

The Social Partners and guidance for lower-paid workers

A project looking at examples of good practice in delivering guidance to lower-paid workers has been carried out with the support of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme of the European Community. The project involved 10 countries (Czech Republic, Iceland, Spain, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden, Finland, Germany and the UK). In addition to collecting and disseminating examples of good practice the project has developed a set of methods and solutions that can be used by employers, trade unions and guidance services. The home page of the project is: www.gla.ac.uk/wg. See the final project report below. Good practice guides for employers and Trade Unions can be downloaded from: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/wg/pilotrep.htm>

Individual reports from the countries involved in the project can also be downloaded from the project home page at: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/wg/index.htm>.

The social partners and vocational guidance for lower-paid workers

Final Project Report

Dr Pamela Clayton, University of Glasgow

Summary of Achievements

As a result of this pilot project, the following results have been obtained:

- Guidance has been delivered to seventy-three low-paid workers, in the Czech Republic, Spain, Finland, Iceland and Sweden;
- Guidance training has been given to twelve trade unionists in the Czech Republic;
- Ten initiatives on guidance for low-paid workers have been described and evaluated, in Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom;
- Guidance for its members has been mainstreamed by Efling trade union in Iceland;
- Guidance for low-paid workers in Joensuu, Finland has become a core activity (subject to funding) of the Employment Service there;
- During the Autumn, the Östersund Employment Agency will be drawing up information material/letter for job changers with regard

to the services supplied by the Employment Agency, and in particular Infoteket's resources and AMS' web site;

- The Östersund Employment Agency will also invite trade unions to information meetings at the Employment Agency in Östersund;
- Guidance for low-paid workers has become a major concern of the COEPA Training Foundation and efforts will be made to find funding or other social partners to deliver it in the future;
- A web site has been set up to promote practice in guidance for low-paid workers and links have been created to this web site by a number of important organisations;
- The issue of guidance for low-paid workers has been disseminated widely through the web site, email distribution lists, partners' networks, conference papers, articles in national and international journals and visits to relevant agencies and organisations;
- The OECD, partly as a result of our efforts, is now including low-paid workers as an important target for guidance.

Summary of Project Activities

In addition to reports by partners, reports of field visits and the gathering of materials from sources outside the partnership, the following activities were completed:

Country	Number of pilots	Clients served
Czech Republic	2	Eight low-paid hospital workers in Kolín given guidance Twelve trade union members in South Moravia trained to give guidance
Spain	1	Twelve well-qualified, under-paid workers in a range of firms in Alicante given guidance
Finland	1	Twelve female cleaners working in SMEs in Joensuu given guidance
Iceland	2	Fourteen fish-processing workers in a medium-sized company in Reykjavík given guidance Fifteen workers in a large power supplier in Reykjavík given guidance
Sweden	1	Fifteen lower-paid workers in a

		range of organisations registered with the Östersund Employment Office surveyed and an information sheet based on this sent to all registered job-changers
Country	Number of evaluations	Initiatives evaluated
Germany	2	Young people in employment receiving psychosocial support and guidance in Kreis Offenbach Baden-Württemberg collective agreement on VET including workers' right to appraisal
Denmark	2	Educational ambassadors from different unions offering peer guidance in large and medium-sized companies Guidance corners set up by a women's trade union offering professional and peer guidance in a range of firms and sectors in Denmark
Italy	2	Workplace guidance for receptionists, Milan Competence assessment in Monza for low-paid workers
Luxembourg	2	In-house guidance in a social firm for people with difficulty finding jobs in the open labour market In-house guidance in a social firm for women with difficult histories
United Kingdom	2	Targeted guidance provided by a large city council Guidance as part of a university Employee Development Scheme

Vocational Guidance and Counselling

This includes, but in this project is not limited to, vocational guidance and counselling services staffed by trained professionals. The basic objectives of guidance are encapsulated in the concept of DOTS (Law & Watts, 1977):

- D**ecision-making skills (how to make sensible decisions and plans)
- O**pportunity awareness (what options are open to individuals)

Transition skills (how to put plans in operation)

Self awareness (what they themselves are like and what they want).

