



Eurofound

Educational and training services: Anticipating the challenges

Case study: FECCOO, Spain

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Introduction

Education and training remain key policy priorities across Europe because of their importance in fostering future economic growth in the European Union. The education and training sector is addressing some of the big policy challenges in Europe and more globally through innovation, job creation, inclusion and active citizenship, to mention a few themes. This focus is a logical next step following previous policy strategies and initiatives aimed to promote lifelong learning. As Green (2002) observes, lifelong learning has been at the centre of European educational discourses for at least a decade. It is reflected in a large number of policy strategies and initiatives, first and foremost the strategic plans for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2010 and ET 2020) and the New Skills for New Jobs Initiative. Initiatives to increase mobility and the transparency of national educational systems, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the higher education framework European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as well as frameworks and networks to promote the quality assurance of education and training across Europe, are all measures that affect the education and training sector. Changing framework conditions brought about by economic, ecological, socio-demographic and technological developments will present providers of learning services with new challenges and opportunities. They will also impact on the outcomes and performance of the sector as well as on employment, working conditions and skills needs.

This case report forms part of a study conducted by the Danish Technological Institute under contract to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). The purpose of the study is to provide empirical evidence about the state of the education and training sector in Europe within the overall context of lifelong learning, to identify and illustrate trends and practices that can function as a source of inspiration. The aim is to produce original scenarios for the sector in the European Union (EU27) in order to provide Eurofound and its stakeholders with a sound and pragmatic knowledge base to improve the understanding and anticipation of change in the sector up to 2020 in the EU.

The study has a particular focus on employment and the supply of labour within the sector. What sort of teaching, training and education jobs will be needed in the future? And what are the skills necessary to do them? How do we make adjustments and develop the current educational workforce in order to be prepared for future trends?

This report is one of six case study reports.

The main objective of the report is to illustrate one example of an innovative approach to anticipating the challenges faced by the education and training sector.

The report is based on preliminary desk research of sources relating to the case, and a case study visit on 9 and 10 March 2011 that included face-to-face interviews with the trainers and stakeholders named below:

- Pilar Losada, Federación de Enseñanza de Comisiones Obreras (FECCOO)
- José Pineda Pamies, responsible for education at Federación de Enseñanza de Comisiones Obreras (FECCOO)
- José Claudio Narganes Robas, Director of the Teachers' Centre of Cadiz Centro del Profesorado de Cádiz
- Daniel González Manjón: Professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at Cadiz University
- Juan M. Serón Muñoz: Director and Professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at Cadiz University
- Lola Morillo Balado: Comisiones Obreras (CCOO)

Description of the initiative

This case study describes an initiative in Spain, one of the larger EU Member States with a high level of unemployment, especially among young people, which makes an analysis of the training sector interesting for policymakers. It is a noteworthy example of a national trade union in the education sector organising online courses for teachers in collaboration with public universities to develop the competence of employed as well as unemployed teachers.

Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) is one of the largest trade unions in Spain, with more than one million members. It is by far the biggest union in the education sector. CCOO is structured in federations: in other words, the members belong to a federation according to their sector of work. At present CCOO has 11 federations, one of which is the federation for education (Federación de Enseñanza de CCOO or FECCOO).

FECCOO works with three public universities: Cadiz, Alicante and UNED (a Spanish distance learning university). This case study focuses on the collaboration with Cadiz University. FECCOO chose to initiate the collaboration with Cadiz University (Faculty of Educational Sciences) because the university has many years of experience with online training and is perceived as forward-looking and well placed to educate teachers for the future.

Essentially, compared with traditional education, the e-learning initiative offers universal access to training for all the groups of workers that FECCOO represents, and the initiative protects the right of the workers in the educational sector to receive continuing training. It also offers the possibility to combine training during a person's career (lifelong learning) with work and family obligations.

The courses at Cadiz University contribute to raising the quality of teaching and services in public primary and secondary schools and focus on the internal challenges to the education sector such as behavioural problems, new technologies and diversity.

Background

FECCOO started organising e-learning with universities in 2000, and e-learning courses represent between 20% and 25% of the courses now arranged by FECCOO. The rest of the courses are classroom courses. At first FECCOO only offered classroom courses, but the union soon realised that it had to adapt to the new times and to e-learning. A mixture of different factors, such as demography, population dispersion and a lack of continuing training among teachers, was taken into consideration when FECCOO decided to introduce e-learning to its members.

