Lifelong Development: opportunities and choices for Tilburg University

Introduction

There is increasing and broader attention to the subject of Lifelong Development (LLD). As individuals and as a society, we do not want to and cannot stick to the traditional idea that a person's development takes place within initial education. This growing awareness is also reflected in the social and political dialogue, studies by social and scientific organizations, and research within our own university as well.[1]

Within this dynamics, the point has also been identified as a strategic agenda item in the VSNU context. After all, universities are providers of education and have a social and statutory task. It is important that Tilburg University determine whether and how the institution wants to focus more on LLD activities. In the run-up to the new strategic period, a deliberation table was established, consisting of employees and a student. This group has been asked to make a recommendation to the Executive Board on this theme.

The deliberation table consisted of the following members:

- Sterre van den Berg
- Charissa Freese
- Stephan Hollander
- Menno Maas
- Lex Meijdam (chair)
- Geert-Jan Peters
- Bob van Soolingen (official secretary)
- Bastiaan Starink
- Christian Staupe
- Kiki Rosman

The members of the deliberation table have agreed on a recommendation. This document is the extended version of that recommendation. The members have also written a condensed version of the advice, in line with the Executive Board's request.

What do we mean by Lifelong Development?

The terms *Lifelong Learning* and *Lifelong Development* have become widely used terms, which are also interpreted in many different ways. They refer to a theme that is constantly evolving. In this muddle of interpretations, it is important to make clear to ourselves what the theme means to us. Based on this interpretation of the theme, we can determine what our ambitions and ideas are within the theme. At

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[1] See, for example, WRR report 'Towards a learning economy'. Scientific Council for Government Policy (2013). *Towards a learning economy* (No. 90).

the same time, it is important to keep an eye out for developments, which in turn, may influence how our university wants to define and elaborate it. In this document, the term Lifelong Development is used, and that is very deliberate. This is because development does not just include learning knowledge, skills, and attitude that are required externally. It also has an internal component, which focuses on the individual's personal capabilities and motivations.

We have used the following definition of Lifelong Development:

"Throughout life, (pro)actively developing qualities based on one's own interests and values for a sustainable contribution to society, one's own health and happiness" [2]

LLD thus encompasses two important perspectives: the *individual* and the *societal*. It is about the connection between the individual's fulfillment, development based on personal goals, values, and interests, on the one hand, and being of lasting significance to society in general or one's own work environment in particular. The word sustainable refers to the anticipation of work that must be done now and in the future while maintaining a person's physical, psychological, and social health. In this sense, LLD contributes to the well-being, assertiveness, agility, and resilience of people in society as well as the organizations in which they work.

What is the role of universities in LLD?

Looking at the above interpretation of LLD, there is a task here for the universities. This is recognized by society (see also the section Developments below) and the universities themselves. The VSNU is currently working on a joint proposition for lifelong development. At the time of writing, this has not yet been adopted, but it is in the completion phase. The VSNU states the following about the role of universities in its proposition:

> *Through their research, universities develop high-quality knowledge that is important to changing professional practice. The sectors, organization, and professionals for whom this is important should not only have access to this knowledge but also develop the skills to apply it. In this way, universities can widely share the latest developments and insights. Lifelong development (LLD) from universities contributes to the value retention of both academic and other tertiary education and can add value to it. Universities pay attention to the individual development of employees: not only skills, but also broader competencies can be developed and contribute to the quality of society.*

This quote shows that universities have a crucial role in interweaving LLD within education and society. For a more detailed explanation of the role that the VSNU sees for universities, please refer to the proposition. It is predicted that this proposition, of which the working group has already seen a draft version, will be published in July 2021.

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[2] *Source: ScienceGuide May 14, 2019:* A career perspective on 'lifelong development' Essay | by Marinka Kuijpers & Judith Semeijn & Beatrice van der Heijden

Although LLD actually encompasses development throughout life, here we limit ourselves to development after completing a Bachelor's or Master's degree (at Tilburg University or elsewhere).[3] Thus, we focus on the range offered by TiU in addition to the initial (Bachelor's and Master's) programs offered by the university. This does not mean, however, that parts of those initial educational programs cannot be used for LLD.

Based on the above description, we formulate a number of principles:

- LLD responds to the growing social need for opportunities for people to continue to develop throughout their lives, based on their own interests and values and for a sustainable contribution to society, their own health and happiness;
- LLD encompasses all developmental opportunities beyond initial education;
- With the activities in the field of LLD, we are fulfilling a statuary task and our social responsibility;
- The interpretation of the LLD concept and its elaboration depends on the questions and needs from society (demand-driven) and the knowledge and skills available within the university (supply-driven).