Hence, guidance can also include:

- Human resource development (HRD) work;
- Assessment processes and appraisals by managers;
- Advice and guidance from shop stewards or other trade union representatives;
- Guidance as a part of educational or training courses, both in-service and provided externally;
- Peer guidance and counselling (that is, carried out by one's equals, fellow-employees etc.);
- Mentoring (the appointment of a more experienced person who can listen, advise and give feedback when the mentee asks for this);
- Self-assessment methods (paper or electronic, via guidance web sites);
- Information resources such as careers libraries;
- Telephone helplines.

The activities of guidance

An educational guidance service will carry out some or all of the following:

- Information, for example, on available learning opportunities;
- Assessment of an individual's educational needs;
- Advice on a range of suitable learning opportunities;
- Counselling to deal with barriers such as low self-confidence or self-esteem;
- Careers education, to inform individuals of the kinds of education needed for certain careers and also the kinds of careers for which their current qualifications make them eligible;
- Placement (more frequently for work experience in firms, but taster courses are an equivalent example);
- Referral to learning providers or other types of agency, for example, ones dealing with related issues such as social benefits;

- Advocacy, by representing the individual to a particular learning provider;
- Feedback to learning providers, for example, on the kinds of learning opportunity needed but not currently available;
- Follow-up, to discover the effects on the individual of the guidance provided.

Even professional vocational guidance and counselling services rarely carry out all these activities.

A definition of the purpose of guidance

The guidance process itself provides 'learning experiences to enable clients to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies related to making personal, educational and career decisions' (Clark, 1999, p. 10).

It is important to note that guidance should be impartial, confidential, centred on the needs of the individual and, as far as possible, holistic, taking into account social and life circumstances which impact on decision-making. These conditions apply as much to workplace guidance as to any other kind.

Lower-Paid Workers

The partnership engaged in much discussion of definitions, particularly that of 'low-paid' worker. In the end, because it was felt that the phrase was stigmatising, we changed the expression to 'lower-paid workers'.

Our target group works in the formal (that is, legal) economy. We are not here concerned with people working in the grey or illegal economy, or with unemployed people. Lower-paid workers may be:

- Men or women;
- Receiving an income from full-time, part-time, sessional or casual work;
- On fixed or 'permanent' contracts;
- Employed or self-employed;
- Of any age, of any ethnic group or citizenship status;
- Disabled or in reasonable health;

- Long-term employed, new employees or returners to employment after a break for childcare, redundancy, illness etc..

'Low-paid' is essentially a relative term - it means those workers at or near the bottom of the national pay scale, or whose earnings over a year are substantially lower than average national earnings. It includes not only people living in 'absolute' poverty (that is, unable to buy the minimum amount of food, shelter etc to sustain life in the long run) but also those living in 'relative' poverty, that is, at a level below that which is considered the minimum acceptable in that society at that time.

Research on low pay in Europe

There are many ways of defining low pay but no trans-European definition at the time of writing. Silvana Greco, the project partner from Italy, carried out some desk research on this issue. The European Low-Wage Employment Research Network (LOWER) is of obvious interest to us (see Lucifora, Salverda 1998). To summarise, she found three types of academic explanation for the working poor:

- Macro - including the labour market, demography, sectoral change, institutional factors;
- Micro - social, cultural and educational factors - individual life conditions;
- Macro + micro - economic and other structural factors + social networks (family, neighbourhood) + individual factors (education, health).

Work is generally becoming more unstable, in conjunction with other institutions like the family and welfare benefits which were stronger and more stable in the Fordist era, it has the effect of widening the range of workers at risk of social exclusion. Therefore even someone with a good job in terms of position and level of earning can suffer through non-predictable events such as industrial restructuring, divorce, personal difficulties, poor health, loss of partner's job, and is therefore more at risk of social exclusion than in the past (the Fordist era). The explanation of this phenomenon is that even one non-predictable event has the power of realising a vicious cycle of negative events and adding other negative events, especially in a context of more unstable institutions. For example, when people lose their jobs, they may no longer be able to pay the rent or mortgage, which can force them to leave the house where they live. This will take them away from the family and friends who helped to look after their children etc.. Thus one factor may affect not only one part of someone's life (for example, the job) but also other aspects (family, relationships etc.). For these reasons, many experts and scholars of social exclusion, state that social exclusion is a multi-factor and multi-dimensional (different aspects of life) phenomenon. For this reasons they recommend the need for a mixture of policies - labour, housing, health, education/training and the development of existing welfare systems.