The introduction of online courses also came in response to requests from a number of the autonomous regions of Spain. Many of these regions are very thinly populated, and the e-learning initiative means that people who live in rural areas or small towns can access the same training as those in the large cities. For FECCOO, the e-learning initiative means that everyone – no matter where they live – has access to the same opportunities.

In Spain, there is no tradition of receiving continuing training during working hours, at least not in the education sector, which makes it difficult to combine a job with continuing training. According to FECCOO, the Spanish education model has changed so much during the last 20 years that there is currently no clear direction. There have been four major elements of education legislation in about two decades, and it has been a huge challenge in the sense that there is never enough time to implement the latest legislation before a new piece of legislation is introduced. While it is mandatory that teachers teach in accordance with the latest legislation, often they are not capable of doing so, because their competences have not been developed concurrently with the development of the education regulations.

Realising that education is key to improving the skills and qualifications of employees within the education sector, FECCOO wants to help increase the quality and effectiveness of the services in the sector, which will also promote the professional development and the working conditions of this group of workers.

Scope of the project

FECCOO is aware of the present crisis and major challenges in Spain. There are changes everywhere, including social changes, technological changes and many more, meaning that employees have to renew themselves all the time. To assist in this, FECCOO has introduced a range of online courses. This is also in line with the objective of the EU to bring education closer to the home, to support lifelong learning, and to offer training as close to the interested parties as possible.

FECCOO sees huge advantages in e-learning when it comes to self-guided learning with online or telephone tutoring and with teams of dynamic tutors and experts who contribute to the motivation and the reinforcement of learning of every student. FECCOO hopes to reinforce education in all areas and in every possible way, and their main reason for introducing the e-learning project is to ensure a broad supply of training opportunities.

People in administrative positions in the Spanish education sector do not receive much continuing education. This makes it difficult for them to adapt to changes and develop in their job. According to FECCOO, in Spain there is a lack of action from the state when it comes to training employees and keeping them up to date. In the current economic crisis many workers are forced to change jobs or sectors, but without appropriate education and training they are not able to make this change. In addition, many employees in Spain do not have much formal education. All their experience is within the sector or business where they have worked for many years. Now they are finding that further education and training is necessary, and for many people e-learning is the ideal way to get this education and training.

The main reason why Cadiz University chose to participate in the e-learning initiative is to raise the educational level within the sector on a national level. The university wants to contribute to education at a high level, which it is able to do because of its extensive experience and knowledge about how to structure courses. Furthermore, the quality of the courses on offer at universities is adapted to the needs of the students and society. Cadiz University focuses on providing permanent education or the 'Education for Work' project. This means that it is essential that the learning can be used in practice. For example, the online courses at Cadiz University are not only for teachers in employment, but also for unemployed teachers who wish to work again. Participating in one of the e-learning courses can provide them with the necessary qualifications to return to the job market.

Target groups

Since FECCOO is not a federation of teachers only, the online courses at Cadiz University address all workers in public education below university level (primary and secondary teachers as well as administrative staff). The educational level of the workers is therefore varied. Many of the workers already have a job, but there are also many unemployed people who have to receive continuing education to get a job; in other words, people who need to be retrained.

Selection process

FECCOO asks Cadiz University to arrange a certain number of courses offering a certain number of places, and each autonomous region asks for the necessary number of places through FECCOO. Then, FECCOO allocates the places in accordance with the size of the region, demography and other factors. Some courses are offered in all autonomous regions, others only in some. In this context, Cadiz University is only a virtual place of learning.

Design of the courses

FECCOO develops annual sectoral plans for workers in the area concerned. The training plans consist of training activities such as courses, seminars, group work, etc., that take place in different training modalities; that is, classroom courses, distance courses or mixed courses. Until now the training needs of the different sectors have been identified at the workplace itself, through FECCOO's work as a trade union as well as through the new education rules and legislation, as well as the collective agreements of the workers in the field of education demanding new skills. FECCOO has published a report on training needs in terms of content, type of training (online, others) and duration for workers in public education below university level. The objectives of this report are:

- to map the initial training and complementary training that teachers and trainers have completed and their future demand for continuing education and training;
- to analyse whether there is a mismatch between the competences that teachers think they need for the future (attention to diversity, behavioural problems with students) and the type of courses they demand (new technologies).

Cadiz University designs the course on the basis of its education experience and the needs that are known to exist. Then it sends the design to FECCOO, which evaluates whether there is a need for this specific course. FECCOO is in close contact with its members and therefore knows a lot about their needs.