What developments are we seeing?

To determine the position and strategy of Tilburg University, it is important to have an image of the relevant developments. To get a good picture, we have tried to map developments within three areas. These are social developments, developments within education, and developments within the market in the field of LLD. Below, we describe per point the most important developments we identified.

Social developments

- The labor market is becoming more flexible and requires people who are agile and resilient;
- At the individual level, you see that people feel the need to expand and deepen their knowledge, and to develop themselves in other ways. Both because of their positions on the labor market and because of personal wishes and needs;
- OECD research concludes that, due to technological developments, every occupation is affected, and that "reskilling" the workforce is the social challenge for the future. See the OECD Future of Work report 2020;
- In response to this development in the labor market and broader societal developments, there is an increasingly resounding discourse about the importance of LLD;

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[3] Within Tilburg University, there are also other types of initiatives that could be classified as LLD. Think of the *Kinderuniversiteit* and the Econasium. For the purposes of this recommendation, such activities have been left out of consideration.

- The government and societal stakeholders (e.g., *SER*, employer's organizations and trade unions) create laws and regulations regarding LLD and related issues such as flexible studying;
- From the political and administrative discussions, it appears that the funded (higher) educational institutions have a statutory duty in the field of LLD. This prescribed task further reinforces the importance and urgency of taking up the theme within Tilburg University.[4]
- The public and private sectors increasingly value LLD among their staff and in the search for new candidates. This is happening both in-house and at external institutions and organizations;

A number of broad societal transitions and developments require people to have new types of knowledge and skills. Think about digitalization and new technology or the energy transition;

Developments within education

- In recent years, many steps have been taken within the digitalization of education. These developments have been accelerated by the necessity to organize distance education in the short term due to the coronavirus crisis;
- In the educational landscape, you have seen the rise of e-learning platforms for several years now, offering MOOCs, for example;
- Corporate Academies are emerging, with companies creating their own LLD, particularly focused on work within that company;
- In 2016, several experiments with flexible studying started, including at Tilburg University. Flexible studying is now being more broadly integrated into higher education. The exact elaboration and legal frameworks for this are not yet clear;
- Since 2020, Tilburg University has been part of Engage.EU, a network of European universities.

Developments in the LLD market

- All universities are engaged in LLD. There are differences amongst the various universities in terms of the form of organization, the products offered, the phasing of implementation, the prioritization, and the scope of activities. At most universities in the Netherlands, the policy is still under development and there is no fixed position yet. Utrecht University and Radboud University seem to be forerunners in the field of elaborating policies on LLD.
- With the amount of academic and commercial providers, it is important to be distinctive.
- Universities and other LLD providers are increasingly betting on a unified narrative and are clearly engaging in marketing.
- Consideration is being given to ways in which LLD can be recognized. Consider certificates or micro credentials.
- The e-learning platforms and Corporate Academies described above are examples of new forms of LLD.

Based in part on the range of LLD offered within Tilburg University, we identified two tripartite divisions along which the range of LLD offered at universities can be subdivided:

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[4] See also, for example, the Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research. Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2019). *Fit for the future.*

Product types

- o **Professional training**: for example, due to requirements from the professional association;
- o **Thematic**: due to social developments, there is a demand for LLD on specific themes;
- o **Ad hoc**: "isolated" activities, which are fairly self-contained.

Type of knowledge & skills

- o **high profile content**: learning content that is current, based on research, and relevant to the professionalism of individuals and organizations;
- o **deep level content** involving philosophical and moral reflection on social issues and current themes and debates as well as reflection on life questions and on the mission and vision of individuals and organizations on their position in and responsibility to society;
- o **broad spectrum content** that involves inspiration, broadening your horizons and general interest in what the university has to offer as an academy (see axis of content focus in Figure 1).

