

Why do older people need further education?

Dear members,

On the occasion of the EFOS meeting in Bratislava we discussed the further development of senior education in Europe. As a result of the discussions further steps for future tasks were fixed. Among others we asked “Why do older people need further education?”

In the following paper some trends regarding the present status of senior education will be presented. We would like to encourage you to reflect on this in your institutions and to inform us of your opinion regarding this matter.

A. Infrastructural development of senior studies at the universities

Starting basis

The range of services offered at the universities has become variegated during the last years. There exist general studies, children’s university, extra-occupational study courses, senior studies and courses for guest students. The main reasons for the activities of the universities are public relations related to them. The enlargement of target groups at the universities has long taken place and is necessary and welcome for the society.

Universities offering senior studies have adapted themselves to this situation. They develop new learning forms and occupy themselves with didactics and methodology for special target groups. Senior studies as a part of the university are also a part of the reform process of higher education.

It must now be discussed

- Where is the place of senior studies at the universities? What is their outlook?
- How will the organization which initiates the studies look like?
- Which structural changes have taken place at the university?
- Has it effects on my organization? (Association, academy, limited company)
- How is the cooperation with the university? Which content must be discussed?

We would like to encourage you to discuss these questions in your working team. The discussion will be continued at an EFOS meeting.

B. Which value for the society has the offer of further education for older people?

Today many older people are fit and have a high level of knowledge. They can and even must participate in education. Otherwise they will not be able to take part in social life. Education is also necessary in later life for the accomplishment of new tasks, for the reflection in connection with possible activities and for the use of existing potentials. According to Friebe education is necessary to avoid social exclusion. (cf. Friebe: “Exclusion and inclusion of older people in education and society, Bertelsmann Verlag 2010).

However, there are different requirements for education in this age-group. You can see it from the composition of the participants. Persons lacking education don’t come to the

university. About 85 % of the participants had studied and worked in qualified professions and want to take part in further education after their professional life.

The role of further education is up for discussion. It is a part of the political measures for the mobilization of older people. Further education as such can contribute to cognitive fitness and can help to get information and mental scope for decisions regarding the maintenance of the quality of life and to cope with tasks in later life. Therefore it is necessary to support people in this regard.

In more concrete terms there are the following reasons for education in later life:

- The changes in society, among others individualization, pluralism, neo-liberalism and globalization are manifold and complex. Particularly older people have difficulties with those changes in society. It leads to more equal opportunities if they can participate in education.
- Education helps to become aware of ones identity. By gaining knowledge and capacities ones own situation in life can be understood more easily. The singular person learns better to deal with his or her environment.
Education makes possible to have a critical look at the social, political, economic and cultural life.
- Education fosters independence and responsibility of oneself and leads to more engagement which increases the satisfaction with life.

The university offers the requirements to study by oneself. The increasing participation in project work confirms this statement.

C. Which value do the studying opportunities have for the universities?

- Older people are included into the research of the faculties. Important questions of age, ageing of the development of competences can be examined.
- The intergenerational learning is important for both groups. But it does not replace the systematic planning of learning processes between young and old.
- The outward opening of the university is very important for its reputation. Like the Children's University is good for the reputation of the university also the studies after the professional work are very important for the reputation of a university in a town. No group could be a better "communication medium" for the institution.

D. Which challenges do we have to meet?

- The participant is the main concern regarding the development of the offer of studies. We have to orientate ourselves **according to the target groups**. Therefore we must know: Who comes to us? Which requirements have the single persons? Which program do they expect from the university? How do the participants wish to cooperate? How much time do they wish to schedule?
- We must reflect how we can reach those persons lacking access to education who come to us. We know that this problem cannot be resolved only by the university. In this case society and politics have to assume the responsibility. This refers to values of a socially just society.
- A network of regional initiatives regarding the subject age and ageing is necessary.

Dear "comrades-in-arms" regarding senior studies. We ask you for an active discussion

regarding the structural changes. Major focus will be put on a glimpse into the future and the question of the role of senior studies in Europe.

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