

# The French Universities Network for Life Long Learning: CDSUFC

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For more than 40 years, French Universities are involved in the development of lifelong learning. The consequences on the university role, structure and organisation are important. The demand is now socio-economic, closely related with the work world, stakeholders, employers, trade unions and individuals who request the attention of our institutions. Always based on high level research activity, universities are asked to build more efficient courses, but also to deliver and guarantee diplomas, certifications and to recognize and accredit prior learning and experience. To share experiences, best practices, but also to influence policy makers, a national network, informal at the beginning, has been established in the early 70's. It's now an „adult“ network, recognized at all level as major actors of ULLL.

## 1. A small history of the french uce network

The opening of higher education to adults appeared in France before 1968 and was linked to the idea of second chances and social advancement. The first IPST in Grenoble (Institut Supérieur de Promotion du Travail) was created in 1951. The CUCES (University Center for Social and Economic Cooperation) was founded in Nancy in 1954. In 1956, a decree established the first „University Access Special Exam“ (ESEU in French) for non-graduates. This exam was the precursor of the future DAEU diploma (Diplôme d'accès aux Études Universitaires) created in 1994 and which is a formidable tool to open the access to university.

We had to wait 1971 and the Vocational Training Act, introducing new financial rules, to see the Ministry encouraging higher level institutions to create the structures needed in order to develop continuing education. It has placed them in a position to become operators recognized for their skills, ensuring their public mission in a new competitive environment. Universities have quickly responded, in 1972, establishing „Continuing Education Mission“ in many of them, supported by spe-

cific State grants. These missions and their leaders began to meet in informal network to share the problems that quickly emerged:

- The question of activity funding: the funding of teachers, engineering ... modality of agreements with employers, with the funding agencies.
- Questions of career of employees who engaged in the development of this non-academic activity. Most of the time, they are not tenured employees.

This informal network has enabled many exchanges that have resulted with the organization of national conferences each year. From 1974 to 1981, relations of the responsible of this network with successive ministries have been difficult but the activity has grown significantly. The network has grown and the arrival in 1981 of the „left government“ has led the network to engage in more contact with the new ministry. This rapprochement with government has led continuing education departments to better organize themselves into network and to make their voice heard in the working groups set up. Thus, was born in 1981 the „Coordination Nationale des Services Universitaires de Formation Continue (CNSUFC)“.

