INTERNATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE OF THE ILO

Board of the Centre

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FOURTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Overview and evaluation of academies

I.   Overview

1. Academies are defined by the Centre as learning events which cluster different standard/open courses in a given area of expertise and offer participants a choice of individualized learning paths among a variety of thematic and linguistic options. Academies have a longer duration than most standard face-to-face training courses and gather a large number of participants. For example, the 2014 edition of the Boulder Microfinance Academy lasted three weeks and had 277 participants compared to the five day duration of most standard courses with an average number of 20 participants.

2. Academies started in 2005 when the Boulder Microfinance Training Programme was held at the Centre. While this event was organised by the Boulder Microfinance Institute, the Centre was involved in hosting it and providing logistical support to it. Based on the structure, format and methodology used by the Boulder Microfinance Institute and learning from that experience, the Centre decided in 2008 to introduce the academy format as an innovation into its training portfolio. It designed and offered its first academy in 2008 entitled *The ILO Academy on Sustainable Enterprise Development*.

3. Table 1 shows that there has been a rapid increase in the number of academies designed and offered by the Centre since 2010. The 2014 catalogue lists eleven academies. Appendix 1 provides a list of the thematic areas covered by the academies organised by the Centre over the period 2010-14.[1] While academies were less than 2 per cent of activities of the Centre in the period 2010-14, they accounted for more than 6 per cent of all participants and 9 per cent of all participant days in the same period. So, in terms of both efficiency and outreach, academies have become an important component of the Centre's training portfolio.

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[1] The ILO Maritime Labour Academies are counted as a single training offer.

Table 1: Academies 2010-14

Year	No. of academies	No. of participants	No. of participant/days	Languages
2010	3	448	5 775	AR/EN/FR/ES
2011	10	910	10 560	AR/EN/FR/PT/ES
2012	8	632	7 665	AR/EN/FR/ES
2013	11	1 060	11 330	AR/EN/FR/PT/ES
2014*	9	833	8 835	AR/EN/FR/PT/ES
TOTAL	**41**	**3 883**	**44 165**	

*Provisional figures

4. The decision by the Centre to introduce the academy format was driven by four main considerations. First, the academy format provided a *higher quality training and learning experience* for the participants as the extended training period allowed for more in-depth examination of the technical areas covered and for greater exchange of knowledge and expertise. Second, academies were conceived as *global knowledge events* and were usually offered in a number of languages thereby increasing the opportunity for cross fertilization and inter-regional learning and networking. Third, the academy format *increased the visibility, outreach and reputation of the Centre* as a global training and learning institution. Many academies were organised in partnership with a range of UN System entities, the European Commission, donors and other international partners. Finally and importantly, the academy format was seen as a *more efficient use of resources* as it enabled the Centre to pool resources in terms of expertise and administrative support; maximize the use of its campus facilities and streamline promotional efforts.

5. From the outset, ILO technical departments were closely involved in the design and technical content of the academies. Senior ILO staff from headquarters and the regions usually delivered core modules of the academies linked to the relevant ILO standards, policies and strategies. The curriculum and learning tracks were closely aligned to ILO standards, policies and strategies so that academies became a very effective way of disseminating knowledge about ILO work in the relevant fields of expertise to a large number of participants. A limited number of regional academies were organised in close collaboration with the ILO Regional Offices concerned.

II.   Independent evaluation of selected academies

6. Further to a request by the Board in 2011, an independent evaluation of a selected number of academies was undertaken.[2] The evaluation was managed by the Evaluation Unit of the ILO. Ten academies (two recurring editions of five academies) that took place between 2011 and 2013 constituted the evaluation sample. Appendix II provides the list of the academies which were selected using the following criteria:

- at least 40 participants;
- presence of alternative learning paths;
- implementation in different languages;
- minimum duration of two weeks.

7. The overall objective of the independent evaluation was to assess the value added of the academies to the Centre's training portfolio in terms of their concept and approach. In particular, the aim was to examine whether they were increasing the effectiveness and impact of learning and hence, to inform the usefulness of mainstreaming and scaling up this approach. The evaluation focused on the relevance of academies to institutional priorities and beneficiary needs, efficiency and effectiveness, the impact of the results and the potential for sustainability.

Summary of main findings

8. The following is a summary of the evaluation findings.

- The academies are uniquely positioned to bring together individuals from diverse nationalities, backgrounds and roles (representatives from the public sector, employers' or workers' organizations) and renowned resource persons with expertise in various fields for the purpose of sharing, across a variety of topics, best practices, experiences from the field and latest/cutting-edge thinking. They also facilitate networking among participants, among participants and resource persons, and among different resource persons.

