# Transforming a national strategy into local activities.

**The Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning, CFL, is a national authority under the Swedish Ministry of Education and Science.**
The main objective for CFL is to enhance access to lifelong learning for adults through flexible learning. CFL got the European e-Learning Award 2005.
The need for Lifelong Learning has been actualized mainly because of recent change in socio-economic structures in Sweden.
CFL contributes to widening access to Lifelong Learning by supporting development of alternative ways of study. The collective term for these alternative ways of study is Flexible Learning. Flexible Learning should provide ways for the adult learner to study in a manner that minimizes intrusion on work and family life. Flexible Learning also provides adaptation of content and form according to the learners´ needs and preconditions.
In practice the work of CFL is aimed at supporting change and promoting development within municipal adult education and liberal education, increasing opportunities for adults with sign language as their first language to participate in adult learning, contribute to achievement of regional development policy goals and increase access to subjects and courses that completes upper secondary adult education.
Main areas of activity
In order to accomplish the above mentioned mission CFL has decided on these main areas of activity
• Development of Flexible Learning
• Production
• Resources for special target groups
• Work force training and regional development

1. Development of Flexible Learning
CFL supports development of Flexible Learning in Sweden mainly by promoting change on local and regional level within municipal adult education and liberal education (folkbildning). This is done by local development projects, mentor support, in-house training and networking.
Production
2. CFL is engaged in production of course material, learning objects and support material. In this area of production CFL works in close co-operation with its target groups. CFL is also involved in development of IT-systems supporting fields of Flexible Learning.
3. Resources for special target groups
CFL has a number of activities aimed at special target groups. Immigrants and disabled people are the main focus groups.
4. Work force training and regional development
Due to the high demand for Flexible Learning in the field of work force training and regional development, CFL is engaged in a number of specific projects covering these fields.
By focusing on these main fields of activity CFL has created a new concept for the interaction between a national support body and local / regional practitioners in the field of education and learning. This concept is being presented in the following document by highlighting some of the projects / activities carried out.

**Support of local and regional development**
Purpose
It is CFL's task to provide support through the promotion of flexible learning within adult education so that all adults are able to increase their knowledge and develop their personal

competence.  CFL works to increase the number of organisations in the municipalities and regions that offer flexible learning with ICT-support, on a permanent basis.


Activities
CFL spreads information to the municipalities and liberal education organisations (study associations and folk high schools) about the development support projects using CFL's web site, holding meetings, printing brochures etc.  In this way we enable all municipalities and liberal education organisations to apply for project funding.
CFL supports local development projects which increase the pedagogical, methodical and organisational levels of flexible learning with regard to personnel, materials and technology. CFL works with and through the target groups.
CFL provides support for the selected local projects and their staff through mentoring, teacher training, direct advice and other consultancy activities
CFL creates a network for the exchange of experiences between different municipalities and liberal education organisations, and for the creation of further networks. This helps create and maintain a variety of flexible learning methods, offering a good educational service to the inhabitants and learners.
Creating new networks helps ensure that the projects will survive when the financial project support comes to an end.  The municipalities and liberal education organisations themselves have also provided an equal amount of money as they receive and this helps ensure that the new ideas and methods become a part of the normal activities in the relevant municipality and organisation.
Finally CFL assesses and evaluates the completed projects. The results and the knowledge are documented and made known to the public in various ways, for example by web publishing, reports and seminars.


Experiences from the activities
Providing information in advance helps the municipalities and organisations to create higher quality applications which make the selection of projects easier.
Mentoring and other forms of support are highly appreciated and also increases the quality of the work done.
The network of projects promotes the exchange of experiences between different municipalities and organisations.  This increases awareness of other solutions, methods and techniques.
Without the support of CFL many of the changes and improvements would have been difficult, if not impossible, to achieve, especially in the short term.

