, social sciences, and the humanities.
- A unified governance and service platform that pools expertise, tools, and resources for market analysis, instructional design, quality assurance, and learner support.
- An integrated digital ecosystem - including LMS, CRM, and data dashboards - that supports modular, hybrid, and online learning tailored to working adults.
- A revenue-sharing and reinvestment model fostering financial sustainability and promoting the mutualisation of resources to strengthen cross-institutional collaboration over competition.

Established in 2009 as a non-profit entity under private law, FCUE was created to build a better world through university continuing education. Since its founding, FCUE has more than quadrupled its programme portfolio, now delivering over 330 continuing education programmes annually to more than 6,000 adult learners from diverse sectors and professions. Offering short executive modules to credit-bearing certificates and diplomas, many programmes can be combined into personalised pathways that support employability, career advancement, personal development and the capacity to tackle complex societal challenges such as digital transformation, sustainability, and health innovation.

FCUE's governance comprises a Foundation Board with university leadership representatives, an Executive Board for daily management, and an Advisory Board including economic and social sector members. This independent governance enables greater flexibility and responsiveness than traditional university frameworks while ensuring full academic rigour through university-based quality assurance.

By pooling resources within an autonomous joint structure, FCUE serves as an agile, scalable platform transcending institutional boundaries. It has become a central actor in the LLL ecosystem of French-speaking Switzerland, adopting entrepreneurial management practices, guaranteeing financial transparency and appropriate faculty remuneration, and applying shared rules and tools that foster cooperation across institutional cultures. It promotes joint and institution-specific programmes, preserving distinct identities while ensuring coherence.

Located on the shared Dorigny–Ecublens campus, FCUE benefits from proximity to faculties, laboratories, and innovation ecosystems of both universities. This environment facilitates cross-disciplinary collaboration, joint programme development, and regional partnerships with startups, research centres, and public institutions. Its revenue-sharing funding model ensures both universities jointly invest in new initiatives serving the professional and broader societal sectors.

Impact on Learners, Industry, and the Community

FCUE provides learners with access to a diverse portfolio of research-informed programmes that blend academic depth with practical relevance. Participants engage with cutting-edge knowledge across multiple disciplines and benefit from unique interdisciplinary learning opportunities - such as combining data science with law, or engineering with management. The curriculum is designed for working professionals, offering flexible modular and hybrid formats that adapt to their schedules. These features collectively enhance employability, career mobility, and personal development, while learners also value the rich networking and intellectual exchange fostered by FCUE's interdisciplinary environment.

For industry and the workforce, FCUE addresses evolving skills needs at local, regional, and national levels - particularly supporting digital transformation, sustainability, and health innovation. Many programmes are co-designed with companies, public organisations, and professional associations to ensure relevance and immediate applicability. Examples include:

- Jointly developed executive programmes with industry input;
- Tailor-made modules for specific corporate or institutional needs;
- Cutting-edge courses on AI ethics, energy transition, and health data governance;
- Programmes leading to mandatory professional certifications required in Switzerland
- (e.g., postgraduate qualification in psychotherapy).

By aligning academic expertise with real-world challenges, FCUE strengthens regional competitiveness and workforce development. It acts as a neutral interface facilitating long-term knowledge transfer and partnerships between academia and professional sectors.

Beyond its economic impact, FCUE plays a pivotal role in the LLL ecosystem by addressing urgent societal challenges such as sustainability, AI governance, and mental health. The foundation equips public and non-profit professionals with vital skills and knowledge, strengthening the social fabric and democratic engagement. As the key partner in the Lausanne Learning City project - an initiative recognised by UNESCO that aims to foster inclusive, transversal LLL across formal, non-formal, and informal settings - FCUE contributes to a city-wide strategy promoting accessibility and social inclusion. This partnership situates FCUE at the heart of a collaborative network linking academia, local government, civil society, and regional actors to create sustainable, equitable learning opportunities for all citizens. Through the UNIR project (University for Integration and

Success), FCUE actively widens participation, particularly supporting underrepresented groups such as refugees.

Moving Beyond Traditional ULLL

Traditional ULLL structures are often fragmented, operating within individual faculties with limited coordination and slow administrative processes. FCUE was deliberately designed to move beyond this model by:

- Externalising the continuing education mission of universities to a dedicated foundation, while maintaining academic oversight
- Pooling resources from two complementary universities to avoid duplication, promote synergies and benefit from economies of scale
- Offering a unified interface for learners, companies, and public partners
- Implementing shared governance and digital tools for programme design, marketing, quality assurance, and accounting
- Encouraging cross-institutional innovation through joint certificates and microcredentials.

FCUE serves as a strategic service platform and modern campus hub for LLL, providing comprehensive professional support in market analysis, instructional design, promotion, administration, financial monitoring, and evaluation. This enables faculty to concentrate on content creation and pedagogy while leveraging specialised services. The foundation also drives digital transformation through advanced online and blended learning solutions, creating flexible, future-ready environments for adult learners.

Transferability of the Model

The FCUE model offers a replicable framework for universities seeking to modernise LLL systems while safeguarding academic integrity. Its key transferable elements include:

- A foundation-based governance structure that blends academic legitimacy with operational agility
- Shared tools and procedures fostering interdisciplinary and inter-institutional collaboration
- A flexible branding strategy accommodating multiple institutional identities
- A culture of collaboration over competition, promoting synergy and shared value creation.

While replication may require adaptation to local legal, cultural, and institutional contexts, FCUE demonstrates that a joint foundation can provide a viable, sustainable mechanism to scale LLL. Given its scalability, the model could be extended to encompass multiple partners across a region or territory, meeting broader workforce and societal needs.

Integration into Institutional Strategy

At both UNIL and EPFL, FCUE is embedded within long-term strategic plans, positioning LLL as a core university mission alongside teaching and research. By situating continuing education within a shared academic and governance framework, FCUE ensures programmes leverage current research, faculty expertise, and innovation networks from both institutions.

FCUE also enhances visibility and influence for its founding universities at national and international levels, with Lausanne exemplifying collaborative ULLL. Financially, FCUE supports diversification of revenue streams through a professional education portfolio,

maintaining a non-profit orientation. Its revenue mutualisation mechanism allows surpluses to be reinvested into programme development, ensuring sustainability.

Beyond operational delivery, FCUE contributes actively to LLL policy dialogues at cantonal and national levels, reinforcing the universities' leadership role in shaping Switzerland's continuing education landscape and beyond.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Despite clear benefits, the FCUE model presents structural challenges that demand continuous attention. Coordinating two universities with distinct cultures, priorities, and administrative systems requires significant alignment of processes, expectations, and timelines. Decision-making often involves multiple consultations, which can slow responsiveness.

Differences in digital platforms, pedagogical tools, and strategic priorities may add administrative complexity. Financial, human, and infrastructural resource allocation can generate divergent views, necessitating transparent governance and careful negotiation. The tri-partite arrangement of FCUE – with both universities and the foundation as parties – means many strategic choices require consensus among all stakeholders.

To address these challenges, FCUE relies on shared planning cycles, clear operational frameworks, and strong collaborative relationships, which foster coherence and support the partnership's sustainability. These lessons offer valuable insights for institutions considering similar joint LLL models.

Conclusion

The Formation Continue UNIL-EPFL (FCUE) exemplifies how universities can unite to fulfil their LLL mission through foundation-based governance, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and a commitment to academic excellence and societal relevance. Its impact is evident in advancing learners' careers, meeting labour market needs – including future skills, and broadening access to learning opportunities.

While demanding substantial coordination and shared governance, FCUE demonstrates that clear processes and mutual trust enable joint structures to deliver significant benefits and contribute to sustainable economic and social development. As a mature, bi-institutional entity combining academic rigour, operational agility, inclusion, and strong partnerships, FCUE provides an exemplary, scalable model that can inform the SAMUELE self-assessment framework and inspire European institutions to enhance their LLL strategies.

Ultimately, FCUE proves that collaborative university structures can transform LLL ecosystems, creating synergies where the whole truly exceeds the sum of its parts.

Details

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Description

The University of Tartu (UT) is the biggest continuing education and training (CE) provider in Estonia. In 2024, nearly 45,000 learners participated in CE programmes, which makes 3 learners per 1 student. Approximately 27% of courses with 47% of learners took place fully online. The university's target is to have 50,000 continuing education learners per year by 2035.

We are guided by the Estonian Education Strategy 2035 which aims that adults' participation in LLL rises to 25% and the percentage of adults with professional education rises to 80%. The goal is to ensure a better match between the expectations of the work world and people's skills and provide flexible learning pathways.

When organising CE in Estonia, the provisions of the Adult Education Act must be followed. Based on national legislation three internal legal acts are in force at UT regulating general principles, payment of tuition and issuing certificates.

Like formal education, programme-based study management is also implemented in CE, but the activities are self-financed, meaning that either the learner or employer pays for the course, or the training is financed from a project or fund.

The Centre for LLL is responsible for coordinating CE activities at UT, i.e. working out and updating regulations, coordinating programme managers network, initiating and implementing development and quality assurance activities, registering micro-credential programmes in the Estonian Education Information System, organising general marketing, representing the university in national and international CE networks, as well as organising some courses and the University of the Third Age.

All academic and support units and institutions (Library, Museum) have the right to organise CE and have designated CE programme managers, who are responsible for the entire process of preparing and conducting the course: designing a course in collaboration with the professor, entering the programme to Study Information System (SIS), concluding agreements with service providers (rooms, meals etc) and formalising proposals or contracts for payments of salaries as well as practical organisation of the training day, formalising documents, collecting and analysing feedback etc.

Detailed instructions in wiki and intranet have been created to support their work. Programme managers also have access to various integrated digital environments, such as SIS, Document Management Information System, Finance Web, Leave Schedule, List Server etc., which makes training administration easier.

The integration of the Moodle learning environment with SIS and with other applications that support the implementation of teaching (i.e. e-Learning platforms, Mahara, LimeSurvey, Panopto, sisu@ut etc) is of great help when conducting blended or e-courses. For example, if the CE programme is partially or totally web-based it is possible automatically to create the course in the Moodle environment, transfer the learners' data from SIS to Moodle, create learners' usernames and passwords for Moodle and send notifications, update learners' data every night (or manually whenever necessary) and transfer learners' results from Moodle to SIS. Lecturers are also supported by Academic Developers and Instructional Designers from the Centre for Learning and Teaching if they need help in preparing or implementing CE programmes.

The university offers various CE and training programmes for different age groups, from pupils to elderly learners. The main target groups are teachers, medical workers, lawyers and advocates, leaders and managers, as well as officials and specialist in different fields, alumni, pupils and elderly learners. Those who wish to learn can choose from the following options:

- Retraining and qualification programmes, incl. micro-credential programmes;
- Short courses for professional development and training or liberal education;
- Degree subject as CE course;
- Tailor-made courses for organisations;
- Summer University for local people;
- International Summer University;
- Winter University;
- Youth Academy (science school for talented pupils);
- University of Third Age.

In recent years, the micro-credential programmes have gained popularity. It provides an opportunity to acquire additional specialty or professional competencies in a narrower field of study. The volume of micro-credential programmes is 5-30 ECTS. The University of Tartu also offers micro-degrees, an exemption made for universities, if the programmes consist of degree subjects. The volume of micro-degrees is 12-30 ECTS. The University of Tartu have been offering micro-credential programmes for 4 years now and approx. 190 programmes have been started with more than 1,700 learners. Most of the micro-credential learners study together with students, which requires that the organisation of the study process is well thought out and suitable for working adults.

The main fields for micro-credential programmes are entrepreneurship, economics, marketing, management, information technology, education, culture, psychology, sustainable development, law and social sciences. Most programmes are developed in cooperation with representatives of the target groups and stakeholders. The five most popular micro-credential programmes are Data Analysis, Systems Analysis, Digital Service Design and Client-Oriented Communication, Religion in culture and thought and Basic Knowledge and Skills for Career Counselling. Learners have said in their feedback that the training time was convenient, and the volume was suitable for employed individuals, the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills and consolidate the existing ones was appreciated and also acquisition of practical skills and their applicability in workplaces were highlighted. Almost 50% are interested in continuing their studies in degree studies and the micro-credential programme is seen as the first step towards obtaining a master's degree.

Since April 2025 the provision of micro-credential programmes are regulated by the Adult Education Act, where the definition of a micro-credential programme is formulated as follows: Set of proven and recognised knowledge and skills acquired in CE and training which meets the needs of the labour market or society. The act also states that provider of micro-credential programmes must have the right to teach in the relevant ISCED

curriculum group or pass the quality assessment of the curriculum group and since September 2025 the curricula of micro-credential programme must be registered in and certificates sent to the Estonian Education Information System. The University of Tartu has registered 90 micro-credential programmes since then.

Thematic Area III: University Lifelong Learning Operations

Details

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Description

Overview

Continuing education programmes in higher education increasingly serve adult learners who combine their studies with employment and family responsibilities. Students therefore exhibit substantial heterogeneity in their professional backgrounds, prior knowledge, and individual learning goals. At the same time, research on AI conversational agents in education emphasises that such systems can be permanently available, scalable and location independent. These agents also have the potential to address the needs of multiple learners simultaneously while adapting to individuals (Khosrawi-Rad et al., 2022). Continuing Education BFH Business School (hereinafter referred to as BFH) developed and piloted “LISA”, an AI-based conversational agent for asynchronous self-directed learning. This innovation was introduced to strengthen personalised learner support during self-study and to make on-campus classroom time more effective, thereby creating value and impact for learners, industry and society. The approach leverages permanent availability and scalability, location-independence, accessibility, and adaptability to individual needs.

What Is LISA and How Is It Used

LISA is a bespoke, custom-trained AI-based conversational agent designed as a virtual learning assistant tailored for continuing education programmes at BFH. It is grounded in structured, lecturer-curated learning material, such as a knowledge base encompassing relevant studies, articles and theoretical frameworks. Upon enrolment, learners complete a personal learning profile detailing their professional background, prior knowledge, and learning objectives, as well as their preferred mode of learning. LISA adapts the introduction, explanation, and contextualisation of course content dynamically based on this profile. Consequently, learners with existing expertise engage more deeply with the subject matter, while those requiring foundational support receive additional explanations and illustrative examples. Importantly, personalisation occurs within interactions between LISA and the student, while the underlying learning materials curated by faculty remain unchanged to ensure academic quality.

LISA is not a generic question and answer tool but is embedded in a structured, phase-based conversational learning methodology, illustrated in *Figure 1*, encompassing warm-up, knowledge acquisition, implementation, reflection, and assessment. These phases are highly adaptable and are customised according to the specific use-case, which defines the goal and the pedagogical role assigned to the AI conversational agent within the course's didactic design.

The various modes and use-cases for LISA are currently included, but not limited to:

- Pre-class Knowledge Refreshment to establish a shared baseline prior to classroom sessions.
- Knowledge Acquisition in Flipped Classroom Settings through autonomous, self-paced self-study, thereby freeing up valuable synchronous class time for application, collaborative problem-solving, deepening and reflection.
- Targeted Skill Development via guided conversational practice and immediate, personalised feedback.
- Formative and Summative Assessments using adaptive conversational formats to facilitate various methods of evaluation.
- Reflection and Metacognition Support guiding learners through structured reflection prompts, thus fostering metacognitive skills.

LISA Phase-Based Conversational Learning Methodology

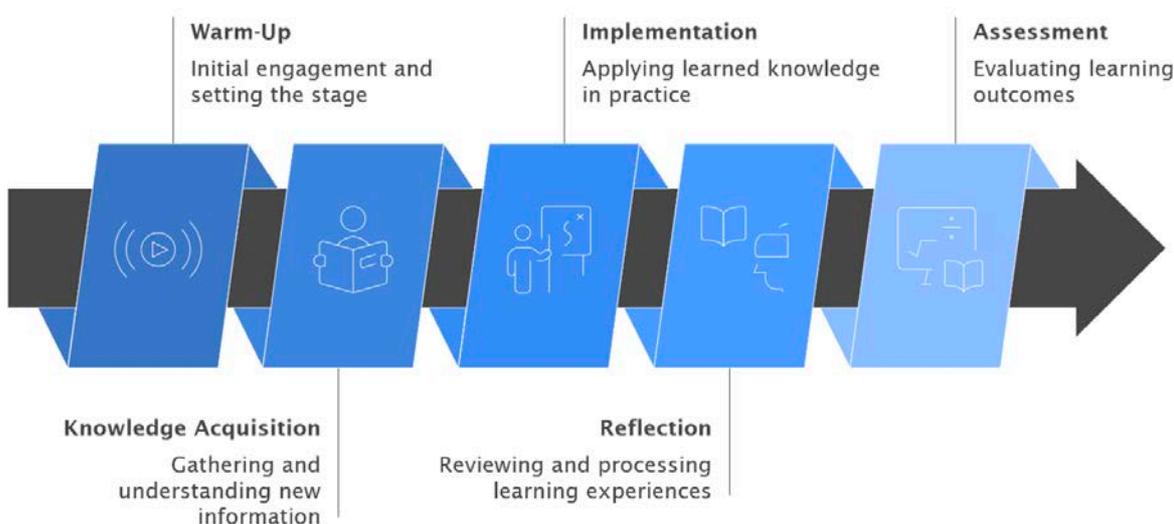


Figure 1. Phases in LISA Pilot

Note. The phases within the conversational learning methodology used for LISA are highly adaptable.

LISA's primary deployment is during self-study periods to provide asynchronous support and effectively minimise differences in learners' baseline understanding prior to on-campus or synchronous online sessions. From a contemporary educational technology perspective, LISA aligns with the definition of a pedagogical conversational agent, combining instructional functions (e.g., supporting knowledge and skill acquisition) with pastoral functions (e.g., individualised guidance and emotional support), as mentioned in recent higher education technology frameworks (Yusuf et al., 2025).

What Makes LISA Innovative

The innovation of LISA resides in didactic integration and institutional control over knowledge sources.

First, BFH shifts from passive self-study toward structured conversational learning. Learners engage in dialogue, receive targeted feedback, reflect, share and develop their insights rather than only consuming static content. This approach aligns with evidence that conversational agents can enhance more interactive learning processes and can

provide timely, individualised feedback, particularly in assessment and feedback contexts where such support is difficult to achieve through human instruction alone (Yildirim-Erbasli et al., 2025).

Second, LISA combines personalisation with a curated knowledge base. While educational chatbots often aim to provide personalised guidance, a recurring concern in the generative AI literature is the risk of inaccurate or non-transparent outputs and the need for safe and responsible integration (Bozkurt, 2023). By grounding LISA in lecturer-curated programme materials and embedding it in defined learning pathways, BFH ensures a flexible conversational interface within institutionally governed knowledge boundaries.

Third, LISA is specifically tailored for executive education and adult learning contexts, supporting flexible, time-efficient learning and immediate applicability to real-world professional challenges.

Impact on Learners, Industry, and Society

BFH collected initial data from a pilot implementation of LISA focusing on pre-class knowledge refreshment in the course CAS Sustainable Corporate Development. Pre-survey results (n = 24) showed high learner expectations and confirmed the need for contextualisation across various industries. Post-survey results (n = 24) indicated high learner acceptance, with the overall learning experience rated "very good" (M = 4.1, scale 1-5) and strong course recommendation rates with an average of 86%. Self-assessed sustainability competence showed positive development, with increasing knowledge from M = 4.9 to M = 6.0 (scale 1-10). Additionally, perceived ability to recognise problems increased from M = 6.7 to M = 7.2 (scale 1-10). These findings provide preliminary evidence of perceived competence development, while causal effects and long-term outcomes require further evaluation.

Qualitative feedback highlighted flexibility, individuality and innovation as key strengths, alongside identified needs for technical improvements. These findings align with studies suggesting chatbots enhance learner experience via self-paced study, reduced stress, and saved time (Ait Baha et al., 2024), but also align with cautions about balancing engagement and efficiency (Yildirim-Erbasli et al., 2025).