- Through a modular format, academies allow learner autonomy and flexibility, which theoretically, should lead to a more effective learning process.

- The academies have demonstrated strong relevance to the ILO's Strategic Policy Framework (SPF) in terms of contribution to various objectives, outcomes and emphasis on partnerships. The SPF also outlines gender equality as central to the achievement of its objectives. While the Centre offers a Gender Academy, the integration of gender issues in other academies has the potential to improve - this is indicated by the gender marker ratings as well as average scores on the participants' questionnaires.

- In practice, the ten academies in the evaluation sample have unevenly demonstrated the conceptual model's competitive strengths.

- There appears to be a high degree of regional homogeneity among participants. While this points to the presence of region-specific training needs, it also suggests a dilution in the academy's ability to serve as a truly "global" training platform.

- The academies have been able to target practitioners – many participants have over five years of experience in the broad topic covered by the academy. At the same time,

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[2] The full text of the Independent evaluation of the academies (2014) is available at: http://www.itcilo.org/board.

with regard to specific electives, various indicators point to a high degree of diversity in participant background by depth (basic/advanced) and type (theoretical/practical) of knowledge. Generally, when there is a high degree of heterogeneity among participants, training events run the risk of becoming either too specific or too general for different participants.

- The majority of academy participants represented public sector institutions with limited participation from workers' and employers' organizations. This is due to multiple reasons: 1) the high cost of participation and specific fellowship policies for workers' and employers' organizations; 2) diffused relevance of a broad-scoped training event to the specific training needs of workers' and employers' organizations, and 3) at least for representatives of employers' organizations, the long duration of the academies. However, the low participation of representatives from workers' and employers' organizations is not limited only to academies – it is also seen in other open courses that are not planned and offered by ACTRAV/ACTEMP. It is important to note that in comparison to global academies, regional academies experience higher participation from representatives of workers' and employers' organizations.

- The expertise of resource persons has been highly regarded by participants in all academies. In turn, the academies have also proved to be a platform for resource persons to update themselves. However, in some cases, participants have called for an improvement in the pedagogical skills of resource persons. Participant comments also point to the need for 1) increased regional diversity among resource persons, and 2) academy alumni as resource persons.

- The topics of electives and plenary sessions were relevant to the needs of the participants. Further, there is evidence that technical programmes were able to tailor successive academy editions (in terms of elective and plenary session offerings) based on participant feedback received in prior editions.

- A majority of participants commented on the "lack of sufficient time" for absorbing the information shared during the electives. This is an important concern as it relates to effectiveness of learning at the academies. Further, as indicated in participant comments, there could be multiple reasons behind this comment: 1) too many electives relative to the two week duration of an academy; 2) too much content relative to the assigned time for an elective; 3) too much depth/complexity relative to the assigned time for an elective; 4) difficulty in following content due to interpretation delays, and 5) time management by the resource person – with a heterogeneous audience, it often takes time to get everyone to the same level of understanding.

- While there was some variation on this across academies, the need to improve experience sharing among participants was noted by many.

- Some participants also commented on the need for case studies and training materials from developing countries. In addition, others specifically requested regional training in follow-up questionnaires.

- A comparison of open courses and academies reveals that when a two-week open course is transformed into an academy format, care should be taken to adapt the course elements to the realities of the new format – higher number of participants, complex courses in the context of simultaneous interpretation, variation in background of participants, variation among resource persons and so on.

- Participants commented that academies were effective in introducing them to new topics and in providing theoretical clarity on important issues. The training was also

seen as directly applicable to participants' jobs. As a result of attending an academy, many participants noted a "large improvement" in their ability to "identify problems and provide solutions" at their workplaces.

- The success of the modular format is underpinned by the presence of sufficient preliminary information regarding academy offerings. Accurate and comprehensive advance information allows participants to effectively choose elective courses. There is evidence that in some cases, the preliminary information was sparse (for instance, only the title of the elective was provided – the sub-title, description and elective-specific learning objectives were missing). In other cases, the titles were misleading. The Gender Academy was able to improve on this in its second edition by providing detailed preliminary information and by offering a guided selection of electives for all participants.

- Conceptually, the provision of simultaneous interpretation in multiple languages allows the academies to train participants of diverse nationalities. Further, it also enhances the extent of experience sharing among these participants at the training. However, in practice, many participants were dissatisfied with the quality of interpretation. Participants also noted that in some cases training materials (slides, readings) had not been translated in multiple languages.

