

Higher Education Learning Partnerships – The Results of the TEMPUS HELP project

Over the past two decades Central and Eastern Europe has experienced unprecedented economic, social and political change. The process of transition has required significant adaptations at all levels of the economy and society. Most relevant to the HELP project, which has been funded with European Commission TEMPUS support, from 2009 to 2012, are those new skills needed by enterprises and their labour forces that contribute to encouraging innovation, increasing competitiveness and raising productivity. However, the reform of adult learning and skills training in Central and Eastern Europe has been slow.

Rates of participation in training continue to lag behind average levels in the European Union. In Croatia, according to the data from 2007, only 2.9% of the adult participated in the training, while in United Kingdom 26.6%. This needs to be addressed if Europe as a whole is to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. Training must not be seen as an option but rather a fundamental component of good business practice. By improving competitiveness at different levels, training enables businesses to realise their goals more efficiently and effectively. The bottom line is that training directly affects business profitability.

A main concern of the HELP project is to raise awareness of the importance of training in successful business. As part of the project a training needs analysis (TNA) was undertaken in Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Serbia to understand better the training situation in the region. It explored employers' attitudes towards training, current training practices and the nature of current skill shortages.

The distribution of companies by size that participated in the Croatia TNA was: micro 4.4%, small 6.7%, medium 26.7%, and large 62.2%. Most companies, especially

smaller ones, were enthusiastic about the prospect of cooperation. For higher level employment categories, the businesses surveyed considered a combination of qualifications and experience important in the workplace. Work experience alone was considered more relevant to the employment of unskilled workers. Most employers were satisfied with the willingness of graduates to learn, their theoretical knowledge and communication skills. The lowest levels of satisfaction were expressed for the organisational and practical skills of graduates. The most important skills indicated were organisational, leadership and communication but these are often lacking. The lowest ranking in importance in the workplace was soft skills. Most businesses indicated a willingness to invest in training programmes. The objectives of training programmes had the strongest influence on businesses when choosing training. Of those surveyed a majority confirmed that a One Stop Shop would contribute significantly to meeting the training requirements of their business.

The close correspondence of the results between countries suggests the pressing need to increase the availability of and access to demand-driven training. One way to realise this is for education institutions to work more closely with business in mutually beneficial partnerships structured around training and business development. In this way, the relevance of education and training can be improved and applied towards improving business productivity, employment opportunities, personal, national and regional prosperity.

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www.tempus-help.uns.ac.rs/