There is additional risk for those with:

- Low economic (material) resources, including low income, poor housing, welfare subsidies;
- Loss or absence of social networks, lack of social integration, poor access to social services;
- Personal difficulties, including low level of education, poor family health conditions.

In attempting a definition of low-paid workers at risk of social exclusion, the following factors are indicators:

- Low level of income;
- Unstable job;
- Low level of education;
- Being an immigrant, a refugee, having a disability, or other kind of disadvantage.

The greater the number of these factors for an individual, the greater the risk.

There are many definitions of low-paid employment. Some are based on income, others on wage rates, whether hourly, daily, weekly or monthly. Some look at net income, others at gross. The OECD has data for a range of countries but no single definition. Furthermore, within low pay, there are several variables, such as the level of education, sex, type of job, sector and size of enterprise.

There is no set proportion of all societies that can be considered 'low-paid'. In some countries, many people have low earnings and struggle to make a decent life for themselves and/or their families (as in, for example, the United Kingdom). In other countries, such may constitute only a small minority (as in, for example, Denmark).

Quantitative approaches

Some countries have a quantitative definition of 'low pay' and where this is the case the partners could choose to use this definition.

For example, low paid workers might be people:

- Earning below a certain percentage of the industrial average wage;
- Earning only the minimum wage set by the state;
- Earning up to a certain percentage above the minimum wage;

- Whose income from employment is supplemented by state social security payments on the grounds that otherwise their income is too low to support a 'decent standard of life';
- Whose earnings fall at or below the official 'poverty line' designated by the state or by experts in poverty.

The income taken into consideration might be annual income or hourly wage.

Qualitative approach

It is not necessary, however, to have a quantitative definition. Common sense can be very misleading but as experts in our fields we relied on our common sense in this matter. We are well aware that certain occupations in many countries are usually lower-paid than others, such as cleaning, catering, hotel work, unskilled manual work, caretaking, clerical work, working as shop assistants, as hospital porters and orderlies, as unqualified carers in retirement, nursing or children's homes, and some kinds of home working paid at piece-rates. In general, where the supply of ill-qualified, low-skilled or desperate people is greater than the number of low-skilled jobs available, such jobs will tend to be low paid.

Features of lower-paid work

Lower-paid workers are of interest to us for reasons other than the fact that they are low paid. Such reasons may include:

- Job insecurity because of contract work, casual work or seasonal work, employment in a declining sector of the economy and therefore at risk of redundancy, added to lack of skills that can easily be transferred to another sector of the economy, a low level of education or of educational qualifications which impedes them from obtaining a secure job, etc.;
- Low level of opportunities for career advancement because of lack of qualifications, inappropriate qualifications, lack of access to education and training, no promoted jobs in that part of the organisation, poor self-confidence and self-esteem, etc.;
- Lack of services and support, such as employers' systems of appraisal, employee development schemes, guidance services, mentors, etc.

The workers involved in the project

Cleaners in Finland, production line workers in a fish-processing factory and unskilled maintenance workers at a power plant in Iceland, hospital orderlies in the Czech Republic, qualified but under-employed workers in Spain and a disparate group of lower-paid workers in Sweden who included members of the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union (SKAF), the Swedish Metal Workers' Union, and SEKO (Union for Service and Communication) were among those

who received information, advice and guidance as a result of the pilot project. In addition, trade union members in the Czech Republic received training to give guidance to members of their unions.

Others involved in receiving guidance (in evaluations and field research) included manual, clerical, secretarial and technical staff at the University of Glasgow and Glasgow City Council; people working for two social firms in Luxembourg, involving sewing and laundry work and garden work; young workers at risk of unemployment and older workers in Germany; factory workers in Denmark and receptionists in Italy; and both employed and self-employed people in precarious economic situations in Denmark and Italy.

