



Cooperation between trade unions and universities:
A reflection and perspective from partners
November 2009

Organisations participating in the TULIP project have networked together for two years as trade unions and universities in cooperative endeavours relating to work-based lifelong learning. This document provides a brief overview of some of their own perspectives of experiences within the network.

Finland

From the university perspective:

Trade Unions have such an important role both within firms and in Labour market discussions in general that LifeLong Learning (LLL) cannot be ignored from their strategies. This can be seen when getting to know Trade Unions activities in developing employees training both from the content and training methods point of view. For University LLL this means that Trade Unions must be recognized when making especially in-company training plans.

There are still some obstacles for LLL to work in practice (integrating formal and informal learning, financing of LLL, understanding the benefits of LLL both for employers and employees etc.). These obstacles might be based on attitudes or legislation or lack of knowledge. Further discussion is therefore needed both in Universities, in Firms, in Trade Unions and in the political decision making organizations.

From the perspective of Trade Unions:

this training and research cooperation must be connected to normal union work. This joint work can be divided into three levels: workplace level (microlevel), union level (macrolevel) and mesolevel organizations, like trade union schools, research organizations, consults.

Co-operation between Trade Unions and Universities can build a bridge from national level to workplace level and vice versa. Mutual Know-how and trust can lead to work place development projects, which promote as well organizational as individual learning.

The problems of the developing work are based on cultural, structural and functional (power) structures in the work place. Business economics is thus not only mathematics but the interpretations of the economic situation are always linked to the empiric and cultural framework of people's everyday lives.

Our results show that such training methods are improving learning and are widening the learners understanding of different roles of people in work organizations. Learners knowledge building from different problems situations is improving. The evaluation results from the case study of the "Straight Pipes" drama support earlier research findings.

The role of workers in the innovation management seems still to be weak and that is definitely one of the development areas. As expected the changes in the management and ownership of family businesses are also important from the workers point of view.

France

Global framework

Lifelong learning Key players

- State (especially *the Ministry for Employment and Social Cohesion, the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of higher education*),
- Regions, which, by Law of August 8th, 2008 to liberties and local responsibilities, have responsibility to implement the regional development plan on vocational training of young people and adult job applicants,
- Companies : companies comprising 10 or more employees have *a legal obligation in terms of financing the on-going training* representing 1,6% of the wage bill. Companies *with less than 10 employees have a 0,55% obligation*. A lot of companies consider continuing education to be an investment grating it therefore an important role.

Lifelong learning beneficiaries

- employees

They are trained based on a company's training schedule (decided by the employer) or on devices available at the employee's initiative (Individual Training Leave of 1 year duration; "individual right to training" of 20 hours per year within a 6-year period).

- job applicants

They benefit from training financed by Assedic, the local Councils or State. They may also integrate a training within an apprenticeship contract or internship period.

The employees as well as the job applicants have the right to achieve a skills assessment step or to have their acquired learning from experience validated.

- young people aged between 16 and 26 years old (who have left the school system with no qualification or with an insufficient one)

They benefit from numerous measures especially "assisted" labour contracts possibly including training periods (learning contracts, internship contracts).

Trade unions in France

There are five Trade Unions acknowledged as "rightful representatives", which are authorized to sign agreements at national and inter-vocational level.

The number of TU members in France is estimated at around 1.8-1.9 millions, of which 0,2 are retired. This corresponds to an average unionization of 8.1%. But the reduced unionization rate is not necessarily representative of the significant role that the trade union organizations are playing in the negotiation at national and company's level.

Common University Services on lifelong learning

There are 83 universities and 224 engineer colleges in France.

Continuing education represents one of the main missions of the higher education institutions that, together with the 300 000 learners trained each year became a leading player in Lifelong learning.

Trade unions - university cooperation

Informing and assisting the employees with on-going training:

- Drafting common information documents on the regulation devices and the university educational offer,
- Participation of TUs to the University councils,
- Organization of common information days and seminars.

Labour institutes inside several universities offer relevant examples of collaboration between TUs and ULLL for over 50 years.

Contribution to Tulip project

Our TU-University cooperation is situated around the AP(E)L issue:

« How to validate, by mean of the AP(E)L, competence/skills acquired within the TU activity ? »

The Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL) (or VAE in French: Validation of acquired learning from experience) in France is an individual right registered in the law of social modernization of January 17, 2002 and resumed in the national inter-vocational agreement (ANI) of September 20, 2003 on the access of employees to lifelong learning, which has been signed by all social partners. This validation allows an individual to obtain, totally or partially, a degree or a professional certificate listed in the National Register of Vocational Qualifications.

This work aims to list citizen skills/competence related to the trade-union activity.