Based on these results, LISA has undergone further development and is being integrated into additional courses through a phased implementation process. For industry and workforce, the main benefit lies in scalable, contextualised upskilling across diverse sectors. Additionally, educational chatbots are discussed as having the potential to support educators by reducing repetitive instructional tasks (Ait Baha et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2025). Accordingly, pilot results indicate strong acceptance of blended support with 88% of learners accepting a coach reviewing the chatbot interactions for targeted support and continuous improvement, provided that robust data governance is ensured.

Societally, LISA fosters inclusion by reducing barriers for learners with lower prior knowledge and enabling study–work–life balance through location-independent, scalable learning (Khosrawi- Rad et al., 2022). However, risks like privacy and safety require deliberate governance and AI literacy (Bozkurt, 2023).

How LISA Differs from Traditional ULLL Approaches

Traditional self-study formats often rely on static resources and fixed learning sequences, limiting personalised support and timely feedback. In the educational chatbot literature, these limitations are described as a lack of teacher-student interactions, limited real-time assistance, and reduced opportunities for tailored learning experiences (Ait Baha et al.,

2024). LISA addresses these constraints by providing an always-available conversational interface that adapts explanations to individual learner profiles and structures self-study through defined didactic phases.

Rather than serving as a supplementary support tool, LISA is embedded within the overall learning design, operationalising formative checks and feedback throughout the learning journey. This aligns with work on conversational agent-based formative assessment, which suggests that conversational interactivity can mitigate engagement challenges associated with traditional computerised formative assessments through timely feedback and dynamic interaction (Yildirim-Erbasli et al., 2025).

Transferability

The described AI-based conversational agent model is transferable across various university continuing education programmes (e.g., CAS, EMBA, micro-credentials) and didactical scenarios (e.g., preparatory study, flipped-classroom self-study, challenge-based education support). In practice, this transferability is based on a reusable design pattern rather than a single chatbot configuration. This pattern consists of four key elements:

- institutionally curated course knowledge
- learner profiling for personalisation
- phase-based conversational scaffolding aligned to learning outcomes, and
- integration into the programme's didactical concept.

Nonetheless, other higher education institutions may face constraints. Developing high-quality curated course content for the knowledge base is time-consuming. Furthermore, it is crucial to carefully design the AI agent's role and purpose within the didactical concept. Additionally, responsible deployment requires governance to ensure accuracy and privacy which are prerequisites for realising educational value (Bozkurt, 2023).

Integration into ULLL Strategy

BFH positions LISA within a long-term institutional strategy focused on digitalisation, entrepreneurship, and sustainability. To sustain impact, LISA is embedded in existing curricular development and quality assurance processes, including continuous content stewardship by faculty, thereby maintaining financial sustainability beyond initial pilot phases.

Initial pilot feedback indicates high acceptance and perceived benefits in flexibility, availability, and competence development. As user satisfaction should be considered a key success factor in ULLL, BFH's strategic roadmap is further supported by evidence that satisfaction with chatbot guidance is positively related to engagement and learner autonomy (Yildiz Durak, 2023). BFH's commitment to ULLL is reflected in the development of flexible and inclusive programmes as well as the ongoing refinement of AI-supported didactic designs to address evolving professional requirements.

Conclusion

LISA exemplifies an institutionally governed, didactically integrated conversational agent approach in ULLL at BFH. By combining curated content, learner profiling, and phase-based conversational scaffolding, the model supports personalised self-study and improves learner readiness for classroom application. Pilot results provide early evidence of high acceptance and perceived competence development. As a transferable design pattern grounded in responsible AI governance, LISA offers a compelling example of best practice in ULLL.

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Description

KTU Lifelong Learning (LLL) platform: the case of a digital NFE ecosystem

This case study presents how KTU has created an integrated LLL platform that automates key non-formal education processes, ensures quality management, and enables sustainable growth of the programme portfolio. This solution is relevant for institutions seeking to develop holistic, data-driven LLL ecosystems and integrate non-formal education into the university's strategic mission, rather than leaving it at the level of individual initiatives.

Innovation: what makes the KTU LLL platform unique?

The KTU LLL platform is currently the only solution of this scale among Lithuanian higher education institutions. It digitises the entire non-formal education cycle, from programme initiation to certificate issuance and quality monitoring. Programmes are prepared in structured forms, automatically linked to the KTU LLL website, and published in dynamic catalogues. Quality of programmes is assessed in stages, and the platform sequentially transfers programmes to the responsible parties for assessment. The organisation of training includes the formation of participant groups, making timetables, and resource planning, while participant registration, contract conclusion, payment administration, and data protection (GDPR) are ensured in a single system. Learning outcomes and attendance are recorded, certificates are generated automatically and assigned registration numbers, and survey-based quality assurance and analytical modules are developed to show trends by programme, participant, lecturer, and revenue.

Integrated financial management and pricing create significant value: a revenue and expenditure structure is assigned to each programme and linked to the price per participant, discount principles, and various funding sources (participants, projects, state funding). This creates the conditions for transparent and uniform financial logic throughout the university and facilitates control. Automatic payment administration, integrated with the payment portal, allows generating receipts and invoices, applying individual discounts, sending payment letters to the entire group, tracking payment status, and applying tax exemptions, thereby reducing the administrative burden and increasing the accuracy of financial accounting.

The platform has a unified operating database of lecturers and external experts, integrated with EDINA (the Lithuanian higher education information system for managing official academic information): it shows lecturers' qualifications, teaching responsibilities, areas of expertise, and their right to work with children. This helps to optimise the selection of lecturers and ensure quality. Automatic generation of timetables and resource planning allows us to create training schedules, assign classrooms and equipment, check their availability in real time, avoiding overlaps and human errors. Participant and legal

client management is based on CRM principles: collecting participant and company history, payment data, completed programmes, and certificates, which creates the conditions for personalised services and more effective work with business clients. Quality analytics (currently in development) will allow for the automatic aggregation of participant survey results, indicators of programme effectiveness, and portfolio analysis by audience group, to ensure data-driven decision-making. Digitisation of certificates with QR codes will ensure the reliability of certificates and make it easy for employers to verify them. The functions of the programme portfolio management make it possible to plan supply for the calendar or academic year, analyse it by target groups, and monitor programme status, thus forming a clear map of non-formal education across the university.

The platform is integrated with the main KTU and national data sources: the LLL website, EDINA, the document management system, the payment portal, and the digital resource repository open.ktu.edu. These integrations provide users with a consistent and convenient path from searching for information to receiving a certificate. The university's strategy for studies for 2025–2030 stipulates further development: a competency passport system for various audiences, micro-credential issuance and recognition functions, progress portfolios and maps, flexible learning pathways, and links to Europass and other EU digital systems.

Impact: how is the KTU LLL platform changing the learning ecosystem?

The KTU LLL platform has an impact on all stakeholders: learners, teachers, departments, the university as an organisation, business and public sector partners, and the national education system. For the first time, learners get a "one-stop shop" experience: the entire range of LLL offerings is visible in one place, information is easy to compare, and registration takes just a few clicks. The system automatically generates contracts, information emails, payment documents, and certificates, and participants can clearly see their learning history. Pupils, teachers, business representatives, and individuals use the same systems, but adapted to their needs. The collected data forms the basis for future competency passports and personalised learning pathways, while the transparent, convenient, and professional service strengthens trust in the university as a provider of training.

The administrative burden on teachers and academic departments is reduced: programmes are developed in a structured manner, content is automatically transferred to the website, contracts, timetables, and payments are coordinated within the system, and quality indicators are presented in unified reports. This allows focusing more on the quality of programmes, content updates, and the analysis of the audience needs. The platform provides strategic unity for the university as an organisation: all departments work according to common LLL standards, the number of programmes, participant flows, finances, and quality indicators are transparently visible, and investments and portfolio development are easier to plan. Uniform pricing and financial management, the stability of processes regardless of staff turnover, and data analytics make LLL not an additional activity, but an integrated, data-driven part of the university's mission.

For external organisations, such as businesses, the public sector, and regional partners, the platform provides a reliable infrastructure for competency development. Companies can easily register participants, track accounts and payments, and use discount or financing schemes. Standardised and digital certificates are easy to verify, and the accumulated history of legal clients enables the creation of customised training packages and long-term partnerships. Kaunas Region is provided with broader opportunities for reskilling and strengthening digital competencies, and the link between non-formal education and innovations in higher education is growing stronger. At the national level, the KTU LLL platform is setting a precedent: for the first time, non-formal education

processes are gathered into a unified system, creating an infrastructure for coordination, quality, finance, certification, and analytics that could become a model for a national micro-credential and competency passport system and data standardisation in the future.

How does the KTU LLL model differ from the organisation of the traditional LLL?

The KTU LLL model clearly differs from a traditional LLL organisation. In most institutions, non-formal education remains the initiative of individual faculties, while at KTU it is integrated into the university's strategy and mission. Instead of a fragmented system managed with the help of Excel forms and email, there is a digital, unified structure with a single programme registration and coordination process, common financial and quality principles, and a centralised certificate registry. The model is data-driven: demand trends, programme effectiveness, staff engagement, and financial results are analysed, and decisions on supply expansion are based on science rather than intuition. In addition, LLL activities are consistently focused on four main target groups – students, teachers, businesses and university staff – with clear sub-models for each one.

Model transferability: what can be adapted in other institutions?

The model is designed so that its elements can be transferred to other higher education institutions or educational organisations. The most easily adaptable elements are process standards, programme registration templates, quality assurance logic, CRM principles, the structure of the financial model and certificate registers, and the logic of target group segmentation. Successful transfer requires a central LLL coordination unit, a ready IT infrastructure, clear quality standards, and process discipline in the units. Potential challenges are related to institutional culture, bureaucratic barriers, and resource requirements for integration; therefore, a gradual, modular implementation is important: starting with processes and quality standards and gradually expanding to a complete ecosystem.

Sustainability and integration into the university's strategy

In this context, sustainability is understood as the long-term operation of the platform, stable funding, and integration into the university's ongoing processes. The KTU LLL platform is included in the university's LLL strategy and strategy for studies until 2030; therefore, it is a permanent institutional infrastructure instead of a temporary project. The platform is supported by the Lifelong Learning Centre and the Department of Information Technology, and funding is provided by the university budget and additional international project funds, which create the conditions for financial sustainability. In this way, the LLL platform directly implements KTU's mission to ensure an open, flexible and LLL ecosystem responsive to the regional needs. It will be further developed into a system of competency passports, micro-credentials and international recognition of competencies.

Details

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Description

ULLL structure and organisation: a cross-faculty model

Traditional ULLL structures are typically organised in either centralised, decentralised, or hybrid forms. In most universities, decentralisation implies that LLL activities are embedded within individual faculties, with each faculty developing and managing its own continuing education offer, often mirroring its research domains or/and as ‘extensions’ of existing degree programmes. A hybrid structure usually combines elements of both: a central coordinating unit responsible for overarching matters such as quality assurance or policy alignment, alongside a high degree of faculty autonomy in programme design and implementation.

[PUC - KU Leuven Continue](#) (PUC), however, operates differently. It functions as a **cross-faculty** and regionally embedded centre for ULLL that deliberately transcends faculty boundaries, fostering transversal collaboration instead of maintaining disciplinary silos. This governance structure facilitates several advantages over more conventional ULLL settings:

- *Complementary role to faculty-based ULLL*
At PUC, coordination happens across faculties rather than within them. As such, the PUC’s portfolio complements the faculty-based ULLL activities that also exist within KU Leuven (e.g., Law, Pedagogy, Medicine, Engineering), instead of duplicating them. These faculty-based offerings typically reflect existing research expertise and/or serve well-defined professional groups (respectively, lawyers, teachers, doctors, engineers), often in the context of mandatory accreditation. By operating across faculties, PUC is able to fill these gaps and address cross-cutting learning needs that transcend disciplinary boundaries, creating a more coherent and integrated ULLL portfolio. For example, [the NIS2 Masterclass](#) brings together expertise from Law (covering this new EU cybersecurity framework), Computer Science (cybersecurity), and Economics (as management is now also held accountable), addressing both technical and governance aspects in a single, integrated programme. Moreover, not every faculty is equally active in ULLL course development. This highlights a limitation of a purely faculty-based model: variability across faculties not only in terms of offerings and expertise but also in supporting functions such as quality assurance, marketing, and communication. PUC functions as a fully dedicated LLL unit rather than as a side-function embedded within a faculty. This allows professional focus and strategic attention to be fully aligned with the goals of ULLL, rather than being secondary to faculty priorities.

- Bottom-up portfolio development*

A key mechanism of PUC's structure for detecting these emerging learning needs is its use of advisory groups, composed of academics from multiple faculties alongside professionals from (regional) industry, government, and the non-profit sector. These groups exist for different domains - for example, 'Personnel & Organisation', which is illustrated in the case discussed below. They provide continuous, field-informed input, ensuring that the portfolio evolves based on bottom-up needs rather than top-down academic supply, while also capturing regional demands more effectively. By leveraging its strong regional network, PUC can rapidly test and refine new portfolio ideas with local SMEs and organisations, translating shared challenges into concrete learning initiatives. Importantly, this bottom-up approach applies not only to new initiatives but also to existing courses, which are continuously evaluated and improved. PUC implements systematic quality assurance through satisfaction surveys, informal feedback moments, and reporting not only to instructors but also to the advisory groups. This creates a coherent evaluation culture that enables comparative analyses across the portfolio - something less easily achievable in faculty-based models. Consequently, whether new or updated, initiatives do not originate from faculty research agendas but from the real challenges that professionals face, while still drawing on academic expertise to address them.
- Interdisciplinary and holistic orientation*

Because PUC transcends faculty boundaries, it can design programmes that integrate not only knowledge but also methods from multiple disciplines to address complex challenges - such as digital transformation, sustainability, and organisational well-being. These issues cannot be solved within the confines of a single field (or faculty!) and therefore require an inherently interdisciplinary and holistic approach.
- Sustainable financial model*

Last but definitely not least, PUC's cross-faculty organisation - bringing together multiple domains under one umbrella - also creates financial flexibility that single-faculty structures often lack. Operating with its own profit and loss (P&L) responsibility, PUC can allocate resources more strategically across programmes and domains. More concretely, PUC applies a solidarity principle: commercially attractive domains, such as [the postgraduate programme in Real Estate Management](#) - a prime example of an interdisciplinary field combining law, finance, economics, architecture, and urban planning, and forming a strong portfolio from individual postgraduate programmes to the entire domain - help sustain initiatives with a lower market return (such as awareness sessions on the ecological footprint of ICT/AI). These more lucrative programmes, typically addressing professional up- and reskilling needs, are often financed by employers and can therefore bear higher fees. In contrast, initiatives aimed at personal or societal development are primarily paid for by individual learners and require a lower price point (such as [astronomy](#), arts, culture...). This financial model thus not only ensures a financially sustainable portfolio but also allows PUC to safeguard the university's broader societal mission - supporting LLL in its most holistic sense, beyond purely professional objectives - while remaining a challenging balancing act.

ULLL operations: the 'Personnel & Organisation' portfolio as a cross-faculty case example

To illustrate how PUC's cross-faculty governance model operates in practice, we highlight one of its most emblematic interdisciplinary domains: Personnel & Organisation (P&O),

which has been successfully expanded over the past five years.⁸ The P&O domain cannot be mapped onto any single faculty. This expansion would not have been possible within a more traditional faculty-based structure, which tends to be constrained by disciplinary boundaries, nor within a purely centralised model, which often lacks direct bottom-up engagement with specific professional fields and the flexibility to adapt to diverse sectoral needs, and risks becoming bureaucratic and supply-driven.

It serves a heterogeneous professional audience - HR managers, team leaders, SME executives, - all involved in organisational development from different disciplinary backgrounds. Notably, many participants, particularly L&D professionals, play a 'strategic' role by referring colleagues to relevant PUC offerings. More broadly they act as ambassadors for LLL within their own organisations, creating a multiplier effect that extends the societal impact of the P&O domain far beyond the individual learner.

The P&O portfolio exemplifies the bottom-up, advisory-driven approach that is central to the PUC model and is facilitated by its cross-faculty structure. A dedicated P&O advisory group, composed of academics from multiple faculties - including Psychology, Business & Economics, Law, Social Sciences, and Medicine - as well as practitioners from (regional) industry and public institutions, identifies emerging learning needs and validates new programme ideas. This ensures that the portfolio is driven by real-world field needs rather than solely by academic supply. As a result, the P&O portfolio directly addresses workforce challenges such as well-being, digital transformation, leadership, and organisational culture.

One illustrative example is an interdisciplinary programme on '[Absenteeism](#)', which combines expertise from Medicine (occupational health), Sociology (organisational culture), and Law (labour regulation), complemented by practitioner case studies and guest lectures. Similar co-creative processes have led to courses on organisational design, AI and work design, and knowledge management, among others.

In this context, it is also important to note that, while the P&O advisory group provides essential interdisciplinary input and ensures that programmes respond to real-world challenges - drawing on expertise from multiple faculties and professional sectors - the coordinators must also avoid fragmentation or ad hoc development across the P&O portfolio. A more structured approach is therefore necessary to effectively manage the P&O portfolio. To this end, the P&O programme coordinators developed an internal matrix as a (lightweight) guiding tool for strategic portfolio management. This matrix combines two dimensions:

- Learning format: short exploratory sessions ("tasters") versus in-depth trajectories.
- Level of application: macro or organisation level (e.g., course on organisational design), meso or team-level (e.g. course on knowledge management), micro or individual-level (e.g. course on AI and work design)

Without such a tool, a bottom-up driven, cross-faculty portfolio could easily become fragmented. The P&O matrix supports interdisciplinarity without chaos, harmonises bottom-up initiatives, and links advisory-group input to a strategic overview of the portfolio, ensuring that new initiatives are integrated coherently rather than emerging randomly or overlapping.

It was developed specifically for the P&O domain, reflecting the multi-level nature of organisational learning, but the underlying logic is adaptable to other interdisciplinary

⁸ From mostly ad-hoc initiatives in 2021-22 and around ten courses in 2022-23, and to 24 - mostly multi-day and recurring - programmes in the 2025-26 academic year.

fields (for example, in Real Estate, where programmes are structured from beginner to senior level).

Concluding remarks: organisational and cultural shift

More broadly, and also summarising, this notion of adaptability captures the essence of PUC's cross-faculty ULLL model: its design is replicable and transferable yet must always be tailored to the unique (regional) context of each university. As such, the faculty-overarching governance of the PUC model offers a blueprint for embedding ULLL. Its core principles - decentralising authority from individual faculties, establishing a more transversal coordination, and investing in advisory governance structures that bridge academia and practice - can inspire other institutions.

Successful transfer, however, requires more than organisational adjustments; it demands a cultural shift. The model challenges the 'traditional' academic mindset by prioritising societal relevance and learner-centred approaches alongside scientific excellence, while moving beyond faculty-dominated processes. For example, even within KU Leuven itself, the recent implementation of microcredentials revealed the persistence of faculty-based constraints: each microcredential must be integrated within a single faculty, limiting interdisciplinary development.

In contrast, PUC's cross-faculty governance allows programme and portfolio development to start from real-world challenges rather than internal research agendas or existing degree programmes. Development thus begins not with "What can our researchers offer or which existing programmes can be marketed?", but with the deceptively simple yet transformative inquiry: "What keeps professionals - and other people - awake at night?"

Details

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Description

A fit-for-purpose Quality Assurance framework for ULLL: The TU Delft Learning for Life model

Innovation

Across Europe, universities are increasingly committed to ensuring high-quality LLL opportunities. Building on this shared ambition, the TU Delft Learning for Life (LfL) Centre has developed a robust and systematic quality assurance (QA) framework tailored to the specific characteristics of LLL education in higher education.

This model was created in response to a key challenge in ULLL: the absence of an agreed national or European framework for quality assurance of these educational products. Existing guidelines⁹ – often derived from degree-education QA systems – are neither comprehensive nor fully suited to the nature of LLL. As a result, institutions have been left to design their own approaches, leading to fragmented practices and potential inconsistencies in quality.