The majority had low levels of education and were working in jobs generally regarded as low-skilled (although this perception can be challenged). Many had low self-confidence and self-esteem. Some, however, had completed upper secondary education or even university, but still required guidance to find the kind of employment suitable to their education and the training to convert from academic studies to vocational skills.

Although the great majority of people interviewed had appreciated the opportunity to receive guidance and had found it useful, most did not wish to change their jobs and some were not interested in further education or training. Nevertheless, there were positive outcomes in the form of increased self-esteem and self-confidence and greater awareness of the availability of both guidance and learning opportunities.

Low Pay and Lifelong Learning

Many (but not all) lower-paid workers have educational needs. They may have:

- No education or qualifications;
- Perhaps problems with literacy and/or numeracy;
- Basic education, no or low-level qualifications (for example, obtained on leaving school at the minimum school leaving age);
- Inadequate grasp of the national language required for reasonably-well-paid employment (however good the grasp of one's mother tongue might be);
- Qualifications which are not recognised, or are considered out of date, or are redundant or inappropriate in some other way;
- Low confidence in their learning skills and resistance to undertaking further learning;

- No access to funding for learning;
- No local provision of learning opportunities.

'Lifelong learning' can be seen as a threat rather than an opportunity or a joy. Many people had poor learning experiences at school and do not wish to repeat them. Perhaps the term 'learning', rather than 'lifelong learning' is less threatening, particularly if we define it quite broadly. The term 'learning' includes what are often referred to as 'education' or 'training' as well as activities which are not conventionally regarded as learning. The following list includes types of learning by subject matter, by motivation, by type, by learning provider and by funder.

Individual motivations for learning

There are many possible motivations for adult learning:

- To improve skills in a job;
- To get a better job;
- For pleasure;
- To relieve stress or boredom;
- To meet people;
- For personal development;
- To improve one's mind;
- To keep one's brain alive.

Types of learning

Too often, people whose main experience of learning took place in school classrooms believe that adult learning is simply more of the same - and if their former experience of learning was negative, they may well fear to return to learning. It is important for guidance counsellors to point out the wide range of activities that in fact make up adult learning. They include:

- Formal learning in mainstream educational system - this may include taught courses, supervised projects, distance learning, learning at one's own pace (such as in some forms of 'open learning');
- Non-formal learning carried out by agencies and institutions whose primary purpose is not education (for example, trade unions, enterprises);

- Informal learning (including experiential learning, learning 'on the job', self-planned learning projects, learning through hobbies and pastimes).

Learning providers

Just as there is diversity in types of learning, there are also many kinds of provider of learning. They include:

- Colleges, universities, training organisations, correspondence schools;
- Community education services;
- Extra-mural or adult education departments, folk high schools;
- Guidance services;
- Employers;
- Trade unions;
- Voluntary organisations;
- Churches;
- Individuals themselves.

Subjects of learning

The subjects of learning are many and varied:

- Academic, abstract or theoretical;
- Practical skills (for a job, for oneself, for the community);
- Mixture of both of above;
- Socially useful skills (for example, sign language);
- How to carry out a role, for example, trade union activities;
- Regulations and legislation, for example, equal opportunities, health and safety;
- Assessing and where necessary improving one's skills and abilities;
- Managing time, money, career;
- Entrepreneurship;

- Social skills, including anger management, assertiveness;
- Work culture;
- Another language;
- Hobbies and pastimes.

Locations of learning

Adult learning may well take place in a classroom (though generally in a different atmosphere from that of a school), but there are many other locations:

- Classroom;
- Training workshop;
- Workplace;
- Home;
- Library;
- In front of a computer;
- Community hall;
- Clubhouse;
- Self-help group meeting (real or virtual, via electronic conferencing);
- Vocational guidance service.

Times for learning

This is an important issue for workers, especially for those who work long hours, have family commitments and so on. Learning can take place:

- In work time;
- In leisure time;
- In a mixture of work and leisure time.