- In their first editions, a large percentage of academy participants were either self-paid or funded through their own institutions. From this perspective, academies make good business sense. However, in 2014, the Sustainable Enterprise Development Academy was cancelled due to insufficient demand. The fate of the Labour Migration Academy was also unclear for the same reason. Thus, academies involve a considerable amount of risk – especially when they don't break even and have to be cancelled at the last minute. Two factors were found to moderate this degree of risk:

    a) *Frequency of academies*: Currently, except for the Gender Academy, all academies in the evaluation sample were offered on an annual basis. Among these, only the Skills Academy saw a large (26 per cent) increase in participation from the first edition to the second. The participation for the Labour Migration Academy increased negligibly (four participants). The participation for the Sustainable Enterprise Development and the Social Security Academies *decreased*. On the other hand, the Gender Academy saw a 31 per cent increase on a base of 121 first-edition participants. The low yield in participation among annual academies is further outweighed by invisible costs that include: 1) development costs of planning an academy; 2) planning an academy that remains "cutting-edge" on an annual basis, and 3) costs of implementing an academy in terms of a programme manager's time.

    b) *Number of academies offered by a technical programme in a year:* There is potential for internal competition when related academies are offered by the same technical programme in the same year. For instance, both a Sustainable Enterprise Development Academy and a new Academy on the Green Economy were planned for 2014. The Sustainable Enterprise Development Academy was subsequently cancelled due to insufficient demand.

- Currently, the Centre does not offer a systematic mechanism to continue the learning process after an academy ends. Further, there is variation in how different academies manage alumni.

- There is a need to come up with certain minimum standards to define "academies" and for those standards to be consistently applied across all events.

Lesson learned

9. The evaluation concluded that the academy model was conceptually strong. However, the degree to which this "conceptual effectiveness" was translated into "actual effectiveness" depended upon how academies were implemented in practice. Factors like provision of accurate and comprehensive preliminary information, quality of simultaneous interpretation, balance between elective content and complexity relative to assigned time for an elective, degree of heterogeneity (in background) among participants, quality of pedagogical training, frequency of academies, number of academies offered by technical programmes in a given year, and so on, have the potential to influence the success of the academy model.

Recommendations

10. The evaluation resulted in the following set of recommendations:

- Instead of a one-time event, a sequenced and harmonized training package should be planned.
- The Centre should continue its efforts to increase tripartite relevance in academy design.
- Improve the design of academies.
- To reduce unpredictability of funds, training needs should be budgeted in advance.
- Strengthen consistency of the academies brand.

III. Management response

11. The Centre welcomes the overall findings of the independent evaluation. It notes in particular that the evaluation found that the academy model was conceptually strong; that academies have been a valuable and useful addition to the portfolio of the Centre's training offer and that they have demonstrated strong relevance to the ILO's Strategic Policy Framework (2010-15) in terms of contribution to various objectives, outcomes and emphasis on partnerships.

12. The following paragraphs set down the Centre's response to the issues raised and the recommendations made by the independent evaluator.

Academy design (Recommendations 1 and 3)

13. The evaluation recommends a number of improvements to the design of academies. For example, instead of a one-time event, a sequenced and harmonized training package should be planned where an academy is offered every alternate year on the campus, complemented by regional workshops in the other year. Other areas for improvement identified in the report are the system of advance information sharing, the quality of interpretation in multiple language academy editions, the pedagogical skills of resource persons and the format of electives.

14. In response to these recommendations, the Centre will engage programme and activity managers in a 'strategic positioning' exercise of the academies to facilitate the adoption and adherence of a harmonized approach to academies. A list of good and bad practices in academy design will be consolidated, drawing on the evidence furnished in the evaluation report and adding other examples from academies not captured in the evaluation sample. This will be widely disseminated among technical programmes to encourage adaptive learning and to facilitate the incorporation of the transferable good practices into the design of future academies. Furthermore, the

academies covered in the sample of this evaluation will be re-assessed at the end of 2016 by way of a peer review and against the baseline presented in the report, to monitor change over time in the level of participants' satisfaction.

15. The Centre will mainstream the use of distance learning modalities in the academy format, a good practice explicitly commended in the evaluation report. In this way, participants will have broader access to learning opportunities upfront and after the face-to-face sessions and can keep their knowledge of the subject up-to-date in a cost effective manner while learning at their own pace.