Figure 1Matrix of range of LLD offered
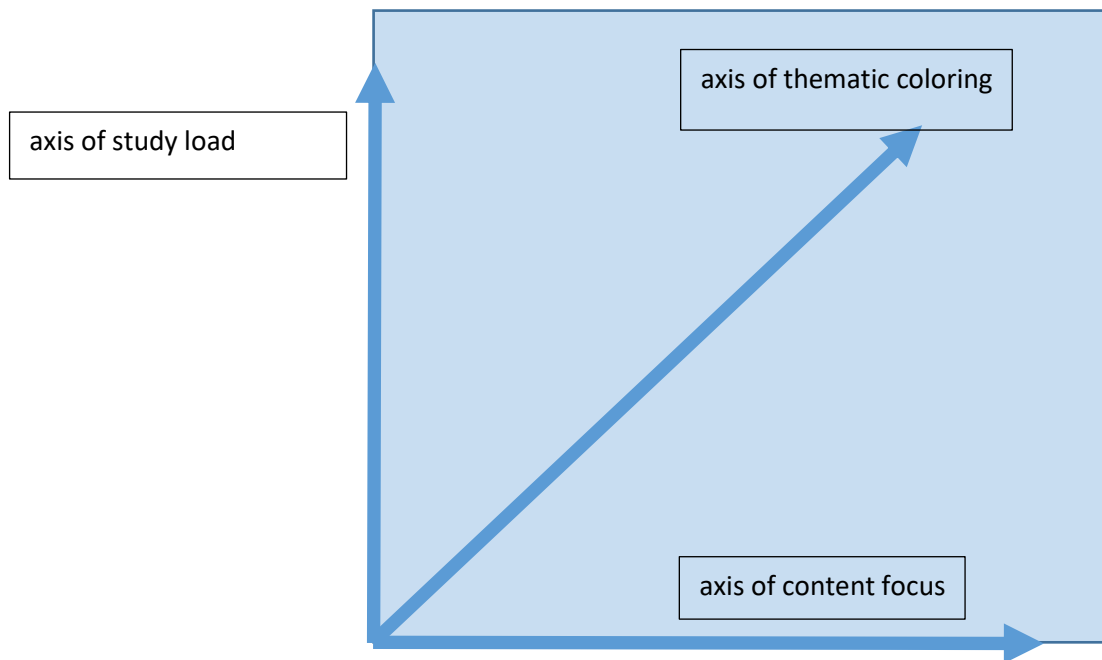
Where does Tilburg University currently stand?

LLD is not a new theme within Tilburg University. The university already has quite a diverse range on offer, both in form and in content. We have made an inventory of what Tilburg University currently offers in the area of LLD. An overview is attached as an appendix. It is good to emphasize that this

inventory is the result of a quick scan and does not provide an exhaustive overview. It offers a good impression, however, based on which we have drawn a number of conclusions:

- **Each School already provides LLD**. The form and content of the range differs per School. For a global overview, see the appendix;
- **Within each School, there is untapped potential;**
- The extent of LLD offered per School varies considerably;
- **The range offered is fragmented and lacks coherence**. It is also not developed and/or presented as a single range; [5]
- In addition to the ranges offered by the Schools, there is, of course, a large range in the field of LLD at **TIAS**. The range offered by TIAS is also partly organized in cooperation with the Schools;
- Within TiSEM, investments were made in the period 2016-2020 to establish the Professional Learning unit, focused on LLD.
- At **JADS,** there is also a diverse range of LLD focused on the themes in which JADS is active;
- In addition, the university provides LLD for students, staff, and the city through **Studium Generale** activities;
- Through the **HOVO**, Tilburg University is involved in a range of programs for people who are 50 years or older.

What could be TiU's ambition?

From the above it has become clear that much is already happening in the field of LLD within TiU, TIAS, and JADS, and that there is potential to further expand the range offered but that a clear strategy on this point is lacking. TiU is open to many initiatives, but is largely reactive, leading to a fragmented and not very recognizable range. What is missing is what we see emerging at some other Dutch universities, namely an integrated, defined range of LLD offered based on a clear vision and profile. This must be dynamic at the same time. There must be an awareness that the supply and demand of LLD continues to change nationally and internationally. T**herefore, it should be a strategic ambition for TiU to achieve a recognizable, coherent range based on a clear vision of what the university wants to achieve with LLD.**

Why do we want LLD?

Let us start with the latter. What would TiU like to achieve with LLD? To avoid any misunderstanding, it is important to make it clear from the outset that LLD should not be seen as a tool to improve the financial position of the university. The market for LLD is large, with many providers, and highly competitive. This makes it unlikely that (structurally) significant margins above cost can be achieved. Long-term cost neutrality seems a more realistic assumption. **If we want to develop LLD, this should be a clear choice on content and not on financial grounds** (*Courageous*).