Funding of learning

This is clearly another important issue for low-paid workers, and the availability of funding varies across Europe; but the following are the commonest kinds of funding for adult learning:

- Funded by self or family;
- Grant or scholarship;
- State subsidy (central, regional or local government);
- Learning paid for or subsidised by employer or trade union;
- Any mixture of these.

What is the value of learning?

Learning by workers of all levels of education and pay is, or should be, valued by:

- Employers, because they add value to the organisation;
 - Unions, because learning workers may become critical and active instead of passive;
 - Workers themselves, because it is often enjoyable and can raise self-confidence (see Clayton 2000), and might lead to career progression or greater interest in the job;
 - State and society, because a well-educated workforce contributes towards economic progress and inclusive citizenship.
-

Workplace Guidance

This is shorthand in this project for guidance aimed at workers. It might be carried out:

- Literally in the workplace, that is, on the employer's premises, as in the studies from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg and United Kingdom;
- On the premises of a guidance service, as in Sweden and Finland, where employed persons can register with the Employment Service, and as in the United Kingdom where guidance services (the Employment Service does not offer guidance) generally do not discriminate between the employed and the unemployed;
- In an adult learning centre, as in the studies from Spain, Denmark and Finland (see also the field report from Sweden);

- In the home, for example, where guidance is given by telephone, as in the studies from Germany and Sweden, or where workers are directed to guidance web sites.

It might equally take place in trade union offices, in a clubhouse, and so on.

Guidance might be conducted face-to-face, over the telephone or electronically (for example, by email or through career guidance web sites).

Similarly, a variety of people might carry out the guidance, formally or informally, including:

- In-house guidance counsellors, who are employees of the organisation, as in the Luxembourg and United Kingdom studies;
- Guidance counsellors located in separate organisations, including the state Employment Service, as in the Swedish and Finnish pilots; providers of further and continuing education, as in the Spanish pilot; folk high schools; and workers' education services;
- Visiting guidance counsellors, organised by employers or trade unions, as in the studies from the Czech Republic, Italy, Iceland and Denmark;
- Trade union trained educational ambassadors or learning advisors, as in one of the Danish case studies;
- Fellow-workers offering peer guidance or mentoring, as in one of the Danish studies and at the University of Glasgow;
- Retired workers offering mentoring to vulnerable young workers, as organised by the Jugendbüro (Youth Office) of Neu-Isenburg in Kreis Offenbach, Germany;
- Line managers, for example, through an appraisal system (more frequently offered to higher-paid employees) or informal chat (see the German report).

Guidance could also be conducted by human resource personnel.

The kinds of guidance given in the project

We found, or generated, examples of many kinds of guidance, ranging from simple information-giving to fully-fledged guidance on the DOTS model. Guidance was found in a variety of locations; it was offered or commissioned by trade unions and employers; it was carried out by trained guidance counsellors, trade union learning advisors and fellow-workers giving peer guidance. It can be done expensively, by hiring trained guidance counsellors; or it can be done inexpensively, after the initial costs of training, via extending the normal functions of managers or giving basic training in peer guidance and mentoring to employees and union officials. This wide variety of

guidance activities, using different methodologies, can be found in the project reports. These include:

- Group guidance using the structured group guidance model developed by Borgen and Amundson and delivered to twelve women cleaners in SMEs (see the Finnish report);
- Group guidance conducted by fellow-workers (see the Danish report);
- A mixture of group and individual guidance, using the psychological guidance method of competence assessment, with eight hospital orderlies (see the Czech report, part 2);
- A mixture of group and individual guidance by a clinical psychologist, focusing on analysis of needs and personal action planning for twelve well-qualified but under-employed and dissatisfied workers (see the Spanish report);
- Individual guidance by a counsellor on the basis of 'taking advantage of the imagination to mobilise your point of view', given to fourteen production line workers in a fish-processing factory and fifteen maintenance workers for an energy supplier (see the Icelandic report);
- Individual lifestyle-based careers guidance and career path counselling, both scheduled and on demand, for young people insufficiently qualified for regular apprenticeships and taking the work-based basic qualification route (see the German report);
- Individual holistic guidance, both scheduled and on demand, in the workplace (see the Luxembourg report);
- Individual holistic guidance, on request, by telephone, email or face-to-face and in a location to suit the employee (see the United Kingdom report, parts 1 and 2);
- Individual guidance in a corner of the canteen by professional guidance counsellors (see the Danish report);
- Individual yearly appraisals for all workers in the metal industry (see the German report);
- Project which includes documenting the skills of older employees (see the German Report);
- Peer guidance in the workplace (see the Danish report);
- Circulation of an info-letter, based on a survey and analysis of information needs of fifteen low-paid workers, to workers registered at a state Employment Office (see the Swedish report).

