



## WHAT IS LIFELONG LEARNING?

Lifelong learning may be broadly defined as learning that is pursued throughout life: learning that is flexible, diverse and available at different times and in different places. Lifelong learning crosses sectors, promoting learning beyond traditional schooling and throughout adult life (ie post-compulsory education). This definition is based on Delors' (1996) four 'pillars' of education for the future.

- **Learning to know** - mastering learning tools rather than acquisition of structured knowledge.  
**Learning to do** – equipping people for the types of work needed now and in the future including innovation and adaptation of learning to future work environments.
- **Learning to live together, and with others** – peacefully resolving conflict, discovering other people and their cultures, fostering community capability, individual competence and capacity, economic re **Learning to be** – education contributing to a person's complete development: mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality. silience, and social inclusion.

This is underpinned by "**Learning to Learn**".

Lifelong learning can instil creativity, initiative and responsiveness in people thereby enabling them to show adaptability in post-industrial society through enhancing skills to:

- Manage uncertainty
- Communicate across and within cultures, sub-cultures, families and communities
- Negotiate conflicts

The emphasis is on learning to learn and the ability to keep learning for a lifetime.

The European Commission (2001: 9) found that lifelong learning has "Four broad and mutually supporting objectives: personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability/adaptability". In this regard, lifelong learning has lifewide dimensions that transcend narrow economic and vocational aspects.

The European Lifelong Learning Initiative defines lifelong learning as

"...a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout



their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment, in all roles circumstances, and environments.” (Watson 2003: 3)

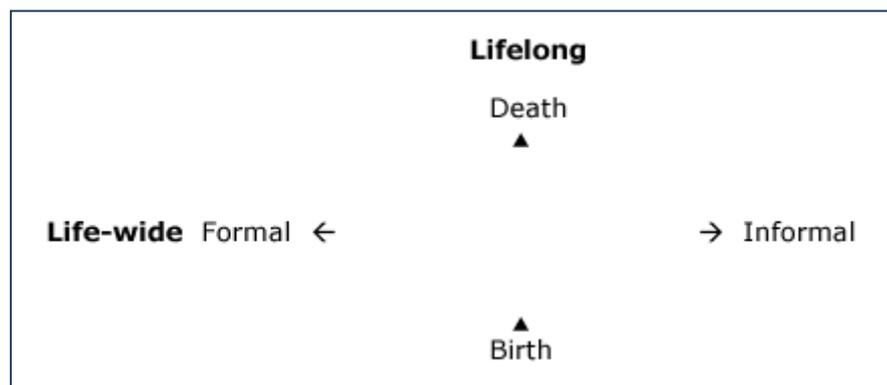
In Sweden, the National Agency for Education has put forward a conceptual framework for both lifelong learning and life-wide learning (Skolverket, 2000). Lifelong learning is seen as a holistic view of education and recognises learning from different environments. As shown in Figure 1, it consists of two dimensions (Skolverket, 2000: 19):

1. lifelong learning recognising that individuals learn throughout a lifetime,

and

2. life-wide learning recognising the formal, non-formal and informal settings.

**Figure 1: Dimensions of lifelong learning**



The lifelong dimension is relatively non-problematic, as it simply comprises what an individual learns throughout life. It is widely accepted that as knowledge and skills become obsolete, individuals continuously update their competencies in a process of continuous learning.

The life-wide dimension is more complex, as it embraces an extensive range of learning settings and contexts, such as set out in Table 1.

**Table 1: Formal, non-formal and informal learning**

Formal	Non-formal	Informal
ACE institutions	Labour market programs	Clubs
Universities	Professional associations	Libraries



VET providers	On-the-job training	Museums
High schools	Work experience programs	Art galleries
Primary schools	Volunteer organisations	Playgrounds
Pre-schools	Childcare centres	Families
U3As	Learning circles	Elder care

The distinction between formal and non-formal learning environments is about where learning takes place. Formal learning occurs within institutions established primarily to deliver education and training, often leading to recognised outcomes and qualifications. Non-formal learning has intended education and training outcomes, however, the setting is outside dedicated learning institutions, most often in places where learning is not the primary business.

Informal learning is distinguishable by intent. It can occur almost anywhere, but as a by-product of other activities. It is often unplanned and without explicit emphasis on learning, yet may still lead to the acquisition of valuable skills, knowledge and attitudes.

This analysis of lifelong learning differs from that postulated by the OECD which classifies formal learning as a program of study that is recognised through a qualification; non-formal learning as a program of study that is not recognised through a qualification, and informal learning as that which is achieved outside an organised program (Watson 2003: 2).

#### References

Delors, J. (1996) Learning: The treasure within Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, UNESCO

European Commission (2001) Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality, Brussels, COM(2001) 428final

Skolverket (2000) Lifelong Learning and Lifewide Learning, Stockholm, The National Agency for Education

Watson, L. (2003) Lifelong Learning in Australia, Canberra, Department of Education, Science and Training