



Identification, Dissemination and Exchange of good practice in
Local Employment development and promoting better governance

CASE STUDY FICHE

Theme: 'Maximising Employment Potential: local approaches to lifelong learning'

The fiche is a guide to the kind of information we need to gather about potential case studies. We will use this to gain an understanding of the coalition and an idea of its value to our seminar.

General details

Case Study name	Centres de Competence (skills centres)
Purpose of the partnership/activity/strategy/project	The skills centres combine a variety of features: they focus on a specific industry, they are set up in the vicinity of local industrial clusters, they provide technology-based training, and they pool their resources with those of external partners. Partnership is an essential component of the skills centres' approach and success.
Address	FOREM (PES of the Walloon Region)
Telephone no.	
Fax	
Email address	
Name of Contact	Marie Corman (initiator) Phillippe Bourgeois (FOREM)
Background on lead organisation	The skills centres partnerships and the skills centres network constitute an essential part of the Walloon Public Employment Service's drive to improve the general level of qualifications, to remove bottlenecks from the labour market and to adopt a more demand-lead approach to training in Wallonia. They were initiated as a core element of the restructured Public Employment Service in 1998.
Database category (delete irrelevant ones)	C: Addressing skills shortages and promoting life-long learning F: Diversifying local economic base

Case study description

Background to the case study	The creation of skills centres and a skills centres network constituted a priority for the Walloon PES, aiming at improving the general level of qualifications, at removing bottlenecks from the labour market and better adapting training courses and methods to the needs of industry. A renewed partnership approach provided the main tool of the policy.
Description of the characteristics of the 'milieu' of the case study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic • Geographical • Political/governance • Cultural • Other 	
Description of activity	The close co-operation with industry sectors allows the creation of training programmes which match the needs of the labour market. To date, 11 skills centres are functioning,

	<p>about 20 centres will be operational throughout Wallonia in 2005, covering a variety of sectors. Each centre is run independently, including responsibility for management and finances. Whereas some centres are still part of FOREM, most of them are managed by a public-private partnership. However, the entire skills centres network is co-ordinated by FOREM.</p> <p>Diversification of activities: While training is the main activity of the skills centres, other activities are also encouraged. These include surveying the evolution of skills leading to regular reports and forecasts; information and awareness-raising; promoting e-learning; and advising employers on the identification of skills needs, developing economic development strategies and on establishing quality control.</p> <p>The Walloon Government awards skills centres meeting all the requirements with a quality label. Among these requirements are four key aspects to fulfil: supporting regional development, a partnership approach, activities covering a broad field complementary to the training actions, being accessible to a large and diverse audience, including free services for unemployed people and students.</p>
Objectives	<p>Delivery of training constitutes only one of the missions of the skills centres. New missions comprise raising awareness, information and demonstration activities, a technology observatory and support for starting companies.</p>
Geographical focus of the project	<p>Sub-regional level for the Walloon Region. There is a link with regional economic development: The skills centres must be closely related to the sub-regional industrial network and representative organisations and they must support socio-economic development through training and other activities.</p>
Have you worked in partnership with other organisations ?	<p>Partnership: The Belgian labour legislation is based on the results of collective negotiation and as a consequence, the skills centres must engage in an open partnership approach.</p> <p>There are three main types of partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Temporary” partnerships when the parties do not wish to invest but have other valuable contributions to make. They would tend to participate through sub-committee work. – Social and other partners may help fund or invest in a skills centre (e. g. by providing equipment). Their role could be of a sort of guidance committee which acts like a board of directors. – Partners who make substantial investments may form non-profit making associations depending on their own independent status. <p>The partnership approach is a central feature of the skills centres. It goes back to a tradition of partnership in skills training between employers’ organisations and trade unions.</p> <p>The partnership approach means the pooling of resources and joint management which, in turn, means a change in organisation and management at operational level. For example, FOREM training centres have had to get used to the</p>

	<p>shift from working with a fixed staff – to a large extent composed of civil servants – to working with part-time trainers brought in from industry.</p> <p>Approximately 20% of the funding for the skills centres comes from the private sector either in cash or in kind. The main part of the funding comes from public funds (regional government and FOREM), training income, and the European Structural Funds.</p>
Have you involved other tiers of government in the project?	
Target groups	The main target groups of the skills centres are the employed and the unemployed but the provision of services goes well beyond these to include company management, apprentices, teachers, and students in their final years of study.
Particular successes	Overall, the level of public-private co-operation (at sub-regional level) demonstrated in Wallonia was considered impressive by other countries that participated in the Peer Review of this initiative.
Problems faced/overcome	<p>E-learning is a challenge</p> <p>The aim of the skills centres is to provide demand-lead training which is also adapted to the needs of the individual. This is of course an ambitious task and requires a shift in thinking about training on the part of both the skills centres and the firms.</p>
Lessons learned	

Theme-Specific Questions

Is there evidence that cooperation at local level around lifelong learning can be a vehicle for development in your area?	It is difficult to measure the qualitative targets at this early stage. The Walloon Social and Economic Council has expressed the wish for a detailed measurement of the effects of the skills centres, e. g. details on the status of trainees and the creation of additional jobs in the skills centres themselves
<p>How can specific groups, such as women, ageing workers, socially excluded people etc. best be integrated into the learning process?</p> <p>What can be done to encourage employers and individuals to invest in learning?</p>	One of the key aims for the skills centres is 'being accessible to all', not just to workers facing restructuring. An individual training plan is written up and in this sense, the skills' centres are open to people from disadvantaged groups.
What can local approaches offer in responding to the learning needs of people at different stages in their lives, that national approaches	In relation to co-operation at local level, the emphasis of the skills centres is mainly sectoral and this may make meeting local needs difficult. The answer was that the idea behind the skills centres was from local initiatives and the implementation of the policy requires local co-operation. However, the

cannot offer?	definition of "local" in this context applies more to the sub-region than to the municipalities. A future challenge may be to work more with the local authorities although this may entail more costs.
What are the X-factors that help local economies become 'success stories' thanks to coherent lifelong learning strategies?	