

Continuous Training

YOU CAN TAKE IT WITH YOU

Where does Luxembourg stand in comparison with the neighbouring countries when it comes to continuous professional training? Is the country's small size an advantage or hindrance?

Brian Power (text), Laurent Antonelli/Blitz (photos)

Training for professionals has developed in the Grand Duchy both swiftly and comprehensively over the past few years, just as the employment market itself has. But as things stand at the moment, how does this country compare to its neighbours in the Greater Region, each of which is significantly larger and more populous? To get a sense of the lie of the land, **Werner Eckes, Paul Emering and Dominique Matera**, respectively of the **Institut de Formation Bancaire Luxembourg (IFBL)**, **Luxembourg School for Commerce (LSC)** and the **Institut National pour le développement de la Formation Professionnelle Continue (INFP)** give their view points on training in Luxembourg.

"Luxembourg has got a very specific geographical situation," says Werner Eckes of the IFBL. "Speaking from the point of view of the financial sector, training has two key areas, bearing in mind that we are dealing very much with an international audience. There is training that is specific to Luxembourg, what the financial industry is involved with, how laws and regulations are structured and so forth." Yet those multinational clients are likely to want qualifications which are still relevant across borders, surely? "The international groups certainly attach a lot of importance to internal mobility. Within such groups, this can clearly involve a change of country, perhaps an employee will work in Luxembourg, then go to Paris or London. We have to try offer more international diplomas." The focus on the client side in these situations is their own return on investment. They invest once (in a particular training), and they expect this to have the same value in other countries.

"What we are seeing now is that international diplomas are 80:20. That is, 80% international and 20% local," he says. "So when an employee travels to another country, he or she may need that local 20%, but the other 80% is already there." There is also another key factor for banks in Luxembourg: they do not necessarily work in specific markets like those in the larger neighbours. "German banks

work first in the German market. Then in other markets. The Luxembourgish market does not 'exist' in that sense. Thus, training here has to take into account a more multicultural clientele. They are more diversified and more international."

Citing the example of a typical IFBL course, Eckes points out that out of 15 participants, you can often find perhaps ten nationalities, which makes things interesting for instructors. "Even if we say we are all the same, each participant brings in a mentality informed by his or her education and background."

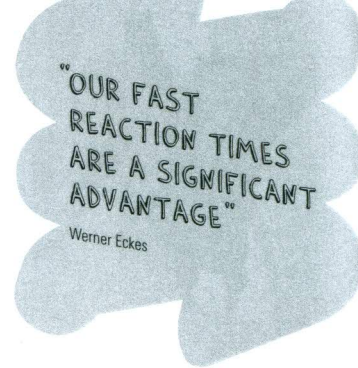
While Eckes highlights these differences between certain training approaches here and in other countries, he also mentions that there is contact with equivalent institutes abroad to discuss what can be done in collaboration.

IT'S EASY TO GET HERE...

It seems difficult then, to compare Luxembourg's offer when it comes to professional training with the neighbouring countries as the markets are different. Fair point?

"At the IFBL, we develop our training on mandate," says Eckes. "Our partnerships are with professional organisations. They work out what they need with us. Take the example of private banking: we have developed the programme 'Certified Private Banker', which is a home-made solution for the private banking group. They needed it, but they also needed to take it one step further: international recognition. So we developed a partnership with Switzerland, the 'Certified International Wealth Manager'." Another example is an international certification in Islamic Finance, offered together with the **University of Reading**.

Yet the country is small and by virtue of that, it is quick and easy to make contact regarding training programmes. "The real strength of our institute is that it is a platform where all the professional associations meet. The associations may have certain ideas and we can make things coherent between them. People do not have far to travel for high level training; continuous professional training is in easy



reach. And the instructors come from universities in other countries, which is a sign of quality in itself. People no longer need to travel to London, Paris or Malaysia for training in Islamic Finance. They can come to the **Chamber of Commerce!**"

"To get in touch with political decision-makers, experts, the chain is much shorter here," concludes Eckes. "This situation doesn't exist in the neighbouring countries. We have fast reactions." And with the country getting up to speed and acting as a training beacon for the Greater Region, the reputation here continues to improve.

