



Reinforce the **L**abour **E**fficiency of **T**ertiary  
**A**dult **E**ducation at Universities

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## Project information

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## Executive Summary

The project aims to study the TLL (Tertiary Lifelong Learning) strategies and programs of higher education institutes in relation with their potential to improve the quality of work for learners (learners' perspective) and the quality of their work performance (enterprise perspective). At the core of the project are: (a) a comparative study of the potential, the possibilities, and the obstacles of universities' TLL within these two dimensions; (b) the development of differentiated tools to measure the impact of TLL programs on the quality of work and the quality of work performance; and (c) facilitating a space for mutual learning for stakeholders of University LL-programmes about the potential and obstacles between universities and labour market actors.

During the first project stage, in each of the covered countries (Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom/Scotland) three case studies on university-business cooperation in the field of adult education were carried out. The national reports are available at the project website ([www.letae.eu](http://www.letae.eu)). A Comparative Report has been elaborated providing an attempt of a classification of adult university programmes. The national and the comparative reports were presented and discussed at national and European seminars. The methodology of the project and results of the case studies were presented at conferences and an article of social science journal.

In the second project stage, the tools to measure the impact of TLL programs on the quality of work and the quality of work performance were developed. Important stages of the tools development were the national seminars and the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Seminar. At these seminars the outline of the tools and its viability for university practice was discussed with stakeholders, responsible and experts. This allowed a continuous refinement of the tools in cooperation with the stakeholders, so that the final tools match the needs of the primary end users: the universities. The tool was tested in two Spanish universities regarding to the responsiveness of the learners. This was considered highly relevant as results of online surveys often are invalidated by low response rate.

The results of the project were finally presented to a wider audience in conference and through publications in a journal and social media as [www.researchgate.com](http://www.researchgate.com) and [www.academia.eu](http://www.academia.eu).

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# 1. Project Objectives

The project studied study the TLL (Tertiary Lifelong Learning) strategies and programs of higher education institutes in relation to their potential to improve the quality of work for learners (learners' perspective) and the quality of their work performance (enterprise perspective). At the core of the project we developed a comparative study of the potential, the possibilities, and the obstacles of universities' TLL within these two dimensions. The project analysed the efficiency of TLL programs in these terms examining the possibilities to improve the integration of non-traditional learners in higher education systems.

Based on a classification of institutional strategies (internal organisation of provision by universities, externalisation through the utilisation of university-related institutions and university-private or university-public cooperation), the project studied apparent good practices in universities of six European countries. The core questions addressed are the regulation of TLL systems within the national qualification frameworks, the integration of labour market actors in the design of learning programmes, which can be classified using the following dimensions: tailor-made closed-programmes, tailor-made open-programmes, closed-general programmes and open-general programmes. The project emphasizes the relevance of internal regulations in terms of access, learning pathways, certification, recognition of prior learning and funding. Special attention is also paid to the relationship with the Bologna three-cycle system and the use of ECTS to map and compare programs.

Taking into account the results of the cases studied (three in each country, that is a total of eighteen cases), the project provides differentiated tools to analyse the impact of TLL programs on the quality of work and the quality of work performance. It provides tools to measure the return of investment based on the integration of financial, human, cultural and social capital.

The project facilitated a space for mutual learning so that the internal and external stakeholders of University LL programmes could exchange experiences of the potential and obstacles between universities and labour market actors, contrast the findings from analyses of apparent good practices and design strategies to improve these linkages.

The project results have been and will continue to be presented and disseminated in congresses, conferences and papers. At the end of the project a conference was organised to present the project results and tools to a broader audience. The project website presents online its results, targeting policy makers, senior managers and directors of higher education institutes, practitioners and students at European, national and institutional level. A dissemination and exploitation strategy has been developed and is being applied based on the principle of networking with other initiatives and projects as well as with experts in the field with the aim to achieve sustainability beyond the project duration, a key aspect of the proposal.

## 2. Project Approach

The project has had three methodological pillars: apparent good practice analysis, mutual learning seminars between stakeholders and tool development. In the following paragraphs we will explain those aspects in more detail.

- a) Apparent good practice analysis requires establishing criteria to select the cases to be studied in detail. Based on the results of the earlier THEMP project, here we have used the classification of institutional configuration mentioned above (second paragraph of section 1), distinguishing between whether courses are tailor made (or not), and if they have open (or limited) access. The case studies have required the creation of a common framework of analysis (interview protocols) and presentation (content index). The methodology is semi-structured interview with relevant institutional actors and labour market actors aimed to detect potential and obstacles for this cooperation. The project has undertaken an explorative survey with labour market actors about the relevance of the Universities as LLL-providers in the different countries included in the project.
- b) Mutual learning seminars are aimed to reinforce the involvement of universities and labour market actors in project development and to assure the usefulness of project results and especially the developed tools. Through the presentation of the project results in the different steps of its development to the involved actors, the organisation of mutual learning seminars and the final conference, on the one hand, a structured dialogue between the universities and labour market actors was promoted, and, on the other hand, between the project team and the stakeholders.
- c) Tool development was oriented to facilitate an assessment of quantitative and qualitative impact of TLL to labour market position and the work performance of learners. The tool was designed as multiple choice on-line questionnaire. Making such surveys among those who seek TLL is considered a cornerstone to continuously improve the link between TLL programmes at universities and labour markets. Based on existing survey tools on the quality of TLL, the results of the cases studies and the mutual learning seminars, the questionnaires were elaborated in interaction with the stakeholders (structured dialogue) and tested in two Spanish Universities so that they can incorporate the tools in their approaches to evaluate and design TLL programmes.