The main reason for developing LLD activities is that the university thereby fulfills its statutory and social task of sharing knowledge and generating impact (*Caring*). LLD is important on an individual level

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[5] It should be noted that at the time of Professional Learning, the range offered did become more uniformly presented and organized.

but also for society as a whole; for the sustainable employability and motivation of an aging workforce, for a competitive economy, and for active social participation and democratic citizenship. Incidentally, LLD can also be about more than just knowledge transfer, for example, about forming or inspiring individuals. Also for TIAS (and to a lesser extent for JADS Professional Education), although it operates in a commercial environment, it is ultimately about relevance and generating social impact. LLD as a means to generate social impact fits very well with the profile of TiU as a university for people and society, connected to the city, region, alumni, and society and focused on that society. From the mission Understanding Society (and Advancing Society), TiU wants to contribute to solving complex social issues and not only develop knowledge, but also transform it into social value. LLD is a means to do exactly that.

A second reason for offering LLD is the duty of care for our students (*Caring*). In a society where knowledge is aging ever faster and sustainable employability is becoming increasingly important, TiU's responsibility for the development of Knowledge, Skills, and Character of its students should not stop at the moment they receive a Bachelor's or Master's degree (whereby it is not inconceivable that in the future the Bachelor's degree will increasingly become an outflow moment). Students should also be able to go to their Alma Mater at various times in their lives to renew or broaden their knowledge and skills and for reflection and inspiration. This also requires attention in initial education for acquiring LLD skills to educate agile and resilient professionals.

LLD is also of value to our students' education in another way. **Namely, LLD can serve as a testing ground for educational innovation in form and content.** The proceeds can be used again in primary education.

LLD helps to strengthen the university's network. If students regularly return to TiU after graduation, this not only strengthens the university's connection with its alumni but also with the organizations where they work, and with other organizations that use TiU's range of LLD. Strengthening the network (*Connected*) can then contribute to research, not only because it can initiate collaborations in applied research but also **because it can lead to interesting questions for fundamental research and access to data that enable new research.**

LLD can also contribute to the university's HR policy. It would be good in the annual R&D interviews to pay attention to the question of what employees are doing about LLD to keep themselves attractive for the organization and the labor market. A range of TiU LLO can offer our staff the possibility, within their own institution and at attractive conditions, to renew or broaden their knowledge and skills, to reflect, and to get inspired.

LLD can also offer academic staff the opportunity for a more diverse job, with more contact with professionals and access to the university's network. For some scientists, this is a welcome enrichment of the task. In the context of Recognition & Rewards, this provides opportunities for the development of more diversified career paths, making better use of talent, which is good for both the individual employee and the institution. In addition, if people are allowed to choose to perform these activities (to a limited extent) "on top of" the regular appointment, LLD can be an instrument that makes working at TiU more financially attractive, and thus strengthens Tilburg's competitive position in the market for academic talent. There is a strong need for this at some parts of TiU.

Profile

In order to have a realistic, recognizable, and competitive profile as a relatively small player in the field of LLD, choices must be made and it must be well defined what we do and do not want to do (*Courageous*). The deliberation table arrived at the keyword "close by". In order to build a recognizable profile, TiU must stay close to its mission and core values regarding LLD. This implies that LLD should be strongly connected to TiU's education and research (*Connected*).

As argued above, the primary reason for LLD should be that it fulfills the university's social mission to generate impact based on its research. Primarily, therefore, the LLD offered should remain close to the university's content knowledge. **The activities in the field of LLD should therefore be in line with the disciplinary research strengths of the university and the interdisciplinary societal themes with which the university presents itself (or will present itself as part of the new strategy). This means that it is not only market demand that determines the supply but also a continuous interaction between inside-out and outside-in, between research drive and social need.** There is no place at TiU for LLD activities for which there is a market, but which are unrelated to the university's knowledge base.

