



Fostering partnerships for continuing training: Cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises

Workshop, Thessaloniki 11-12 February 2016

Workshop Summary

In the Cedefop workshop on 11 and 12 February, over 20 experts from different European countries discussed the role of cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises for continuous professional development. This field is still rather underplayed. Cooperation is mostly practiced in the area of research, development and innovation, but less in education, especially when it comes to continuing vocational education and training (CVET). The workshop had a specific focus on work-based learning (WBL), i.e. linking WBL in the world of work with learning in higher education for continuous professional development.

During the workshop, the participants discussed which forms of cooperation between higher education and enterprises exist in Europe, and what their key features are. Several examples of cooperation were presented, for instance from UC Leuven-Limburg, Middlesex University and the University of Chester. Particular attention was paid to the role of WBL.

Approaches that explicitly link WBL in enterprises with learning at higher education seem to offer a lot of potential. They can integrate and value learning that is happening informally while working. The learning can be better tailored to the actual workplace needs of the individual learner and employer, focussing on current and future challenges. Further, it can also encourage learning and open higher education to non-traditional target groups. The examples from the UK showed how WBL can be used rather flexibly, as long as there is a sound underlying framework for it, including quality assurance mechanisms. They also illustrated how enterprises and other training providers cooperate with higher education institutions in the provision of WBL.

Workshop participants also discussed about main barriers and drivers for cooperation between higher education and enterprises. Among the barriers are, for example, lacking awareness on both sides regarding what each other could offer and whom to contact, i.e. responsibilities. Main obstacles are cultural barriers: Enterprises and higher education institutions use different 'languages', they have different time horizons, face different levels of bureaucracy and have a different understanding of relevant concepts, e.g. concepts of knowledge, and how to use/translate practitioners knowledge into academia. There are however differences between higher education institutions; some of them, e.g. universities of applied sciences, have often traditionally been more engaged with the world of practice.

What are drivers for cooperation? Creating trust, mutual understanding and common interest are key factors, as well as raising awareness of benefits and getting support from

management. Allowing for more flexible learning pathways and progress in the validation of informal learning outcomes is crucial, too, especially when it comes to the integration of WBL. Examples presented during the workshop showed that networks might also play an important role in fostering cooperation. They can help to develop cooperation and to spread practice models. European Associations, such as the European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), but also others, e.g. the University Industry Innovation Network (UIIN) and the World Association for Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education (WACE) have presented their work and thoughts on this field during the workshop.

Insights from European projects and studies were also provided, for example from the EU-funded project EMCOSU (Emerging Modes of Cooperation between Private Sector Organisations and Universities) and the recently finalised European Commission study on Higher Vocational Education and Training in the EU.

The workshop showed that innovative models of continuing professional development which build on cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises and link WBL in the world of work to higher education exist. However, practices in Europe are still rather few and fragmented. There is a need for more systematic analysis and development in this field. It offers the opportunity to develop new approaches to learning, to promote access and participation and to foster excellence in and through CVET.

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