The LfL QA cycle therefore serves both as an operational tool for TU Delft and as a potential reference model for other higher education institutions aiming to embed structured and transparent QA processes in their LLL activities.

Key innovations of our approach

- **ULLL-specific QA framework:** instead of relying on frameworks designed for degree programmes, our QA framework¹⁰ is designed specifically for LLL products across all delivery formats, including both in-person and online offerings, such as MOOCs, online courses, summer schools, and workshops. It responds to the diversity and shorter lifecycle of ULLL products

⁹ [EQF-LLL-2008_596690.pdf](#)

¹⁰ [QA handbook.pdf - Google Drive](#)

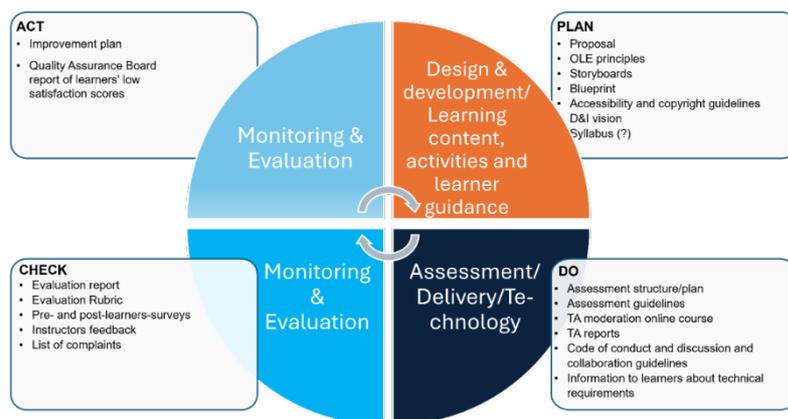


Figure 1. Alignment of PDCA cycle and [quality standards](#)

- **Tailored quality standards and indicators and embedded PDCA cycle:** we have defined specific [quality standards and indicators](#) and operationalised the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle to monitor and evaluate the quality of ULLL. Each phase of the cycle is mapped to specific quality standards and indicators, (see Figure 1) – inside the circle the different QA standards are presented, externally the PDCA phases with the corresponding documentation produced in the different moments. Moreover, the PDCA cycle is aligned with the products lifecycle (see Figure 2), to ensure quality is embedded throughout rather than assessed retrospectively. Products are reviewed every three years with subject matter experts to ensure continued relevance, and ongoing monitoring is carried out in collaboration with learning developers, instructors, teaching assistants, and other stakeholders. A detailed explanation of our approach can be found in our [QA handbook](#).

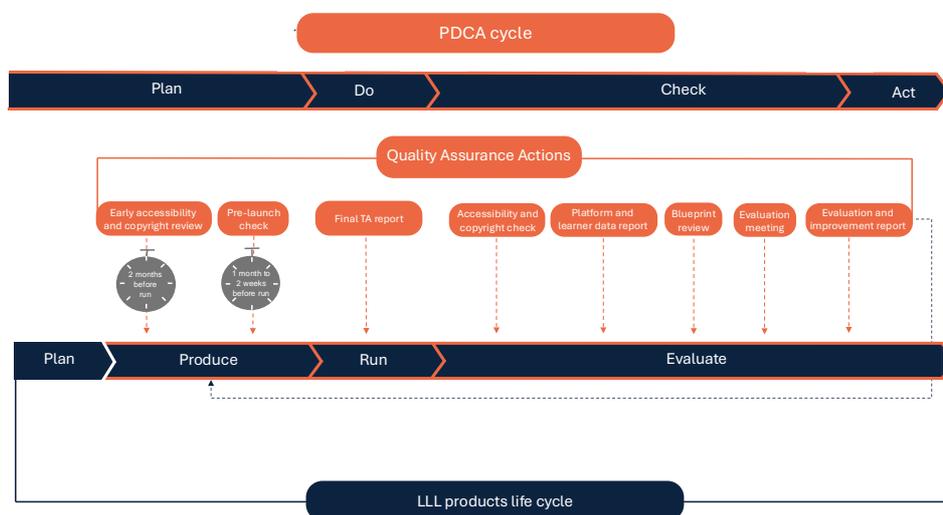


Figure2: QA PDCA cycle alignment with product life cycle

- **Technology for data-driven improvements:** we incorporate learner data (surveys, assessment performance, platform analytics, and moderation feedback) into QA evaluations. To support this process, we use [Tableau](#), a data visualisation and business intelligence software that integrates multiple data sources to create dashboards and visual reports. By combining qualitative and quantitative insights, we ensure continuous, evidence-based and learner-centred improvements.

Transferability

The QA cycle developed by the TU Delft LfLC offers a tested framework that other universities can use as a starting point for building their own QA systems. Its structured PDCA cycle supported by explicit standards and indicators is generic enough to be adapted to different educational contexts. Any institution seeking to assure the quality of its ULLL provision can, in principle, adopt these building blocks.

However, the degree of transferability depends strongly on the institutional governance and organisation. At TU Delft, ULLL is coordinated through a dedicated centre with its own QA officers and QA Board, a clear mandate, and structured collaboration with faculties. The LfL C set-up is shown in *Figure 3*.

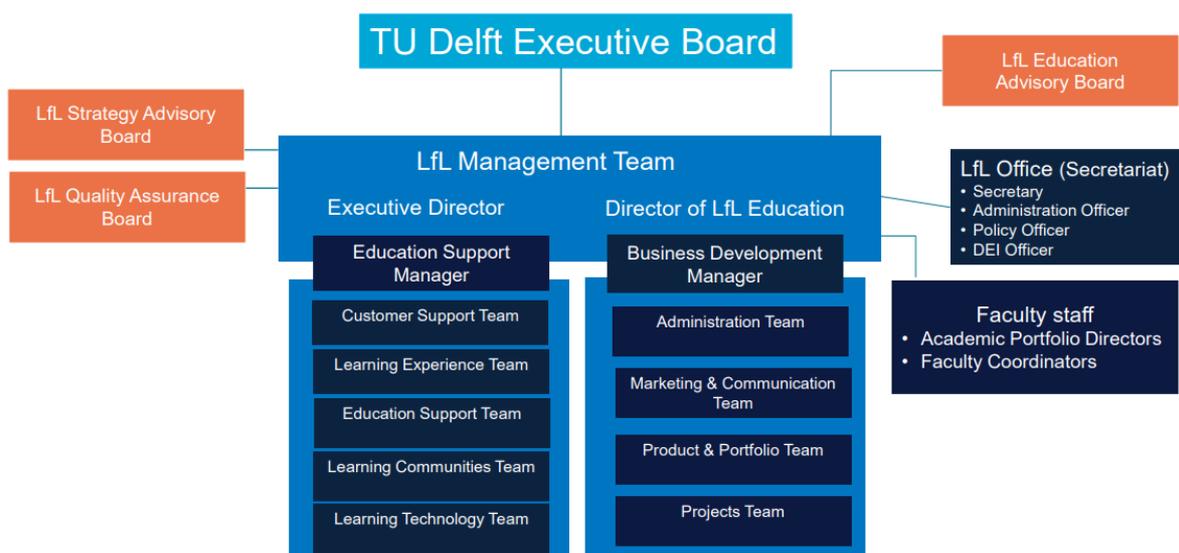


Figure 3: LfL governance structure

This organisational set-up allows us to apply the QA processes and to continuously monitor the entire LLL offer across the university. In other words, QA is not left to individual or faculty initiatives but is systematically embedded in our institute.

Transferable elements

- **Quality standards and indicators:** these can be used by most HEIs as a tested reference to develop their own standards and indicators.
- **PDCA cycle:** while the cyclical structure is widely recognised and can be replicated in other institutions, the embedded QA steps and several of the specific tools present a novel approach that can be adopted or tailored to the needs of every institution.

Challenges

- In universities where ULLL is largely faculty-driven, transferability becomes more challenging. Without a central unit or dedicated QA capacity, the systematic embedding and continuous monitoring of QA processes is difficult to sustain. Faculties may apply different approaches, leading to an inconsistency in QA.
- Our model depends on cross-functional teams (content experts, learning developers, QA officers, marketers). Not all institutions will have such organisational capacity or resources.

Our LLL QA cycle is therefore widely transferable in terms of tools, standards, and methodologies as a practical reference model; however, successful adoption requires governance structures with a central unit supporting both education delivery and QA. Where such structures are absent, organisational adjustments may be needed, though the core principles still apply.

Relevance

Most existing QA systems in higher education are tailored to the needs of degree programmes and grounded on the ESG¹¹. They focus on external accreditation cycles, compliance, and faculty-based evaluation processes. While these mechanisms work well for traditional education, they do not fit the specific nature of ULLL. ULLL requires flexibility to learners' needs and faculties expertise and availability, adaptation to labour market demands, and attention to a wide diversity of products, and delivery formats.

The QA cycle developed at TU Delft LfL is tailored to ULLL and supports modular, short, and learner-centred educational products such as MOOCs, online courses, workshops, and summer schools, which operate on faster lifecycles and require continuous improvement based on learner feedback and societal needs.

By embedding the PDCA cycle in the QA of our LfL products, and by applying clear quality standards and indicators across design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation, the model ensures that ULLL provision is systematically assured and enhanced.

In this way, our QA cycle goes beyond traditional approaches by offering a fit-for-purpose model that directly responds to the reality of ULLL, positioning it as a relevant and robust framework for other institutions seeking to professionalise their LLL education.

Impact

To assess the impact of the new QA Framework and QA processes reflecting the PDCA cycle, a baseline survey was conducted in mid-2022, distributed across the central organisation. This revealed a moderately positive perception of the overall quality culture; however, it also highlighted shortcomings such as the absence of specific metrics and unclear QA processes¹². Three years later, in mid-2025, the survey was repeated using the same set of questions and a comparable respondent pool. The results demonstrated a clear positive impact of QA efforts on the whole organisation and on individuals.

Organisational perspective

QA efforts have led to:

- Improved perception of overall quality culture
- Greater clarity in QA processes and awareness of quality indicators

Notably, 91% of respondents rated the overall quality culture as “excellent or good,” up from 80% in 2022. The most significant improvement was a 34% rise in staff confidence that quality assurance processes are clear and robust. A major contribution to this result was the establishment of clear quality metrics: in 2022, 80% of respondents were undecided or disagreed that such metrics existed; by 2025, this figure dropped to 24%.

¹¹ [ESG_2015.pdf](#)

¹² Paraluppi, C., Mancebo May, P., Pellikaan, C. & Wahls, N. (2023) Enhancing quality assurance in continuing education through an organisational cultural change. *European Journal of University Lifelong Learning*, 7(2), pp. 89-96. © eucen, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.53807/0702ADf6>

Individual perspective

Enhancing the QA of ULLL products has also positively influenced individual staff behaviour, resulting in:

- increased sense of ownership for the quality of their work
- greater commitment towards continuous improvement

In 2025, 81.8% of respondents reported feeling personally accountable for the quality of their work, compared to 60% in 2022. Similarly, 93.9% indicated they actively take initiatives towards continuous improvement. These trends confirm a positive cultural shift that directly reflects in our PDCA processes underpinning product design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation. These positive individual behaviours ensure that our quality culture is lived in practice and reflected in our educational products.

Impact on learners, while broadening access

In alignment with our vision on [Diversity and Inclusion](#), every course is developed and reviewed against accessibility guidelines. While before 2023 no former guidelines were in place, since 2024, the QA team has begun to systematically review courses following accessibility principles. This provided insights on the accessibility of 49 online courses, of which 83% were either fully or mostly accessible. Through this process, we ensure that learning materials can be used by diverse audiences worldwide.

Sustainability and strategic alignment

In 2021, a new governance structure embedded the LfL C as an independent department reporting directly to the Executive Board, thus guaranteeing structural financial resources and dedicated QA capacity. Beyond institutional embedding, QA activities are supported through (national) funding initiatives such as the [Lifelong Learning Catalyst initiative within the Dutch National Growth Fund](#). Such additional funds have guaranteed continuous refinement of QA processes, leading to an improved offer and positioning us as a trusted provider of ULLL.

In the TU Delft Strategic Agenda 2024–2030, LLL is defined as a core educational task, rooted in the university's mission to educate professionals throughout their careers. In line with this, LfL-C offers professionals learning opportunities with a quality level comparable to campus education. A solid QA framework is therefore indispensable to ensure high educational and professional standards¹³, promote the Delft Signature, and generate positive impact on both campus education and lecturers.

¹³ [TU Delft Lifelong Learning Strategy](#)

Thematic Area IV: Impact and Engagement

Details

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Description

What makes your ULLL model innovative or a good model?

We live in a rapidly changing era shaped by digital transformation, environmental crises, and social inequalities. These challenges are deeply interconnected and affect societies in complex and uneven ways. Addressing them requires more than conventional education systems; it calls for learning models that foster critical reflection, collaboration, and real-world problem-solving.

In this context, DİBA – *Academy of Youngsters Who Care for the World* offers a holistic LLL model that goes beyond the acquisition of competencies or vocational skills and fosters the realisation of a just and sustainable transition for all by supporting the sustainable development solutions. It aims to transform how individuals relate to themselves, others, and society through the lens of social impact by creating and activating a social entrepreneurship ecosystem. In addition to cognitive learning, the programme adopts an innovative approach that places emotional awareness, critical thinking, design thinking, social entrepreneurship, and empathy at its core.

One of the most innovative aspects of the model is its integration of cognitive, emotional, and social learning. In addition to academic knowledge, the programme emphasises emotional awareness, empathy, ethical reflection, design thinking, and critical thinking. This creates learners who are not only competent but also socially conscious and capable of initiating change.

The model also uses experiential and participatory learning methods as a core principle. Through workshops, group work, case studies, mentoring, reflective writing, and dialogue-based learning, participants become active producers of knowledge rather than passive recipients. This leads to deeper engagement and long-term transformation.

Another innovative feature is DİBA's strong connection between academia, the private sector, and civil society. Participants gain access to university-based theoretical knowledge while also learning from practitioners, entrepreneurs, and corporate partners. This integrated ecosystem enables learners to understand both social needs and market realities.

The programme is structured in two progressive stages. The first stage develops sustainability awareness, SDG literacy, and 21st-century skills. The second stage supports those who wish to pursue social entrepreneurship through mentoring, project development, and ecosystem access. This flexible, multi-stage structure allows participants to progress according to their motivation and capacity while producing concrete social impact at every phase.

Its multi-stage structure allows participants to decide whether to continue or complete the programme based on their motivation and performance. Each stage produces tangible outputs, particularly in project development, and contributes to building a tightly connected social entrepreneurship ecosystem. By the end of each phase, a qualified participant group emerges that can serve as a valuable human resource for both the social sector and the business world.

Finally, the programme's free-of-charge access ensures inclusion and equal opportunity, making it a socially responsible and scalable ULLL model.

How does your model impact learners, industry, and the community?

The DIBA project consists of five complementary stages: recruiting participants, digital learning, interactive workshops, mentoring and project implementation. First, applications were collected and then participants were recruited after an initial screening process. In the digital learning stage, initially a learning management system (LMS) was developed in order to deliver three different education programmes and to provide related educational resources besides the assessment and communication tools. The asynchronous programmes were on Management and Leadership for Young Entrepreneurs, Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development Goals, which were designed to address the lack of knowledge and competences of the participants. The next phase was interactive workshops which included workshop preparation and implementation phases. In this phase, additionally, the participants had the opportunity to learn from the experiences of different entrepreneurs invited to the programme. Finally, the participants worked in groups with their mentors to develop projects for sustainable solutions that create social impact.

At the learner level, DIBA creates strong personal and professional transformation. The DIBA Project creates a strong personal and social impact on learners. Participants gain significant competencies in empathy, nonviolent communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and social responsibility. Bringing together individuals from diverse disciplines enables them to combine their knowledge and experiences, leading to the development of innovative solutions and intervention methods in the field of social entrepreneurship.

Pre- and post-test results reported in DIBA's evaluation studies show meaningful improvements in participants' understanding of social entrepreneurship, the Sustainable Development Goals, and their communication and leadership skills. The programme has also established an academically grounded and practically applicable methodology for the social entrepreneurship sector.

At the industry level, DIBA contributes to the development of a socially responsible workforce. Corporate partners gain access to young professionals who understand sustainability, innovation, and social impact. This strengthens the link between business and sustainable development and supports the growth of responsible entrepreneurship.

At the community level, participants act as multipliers. Participants transfer the knowledge and awareness they gain to their universities, civil society organisations, and local initiatives. This demonstrates that DIBA functions as a multiplier ULLL model. Through partnerships with private sector and civil society stakeholders, the programme also builds a strong bridge between business and social benefit.

How does your model differ from traditional ULLL approaches?

Learning in DIBA is based on dialogue, reflection, and experience. While traditional LLL approaches tend to focus on knowledge transfer and certification, the DIBA model is based on transformational learning. Instead of one-way teaching, the programme

emphasises mutual learning, the creation of safe spaces, and experience sharing. DİBA aims not only to change what participants know, but also how they think and behave. In this respect, it differs from conventional ULLL programmes by offering a deeper, value-based, and social impact-oriented structure.

Moreover, DİBA is explicitly impact oriented. It is designed to generate social entrepreneurship projects, not just individual learning outcomes. The collaboration between academia, private sector and NGO, namely Boğaziçi University, Kale Holding, and BRM demonstrates a strong multi-stakeholder approach that is rarely found in traditional ULLL programmes.

How transferable is your model?

Thanks to its modular and flexible structure, the DİBA model can be easily adapted to different higher education institutions, age groups, and national contexts. Programme content can be delivered online, face-to-face, or in hybrid formats.

Its transferability is strengthened by its open curriculum structure, its scalability through trainer training programmes, and its methods that can be adapted to different socio-cultural contexts. Potential challenges mainly relate to adapting content to local needs, but these can be effectively managed due to the model's flexibility.

The results of the project also underlined that interactive training, and the transfer of knowledge and experience improved the capacity of the participants required for social entrepreneurship and reduced the barriers effectively for the growth of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. The DİBA project elaborated a new landscape both for leadership, social entrepreneurship and sustainability training by means of different project stages which support the achievement of SDGs.

How is your model integrated into the institution's long-term strategy?

The DİBA Project is aligned with Boğaziçi University's strategic commitment to sustainability, social responsibility, and LLL. It also supports Kale Holding's corporate social responsibility goals and BRM's mission in civil society development.

The DİBA Project positions LLL as a tool for corporate social responsibility and social impact. The DİBA Project aimed to support the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Türkiye while concentrating on the sustainable development solutions in parallel to the strategic plan of the university. It is also designed with long-term goals such as building a network of trainers, maintaining sustainable relationships with alumni communities, and developing new partnerships.

The DİBA project is a good example for sound collaboration between different stakeholders in the social entrepreneurship by academia, private sector and the civil society.

Financial and institutional sustainability is supported through multi-stakeholder partnerships, volunteer engagement, and project-based funding, making DİBA a stable and scalable ULLL model. In this way, DİBA demonstrates how LLL can be embedded into institutional missions while creating lasting social impact.

Details

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Description

Building Green Competencies in Teacher Education: Implementing the UNESCO GEP Green Curriculum to Enhance ULLL

Introduction

This case study presents a ULLL model developed in the Faculty of Education at Erciyes University, Türkiye, designed to prepare mathematics teacher candidates to integrate sustainability, systems thinking and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their teaching practice. The model is anchored in the course *Sustainable Development and Education* and reinforced through *Community Service Practices*, where university students collaborate with local educational institutions.

A distinctive feature of this work is the natural emergence of two different learning contexts shaped by global policy developments. Between 2024 and 2025, UNESCO's Greening Education Partnership (GEP) released two major resources - the *Green Curriculum Guidance Book* and the *Green School Standardisation Guidance Book* - providing structured tools for embedding sustainability, whole-school transformation and green competencies into teacher education.

As a result, the 2024 cohort, working before these publications, relied solely on the 17 SDGs and showed strong conceptual understanding but difficulty translating sustainability into age-appropriate mathematics lesson plans. The 2025 cohort, benefiting from the new guidance, produced structured, competency-aligned lesson plans that they later implemented with gifted learners at BİLSEM.