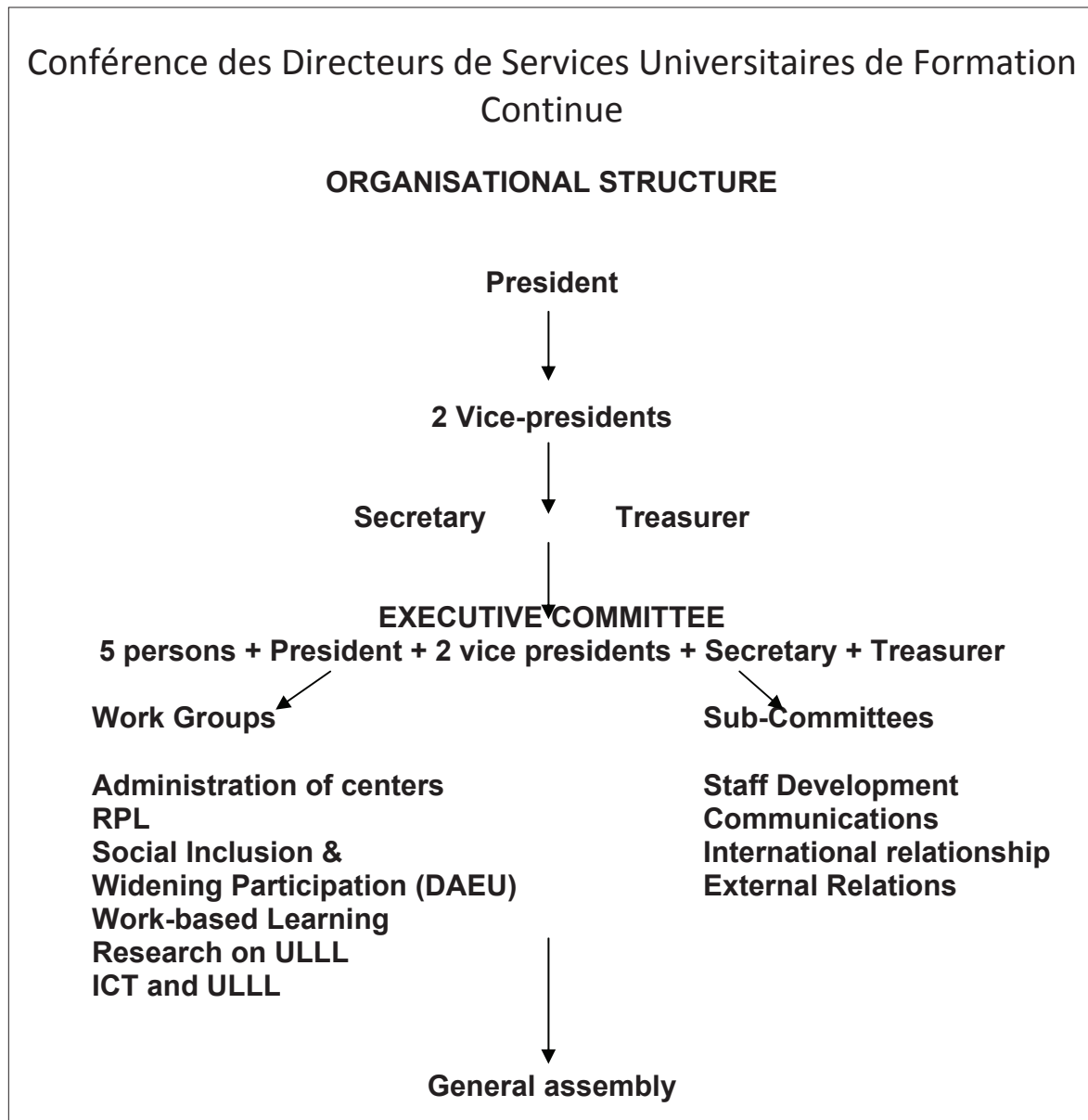
It was transformed into the „Conference des Directeurs de SUFC“ in 1988 (CDSUFC). It was still an informal network, but it has moved closer to the Conference of University Presidents (CPU) and broke, at the initiative of the ministry, most of its direct links with its services. Working groups were set up to allow for construction and more regular exchanges between its members. One group will take in charge the development of the recognition of prior learning in universities. The extension of the network's activities will lead it to adopt a formal association status in 2004. It will then provide new tools: many committees, working groups, web site, etc, that would make a real recognition of the continuing education in universities.

## 2. The organisational structure of the french uce network

The CDSUFC is an association created on March, the 18th of 2004, within the meaning of the French associations Law of July 1901. Its statutes were deposited in Paris. The only full members of the Association are the directors of department of continuing education of public higher level institutions (Universities and Schools). There are 107 in France in 2009. The full members do not pay fees but the services offered by the association are charged on an annual base of 525 € in 2009. These services will be listed and described in the next section.

This network has set the objective of:

1. Synthesize and disseminate information on projects and regulations regarding continuing education activities in academic institutions.
2. Allow the exchange of teaching experiences, management and relationships with different partners of Continuing Education,
3. Deepening the research on certain topics in order to contribute to the emergence of new ideas for continuing training,
4. Speak whenever the need arises on issues concerning the Continuing Education, within the limits of its prerogatives,
5. Organize actions, interventions, take all initiatives to promote the development of university continuing education



6. Represent the interests of university continuing education to the authorities concerned, within the limits of its prerogatives. That's why the CDSUFC is regularly consulted and involved in the work of the CPU, but also the Ministry of Higher Education and Research.

The Association is managed by a steering committee of ten members, elected for two years by the General Assembly. The steering committee elects a President, two Vice-Presidents, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The association statutes' file are deposited in Paris and, and so are the rules of procedure which establishes its operations.

The steering committee is responsible for the internal administration of the Association and the organization of activities, interventions from the different partners, mainly on issues of management and policy of the University Continuing Education.

The Vice-Presidents comes along with the President in relations with external partners. They may be responsible for specific tasks defined by the steering committee. The Secretary is responsible for everything that concerns the correspondence and the archives. He prepares the minutes of meetings and assemblies and, in general, all writings concerning the operations of the association, except those concerning accounting. The Treasurer is responsible for keeping or holding under his control the accounts of the association. He makes all payments and receives, under the supervision of the President, all sums due to the Association. He reports to the General Assembly which approves his management.

### 3. The instruments of the network

The association has gradually put in place tools to serve its members, tools to develop common positions, but also ways to make them known. These tools are, mostly because they are driven by the members themselves, in a spirit of cooperative work which makes the strength of the network. The main tools are presented in the next section.