**Development of new skills and methods.**
Purpose
The aim of this activity is to develop new skills and methods in pedagogy and organisation within the field of flexible learning.
Activities
Working with the development of flexible learning for the target group, we try to maximize the effect of our efforts by linking all our efforts in different activity fields to one continuous process. We develop new methods for teaching and this new knowledge immediately results in a further development of the curriculum in our teacher training program courses and it will also immediately create new seminars to nourish our ongoing projects.
This process model for supporting the development of flexible learning in the Liberal Adult Education is possible because the whole team who work with teacher training, project

management and mentoring and knowledge building, actually work very close together in a flexible and non prestigious group where comprehensive goals are defined and set together.
 Working with the development of new skills and methods in flexible learning for the mentioned target group takes quite a lot of adaptation to the tradition and culture of this target group. The Liberal Adult Education in Sweden has a long tradition of freedom from the government and if a government agency wants to support the development of flexible learning in this target group, this work must be done in close collaboration with the target group itself. One should also remember that the pedagogical tradition of the Liberal Adult Education in Sweden strongly stresses the importance of the study-circle method, which means democratic and group based studies in small groups, with a strong focus on the dialogue. Self study models or old fashioned e-learning models are strongly rejected. On-line Liberal Adult Education means Computer Supported Collaborative Learning using asynchronous text based communication mixed with face-to-face meetings.

We have formed what we call an "Expert forum". We have identified the 27 most skilled and experienced folk high school teachers, study circle leaders, school headmasters etc to this forum that has one face-to-face session every year in November when we define what main questions in the field of new knowledge we should concentrate on during the next year. The rest of the year, the group meets in a continuous online seminar (some 1700 messages sent in a year) where each member tries to identify interesting local project results, in their own part of the country, that could add new pieces of knowledge to what we already know.

We should add that these processes in the "expert Forum" are managed by us, the responsible project managers from the Agency.

So, when the online discussion in the "Expert Forum" and in a certain knowledge area reaches a certain degree of maturity, we form a "handbook project group" consisting of the most active expert in that specific discussion. They are paid to further identify, analyse, and develop this specific knowledge for the national arena and present it in an easily available written handbook that could be read and immediately understood and used by the practitioner around the country.

So far we have produced handbooks on mainly pedagogical issues –

How to create an active dialogue in the asynchronous text based online study circle?

How to adapt the traditional local study association so that it will stronger support flexible learning?

How to create a good mixture of distance and face-to-face elements in a flexible course or study circle? Etc.

When we have published a handbook, we immediately organize seminars, both national and regional and also specifically designed seminars for our own projects. The idea is that the handbooks should be spread all over the country and read as soon as possible, to maximize the utility.

We have worked with this model for developing new skills and methods in flexible learning since 2002 and our experiences are very positive.

We work almost only with experience based knowledge building. Why do we not work with university researchers? For a simple reason, we firmly believe that it is not the university researchers who experiment with and develop new methods for flexible learning. This work is done by interested, highly devoted and talented practitioners around the country.

We are of course also interested in research contacts and we are building networks between researchers and the "Experts", we are continuously reading and discussing researchers reports in the "Experts forum" and now and then we invite researchers to have online seminars with the "Experts".

Isn´t this an expensive way of developing new skills and knowledge? No, on the contrary, being a member of the "Experts forum" is a commission of trust and it is not paid. Still, we

have no problems recruiting the experts, it is considered a great honour being a member, also for the "Experts" organizations.

Isn´t there a risk that a permanent "expert forum" after some time turns conservative and no longer has the eyes for what is new and interesting? No, we demand a high degree of activity and presence from the experts in our discussions, both in our face-to-face planning meetings and in our online discussions. Every year 5-6 experts have to leave the forum due to low activity and 5-6 new experts are elected members.

**Digital Learning Resources - 2004**
Digital learning resources – 2004 is a project where the Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning (CFL) is developing digital learning material for courses at upper secondary level together with adult education providers from eight different municipalities.

Purpose
The purpose of the project is
to increase knowledge in how to create and use digital learning resources/materials
to support municipal adult education institutions in their work with flexible learning

Target Group
Our primary target group is teachers involved in municipal adult education in Sweden – and also the technicians who help to produce the learning resources. An indirect target group is also all the adult students who will use the digital learning objects in order to achieve their study goals.

