

European context

Chapter 6. Content

Further to the research on the senior education programmes in Europe described in 6.4 above, the consortium decided on additional cross-country research to be conducted, reviewing the most common senior education courses in the 7 partner-countries.

The purpose of this study was to find the commonalities among the most-widely offered and delivered senior courses (as part of a programme or offered independently) in the partners' countries, and include the data processed in the Chapter 6: Content, alongside with the already conducted EU-wide research.

The suggested rationale was findings to be related and referred to¹:

- a. The 8 Key Competences for Lifelong Learning of the EU, and
- b. The Quality of Life dimensions, as already defined and specified by this project

The idea was not just to further exemplify and provide more data for this chapter, but also to use the relevant information collected through this research in other chapters (e.g. Pedagogy) to exemplify and justify the statements and conclusions made.

Findings and conclusions: In terms of content areas the information and data collected throughout the research have defined ICT, Arts and Culture, Foreign Languages, and Physical Health as most common to which programs and courses refer to. Despite the course- and content-specific competences for lifelong learning, such as e.g. Digital competence and Communication in foreign languages, almost all courses offered are seen as developing key competences like Learning to learn, Social and civic competences, and last but not least, Cultural awareness and expression.

The above also refers to a great extent to the Quality of Life dimensions such as Physical Health, Psychological Health, Social, Increased participation, Perceived control, Personal growth, and Leisure.

Content and delivery: Senior learners principally prefer to focus more on practical rather than on theoretical aspects and issues, as they do not need that much of a theoretical background, given their life skills, knowledge and sometimes experiences in different areas, topics and subjects. Therefore the most common forms of delivery are seminars, workshops, practical activities, and topic-based discussions, and less preferred are lectures and presentations.

The most popular common courses in the partners' countries include:

1. ICT: Most widely-offered are the ICT courses (in all countries) as they reflect a declared need for the use of new technology and increased digital competence. They are generally at Basic and Intermediate level. Seniors themselves see the ICT skills development and practical use of new technologies as a prerequisite for improving their QoL, increased social participation, and active aging. Specific issues in terms of content related to this group are: using the Internet and looking for specific information; email communication; using the Social media: Skype, Facebook, Google +, You Tube, LinkedIn, etc., especially with those who have friends and relatives away (overcoming the physical distance); tackling with decreased mobility and using web-based services such as e-payment systems, e-services, e-support, e-government, e-taxation. Other examples provided by partners include use of web services for banking and finance, buying tickets, accessing civil services, Google maps and applications, photo-albums such as Picasa, participation in forums, social networks, etc. Some other would also include modern technology devices (mobile phones, tablets and the relevant mobile

¹ See Annex 1: Template used with an example for the cross-country research and report at the end of this document

applications); others would refer to accessibility tools for disabled, e.g. people with low vision and hearing loss.

2. Languages with a focus on Foreign Languages. Foreign language learning refers mainly to most widely-used European languages such as English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. In terms of methodology and delivery these courses are based on the communicative approach, topic-based activities, and avoid the grammar-translation method, with the focus on conversational activities, everyday life and real-life communication between people. The content is commonly based around topics like: Greetings and getting to know each other; Food and eating out; Health; Housing; Shopping; Family and friendship; Time and weather; Travel; Work; Leisure and hobbies. Besides the Communication in Foreign Languages as one of the Key Competence for Lifelong Learning these courses also contribute to other competences such as Communication in the mother tongue, Digital competence, Learning to learn, Cultural awareness and expression, Social and civic competences.
3. Arts and Culture: The activities include mostly drama, theatre, singing, dancing, folklore, creative arts and handicrafts. The latter seem to be very well-accepted by seniors and examples of content include mosaic, textile dyeing, felt-making, sewing courses, glass painting, icon painting, tiffany techniques, patchwork, mandala courses, landscape painting, right side brain drawing techniques, and bead jewellery making.
4. Physical Health (physical education, sports and sport-oriented activities, physical and related exercises, e.g. Yoga, Swimming, Nordic walking, Gymnastics). These courses and their outcomes contribute also to the improvement of Psychological/Mental Health of seniors, both areas being interrelated.

There is an interesting phenomenon in combining both Arts and Culture with Physical Health in activities such as singing and dancing in senior dance groups, folklore, aerobics-type dancing, hydrobics and aqua jogging.

Other popular, though depending on other circumstances, are courses for self-awareness (e.g. General Gerontology); Rural/Eco/Green Tourism Entrepreneurship which refers to the Lifelong Learning Sense of Initiative and Entrepreneurship key competence (for Developing entrepreneurial skills and personal growth); Life Skills for Seniors (for developing skills like: Problem solving; Critical thinking and decision making; Self-management skills; Self-awareness building skills, Interpersonal relationship and Communication skills; Empathy; Coping with stress and emotions).

Level: The level of the courses (e.g. Basic/Intermediate/Advanced) varies and is dependent on the previous knowledge, experience, competences and skills of the seniors attending.