According to Professor Serón Muñoz of Cadiz University, the students contribute to the design of new courses by giving their input on good and bad things – things that are missing or should be changed. Moreover, during the courses, the teacher may become aware of things that should have been included in the course. In this way, the courses are developing all the time. After the courses, the students have to answer an evaluation questionnaire. Information obtained from these questionnaires is one of the tools that FECCOO uses to draw up its education plans.

Activities

The most demanded online courses are those related to teaching issues, which are mainly the ones organised by Cadiz University and Alicante University. The second biggest demand is for courses dealing with new technologies. Cadiz University offers courses to primary and secondary teachers. These courses include topics such as dealing with diversity, how to approach learning problems, and teaching methodology.

FECCOO offers 12 online courses at Cadiz University. The courses are held through a virtual platform with one virtual classroom for each course. The platform is divided into different parts: one part for examination requirements, one part for documents, one part for communication with the teacher, one part for activities, etc. The programmes are very intuitive and easy to access. The tasks are clearly described and the courses are characterised by structure and predictability.

For the student to participate, he or she needs a computer, internet access and an e-mail address. According to the professors at Cadiz University this is not a problem since most people own a computer, and if they do not, it is easy to gain access to one at work or at an internet café. Technically speaking, the students do not have problems following an online course once they get used to the teaching modality. They are fast learners.

Finance/costs

The online courses are completely free of charge to the student. In Spain, employees pay 0.1% of their salary as a contribution to training, and employers pay 0.6% of the payroll. These contributions are used for training all workers in Spain, and the amount is distributed in subsidies of different amounts (in terms of employment sectors and number of workers) to companies, organisations and institutions authorised to provide training – including to FECCOO, which uses part of the money on the online courses.

Evidence-based results

According to FECCOO, 20–25% of all courses run by FECCOO are online, and the rest are classroom courses. FECCOO wants to increase the percentage of online courses to 35% in the coming year depending on demand. In 2009, FECCOO received about 16,000 applications for its online courses, and about 4,200 persons passed an online course.

More than 80% of the students pass the course. Between 10% and 15% abandon the course before it even begins or during the first week. A small number (about 5%) quit during the course and do not pass the final evaluation. FECCOO believes that the fact that the courses are free could be an explanation of why some people choose to quit. The evaluation reports of the online courses show a high degree of satisfaction from both students and teachers: 4.5 out of 5 points.

The high number of applications shows that many people are very interested in continuing education. However, FECCOO stresses that it has to disappoint many people, as it rejects about two-thirds of the applications. This means that some needs are not met, since FECCOO simply does not have enough funds to accept all applicants.

Impact evaluation

Pilar Losada (FECCOO) reports that in Spain little emphasis is generally placed on evaluating the impact of training. Without an evaluation, it is impossible to be sure if the initiatives are working. In general, FECCOO evaluates the impact mainly according to the level of recognition of the training in the person's professional career. As the demand for the courses is increasing all the time, FECCOO assumes that the training it provides is appropriate for the training needs of the sector. On the other hand, FECCOO also takes note of suggestions made their members in the evaluation questionnaires.

The initiative in the educational landscape

Recognition of skills

When the students finish a course, they receive a diploma issued by FECCOO and the university concerned. One reason for working with universities is to streamline the question of recognition and certification of the training. Certification is very important, as 17 Spanish autonomias deal with certification, and FECCOO needs to guarantee to workers that the training will be valid in all parts of the country. Therefore, FECCOO has signed an agreement with each of the universities it works with regarding how the online courses are to be certified.

The recognition of the online courses is not, however, universal as the different Spanish autonomias have the power to make their own rules or legislation for recognition of skills. The professors at Cadiz University see this extreme localism as a major problem. For example, a person from Cadiz looking for a job in Malaga could encounter problems because he did not pass the course in Malaga, but in Cadiz. What is accepted in one autonomy is rejected in another. There is therefore a need for a new outlook in Spain when it comes to the recognition of skills. This would enable FECCOO to guarantee to their workers that their qualifications will be recognised automatically.