This policy-driven shift illustrates how global frameworks, when integrated into university programmes, can significantly strengthen teacher candidates' readiness for sustainability-focused education.

Two Cohorts-Two Different Contexts

2024 cohort (Spring 2024/ Year 2): This group developed their SDG-based lesson plans before the publication of the UNESCO GEP guidance. Working only with the 17 SDGs, they showed strong creativity and conceptual understanding but struggled to translate SDG themes into age-appropriate learning outcomes, interdisciplinary mathematics tasks and assessment criteria. Without structured guidance, moving from theory to classroom-ready practice proved challenging.

2025 cohort (Spring 2025/Year 2): With full access to the UNESCO GEP Green Curriculum and Green School guidance, this cohort produced structured, competency-aligned, and pedagogically coherent lesson plans. Their work demonstrated clear learning progressions, systems-thinking integration and strong assessment design. They also

implemented their lessons with gifted learners at BİLSEM, generating measurable community impact and authentic teaching experience.

Consistency with UNESCO 2018, COP28, and GESS Dubai 2024 Findings

Before teaching the 2024 cohort, global evidence had already identified a key challenge: teachers understood climate change and the SDGs but lacked guidance on classroom integration. UNESCO's 2018 Monitoring Reports, COP28 discussions and exchanges at GESS Dubai 2024 all emphasised this "implementation gap." This was reflected in the 2024 cohort, who needed substantial support to convert SDG concepts into age-appropriate lesson plans.

Innovation: A Model Shaped by Policy, Practice, and Global Frameworks

A naturally emerging comparative structure

A natural comparative structure emerged because the UNESCO GEP guidance was published after the 2024 cohort completed the course.

2024 cohort: Worked only with SDGs and struggled to convert concepts into structured, age-appropriate mathematics lessons.

2025 cohort: Used the newly available UNESCO GEP guidance, producing coherent, competency-aligned, and pedagogically consistent outputs.

This contrast clearly shows how global frameworks strengthen pedagogical capacity.

UNESCO GEP as a foundation for transformative learning

Integrating the UNESCO Greening Education Partnership (GEP) into mathematics teacher education gave the course a transformative structure. With access to the Green Curriculum and Green School Guidance Books, the 2025 cohort designed sustainability-aligned lessons, embedded SDG targets into mathematical tasks, incorporated cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural domains, applied systems thinking, and demonstrated sustainability competencies in real teaching settings.

A structured multi-step ULLL learning cycle

The initiative follows a concise design–practice–reflection cycle:

1. understanding SDGs,
2. analysing GEP guidance,
3. designing SDG-aligned lessons,
4. implementing them at BİLSEM,
5. documenting responses,
6. refining strategies.

This strengthens learners' ability to bridge theory and practice.

Innovative engagement with gifted learners

Through the BİLSEM partnership, university students engaged gifted learners in climate modelling, SDG-linked data tasks, resource-optimisation scenarios and systems-thinking activities, linking sustainability competencies with high-level cognitive skills.

Global outreach through GESS Dubai 2024

Presenting the 2024 cohort's SDG booklet at GESS Dubai provided early international visibility and sparked dialogue on the need for structured sustainability resources, reinforcing the importance of UNESCO GEP guidance that strengthened the 2025 cohort's work.

Impact: Evidence Across Learners, Institutions, and Communities

Impact on adult learners (Education Faculty students)

Clear differences between the 2024 and 2025 cohorts show the model's strong effect on teacher candidates' skills and confidence.

2024 cohort:

- Understood SDGs conceptually but struggled to embed them in mathematics lessons.
- Produced creative but structurally inconsistent plans.
- Reflected the global “awareness–implementation gap” highlighted in UNESCO reports and COP28 discussions.

2025 cohort:

With UNESCO GEP guidance, students developed:

- structured, competency-aligned lesson plans,
- coherent learning progressions,
- strong mathematics–SDG links,
- effective assessment strategies for green skills,
- higher instructional confidence supported by BİLSEM teaching practice.

Overall, the shift demonstrates how structured international frameworks substantially improve preparedness for sustainability-focused pedagogy.

Impact on gifted middle-school learners (BİLSEM)

The 2025 cohort's lessons at BİLSEM supported gifted learners in engaging with sustainability through mathematical inquiry, solving real-world problems, analysing SDG-linked data, and strengthening systems-thinking skills. Educator feedback highlighted higher engagement, deeper discussions, and strong enthusiasm for sustainability-based mathematics activities.

Impact on community engagement and partnerships

The initiative strengthened collaboration between the university and local educational institutions, leading to co-designed sustainability materials, joint workshops, and increased community awareness of green curriculum frameworks.

Institutional impact on Erciyes University

The model advanced institutional sustainability efforts by embedding green competencies into teacher-education courses, aligning programmes with UNESCO GEP and national priorities, increasing visibility through COP28 and GESS Dubai, and encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration across the university.

ULLL Case Study Approaches

Integrating theory with authentic practice

The model connects university-level sustainability education with real classroom practice through community engagement and iterative design cycles, ensuring that adult learners understand sustainability concepts and apply them effectively.

Aligning with international sustainability frameworks

Grounding the learning process in UNESCO GEP guidance enables the model to move beyond national curriculum boundaries. Teacher candidates work with globally recognised sustainability competencies and develop practices aligned with international standards.

Capturing learning across two policy contexts

The existence of two cohorts - before and after the publication of UNESCO GEP guidance - offers insight into how adult learners respond to structured sustainability frameworks. This contrast illustrates how global policy tools enhance clarity, confidence, and lesson quality.

Promoting active, applied, and reflective learning

The model requires learners to apply sustainability knowledge by designing SDG- and GEP-aligned lesson plans, teaching them at BİLSEM, evaluating learner responses, and refining their work based on evidence. This develops reflective practitioners who bridge sustainability theory and classroom application.

Transferability to Other Higher Education Institutions

The model is highly transferable due to its modular structure, use of publicly accessible resources, and adaptability across different institutional and disciplinary contexts.

Universal framework compatibility

Any higher education institution can adopt the model through globally available documents such as the SDGs, UNESCO GEP Green Curriculum and Green School guidance, or national green curriculum frameworks. These common references support implementation across diverse systems.

Adaptability across disciplines

Originally developed in mathematics teacher education, the model can be applied to Science Education, Social Sciences, Primary Education, Engineering, and broader STEM fields, thanks to its competency-based and interdisciplinary design.

Flexible community partnerships

Universities can replicate the community engagement component by collaborating with local schools, gifted education centres, NGOs, or environmental organisations, enabling context-responsive implementation.

Minimal financial requirements

The model requires no new infrastructure and is built on existing courses, open-access UNESCO resources, and community-based teaching opportunities.

Transferability with contextual nuance

While variations in local resources or faculty expertise may pose challenges, the core framework remains highly adaptable and can be tailored to institutional needs.

Sustainability and Integration into Institutional Strategy

Long-term embedding

The initiative is anchored in two core undergraduate courses at Erciyes University - Sustainable Development and Education and Community Service Practices - ensuring annual, long-term implementation through both theoretical and applied learning.

Alignment with institutional and national strategies

The model aligns with sustainability priorities at institutional, national, and international levels by supporting Erciyes University's community-engaged teacher-education mission, Türkiye's national sustainability agenda, and the UNESCO GEP vision for greening education systems.

Financial sustainability

Built on existing courses, open-access UNESCO GEP resources, and community partnerships, the model requires no additional infrastructure, ensuring full financial sustainability.

Future directions

Planned developments include expanding the model to other departments, integrating digital tools such as VR and AI for SDG-based lesson design, creating a digital repository of student lesson plans, and strengthening partnerships with regional schools and public institutions.

Conclusion

This ULLL model demonstrates how higher education can support societal transformation by preparing future teachers to integrate sustainability into mathematics and interdisciplinary education using internationally recognised frameworks. The natural contrast between the 2024 and 2025 cohorts clearly shows the transformative impact of UNESCO GEP guidance on pedagogical competence. Implementation at BİLSEM further highlights the model's community engagement and real-world relevance.

Overall, the initiative is innovative, impactful, transferable, and sustainable, fully aligning with the vision and criteria of the SAMUELE ULLL Award.

Details

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Description

The ULB Lifelong Learning launches an Impulse fund to Strengthen University Societal Engagement and Innovation

Context and Rationale

At the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), ULLL is a long-standing institutional mission, embedded in the university's commitment to social responsibility, academic openness, and the sharing of knowledge beyond traditional academic boundaries. Each year, ULB delivers continuing education through four thematic LLL centres, reaching more than 5,000 adult learners, including professionals seeking to upskill, jobseekers, and individuals in career transitions.

Unlike many European universities, ULB's LLL model is almost entirely self-financed through tuition fees and external project funding. While this model has encouraged strong entrepreneurial initiative and responsiveness to societal needs, it has also revealed structural limitations. Innovative or socially oriented programmes with high institutional or societal value are not always financially viable in their early stages. At the same time, rising operational costs, increasing learner expectations in terms of digital services, flexibility and support), and growing competition in the LLL market have further reduced the space for experimentation and innovation.

In response to these challenges and recognising the need for an institutional and organisational solution, ULB launched in 2025 an Impulse Fund for Lifelong Learning. Designed as a strategic internal funding mechanism to support the incubation of innovative, socially engaged, and institutionally relevant LLL initiatives. It represents a structural shift in governance and strategic steering: instead of evaluating programmes solely on short-term financial balance, ULB explicitly recognises the long-term strategic and societal contribution of ULLL.

Spirit and Objectives of the Impulse Fund

The Impulse Fund was conceived as a policy and governance instrument, not merely a financial tool. Its guiding principles are the following:

- *Societal engagement*: The fund supports programmes that address major societal challenges (digital ethics, sustainability, health, inclusion, democratic citizenship).
- *Institutional relevance*: Funded projects must align with ULB's strategic priorities and cross-cutting missions, reinforcing the university's role as a socially engaged institution.
- *Innovation and incubation*: The Impulse Fund enables experimentation and incubation by supporting the early stages of programme development. It creates

space for pedagogical innovation, including techno-pedagogical approaches, microcredentials, blended learning formats and interdisciplinary cooperation.

- *Equity and access*: The fund supports more inclusive access to LLL for diverse audiences including ULB's own administrative staff and academics as well as learners far from education or employment.
- *Sustainability*: The fund is designed as a catalyst, not a permanent subsidy. With the expectation that supported programmes become financially viable over time.

The main objective of the fund is to make possible what would otherwise not emerge under a strictly market-driven LLL model.

Organisation and Governance

The Impulse Fund is provided through an annual call for projects and managed centrally by the ULB Continuing Education Service. This ensures coherence, transparency, and alignment with institutional strategy.

The fund is established as a recurrent annual mechanism with a fixed budget of €120,000 (2025), distributed equally across the four LLL centres.

Eligible expenses: primarily cover human resources costs related to the design, coordination and launch of new programmes, in particular temporary staff engaged for a fixed duration. For each project, funding is capped at €30,000 per LLL centre, corresponding to a maximum of 0.3 FTE per person, and may also include limited operational costs directly linked to programme development.

Selection process:

- LLL Centres submit project-based applications using a standardised template.
- Each application includes a pedagogical description, institutional and societal relevance, and a detailed budget.
- Applications are reviewed and approved by the Continuing Education Council, ensuring collegial decision-making and institutional oversight.

Time-limited funding: funds must be committed within the calendar year; continuation beyond the funded period must rely on the programme's own revenues or external funding.

This governance model balances operator autonomy with institutional coordination, avoiding internal competition while ensuring strategic coherence.

Supported Initiatives in 2025

In its first year of implementation, the Impulse Fund supported a diverse portfolio of initiatives illustrating the breadth and impact of ULLL at ULB.

a) Ethics of Digital Technologies and Artificial Intelligence (University Certificate)

This interdisciplinary certificate addresses the ethical, legal, and societal implications of digital technologies and AI. Targeting professionals from public administrations, civil society, culture, education, and industry, the programme equips learners with critical frameworks to design responsible digital practices.

The Impulse Fund enabled:

- Pedagogical engineering and coordination of an interdisciplinary teaching team.
- The development of case-based learning grounded in real professional contexts.

- The opening of selected modules to the ULB community, reinforcing internal capacity building.

This programme strongly contributes to ULB's societal mission by fostering ethical reflection on technological transformation.

b) Data Science Applied to Health and Life Sciences (University Certificate)

This certificate responds to the growing demand for data competencies in health and biomedical fields. It targets researchers, professionals in reconversion, and jobseekers, combining academic expertise with applied projects and industry exposure.

Thanks to the Impulse Fund, the programme could:

- Be launched with free access for the first cohort, lowering financial barriers.
- Integrate blended learning formats and supervised applied projects.
- Act as a bridge between academic research, professional practice, and employability.

c) REDCap Microcredential (Research Data Management)

This microcredential trains learners in the use of REDCap, an international standard for secure research data collection. It addresses doctoral candidates, researchers, and hospital staff.

The fund supported:

- The transformation of internal expertise into a certified microcredential.
- The professionalisation of research support skills.
- Institutional harmonisation of data management practices.

d) Sustainability Microcredential

Focused on sustainable development, this microcredential is open to ULB staff and external learners without formal entry requirements. It directly supports the university's environmental and social commitments.

The Impulse Fund enabled:

- The creation of an accessible, modular programme.
- The integration of sustainability literacy across disciplines.
- Free access for ULB staff, strengthening internal capacity for transition.

Innovation Compared to Traditional ULLL Approaches

The Impulse Fund departs from traditional LLL funding models in several ways:

- From market logic to mission-driven logic: programmes are evaluated not only on profitability but on societal and institutional impact.
- From individual initiatives to portfolio thinking: the fund supports a coherent ecosystem of ULLL innovation rather than isolated projects.
- From stable formats to experimentation: microcredentials, interdisciplinary certificates, and blended formats are explicitly encouraged.
- From short-term balance to long-term value creation: financial sustainability is expected, but not immediate.

Through this approach, LLL is positioned as a strategic academic mission, not a peripheral or purely commercial activity.

Impact on Learners, Institution, and Society

For learners, the fund has:

- Expanded access to high-quality LLL, including free or reduced-cost programmes.
- Increased the relevance of training to labour market needs and societal challenges.
- Strengthened recognition of skills through certificates and microcredentials.

For the institution, it has:

- Reinforced interdisciplinary collaboration across faculties.
- Accelerated pedagogical innovation transferable to formal education.
- Enhanced ULB's visibility as a socially engaged university.

For society, the supported programmes contribute to:

- Ethical and responsible digital transformation.
- Sustainability awareness and action.
- Workforce upskilling in key sectors such as health, data, and public administration.

Transferability and Sustainability

The Impulse Fund model is highly transferable to other European universities. Its key transferable elements include:

- A modest but stable internal funding envelope.
- Clear eligibility criteria linked to societal and institutional priorities.
- Central coordination combined with decentralised implementation.
- Time-limited funding focused on incubation, not permanent subsidy.

The model demonstrates that even limited internal funding can have a strong leverage effect when strategically deployed.

In terms of sustainability, the fund is fully integrated into ULB's long-term vision for LLL. Supported programmes are expected to become self-sustaining or externally funded, while the fund itself is envisaged as a permanent strategic tool, subject to periodic evaluation and adjustment.

Conclusion

The ULB Lifelong Learning Impulse Fund illustrates how universities can actively shape the future of ULLL by aligning their financial mechanisms with societal missions and academic values. By supporting innovation, inclusion, and engagement, the fund strengthens the role of LLL as a cornerstone of the university's contribution to society.

Beyond the ULB context, this initiative provides a concrete, transferable and policy-relevant model for strengthening LLL across Europe, illustrating how strategic internal funding can enable universities to respond to social needs while sustaining educational innovation over the long term.

Details

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Description

The Community Education and Development course in SETU is an access programme for adults to Third Level Education. First established through Access 2000 funding to reach and empower marginalised women experiencing social, financial, geographic and educational disadvantage using an outreach model, deliberately reaching out to and including those most removed from education.

Students can progress from a Special Purpose Award to Level 6, 7 and 8 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications and achieve a qualification in Community Education and Development and become professional Community Workers.

Using Freirean Critical Pedagogy and rooted in the values of collectively, community empowerment, participation, social Justice and sustainable development, human rights and equality. The approach is fundamentally about impact – the transformational impact on the learner and within communities.

Our learner groups experience intersectional barriers to education and community life. Learner groups are diverse including Travellers, people in recovery from addiction, refugees, asylum seekers, lone parents and those living in socio economic disadvantage experiencing a range of psychological, social, political, financial and social barriers. Learners are often volunteering in their community but do not have the qualifications needed to access paid work or the opportunity to access accredited training.

It is run by two programme coordinators within the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, linking university opportunities into communities and valuing the lived experience and local community knowledge in the Higher Education setting of SETU.

We identify learners for inclusion through engagement and outreach to our network of collaborations in the Community with various groups.

Using Freire's radical and dialogical approach, together, with our learners we create a rich environment of shared learning – cultivating a space where experiences are shared, where learners learn to think critically and become reflective in their practice. The community education methodology involves a facilitative approach, a value on lived experience, collective care and collaborative learning. This results in deep engagement and a meaningful educational experience.

The programme is flexible and adaptable, for example, Learners are consulted in decision-making processes around for example times, dates and locations of classes. Assessments are creative and often co-created with students.

950 learners have accessed the course, many moving from volunteer work into paid positions in different settings, including both SETU programme coordinators, Irish

Traveller Movement, Irish Men's Sheds founder, addiction and recovery services, Community Education Facilitators and tutors, Community Employment Supervisors, Family Resource Centre Managers and workers, Community Development Workers, Youth Work, supports for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Homeless Services, Social Inclusion Programmes. The family members of each of these learners would have been impacted through the access to paid work and personal development.

Community work/ community development is a unique and distinct professional practice which comprises both task and process. This task and overall goal is social change - to achieve equality, social justice and human rights. The process is the application of the application of the principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making. The cascading effect of this programme ripples through communities in the region creating real social change and impact.

With newly qualified community workers across the region, applying their new knowledge and skills, communities are experiencing stronger support systems, greater social inclusion and more opportunities for people to connect and participate. This ongoing growth in expertise and reflective practice results in a sector that is skilled and informed and keeps the fundamental work of inclusion on the agenda when in a time of local geopolitical uncertainty.

A learner centred approach promotes autonomy, many of our learners had poor experiences of education.

Not industry led, this model is equity led. We take the extra step into communities and deliver outreach programmes in local settings rather than just inviting people to apply.

We build relationships with learners and their communities and get to know them – their challenges, needs and strengths. As the students progress through their studies, they build the personal and social capacity to integrate into the university setting – with a sense of belonging!

With a strong focus on rights and equality, the course and approach have a clear anti-poverty focus.

This approach shifts the power dynamic by challenging traditional mainstream structures and repositioning communities as co-creators of knowledge, valuing the lived experience, the learner voice and community knowledge in a Higher Education setting. The model is now firmly embedded in SETU, as community partners have joined the network of collaborators to sustain this model for 25 years in SETU.

This model is replicable, scalable and sustainable due to the investment from community groups and organisations and role the role they play in sustaining the programme. The model has proven effective in urban and rural settings and with various groups. These relationships must be established and nurtured over time.

A consistent commitment to process and advocacy for the values of the work – collectivity, empowerment, social justice and sustainable development, human rights and equality is required.

Learner group numbers are smaller than traditional approaches with the goal being equity, social change and widening participation rather than prioritising quantifiable outcomes and high volumes moving through a system.

Relational pedagogy is critical. Student retention and engagement is sustained through building trust and understanding with the learner. Working with learners who have had

consistent adverse experiences, trauma and exclusion requires tutors to have a specific skill set and commitment.

Support within the HE setting is required and a value on working in innovative ways that sit outside of traditional approaches to education. Acknowledging and responding to the fact that this work requires different resourcing than traditional approaches.

