



National Report for Estonia on Cooperation between Trade Unions and Universities

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Lifelong learning (LLL) in Estonian universities

In Estonia adult education is regulated by the Adult Education Act (1993), supplemented by the Universities Act (1995) and the Applied Higher Education Institution Act (1998) that regulate provision of training and education by the universities. There are also some by-laws enacted and adopted by the universities. In 2005, the 'Lifelong Learning Strategy 2005-2008' was adopted as a basis for the development of a broad group of studies of lifelong learning. And today the new Development Plan for Adult Education 2009-2013 has been prepared and presented to the Estonian Parliament for adoption.

There were 6 public universities and 4 private universities in Estonia in June 2008 (Haridus ja teadus..., 19.02.2009). Universities started to introduce the principles of lifelong learning more than 10 years ago when the structure of the Open University was created. However, most traditional universities have offered forms of distance education and continuing education for adult learners for decades. Different universities have organised adult education differently. The majority use a decentralised model, i.e. they have established a structure for coordinating training, and academic structural units have been involved to a certain extent. In general, one can say that University study, including paid formal diplomas and degrees for adults, is coordinated by one structural unit and Continuing Education (CE) by another structural unit. In the universities, both formal university education, acquired within the adult education system, and continuing education are provided by the faculties and colleges. Continuing Education may additionally be offered also by some non-academic units of the university, which have been created specially for this purpose. As a rule, CE is offered in most of the subject studies taught in the university.

Participants in the CE courses of Estonian public universities

	2006	2007	2008
Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre	563	531	511
Tallinn University	12286	12352	11387
Estonian Academy of Arts	85	258	260
Tallinn Technical University	3656	4343	9152
University of Tartu	16452	19123	20843
Estonian University of Life Sciences	2345	2360	2500
Total	35387	38967	44653

Resource: CE statistics of the universities

Academic accreditation is the basis for assuring the quality of training provided by the universities, but it does not directly concern the area of continuing education. When assuring quality of continuing education, provided by the universities, reference is made to the accreditation of the university and its curricula only for the general assessment of the broad group of studies and teaching staff. The universities have adopted internal legal norms to assure the quality of education provided. As a rule, these norms enact requirements for training programmes (the essence of a training programme, endorsement of the programme, etc) and the certificates issued after passing the course. Feedback questionnaires are usually used in the universities to assess the quality. The course organiser has devised the questions and the participants can give their opinions about different aspects of the training, e.g. its organisation, content, lecturer. The lecturers are also asked to give feedback. Up to now there has not been much cooperation with employers to assess the results of training. Universities use different forms of control: tests, research papers, reports in seminars, etc. to assess the acquired knowledge and skills after passing some training. These forms of control constitute an important prerequisite for recognising prior learning in the framework of accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL).

Estonian trade unions

In Estonia the activities of trade unions are regulated by the Trade Unions Act (2000), which enacts the general rights, basis of activity, relationships with state and local authorities as well as employers. Relationships between employees and employers are regulated also by other acts, such as the Act of collective agreement, the Act of employees' fiduciary etc.

According to the Act a trade union is a voluntary union of people created on its own initiative with the aim of representing and defending the employees' work, in-service and professional as well as economic and social rights and interests. The trade union is a partner in social dialogue with the employers and their associations, local authorities and the Government of Estonia through exchange of information, consulting and collective negotiation as well as the above-mentioned rights and interests of employees. (Ametiühingute seadus, 19.02.2009).

In June 2009 there were 284 registered trade unions in Estonia. But among them there are many quite small unions that do not represent the majority of employees. Trade unions are not very popular since they still have a negative aura from the Soviet Union period when they were rather a tool for central government to flatter the employees with travel and commodities vouchers than the unit to represent and defend employees' interests and rights. Also the biggest association of trade unions the Estonian Trade Union Confederation has pointed out in its action plan for 2008-2011 that it is essential to raise the credibility of trade unions and increase their representation in all levels. (EAKL tegevuskava ..., 16.03.2009)

Those unions which have got more media attention and are more active in fighting for the rights of members are uniting workers in the fields of medicine, transport and education as well as the Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL) and Estonian Employees' Unions' Confederation (TALO). Mostly they represent employees in the wage negotiations. They have also criticised the new Employment Contracts Act coming into force on July 1, 2009 as well as organised strikes and demonstrations against it since it liberalises significantly relationships between employer and employees. The new Act reduces the rights and social protection of employees whilst nevertheless their responsibility rises (Uus töölepinguseadus ..., 25.06.2009).

