



Summary 8th of November 2021 @Doelenzaal UB Singel

University Forum

Life Long Learning

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Society and the economy are transforming at a rapid pace. More and more is expected of us. You have to be flexible, you have to keep developing and you have to be able to keep up with a rapidly changing economy. We are used to seeing the university diploma as the point at which learning ends and work begins, but is that starting point still appropriate today? Does this mean anything for the university? To what extent, and in what way, should we as the UvA move along with 'lifelong learning'? And what role should professional practice actually play in our academic education? The members of the University Forum and other interested parties have discussed these and more questions.

Discussions were held in a world café format, in which those present always changed sub-questions after 15 minutes. The questions below have been discussed. You can read the results of those discussions in this report.

1

What should the UvA's objective be in regards to Life Long Learning?

2

How do we make learning attractive to adults?

3

What is the role of research in Life Long Learning?

4

What role should challenges in professional practices outside of the university play in our education?

Guest Speaker

Frank Cornelissen

Dr. Frank Cornelissen is program group leader and manager of the Master's program in Educational Sciences. He inspired those present with an example of how science and professional practice can arrive at a valuable innovation together. Frank also talked about the rapid transformation of the labor market, which makes it increasingly important to continue to develop later in your career. This means that we have to start thinking again about certification and creating a learning culture in professional practice.



What should the UvA's objective be in regards to Life Long Learning?

The first question is whether Lifelong Learning should be an assignment for the university in the first place. Training courses aimed at workers are currently mainly provided by private parties. What does the university have to offer compared to the existing educational offer? Quite a lot. Because the distance between education and research is nowhere as small as at the university, it is the ideal place for cross-fertilization between practical experience and science. The non-commercial nature of the university makes the UvA more attractive than parties that are currently mainly active in Lifelong Learning. The university not only has something to offer to workers, this relationship also works the other way. Practical experiences are often a source of inspiration for scientific research and can certainly enrich academic education. So there is much to be gained if the UvA gets started with Lifelong Learning, although of course we have to think carefully about the right form.

Several points for attention were raised at the Forum meeting. If we make academic knowledge available to professional practice, we will also have to think about the appropriate academic recognition that goes with it. We will have to explore new types of diplomas and so-called 'micro-credentials'. It is also important to bear in mind that there are major differences between alumni in the professional field. It would be useful to focus education on different career stages, because it is likely that certain education formats work better for certain groups than others, but also to promote interaction between starters and experienced alumni, for example by setting up 'learning communities'. Furthermore, at the moment further training and education for adults is often characterized by short courses, while longer trajectories may be more desirable with a view to bonding and depth.

How do we make learning attractive to adults?

To make learning more attractive for adult participants, we will have to look at education differently than we are used to. This has a practical and a substantive component. On a practical level, it is important that education can be combined with work and care obligations. This will have to be taken into account when drawing up rosters. But we also have to keep an eye on financial accessibility. University education can quickly become too expensive if you cannot simply rely on student grants and have to pay the institutional tuition fees. With such a major economic barrier, it is understandable that people expect that what has been learned can also be applied outside the university. Relevance of education to challenges in professional practice makes it more attractive to adult participants and increases the likelihood that employers would be willing to pay for it. Focusing on practice is therefore important, but we will have to look for the right way in which we can combine this with an emphasis on research: that which makes the university interesting as a place for Lifelong Learning. Furthermore, it is usually a long time ago for adult participants that they last attended lectures, so it is wise to make education a bit more interactive and flexible.

What is the role of research in Life Long Learning?

The close proximity to scientific research makes the university a particularly valuable place for Lifelong Learning. Co-creative collaboration between people in the professional field and university researchers has a lot to offer for both parties. The field can draw on scientific research when working with difficult challenges. Researchers may find a great source of inspiration for future research in professional practice. The academic curiosity-driven freedom that we consider important at the university should not be compromised in this way. We want to determine the research agenda ourselves as much as possible, but it is also in our own interest to let that agenda be informed by what is happening outside the academy. To promote this, more interaction is needed between science and the professional field, to which LLL education could contribute. The greatest challenges of our time require us to rethink structures that we have long taken for granted; that we think about how things can be done differently. Let the university be the place for that. Not just for scientists, but also for anyone who wants to go the extra mile to advance their own field of work. In this way we can also give something back to society. This, of course, applies to the developments surrounding Lifelong Learning itself as well. Educational research in this field is desperately needed.

What role should challenges in professional practices outside of the university play in our education?

Connecting education to challenges in professional practice is essential, both for programs with a clear vocational orientation and for programs that have less. The question is how you can ensure that the educational offer coincides more with the demand from professional practice. If we let ourselves be guided too much by that question, we risk losing what makes us attractive: the academic character. We should distinguish practical focuses from more conceptual ones. To what extent should research be directly applicable in practice? Fundamental research is also valuable and the application of research often only becomes apparent many years later. It is precisely for innovation that it is important to investigate things that are not necessarily in line with expectations from current professional practice. It's a precarious balance that we need to keep a close eye on. Another potential pitfall to watch out for is the potential tension between post-initial and mainstream education. The last element to keep in mind is the fact that the professional field, while very clear for some programs, can be extremely diverse for others. This makes it important to address Life Long Learning program by program.

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding the Life Long Learning project of the UvA, feel free to contact the coordinator Susan Nuijten.

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