



UNCTAD VIRTUAL INSTITUTE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

Frequently Asked Questions: Answers for member states

Why has the UNCTAD Virtual Institute been developed?

The UNCTAD Virtual Institute has been conceived in response to the growing number of requests from member States for help in providing training on issues related to trade, investment and development. Since UNCTAD has limited resources for developing and delivering courses in member countries, it has focused on helping to strengthen academic and training institutions in member countries so that they can deliver necessary courses. This support has been offered through technical cooperation projects. However, demand for training far exceeds the resources available, so there needs to be new ways of these institutions accessing technical cooperation that are less resource-intensive, yet flexible and locally relevant. The use of information and communication technologies presents new opportunities in this area.

What is the purpose of the Institute?

The Institute aims to offer new and sustainable ways of assisting academic institutions in member countries to develop training and research capacity in UNCTAD's key areas of expertise (trade, investment and development). It will do this through a resource-based website and a network of academic institutions.

The Institute will make training tools, readings and other resources available to interested institutions via the website so that they can use them in developing their own courses.

It will also give institutions within countries the opportunity to join the Virtual Institute network and to develop courses in cooperation or exchange with other network members.

In order to facilitate access to full-fledged technical cooperation projects, the website of the Virtual Institute will provide academic institutions with information about possibilities and modalities of technical cooperation with UNCTAD, where relevant and subject to the availability of resources.

Who are the intended beneficiaries of the Institute?

The Institute is targeted at academic institutions, particularly in developing countries and countries in transition, which deliver courses and conduct research on subjects related to trade, investment and development.

Information posted in the public areas of the website may also be relevant for research institutions, students and the general public who wish to be updated on recent developments on the international economic agenda.

What teaching and research resources are available on the Institute's website?

The website of the Virtual Institute is divided into four main areas.

- ♦ The first two areas, **UNCTAD Resources** and **Teaching Tools**, contain: (a) a collection of substantive documents, papers and chapters resulting from UNCTAD's research work and used as background reading in UNCTAD courses (initially the Paragraph 166 courses), and (b) a set of generic pedagogical tools providing practical guidance in course development. These two areas are publicly accessible and are designed to help interested academic institutions develop their own courses and other training activities. The information in UNCTAD Resources may also interest researchers.
- ♦ A third area, the **Network**, is designed to assist the academic network on main UNCTAD issues in developing courses or research in cooperation or exchange with other network members; in promoting their own activities; and in exchanging course material, research resources, curriculum development tools and experience. The publicly accessible information in this area will give network members increased visibility with regard to their institutions and the courses they offer. The "private" information will include course material (such as course outlines, syllabi/key readings, reading lists, lecture notes and presentations, exercises and assessments) developed by member institutions, as well as background information about staff members involved in the development and delivery of courses. A private Forum section will facilitate cooperation, communication and exchange among members.
- ♦ A fourth area called **Technical Cooperation** contains information about courses developed by UNCTAD, technical cooperation projects in various substantive areas, and how to obtain technical assistance from UNCTAD. The information in this area is open to the general public.

What is the relationship between UNCTAD's corporate site and the website of the Institute?

The purpose and target audience of the Institute's website are different from those of the main UNCTAD site (www.unctad.org).

The purpose of the main site is to disseminate information about UNCTAD's activities and meetings and the deliberations of the inter-governmental machinery. The site's structure and features reflect this purpose. The site's interactive features are limited, and posting information involves a rigorous approval process.

The Virtual Institute website targets a more general audience interested in specific topics related to trade, investment and development, rather than the organizational aspects of UNCTAD's work. The website presents only selected information from the main UNCTAD site and complements this material with additional documents, tools and features tailored to the needs of the audience – higher education professionals and researchers.

The Virtual Institute website complements the main web site. It enables UNCTAD to connect with the potential audience in a more responsive and targeted way. The site may appeal to users whose needs are not completely met by the main UNCTAD site or who would not visit a site that is more institutionally oriented.

What is the relationship between TrainForTrade and the Institute?

TrainForTrade is UNCTAD's core programme for training and capacity building in the fields of international trade, trade-related services, investment and port management in developing countries, particularly the least developed ones. It develops original training packages adapted to local conditions using a systematic course design methodology. The programme also makes extensive use of distance-learning techniques.

The TrainForTrade team works with UNCTAD's substantive divisions and programmes to design learning materials and deliver training courses. This combination of substantive expertise and pedagogical rigour gives the programme its comparative advantage and its added value.