#### The work groups

The steering committee may decide to establish work groups on topics related to its object. These work groups are open to all members and staff of the members. External experts may be solicited. In 2008–2009, eight work groups (WG) are active:

- WG on Work-based learning
- WG on RPL
- WG on DAEU and widening access
- WG on management tools and information systems for the UCE
- WG on seniors
- WG on Medical Continuing education
- WG on research on UCE
- WG on ICT and LLL

These work groups meet as often as necessary, have a number of participants which can range from a few to nearly a hundred. They enable participants to develop new professional skills, build tools ... and feed the community with their thoughts.

#### The commissions

Commissions are established by the steering committee and are responsible to think and propose actions to the steering committee on a number of topics:

- communication
- Staff training plan
- International relations
- Relations with institutional or professional partners
- ...

Members of these commissions are members of the steering committee appointed by him and experts in the field concerned.

#### The technical seminars or workshops

Technical seminars or workshops related to amendments to statutory or legislative evolutions are regularly organized. These events are often coupled with a general assembly and open to all members. Recent topics

have included the establishment of the „LOLF<sup>1</sup>“, or the development of „research competitiveness cluster and LLL”.

### **The general assembly**

The ordinary general assembly shall meet at least twice a year. These assemblies allow the democratic life of the association, with a possible participation of all its members. These general meetings elect members of the steering committee, vote on budgets and strategic directions. These meetings are an opportunity to meet and debate between members that allow the steering committee to confirm or not their positions.

### **The staff training courses**

The training of our structures seems fundamental for our association and it's one of the tasks that we take the most carefully. It can not only increase the skill level of personnel but also maintain the spirit and the momentum of progress that drives the activity of CE since its kick off. We organize, with the support of universities or other institutions that provide logistics, short modules of training (usually two days) on topics such as: the regulation of FCU, the tools for communication, the quality in UCE, the management of a CE service, the support of candidates for RPL, ... Since 2005, we are implementing a longer course (nine days) for people who are or who have just taken the direction of a university service. This training is organised in partnership with the „Universities Mutualisation Agency“ (AMUE in French) and encounters a real success. It has received nearly 90 trainees over four promotions. A more detailed presentation is given in the following frame (see next page). Training sessions are billed at actual cost to institutions.

### **One or two annual conferences**

Each year, our network organizes a national conference in June, and often a second one, shorter and focused on single theme in the fall. They are organized in different cities each year, after a call for applications. The conference themes are varied but still relevant today. They

focus on workshops that produce recommendations for use by each institution but also by policy makers: regions, ministries ... The seminars are also an opportunity to invite foreign colleagues, including action to confront and expand discussions. The average participation in annual conferences reaches 300 persons. The conference fees are low but enable the association to get revenue for the operation of the association. Last conferences are available on the web: Paris 2008, Toulouse (2008), Pau (2007), Lyon (2007), Clermont Ferrand (2006), ...

### **A website with a database of useful documents**

For nearly ten years, CDSUFC has maintained a web site used as a resource centre for its members but also information site for anyone interested in UCE. A forum question/answer has allowed answering individually to over 1700 questions for five years. This is an important tool for the network because it allows easy sharing of information and documents, as well as space for collaborative work groups. Its address is [www.fcu.fr](http://www.fcu.fr).

### **An electronic newsletter in preparation**

A new tool for information dissemination will be implemented from early 2009 and will replace mail alerts that we used so far in a piecemeal fashion. This will be an electronic newsletter sent by mail subscription. The letter, covering news in our entire field, but also information relayed by the services themselves, will be managed by a member of the steering committee.

Network activities rely on the unpaid participation of personnel having position in our institutions. However, the secretariat and the website management are provided by a person who is paid 30 % on the budget of the association. The incomes of the association shall consist of contributions from members, the revenue related to training courses and conferences. During several years, the association has received an operating grant from the Ministry of higher education and research, for its training and information activities.

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1 LOLF Law on the organization of national budget.

### Training of managers of UCE department: 9 days

Document of 160 pages, published by the EUAM ([www.amue.fr](http://www.amue.fr)) and available on request from [info@fcu.fr](mailto:info@fcu.fr)

To take the responsibility of a UCE department requires very different skills, given the political, educational, management dimensions that entail. That's why the Conference of directors of UCE departments (CDSUFC), in collaboration with the Universities Mutualisation Agency (AMUE in French) has developed a comprehensive operational training which presents both the theoretical and practical aspect of this position.