16. The Centre will accelerate the pace of adoption of learning technology during the face-to-face sessions, by expanding the use of internet-enabled tablet computers. Via these tablets, participants will be connected through communities of practitioners on campus, and readily access online resource materials and relevant documents so far furnished as hard copies or on USB sticks. The greater use of tablets during the academies will also facilitate real time monitoring of participant satisfaction through daily online feedback surveys and open up new opportunities to apply IT enhanced training methods.

17. In addition to improving the design of the academies, another important observation made in the evaluation report is the contribution of the academies to the facilitation of systemic thinking among ILO constituents and ILO staff. The evaluation underlined the relevance of the academies to the ILO's Strategic Policy Framework for 2010-15 and provided a number of examples of how the academy format has lent itself to inter-connect work streams related to more than one strategy outcome.

Tripartite representation (Recommendation 2)

18. The evaluation observes the comparatively poor outreach of academies among ILO constituents, particularly in relation to the number of participants nominated by employers' and workers' organizations. For example, less than 10 per cent of the participants enrolled in the 2012 and 2013 labour migration academies and the 2013 Sustainable Enterprise Development Academy were from employers' and workers' organizations. The Centre notes that the outreach figures quoted in the evaluation report do not include representatives from ministries of labour and other related government institutions.

19. The Centre is committed to boosting the outreach of the academies among workers' and employers' organizations. In 2013, tripartite guidelines were issued that re-affirm the commitment of all technical programmes to the facilitation of capacity building support for ILO constituents. A review of selected training activities – including academies - was commissioned with resources from the Innovation Fund in order to mainstream tripartism in the design of the activities and in the training and learning materials.

20. The 2014 edition of the Social and Solidarity Economy Academy and the Informal Economy Academy have special learning tracks for representatives from employers' and workers' organizations. Additional funds were made available to facilitate the participation of workers' representatives in the regional edition of the Social and Solidarity Economy Academy held in Brazil in July 2014. Furthermore, an academy explicitly dedicated to the facilitation of national tripartite social dialogue has been launched in 2014 to increase knowledge on the promotion of social dialogue at national level and the governance of the labour market. The Centre will closely monitor whether these new measures have a positive impact on the outreach of the academies among representatives from employers' and workers' organizations.

Financial sustainability (Recommendation 4)

21. The evaluation report highlights the unpredictability of funds for the academies, and proposes that these events should be included in the budget architecture of the ILO Programme and Budget outcome-specific workplans and for the allocation of RBSA during the biennium. In response to this recommendation, the Centre notes that academies do in fact feature in several ILO workplans for the 2014-15 biennium and that resources have been ring-fenced in the workplans of Regional Offices. It is also important to note that there are significant direct or in-kind contributions from many partner organizations involved in academies. These combined resources constitute important building blocks in the financial architecture of academies.

22. To further improve the prospects for financial sustainability of the academies, the Centre proposes to refine the business model underpinning them. In the budget architecture of an academy, income is potentially earned by charging for (a) accommodation for participants on the campus, (b) staff time required to plan and deliver training, (c) the cost of expertise and/or travel of external collaborators and ILO colleagues, (d) the production of media content including training materials, and (e) other services like translation and interpretation services for multiple-language tracks, evaluation and social services. Furthermore, the Centre charges 10 per cent overhead on the budget.

23. Revenue streams are consequently mainly a function of four parameters, namely (a) the number of participants, (b) the choice of training venue, (c) the volume of services commissioned from external resource persons, and (d) the number of languages offered. To improve the underlying financial sustainability of academies, the Centre has an interest to run the academies on campus, to enrol as many participants as possible for several weeks, to deliver training with ILO and in-house experts and to deliver training in a more limited number of languages of instruction mastered by its learning experts.

24. With this in mind, the Centre will in future focus on the holding of academies on the campus for large groups of participants with at least 50 but preferably more than 100 people. Academies for up to 300 people have been successfully hosted by the Centre in the past, but in practice, a trade-off has to be sought between the benefit of hosting large groups of participants and the escalating costs of the programming effort involved.