### 3. Project Outcomes and Results

The target groups of the project are universities, any type of industrial companies (or public bodies) and adult learners with work experience. The study focused on the labour market dimension of TLL, providing information about the degree of cooperation between universities and labour market actors in different institutional settings of tertiary adult education.

In its first stage, the project has provided information about the potential of these co-operations; the main obstacles are also included in national and trans-national comparative reports. In each of the participating EU member states (Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom/Scotland) the landscape of adult education at universities has been described and three case studies of University adult education in cooperation with business/private companies have been carried out. The intention has not been to make analysis of representative cases at the national level, but of selected illustrative cases of university-business cooperation in the area of adult education, obtaining insights of the potential and obstacles for such cooperation.

A second objective was to make a step forward in the development of tools to measure the impact of university adult education in the work performance and the quality of work of the learners. These tools (one of the main project outputs) were developed in the second part of the project in cooperation with stakeholders at national and European mutual learning seminars and tested regarding the responsiveness of the learners with two universities.

From the beginning, the project has involved: persons responsible for the adult education at universities; those working in human resource development from enterprises; practitioners; and those responsible for adult education in trade unions. In this context, the first European Mutual Learning Seminars was hold in November 2014 in Bremen, Germany and the second was hold in Istanbul June 2015. At these event adult learners participated actively. The objective of the Mutual Learning Seminars was to compare and contrast provisional results of the field work with practitioners in the field of adult education and to consider the viability of the tools under development to measure the impact of adult education in the work performance (enterprise perspective) and quality of work (learners perspective). The European Mutual Learning Seminars opened also formal and informal spaces for the exchange of experiences among the participants, so that the participating universities, the enterprises and trade unions could refine their strategies of cooperation between University and labour market actors in the field of adult education. In addition to the European Mutual Learning Seminar, national seminars have been organised. This allowed extending the discussion about the project outcomes beyond the project partnership and the cooperating universities, enterprises and trade unions.

Finally, the results of the project were presented at a conference hold in Barcelona in June 2016. Additionally, the project developed dissemination activities presenting the project and its preliminary results at several events. These include the *6<sup>th</sup> Nordic Conference for Adult Education and Learning* (25-28<sup>th</sup> March 2014, Tampere, Finland); in the 150th Anniversary of the Lifelong Learning Day (26<sup>th</sup> April 2014, Bucharest, Romania) and *Fourth International Conference on Adult Education: Adult Education in Universities. Local and Regional Perspectives* (27th – 30th April 2014,

Iasi, Romania); EUCEN Conference (4<sup>th</sup> June 2015, Istanbul, Turkey), 12<sup>th</sup> PASCAL International Conference (9<sup>th</sup> October 2015, Catania, Italy); ASEM LLL HUB Symposium (7<sup>th</sup> June 2016, Glasgow, Scotland); ECER-Conference (23-26<sup>th</sup> August 2016, Dublin, Ireland). 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Teaching, Education and Learning (19-20<sup>th</sup> September 2016, London, England).

The methodology of the project was presented in the following article:

- Karsten Krüger, Martí Parellada, Michael Osborne, Muir Houston, Alba Molas and Laureano Jiménez (2014) The relevance of university adult education for labour market policies. In *Revista Internacional de Organizaciones*. N° 12 (2014): Social Class, Gender, Participation and Lifelong Learning. pp. 45-69. Project results were published in other journals:

- Muir Houston, Karsten Krüger, and Mike Osborne (2017) Partnership and collaboration in work-oriented learning in HE. *Journal of UNIVERSITIES AND LEADERSHIP*, forthcoming in the 3rd issue 2017 [[http://www.testing.co.ua/en\\_US/](http://www.testing.co.ua/en_US/)]

- Muir Houston, Karsten Krüger, Alba Molas, Mike Osborne and Laureano Jiménez (2016). Cooperation in work-oriented learning in higher education. In *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, special issue, volume 2, issue 1, pp. 685-705. (ISSN 2454-5899). <https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2016.s21.685705>.

The national reports that focus on the case studies, the comparative report resuming the different cases including a typology of the cases, the proceedings of the European Mutual Learning Seminar and the LETAE-Conference, the minutes of the national seminars, the questionnaires and the results of the viability study are available at the project website ([www.letae.eu](http://www.letae.eu)) and can be disseminated upon request.

## 4. Partnerships

The consortium was based on the classification of dominant institutional settings of adult education at universities: internalisation (UK, Finland and Czech Republic), externalisation (Germany and Spain) and internalisation and externalisation (Turkey). This allowed comparison of the potential and obstacles for cooperation between universities and labour market actors in the field of adult education in different institutional environments.