TiU has chosen a clear profile for its education. In doing so, the academic character is paramount: education and research are closely intertwined. As indicated above, this should also apply to LLD. In line with the tradition of the university that was started by Martinus Cobbenhagen, the choice was made to educate students to become "TiU-shaped professionals." This is elaborated in the Tilburg Educational Vision, which is based on the concepts of Knowledge, Skills, and Character, whereby the latter in particular is distinctive for TiU and refers to, among other things, intellectual independence, a critical attitude, ethical awareness, and social responsibility. **In order for LLD to remain close to the university's mission and to develop a recognizable Tilburg profile, these elements of Character should also be reflected as distinctive elements in all LLD activities and should also be presented as such: LLD that educates to become "TiU-shaped individuals."**

Target group

In a general sense, the target group for LLD is the scientifically (or university of applied sciences) educated individual (both as a professional and outside his/her professional career) and organizations. However, in the context of creating a clear profile, a convenient range, and achieving greater efficiency in marketing, it is wise to make choices in this respect by further delineating the target group. It is obvious to take "close by" as the starting point. Based on this starting point, a number of "preferred relations" can be mentioned. In the first place, this concerns **TiU alumni and TiU staff** (in line with the university's duty of care for its students and staff). A second important target group concerns **(employees of) organizations from TiU's network.** These are groups with whom we already have a relationship and who know the specific character of our university, which makes it easier for TiU to take up a position regarding this group compared to other providers. Because this network has an important regional character (Brabant companies, municipalities, province, hospitals, et cetera), this means that **TiU presents itself primarily as a partner for LLD in the region.** Of course, participants from outside these primary target groups are also welcome at the LLD activities, but less active recruitment will take place here.

LLD offered

The motives of individuals to choose LLD can be very diverse (see also Figure 1. Matrix LLD offered). They may want to continue or deepen their professional development (for example, in a post-Master's program that follows on directly from the Master's program or in the context of obtaining the PE points that are required for a particular professional group), but they may also want to broaden their professional horizons, gain management skills, receive coaching, satisfy their interest in science and (moral, philosophical, critical reflection on) culture, look for fulfillment, and interpret social developments. This requires a wide range of LLD activities, in different forms and with different durations and frequencies. It is not obvious to place restrictions on this in advance, other than that the activities must be in line with TiU's research and education. However, it would be desirable to arrive at a certain clustering in a limited number of product groups with a clearly recognizable profile and a clear target group, for example on the basis of a classification such as *Discover - Execute – Lead,* which is currently used at JADS.

In summary, the working group proposes to create a distinctive, broad portfolio that is consistent with the profile of the university:

- TiU's range of LLD offered is recognizable as a TiU range: the LLD offered is inspired by the university's mission and is further defined by
  (a) the strategic (and temporary) choice of social themes, such as the themes of the Academic Collaboration Centers;
  (b) themes linked to Schools' expertise and research programs;
  (c) societal themes, which may arise in part from questions from social partners or professional fields (see the axis of thematic coloring in Figure 1).

- TiU's range of LLD offered is broad in the sense that it include all the product types distinguished on p. 4, from occasional lectures or master classes to multi-year *degree* programs, and the various levels of knowledge and skills that can be distinguished (high profile, deep level, and broad spectrum content).

What choices are needed to achieve those ambitions?

Administrative commitment

In order to realize the ambition of becoming a recognizable, coherent LLO-provider with a clear profile, it is firstly necessary that this is an explicit strategic choice supported by the Executive Board and the Deans. If we can learn anything from the experiences of other Dutch universities, it is that achieving a recognizable and recognized position as an LLD provider is a process that takes several years (3–5 years) and requires administrative commitment as well as the willingness to invest in it.

An important part of this administrative commitment is that the **Schools must be willing to start seeing LLD as part of their normal duties and also feel administratively responsible for making it happen**. To make this happen, the LLD portfolio should be placed administratively at the School level, for example with a Vice-Dean for Impact or an Associate Dean. All Schools will include LLD as part of their normal duties and become administratively responsible for realizing it. LLD will thereby become an integrated element of the activities within TiU. It is not an afterthought, nor is it perceived that way by colleagues.

This is translated into recognition and appreciation for the scientists who provide LLD and in a business operations model that facilitates this for the institution and its organizational units.

Without allocating a reasonable amount of time for these activities and valuing them when it comes to decisions regarding tenure and promotion, building a good LLD portfolio is not going to work. This is equally true for a business operations model for LLD that does not structurally break even.

<u>Willingness to invest</u>

As indicated above, it is unlikely that (structurally) significant margins above the cost price can be realized. This is not compatible with the choice to offer LLD in order to fulfil the social task of the university.[6] **The objective should be that LLD is at least cost-neutral in the long term, but in the path towards this, start-up losses will inevitably occur. This means that TiU must be prepared to invest heavily in LLD.[7]**

<u>Setting up a task force</u>

If there is administrative commitment to developing an LLD portfolio, the deliberation table recommends that **a task force be appointed to draw up a development plan** to implement this portfolio. This development plan will have to flesh out TiU's ambition, particularly with regard to the scope and composition of the range of LLD offered (content, themes, formats) and provide more insight into the investments needed and in terms of money and staffing to realize this ambition.

