

International Dialogue on Education (ID-E Berlin)

Exploring Difference - Integrating Lifelong Learning into Universities' Missions
Monday 19 October 2009, Canadian Embassy, Berlin

Professor Krishna Sen – Australian Workshop

'Lifelong learning in Australia: setting parameters for global comparisons'

Winthrop Professor Krishna Sen, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at The University of Western Australia, spoke on behalf of the Group of Eight at the ID-E Berlin event and conducted a workshop titled 'Lifelong learning in Australia: setting parameters for global comparisons'. The workshop was attended by German and American university administrators, representatives from the diplomatic corps and the Australian Government.

Professor Sen set her workshop in the context of the Australian Government's recently announced 2025 target of pursuing bachelor-level qualifications for 40 per cent of 25 to 34 year olds in a quest to maintain economic competitiveness. Furthermore, the Government has announced that 20 per cent of undergraduate enrolments should be from low socio-economic backgrounds. Currently, there are insufficient school leavers to fill these targets. In response to this dilemma, Professor Sen stated that the fastest way to increase enrolments and get the next generation of students to enter university is to educate their parents.

Professor Sen began by explaining that although lifelong learning (LLL) is often thought of as a future objective, it also has a past. The University of Western Australia offers numerous examples of how individuals, given a 'second chance' perform as well, if not better, than their undergraduate or graduate cohorts.

In a participatory workshop, the audience members were asked for their observations on the Australian situation using knowledge gathered in their home institutions. Four key findings were developed which may be used to guide German university efforts in developing lifelong learning policies.

1. LLL policies cannot be developed effectively until we know who our targets are. There is a great diversity encapsulated in LLL, from 'second chance' students to 'second career' students.
2. In a context of competition and privatisation, is further education for money or morals?
3. There is a need to find a balance when setting university level policies that must observe market forces and social needs.
4. Rigid interpretation of the Bologna process in Germany is working against the LLL goals of equity.