In addition, training was given to twelve trade unionists which qualifies them in guidance counselling for the workers in their companies (see the Czech report, part 1).

Who pays?

Funding is an important issue - beyond recognition of the important and value of guidance for lower-paid workers, which we believe we have increased through the project, lies the first fundamental question:

1 Who pays?

The guidance activities described in the project and elsewhere are funded in a variety of ways:

- Paid for by employing organisations, public, social and private, as in the studies from Italy, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom;
- Paid for by trade unions, as in the Czech, Danish and Italian studies, as well as services for redundant workers in Sweden;
- Paid for by the state, as in Germany, Sweden and Finland, or subsidised by the state, for example, through the Union Learning Fund in the United Kingdom;
- Paid for or subsidised by our project, as in the Czech, Spanish, Finnish, Icelandic and Swedish studies;
- Paid for by local economic generation agencies, as in the United Kingdom;
- Paid for by individuals, for example, by accessing private agencies, or through the costs of going online to access guidance.

When considering the case of guidance for lower-paid workers, two additional questions arise:

2 Who should pay?

3 Who can pay?

The answers to the first of these questions may rest on a further question:

4 Who benefits?

As asserted above, the guidance leading to lifelong learning benefits the employer, trade unions, the workers themselves and state and society as a whole. In this sense, any or all should pay the costs of guidance.

Should employers pay?

Large and even some medium-sized employers have the resources, in terms of funding and staff, to provide educational guidance for all their workers, and many

do, though not all consider the needs of their lower-paid staff. There is room for improvement, but it is often the larger firms, such as the University of Glasgow and Glasgow City Council, which provide useful models.

Small and micro firms often do not have such resources and it seems unreasonable that they should either provide or pay for guidance for their workers. We suggest a number of alternatives, including:

- Delivery of guidance, subsidy or payment by the state, perhaps in the form of guidance offered by the Employment Service or by a local economic regeneration agency;
- Delivery of guidance, subsidy or payment by an employers' federation such as a chamber of commerce;
- Formation of consortia with other small firms and sharing resources;
- Delivery of guidance, subsidy or payment by larger contracting firms.

When asked about guidance for their workers, one fear often expressed by employers, especially in small firms, is that they will lose their employees to other firms if they receive guidance and undertake learning that makes them more employable. This, however, is by no means inevitable. The Finnish study, for example, found that few of the workers given guidance wanted to change their employer.

If they thought of career progression, it was within their existing employment. The importance of familiarity with the work, the management, the location and fellow-employees should not be under-estimated. Furthermore, the offer of guidance and learning opportunities makes employees feel more valued and contributes to their loyalty to the employer - which is, of course, one of the reasons some larger employers have Employee Development Schemes.

The Spanish study, on the other hand, found that nearly all the workers given guidance wanted to find other employers, because they were under-valued and sometimes exploited in their current jobs. Since the Spanish partner represents local businesses, it cannot logically continue to give guidance to workers who intend to use it in order to leave their jobs (although they will presumably find work with other members of the Federation).

The workers in the Swedish study were registered with the Employment Service specifically because they wished to change employers, so they do not represent all employees. The same could be said, of course, for the Spanish students, who were studying at the COEPA Foundation for the same reason - to get careers rather than remain in unsuitable employment. One could suggest that bad employers will in any case tend to lose workers and good employers will tend to keep them - and good employers include those who offer their employees the chances to progress, either in their careers or personally.

Should trade unions pay?