An essential first step is to take **stock of the wishes, ideas, and interests of internal stakeholders, combined with an inventory of the wishes and needs of external stakeholders and potential clients (inside-out and outside-in).** In this way, we can arrive at a proposition that, on the one hand, can count on support within the institution in line with our ambition and profile, and on the other hand, is in line with the needs and interests of the members of our target groups and the needs of society. Previous studies by TIAS and Professional Learning can serve as a basis for this. Given the importance of this inventory, it may be necessary to free up additional resources, staffing, and time for this.

Next, the development plan will have to answer a large number of questions about the "what and how" of LLD. Experience has shown that no clearly recognizable, sustainable supply of LLD is created if clear, supported choices are not made on these points and then consistently adhered to. It is important that these **choices concerning the "what and how" are made by the Executive Board and the Deans** on the proposal of the task force.

<u>Choices regarding the "what" of LLD</u>

Questions around the "what" that need to be answered in the development plan are the following:

- How does TiU achieve a recognizable, distinctive, competitive, and coherent range of LLD that results in a sharp and distinctive profile?

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[6] With the financial dimension, it is important to note that you need to have a good understanding of the flow of funds and be alert to what can and cannot legally be financed from the government funding.
[7] The working group estimates that a commitment of 3 to 5 FTEs should be taken into account. This estimate is based on the scope at other institutions and at Professional Learning.

- Do we organize the range around disciplines (Schools), around interdisciplinary themes, or a combination of both, supplemented or not by questions and themes from the market (demand-driven in addition to supply-driven)?
- Will the complete range (i.e., all TiU LLD products as well as TIAS and JADS activities, but also, for example, Studium Generale and HOVO activities) be offered under one uniform label, or is there also room for different (sub) entities to offer this under their own labels.
- How can the range on offer be divided into formats or product groups that are recognizable and attractive to the market?
- What "credentials" do we attach to LLD activities (formal degrees such as MBA, (uncredited) MSc, certificates, micro credentials, Edu Badges)?

<u>Choices regarding the "how" of LLD</u>

The answers to these "what' questions then lead to a number of important "how" questions, particularly questions about how we are going to organize things. Only when the processes, organizational form, structure, and culture are in order will we be able to realize the ambitions described above.

The most important question regarding the "how" that needs to be answered is: How do we organize the support of LLD? **It is crucial that a good support organization for LLD be set up, which ensures an attractive and recognizable range in constant consultation with lecturers and School, which is marketed and offered in a professional and efficient way, and which ensures that lectures feel sufficiently involved and co-responsible, on the one hand, but are well taken care of, on the other hand.** This support organization must not become detached from the Schools. The university must be careful that this organization works as a motivator and facilitator and that Schools and individual staff members do not come to perceive it as a burden. The organization must not be perceived as (yet another) additional cost and an additional source of workload and administration.

When designing the support organization, the question of whether the support will be (partly) organized by TIAS, or whether a new organization will be set up for this purpose, will also have to be answered.[8] It is important to realize that the organization behind the front door does not have to be the same as what the market sees. Although TiU's LLB portfolio is broader and partly different in character compared to TIAS-education, optimal use can be made of the knowledge and experience that is present within TIAS, JADS, and TiU. If a new organization is set up, use could be made of the experiences gained in the recent past with Professional Learning from TiSEM. In any case, it will have to be ensured that the support organization is cost-efficient and remains well connected to the Schools so that the necessary continuous interaction between inside-out and outside-in and between research-driven and societal needs can take place. This will also require thinking about points of contact and administrative embedding for LLD in the Schools. Another point for consideration is how it will be incorporated into the university's HR policy, particularly in light of Recognition and Rewards and the onload/offload discussion.

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[8] Such a new organization could draw on the experience of Professional Learning.

Governance

Regardless of whether a choice is made for one or several brands, and whether support is provided by TIAS or by a new organization, questions about governance will arise. The relationships between TiU, TIAS, and JADS (and also TU/e as partner in JADS and co-shareholder in TIAS) play an important role. It is of great importance that clear and supported choices are made, whereby it must be ensured that competition is prevented and as much synergy as possible is created.