Beaujolais Ed-Nouveau: Decanting the importance of life-long learning in the challenging, changing Europe of 2020

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Abstract. The modern European university as we know it is changing, has changed, and will continue to in order to adapt to modern needs and to what is happening around it. This process has been revealed by the huge upsurge in higher education reform programs, of quality assurance initiatives, of Higher Education (HE) league tables across the region and beyond, purporting to measure this-and-that all-vital “indicator” or “criterion.” The authors posit that all of these policy innovations have their merits, for each in its own way is beginning to move HE away from being an pedigreed ‘acquired taste’ elixir for an elite, to a new and more palatable drink that is open not only to different partakers of all knowledge and skill varieties, but also enticing to a novice post-secondary learner attracted to try attractively bottled ‘New World’ Beaujolais of Life-Long Learning (LLL) courses and programs. This is seen generally as especially good news for fulfilling individual personal aspirations for professional and personal advancement as well as meeting knowledge societies’ present and future needs of national prosperity, growth and stability. The accompanying downside of this positive development, the twinned phenomena of diploma inflation and job inflation, present a real threat to these real lifelong learning successes, however. To begin to unpack these intertwined phenomena will require that the authors first discern the real spirit or wine of “lifelong learning” in modern education and labour market circles and specifically how this, or indeed if this, is of any relevance to the process and function of HE generally and the modern university in particular.

Keywords: Life-Long Learning (LLL), Higher Education (HE), Further Education, Vocational Education, ‘Diploma Disease’, Labour Markets, Graduate Qualifications

JEL Codes: I (I21, I23, I25, I28).

1. Introduction

To begin to unpack the intertwined phenomena of ‘Higher Education’, ‘Further Education’, ‘Vocational Learning’ and the twinned provision of an individual’s education process and the provision of appropriately learned and skilled human capital for the Europe of 2020 will require that the authors first discern the real

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spirit or wine of ‘Life-Long Learning’ (LLL) in modern education and labour market circles and specifically how this, or indeed if this, is of any relevance to the process and function of the modern Higher Education (HE) sector, particularly the university.

In many ways, at least to these authors, LLL is often perceived in much the same way as the eagerly anticipated arrival of each year’s Beaujolais Nouveau “vintage”. The third Thursday in November may well be a red-letter day for the sprightly spritzer generation, but real wine connoisseurs wouldn’t grace it with a sideways spittoon. Likewise, LLL is too often dismissed as this year’s flavour in HE and one that will never stand the test or taste of time. What we hope to do here is set out why not only is this closed view wrong, but how the reversing of a whine for only such-and-such wines of ‘higher’ learning is crucial for preserving the whole vineyard of academic learning and social progress.

2. Definitions: A distinct bouquet of confusion

Uncorking any discussion about lifelong learning in modern education and labour market environments is likely to prompt an instant dinner table division for many. The opinions being not so much about whether the subject should appear at the top or the bottom of the educational wine list, but whether it should even be on the menu at all. Likewise, the topic will more often than not induce eye-rolling agony in any invited guests from the world of higher education and the university. Where the non-academic or non-teacher might perceive anything “lifelong” as at best merely a future–perfect tense or at worst as somebody else’s dilatory utopian delusion, the guest professors will delight in claiming that their responsibility passes to society at large once young students graduate university and that the middle and latter part of life is nothing to do with them (unless they choose to join academia of course). In an age where even instant gratification takes too long, and where every day lives are ever more built on seemingly shifting knowledge, technological and scientific sands, on the face of it, it would seem even counter intuitive if not impossible to describe anything as being “lifelong” let alone learning.\(^1\) Since it’s formal adoption in policy-maker terminology and being heralded as the next best thing to hit education, rather than maturing into a strong and highly quaffable educational digestive or at least an acceptable Ed de table, it seems that for many educational systems and labour markets it still seems to be either undrinkable or at best reluctantly choked back and spat out when nobody is looking. A good full-bodied LLL strategy is still as elusive as it was before we laid it down for the future over twenty-five years ago.