Connecting for Impact SETU Lifelong Learning Strategy 2025 – 2028

The strategy, entitled 'Connecting for Impact in Lifelong Learning', aims to embed a culture of LLL across the southeast and beyond.

It maintains a core belief in the potential of each person and the role that meaningful education plays in transforming lives and communities.

An overview of the Strategic Objectives:

1. Lifelong Learning Portfolio – aligned to SETU SO 4, 5, 6
2. Lifelong Learning Student Experience – aligned to SETU SO 8
3. Lifelong Learning Engagement – aligned to SETU SO 7,8
4. Lifelong Learning Research and Scholarship – aligned to SETU SO 1, 2, 3
5. Lifelong Learning supporting Sustainable Development – Aligned to SETU SO 9

This Community Education model has existed within SETU for 25 years. It has remained sustainable due to the engagement and support of community organisations. For example, the current Special Purpose Award is running in a Ramsgrange, Co.Wexford a rural community in Co. Wexford. Located within a Family Resource Centre (FRC) where a room is provided and learners for the programme are identified in collaboration with the FRC team. Funding for programme fees has been secured through engaging with 2 community-based sources the local Education and Training Board (WWETB).

Details

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Description

Cooperation as a Mechanism for the Development of University Micro-credentials in Spain: The Role of RUEPEP and CRUE

Introduction

Micro-credentials have emerged in recent years as a key policy instrument for advancing LLL, employability, and flexible learning pathways within higher education systems. At European level, their development has been driven by the Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for LLL and employability, which establishes a common conceptual and operational framework for their design, quality assurance, and recognition. Within this context, national higher education systems are expected to align their regulatory frameworks, institutional practices, and quality assurance mechanisms with this emerging European ecosystem.

Spain represents a particularly relevant case for the study of micro-credentials, due to the simultaneous emergence of a regulatory framework, a coordinated university response, and a substantial public funding programme. In 2021, Royal Decree 822/2021 introduced the first explicit reference to micro-credentials in Spanish higher education legislation. This was followed by the rapid mobilisation of two key national bodies: the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE) and the Spanish Network for Lifelong Learning in Higher Education (RUEPEP).

This article analyses how cooperation between CRUE and RUEPEP has functioned as a mechanism for the development of micro-credentials in Spain. It examines the processes through which a shared conceptual framework, quality guidelines, and implementation tools have been constructed, and how these processes have been reinforced by the national Microcreds funding programme. The Spanish case illustrates how network-based governance can reduce institutional fragmentation and support the alignment of national practice with European policy objectives.

Micro-credentials as a policy instrument in European higher education

The European approach to micro-credentials defines them as certified learning outcomes of short learning experiences that are assessed, quality assured, and transparent in terms of level, workload, and learning outcomes. Unlike informal certificates or badges, higher education micro-credentials are intended to be fully integrated into national qualifications frameworks, quality assurance systems, and digital credential infrastructures.

Three core characteristics distinguish micro-credentials from other forms of short-learning experiences of continuing education:

- Learning outcomes and assessment, ensuring that credentials certify verifiable competences.
- Level referencing, typically through the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), enabling comparability and portability.
- Quality assurance, either through internal or external mechanisms aligned with national higher education quality frameworks.

In addition, the European Recommendation highlights other desirable features, including labour-market relevance, digital portability, learner ownership, and stackability toward larger qualifications. These elements position micro-credentials not as marginal or supplementary products, but as building blocks within a coherent LLL ecosystem.

However, translating this European framework into national practice requires significant institutional coordination. In systems such as Spain's, where universities enjoy a high degree of autonomy and where LLL has historically been weakly regulated, there is a risk of fragmentation, duplication, and loss of public trust. This risk has made collective governance mechanisms particularly important.

RUEPEP as a coordinating actor in ULLL

RUEPEP is a national network comprising more than sixty Spanish universities, including all public institutions and most major private universities. For over twenty-five years, it has served as the main platform for collaboration, professional exchange, and policy development in the field of ULLL.

When micro-credentials began to attract political and institutional attention in 2021–2022, RUEPEP was uniquely positioned to respond. Unlike individual universities.

In early 2022, RUEPEP established a dedicated working group on micro-credentials. Its initial objective was to clarify the concept and distinguish it from existing continuing education offerings. The group identified that, although short courses and certificates had long existed in Spanish universities, they rarely met the three defining criteria of micro-credentials: explicit learning outcomes, formal level referencing, and systematic quality assurance.

This diagnostic phase led to a shared understanding that micro-credentials could represent both an opportunity and a risk. On the one hand, they could expand universities' LLL mission, enhance engagement with employers, and support reskilling and upskilling. On the other hand, if universities failed to act collectively, the field could be captured by unregulated private providers, weakening the public role of higher education.

From network initiative to national coordination: the role of CRUE

The strategic importance of micro-credentials led RUEPEP to seek closer cooperation with CRUE, which represents the entire Spanish university system in its dialogue with government. In late 2022, a joint CRUE–RUEPEP working group was established, with the participation of the Ministry of Universities.

This tripartite configuration proved critical. It connected operational expertise (RUEPEP), institutional authority (CRUE), and regulatory capacity (the Ministry). The group's first major outcome was the Córdoba Declaration on Micro-credentials, which articulated ten core principles for their development in Spanish universities. These principles emphasised quality, transparency, European alignment, and public responsibility.

More significantly, in March 2024 the group published the Guidelines for the Design and Accreditation of University Micro-credentials, commonly known as the "Green Book". This

document provided a detailed framework covering learning outcomes, workload, EQF level referencing, assessment, quality assurance, and institutional governance. It effectively translated the European Council Recommendation into operational criteria for Spanish universities and quality agencies.

The Green Book has since functioned as a de facto national standard. Both the Ministry of Universities and regional quality assurance agencies have used it as a reference, thereby ensuring system-wide coherence.

The Microcreds programme and cooperative implementation

The governance framework developed by CRUE and RUEPEP was reinforced by the launch of the Microcreds programme in June 2023. Funded through Spain's Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan, the programme allocates €60 million to public universities with the objective of issuing over 60,000 micro-credentials across at least 1,000 learning activities.

The design of Microcreds is particularly noteworthy. Rather than operating as a competitive call for proposals, funding and targets were distributed across universities primarily according to institutional size. However, overall success is assessed collectively: only if the national targets are achieved is the programme considered successful.

This cooperative funding logic has altered institutional behaviour. Universities have strong incentives to share solutions, platforms, and administrative practices, since the failure of some institutions would jeopardise the collective outcome. RUEPEP has served as the main channel for this horizontal coordination, facilitating the exchange of technical, pedagogical, and organisational knowledge.

Such a model contrasts with the dominant competitive logic of higher education funding and illustrates how financial instruments can reinforce collaboration.

Digital credentials and interoperability

A further step in the institutionalisation of micro-credentials was taken in January 2025 with the publication of the Guidelines for Issuing University Micro-credential Digital Credentials, known as the "Blue Book". This document provides detailed recommendations for implementing micro-credentials using the European Digital Credentials for Learning (EDC) infrastructure.

The Blue Book aims to ensure that digital micro-credentials issued by Spanish universities are prepared to be interoperable, verifiable, and aligned with European standards. By promoting a common technical architecture, it addresses a critical risk in the micro-credential ecosystem: the proliferation of incompatible digital formats that undermine portability and trust.

Together, the Green and Blue Books form a comprehensive governance toolkit, covering both pedagogical and technological dimensions.

Challenges and future directions

Despite these advances, several challenges remain. First, the integration of European University Alliances into national micro-credential governance has been limited. Given that many Spanish universities participate in such alliances, this disconnect may hinder cross-border recognition and joint provision.

Second, the place of micro-credentials within the Spanish Qualifications Framework remains underdeveloped. Following the Irish example, CRUE and RUEPEP are exploring mechanisms to enhance their formal visibility and recognition.

Third, substantial variation persists across Europe regarding workload, credit equivalence, and stackability. Without further harmonisation, the portability of micro-credentials will remain constrained.

Finally, the long-term sustainability of funding mechanisms beyond the Microcreds programme remains uncertain. The programme's results, to be assessed in 2026, will be crucial for informing future policy design.

Conclusions

The Spanish experience demonstrates that new learning paradigms, as micro-credentials can be undertaken easily with collaboration and consensus. Through the cooperative action of RUEPEP, CRUE, and the Ministry of Universities, Spain is developing a coherent framework that aligns national practice with European policy while preserving the public mission of universities.

This case illustrates how network-based governance, supported by appropriate funding instruments and technical standards, can enable higher education systems to adapt to new challenges without sacrificing quality, legitimacy, or coherence.

Details

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Description

Regional Ecosystem for Continuous Learning in Southwest Finland

Innovativeness

The innovative approach is based on creating an exceptionally broad ecosystem of 23 educational institutions, public and private organisations to reach stronger alignment in design, delivery and governance of continuous learning in the region. ULLL is intentionally situated in a regional context. Consequently, the ULLL orientation, services provision and strategy and ecosystem development is carried out in regional level, surpassing organisational, sectorial and linguistic barriers.

Innovativeness of the case is based also on the context of application. The approach was designed to address the following key challenges in the region:

- Lack of a comprehensive national and regional strategy for continuous learning.
- Fragmented services and poor coordination among providers.
- Risk of inefficient resource use and unnecessary competition for students.
- Low participation among low-skilled and vulnerable groups.

Simultaneously, dedicated centres for ULLL were dissolved in higher education institutions due to financial cuts, leading to lack of coordination and collegial support for development.

In the new model, ULLL is driven towards a more responsible and future-oriented model. An agreement-based ecosystem covers educational institutions, regional government, municipalities including the regional capital, City of Turku and entrepreneurship organisations in whole Southwest Finland.

Social impact

Outward-facing orientation and collaboration with external stakeholders in ULLL has been facilitated by seminars and workshops with the Foresight Academy of Southwest Finland, and with joint surveys carried out in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce in Turku.

Outreach to adult learners has been carried out with joint marketing and communication model, and by structuring organisational websites to customer segments (individuals interested in upgrading secondary level degrees, professionals and career changers, entrepreneurs, and human resources representatives).

Guidance services in educational institutions and the newly established regional employment services have been structured to target the same customer segments, to enable upskilling and reskilling of the workforce.

Inclusion and integration to domestic and international labour market have been facilitated by the launch of a study voucher by the new regional employment services. Educational institutions have designed new micro-credential study structures that meet the voucher criteria of modular and flexible training provision. Entry to labour market for adults with migrant background is facilitated by language and integration courses in liberal adult education institutions, which enables them to participate in ULLL for further upskilling and reskilling.

Part of social impact is also supporting the competence development of SMEs with continuous learning services. Through cross-sector cooperation, the aim is to strengthen RDI development in the region and, at the same time, enable the growth of the SME sector in particular.

Beyond traditional

Instead of developing singular courses or modules, the new model focuses on a broader, systemic and structural change by employing an ecosystem of actors across sectors and organisations. Actors in liberal adult education, vocational education and training and higher education design services and processes together, with close collaboration with regional government institutions, municipalities and entrepreneurship organisations.

Until now, ULLL in higher education institutions have had mostly project-based development to meet direct training needs. In the new model development targets are rooted in the regional strategies and policy programmes, then assigned to the ecosystem to tackle collectively. The information provided by the South-west Finland Foresight Academy is used to cater for the ecosystem instead of single sectors or organisations. The ULLL is more rooted in the context of application, enabling both horizontal and vertical learner mobility.

Transferability

Based on our experience, facilitating a regional ecosystem for continuous learning, and integrating ULLL in the ecosystem requires at least three stages.

Firstly, leadership and management of the educational institutions should agree on mission and strategy, in collaboration or informed by stakeholders such as enterprise organisations and chambers of commerce. Additionally, regional governments or municipalities in charge of employment services should be integrated to the collaboration. This way the perspectives of upskilling and reskilling as well as both current and future workforce can be combined in the design of services.

Secondly, key actors in the future ecosystem should be actively engaged in 1) orientation of continuous learning, 2) service development and 3) creating and updating the action plan for continuous learning. These activities should be carried out micro-, meso- and macro-level, aligning the organisational, sectoral and ecosystem level actions.

Thirdly, leadership and management and key actors should review feedback and experiences gathered systematically, in order to share the same understanding of the state-of-the-art in continuous learning in the region. Forecasting information should be integrated in these discussions to enable visionary thinking. Dialogue with stakeholders should be systematic in order to gain insights on signals and to update education towards forward-looking job profiles.

Considering these stages, transferability of model can mitigate the following risks in creation and implementation of the ecosystem: 1) lack of leadership and management commitment, 2) lack of communication between management and key actors, along with lack of authorisation to act in alignment between intra and extra organisational level, and 3) lack of long-term commitment and motivation in the consortium members, and poor use of follow-up information.

Integration

Strategy and policy level

The ecosystem framework is based on a systematic and structured work on developing LLL, based on previous adult learning strategy (2009-2015), education strategy 2015+, and latest, the Regional strategies of Southwest Finland (2026-2029) and Regional strategy for smart specialisation 2026-2029). The regional ecosystem for continuous learning is designed to improve societal impact and stakeholder engagement, addressing the mentioned key challenges.

Coverage of HEIs

Regarding ULLL orientation, the framework aims to ensure wide coverage of HEIs for increased working life relevance and facilitation of vitality and employment in the region. Additionally, considering the binary system of HE, both university and university of applied sciences sectors are involved. Furthermore, coverage of the two language communities is ensured by including both Finnish and Swedish speaking institutions.

Embedding ecosystem approach to service design and provision

Foresight data is integrated in planning the ULLL educational provision. Guidance and support services are developed for adult learners. Intraorganisational guidance is developed using a shared customer segmentation and communication model. Extra organisational guidance is ensured by a network of lifelong guidance in the educational institutions (liberal adult education, VET, HE, and the municipal employment services). Horizontal and vertical mobility of learners is supported by the network members.

Renewing strategy and action plan

Integration is facilitated by shared information models for key processes. Annual meetings are organised to review feedback and indicators. Each sector updates their strategy and action plan, with alignment to the regional ecosystem. Ecosystem agreements have been signed between the institutions to ensure sustainability and feasibility.

Regional RDI and university-business-collaboration

Each university collects follow-up data on RDI and continuous learning as part of the annual statistics, reported to the Statistics Finland. Universities receive part of their performance-based funding according to the collected statistics. Each region, like the Southwest Finland, also collects data on regional RDI investments and participation in education. These findings are followed in the regional strategy process, and goals linked to RDI and university-business-collaboration are set based on the findings.

Indicators for social impact measurement

The tangible and measurable results of the framework are e.g. the following:

- Number of shared information models for process development: 5, including ecosystem service model, university-enterprise collaboration, customer segmentation, lifelong guidance, website pages for joint thematic course offerings
- Number of joint educational offerings between universities: 3, including Use of AI, Communication studies and management, and Sustainable development.
- Number of companies involved in the framework activities: 36, including 8 micro, 20 small, 7 medium and 1 large company
- Shared ULLL practices developed: 7, including models for integrating foresight knowledge, regular surveys for companies, education provision service model, guidance and support service model, vision and mission agreement, forum for Swedish-speaking educational institutions, and service model for Swedish-speaking learners.
- Social inclusion practices: 3 models for collaboration with the employment services: 1 forum for knowledge exchange, 1 communication channel for guidance personnel, 1 voucher model for financing participation in ULLL for unemployed learners.

Details

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Description

An Educational and Development Partnership Programme for ULL

1. ULL Innovation and good practice: an outside the box model for stakeholder engagement and societal impact.

University College Cork (UCC) is committed to widening participation and promoting LLL through innovative, learner-centred approaches. UCC's latest *Strategic Plan 2023–2028: Securing Our Future* explicitly incorporates LLL as part of its core vision for teaching, learning and student success. The plan positions LLL as part of a broader commitment to inclusive, flexible and responsive education that supports learners at all stages of life. While the Strategic Plan 2023–2028 sets the high-level direction, UCC's delivery of LLL is supported by structures and programmes in the Centre for Adult Continuing Education (ACE). ACE annually supports thousands of adult learners across introductory to postgraduate levels, using flexible delivery modes and inclusive engagement, further reflecting the institution's commitment to LLL in practice.

Unique Strategies and Methodologies

ACE at UCC's ULLL model offers a distinctive educational experience for part-time adult learners through promoting both lifelong and life-wide learning. ACE operates through a commitment to grassroots and community delivery. ACE's ethos of equality, diversity and inclusion for all is evident in our leading role in developing fair access to higher education (HE) for adult learners. ACE provides access to HE by actively engaging with non-traditional learners and removing barriers to participation, making it an accessible space for marginalised and underrepresented groups. The culture of ACE programmes is to break down these barriers by providing support through community outreach, academic development and pastoral care. Partnership is a central mission of ACE, which we seek to embrace in our relationships both inside the university and in the wider community.

Case study ACE LLL University College Cork: Innovation in practice

The Educational and Development Partnership Programme (EDPP) is a collaborative initiative with the University supporting individuals with lived experience of homelessness, addiction, or mental health challenges in accessing and progressing through third-level education. The University has adopted an innovative approach in this delivery through ACE. It works in partnership to facilitate the transition from supported living and recovery into independent living while offering mentoring and educational guidance to promote successful integration into higher education and ongoing personal and professional development.

Partnership Model

The programme operates through a multi-agency partnership model:

- Health Service Executive (HSE) Drug and Alcohol Services provide referral pathways and ongoing recovery-informed support as well as educational funding streams.
- Focus Ireland supports participants referred from homeless services and TUSLA aftercare services and provides wraparound supports including one to one and study sessions and safe housing through Cork City Council's Bishopsgrove Student Accommodation (via the Cork Foyer Project).
- The Recovery Academy of Ireland provides addiction supports and referral pathways through pre-entry education.
- University College Cork provides enhanced academic supports and progression opportunities within existing accredited programmes.

Programme Rationale, context and the transferrable model

Many individuals engaging with homeless services and addiction recovery services experience significant barriers to education, including disrupted educational histories, literacy challenges, financial constraints, and a lack of confidence in academic settings. The EDPP responds to these barriers by providing a supported, trauma-informed, and partnership-based pathway into further and higher education.

The partnership represents an innovative, “outside-the-box” model for stakeholder engagement and societal impact. By bringing together housing providers, health services, recovery organisations, and University College Cork, the programme creates a collaborative framework that supports individuals. Through this integrated approach, EDPP not only facilitates the transition to independent living and academic success but also demonstrates how the University has leveraged partnerships to address complex social challenges, foster inclusion, and generate measurable societal impact demonstrating its potential as a transferrable model of practice.

2. Learner impact: evidence-based, change focused and driven by a social inclusion agenda.

The Educational and Development Partnership Programme (EDPP) delivers measurable learner impact through evidence-based, change-focused interventions that are guided by a strong social inclusion agenda. It is in the impact of a practice of work built on the guiding principles of youth and community work practice intertwined with LLL principals, it is in the collaboration of practitioners, in the shared vision of empowerment of learners and in the cross organisational collective action. It works from a student-centred focus and a solution focused one that requires the “traditional” systems to change to let these learners in and to allow them to succeed when they get there. It bridges those gaps and models a new way of practice for the University.

Programme Delivery and Supports

Participants enrolled in the EDPP primarily access the Youth and Community Diploma at Irish NFQ Levels 6 and 7 but are also engaging in different programmes such as Social Work and Nursing.

Pre-Entry Engagement and Classroom Readiness

Support begins at the pre-interview stage, with a strong focus on ensuring classroom readiness. This includes structured guidance throughout the application process and the delivery of a tailored campus pre-induction experience. These early interventions are designed to build confidence, familiarity with the university environment, and readiness for academic study.

Ongoing Academic and Pastoral Support

Once students are enrolled on the programme, support continues through sustained collaboration with their key workers. This is complemented by targeted academic guidance and structured pastoral support throughout the duration of their studies. Together, these measures achieve retention, progression and positive learner outcomes.

Outcomes and Impact

By embedding innovation and collaboration across the learner journey, University College Cork demonstrates a sustained commitment to inclusive education and LLL.