This cycle is reserved for teachers and or administrative staff who have not taken positions of leadership yet or asked to take one. This course is a real vector for getting used to the position and will enable the potential candidate to understand and be able to master all facets of this activity. Theoretical input, case studies and group work will be put in parallel with the trade data repository of this business.

We have already trained 4 classes of 15 trainees. Many of them have taken the position of director and have shown the specific skills needed for this function. This 9 days training is delivered by the directors of several centres but also by rectors of universities who give their views and expertise on specific issues such as general management or communication.

Sample tool: Training of managers of UCE department

## 4. The main goals and objectives for next years

Many subjects connected with our activities are in the forefront of actuality in France. Beyond the Bologna process which has been fairly well accepted and implemented; we are concerned now by the multiple reforms currently discussed in France. The first one, which carries more uncertainties for us, is the reform on higher education, with several laws on research and governance of universities. The UCE department is generally a common service which is connected with all the parts of the university and uses the resources from every department, in function of the needs.

The reforms change the structure of the direction but also the status of staff and funding. It is currently difficult to build projects in the medium to long term. However, we also have an opportunity with the European Universities' Charter on Lifelong learning. It was written on the request of the French Government and by the European Association of Universities (EUA, conference of European Rectors). We work for its dissemination and implementation.

At the same time, negotiations on continuing vocational training have been initiated between the social partners. This is the rule in France and, once an agreement will be

reached, the government should prepare a law putting all or part of the agreement into effect.

A third set of reforms concerns the organization of local governments and their respective powers. Jurisdiction over vocational training is part of the discussions.

A key feature of continuing education in France is to be under the guardianship of several entities (bodies): The state through the Ministry of Education, the state through the Ministry of Labour and social affairs, the regions. It is also considered to be in the competitive sector and, as such, submitted to supply and demand schedule.

These few lines are simply intended to illustrate the multiplicity of questions and contacts we must always manage.

Our activity is spread into different directions which are in fact our mission:

→ The representation of universities for all UCE issues, especially at a national level. We spend a lot of energy to follow all the files opened, with the CPU, the ministry, regions, but also representatives of various professions. It is also in this context that we are working on the issue of qualifications and

their recognition through the VAE, their submission by the Diploma Supplements; the description of the skills associated with qualifications that we deliver ... a special emphasis is placed on the extension of the European Qualifications Framework.

- The centralization and communication of information on ULLL: We conducted over the previous years a significant effort to upgrade our graphics look, our communication tools, our website. Now we prefer to put emphasis on a communication by electronic letter, in the context of events organized in France or abroad, in particular the thematic conferences.
- The promotion of all kind of exchanges between members: This activity is central for our members who attend and run the many working groups which are created or re-created as needed. Conferences and seminars fulfil a similar function.
- The support of specific research activities on new trends in UCE: New activity, it is supported for several years in the declaration but only took off in 2009. A special group of interest was formed and seeks recognition by the ministry. The group takes on subjects of interest for services such as files of the national professional certification but also the „public“ involved in our training and their expectations.
- The organization of actions and courses in order to develop UCE: The organization of activities and courses in order to develop UCE: This activity is very important for the association and is his best card. The goal for 2009 is to ensure a minimum of 21 training days in the first half of the year. The development of international cooperation which is presented in the next section.

### The International cooperation

This dimension was somewhat neglected in our association, but for five years, we have built close connection with the association EUCEN ([www.eucen.org](http://www.eucen.org)). This has allow us to come into contact with many other networks, but also to enter European projects, based on our network organization to leverage more easily dif-fusing of surveys and disseminating the results of the projects. The first experiments was in the „REFINE project“ focusing on RPL, EQUIPE+ project on quality in continuing education or BEFLEX project on the

link between the Bologna process and the ULLL. They all have given ideas to our colleagues that tomorrow should invest more in response to European or international calls for participation. The CDSUFC association is an associate member of EUCEN since 2004.

## 6. Conclusion

The CDSUFC is a pro-active network dedicated to university Lifelong learning development. The Association wants to develop its European relationships and activities and tries to be an active associated member of EUCEN. The current transformation of the society requires more and more implication of the institutions we work in and it is an exiting challenge.

More information is available on the CDSUFC website [www.fcu.fr](http://www.fcu.fr). The CDSUFC Secretary is currently assumed by Pierre Chambon ([pierre.chambon@univ-nantes.fr](mailto:pierre.chambon@univ-nantes.fr)). The administrative secretary is Marie-Dominique Georges: [marie-dominique.georges@u-picardie.fr](mailto:marie-dominique.georges@u-picardie.fr).

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