

Addendum to the CELSTEC Self-Evaluation Report 2006-2011

Preamble

At the time of the original writing and approval of the CELSTEC Self-Evaluation Report 2006-2011 the OUNL was involved in a reorganisation. At that moment CELSTEC and LOOK were planned to be two separate research institutes within one of the three fused OUNL-faculties. In the period between completion and the site visit, a second unexpected reorganisation was required (see the following paragraph). This addendum is (1) meant to give the Commission insight into the reorganisation and the tentative function of the new fused research institute and (2) amend the original SWOT-analysis to reflect this new situation.

On July 5, 2013, the parliament of the Netherlands approved an austerity measure of € 200 million proposed by the ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences. One of the cuts made was the complete budget of LOOK (€ 3.9 million, which impacts about 45 fte). The Executive Board of the Open University of the Netherlands choose not to eliminate LOOK, but rather to amend its reorganisation plans and unify CELSTEC and LOOK, into one research institute which has the provisional name University Centre for Educational Research and Development (NL: Universitair Centrum voor Onderwijswetenschappelijk Onderzoek en -Ontwikkeling (UCOO))¹. The rationale behind this choice was that Learning Sciences and Technology Enhanced Learning would be strengthened by, and cannot be seen as separate from Teaching and Teacher Professionalisation. These three facets, thus, form the core of the new research institute which will take shape in the coming period. In broad strokes, the programme will focus on (and thus will not be divided into) three integrally related core themes², namely:

- Learning and the learner in her/his learning environment: the cognitive learning mechanisms in interaction with the learning environment (i.e., materials, teachers, tools) which guide and influence pedagogy, learning/teaching behaviour, and the strategies employed for effective, efficient and enjoyable learning and teaching.
- Technology enhanced learning environments for teaching and learning: the innovations in technologies in general and educational technologies in particular which influence and lead to changes in the practice of teaching/instruction and learning.
- Teaching and teacher professionalisation: the equipping of the student, teacher and educational organisation to deal with changing cognitive, motivational, and physical changes specifically relating to changes in the interactions amongst them (e.g., networks of learners, teacher networks, teacher professionalisation).

These three topics form the core of what the OUNL refers to as its profile research and will lead to expertise in the domain of the ecology of education and the ecological validity of research in education. Research, thus, may have a primary focus in one of the three themes but will also consider the other two. Without this ecology / ecological validity application of results, valorisation of ideas and innovation of education is unlikely to be achieved.

LOOK

LOOK is the Scientific Centre for Teacher Research (NL: Wetenschappelijk Centrum Leraren Onderzoek). It is an expertise centre within the OUNL that focuses on teacher professional development. LOOK carries out practice-based research on the professional development of teachers and evaluates teacher-learning activities. Through research, the centre stimulates professional development of teachers and contributes to the quality of teachers in the Netherlands. Its research is primarily focussed on 'informal learning at the teachers' workplace'. Knowledge developed on effective and scientifically proven methods and tools, is based in four research programmes: teacher motivation, social learning, reflection skills and use of ict, and school organisation and leadership.

Transition towards a University Centre for Educational Research and Development

CELSTEC and LOOK are of high strategic importance to the OUNL's mission in terms of research, innovation and societal impact. The new University Centre for Educational Scientific Research and Development forms the main focus area of OUNL profile research. UCOO will take the form of a research institute composed entirely of

¹ The name of the institute is tentative.

² The names of the themes are tentative.

researchers who have attained their PhD and PhD candidates. The facilitative staff necessary for carrying out research will be positioned in the new Faculty of Psychology & Learning Sciences but will be integrally involved in the research work to secure quality assurance, valorisation and maintain strategic relations through a process of co-creation. This is also the case for the Master of Sciences programme in the Educational and Learning Sciences. As such, the Centre will focus more on its core activities, namely profile research while not losing either the necessary support staff (i.e., technical scientific programmers, research assistance, valorisation & communication officers) or its relation to innovative education of the next generation of educational and learning scientists.

CELSTEC had a rich tradition of and reputation for advising institutes on educational innovation and in the organisation of workshops, presentations and innovation projects. With the addition of LOOK expertise in the new Centre, this aspect of the profile research will be strengthened through LOOK's contacts within the work field.

What follows is a discussion of how the leadership of UCOO (Dean and six core full professors) feels that this unification will affect the Centre in terms of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in the form of a revised SWOT-analysis.