The programme offers participants a structured and multifaceted support framework, combining group-based study sessions with individual one-to-one literacy and academic support. Participants also receive personalised educational planning and progression guidance, complemented by access to additional academic and pastoral supports provided by University College Cork (UCC). Recovery-oriented interventions and peer support mechanisms further reinforce both academic engagement and personal development.

Analytically, these combined supports appear to foster not only short-term academic progression but also the development of skills and habits conducive to LLL, including self-directed study, resilience, and collaborative problem-solving. The requirement for participants to make a personal financial contribution towards programme fees further promotes a sense of ownership and commitment, enhancing engagement and contributing to the long-term sustainability of the programme.

Overall, the programme demonstrates a holistic approach by integrating academic, personal, and financial dimensions. Together, these elements support participants' ongoing educational trajectories and their capacity for LLL, as evidenced by the quantitative and qualitative data presented below.

Progression and Outcomes

Progression within the EDPP is carefully managed and sensitive to individual readiness. A number of participants have successfully progressed from diploma-level study to degree programmes. This progression is undertaken on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that academic demands align with participants' recovery, wellbeing, and life stability.

Student Progression & Outcomes Snapshot (2022–2025)

Total Learners Supported: 45+ students across Diplomas, Undergraduate Degrees, and Postgraduate pathways

Programme Participation

- Diploma in Youth & Community Work: 27 students (UCC)
- Other Undergraduate Degrees & Diplomas: Social Work, Social Care, Nursing, Addiction Studies, Business, Hospitality, Childcare, Pharma
- Postgraduate Progression: Master's programmes in the UK and Ireland

Progression & Retention

- Strong year-on-year progression, including:
 - Successful module deferrals with return to study
 - Learners advancing from Diploma → Degree
 - Learners advancing from Degree → Master's
- 100% first-year completion for the 2024 Diploma intake

Higher Education Progression

Learners progressed to:

- University College Cork
- Munster Technological University

- College of Commerce Cork
- Queen's University Belfast
- UK universities (Manchester)

Key disciplines:

- Social Work & Social Care
- Addiction & Substance Misuse Studies
- Counselling & Applied Social Science
- Nursing, Childcare, Pharma Sciences

Employment Outcomes

- Multiple graduates in full-time employment, including:
 - Social Care & Youth Work
 - Hospitality & Tourism (Ireland & abroad)
 - Childcare
 - Pharmaceutical / Laboratory Services (Cork County Council)
- Joint study & employment models successfully achieved (e.g. Fellowship House, Tabor Group)

International & Mobility Outcomes

- Employment abroad (Hospitality & Tourism)
- Postgraduate study in:
 - Manchester
 - Belfast

Key Impact Highlights

- Clear education → employment pathways
- Strong return-to-education outcomes
- Effective academic partnerships (UCC, MTU, College of Commerce Cork)
- Tangible progression into priority social, health, and community sectors

Student A

"I am happy with my accommodation and education plan, I was worrying about the application process, but the other lads told me they hold a class on this and organise people to visit from UCC to help us. I didn't think I would be able but listening to the other lads in the group it all seems possible now".

Student B

"I have been encouraged and supported by the education and development group, when I thought all was lost they came up with a plan to drive me forward, I feel I am lucky to have this support and other students to share their experiences and give me belief that I can do it, my part time job is great, it may not suit everyone but I feel I am giving back some of what I have been given and I want to continue on this path".

Student C

"I was far removed and sceptical at the thought of education, my path was reshaped by mentoring and guidance. They ignited a belief in me that led to a transformative journey, from incarceration and the depths of addiction to pursuing a Level 8 degree. What I once deemed impossible, I now embrace with a Level 7 diploma in progress, all part of the 'life-changing five-year plan".

Sustainability and link to institutional longer-term strategies

The programme is sustainable in the long term, as it is closely aligned with University College Cork's Strategic Plan 2023–2028, which prioritises LLL, widening participation,

and flexible learning pathways. ACE at UCC has recently developed a further education pathway for Diploma in Youth and Community Work students, who constitute the majority of participants in this partnership programme. This pathway enables progression from the Diploma in Youth and Community Work to Year Two of the B.Soc.Sc. (Youth and Community Work) programme at UCC - a long-sought after access route. This new pathway enables students to move into full time third level education after successful completion of the Diploma part- time over two years and subsequently obtain a level 8 honours degree. As more students come through the successful Educational and Development Partnership Programme (EDPP) this increases its profile and funding sustainability. In turn this newly developed pathway integrates these students and embeds them in the wider educational institution and in the university's commitment to LLL.

Details

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Description

UCC Adult Continuing Education – Introduction to Addiction Studies Prison Programme

Adult Continuing Education (ACE) at University College Cork (UCC) has a long-standing commitment to widening participation aligning with the United Nations mission of ‘leaving no one behind’. The Introduction to Addiction Studies Programme (level 6 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications) is an innovative initiative, bringing higher education beyond the walls of the university and into prison. Prisoners are amongst the furthest behind, both in education and society, having many adverse life experiences including trauma, addiction, homelessness and early school leaving. For a significant number of students in prison, this programme is their first positive engagement with education.

The model is innovative in three main ways:

First, it aligns academic content very closely with learner’s lived experiences. The curriculum covers commonly used substances, the distinction between substance use, misuse and dependence, drug pharmacology, biological effects, and the impact of substances on mood, behaviour, cognition and relationships. It also explores social, psychological, and sociological perspectives, as well as community responses, harm reduction, and overdose prevention. This relevance helps learners make sense of their own histories and the environments that shape them, while building critical understanding rather than moralising.

Second, the programme is designed from the outset with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to accommodate a wide range of literacy levels and educational backgrounds. Materials are carefully scaffolded, as concepts are introduced in accessible language and revisited through discussion, examples, and visual support. In addition to more traditional options such as essays and reflective journals, students can choose to complete an Object-Based Learning assessment, creating artwork, posters, or podcasts to demonstrate their understanding of addiction and recovery. This enables learners who might struggle with academic writing, to demonstrate their knowledge, and achieve learning outcomes in alternative, meaningful ways.

Third, the model is firmly rooted in inter-agency collaboration. The programme is delivered by ACE, in partnership with the Health Service Executive (HSE), Cork and Midlands Prison Education Units (Educational Training Board, ETB), Cork City Partnerships, and the Irish Prison Services. HSE specialists, prison teachers, community partners and ACE academic staff co-create and co-deliver content, ensuring it is pedagogically robust, clinically accurate, and appropriate to the prison context. This collaboration has allowed the programme to navigate security, timetabling, and support challenges while maintaining a strong learner-centred ethos.

Taken together, the relevance to lived experience, UDL informed pedagogy, and strong inter-agency partnerships, make this a distinctive ULLL model demonstrating how higher education can engage meaningfully with learners in any context beyond the walls of the university.

Impact on learners and the community

The most important impact of this programme is on learners' confidence, identity, and educational trajectories. Since its launch in 2022, the programme has been delivered as a micro credential in two Irish prisons, and at the Dillon's Cross Project for Wives and Partners of prisoners. The programme has introduced third-level education to over 50 prisoners, and for many, this is the first time they have experienced recognition and success for their educational experience, which helps to shift self-perceptions from 'failed students' to capable university learners. Formal graduation ceremonies are held within the prisons, and wearing caps and gowns, graduates of the programme are presented with their Certificates of Achievement from UCC.

The course content supports personal and community change. Learners gain a deeper understanding of addiction's psychosocial dimensions, and the role of trauma, and the social determinants that shape substance use in their communities. They also gain knowledge on safer use, overdose response and local problem solving around alcohol and drugs. One of the programme's explicit aims is to build 'recovery capital' and community capacity, whereby students are encouraged to think about how they can, after release, contribute to healthier, more informed responses to substance use in their families and communities.

Educationally, the model creates clear progression pathways. Successful participants (after release) are eligible to progress to a Level 5 Substance Use Issues and Community Work Course at Cork College of Commerce, delivered in collaboration with the HSE, Cork ETB, and Cork City Partnerships. From there, students can progress to UCC's Level 7 Diploma in Substance Use and Addiction Studies (DSMAS). The Level 6 module is recognised as an exemption within the Diploma, making the pathway both visible and structurally supported. This pathway from prison and community classrooms to university campus, is an excellent example of impact in terms of access, retention and progression into higher education.

The wider community impact is also significant as prisoners are one of the most marginalised groups in society. By introducing a university level module in this context, the programme challenges intergenerational patterns of disadvantage, demonstrating that higher education is possible for people with complex life experience. The extension of the module to wives and partners at the Dillon's Cross project further broadens the social impact by supporting families affected by imprisonment and addiction.

While 'industry' is not exactly the core focus, the programme does contribute to community understanding of addiction related social issues. It strengthens links between ACE UCC, the HSE, ETB prison education and community partners, building a shared evidence-informed understanding of addiction and recovery. Graduates who progress through the pathway have direct contact with front-line professionals teaching the programme. It offers possibilities for further study and the potential to work in addiction services, community work, peer support or related fields, bringing lived experience and formal training together in ways that benefit services and communities.

Transferability of Model

Several core elements of this model are highly transferable to other higher education institutions and outreach settings. Key transferable elements include:

- A modular, credit-bearing course on addiction and substance use grounded in current evidence and aligned to a clear qualification framework.
- A UDL informed curriculum and assessment strategy that can accommodate learners with diverse literacy levels and educational histories, including creative options such as Object Based Learning assignments and presentations, to achieve the learning outcomes.
- The partnership structure brings together the university LLL unit, public health and addiction services, and community projects in the development and delivery of the programme.
- The programme offers a progression pathway that links the module to further accredited courses at Levels 5 and 7, making it a coherent steppingstone rather than a stand-alone module.

These elements could be adapted in other HEIs in Europe that work with prison populations, probation services, drug and alcohol services, or marginalised communities more broadly. The main challenges relate to contexts such as differences in prison rules, security, funding mechanisms, staff capacity, and local education structures which can affect the delivery of programmes inside the prison walls. Initially, it is most important to establish trust with prison services to negotiate access and to enable collaboration between the university and the prison education units, as well as other stakeholders in services and communities. Once trust has been established between HEIs and prison administration, timetabling and access can be negotiated to ensure continuity of learning for students.

The core pedagogical and partnership principles are transferrable to settings beyond the university. Many aspects, such as the UDL informed design, flexible assessment, collaborative teaching with practitioners and clear progression routes, are relevant to any ULLL unit working with learners who have been underserved by traditional education systems. The experience gained in Cork and Midlands prisons, as well as the extension to family members at Dillon's Cross, with further plans to expand to additional prisons, demonstrates that this model can be scaled and adapted provided there is institutional commitment and local partnership support.

Sustainability of Model

The Introduction to Addiction Studies programme is an excellent example of ACE's and UCC's long-term commitment to LLL, widening participation and social inclusion. ACE has been educating adults from all backgrounds for almost 80 years and aligns with the UN mission of 'leaving no one behind'. Delivering accredited modules in prisons is a natural extension of this mission, bringing university learning beyond the walls to those who could be considered 'furthest behind'.

Strategically, the module is part of the established university Diploma in Substance Use and Addiction Studies, rather than a stand-alone pilot, ensuring a pathway is available to those who wish to progress their studies in the future. It functions both as an independent Level 6 micro credential, and as a recognised component of the two-year part-time Diploma, with formal exemption arrangements for students who wish to progress. Discussions are underway to introduce further modules from the DSMAS Programme, with plans in place to deliver the next module, Substance Misuse Prevention with Young People and Families at Dillon's Cross in Autumn 2026. ACE values the involvement of

other stakeholders such as HSE staff and practitioners, as lecturers coming from these professions embeds the programme within the addiction services.

In terms of resources and sustainability, costs and support are shared across partners. The ETB facilitates the prison classroom environment providing support from the art teachers and other prison education staff. ACE provides academic design, accreditation and coordination, and the Irish Prison Services provide the funding, and HSE professionals and partners contribute to specialist teaching. Since the initial delivery in 2022 in Cork, interest has grown and the programme expanded to Midlands and Dillon's Cross. Future plans for its replication to further prisons indicate that partners see it as a long-term investment, rather than a time-limited project.

The model also supports UCC's broader strategic goals around civic and community engagement, health and wellbeing, and equality, diversity and inclusion. By working with one of the most marginalised groups in Irish society and addressing a pressing public health issue such as addiction through education, the programme exemplifies how a university can use its expertise to contribute to social change. The programme has already attracted recognition in its infancy as runner up in the Cork City Lifelong Learning Awards 2024, finalist for the AONTAS Star awards 2025, and also finalist for the 2026 AONTAS Star Awards, winners will be announced on March 6th, 2026. This recognition further places it within institutional narratives of innovation and impact, strengthening the case for expansion and continued support and development.

Overall, the programme illustrates how a ULLL unit can implement the principles of access, engagement, and impact in a challenging context. It is pedagogically robust, partnership-driven, and impactful for learners, aligned with UCC's long-term strategy for inclusive LLL. This demonstrates that the Introduction to Addiction Studies Prison and Community Programme is deserving recognition for the SAMUELE thematic area of Impact and Engagement.

Details

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Description

Innovative Features and Strengths of the IGEL Model

The IGEL bridging programme (“Integration und Gleichstellung internationaler Lehrkräfte”) is a flagship initiative in ULLL designed to support migrated teachers in adapting their professional qualifications to the German education system. Teachers who migrate face complex challenges: differing qualification standards, teaching practices embedded in specific pedagogical cultures, and high linguistic demands for school communication. These issues often intersect with personal and financial pressures, making re-entry difficult.

IGEL responds to these challenges with a holistic, context-sensitive model providing tailored linguistic and academic preparation, individualised advisory services, and career support. It distinguishes itself by recognising the “situatedness” of teaching; participants must not only meet formal requirements but also develop confidence in navigating new educational cultures, teacher-student interactions, and administrative norms.

The programme consists of:

- academic modules in (vocational) German language training (B2–C1, focusing on educational communication, pronunciation, interactional competence, and curriculum-related vocabulary); pedagogy, didactics, and classroom management
- supervised school observations and teaching practice, providing insight into school routines, methodologies, and expectations in Baden-Württemberg;
- individualised advisory sessions to clarify recognition processes, navigate ministries and documentation, and plan qualification steps;
- digital learning components, including hybrid classes, online interactive exercises, and AI-based tools for linguistic feedback;
- peer learning structures, where participants support each other through shared migration-related experiences and professional exchange.

Together, these elements create a bridging model that simultaneously builds competence, linguistic agency, resilience, and professional identity in a new educational context.

Impact on Learners, Institutions, and the Wider Community

Impact on Learners

Since its start in 2019, IGEL has supported more than 250 migrated teachers—from refugees to internationally mobile professionals—navigating interrupted careers and unfamiliar systems. These teachers typically bring high motivation, strong pedagogical

experience and multilingual expertise, but often lack guidance on how the German school system functions or which qualification pathways are required.

Research by Bergmüller-Hauptmann et al. (2025) underscores that explicit bridging programmes such as IGEL promote equitable access to the teaching profession for migrated teachers who express a strong desire to simply return to the profession they were trained for, yet facing systemic obstacles related to recognition, language requirements, and institutional unfamiliarity. IGEL bridges these gaps by fostering professional confidence, supporting recognition processes, and mitigating structural disadvantages. This showcases the power of a well-designed, inclusive and socially responsive ULLL.

Through IGEL, participants:

- develop advanced educational German (B2–C1) with a focus on clarity, interaction, and classroom discourse;
- gain insight into German curricula, teaching materials, assessment practices, and school culture;
- strengthen digital competences, including safe and effective use of learning platforms, communication tools, and digital/AI applications;
- receive structured mentoring and career guidance;
- build a deeper understanding of their professional identity in the context of migration;
- acquire concrete strategies for managing the emotional and logistical demands of requalification.

In addition to programme-specific insights, research highlights the emotional and identity-related challenges faced by migrated teachers during professional transition. Schüssler et al. (2023) show that navigating unfamiliar institutional logics, implicit expectations, and new pedagogical cultures often leads to emotional strain and identity negotiation. A success story from Brazil exemplifies this: despite initial struggles with the complex affordances of the recognition process, a primary teacher regained her confidence through IGEL, became a permanent staff member, and now serves as a mentor within the IGEL community, embodying the "multiplier effect" the programme aims to achieve.

Notably, the majority of participants are women, who often carry higher care responsibilities; IGEL's flexibility directly addresses these gendered challenges. Evaluations (Kansteiner et al., 2022) confirm that such supportive environments strengthen self-confidence and a sense of belonging.

Impact on the education sector

Against the backdrop that Germany faces substantial teacher shortages (SWK, 2023), IGEL contributes directly to workforce development by preparing teachers, who show high motivation to re-enter their profession and who bring:

- multilingual and multicultural expertise;
- teaching experience from diverse educational traditions;
- intercultural awareness and sensitivity.

Schools consistently provide positive feedback on IGEL participants during internship phases, emphasising their adaptability, global perspectives, and ability to support multilingual learners. The programme thus enriches diversity-sensitive pedagogical practice and strengthens a more inclusive, culturally responsive schooling.

Impact on the wider community

At the societal level, IGEL promotes:

- equitable access to regulated professions;
- integration through professional continuity;
- multilingualism in education;
- social cohesion, particularly in communities where families communicate in multiple languages.

Migrated teachers often serve as important role models for multilingual children, illustrate global society and internationalisation and thus contribute to a more inclusive, interculturally open-minded society.

Distinction from Traditional ULLL Approaches

IGEL differs from traditional ULLL formats in several essential ways:

1. A systemic bridging pathway rather than isolated upskilling - IGEL provides an integrated requalification framework aligned with legal requirements, school expectations, and adult learners' biographical needs.
2. Strong integration of language and pedagogy - Teaching in Germany requires advanced professional German. IGEL treats language not as an add-on but as a core dimension of professional competence, linking linguistic development directly to pedagogical tasks.
3. Focus on identity and resilience - Research on migrated teachers (Fabel-Lamla & Klomfaß, 2014; Kansteiner et al., 2022) shows that identity negotiation is central to successful transition. IGEL integrates reflection, mentoring, and peer support to strengthen this process.
4. Close alignment with public authorities and schools - The programme operates in active exchange with regional education authorities, ministries, and schools, ensuring practical relevance and systemic coherence.
5. Digital flexibility and digital integration - Hybrid structures, asynchronous materials, and digital-supported pronunciation and writing tools enable consistent participation despite work, family, or administrative demands.

These features make IGEL a forward-looking model for enabling teacher mobility in a globalised world.

Transferability and Scalability of the Model

The IGEL model is highly transferable to other regulated sectors where language and contextual knowledge are vital, such as social work, childhood education or health care.

Key transferable elements include:

- modular linguistic and academic components adaptable to local curricula;
- competence diagnostics for individual learning trajectories;
- advisory structures for navigating recognition and bureaucracy;
- school or workplace placements as immersion-based learning spaces;
- peer-support communities that enhance motivation and retention;
- digital and hybrid formats ensuring accessibility across geographic areas.

While adaptation must consider local legal frameworks, funding structures, and labour market, the core design is robust and well-documented for European-wide transfer.

Alignment with Institutional Strategy and Long-Term Development

As part of the Akademie für Wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung (AWW) at the University of Education Weingarten, IGEL is embedded in the institution's long-term strategy. The programme contributes to key institutional goals such as:

- widening participation in higher education;
- supporting diversity and inclusion;
- strengthening digital transformation;
- addressing regional workforce needs;
- promoting multilingualism and internationalisation;
- and contributing to the university's third mission.

IGEL benefits from a stable combination of institutional infrastructure and national funding (by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, BMBF). The programme also overlaps with other education activities at the University of Education Weingarten, particularly in language education, dealing with diversity, and fostering intercultural competence. Furthermore, participants from other programmes at the university benefit from shared methodological approaches, multi-perspective learning environments, and materials that support multilingual and migration-related dimensions of teaching.