These countries also represent different educational models and trajectories: Germany and Czech Republic have a high proportion of the employed population with a higher vocational qualification (ISCED 3-4), whilst Finland and the UK are tending to a balance between ISCED level 3-4 and ISCED 5-6. Spain has a higher proportion of employed people with ISCED 5-6 than with ISCED 3-4. Finland, the UK and Spain show rates of the population with higher education within the age group between 30-34 years higher than 40%, whilst the Czech Republic and Germany are below the 40% rate. This is a first indicator: university adult education must provide answers to different societal challenges by allowing the access of non-traditional students to university education and to provide certification for their continuing vocational education.

The composition of the partnerships within the project provided a balance between experts in higher education, vocational training, adult education, labour market and business, adequate to achieve the project objectives. The professional background of the researchers involved, coming from economic sciences, engineering, sociology and psychology, allows a multidisciplinary perspective, necessary to handle complex issues such as the interrelation between higher education and labour market, but also the linkages between Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) in terms of permeability.

All the researchers and experts have experience in European and/or National projects concerned with educational issues. All national project teams have experience in qualitative and quantitative research, and in tools and instrument development to measure the quality of training and education. All partners brings not only huge experience in the management and realisation of projects in the area of lifelong learning, VET and HE, but they also provide connections with national and international networks allowing: a) the integration of associated partners in the project, with experience and interest in the relationship between higher education and the labour market (businesses); and b) the setting-up of an international network of interested institutions and organisations assuring so the dissemination and exploitation of the project outcomes, and the integration of perspectives from the outset of the project consortium.

## 5. Plans for the Future

Based on the work done in the first project stage (see national and comparative report) and on the research done in other national and EU projects, the LETAE project has developed in the second project stage tools to measure the impact of tertiary adult education focussing on: a) the employability and quality of life of adult learners; and b) the quality of work performance in enterprises.

The project provides tools for the quantitative and qualitative measurement of the return of investment, which allows universities, which are the main target group for these products, to adapt their adult learning programmes and strategies to the requirements and needs of the learners and enterprises. These tools would facilitate in both the mid- and long-term the constant update of TLL at universities to labour market requirements.

The future prospect is:

- a) To use the tools in cooperation with universities. First steps were done with Catalan universities, which are frontrunner for adult education for postgraduates. In fact, viability test were done in two of them. Also contacts were established with EUCEN to search for the possibility to apply the tools in other European universities. The German partner evaluate how to integrated the LETAE finding into own study programmes, for instance in the first German case. It also maintains conversation about future cooperation with cooperating organisation in the LETEA project, for instance Airbus, HCAT, HAW Hamburg from German case study 3.
- b) To search the possibilities to apply the tools in other areas of adult education. For this objective first contacts with Spanish trade unions (Unión General de Trabajadores, UGT, and Comisiones Obreras, CCOO) has been made searching possibilities to make a survey on the social impact of adult education with among their affiliates or in cooperation with the Tripartite Foundation for Continuous Training. Similar activities were undertaken in Scotland with UNITE.
- c) All partners are evaluating future projects to improve cooperation between universities and the world of work, especially in the bachelor and master study programme, but also doctorate programmes (Industrial doctors)

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

In several documents EU policy makers encourage structured partnerships between universities and enterprises. This doesn't concern only the research and knowledge transfer mission to the society, but also the education and training mission of universities. To achieve this aim, university adult education is essential as it allows, in principle, the creation of flexible learning pathways, opening access to non-traditional learners and a major role in the contribution to improving the skills level of the EU population as demanded in the new Europe 2020 strategy. However, adult learning at universities is very fragmented in the EU; establishing a European dialogue on the labour market relevance of adult education at universities is an important step forward that the majority of universities are not ready to take.

The EU also has asked for a culture of evaluation within education and training systems. Specific policies for the whole lifelong learning continuum should be developed, taking into account long-term efficiency and equity. Substantial progress has been made in recent years due to the programmes linked to the Education and Training 2010 Strategy, but there is still a gap in the evaluation of the impact of TLL on the labour market in terms of employability, quality of work and quality of work performance. This has been the topic of a recent call within the framework programme Horizon 2020.

The tools, which this project has developed to measure the impact of adult education on work performance (enterprises' perspective) and quality of work (learners' perspective), will facilitate the evaluation of the lifelong learning programmes of universities, the identification of training needs and will increase the labour market relevance of these programmes. The use of these tools will be a valuable contribution to the European discussion on the social efficiency and equity of education and training.

Focusing on non-traditional learners, the project provides insights into the challenges of HE institutions meeting their social responsibility to update skills, competences and capacities of the European workforce. Using a mixed approach in the analysis of learning provision, LETAE puts individuals back at the forefront by considering their needs and their responsibilities, therefore reinforcing the European Social Model.

The LETAE project was based on comparative European-wide analysis of TLL programs involving stakeholders and decision makers. The clear objective was to establish a European process of mutual learning aimed at transferring knowledge and experience in actions and strategies to improve the design of LL programs at universities and to reinforce their third mission. It is expected that the dissemination beyond the project boundaries have a multiplier effect on European higher education systems.