Looking at it in a purely practical sense, lifelong learning is in many ways a “no brainer” (to coin an uncharacteristically useful Americanism). Unless we are in a coma or live in Middle Earth, we all learn something new almost every day of our lives courtesy of, if nothing else, twenty-four-hour news channels, filling our minds with new often dis-information. We also learn from friends, family, employers, colleagues, taxi drivers, even the homeless guy on the street teaches us that we are lucky not to be him/her. Some of this information has relatively little intrinsic value – for example who has just won the Boston Marathon or where you can get two Botox treatments for the price of one, but we also learning everyday something that will make our lives easier, faster, cheaper – and in essence therefore (we believe) better: a new phone App to pay your parking ticket; a new free website to learn Cantonese on your office PC; or a new YouTube site that shows you how to open the box that your high-pressure water-jet device comes in. (It has to be noted here that whilst our paper does set out to advocate the legitimacy of all types of LLL, we may suggest that anyone who needs a video tutorial on how to open the box of a household appliance shoul d probably not be allowed to purchase it in the first place).

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) in its 2011 research report acknowledged that definitions of LLL are still difficult and complex,
European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF) based on learning outcomes is urging authorities and stakeholders to reconsider the relationship between their separate frameworks and educational offers for general education, vocational education and training (VET) and higher (HE). [The report] testifies to the difficulty in grasping the phenomenon. [and] the dimensions of change in terms of stakeholder involvement, learning outcomes, motivations and policy-statements. It also confirms the loosening of ties between institutions and qualifications types, increasingly pluralistic education and training systems, blurring boundaries between VET and HE.\[2]\n
Much of what has been written about the meaning of 21st century LLL tends to vie towards the theoretical or conceptual as if the applicable were improbable. The authors have previously touched on this in their work on the European higher education reforms formerly known then as the Bologna Process.\[3]\n
What we want to do here is explore in more detail why LLL is more than just a flight of fantasy, why it is not the abominable snowman, nor a single bottle of 1964 Chateau La Fitte stuffed at the back of a cellar only to be brought out at post-G7 summit dinner. That now individuals, institutions of learning at all levels (but specifically at the post-secondary level) and governments have to make the conceptual notion of learning for life and throughout life as just as important – and possibly even more so - than the formal and compulsory learning that takes place at primary, secondary and tertiary/higher education institutions.

Clearly, the concept of continuous learning is not nearly as new or radical as it purports to be. It is in fact as much a part of the human curious, creative and down-right nosey psyche as it ever was. However, by puffing out its education and training pigeon chest, the ruffled feathers of traditional institutional learning advocates have unwittingly turned a potential bird of paradise into an albatross around the necks of policy makers, learning institutions, and learning communities around the world.

3. The original cellars of Life-Long Learning

It could be said that elements of LLL have been in circulation for many decades already. In earlier - admittedly unremarkable vintages – it was commonplace for traditional formal learning to also run “adult education” or “evening classes” open to anyone and seen to be flourishing in many parts of Europe, Australia and North America from the early 1970s through to the present day. The American “Center for Participant Education” ‘movement’ (with origins in the University of California/Berkeley’s Free Speech Movement of the 1960s),\[4]\n
which spread across the country’s higher education institutions (HEIs) was perhaps the best example of adult or real community education in action, whereby members of the community volunteered to run classes on everything from languages and pottery to bicycle mechanics and Machiavellian thought all for free or at least not for profit. People literally giving their time to help others learn something new – both skills and knowledge both for life or for the joy of it. At its height, and certainly well into the mid 1990s such was the demand and supply of these programs that whole catalogues were produced each academic year by a university’s Center for Participant Education (CPE) (see Florida State University, USA for example) offering hundreds of courses and requiring enrolment periods and even ‘drop-add’ sessions just as with regular university courses.\[5]\n
Adult education – was and still is in many countries – essentially the same concept although it differed/s in two fundamental ways: classes were for the vast majority not organized by the higher education sector and were almost exclusively fee-paying. In the UK for example it is still common for village halls or other public spaces to run evening classes – often in subject areas requiring little physical resources and no permanent resources on behalf of the venues and teachers, and relying more on the learner providing the materials – e.g., photography, painting, sculpture etc. As Western obsessions about “healthy lifestyles”, fitness regimes and every diet known to man ballooned in the mid 1980s, so did the proliferation of literally
hundreds of different evening and afternoon classes to “keep fit”. Ironically, just as the New World wines of South America were filling the supermarket shelves, so were the middle classes filling afterschool assembly hall aerobics classes to shift the expanding midriff brought on by too much Argentinean Merlot.