By linking research, teaching innovation, and professional qualification, IGEL positions the University of Education Weingarten as a leading institution in inclusive, socially responsive ULLL - both nationally and across European networks.

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Details

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Description

From its iteration, the Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development (CALPD) at University of Galway has recognised and championed working with companies and external organisations to address professional development and industry needs amongst the ever-evolving workforce. CALPD has a unique set of skills in the areas of:

- (1) course design for online and blended learning;
- (2) a model of student engagement and support for adult learners;
- (3) an enterprise engagement model responding to industry needs;
- (4) a dedicated marketing and communications strategy for professional audiences
- (5) a remit for LLL policy oversight at university level.

The CALPD team have developed knowledge and expertise in creating demand-driven programmes and micro-credentials for industry partners, forged strong academic partnerships with university academic units to support programme delivery, and utilised their expertise in online course design and development to offer flexible and accessible professional development opportunities to adult learners.

ULLL impact on learners, industry and community

An example of this extensive experience of working with professional learners and industry, is a case study of our work with the Learning and Development Unit at Medtronic, Galway in relation to workforce development needs at the company.

In 2016, despite having a defined technical talent strategy to develop their workforce, the Medtronic Galway leadership team were experiencing labour shortages, especially in technical areas such as Engineering. Under the auspices of the University's industry partnership model, CALPD and Medtronic explored how to attract and develop talent into a traditionally male-dominated manufacturing environment. These discussions led to the development of a bespoke, Irish NFQ Level 7 part-time Diploma in Operations Engineering, delivered via blended and online over two years. The course was supported by an in-company Operations Engineering Scholarship programme, aiming to recruit 12 candidates each year from the manufacturing operator's pool, with one year's relevant experience, wishing to progress in a technical/engineering role.

This course was designed with a clear objective to build a robust talent pipeline of skilled engineers who were not only academically proficient but also equipped with the practical experience necessary to excel in a dynamic, high-tech environment. The direct beneficiaries of the course were operative staff/product builders. The Medtronic scholarship provides them with a fully funded opportunity to reskill, and in turn, it provides

the company with a sustainable pipeline of Engineering talent, enabling the business to successfully fill key positions, and to ensure smooth transitions. The partnership has yielded the following results to date:

- 9 Diploma cohorts (125 students);
- 42 % of students have progressed to further studies at Level 8;
- 98% have progressed to technical roles;
- 30% have progressed to Engineering 1 & 2 roles, and Senior Engineering roles;
- At Diploma (Level 7), students have obtained roles as Manufacturing Technician, Manufacturing Engineering 1, Quality Engineer 1 and IT Technician;
- From further studies at Degree (Level 8), students have obtained roles as Manufacturing Engineer 2, Quality Engineer 2, Senior Design Engineer (R&D), Senior Operations Excellence Analyst.

The course also delivered some unexpected benefits such as:

- Participants' prior experience as manufacturing operators accelerated their induction and onboarding into new roles.
- Employees' awareness of improvement opportunities (from experience in operative roles), helped drive a continuous-improvement culture in their new positions;
- The Scholarship allowed Medtronic to attract and nurture top-tier talent from diverse backgrounds. Many would not have the opportunity to pursue these studies without this support;
- An impact survey of graduates from the programme was conducted in August/September 2024 - responses showed that:
 - 93% of students felt that the course had a positive impact on their career (72% Strongly agree, 21% Agree);
 - 90% of students said that the course led to a promotion at work. Students overwhelmingly felt that the course had a positive impact on their career progression.
 - 70% of students surveyed felt that they developed significant technical and soft skills from the course in relation to operations, regulatory compliance, sustainability, and automation.
 - Soft skills mentioned by the students included open-mindedness, critical thinking, communication, presentation and team skills.
 - Technical skills noted involved developing a better understanding of the statistical and automation software used in the company, quality tools for problem-solving and technical writing skills.

How does ULLL model differ?

The unique co-design and co-development model used was critical to the success of this course. It involved a number of key curriculum design stages with University and Medtronic staff (based on industry skills needs), including:

1. Identification of a cross-functional team: including University of Galway staff i.e. Course Coordinator, Academic, and Multi-Media Content Developer (MCD) - skilled in design and development of online course content, academic standards, quality assurance and support for adult learners and Medtronic staff from Learning and Development, Engineering, the Operational Excellence group, Quality Assurance team and technical supervisors skilled in users' needs, technological requirements, industry practices and challenges
2. A Needs validation process to identify the skills required by employees progressing to technical roles

3. Identification of appropriate pedagogical frameworks e.g. online and blended learning along with identification of new learning technology tools suitable for professional learners
4. Review existing company-based training: Map outcomes from that training against module and programme level learning outcomes in the destination award
5. Plan co-delivery components such as industry mentors and guest speakers
6. Upskill academic staff in the design of learning materials using the co-creation process
7. Continuous improvement: an annual review takes place to assess programme learning outcomes against required skills. Members of the Medtronic Learning and Development team and student representatives are involved in this process

A key feature of the course design process were bespoke modules in Operations Engineering Techniques and Systems, Manufacturing processes, and a Socio-technical Project which students undertake in year 2 of the course. The Socio-technical project is specific to Medtronic's processes/problem-solving and lean manufacturing. It is a transformative module in how it gives the employee a professional experience to support their development through immersive engagement in cross-functional-teams. It takes the employee away from their day-to-day role and engages them in projects they would otherwise not have had the opportunity to work on. The Socio-technical project is innovative as it focuses on problem-solving real life operational issues on very diverse teams. Working on these projects on new cross-functional teams in the company plays a key role in raising students' skills profile and reputation within the company. Project include reducing rejects, product failures, minimising health and safety risks, and implementing transformative software systems.

The industry-academia collaboration is a critical element of the model's success so that key information and synergies are identified for further course developments. This is facilitated by a joint Programme Board with industry, and a review of module evaluations which students. This collaborative process ensures that changes are made in a short timeframe, and in turn, supports student engagement and progression. Changes made have led to a more engaging, relevant and inclusive learning process.

Transferability of the Model to other areas

1. A number of pedagogical frameworks were developed for the design and delivery of blended learning programmes during the course of this project. This included templates and a multi-media toolkit for teaching staff to use in the VLE to enhance the learning experience for adult learners. These templates have been rolled out internally within the University of Galway and are being used by academic staff on other flexible learning programmes.
2. The steps involved in the co-design and co-delivery model for workforce development programmes can be replicated across all subject and industry areas. The industry-University partnership model was replicated from the Medtronic case study with a national training body in 2020 for Diplomas in Change Management and Technology Enhanced Learning in response to the CPD needs of staff;
3. The practical and applied nature of the programme assessment and scoring rubric which were designed specifically for the Diploma, including the socio-technical project, can be applied across multiple course areas to ensure meaningful transfer of course content to the workplace.

How is your model integrated into the institution's long-term strategy?

The project outcomes have shown the value of industry engagement, the upskilling and progression opportunities for learners and has strengthened the case for investment in LLL at an institutional level. The Diploma is now part of the University's Signature

Partnership with Medtronic which was the first signature collaboration with industry, expanding the University's MedTech ecosystem, advancing STEM programmes, and supporting early-stage collaborative research.

The University of Galway has recently released its Strategic Plan 2025-30. Among its three main strategic priorities is the concept of Education for the Future. This calls out the specific actions in terms of:

- Innovative Curriculum Design and Delivery
- Flexible Enterprise-Focused Programmes
- Removing barriers to education and enabling universal access for all learners

A suite of KPIs in the area of LLL have been identified to meet these priority objectives and includes the expansion of the flexible-learning programme portfolio, increasing the number of part-time students at the University and related services and increasing the number of RPL applications to ensure widening access and participation for all learners.

Details

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Description

Supporting LLL through life stories – A project to support continuing education at the University of Geneva

Many current European and national policies on skills development have emerged from a political awareness of the need to adjust the level and type of skills required by citizens to cope with the rapid and constant evolution of our societies and professions.

The approach that supports continuous skills development is based on a LLL mindset. This involves integrating the need to learn and adapt to one's daily life as a means of resilience. In reality, this is already the case: everyone learns throughout their lives, but not necessarily in a conscious way. For most people, the perception of learning is often linked to formal learning, whereas we all learn throughout our lives.

The University of Geneva is breaking new ground by offering training support workshops for participants in its continuing education degree programmes. One of the objectives is to reinforce the LLL mindset. Among the means employed is the (re)valuation of life experiences and resources developed over the course of one's life. Whether during formal training, or during informal encounters, life challenges, moments of crisis or significant changes, everyone develops strategies and resources that can be re-utilised in the context of formal and complex training programmes such as those offered by the University.

Over three days, spaced out to allow for integration/assimilation between face-to-face sessions, participants are encouraged, in a confidential setting that fosters trust, to gradually share their experiences until they are ready to present an account of their journey to the other members of the group, who in turn share their reactions to these accounts. A final day allows them to capitalise on these exchanges for the rest of their training. An individual interview allows the process to be supported in the best possible conditions, given the limited time available. Three days are the bare minimum required to go sufficiently in-depth in the process for the benefits to be tangible. The group is deliberately small, with a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 10 participants, in order to encourage sharing and ensure rich exchanges.

Rooted in the life story approach developed in the 1980s in the French-speaking world by Pierre Dominicé, Marie-Christine Josso in Switzerland, Gaston Pineau in France and in Quebec and Guy de Villers in Belgium, these workshops provide a safe environment for introspection and enable participants to create and present to the group a life story from a learning perspective.

Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning allows the workshops to focus not on the instrumental learning covered by the training courses in which participants are enrolled,

but on communicational, even transformative learning. While there is no guarantee that the workshops will have a transformative effect, they can be expected to provide an opportunity for reflection on one's own journey, reshaping the meaning and value attributed to it. Focusing on one's own journey and discovering the journeys of others opens and nuances one's perspective.

Life stories are used in various training programmes, including, for example, in certain accreditation of prior learning processes or to support students in their final year projects/dissertations. The innovation here was to offer workshops across different programmes with the explicit aim of developing a LLL mindset, building self-confidence, and highlighting personal resources that are useful for all current and future training. Feedback from the first 16 participants who benefited from this biographical support during the last three semesters proves the value and usefulness of this programme. A systematic analysis of the feedback (feedback at the end of the third day and feedback after three months) is planned for spring 2026.

The positive effects are felt by several parties. First, the university, which, by choosing to offer this type of support, humanises the student experience, a significant quality for an institution, especially in parallel with the development of artificial intelligence. Secondly, the learners themselves, who, in addition to the training they have chosen to follow, receive support that has the potential to impact all areas of their lives. There is also a notable effect of inclusion: through group work, the workshops provide an opportunity to experiment with a non-judgmental attitude and thereby refine one's understanding of oneself and the world, thus promoting inclusion. Finally, employers also benefit, as employees who are sent on training courses return with a stronger professional attitude.

This type of learning support differs from the usual approaches offered by universities, which generally focus more on methodology and are aimed at BA/MA/PhD students. Biographical support thus complements our institution's training support offering, with a particular focus on adult learners who are already in employment.

The main condition for the transferability of the experience is to train the coaches adequately. In Switzerland, there are a multitude of training courses on the concept of life stories, but only one at university-level, in French, with a focus on biographical coaching skills. Political support from the institution's management is also essential, as is a minimum financial investment, even if the costs associated with the system set up at UNIGE are ultimately insignificant in themselves.

The evolution of universities is a highly topical issue. With the changing demographics of our Western countries on the one hand, the strong current and future migratory flows linked in particular to climate and security issues, and the ever-faster development of artificial intelligence on the other, universities will be forced to rethink their target audiences and their teaching models. The heterogeneity of student populations will require an adaptation of curricula that are much more focused on LLL, shorter, and more frequent. The attitude of LLL, confidence in one's ability to learn and to use different personal strategies to adapt and develop one's skills will become increasingly important, and any steps taken to reinforce this attitude are welcome.

Details

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Description

Evaluating the Impact of LLL

The Formation Continue UNIL-EPFL (FCUE) is a joint foundation that groups together the continuing education activities of the University of Lausanne and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland. FCUE has made a strategic institutional decision to better understand the real contribution of its programmes to the professional development, career and personal development of adult learners. This decision emerged from a clear need: while conventional end-of-course satisfaction surveys provide essential information on teaching quality and course organisation, they do not capture the long-term impact and transformative effects of LLL.

In response, the FCUE initiated the development of a complementary post-programme impact evaluation model designed to document how our certified programmes (Certificate of Advanced Studies-CAS, Diploma of Advanced Studies-DAS and Master of Advanced Studies-MAS) influence professional practices, career evolution, personal development, and the creation of a professional network by former participants. First, a pilot was conducted during Spring 2025 and then this evaluation is formally integrated into the FCUE's internal quality procedure, where it now strengthens the existing cycle of continuous improvement by adding a dedicated phase on long term outcomes for certified programmes.

This model is innovative because it extends them in a way that reflects the FCUE's commitment to understanding the full impact of LLL for professionals. While not driven by external requirements, it aligns naturally with broader Swiss and European recommendations for quality in LLL, particularly the emphasis on impact and relevance of trainings into the professional world.

The model stands out methodologically through its mixed-methods approach. A common questionnaire was created for several programmes, enabling comparison across fields while also maintaining the possibility to customise questions. The model combines quantitative indicators with qualitative thematic analysis, creating a structured yet flexible framework that captures diverse forms of impact. The qualitative analysis, conducted with appropriate research tools, categorises recurring themes across programmes and enables the FCUE to go beyond surface-level observations. This makes the model robust enough for institutional use.

The process is lightweight and can be replicated without substantial resources. Programme coordinators disseminate the survey to alumni, the quality officer conducts the analysis, and findings are compiled into structured reports. These reports support programme management and strategic decision-making. Because of its clear and modular

architecture, the model can be deployed across different certified programmes and disciplines, making it an effective tool for quality development.

From a governance perspective, it contributes to a more complete and meaningful quality loop: planning, teaching, immediate evaluation, long-term impact evaluation, and programme revision. By institutionalising the practice of measuring long-term outcomes, the FCUE has created a sustainable and strategic approach to understanding the impact of LLL in real professional contexts.

The model does not simply measure impact in a descriptive way; it provides a structure for analysing the multidimensional effects of LLL on individuals and their environments. Based on prior institutional experience and existing research on adult learning and professional development, five key dimensions were identified and used in the questionnaire.

First, the model explores the impact on professional practice, capturing how competencies acquired during the programme are mobilised in day-to-day work. Alumni frequently report applying technical, transversal, and methodological competencies acquired during their training. This includes discipline-specific competences and skills, but also collaborative capacities, reflective habits, and structured approaches to problem-solving. These forms of professional application reveal how LLL programmes contribute not only to knowledge acquisition but also to behavioural and organisational change within workplaces.

Second, the model captures the impact on career development, such as career advancement, career transition to a new professional field, and consolidation of an existing role. This understanding of professional trajectories allows the institution to assess whether its programmes support mobility, enhance employability, or help learners reinforce their position within their current environment.

A third dimension concerns personal development. Alumni describe increased confidence, a strengthened reflective posture, greater ethical awareness, or improved resilience. These personal transformations are essential for adult learners and contribute to the development of a robust LLL identity.

The fourth category concerns the impact on professional networks and communities, describing the creation, activation, and sustainability of professional relationships initiated during the programme.

LLL programmes often create strong learning cohorts that become lasting professional networks. The model analyses both the creation of these networks and their continued use after graduation. Alumni often rely on their peer group for collaborative projects, sector-specific exchange, or support in career transitions.

The final category interests on the long-term programme-related feedback, which invites alumni to reflect on the strengths of the programme and identify areas for improvement once they have had sufficient distance to assess its relevance, coherence, and applicability. By collecting feedback several years after completion, the model provides a final and particularly valuable layer of insight for programme revision. This informs the development of new course offerings, adjustments in pedagogy, or the identification of new strategic partners.

This post-programme survey model introduces a supplementary evaluation conducted between one and ten years after programme completion. This addition enriches the institution's understanding of how learning outcomes materialise in real contexts over time. Consequently, this model introduces a multidimensional perspective on impact. It assesses how learning influences professional practices, career development, personal

growth, network-building, and institutional relevance. This broader scope is particularly relevant for ULLL, where learners often have diverse aims and complex career paths.

Another distinctive element is the use of qualitative thematic analysis in addition to quantitative data. This method captures the depth of learners' experiences and allows programme directors and FCUE to identify not only areas for improvement or innovation, but also the strengths, pedagogical practices, and teaching approaches that have proven effective over time and should be maintained, reinforced, or further valued within the programme.

The model is fully integrated into our internal quality cycle. The results of the long-term impact evaluation are presented and discussed alongside module-level evaluations conducted during the certification process and post-programme satisfaction surveys. In this way, the impact evaluation constitutes a final, complementary step in an already established quality process. This integrated approach ensures that feedback collected at different moments in time is brought together and interpreted coherently, allowing programme directors to base programme development on a longitudinal and comprehensive set of evidence rather than on isolated data points.

Its structure is simple, coherent, and suitable for adoption by a wide range of higher education institutions. Any institution with alumni records can replicate the process, and the questionnaire can be tailored to any discipline, learning level, or professional sector.

The model's architecture is modular. Institutions can adopt the full model or select the components most relevant to their needs. The core transferable elements include: the five dimensions of the questionnaire, the dissemination procedure through coordinators or an alumni office, the basic quantitative and qualitative methodology, and the systematic integration of results into quality procedures. This modularity allows institutions with different capacities and priorities to implement the model effectively.

Resource requirements are low, which further enhances transferability. The data collection process uses widely available online survey tools. This makes the model relevant for institutions of all sizes, including HEIs with limited administrative structures.

The model is also compatible with diverse national and institutional contexts. Because it focuses on long-term impact and relevance, it aligns well with European approaches to LLL quality assurance, including the emphasis found in the ESG, micro-credentials frameworks, and professional accreditation schemes. It is particularly suitable for certified programmes and other forms of LLL aimed at adult professionals.

Since the model is now anchored in our internal quality procedure, it supports ongoing improvement and helps ensure that programmes remain aligned with learners' needs and evolving professional environments. The impact evaluation reports are systematically shared with programme directors and reviewed in periodic programme meetings, where teams can take decisions on curriculum adjustments, teaching methodologies, and admission criteria.

The model is sustainable from both a financial and organisational standpoint. It relies mainly on existing staff roles and uses tools that are already available within the institution. Its integration into the internal quality cycle ensures its continuity over time, and its periodic administration (every two to three years) fits well within programme review cycles.

The model also contributes directly to the FCUE's strategic vision for LLL. By systematically documenting the impact of its programmes, the FCUE is better equipped to demonstrate their relevance, guide the creation of new offerings, and engage with

professional sectors. It supports the development of new courses that respond to emerging needs.

Future developments include the possible creation of an internal observatory on LLL impact, aimed at consolidating data, supporting institutional strategy, and facilitating the sharing of good practices. Through this model, the FCUE reinforces its long-term commitment to meaningful and high-quality LLL.

Details

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Description

A Strategic Human Resources Model Based on Collective Recognition of Prior Learning

LLL constitutes a major and strong pillar of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) promoting equal opportunities, social inclusion, and sustainable employability by ensuring access to higher education for all. European higher education policies foster the development of adaptive learning environments, flexible learning pathways, and ensure the permeability between professional and academic world through the recognition of learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts.

Within this European framework, and in the context of ULLL, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a key mechanism to support adult learners, facilitating access to qualifications in the framework of NQF/EQF and their progression in their learning path. Professional experience as legitimate source of learning makes RPL valuable and a strong tool to contribute to up-skilling, and re-skilling strategies to address challenges of competitiveness in a fast-evolving world. But RPL, beyond its individual aspect of validating qualification, it can become a structuring tool for skills development, career security and talent management, aligned with European priorities both for qualifications and labour market needs.

Organisational Context: From Training Policy to Skills Strategy

As part of its long-term development and employment strategy, the Regional Organisation of a French bank "Crédit Mutuel Nord Europe" (CMNE) has adopted a proactive training policy for several years. In their vision, vocational training is a strategic lever for human resources management that contributes to organisational performance, adaptability and attractiveness.