Brand support (Recommendation 5)

25. The evaluation found that the term academy is currently used as an umbrella brand for a heterogeneous spectrum of training events including for example, the ILO Maritime Labour Academies and the Employers' Young Professionals Academy which do not fit the main criteria set for academies. These events do not gather together large groups of participants; they offer training in a single language; they do not offer a choice of learning tracks, and have a duration of a maximum of one week.[3]

26. In order to strengthen the consistency of the academies brand, the Centre will in future reserve the use of the term academy for learning events that meet **all** of the differentiation criteria listed above i.e. cluster different standard/open courses in a given area of expertise; offer participants a choice of individualized learning paths among a variety of thematic and linguistic options; have a duration of at least two

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[3] There are various historical reasons for labelling these events as academies. For example, in the case of the ILO Maritime Labour Academy, the term had been in use before the academy format was adopted by the Centre in 2008.

weeks; target 50 participants or more and - in future – combine face-to-face training with distance learning modalities. In turn, other Centre activities that conform to the differentiation criteria but carry different titles such as Learning Forum or Summer School, will be promoted under the academy brand.

27. To protect the brand from the risk of dilution as identified in the evaluation, the Centre will limit the number of academies to up to one event per year linked to the high-level outcomes of the next ILO Strategic Policy Framework. Also, training programmes will be encouraged to offer academies on a specific technical field only once every two years.

28. ***The Board is invited to provide its comments and guidance on the findings and recommendations of the independent evaluation of the selected academies so that they can be taken into account by the Director in the follow-up.***

Turin, 7 August, 2014

APPENDIX 1

ACADEMIES 2010-14

Year	Thematic areas/topics	No. of activities	No. of participants	No. of partic./days	Languages
2010	Social and Solidarity Economy		65	325	EN/FR/ES
	Sustainable Enterprise Development		59	590	AR/EN/FR/ES
	The Boulder Microfinance Training Programme *		324	4 860	EN/FR
		3	**448**	**5 775**	
2011	Entrepreneurship Training of Trainers		39	390	EN/FR
	Gender		121	1 210	EN/FR/ES
	Green Jobs		34	510	EN/FR/ES
	Labour Administration and Labour Inspection		76	760	EN/ES
	Labour Migration		52	520	EN
	Skills Development		66	660	EN/FR/PT
	Social and Solidarity Economy		46	230	EN/FR/ES
	Social Security		103	1 030	EN
	Sustainable Enterprise Development		69	690	AR/EN/ES
	The Boulder Microfinance Training Programme *		304	4 560	EN/FR
		10	**910**	**10 560**	
2012	Labour Migration		47	470	EN/FR
	Skills Development		80	800	EN/FR/ES
	Social Security		83	830	EN
	Social Security		34	340	FR
	Sustainable Enterprise Development		41	410	AR/EN/ES
	The Boulder Microfinance Training Programme *		269	4 035	EN/FR
	Training of Trainers		44	440	EN
	United Nations Summer Academy		34	340	EN
		8	**632**	**7 665**	
2013	Gender		159	1 590	EN/FR/ES
	Innovation in Public Investment and Employment Programmes		51	510	EN/FR
	Labour Administration and Labour Inspection		76	760	AR/EN/FR
	Labour Migration		54	540	EN/FR
	Skills Development		101	1 010	EN/FR/PT
	Social and Solidarity Economy		86	430	AR/EN/FR
	Social Security		78	780	EN/FR
	Sustainable Enterprise Development		62	620	EN/FR
	Sustainable Enterprise Development		54	270	ES
	The Boulder Microfinance Training Programme *		286	4 290	EN/FR
	Youth Development		53	530	EN
		11	**1 060**	**11 330**	

Year	Thematic areas/topics	No. of activities	No. of participants	No. of partic./days	Languages
2014 (provisional)	Informal Economy: Drivers for Formalisation		50	500	EN
	Labour Migration		25	250	EN
	National Tripartite Social Dialogue		70	700	AR/EN/FR
	Social and Solidarity Economy		95	475	EN/PT/ES
	Social Security		80	800	EN/FR
	The Boulder Microfinance Training Programme *		277	4 155	EN/FR
	The Green Economy		110	1 100	EN/FR/ES
	Training of Trainers in Enterprise and Financial		81	405	FR
	Youth Development		45	450	EN/FR
		9	**833**	**8 835**	

* Flagship programme of The Boulder Institute of Microfinance, hosted on the campus.

APPENDIX 2

THE 10 ACADEMIES SELECTED FOR INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

Title of Academy	Year
1. Gender Academy	2011
2. Academy on Sustainable Enterprise Development	2012
3. Academy on Social Security	2012
4. Academy on Skills Development	2012
5. Academy on Labour Migration	2012
6. Academy on Sustainable Enterprise Development	2013
7. Academy on Social Security	2013
8. Academy on Skills Development	2013
9. Academy on Labour Migration	2013
10. Gender Academy	2013