Both the CPE and adult or evening education concepts were for sure the forerunners of LLL as a term and they were and are indeed all about learning, whether it be to dance a Rumba or stay fit with a Zumba. Yet ironically, in many ways this was not the same as lifelong learning in the modern or 21st century sense. This was learning for fun, for relaxation, for personal fitness, or for pleasure. It was (and is) in essence learning as a hobby. It certainly was not designed for professional development.

The concept of learning for professional development in the work place can be traced back in Western Europe to the late 1970s and early 1980s, a time when it became en-vogue for employers wishing to attract the best candidates to offer attractive “in-service” training schemes or “professional development” programs. This was a costly investment on behalf of employers but one that proved dividends when they were able to recruit and retain the best people. There was also a while later an even bolder (some might say brazenly slavish) strategy to recruit or lure new graduates out of university in any field with promises to train them “on the job” and propel them to high stakes and high-status positions within a short time. In effect a fast-track to professional stardom. This was not in any sense a commitment to lifelong learning. It was nothing more than an HR marketing ploy to get the best graduates into an organization. To be fair there was nothing intrinsically wrong with this, and it worked. But, it worked at a time where there were only a certain number of higher education graduates entering the labour market every September. In many countries (outside of the USA) this was approximately 25% of that age cohort population. Essentially demand outstripped supply of eager young graduates – and graduates could pick-and-choose. The wisdom of bumping that figure from 25% to 50% may be reserved for another discussion. Lest to say here however, that predictably with a near 100% rise of university graduates on the labour market and supply subsequently outstripping demand, employers are no longer willing to take on any graduate to train-up themselves in order to turn their university learned “knowledge” into useful work place skills and knowledge.

Putting it quite bluntly: In the 1980s employers wanted graduate saplings that they could plant in their own organizational vineyard, to nurture and grow them into their own distinctive House varieties. By the 1990s, this had moved to seeking the best graduates straight from the vine that they could crush, mature and lay down for a few years until they emerged as a hot shot on the professional Loire list. Today, employers are looking for fully bottled graduate minds, accompanied by recognizable labels, well-rounded characters, experienced yet decidedly different, sprightly and zesty inspirers to make their organization, products or services exciting and now. They have neither the time nor the desire to train people who in all probability will have left to pursue their third career within three years.

As employees (be they new or mature graduates/non-graduates) are required to have further/new knowledge, additional skills, or certifications, they are expected to get them, and to pay for them, themselves. They are likewise free to decide where to get them.

4. The University and LLL: An unorthodox Grenache

Compulsory education institutions and systems often represent a vat where the individuality of learning, creativity and curiosity are confined within state controlled curricula and standards. Education from early years to high school diploma levels should in theory provide the skills and knowledge to go on to further learning – either in the work place or at a higher education level – be that at degree or professional levels. Post-secondary learning on the other hand tends to concentrate on subject specific knowledge without due reference to its compatibility with life beyond or after the university. Tertiary institutions also have a
tendency to see a university education as the pinnacle of an educational pyramid with the expectation that once they graduate their chosen level, former students will never set foot on campus again. To be fair on the institution, the same desire and hope has long been that of graduating students themselves who equally hold that once you have graduated tertiary education, you are all done with education forever.

Universities still too often distance themselves from any learning or activities that does not concentrate on teaching Bachelor’s or Master’s students or high-level research (or low level research disguised as high level research) even actively deriding anything which does not fall within this frame of reference and hence reverence. They are in fact dismissive of anything that would appear to be a lighter Pinot Grigo rather than a full-bodied Claret. In addition, it is a sad state of affairs that in many countries the more you can look down on any LLL initiative, the more that it elevates your own academic credentials and narcissistic peer standing. Such home-grown moonshiners might be interested to know that even the likes of Harvard University – ranked for the 8th year in a row as the Academic Ranking of World Universities’ top university in the world, has embraced LLL and its value and worth to learning for the American Economy and way of life, and has become one of the standard bearers of LLL.

