



Round Table Discussion

Friday 7 November 2008: 14.00 – 15.30
Tallinn, EE

Present:

TULIP Partners plus EUCEN delegates and leaders of discussion (see attached signed list).

Discussion of the following questions included the following points:

Professor Alfredo Soeiro provided an overview of some experience in work-based learning (WBL) and noted the need to engage the employer in WBL learning contracts, i.e. not just the learner and the university. He raised the issue also as to how TUs can be involved in those learner contracts.

The discussion then developed around the questions below:

How do we motivate Trade Union members (Learners) to overcome their fear of formal learning when they have little experience of academic study, so that they can feel encouraged to undertake some work-based LLL? How can we address the cultural barriers involved in this?

Need to ensure that the university curriculum uses words that are relevant and not just based on academic terminology.

In Finland there is a specific issue about middle-aged men engaging in education as women appear more motivated to engage in learning.

It was noted that for those working in universities and in TUs with lifelong learning it can be difficult to fully appreciate the barriers because our academic experience will have been largely positive.

Many universities now offer small part-time awards and not just full degrees and this can be encouraging to new adult learners, who feel more able to study for a smaller qualification.

For a number of the TU partners the issue is how to validate the experience of TU activists whilst they are engaged in TU activities. Very often these activists don't know how they could get their learning from this experience validated. Often having some formal academic recognition of their learning to date gives the learner encouragement and confidence possibly to then go on and achieve a more formal qualification. Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is an important avenue for gaining this recognition.

It was also recognised though that from the universities' perspective it can sometimes be difficult to work out exactly what element of the learning from these experiences can be validated. Sometimes the individual's TU activist role is quite far removed from their earlier work and life experience, and so it can then be difficult to find the most relevant qualification to relate the learning to. Should it be to a qualification that reflects the TU activity or to their original job or interests?

It was also noted, from the experience of university lifelong learning centres, that engaging with lifelong learners cannot always start from the theoretical perspective. It often needs to start from where the learner's educational experience currently is and build from there, for example in tackling issues arising in the workplace. In those cases having a practice-related environment for the learning (eg at work) can be more supportive.

In some countries (e.g. EE) employers show little interest in employees' learning and say 'they cannot afford it'. It was noted though that TUs around Europe are often dealing with this same issue of employers saying they can't afford new practices and that maybe their influence could be used to promote the benefits of WBL. All recognised though that with business/economy fluctuations so employers' commitments to learning change.

Is the marketing/promotional information provided by Unis sufficiently 'user-friendly'? Are there ways in which Unis can better inform TU members of the WLLL opportunities?

It isn't just about marketing and promotion. The only way to really attract learners is to offer global services through for example:

- a. Appropriate reception of new learners
- b. Good counselling / advice – for some people the right answer may not always be more training
- c. Help learners build a global dossier of learning
- d. Ensure university registration/admin services support the flexibility of learning
- e. Prepare pedagogical pathways for them e.g. APL
- f. Support the learner through their journey – maintain a level of guidance and possibly tailored support courses to help them meet problems

Universities need to increase their pro-activity in engaging with TUs and employers – finding out what their needs are and exploring this with them – because often the TU / employer may not fully realise what their needs are.

The DE model includes a co-operation centre which can act as a 'go-between' for Unis and TUs – Hannover has the same as Oldenburg.

The drop-out rate for adult learners is a big issue because of all the external pressures on the learner.

The question was posed: If there is a class of say 10 learners from 3 different employers with 3 different expectations how can universities and TUs manage this – how do we find the common ground? It was agreed that it is important to manage expectations – don't raise expectations too high as it is problematic to promise too much and then not deliver.

It was also noted that TUs and employers need to recognise that many Centres of LLL in Unis are very small and often having an internal struggle within their own university to gain recognition of the real importance of ULLL and sufficient funding for adult learning, as many universities despite demographic changes still firmly concentrate just on younger learners.

TUs in some partner countries are not fully represented across all sectors (e.g. in EE). In EE these have little funding and with a free economy the state is not inclined to support much union activity. How can universities engage TUs in meaningful discussions about Lifelong Learning (LLL) in these circumstances?

The more attractive a TU becomes to non-members (eg though offering LLL opportunities) the more new members it will attract and the more powerful it will become.

The work of a TU affects all workers not just their members. Also LLL is at the basic heart / ethics of every TU as it opens up further opportunities for all.

Where the process/concept of 'collective bargaining' changes or ceases then TUs have to offer more services to members e.g. LLL opportunities. This is happening in UK and will become an issue in FI and DE also. UK experience of developing the role of Learning Representatives is a useful example.

The DE model of co-operative centres for TUs and universities and the general partnering between TUs and Unis amongst the partnership provides some illustrations of how this can encourage TUs to offer more WLLL opportunities.

LLL is easier to talk about than some of the hard issues such as pensions /pay and so can be a way of opening discussion with employers and government.

Summary of the discussion

To succeed in providing more University based WLLL to TU members:

- There must be clear high-level policy statements about LLL in all stakeholder sectors (educational/ employment/ TU) – to open not just doors but minds
- TUs have to change their mindset – learning and education are not always high enough on their agenda and there has to be investment in this
- Employers need to have a clear perspective in their HR /management strategies to encourage LLL
- Universities need to continue to develop their existing provision of flexible LLL opportunities