Because of the free exchange of people across autonomias and borders, there is, according to FECCOO, a need to create a unit to streamline the recognition criteria – both at national and European level. For many years, FECCOO has negotiated for universal and uniform recognition for teachers between the different autonomias, but this will require political efforts from both Spanish and European politicians. Furthermore, because of the decentralised Spanish system, the autonomias can – in some areas – make individual legislation or regulations. General legislation is set by the government but according to FECCOO this legislation leaves the door open for loopholes. In the area of education, this causes unequal development and supply of education in different parts of Spain, which can create a kind of discrimination between persons working the same job but in different autonomias. Moreover, in Spain, the work of teachers is 'regulated' by State regulations, but the rules are enforced by the autonomias.

How much continuing training teachers receive, which courses are available, etc., therefore differs from region to region, and the result is that employees in the education sector develop differently from region to region. With the online courses, FECCOO hopes to give all those who need continuous training the same opportunities and contribute to reduce the geographic differences.

Other initiatives in the education sector

According to FECCOO there are not many policy initiatives to improve the skills of workers in Spain's education sector. The government promotes training plans, but the number and quality of courses vary from autonomy to autonomy. The Spanish trade unions are constantly urging the government to develop policies that will improve the skills and working conditions of people in the education sector. FECCOO stresses that there has been a lack of political will from recent governments, and this has prevented the development of a national catalogue of professional qualifications.

Participation in continuing education is voluntary. FECCOO sees it as a right and a moral duty, especially as the workers pay for the education through their salaries. For example, the agreement for teachers in public schools says that every six years the teacher should have up to 100 hours of continuing training. This is not obligatory, but if a teacher chooses to do it, they can earn credits for different processes of career development.

Regarding the willingness of the Spanish education system to implement new initiatives similar to the e-learning initiative, the education system has made a strong commitment through the plan 'New Technologies of Information and Communication, entitled 'School 2.0' (Escuela 2.0). In general, the introduction of this plan means that classrooms are equipped with computers and other technology to advance both teaching and learning. However, as with other aspects of education, there is an uneven outcome or implementation because of the different economic investments in the different autonomies.

Role of teachers/trainers

The interview with the professors at Cadiz University made it very clear that there is a big difference between teaching online and in a classroom. The usual, familiar role of being a lecturer in the classroom is changing. The teachers step out of their comfort zones and have to change their methods. The specific skills required to teach the course varies from subject to subject, but a common feature for the teaching staff at Cadiz University is that they are very experienced. Cadiz University is a leader in the field of online education with many years of experience.

According to Professor González Manjón, it is more complicated to teach online. Students expect a very quick response from the teacher, who must be prepared to correct many tasks quickly to allow the students to move forward. Furthermore, the students have very different backgrounds and different ways of learning – even in the same course. Some students are very demanding. For example, an unemployed student who wants to get a job will spend a lot of time on the course because he has the time, and he expects the same from the teacher. In general, the role of the student is changing because in e-learning he or she contributes much more actively.

Being a good online teacher is something that must be learned over time. It is very important to create a sound and practical structure that links theory with reality. It is also important that the team of students works well, and one way of making this happen is to establish good personal contacts with the student. The teacher can do so by using the name of the student in the e-mail communication and send short messages now and then. This helps to make the student feel special and comfortable, and it gives the student a sense of recognition and safety.

An online teacher has a great need for pedagogical (teaching) skills as well as patience. At the start of an online course students who have not used computers before are sometimes nervous about online education. Some are hesitant about pressing the buttons, and the teachers, for example, have to write short messages in the virtual classroom such as 'read

me' because the student is afraid to 'touch' anything. In general, however, the students learn very fast and most of them are willing to learn.

New or innovative aspects of the initiative

The most innovative aspect of the e-learning initiative is that it rethinks the traditional education model by focusing on the needs of the student. The initiative takes into account that there are many changes in society (single parents, two parents working full time, rural areas with few schools, etc.) that require new teaching methods allowing students to study wherever and whenever they want to, and combining personal life with professional life. Making things easier for the student is also a way of encouraging lifelong learning.

Offering online courses means paying attention to the new needs emerging in various educational fields and at the same time contributing to solving some of the challenges of new technology. The double effect of the online courses is that the students learn the content of the course in question and at the same time acquire some technological skills by using computer, e-mail, internet, etc. Since many of the students are teachers themselves, they can also pass these technological skills on to their own students.

Finally, the roles of both teacher and student are changing. There is a trend for students to become more active and take greater responsibility for their own learning, and the university teachers are changing from their traditional role as lecturers to being active and strong communicators with strong pedagogical skills. In general, a more active dialogue means greater satisfaction for both teacher and student.