One very important university exception to the norm is the UK’s Open University (OU).[6] Still a leading beacon and the earliest example of what LLL means in real terms. The OU opened in 1969 with a mission to expand access to higher learning with a controversial open access policy. In its earliest incarnations it would perhaps be fair to say that academia and the traditionalists were scathing about the OU, not only because of its unorthodox teaching methods (many “courses” were broadcast on television in the middle of the night at a time in the UK when there was literally nothing else on TV between midnight at midday) but also because of the decidedly older age of the typical OU students. On a popular TV quiz show “University Challenge”, which saw teams of undergrads from different universities competing against each other, the OU team regularly resembled the parents’ generation of the opposing team. Employers were also often wary of an OU degree-wielding applicant – although they may have found other reasons not to employ them. And other universities would rather close down a program that have it taught by faculty with an OU qualification. This was the unfortunate reality of the times. Those times have thankfully changed and the OU is now one of the United Kingdom’s leading universities with the maturity – not only in age but in life - of its students reflected in the maturity and calibre of its research and the competency of its graduates.

The OU model has since been emulated in many other countries (e.g. the Polish Open University (POU/WSZ) in Warsaw) not only because the OU model allows learners to study part-time or within a more flexible course types and learning modes than traditional universities (particularly in Europe), but because they are also attracting students who had not previously had any formal post-secondary education or may even have not finished secondary education, but who have since acquired the equivalent skills, knowledge and competences via informal or non-formal learning opportunities and experiences. In every sense of the word, the OU was the first great leap forward in lifelong learning and was a lone pioneer in recognizing and actively realizing formal learning throughout life for life.

More than half a century after the grey jumpers and droopy moustaches of the UK’s Open University graced the grainy TV sets of an even greyer Britain, MIT in the US launched it’s program of free short courses open to everyone via the internet in 2012 and the term MOOCs (Mass On-line Open Courses) was born. The MOOC phenomenon – or as some still now claim the fleeting fad of MOOCs (see Daniel & Uvalić-Trumbić) – has given rise to as much consternation as the OU did in the 1970s and the Macdonald’s Hamburger University of the late 1990s. MOOCs are the modern day equivalent of bringing a bottle of Australian Chardonnay to a White House Bar-b-Que. Much like the other early 21st century “interference” in higher education of university rankings whereby every institution sought to belittle the practice while at the
same time walked over hot coals to climb up various league table lists, the rise of the MOOC has prompted institutions around the world to simultaneously deride the MOOC revolution as being over before it began, yet still desperately trying to replicate their own MOOC schemes. Here is not the place nor the space for a fair and thorough analysis of the impact of MOOCs and the authors believe it is really too early to say whether “the MOOC” has been and gone or not, although this mass open approach – be it access for free or fee-paying, does speak precisely to the notion of what lifelong learning opportunities are supposed to be – open to all, accessible by all, (ICT conditions not with standing), and of use to anyone. Broadly, MOOCs can be short courses taken in isolation on very specific subjects, or can collectively contribute to a wider qualification, diploma or even degree program. Many MOOC universities are now giving formal credits for MOOCs with the aim of encouraging non-traditional learners who succeed in their individual standalone courses to pursue a full diploma or degree courses. And perhaps here is where the rest of academia and other universities need to wake up to the potential of LLL programs as (if for nothing else) a new recruiting ground for their beloved case’s of traditional Bachelor’s and Master’s students.

A recent report in the University World News made a strong case for universities to be generally more open to lifelong learning:

Universities need to come down from the ivory tower and make it easier for students who have not trodden the traditional pathway to higher education to get the qualifications they need at any point in their lives. The demand for education and professional education is rising in today’s knowledge based societies, and the need to adapt and respond to changing skills needed for economic success requires ad education system that goes beyond traditional educational paths. University education is still heavily balanced towards traditional high school graduates and professionals with a university degree. Alternative offerings that recognise that lifelong learners live in different circumstances – for example, they already have a job and family – need to be enlarged.[8]

Moreover, the report makes a clear call for HE is to up their game in becoming more inclusive to non-traditional learners and non-traditional learning pathways, alternative ways to make the higher education system more permeable need to be considered. Universities can play a crucial role in this process and need to open up to students who come to university at a later point in life to gain the skills or training they need. . Universities must increasingly meet the needs of students who already have some post-secondary education, but not necessarily at the university level. Flexible study formats, such as blended learning, distance learning or MOOCs, special support structures, alternative admission criteria, recognition of professional competencies or collaborations with companies and adult or vocational education providers could offer a solution. [9]