Amended SWOT-analysis in light of the first contours of new Centre

Strengths

- CELSTEC has a strong academic reputation, nationally and internationally which:
 - opens doors for collaboration (as evidenced by national and EU cooperative proposals)
 - opens doors for exchange (as evidenced by the visiting scholars at all levels)
 - sets a high standard to which the organisation proudly adheres (evident in the CELSTEC culture).
- The fusion of CELSTEC and LOOK in the UCOO strengthens this reputation, primarily in the field of practical oriented research aimed at innovation at all levels of education encompassing primary, secondary (both academic and vocational), and tertiary (both academic universities and universities of applied sciences) as well as teacher training and retraining in the Netherlands. In this way the societal impact will be increased.
- The LS cluster works with the TEL cluster on cross-boundary innovation. SIG meetings are frequently organised where representatives of both clusters work together on special topics of common interest to formulate new research plans and grant applications.
- CELSTEC provides breeding ground for innovation as evidenced by its transdisciplinary approach to the design of education/instruction/learning, close collaboration between clusters on topics of special interest, increased collaborative tendering for research grants and availability of multidisciplinary expertise and varied backgrounds of staff.
- The fusion broadens the already present expertise to include: Teacher motivation, Professional Teacher networks and social learning for professionalisation, Reflection skills and the use of ICT for teachers, learners, and school management, The professional environment: school organisation, leadership and excellence in education
- The fusion combines complementary research traditions (i.e., empirical, development-based, design-based) strengthening the Centre's ability to innovate education and increase societal impact

Weaknesses

- The location of the OUNL is not an attractive starting point for national collaboration/meetings or venue for relocation for prospective new faculty staff. The fusion, however, allows the opportunity for utilising flexible working spaces and offices already in use by LOOK's personnel in Utrecht.
- Nation-wide demographic developments have made the region of Heerlen less attractive for the labour market.
- Although many activities related to valorisation have taken place, insight in the actual impact of such activities needs to be strengthened.
- Any reorganisation has a temporary phase of uncertainty and turmoil

Opportunities

- CELSTEC's focus on innovation in higher education and LOOK's focus on teaching in secondary education unites into a focus on both learning and teaching, and both higher and secondary education, so that the full spectrum of education and learning is covered.
- The nationwide support of the LOOK received when its budget was cut became public was unprecedented. This is proof of LOOK's impressive record in an active network and of the excellence of the work they have carried out and can be seen as an opportunity to strengthen UCOO.
- The Horizon 2020 initiative and developments in the top industry sectors in the Netherlands (CELSTEC participates in the 'creative industry' sector) provide opportunities for research and valorisation activities.
- The focus on turn-key solutions (see Electronic Appendices EMERGO-games, OPO, SAITO) is developing successfully, offering new funding opportunities for research and increasing impact.
- The Centre is well-positioned to hook on to developing trends in higher education such as:
 - MOOCs: Expertise/experience with large-scale distance teaching, applying advanced learning technologies and high quality learning designs to education. The Centre is discussing initiatives for collaboration with a number of Dutch universities and with the fusion also with academic teacher education colleges (Academic PABOs).
 - Part-time education is under pressure in the Netherlands. The OUNL positions itself as 'national co-provider' for part-time academic education. The Centre has tools and methods to support this including providing blended learning in collaboration with institutes of higher education and industry partners.
 - Educational quality is a continuing discussion. In this field CELSTEC is increasingly being asked to provide help in establishing a better quality policy for educational institutes (or to assess their quality).
- The cross-boundary innovation already present in CELSTEC (see Strengths) will be broadened to include the unique strengths of LOOK, and specifically with respect to:
 - implementation of LS and TEL research and solutions in schools,
 - professionalisation of teachers to make use of new scientific / research-informed insights, techniques and tools for improving teaching and learning,
 - broadening of the research pallet, and the systematic inclusion of research and control variables to further strengthen the ecological validity of research in education (e.g., teacher motivation)
 - implementation of relevant technological enhancement to support teaching and learning
 - consolidation of the OUNL's national profile on research on informal learning and professional development by combining TEL and workplace learning.

All of this provides opportunities for future research and valorisation activities, increasing the impact of the Centre's research and providing a base for new research.

Threats

- The major threat is of a political and economic nature: Will the core funding for universities and the OUNL be maintained in the future at the same level as it is now? Governments are changing many rules in the game, which provides for uncertainties at the university funding level.
- This is also true for the policy regarding national research funding. At this moment research money is increasingly being connected to industry policy, meaning that research should be increasingly applied and industry-connected to attain 2nd money stream funding. Educational research in the Netherlands has been faced with a substantial cut back in funding opportunities.

Conclusion

The fusion of CELSTEC and LOOK in a University Centre for Educational Research and Development (UCOO) will make the research stronger, offering and increasing number of opportunities to perform valuable research, innovate education at all levels and demonstrate its impact nationally and internationally. The reorganisation will, of course, cause disturbances on different levels, but from the beginning of 2014 this will be completed and the new Centre can fully attend to the ambitious tasks that it has set for itself and which the government of the Netherlands has approved.