

Using information sources on industrial relations in Europe

A workshop for trainers

Dublin, 8-11 March 2001

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

European Trade Union College

European Trade Union Institute

1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In summer 1995, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EFILWC) and the European Trade Union College (ETUCO) met in order to discuss a joint workshop to support trainers of the College to broaden their multimedia perspective in regard of major sources of information on Industrial Relations in Europe. As the Foundation is a main provider of information in this area via research reports, glossaries, observatories and databases, it was decided to organise a pilot workshop, with the additional co-operation of the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI). This first workshop, jointly organised and financed by both organisations, took place in September 1996 and was generally well received. On the strength of this experience, a second workshop took place in February 1998, with some modifications to aims and target groups, followed by further workshops in February 1999 and February 2000. The workshop has now become a regular feature of the work programme of all three organisations. Over the years the workshop has undergone significant changes, including a marked transfer of interest away from printed information sources, which formed the major focus of the first workshop, to electronic sources available via the Internet. This paper reports on the fifth of the workshops, which took place in March 2001.

A preparatory meeting took place in Dublin on 27 November 2000, with a further meeting in Brussels on 13 February 2001. Between meetings, planning was continued in frequent communication by telephone and e-mail.

As on previous occasions, the workshop was held outside Dublin (Eire) at the headquarters of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Loughlinstown.

An invitation, together with a provisional programme, was sent out by ETUCO to its affiliated organisations on 1 December 2000 in English and French. This was followed up by a confirmation letter which was sent out in English on (22 January 2001) only to those who responded to the invitation letter.

This produced a total of 15 participants from fourteen countries representing fifteen different organisations (see Participants' List, Appendix A)

A questionnaire was sent out with the confirmation letter, designed to elicit information regarding technical details and experience in electronic information (Appendix B).

All fifteen participants completed and returned the questionnaire. The results of the survey are included as Appendix C.

2 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the workshop were:

1. To encourage trade union trainers to develop innovative methods and to improve the quality of training they provide by:
 - developing the skills and techniques for conducting effective Internet searches;
 - introducing participants to other major sources of information on industrial relations, including directories and databases;
 - evaluating the quality of a range of information sources relevant for trade union training;
 - contributing to the development of a web-based information resource useful for trade union training.
2. To help the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EFILWC) as well as ETUCO, AFETT and the ETUI improve the quality of the information services which they provide by gathering feedback from participants on existing services.

3 TUTORS AND PARTICIPANTS

The tutors were Jacky Barry and Derek Stubbs, assisted by colleagues from the European Foundation (Fiona Murray, Jan Vandamme) and from ETUI (Lilli Poulsen).

Technical support was provided by Eva Berger (ETUCO) and by Maria Barbosa and Karin Teeuwen (EFILWC).

The participants came from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark (2), Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic and Sweden. Participants were involved in trade union training or information services or IT services at national or European level. All were well-qualified and able to make a valuable contribution to and benefit from the workshop.

The working language was English, which caused no significant problems for the participants.

4 WORKSHOP METHODS AND CONTENTS

During the workshop, which lasted two and a half days, the following methods were used:

- presentation in plenary
- technical training
- practical exercises
- buzz groups
- plenary discussions.

Welcome and introduction

Participants were welcomed by Raymond-Pierre Bodin, Director of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, who gave an introduction to the work of the host organisation and to the new four-year work programme which was just beginning. Dr Jeff Bridgford, Director of the European Trade Union College, also welcomed participants and spoke briefly about the work of the College and Mrs Lilli Poulsen introduced the work of the European Trade Union Institute and of its Documentation Centre. Tutors and participants then introduced themselves to the rest of the group.

Jacky Barry then introduced the workshop programme.

As a preliminary activity (Activity Sheet 1), participants were asked to discuss in small groups how the Internet was used in training in their own organisations, what were the current priority topics for training within their organisations, and also to identify their own training needs in the area of information skills. These were then shared verbally with the rest of the group. The main trends which emerged from this report back can be summarised as follows:

Use of Internet in training

Most organisations used the Internet in the field of training as a source of information which could be used for research or could provide a basis for the preparation of learning resources. Few had any experience of using the Internet as a medium for distance learning, although this was identified as an area of increasing interest and importance.

Priority topics for training

Training in the effective use of the Internet and the provision of basic skills in e-mail and web searching was one of the main priorities in a number of organisations. Also noted were training about workers' rights, communication skills, labour law and collective bargaining, as well as training for shop stewards.

Individual training needs

Most responses here again were located in the field of training about information technology and included training on Internet search skills, WWW site development and skills in delivering computer-mediated distance learning.