Challenges and future of the e-learning initiative

The possible weaknesses and challenges of the online initiative according to the interviewees are not related to the method of teaching (online) but to other factors, including:

- insufficient subsidies;
- lack of rigorous studies of training needs and studies of impact of the online training;
- lack of recognition of skills – at a national and European level;
- readiness of the public universities to offer online courses.

Inadequate subsidies

For FECCOO, the biggest challenge in relation to the students is to train the maximum number of students possible, while maintaining the quality criterion. The major obstacle is that the subsidies are insufficient. FECCOO is currently experiencing a reduction in subsidies because of the high number of unemployed people in Spain, and if the level of subsidies is not maintained, the supply of courses will obviously be in danger.

According to FECCOO the future of the e-learning initiative is uncertain. At the moment, a reform of the existing training model is being discussed at a national level. Whatever the outcome of the discussions, FECCOO emphasises that it will keep working for high-quality continuing education for workers in Spain. As long as FECCOO continues to receive public funds it will continue to develop and adapt the model of continuous training to the future needs and demands of the sector.

Lack of research into training needs and impact of training

There is a pressing need for rigorous research into training needs and studies of impact of the online training. FECCOO emphasises that there is an extraordinary lack of research in the sector, particularly concerning the impact of education. Without such studies, it is difficult to plan for training needs in a realistic way. FECCOO uses their intuition when designing the courses; sometimes they discover needs when they visit schools or talk with their members. However the union points out that these methods are not rigorous and the Spanish authorities need to commission studies that will help them to plan courses more methodically.

Lack of recognition of skills

As mentioned previously the qualifications achieved through the online courses are not universally recognised, since the different Spanish autonomous regions have the power to make their own rules or legislation for recognition of skills. The professors at Cadiz University describe this as a major challenge, which also makes it difficult for FECCOO to guarantee their workers automatic recognition of skills every time they take a new course. According to FECCOO, the creation of a unit for recognition of skills both at national and European level is necessary to unify the recognition criteria.

Lack of online courses in public universities

Another issue is the readiness of the Spanish public universities to offer online training. Most private universities do offer online courses, whereas many public universities still do not offer sufficient online training. The fact that most courses are at the public universities are still classroom-based means they are unattractive for people who hold a job. As mentioned before, there is no tradition in Spain for receiving continuing training during working hours. Therefore, if for example you want to take a Master's Degree and you have a job, you often have to go to a private university where you can do it online. The fees are, however, very high at the private universities, and not everyone can afford them. Therefore, the public universities should start offering degrees online to reach out to more students.

Maintaining quality

A big challenge for the professors at Cadiz University is to maintain the quality of the courses. Two important issues are how to make sure that the students participate in a course for the right reasons and how much can be expected of the students. Some students think that online courses are easy, and they ask 'what's the minimum I have to do to pass the course?' In some instances, students are told that they must complete, for example, 10 hours of continuing education to be retrained, but according to the interviewees this does not make any sense. It is about mastering the content of the course, not about how long it takes.

The student emphasis on minimising effort may lead to a reduction in the quality of the courses, and Cadiz University stresses that it is not willing to do that. The professors at Cadiz University emphasise that some universities are willing to lower the education level in order to get more students (more students mean more money). Instead of focusing on offering many hours of training, more money should be spent on trying to change the mentality in the approach to education.

However, the professors stress that there is no doubt that e-learning is the future. And José Claudio Narganes Robas, Director of the Teachers' Centre of Cadiz, agrees. E-learning is the solution for the future because it reaches out to many people. In order to make it even more popular, information is very important. Employees need to be informed about online courses. What is it all about? This will help consolidate the courses and solve the recognition problems. It is a big challenge to change the mentality of some students – especially of those who participate in an online course for economic reasons (they need to be retrained to get a new job), and not because they are interested in the content of the course. Online training is changing everything that teachers are used to do, and continuing training should, according to José Claudio Narganes Robas, be mandatory for teachers because more skilled teachers will increase the quality and the productivity of the education sector.

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Interviews

Pilar Losada, Federación de Enseñanza de Comisiones Obreras (FECCOO)

José Pineda Pamies, Responsible for education at Federación de Enseñanza de Comisiones Obreras (FECCOO)

José Claudio Narganes Robas, Director of the Teachers' Centre of Cadiz Centro del Profesorado de Cádiz.

Daniel González Manjón: Professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at Cadiz University

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