TrainForTrade delivers its training packages and trains local trainers in the framework of technical cooperation projects. These projects are designed to develop and sustain human resources in the key UNCTAD areas in beneficiary countries. TrainForTrade works mainly with ministries of trade, economy, finance, investment, environment, tourism, foreign affairs and development, as well as trade and investment operators and port communities. Academic and training institutions in developing countries are involved in TrainForTrade as members of the national and regional pedagogical committees, which support the implementation and sustainability of project activities; they are also part of the virtual network of TrainForTrade partners (www.unctad.org/trainfortrade).

The UNCTAD Virtual Institute offers new ways of assisting training institutions in developing countries:

- ◆ Access to UNCTAD resource material and training tools to facilitate autonomous development of training courses
- ◆ Opportunities to exchange pedagogical material, information and trainers among members of the Virtual Institute network, which may also include TrainForTrade partner institutions

TrainForTrade and the Institute offer different but complementary services. The Institute is designed to support course development (without providing training itself), while TrainForTrade designs and delivers technical cooperation projects for capacity building and training. The Institute's typical audience is academic institutions, whereas TrainForTrade works primarily with professional training institutions. Finally, the ultimate beneficiaries of the Institute's work will be university students, while TrainForTrade's target population consists primarily of professionals in service.

Training institutions using the Institute's website will have access to information about TrainForTrade. Subject to technical cooperation agreements, these institutions may also participate in TrainForTrade activities for developing human resources in their countries and regions.

In what ways will the Institute benefit member countries?

The Institute will provide member countries with additional opportunities to strengthen teaching and research in their academic institutions.

All member institutions will have access to a user-friendly catalogued selection of substantive material on UNCTAD issues, as well as pedagogical tools to help them develop their own courses. The substantive resources provided by UNCTAD will also be a useful contribution to members' research efforts.

Members will also be able to share training-related information and develop courses in cooperation with colleagues from other countries participating in the same network. Membership is free of charge, and members will benefit as follows:

- ◆ The Institute will help members save time and money in course development and enrich their curricula through exchanging course material via the password-protected parts of the website. UNCTAD will contribute to this exchange by making available selected UNCTAD training material that is not accessible to the general public. (Such resources will not include TrainForTrade material that is provided only in the context of technical cooperation projects.)
- ◆ The Institute will assist members in sharing expertise with each other – for example, an institution might want to recruit an expert from another institution for a project. For this purpose, they will be able to post information about their staff members' experience and qualifications, and possibly also their requirements for course or research expertise.
- ◆ Network members will be able to promote their institutions as members of a UN training network through a UN website by posting a fact sheet about their institution, as well as courses that they offer in the substantive areas covered by the website. This information will be publicly accessible.
- ◆ Through the Forum, members will be able to communicate and exchange opinions and experiences regarding the development of their training and research activities. It may also be possible to organize regular chats or ad hoc forums on specific topics, depending on the level of interest.
- ◆ Participating institutions can opt to receive an e-mail notification whenever new information is posted in their area of interest.
- ◆ Members will benefit from UNCTAD's assistance in the technical maintenance and development of the network area of the website. They will also receive a user guide.
- ◆ Members will receive support from UNCTAD secretariat divisions working on issues of particular interest to them. Divisions will moderate the Forum with regard to the substantive issues they handle and will stimulate exchange and communication among network members. The Information and Training Branch (ITB) of SITE will moderate on pedagogical issues.
- ◆ Subject to availability of funding for travel and experts, UNCTAD is prepared to arrange delivery of selected modules of the members' respective curricula by UNCTAD staff members or consultants.
- ◆ Participation in the network may facilitate subsequent collaboration by members in technical cooperation projects with UNCTAD, involvement in cooperative research projects with UNCTAD, and/or teaching and research collaboration with other network members.

Who can become a member of the Virtual Institute network and how?

Network members should be academic institutions with training and research activities in UNCTAD's areas of work – trade, development and investment. Interested institutions should send an application to UNCTAD. Members will be selected by an UNCTAD selection committee. The main criteria for membership will be (a) the institution's track record and the quality of its work; (b) its commitment to making course material available to other members free of charge; (c) its competence (capability to develop courses and conduct research autonomously); and (d) its relevance to UNCTAD's mission.