Basic Internet skills (Derek Stubbs)

The first module of the workshop aimed to establish some common understanding about the Internet as well as familiarity with some basic skills in using a web browser, which would be essential for the work over the next two days.

Derek Stubbs made a short presentation on the development of the Internet and the key technologies on which it was based and briefly introduced participants to Internet Explorer version 5.0. Participants had been sent in advance (15 Feb.) a specially prepared workbook which explored key features of Internet Explorer. They then worked through a checklist of basic skills at the computer (Activity Sheet 2) with tutors available to assist and clarify any questions.

Using search engines and directories (Jan Vandamme)

This module looked at approaches to Internet searches and search techniques, using firstly, search engines and, secondly, directories and databases.

Jan Vandamme began the first session on using search engines with a presentation which introduced participants to tools for searching the ‘surface Web’ – that part of the WWW that is searchable by the traditional search engines. He explained the difference between search engines (mechanically constructed databases of web pages) and directories (collections of sites selected by editors), before exploring some of the limitations of these tools. Although a wide range of search engines and directories were introduced, the presentation focused principally on Google (www.google.com) and Altavista (www.av.com). The presentation also provided a helpful set of pointers on framing effective searches. Following the presentation, participants worked in pairs on a series of web-search tasks (Activity Sheet 3) which enabled them to put these skills in searching into practice.

Searching the Deep Web (Jan Vandamme)

This module also began with a presentation, this time focused on those areas of the World Wide Web which general search tools could not or would not make available, including PDF, Doc and other format files, and web pages that were dynamically generated (e.g. ASP pages). Current research placed the ‘deep web’ at about 500 times the size of the ‘surface web’. Jan Vandamme introduced participants to a series of important subject directories, databases, portals, vortals and other sources which might be useful in tracking down more specialised information. This presentation was again followed by a series of hands-on activities (Activity Sheet 4).

Participants came together in brief plenary session at the end of the morning to share experiences and discuss the issues raised in the previous two modules.

National organisations' web-sites

Seven of the participants had volunteered to make brief presentations to the workshop of particularly interesting features of their own organisations' web-sites:

INE/OTOE – Greece (www.ine.otoe.gr)

Aristotles Lakkas briefly introduced a number of linked sites developed by his organisation, including a newly established site for the South-East Europe Trade Union Network, covering Greece and the Balkan countries.

IMPACT – Ireland (www.impact.ie)

Martina O’Leary introduced the site of IMPACT, the Irish trade union for public sector workers. IMPACT provided an online news and information service which was an important reference point on industrial relations issues, including legislation and pay scales.

OEGB – Austria (www.oegb.at/europa)

Christian Frasz introduced OEGB’s new *Europainfo online* service which provided a reference point for European issues for OEGB’s affiliated trade unions.

HK – Denmark (www.hk.dk)

Erik Schlüter presented HK’s web-site and demonstrated an area devoted to online recruitment which allowed members to post their c.v..

FTF – Denmark (www.ftf.net)

Peter Christensen told participants about FTF-net, which had now developed into an ISP providing Internet access for 20-30 smaller trade unions, and showed some of the WWW publishing solutions which were being developed.

IG-Metall – Germany (www.igmetall.de)

Marika Varga introduced sections of the IG-Metall site devoted to European Works Councils and the European Works Council Network. These also included sections in English and French, as well as online discussion forums.

TCO – Sweden (www.tco.se)

Kerstin Ramden introduced the TCO site, which had originally been conceived as an information site about the union for journalists and the general public, rather than as a site for members and activists. This was now changing and the site

currently included Web TV and online booking courses for members to reserve places on training courses.

The scale of activity and variety of approach demonstrated was warmly appreciated in the discussion which followed.

Exploring and evaluating quality on the Web (Fiona Murray)

Fiona Murray discussed the difficulty of finding information of reliable quality on the web and gave a brief presentation on criteria for evaluating the quality of information sources, which drew in part on the criteria which had been identified by participants on previous workshops.

European organisations' web-sites (Fiona Murray, Lilli Poulsen, William Spurgeon)

In this session the participants were asked to explore one of the web-sites belonging to the European organisations responsible for the workshop and to assess its usefulness and usability within the quality criteria presented in the previous session. The session began with three brief presentations:

European Foundation

Fiona Murray gave a brief introduction to the European industrial relations observatory, EIROOnline (www.eiro.eurofound.ie) and the European Foundation's main site (www.eurofound.ie). The database covers the 15 EU member states, Norway and the EU enlargement candidate countries, and includes both news (short articles) and features (more extended analyses) on different aspects of industrial relations.