Similarly, the EU has explicitly called for better cooperation between different types of education providers and the labour market,

The impression is that traditional HE is not adapting rapidly enough to the (changing) needs of the labour market (e.g. the Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal, and Romania), and especially the needs of the private sector. […] There are a number of countries in which there is resistance towards opening up more extensive interaction with labour market players or where interaction hardly exists.[10]

There is nonetheless still a distinct aversion in the vast majority of countries to throwing resources – human and financial - at a systematic approach to LLL within university systems. The community colleges in the USA and the technical colleges in the UK, for example, are seen as the natural home for LLL in action, absolving the major higher education institutions of any responsibility beyond their impenetrable traditions. This is a dismal dereliction of duty, particularly for countries that have no alternative to a university education after high school (as is the case in Romania). An element of blame could be laid at the doors of the ranking ateliers with their biased towards rewarding research output in their lists. Whilst some rankings are
now expanding their scope to the third pillar of the university by measuring more than just teaching and learning (see for example the THES or QS), if a distinct, discernible and sustainable policy of LLL had to be evidenced for inclusion on ranking lists, then we might just see universities becoming learning spaces for everyone, throughout life, for short periods or longer periods and in a wider and ever-changing variety of subjects. Rather than being an expensive and heavy 1962 Sancerre, the university could become a fruity and refreshing blended Grenache suitable for everyone.

5. Judging a wine by its label: Employers and parents

So widespread is the belief now that the future is “knowledge” and that the university and a university degree is the passport to that future, that employers and parents in many countries are equally closed to any concepts of lifelong learning that does not serve up another university degree certificate. This is particularly the case where there is only one post-secondary option – the university, leading to what the EU terms a “disparity of esteem” between higher education and vocational education and training.[11]

In our introduction, we hinted at the backlash of over reliance on higher education resulting in diploma inflation and job inflation.[12] In its darkest form, diploma inflation is a situation when every single person has a degree and so the only way to distinguish between graduates is to have them take a Master’s or even a third degree. No country has thankfully reached the absolute saturation point of every single high school graduate going on to earn a degree, but with unrealistic expectations by policy that 50 or even 70% of high school leavers should have a higher education, the spectre of absolute degree insignificance looms ever closer.

On the surface of it, there does seem here to be a certain contradiction to the argument in favour of LLL. On the one hand, we are declaring that learning is essential for everyone, and yet on the other that only 50% of high school leavers should go to university. The point is, that we don’t only need university education at degree level for young people, immediately after high school; what we need is different types and timing of learning. What we need is learning throughout life that is not necessarily just another degree or another career professional qualification. LLL is not about retraining to be a lawyer having worked as an entrepreneur for twenty years. It is not just about taking a Master’s in Education Management having been a teacher for 15 years. It is more than that.

The problem here is that many universities and many university systems, do not know how to offer anything but degree programs hence if you want any further learning the option is to embark on another degree program. Universities are not set up or geared to short courses or modules that may or may not be accumulated into a bigger qualification. They also stick steadfastly and rigidly to traditional access and eligibility rules for their degree programs, thereby effectively ensuring that only previous graduates who have followed the traditional educational trajectory can access any form of lifelong learning at the university. The European Union has been clear on urging member states to address this corollary:

The European strategic framework for cooperation in education and Training (ET 2020) calls for coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies [that] should include the establishment of more flexible learning pathways (Council of the European Union, 2009) combining different learning venues and provision modes. In its third strategic objective, the Bruges Communiqué (2010) calls for the promotion of flexible pathways between VET, general education and HE. [13]

The academic elitism of the University and in fact of their governments particularly of those in Europe, and particular those of the former Soviet space and Eastern Europe has led many to believe that building a system of (sigh) “World Class Universities” is more important than any lifelong learning strategy, since only
with a flurry of world class institutes can their economies big themselves up.[14] They believe that just by having everybody now able to get a university degree (or worse still a Master’s degree) they will somehow be a brilliant high-flying nation. The idiocy of this requires no clarification. Unfortunately for the universities operating under such delusions (or being forced to by their governments) far from being the future of their countries, their own futures look decidedly shaky since they are still only looking to expand their traditional student cohorts. They still don’t see that their future is dependent on the continual education of not only their own graduates but also of non-graduates and non-graduates from other countries. And not only through the provision of degree programs, but also of short courses, diplomas, and certificate programs.