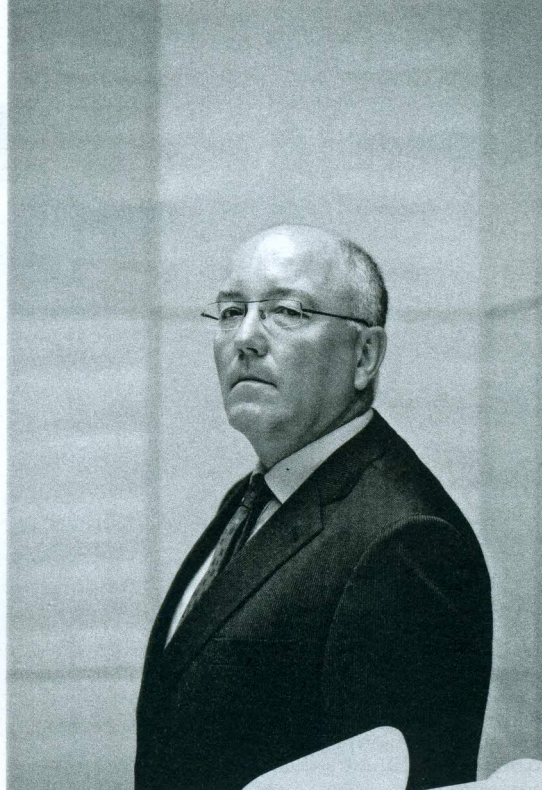
Paul Emering of the LSC believes that continuous training offers in a country represent a reflection of woven fibres that make up its economy. "When we compare Luxembourg with the neighbours, there are certainly common factors. This country has its artisans, its shops and traders, its industry... These all have training that concerns them." And then there is the banking and financial sector, and all those areas dependent on it, where the Grand Duchy obviously exerts an influence beyond its borders in terms of the workforce, but also shows a training and development programme which mirrors the development of this sector within those borders. "This certainly impacts upon training and markedly more developed in Luxembourg than in surrounding cities," states Emering. That said, he believes training in sectors such as industry has a longer and more established history in the surrounding regions, so it works both ways. Overall, he also is of the opinion that it has been part of the fabric more in France and Germany.

Like Eckes, Emering also mentions the multicultural aspect of the population, and speaks of this country "having Germanic, Francophone and Anglophone communities, something which you do not find in Trier, Metz or Nancy." Thus, training exists in several languages.

But is there a problem with this perceived advantage? In some cases, there will surely be employees who need or desire a certain form of training but do not have the linguistic capabilities



Werner Eckes (IFBL)



Paul Emering (LSC)

to take advantage? *"That could be a problem,"* admits Emering. *"But I think a lot of companies find a solution. Taking LSC as an example, much of our coursework is done through French, but we are doing more through English. Meanwhile German-language programmes work well..."* He also points out that 20 years ago, *"40% or more,"* of the seminars organised by the Chamber of Commerce were in German. Now, he estimates that this figure is around 15%, *"which also shows the evolution of the workforce."* And again, these linguistic changes are not likely to occur in Trier or Metz any time soon.

Is the comparatively small size of the Luxembourgish market an advantage, for Emering? He is guarded. *"I would lean more towards believing that it is. The small size means that osmosis between clients and trainers is very positive. We can be reactive and quick when it comes to finding the training offers we are looking for."* As far as the negative aspects go, *"if we go back 15 years, for example, there was cer-*

tainly a lack of training programmes in sectors that are vital. But the law of 1999 took care of that, and every day we see new trainers offering new programmes. We have learnt from foreign systems in terms of marketing, improved competition..."

There may be a challenge in finding qualified people to lead training programmes, and **European Commission** enquiries back this up to a certain extent, finding that Luxembourg lags behind other countries. The figures may be slightly misleading however, taking into account as they do resident-based statistics. Eckes' point about qualified trainers and instructors coming in from abroad is backed up here by Emering. And the number of companies adopting strategies revolving around continuous staff training is increasing year on year, especially among small and medium enterprises, although Emering still thinks this requires more effort. *"Comparing the figures for continuous training in the Greater Region, accord-*

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