

**BRIEFING PAPER 5 issued 2009**  
**LLL2010 SUBPROJECT 4**

**The qualifications-supporting company – How do small and medium sized enterprise perceive formal adult education?**

**Context of the research**

Despite the wide variety of research literature on training in enterprises, little information is available on the role and significance of formal adult education within the broader HRD and training activities in organisations, in particular in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Revealing the significance, social reality and meaning of formal adult education in a comparative way is the aim of the project 'Lifelong Learning 2010: Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: The contribution of the Education System'. Subproject 4 investigates the importance of formal adult education in SMEs, taken both parties into consideration, the employers and the employees. Teams from twelve countries (Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Bulgaria, England, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Russia, Scotland and Slovenia) provided case studies on the importance of formal adult education in Small and Medium Enterprises.

**Key issues**

For exploring the under-researched topic of formal adult education in SMEs, key questions include

- Do representatives of SMEs actually make a difference between formal adult education and other types of continuing education?
- If so, how are advantages and disadvantages of formal adult education assessed?
- Do SMEs provide support for participation in formal adult education?
- How is non/support for formal adult education embedded in SME's more general human resource management and development strategies and *training cultures* in particular?
- When comparing countries and speaking of policies of SMEs, is there support for a convergence thesis or is there clear evidence for particularities, routed in differences in societal frameworks?

**Initial Results**

Formal Adult Education represents a distinct social reality in its own right, of which learners and employers are aware. Evidence of case studies suggests that representatives of enterprises perform a distinction between formal adult education and other types of further education present in the enterprises. However, they seldom use the notion formal adult education or its equivalents in local languages but explain the differences by comparing examples of formal adult education to examples of non-formal and formal adult education.

The assessment of advantages and disadvantages of formal adult education depends on requirements and policies of the enterprise; the same features of formal adult education highlighted as an incentive by a part of SMEs are mentioned as a drawback by others.

SMEs use a variety of policies for supporting formal adult education, including strengthening existing motivation, allowing rearrangement of working schedules and paying (partly) for time used for studies, covering (partly) tuition fees, supporting cross-fertilisation of work and study and organising actively programmes in formal adult education. Support could be classified on a spectrum from '*ignorance*' to '*integrated support*'.

Support for formal adult education is connected to companies' more general *training cultures*. Enterprises with an *expansive training culture* also support formal adult education more widely. However, there is a significant number of SMEs with little engagement in company training, but fairly strong support for formal adult education.

*On a comparative level, results provide tentatively support for a convergence thesis. However, as there is a clear difference in the characteristics of formal adult education between groups of countries, the behaviour of SMEs is at least partly touched by these differences. Further research is necessary to explore this mixed picture.*

### Further information

Further information about this subproject can be found on the project website <http://LLL2010.tlu.ee>. Details about the entire project and the other subprojects, including reports, are also available there.

### Research Institutions in LLL2010 Consortium

1. Institute for International and Social Studies, Tallinn University, *Estonia*
2. Higher Institute for Labour Studies, Catholic University of Leuven, *Belgium*
3. University of Nottingham, *England, United Kingdom*
4. Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, *Scotland, United Kingdom*
5. Educational Disadvantage Centre, Centre for Human Development at St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University, *Ireland*
6. Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Oslo, *Norway*
7. Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, Ljubljana, *Slovenia*
8. TÁRKI Social Research Centre, Budapest, *Hungary*
9. Centre for International Relations and Studies, Mykolo Romerio University, Vilnius, *Lithuania*
10. Institute of Sociology, Sofia, *Bulgaria*
11. St. Petersburg State University: Department of Sociology, Department of Retraining and Improvement of Professional Skills for Sociology and Social Work, *Russia*
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