Activities
-a production start where all the teachers and technicians from the eight municipalities together with the personnel from CFL met for three days to discuss and plan the work for autumn 2004
-project specifications were written for the different productions.
-manuscript writing with external and our own manuscript writers
-web production
-a second physical meeting in December to give everyone the chance to demonstrate the material produced and also to gather experience for an external evaluation

Experiences from the activities
- - It's fun to work in this project together with our Agency
- - a good career possibility for the teachers
- - the external web resources available to the municipalities are not sufficient – with regard to both knowledge as well as time as a resource
- - more support for the manuscript writers is needed at the beginning (this could be done in form of a short course in how to use our model for manuscripts and the exact writing when it comes to the language and ways of thinking digitally    )
- - it's important to create good group dynamics for the manuscript authors so that they feel secure in their role and are comfortable to read and comment on each others' texts (we have manuscript writers from the municipalities together with our own manuscript writers in same teams). This can't be emphasized enough because they will also get comments and guidance from both the web designers and educational technologists and to get comments on something one has written can be experienced as something negative, which it of course isn't – quite the opposite!

- - it is good that our Agency can function as a support both in technical and educational matters. This role has had to be defined first though, so that everyone knows what the concept "consultative support" means.

- - questions concerning copyright are many – we have needed to get help from a lawyer at the University of Stockholm to create a form which can be used when it comes to pictures, different applets and such when the material is published in our learning resource library "the Course Hub". In this environment everything that is produced is also copyright-free.

Purpose

The purpose of this function is to create a living and growing database for digital learning resources. And not only a database but also a packager of learning objects and modules. At the moment we have digital learning objects, modules and courses in this database.

One of the basic principals of this database: it provides content but not pedagogical methods concerning how to deal with the material at a user level. Other principals for this database are: 1) it is free to use, 2) when you publish material in it, it has to be copyright free and 3) the person who publishes the material is responsible for its maintenance (the Agency's administrators take away the material produced by different test users every week as well as "unsuitable" material).

Activities

In 2004 we have worked to spread information about "the Course Hub" as well as to publish more learning material in it. Three good examples of this are the projects: "Digital Learning Resources – municipalities 2004" as well as its sister project for the Swedish Liberal Adult Education. The third project was the project called "LLL" (Life Long Learning – an EU-project for "Objective 1") which was finished in September 2004. The address to one of the courses produced is http://kursnavet.cfl.se/broker/pages/loader.aspx?objectid=30587

Many visits to different teacher groups in schools as well as presentations of "the Course Hub" in several seminars and conferences are made in order to encourage teachers to be active in this database. Active both in publishing their own material (not always easy when dealing with sharing material among this target group) as well as using the material already available in "the Course Hub".

Experiences from the activities

We have about 23 000 learning objects in this database at the moment and 1 300 registered users

We had technical problems at the beginning when it came to using the data base with Mac-computers. This problem is now solved with the so called "Course Hub –light – version".

The idea of having a database that functions as a library for digital learning material has received very positive feedback

It takes time for the teachers to change their ways of working and start using digital resources (here we could help with discussions about methods) and to start sharing what they already have in their own systems

**Teaching aids in sign language**

Purpose

The Swedish agency for flexible learning (CFL) is commissioned by the Swedish government to produce teaching aids for adults with sign language as their natural language. The teaching aids are produced for flexible learning to be used in varying teaching situations, taking the student needs as starting points.

Target group

Deaf adults with sign language as their natural language.


Activities
The main task is to produce teaching aids for the target group. The target group is often a partner in the production. The programme has a reference group, which purpose is to feed the programme with updated agendas from the deaf communities, for example The Swedish National Association of the Deaf. The actual productions of teaching aids are carried out by various partners within the target group.
The teaching aids are produced for flexible learning, independent of time and space. As the sign language is visual, we are dependent of a visual media – video. The vast majority of teaching aids is video, presented in a web environment. For the material to be used as teaching aids, the possibility to communicate is crucial. CFL has in cooperation with a computer technology company developed an asynchrony video communication system, designed especially for sign language.
CFL has developed a database of teaching aids, where the material is stored digitally. The database is designed for sign language material and structured by metadata, to make the material searchable in an efficient way.
Experiences from the activities
The programme has gained a great acceptance within the target group by listening to and involves the target group in the development processes. Another experience gained is that work has to be made within many fields of the educational arena, to change the established educational culture. To produce teaching aids for the target group is not enough. A smooth and secure distribution is a basic condition.
eCFL has developed a continuation course for educationalists and also a course in study training for the students.

**Hans-Inge Persson**
**Director General**
**Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning (CFL)**
**Winner of the European e-Learning Award 2005.**