4 models of experience / case studies proposed:

1. **The training – action undertaken at the Labour Institute of Midi-Pyrénées region « Validation of experience of TU activists: a recognition of TU activism »**
2. **The regional experimentation regarding the AP(E)L of TU activists in Rhône – Alpes region, in collaboration with the regional CIBC (Inter institutional Centre for Competence Assessment)**

3. **An analysis of some relevant examples of APL individual cases of TU activists**
4. **A device developed in our university (UVSQ) in order to take into account associative and citizen competence**

Germany

In the Tulip Project there were two partners from the German side. One partner was the University, represented by the cooperation centre between University and trade union and the other partner was the representative of the trade union. The main added value to the topic of Tulip from the German side was the introduction of our institutional model of cooperation. In our opinion, this model is the most efficient way of cooperation. The basic idea from the 1980's is still valid today. The founding and maintaining of cooperation centres is a public responsibility and must be financed through public funding. In the case of Oldenburg, the state gives the University the necessary funds for employing one full-time scientist as well as funds for administrative support. The cooperation centres are an instrument for the strengthening of the social responsibility of science in transferring knowledge out of the university into the public, especially in this case to trade unions. On the other hand, trade unions can use universities for their own needs. This can be supported by research on relevant topics for trade unions as well as training or seminars.

In the discussion of the Tulip project, we discussed our cooperation model, its strengths and its weaknesses and gave the partners the opportunity to learn from our good practice.

See publication of Hans Böckler Stiftung: Klaus Kock *"Between Chairs and Work Benches"*

Lithuania

First of all, it was a great opportunity for us to get familiar with the experience of other partners, which already have well developed systems of cooperation between universities and trade unions in their countries. That made us able to identify several reference points for improvement of our own system. As lifelong learning is a quite new concept in Lithuania and activities of "young" trade unions are rather limited, this kind of guidance is of big importance in developing cooperation between universities and trade unions in terms of providing LLL opportunities for TU members.

Experiencing the progress of the countries, which have poorly developed cooperation between universities and TUs, gave very good background to do the benchmarking in the field.

Also, the project encouraged more active discussion with Lithuanian trade unions on the topic. Furthermore, Lithuanian trade unions got opportunities to contact trade unions in foreign countries and share their experience in different fields of interest.

The web-based resource kit enables representatives of Lithuanian universities and trade unions not only to study the different material produced, but also to directly contact experts in the field, which makes the learning and experience sharing process much more efficient.

Moreover, the project, being presented at a national wide seminar, organised in order to develop Lithuanian education system, adds its contribution to better understanding of opportunities to promote LLL by promoting cooperation between universities and TUs.

Partnership in the project resulted in creation of additional value not only to the two sectors (universities, trade unions), but also to the society (better understanding of LLL and even activities of TUs) in general.

So the project accelerated both cooperation between universities and trade unions in terms of LLL and higher involvement of TUs in the LLL process itself.

Slovenia

When the project TULIP started in 2007 there was no discussion in Slovenia about lifelong learning and trade unions. Moreover it was nothing strange that some trade union's managers haven't heard of the possibility of trade unions being involved in LLL activities. Thus our main contribution is that the discussions started. On several different occasions we presented and emphasized the need and importance that trade unions start not just thinking but also acting in the field of lifelong learning. Besides that the debate about the responsibility and legal regulation of this subject started. The next step will be to present some actual good practises how foreign trade unions approached LLL and to implement in our system. Simultaneously the state should be stimulated to develop some activities in order to promote LLL at working place.

United Kingdom

From the university perspective:

Much of the current trade union – university interaction in the UK focuses on research activity or, in terms of Lifelong Learning, courses in trade union studies targeted at trade union officials. A notable exception is the partnership between Union Learn and the Open University which aims to open flexible degree study to trade union members.

The networking and cross-border knowledge exchange facilitated by the TULIP project has shown that there is good potential to develop UK TU-UULLL interaction beyond part-time courses focusing on labour relations and for universities to engage with trade unions in such a way that they see TU members as a natural audience for their adult education activities.

Although more is still to be achieved, university study in the UK has developed considerably in terms of the flexibility of courses, diversity of progression routes and responsiveness of accreditation systems. Universities are therefore in a good position to offer TU members access routes to university study.

To take advantage of the opportunities offered by universities, trade unions need to promote and endorse lifelong and work based learning at every level of their structures. This includes raising the aspirations of trade union members to make university study a reality.

Perspective from the Trade Union:

UNISON has found the whole TULIP experience to be extremely valuable in respect of our trade union approach to life long learning.

We have been able to consider our education and training policies and procedures within the context of the experience of trade unions from other parts of Europe and the relationships they have with Universities and a variety of other organisations. Sharing both experiences and techniques has been a positive learning experience for UNISON and we trust that our

input to the project has been of value to other partners in TULIP - and to the organisations that they are associated with.

We intend to build on, and widen, our existing relationship with the University of Liverpool as a result of TULIP. We have also made invaluable sustainable links with CGT in France and Murikka in Finland which we believe will enhance the service we provide to the UNISON membership in the UK.

TULIP has been a truly cohesive and cooperative venture which has met the objectives we set at the outset.