The strategy supports:

- the integration of early-career employees and graduates,
- careers management and pathways (including diploma-oriented progression),
- upskilling and reskilling aligned with transitions in technologies, economy, society.

University-Company Partnership through a Collective RPL process

Due to these considerations, a strong and sustainable partnership was implemented between the University of Lille and the CMNE to support the Human Resources Department in implementing a collective programme to facilitate the validation of skills acquired in the professional career for their employees and to assist candidates in the process. The CMNE is thus committed to initiating actions to develop qualifications and

skills for better adaptation to the professional environment, and the partnerships aims to recognise and certify competencies, and secure career pathways.

These initiatives are part of the forward-looking management of workforce and skills approach (*Gestion Prévisionnel des Emplois et des Compétences - GPEC: strongly supported by French Legislation - 2018) and aligned with European recommendations on career guidance, employability and LLL.

A Learner-centred Approach and a Collective Support Model:

As part of the partnership, advisors from the University of Lille's Professional Training Department provide collective support to the employees in close coordination with the HR teams and the process covers the entire value chain:

Reception, information and positioning:

- collective information session
- individual positioning through counselling interviews in order to verify the alignment between professional experience, the objectives and learning outcomes of the qualification, and the career

Administrative admissibility and educational feasibility:

- review of the eligibility of the candidates
- pedagogical feasibility analysis

Collective and individual methodology:

- initial collective workshops to clarify the aims of VAE, requirements, methodology
- ongoing collective sessions to address the difficulties, facilitate the exchange of practices (peers-to-peers learning), remove obstacles, and maintain motivation all along the process.
- individual support is also available for writing.

Customised and individual pathway:

- individual support to prepare their individual VAE at different phases of the process.
- individual face-to-face and/or remote interviews,
- alternating with period of autonomous work,
- the pace is adapted to each candidate withing the legal framework agreed with the company.

The collective approach proposed by the university is a learner-centred approach and place the candidates and their project at the heart of the system. The advisors support candidates to analyse their personal and professional experience and identify elements to translate them into assessable learning outcomes to present them to the jury evaluation.

The partnerships include collaboration with the HR to prepare and organise the final evaluation and coordination of the collective VAE supporting and counselling the Human Resources Department of the company:

- Information and advice for the CMNE Human Resources Department Management
- Administration of the collective VAE initiative

The programme is aimed at CMNE employees who are enrolled in a VAE programme approved and supported by the company, targeting a level 6 (French BUT, Bachelor's degree) or level 7 (Master's degree) qualification in a context of evolution of the requirements of recruitment of employees with higher level.

The process generates multidimensional added value for the company and is based on a logic of upstream diagnosis and detailed guidance, limiting unsuitable pathways. The VAE interview acts as a skills engineering tool and career-pathway design, combining academic expertise and analysis of skills acquired in the field. For HR managers, VAE becomes a strategic lever for securing career paths, recognising internal skills and retaining talent and can be part of the policy of employer branding. It generates a measurable return on investment in terms of employability, performance and employer attractiveness. For the employee, the impact can be transformative, since it focuses on his/her experience and gives him/her academic recognition and legitimacy. It can be valuable for further career trajectories but also for the career of the employee within the organisation. Learners can then become active stakeholders and ambassadors for the company and the learning ecosystem.

The model can be replicated across different sectors, certification levels and territories. It can be easily integrated into existing Human Resources policies (and skills development plans) and can be industrialised at the level of a group or network of companies. The university of Lille has developed several partnerships with companies and adapted the process to the requirements of the company and aligned with the academic standards of the targeted diploma, with learner-centred principles.

This case study shows the capacity of universities to act as a strategic partner for workforce and skills development and building bridge between academic standards and labour market needs. By integrating RPL into skills strategies, it becomes a driver for learner empowerment with impact on the organisation.

Details

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Description

Innovation Through Transnational Collaboration and Local Focus

University of Limerick's (UL) micro-credential *Sustainable Organisations and Decision-Making* is innovative not only in content and pedagogy but also in its origin. It emerged from the L2L Erasmus+ project, a transnational collaboration between four higher education institutions in Ireland, Norway, Italy, and Australia. Each partner conducted in-depth regional research to identify the competence needs, learning preferences, and structural barriers experienced by disadvantaged adult learners in their context. Despite regional differences, the partners identified strikingly common learner preferences: demand for short, modular, flexible courses; applied content with real-world relevance; and accessible, inclusive pedagogical approaches. These findings informed the co-creation of the Open Box model and pedagogical toolbox - conceptual and practical frameworks for micro-credential design targeting disadvantaged learners. UL then applied these shared insights in a regionally tailored way, maintaining a clear focus on its own target group, SME workers in Ireland's Midwest, while drawing on international evidence and methodology.

Context: Barriers and Needs Among Irish SME Workers

In Ireland, SMEs represent over 99% of active businesses and account for approximately 70% of private-sector employment. Yet, SME workers have persistently low engagement with LLL due to time constraints, cost, limited access to training providers, and low employer support. These barriers were central to UL's regional analysis, which identified SME workers as the most in-need cohort for flexible, workplace-relevant upskilling. Leadership and sustainability were highlighted as critical skill gaps, particularly as businesses in the region face growing demands for responsible practice, green transition, and agile decision-making in increasingly complex environments.

Research-Informed Course Development: From Mapping to Design

UL's journey began with structured regional analysis as part of the L2L project's activities. Using a shared methodology across all four countries, the team reviewed national policy, held consultations with government and employer stakeholders, and conducted interviews with SME workers. These efforts uncovered specific competence needs, chiefly leadership and sustainability, and confirmed shared learner preferences across contexts. UL then collaborated with stakeholders and drew on the transnational pedagogical toolbox to design a course tailored to local learner profiles. This co-design approach ensured that the course was not only research-informed but also grounded in real employer demands and target learner preferences.

The result was *Sustainable Organisations and Decision-Making*, a six-week part-time micro-credential offered fully online. The course equips learners with the knowledge and tools to drive sustainability within organisations, while linking sustainability principles to strategy, leadership, and change management. UL's model was distinct in how it embedded high-level theory, such as transformational leadership and B Corp sustainability frameworks, into a short, practical course specifically adapted to full-time SME employees. This ensured that regional research findings translated directly into curriculum content, assessment design, and delivery format.

UL offered the course as a standalone micro-credential but with the option to stack into a broader Sustainable Work diploma. This provided a viable learning pathway for SME professionals with limited time and opened a door to continued engagement in LLL. Throughout development, the university engaged employers, local enterprise offices, and workforce planning representatives to ensure the course aligned with evolving regional business needs.

Learning Design: Applied, Flexible and Inclusive

The course curriculum was tightly aligned with the competence gaps identified in UL's stakeholder interviews and user mapping. Learners explored key leadership models, with particular focus on self-assessment and adaptive leadership in sustainability contexts. Core sustainability content spanned global frameworks (e.g., UN SDGs, B Corp) and organisational metrics. Learners were encouraged to apply these frameworks to their own workplaces through real-time projects and assignments. The evaluation report confirmed that learners found the leadership component "well addressed" and the sustainability modules highly impactful. For example, one participant noted they had begun tracking carbon emissions at work as a direct result of what they learned in the course.

The course's learner-centred pedagogical design directly reflected the L2L research findings. It was built around a modular structure combining asynchronous learning (e.g., pre-recorded lectures, quizzes, videos, and reflective journals) with weekly live online sessions. This blended, micro-learning format accommodated the time-poor nature of SME learners and mirrored the preferences identified across all L2L target groups. Assignments encouraged learners to analyse their own organisation's sustainability strategies or leadership gaps, creating immediate professional relevance. Universal Design for Learning principles informed the course structure: materials were delivered in multiple formats, and learners had choices about how to demonstrate progress at key milestones.

Participants praised the flexible pacing and the quality of materials. One noted that the weekly content "fit into spare hours" and was "never overwhelming," particularly valuable for those balancing full-time jobs and family responsibilities. Post-course interviews revealed that learners appreciated the supportive environment, the clarity of resources, and the peer-engagement elements of the course, all priority areas that were identified via the research stages of the L2L project.

The design process also validated the L2L pedagogical toolbox and Open Box model, which situate the learner at the centre of four dimensions: competence needs, support and self-efficacy, learning preferences, and learning environment. By structuring content and assessments around learner needs and motivations, UL tested and confirmed the usefulness of this model in real-world delivery. Its practical application through UL's course underscores its value as a guiding framework for adult learning design in other contexts.

Measurable Impact: Learner Confidence and Workplace Change

The course evaluation, learner surveys, and post-course interviews indicate strong engagement and positive learner impact. Quantitative survey data showed high satisfaction (mostly 4–5 out of 5), while qualitative interviews described the course as “transformative.” One learner said it created “an area of awareness I wouldn’t have had before... I started driving change in my organisation”. Another reported it was “a shot in the arm for my confidence”. Practical applications were widespread: learners introduced sustainability audits, initiated B Corp discussions, and adapted their leadership styles. The majority expressed greater motivation to pursue additional learning, and many recommended the course to colleagues and managers.

Transferability: A Scalable and Adaptable Model

This case demonstrates a highly transferable process. The micro-credential’s structure, short, modular, online, and workplace-relevant, is adaptable across sectors and regions. The methodology used to develop it, a combination of local user mapping and cross-national pedagogical framing, is equally replicable. Institutions can follow this model by conducting their own stakeholder and learner research, applying the Open Box framework, and co-developing modular content that responds to identified needs. The course’s active learning strategies, reflective assessment, and UDL integration represent effective principles for engaging disadvantaged learners across cultures and disciplines. The course also aligns with UL’s strategic commitments to LLL, sustainability, and workforce development. It fits into the University’s Graduate and Professional Studies portfolio and complements the Sustainable Work diploma pathway, reinforcing institutional goals for inclusive and socially responsive learning.

Conclusion: Regionally Grounded, Globally Informed

In conclusion, UL’s approach stands out for its learner focus, regional responsiveness, and international relevance. By co-developing a shared pedagogical model across countries, and then localising that model for SME workers, UL successfully bridged European-level insights with Irish-level action. The result was a practical, inclusive micro-credential that addressed urgent skills needs and proved highly effective for disadvantaged adult learners. This case offers a compelling example of how regional relevance and transnational collaboration can combine to advance the goals of ULLL.

Details

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Description

The Lifelong Learning Research Centre of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pécs (UP) has developed an innovative model of the Learning City Pécs for fifteen-years and, accordingly, constructed a profound model of annual Pécs Learning City Festival based on stakeholder collaboration and partnerships amongst a number of local and regional institutions and organisations advocating LLL in the community. Such a third mission action of the University of Pécs ought to be recognised as a particular action of ULLL so as to promote effective knowledge transfer based on the needs of citizens and their communities in the scope of skills development. This main character of Learning City Pécs is to bridge in between smart, creative and learning dimensions of urban renewals and functions as the ground of an UNESCO GNLC member Learning City. The uniqueness of this model lies in the humanistically driven approach to LLL framed into a sustainable model of urban community in order to build its future on trust, equity and mutuality. A strategic focus of this model reflects the commitment of around seventy local-regional stakeholders to collectively select topics of the Learning City Festival and to address challenging issues to be discussed and related practice-based knowledge shared in the triangle of economy-society-environment. A necessary method used is a cumulative approach by which partners bring in their own practices of LLL and the LLL-Research Centre of UP functions as a moderator, in association with the House of Civic Communities, to balance in between those diverse interests of partners and stakeholders to reach for a common message with participatory goals combined with a vision of inclusion, respect and solidarity. The Pécs Learning City Festival is a key action of Learning City Pécs in which UP has brought in several modalities of technology, as digital and green transition plays an outstanding role, for example, to address skills renewals and development as key to sustainable communities and cities. Since COVID, UP has been using several on-line learning modalities to get citizens with disabilities or having limited mobility on board. At the same time, digital and technological dimensions as AI, robotics and automation have been well integrated into the programmes of the latest three Learning Festivals through street science actions with intergenerational scopes.

As for the impact of the Learning City Pécs programme and its Learning City Festival on learners, industry and community, it has become obvious that the Learning City model has been formulated to plan, develop and organise programmes for learners with diverse intergenerational and intercultural backgrounds, therefore, its flagship initiative, the Learning City has grown out of an initiative as a platform where people could collect and share relevant knowledge and develop skills referring to occurring needs upon environment, economies, community.

The Pécs Learning City model is built on the EcCoWell concept of Kearns et. al. and examples of Cork (IE), Espoo (FI) and Sonderborg (DK), Ljubljana (SI) where HEIs had inspired urban developments with local and regional knowledge transfers through LLL. Such examples have inspired the University of Pécs and its LLL Research Centre to

initiate the model of Learning City Pécs through direct involvement of Chamber of Commerce and Industry, several multinational firms as BAT, KÖRBER, VEOLIA, and a number of SMEs, Moreover, the street-science activities connected learners to iVET and cVET providers from formal to non-formal environments having worked together with industrial partners in the region to embrace technical and vocational skills for employability and also to respond to actual needs of labour market. At the same time, the Pécs Learning Festival has a responsibility that it must work as a platform to help developing and raising transversal skills as necessary in both labour and community perspectives.

In the last four years, the Pécs Learning Festivals itself have been visited by approximately six to eight thousand visitors as participants of events in town, the street-science actions, in the last two years were visited by two-thousand children in between the age of twelve and eighteen.

Community itself is the main driver of the civic orientation and mission of the Learning City Pécs model which became strengthened by the special role of the House of Civic Communities so as to coordinate the programmes of the annual learning festival by integrating the needs of local CSOs. Accordingly, the LLL Research Centre of UP has kept its primary role in planning, developing and researching the progress and evolution of this model in accordance with the Municipality of Pécs as holder of the title of UNESCO Global Learning City (2017) and membership in UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.

As for the number of partner organisations and stakeholders, the Learning Festival of Pécs has been collaborating with 75 partner organisations and institutions as stakeholders and CSOs in the fields of education, culture, arts, museum-work, sport, economies, civil society, voluntary work, health and well-being, urban-development, active ageing, religion and beyond.

The Learning City Pécs initiative and its functioning as coordinating tool for effective LLL has helped UP to recognise the benefits of this third-mission oriented direction of ULLL. However, it must be underlined that the University of Pécs and its LLL Research Centre have gained from the already 25-years-old membership in eucen and to have been able to learn from projects-oriented HEIS to recognise and understand ULLL with a wider scope to social responsibilities like EQUIPE+.

The LLL Research Centre of the University of Pécs became a dedicated HUB at the University to outline and develop strategic directions for UP with a strong attention to adult and LLL, upskilling and reskilling, implementation of microcredit courses and AI supported digital learning environments both supporting graduate students and effective knowledge transfers for adult learners as participants of on-line and/or on-site short-cycle programmes.

At the same time, ULLL became well-recognised by local and regional stakeholders as partners of Learning City Pécs programme and its Pécs Learning Festival as a result of a respectful and mutual collaboration dedicated to joint actions in wide spectrum of LLL connecting formal, non-formal and informal grounds and formations.

The Learning City Pécs model and its Learning City Festival is very much transferable since it is based on the examples of post-Millennial learning city cases having been mostly initiated by universities as members of PASCAL Int. Observatory and/or eucen as a special ground for knowledge transfers supported by ULLL. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) joined in for such expansion in LLL by creating a Global Network of Learning Cities and, accordingly, composed a set of guidelines alongside with universities can discover their potentials to be connected with urban based community development. A latest collection from Springer is a relevant example which also discusses on this matter

and has got a chapter on Learning City Pécs. (Nemeth - Berendi, 2025) Another good source for universities to build on learning cities' collaborative power is the ASEM LLL HUB's Research Network⁶ on Learning Cities and Regions where UP is participating to discover similarities and differences in the roles of HEIs referring to building and innovating learning cities.

Most probably, universities have got a responsibility in shaping the future of learning cities and to turn them and keep them inclusive, integrative whereby the model may be able to serve as a balanced set of structure in between the economic/social and environmental/natural. Just quite recently the University of Pécs, in association with the Municipality of Pécs, have influenced the Learning City Pécs programme to turn direct attention to green matters in combination with technological challenges as a mainstream focus to learning in urban environments. The Green University campaign of Pécs and the Green City movement have arrived to collaborate with local and regional stakeholders and turn the Pécs Learning City Festival into a good space to celebrate partnerships for green and healthy moves combined with reaching out to relevant cases from GNLC member cities in which UP is a good source of transfer in articulating lessons, messages for the city of Pécs and its local and regional communities.

The internationalisation strategy of the University of Pécs implies a chapter on continuing collaboration with the Municipality of Pécs and relevant stakeholders so as to carry on developing the Learning City Pécs programme and, likewise, to apply again for the title UNESCO Global Learning City in 2026. Eventually, the Learning City Pécs programme and the RDI aspects of the annual Pécs Learning City Festival is a strategic mission of the Lifelong Learning Research Centre of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pécs.

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Description

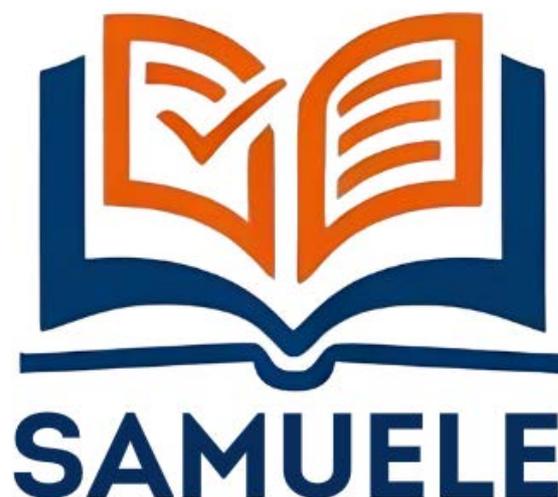
The University of Tartu (UT) has offered a wide range of LLL opportunities for various target groups for decades and reached a participation rate of 45,000 learners per year.

The University of Third Age programme targeted to learners 50 years of age or older, started in the University of Tartu Pärnu College in January 2010 with nearly 300 participants and expanded to Tartu in the autumn of the same year. Today, 16 year later, the Third Age University is a registered trademark of the University of Tartu and gathers 20 different programmes in 19 locations with nearly 5 000 participants across Estonia in its network. In addition, workshops, language classes as well as courses to develop entrepreneurship and digital skills have been held. Since 2020 a series of webinars is organised for target group across Estonia.

The aim of the Third Age University is to provide equal learning opportunities for older learners and to increase their life satisfaction through the development of knowledge and awareness as well as personal development and creativity. Acquiring new skills and knowledge allows participants better to adapt in a rapidly changing society. LLL supports learners' active lifestyle and readiness to contribute to society and offers them additional opportunities for social interaction. According to research, all these aspects play an important role in ensuring the emotional well-being and mental health of the elderly population. In their feedback, learners have said that "Life around us is changing so quickly, new knowledge makes you think, gives you the opportunity to feel like a part of what's happening, and not an excluded citizen in this remote country". Another learner wrote "The Third Age University has given me faith in the continuation of youth – we can still acquire knowledge and be curious about the world around us even at an advanced age. Look at how many elderly people leave their homes on Thursdays to go to school!"

The University of Tartu is responsible for the organisation of programmes in Tartu and Tallinn as well as in 3 college towns: Pärnu, Narva and Viljandi. In other locations the programmes are conducted in cooperation with either the local government or a non-profit organisation. Each programme has its own programme manager, who is responsible for the preparation of the lecture programme as well as practical organisation on site. The programmes consist of lectures on important topics in society once or twice a month delivered by the university professors and researchers as well as professionals and socially recognised opinion leaders and experts in various fields. At the end of the academic year, learner who have attended at least 75% of the lectures receive UT continuing education certificate of attendance.

The programmes are free for participants. The activity is supported by the university, Ministry of Education and Research, local governments, private entrepreneurs and volunteers. This year, the University of Third Age received the Nationally Recognised Science Populariser Award.



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