Educational settings, providers and forms of delivery: The educational settings where senior courses are provided are mostly non-formal, though formal and informal happen as well. The type of providers varies a lot. These include universities and especially the Universities of the Third Age, who play a big role in senior education (e.g. 95 % of the universities in Spain have educational programmes for the elderly). Other establishments, both public and private, are colleges (with adult, further and continuing education profiles); schools, adult education centres, community centres, libraries, seniors' associations, seniors' day centres and clubs, NGOs, local and regional authorities/governments, and last but not least - social responsibility and other relevant projects at all levels.

Credit vs. Non-Credit courses, Testing and Certification: The courses offered by each institution are different, some of them are accredited and others are not. In general most courses are non-credit and there is little formal assessment/testing for certification. At that age senior learners are not generally interested in formal certification. Certificates of attendance are most common in principle.

Conclusion: Though the content and delivery of senior education courses vary, the main aim is seniors to acquire knowledge, competences and skills to face the challenges of today's world and the changes that happen in their lives. Major issues to be addressed are the changes in their own body, the changes in seniors' family and relationships, the digital divide, the new

technology developments, alongside with the clearly identified and declared need to understand and be part of the society and community, to feel integrated and adopt positive attitudes, to provide and receive support, in order to stay active and improve their quality of life.

Annex 1: Template used with an example for the cross-country research and report at the end of this document

Section 1: Fill in the table below with the 3 most popular senior education programmes and courses in your country:

EU Key Competence (s) for LLL (check as appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication in the mother tongue <input type="checkbox"/> Communication in foreign languages <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology <input type="checkbox"/> Digital competence <input type="checkbox"/> Learning to learn <input type="checkbox"/> Social and civic competences <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural awareness and expression
QoL Dimension(s) (check as appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical Health <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological Health <input type="checkbox"/> Social (integrated, to know the environment) <input type="checkbox"/> Increase participation (in communities, families, friends: communicating, creating) <input type="checkbox"/> Increase perceived control (internal and external, primary and secondary) <input type="checkbox"/> Personal: optimism, motivation <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure, spend time on oneself, useful time
Course	ICT for Seniors
Description: aims and objectives	ICT skills development and practical use of new technologies to improve their QoL
Content (Topics/Modules)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Introduction; ✓ MS Office Word; ✓ MS Office Excel; ✓ Free tools like Open Office to replace MS Office; ✓ Using the Internet: browsing/looking for info; ✓ Using the Internet: email communication; sending and receiving files; ✓ Social media: Skype, Facebook, Google +, You Tube, etc. ✓ Decreased mobility people services: e-payment systems, e-services, e-support <p>Other: modern technology devices; accessibility tools for disabled, e.g. people with low vision and hearing impairments</p>

Mode(s) of delivery (check as appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lectures <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations <input type="checkbox"/> Seminars <input type="checkbox"/> Workshops; <input type="checkbox"/> Practical activities; <input type="checkbox"/> Topic-based discussions; <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):
Educational settings (formal/non-formal/informal) and Type of providers (check as appropriate)	Educational settings <input type="checkbox"/> Formal <input type="checkbox"/> Non-formal <input type="checkbox"/> Informal Type of providers <input type="checkbox"/> University <input type="checkbox"/> College <input type="checkbox"/> School <input type="checkbox"/> Community Centre <input type="checkbox"/> Library <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):
Type of course: accredited /non-accredited (check as appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/> accredited <input type="checkbox"/> non-accredited
EU Key Competence (s) for LLL (check as appropriate)	Assessment/Evaluation: <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Certification: <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no Type of certification: <input type="checkbox"/> Certificate of Attendance <input type="checkbox"/> Certificate of Achievement <input type="checkbox"/> n.a.
QoL Dimension(s) (check as appropriate)	

Section 2: Other popular programmes and courses (if you consider relevant to be added as additional information).

(Same table than previously)

Reference 1: 8 Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (EU)

- **communication in the mother tongue**, which is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts;

- **communication in foreign languages**, which involves, in addition to the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue, mediation and intercultural understanding. The level of proficiency depends on several factors and the capacity for listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- **mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology**. Mathematical competence is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations, with the emphasis being placed on process, activity and knowledge. Basic competences in science and technology refer to the mastery, use and application of knowledge and methodologies that explain the natural world. These involve an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of each individual as a citizen;
- **digital competence** involves the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and thus basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT);
- **learning to learn** is related to learning, the ability to pursue and organise one's own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with one's own needs, and awareness of methods and opportunities;
- **social and civic competences**. Social competence refers to personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life. It is linked to personal and social well-being. An understanding of codes of conduct and customs in the different environments in which individuals operate is essential. Civic competence, and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights), equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation;
- **sense of initiative and entrepreneurship** is the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. The individual is aware of the context of his/her work and is able to seize opportunities that arise. It is the foundation for acquiring more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance;
- **cultural awareness and expression**, which involves appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media (music, performing arts, literature and the visual arts).

Reference 2: QoL dimensions, as specified by this project

- Physical Health
- Psychological Health
- Social (integrated, to know the environment)
- Increase participation (in communities, families, friends: communicating, creating)
- Increase perceived control (internal and external, primary and secondary)
- Personal: optimism, motivation
- Leisure, spend time on oneself, useful time

This text is part of the book “Education and quality of life of senior citizens”. See the full book in <http://www.edusenior.eu>

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