Universities today must be an open resource for different learning pathways, for different types of learning and for differed types of learner – and they must be seen to be promoting different types of learning other than the degree program. As we have seen above, there is many a different person that could benefit from some learning later in life and every institution can equally benefit from a later learner’s interaction and contribution to the university or academy of learning.

Writing in the UK’s The Telegraph, David Harbourne warned that it is not only universities who are to blame for pushing degrees over other vocational qualifications claiming that “classrooms up and down the [UK] are still peddling the notion that a degree is the only passport to success. This is simply not the case”.[15] He also goes on to say what we all already suspected or knew in that “Too many graduates are finding themselves in non-graduate jobs on completing their studies. Not only does this push down graduates average pay, it also pushes young people without degrees further down the labour market rungs”.[16] PhD holding taxi drivers, supermarket managers with a Master’s degree and accounting technicians with accounting degrees are more and more a sad reality. As is the booming and politically worrying spectre of youth unemployment – particularly in countries such as Spain and Greece, but also Romania and Bulgaria too where the deference to the university degree in the hangover of post-Communist societies is extremely debilitating.

Directly: the problem of job inflation is a direct result of too many people with too many degrees that they don’t need. Moreover, and more importantly, the problem is of employers demanding a degree (even a specific subject degree) for jobs that actually don’t require them simply as a quick way to weed out or limit job applicants. Apart from over-inflating a job’s worth (and hence salary) by demanding degrees over any other form of lifelong informal and non-formal learning employers are in fact recruiting the wrong candidates and missing out on the best people who can actually do the job and do it well.

The problem is that many countries simply do not recognize LLL or informal learning or non-formal learning as alternatives or substitutes for formal degree qualifications. The reality for employers (and this is particularly true of Romania) is that lifelong learning is only about degrees. It makes no difference if someone has a twenty-year career as a paralegal and a varied history of short courses and training to stay up to date with the changing legal issues du jour and can function in several languages acquired independently, he/she will still not be eligible for a job without a degree certificate.

And parents are also increasingly imbued with the belief that a degree is the only currency of lifelong learning. Again, in systems where the university degree is the only choice for post-secondary learning this is to an extent understandable. In the UK, Harbourne exposes the need to educate parents on how we advise our children:

There is a very obvious disconnect between what […] parents think is desirable in the world of work. In the UK a research commissioned by the Edge Foundation and City & Guilds found that nearly three-quarters of employers see vocational [lifelong] qualifications as essential for improving the skills of young people.[17]
For countries and education systems emerging from centrally planned structures, a latent and extremely corrosive corollary to the hangover of previous education and higher education systems is the lack of an appreciation of any form of learning outside of the traditional two- or three-tier systems and as a consequence of any of acknowledgement of any alternative learning pathways to becoming a lifelong learner. A change in the way LLL is recognized would be a significant step in ensuring that students, parents, universities and employers are convinced by the importance and value of such learning.

If we are still struggling with conceptualizing what we actually mean by lifelong learning and who is responsible for it, then going a step further in identifying learning outcomes and assigning credit values for formal recognition purposes is still very much a case of turning water into wine for many countries. Nevertheless, we do not need a miracle for this to happen, simply an appreciation by Ministries of Education (working for once in conjunction with Ministries of Labour) and their respective university institutions that they are a vital if not the central ingredient in sustainable national lifelong learning strategies.

6. Conclusions: From Champagne to Prosecco

For many European and indeed world higher education communities the new demands and accountabilities of quality assurance, and national, international and world ranking positioning, have become such a drain on their educational and emotional resources that some have just thrown up their hands in despair and told the world they want to get off – and have a drink. And, to an extent, who can blame them? It is very sad that a list of a top 10, top 100, or top 1000 should distract institutions from focusing on opening up their courses and modules and degrees to a wider league of learning for their communities.