European Trade Union Institute

Lilli Poulsen gave a brief introduction to the ETUI web-site (www.etuc.org/etui/) and ETULIB, a searchable database providing details of the ETUI Documentation Centre collection of books and periodicals on industrial relations. (www.etuc.org/etui/doccentre/). The database provides reference details of over 15,000 items published in 9 languages.

European Trade Union College/AFETT

William Spurgeon presented the ETUCO/AFETT Trade Union Education in Europe site (<http://www.etuc.org/etuco/>). The site provides a range of information and news of interest to trade union educators and trainers, including courses, training materials, transnational projects, and the EU Information Service which provides information and advice about European Union programmes and other funding sources which support trade union education.

Following these brief introductions, participants were involved in a hands-on exploration and evaluation of the sites (Activity Sheet 5). The feed-back provided will be carried back to the sites owners to help improve service delivery.

Sharing information (Jan Vandamme)

The final day of the workshop began with a short presentation from Jan Vandamme on Internet tools which facilitated the sharing of information and networking. This presentation covered e-mail discussion lists, e-mail journals, newsgroups, weblogs and group collaboration tools, and included many useful web addresses. Participants were given an introduction to the range of possibilities on offer, as well as the practical information necessary to make effective use of these tools. The idea of continuing collaboration was to be picked up in the next session and again towards the end of the workshop (see *Action Plans* below).

Compiling a set of useful weblinks for training (Derek Stubbs)

Derek Stubbs then introduced an exercise (Activity Sheet 6) which asked participants to take one of the key training priorities they had identified earlier during the workshop. Working individually or with a partner, they were to begin to assemble a collection of relevant WWW addresses which could provide valuable references for trade union educators and trainers. They were asked to report on these sites with particular attention to the quality criteria which had been discussed. Using *Mylinea*, one of the tools which had been introduced in the previous session, it was intended to begin to create a structured directory of quality tested sites and web-pages of interest to trade union trainers which could be developed further after the Workshop. Participants were asked to post the best of their results as suggestions for inclusion in the new directory which had been established for the workshop at www.mylinea.com/searcher/.

In the plenary session which followed, participants shared the results of their work and briefly demonstrated a range of sites with information about:

- European trade union education
- European Works Councils
- Distance learning – e-learning tools; language learning
- Web design – resources for web design; web design software
- Working time

Action plans

Participants were asked to consider specific steps by which they could carry forward the work undertaken during the workshop both individually and within their organisation (Activity Sheet 7).

Suggestions included:

- Developing co-operation in this field between trade unions at national level

- ‘Positive contamination’ – spreading the skills and experiences gained from the workshop to other colleagues
- Building the use of web resources into all training courses
- Opening a similar directory on *Mylinea* for EWC delegates from German-speaking countries
- Making the organisation’s training materials available on the web-site
- Writing an article about the use of Internet in trade union work for the union’s magazine
- Translating the PowerPoint presentations made during the workshop for use in by the Education Department and also making them available over the local network
- Sharing the URLs of web-sites presented/visited during the workshop
- Developing an exchange of files both within the organisation and establishing some kind of Francophone electronic library shared with other organisations
- Trying to change mentality within my organisation so that the Internet is thought of principally as a key source of information rather than of entertainment.

In discussion, there was a strong commitment to trying to continue to work together beyond the end of the workshop. It was agreed to continue to submit suggestions for links to the *Mylinea* site and to re-activate the electronic mail-list established after the previous workshop with this year’s participants also being registered as members. (The list can be accessed at Info_Sources@list.etuc.org. Additional requests to join the list should be addressed to derek.stubbs@dial.pipex.com).

Evaluation

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire evaluating the workshop, as well as sharing the main elements of their response in a plenary discussion. An analysis of the results of the questionnaire is provided as Appendix D.

From the discussion, it was clear that all participants had found the workshop extremely useful and the responses were most positive. Comments to be considered for future workshops included:

- Consider whether more of the information could be made available electronically rather than on paper.
- The days were quite pressured- suggestions were made to increase the length of the workshop by half a day to allow more time for the practical exercises.
- Some participants would prefer the opportunity to work on the hands-on exercises individually, but others were happy to do these in pairs.
- The workshop provided an extremely challenging foundation which it will be possible to explore in more detail later.

- Consider whether there could be more preparatory activities before the start of the workshop and also whether it would be possible to develop some distance learning activities after the workshop.
- Retain the provision of hotel accommodation in the city centre.