Interested institutions should send UNCTAD a written request to participate in the network. To facilitate this process, ITB/SITE has prepared a model application form. Before sending an application, prospective members should be aware of and in agreement with the Terms and Conditions Applicable to the Participation in the UNCTAD Virtual Institute, which specify the rights and obligations of members.

What are the obligations of Network members?

Like any network, the Virtual Institute network can function effectively only if its members are fully committed to cooperation and sharing. Therefore, members' main obligation is to share course material and other information with other members by posting them on the Institute's website. Another obligation is to regularly update the information about their institution and its training activities that appears on the website. Finally, members have legal obligations concerning issues such as UNCTAD copyright and the use of passwords to access the private area of the website provided by UNCTAD. All these obligations are detailed in the "Terms and Conditions Applicable to the Participation in the UNCTAD Virtual Institute Network".

How might membership of the network benefit an institution from a developed country ?

Some academic institutions, particularly in developed countries, are involved in working with developing countries as part of their programmes. Participation in the Virtual Institute network can streamline their efforts, particularly by facilitating access to potential beneficiaries.

Participation in the network and partnering with selected qualified institutions in developing countries can also benefit institutions in developed countries by giving them access to additional information and knowledge about these countries, thus contributing to their own training and research activities.

What will happen if a member of the training network does not (or cannot) comply with member obligations?

If, for reasons beyond its control (war, force majeure), a member institution fails to follow the network's solidarity principle (i.e. by sharing information and training material and updating information about itself), its membership may be suspended for a limited period (12 months).

Membership may be terminated (a) if a member seriously infringes the obligations to which it subscribed by signing the "Terms and Conditions"; (b) by a unilateral decision of either party following a change in priorities or work programme, or a re-organization or cessation of activities; or (c) by mutual agreement if the reasons for a previous suspension outlast the 12 months.

Decisions about the suspension and termination of membership will be taken by the UNCTAD selection committee. Use by other network members of any material posted by the member concerned prior to the termination of membership will, however, still be authorized.

What resources will be required for the development of the Institute?

- ♦ The Information and Training Branch (ITB) of SITE will be in charge of technical development and backstopping of the Institute's website (in cooperation with UNCTAD's Information Technology Support), posting and updating information and producing a user guide. ITB will develop pedagogical tools for the Teaching Tools area of the website, moderate the network's Forum with regard to pedagogical issues and provide organizational backstopping of the network. It will develop information about UNCTAD's technical assistance, in cooperation with the Technical Cooperation Service. ITB will also produce a user-friendly guide for divisions and provide coaching and training as required.

- ◆ The divisions and programmes will be asked to contribute to the UNCTAD Resources area of the website by selecting substantive material for posting, organizing it into relevant categories and providing keywords. ITB will assist in this process. The divisions/programmes will also be requested to provide information about training courses they have developed.
- ◆ Divisions/programmes will be invited to recommend as members competent partners with which they have been working. Moderating the network's Forum on the substantive issues of individual divisions/programmes and building the communities of practice from within these networks will also be the responsibility of the divisions/programmes concerned.

Until UNCTAD XI, work on the Institute will mostly rely on existing UNCTAD resources. However, for the work to progress, these resources need to be complemented by extra-budgetary funds. Such funds would make it possible to accelerate technical development, develop additional pedagogical tools, more efficiently tailor the Institute to the needs of beneficiaries, and promote the network to users, member States and potential partners. A project document will be prepared for submission to potential donors.

Will there be a mechanism to assess the functioning of the Institute?

The functioning of the Institute will be assessed on an ongoing basis through feedback from outside beneficiaries and UNCTAD divisions, with a view to improving and further developing the Institute. The UNCTAD selection committee will conduct an annual formal assessment of the Institute's functioning and identify necessary follow-up actions.

The UNCTAD secretariat will report on the Institute's functioning to the membership in a way to be determined.

When will the Institute become operational?

The Institute will be developed in two stages.

- ◆ During the first stage (before UNCTAD XI), a prototype of the website will be prepared that will showcase information about the substantive areas that are covered by Paragraph 166 courses and provide information about UNCTAD training courses. The prototype will also present information provided by interested UNCTAD Divisions. At the same time, the network will be piloted using a sample of qualified and interested academic institutions in UNCTAD member countries. The Institute will then be presented at UNCTAD XI.
- ◆ During the second stage (after UNCTAD XI), development of the Institute will continue, guided by feedback from member States, users and UNCTAD Divisions and programmes.

For more information, contact:

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