The arrival of the annual Beaujolais Nouveau generates much anticipation and expectation over what to expect; what will this year’s grapes be like in terms of body, colour, subtlety of flavours, strength of character? Each academic year heralds a new body of learners with new ideas, new expectations, following new courses and programs leaning new skills, competencies, and training for previously unheard of jobs. Every year the body, make-up, character and traditions of learning are challenged as new times, new decades and in fact each passing generation’s ‘useful’ and ‘un-useful’ knowledge, skills and competencies change for getting on with life and succeeding professionally and personally.

Just as Beaujolais has its traditional detractors, the educational traditionalists see such new “knowledge” or new learning as just the latest fad in education of a populous policy initiative by some government quango or intra-national select committee; or perhaps even a rather unnecessary research paper written by two little known or respected commentators. The truth is however that the true educational connoisseurs both in the public sector higher education institutions and forward thinking private learning communities and educational enterprises are now taking LLL very seriously indeed. They make regular skills tasting tours to employee vineyards of enterprise, science, research and information technology; they know what is the current trend in style and substance of learning and make instant changes to complement their own learning menus. They speak with the technology and information developers and entrepreneurs and lay down the bottles of learning in their cellar of learning for the next three to five years of coming innovations. They in fact plan for the future of the communities they serve not only by anticipating the needs of lifelong learners but also the future of lifelong earning itself.

For the modern university the real implications of turning down an invitation to the dinner party of lifelong learning are twofold: As skills, knowledge and competencies continue to change so ferociously it will be impossible for whole degree programs to keep up and change to meet these realities, and as a consequence employers will stop believing in, and hiring degree graduates as they will be out of date; As tuition fees continue to rise and graduates find themselves in low paid non-graduate level jobs they will shun
the universities in favour of other institutions for shorter courses, more vocational and practical courses with private providers be that on-line, via MOOCs, via professional training organizations or via apprenticeships and self-determined professional development. In both cases the university risks becoming redundant beyond commercially viable research.

The bubble is already beginning to burst with employers and parents on the overzealous policies of getting more young people into higher education straight after high school, not to mention forcing them all into Master’s degrees because of there being too many Bachelor’s graduates. Societies are beginning to wake up to the need for more high school graduates continuing on into some form of tertiary learning rather than exclusively a university academic path. The demand for lifelong learning opportunities will soon outstrip the demand for the traditional one-stop degree route. Parents, teachers, students, employees, as well as employers are slowly coming round to alternatives to long expensive degree programs at all levels and at different stages of professional lives. Simply put, for the individual, lifelong learning is the new passport to lifelong earning.

Champagne has traditionally been the exclusive provenance of the wealthy and the privileged and beyond the means of most. Today, the quality of the new Proseccos as an acceptable alternative has rivalled the dominance of the Dom Perignon set– it may have a different label, but it looks the same, it tastes the same, and it has the same effect. Where a university degree may be still held up as the Champagne of tertiary and continuing education, alternatives in the form of short courses, specialist training, professional programs throughout life will become the toast of the institutions of higher education that truly get a taste for them.

7. References (Endnotes)


[9] Ibid.


[12] See: Dore, R. The diploma disease revisited. *IDS Bulletin* 11.2, (1980). Dore states: “So there is more and more schooling (over and above the generally desirable extension of basic education) for reasons which have nothing to do with the actual knowledge acquisition necessary for doing jobs. Nor does it have much to do with personal development and self-fulfillment, or learning for its own sake, since a lot of the schooling is ‘reluctant schooling’ – the ritual acquisition of qualifications necessary to get jobs” (n.p.). Retrieved: https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Dore11.2final.pdf (accessed 28 October 2014).


[14] “In the current policy context, world-class universities are not those that provide the best programs or educate the most diverse set of citizens. They are not necessarily the most intellectually creative or far-sighted institutions, and are not the most socially equitable. Nor are they those that best address the common problems of humanity. World-class universities pump out the most global science, attract and hold the top scientists, generate lucrative research applications for industry, and lead in the rankings. For better or worse, that is the present global standard” (Marginson, S. Yes, minister, the recipe for a world-class uni is a piece of cake. *The Australian* (6 February 2013). Retrieved: http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/opinion/yes-minister-the-recipe-for-a-world-class-uni-is-a-piece-of-cake/story-e6frgcko-1226571060918 (accessed 30 October 2014).


[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.