

Keynote Speech

Learning in later life: what can Universities do?

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The ageing of populations across Europe and beyond raises major challenges for policy makers and practitioners alike with 2012 being designated The European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. Against this background, the potential of lifelong learning to improve the quality of life as people age means that discourses of lifelong learning now occupy a major place in the policy agendas of several supranational organisations and within individual countries. In particular, it is often claimed that continuing to learn in later life can have a range of beneficial outcomes as demonstrated in some of the projects funded through the EU's current Lifelong Learning Programme. However, many of these are concerned with informal educational opportunities; and although there are a number of Universities across Europe that have opened their doors to older learners, the experience of growing older in the 21st century suggests that many Universities could play a much greater role in reflecting the changing needs and aspirations of a diverse range of older people whether still working or not. Accordingly, some possible developments will be presented and discussed.