Estonian Trade Union Confederation (www.eakl.ee)

The Estonian Trade Union Confederation was established in 1990. It is one of the legitimate unions from the First Estonian Republic and Soviet period. Today the confederation is the biggest association of trade unions including 17 trade unions and their associations as well as 2 professional unions. The aims of the confederation are:

- to represent employees' work and social interests and defend their rights before the Estonian Government, employers and their associations, in state and local authorities, courts and institutions dealing with work issues;
- to assure balanced development of society and social justice;
- to promote and defend social dialogue, participatory democracy and trade union rights;
- to develop employees' socio-economical situation, occupational safety and health conditions as well as to improve vocational education and professional qualifications
- to create democratic and representative trade unions, to increase their negotiation power and to strengthen the feeling of identity of members;
- to connect members and support cooperation and representation to defend collective interest (Eesti ametiühingute keskliidu põhikiri, 16.03.2009).

In its action plan for 2008-2011 the Estonian Trade Union Confederation has for the first time pointed out in the section on employment policy that it is essential to:

- create the environment and change attitudes to support lifelong learning,
- reorganise the vocational education system,
- invest in the central support system of continuing education and retraining of employees'
- and it is important to use more European Social Fund resources for the training of employees.

In the section on notification and training the confederation sees its role in the organisation of courses for trade union leaders and educators as well as broadening possibilities and promoting the importance of lifelong learning (EAKL tegevuskava ..., 16.03.2009 – *ref 5 overleaf*).

Estonian Employees' Unions' Confederation TALO (www.talo.ee)

TALO was established in September 1992 and unites 9 members, including different professional and trade unions. In the action plan of TALO for 2005-2009 more attention than earlier is paid to continuing education. In the section on education and training it points out that it is important to:

- promote lifelong learning,
- participate actively in working out a contemporary training structure,
- foresee the needs of the labour market and support systems for in-service training and retraining before collective redundancies or restructuring,
- facilitate the creation of opportunities for increasing professional qualification of its members
- help those who have left learning back to the study process
- also help employees with higher education qualifications to have lifelong learning opportunities. (TALO tegevussuunad ..., 16.03.2009 – *ref 6 overleaf*).

Up until today most trade unions have organised training mostly for trade union leaders, fiduciaries and specialists working for the union. Only in a few cases have the courses been organised for the ordinary members. The professional unions that are acting according to

similar principles to the trade unions (with the aim of defending the rights of members) are more active in providing professional training for their members. For example the Estonian Nurses Union has a training centre that organises courses for people working in the health sector to develop their professional competences. The aim of the training is to support evidence based knowledge and skills of these people, which helps to promote public health and the professional reputation of nurses. In their course plan it points out that it has been composed in cooperation with experts from the Estonian Nurses Union and the educators are the best specialists from the Estonian leading health and educational institutions (Õdede Liidu koolituskeskuse ..., 25.06.2009). At the same time, however, they do not refer to the educational institution that they are cooperating with.

Cooperation between universities and trade unions

Although the topic of continuing education is integrated into the action plans of trade unions, cooperation between them and educational institutions and universities in the field of continuing education has not yet started. As referred to above, the Estonian Nurses Union's courses do not directly refer to the educational organisation with whom they are working.

Nevertheless first steps are already being made. In Estonia only the University of Tartu offers continuing education in the field of medicine. The University of Tartu and the Estonian Nurses Union are cooperating within different projects but not in the field of continuing education. However there is a link to the university continuing education courses for nurses on the union's website.

Also there is much more cooperation between universities and professional unions in the field of technical sciences. A good example here is the cooperation between the Union of Engineers and Tallinn Technical University in organising training.

The universities are forwarding information concerning continuing education and training to the bigger trade unions and associations. As yet though they do not have enough feedback as to whether the unions are forwarding this information to their members. Certainly there are few trade union members who have participated in different CE courses, but it is not usual that a trade union suggests to its members or requires that they participate in certain CE courses. Some university professors have been invited to give a presentation to trade union members and a few training inquiries have been made, but it is not known if any course has been commissioned from the universities for union members.

As a rule the trade unions do not see universities as cooperation partners. Only a few trade unions are referring to some educational institutions as partners. One of them is the Estonian Sailors Independent Trade Union, which in the "friends" section on its website has a link to the Estonian Maritime Academy. The Estonian universities, however, have enough competences to offer continuing education courses and training to the trade union members in very different subject fields.

References

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