There is, on the face of it, no reason why large, well-resourced trade unions should not add the provision of guidance to their services for members. This is already carried out, or being set up, by several unions including HK and KAD in Denmark; the South Moravian Association of Trade Unions in the Czech Republic; Cgil-NIdiL in Italy; Efling in Iceland; and UNISON and the TGWU in the United Kingdom. In the case of the United Kingdom, assistance is given by the Union Learning Fund (which, however, has to be tendered for, is for specific projects and leaves the unions to mainstream their activities). This will be bolstered by an Employment Act giving union learning representatives time off to give guidance to trade union members.

On the other hand, union membership levels in Europe are very varied and many lower-paid workers are not members, either because they work in non-unionised premises, feel that they cannot afford the union dues or do not see the value of membership. It could be argued that the more services unions offer, the more attractive membership becomes. (One interesting case is that of KAD in Denmark which does not restrict the guidance it provides to members.) Nevertheless, if guidance for lower-paid workers were left wholly in the hands of the unions, it would be inaccessible to many of them. Furthermore, since union services are funded partly from members' dues, this almost constitutes workers paying for their own guidance, except that, of course, as in the case of taxation-funded state services, the better-off subsidise the worse-off.

We believe that trade unions should be among those offering guidance to lower-paid workers but they should not be the only providers.

Should the state pay?

By the state, we mean:

- Central, regional and local government directly-managed guidance and employment services;
- State-funded economic regeneration agencies and local guidance services.

One of the German studies described the role of Kreis Offenbach, a regional authority, in the targeting of vulnerable young workers in supported (but not subsidised) employment in which they learn basic skills on the job. Under a new law, Job Aktiv, Kreis Offenbach also provides for guidance to people aged fifty or over working in SMEs, to help them stay in work.

In Sweden and Finland, employed people can register with the Employment Service; but although they can access information with ease, there is usually a long wait for counselling services, as the needs of the unemployed take precedence.

In the United Kingdom, the first joint publication of the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress (CBI/TUC 2001) was on basic

skills and the need for training. This argues that the state should pay for compulsory education, for training for the unemployed, and for education and training up to level two for people of any age. (Level two is equivalent to the qualification gained after ten/eleven years of initial education - in the United Kingdom this would be General Certificate of Secondary Education [GCSE] and a vocational equivalent is National Vocational Qualification [NVQ] level 2). Firms should pay for the training of their employees, but with state subsidies for smaller firms.

The idea of guidance and how it should be funded, however, is less clear-cut. They advocated a 'Basic Skills Champions Group' including the CBI, the TUC and the government to raise the awareness of employers and unions concerning literacy and numeracy, to spread knowledge of workable solutions and to show employees that help is available.

The responsibility for the education, training and development of employees in order to meet business needs and the long-term development of the workforce rested with employers; but employees should be responsible for their employability and development beyond their current employment.

They felt that government should, inter alia:

- Improve advice and guidance;
- Provide 'incentives for individuals'.

In fact, there is a state scheme in the United Kingdom which offers telephone information and advice, and can also arrange guidance, to anyone interested in further education. This is called LearnDirect.

It seems reasonable to suggest that, as far as guidance for lower-paid workers is concerned, and where neither the employer, trade union nor the individual worker is able and willing to pay for guidance, it should be provided free of charge by the state for lower-paid workers who are:

- at risk of redundancy, in that they are low-skilled or work in a firm or sector in decline;
- willing to upgrade their education and skills but do not know the best way to do this.

Should lower-paid workers pay?

In the case of lower-paid workers, however, the third question, that of who can pay, raises a difficulty, since by definition they most often cannot afford to pay for professional guidance.

There is a case, then, of lower-paid workers paying either none, or only a proportion, of the cost. The second idea, that they might pay a proportion, arises from the experiment of Individual Learning Accounts carried out in the United Kingdom. These offered a certain amount of money to fund a course, provided that the student contributed a relatively small sum as a sign of

commitment. The scheme, while undoubtedly subsidising many who could afford courses without subsidy, also drew into learning many who could not.

On the other hand, very low-paid workers cannot pay even a token amount. In recognition of this, Glasgow City Council paid the contribution on behalf of the student as well as offering a free guidance service. Similarly, in the University of Glasgow Employee Development Scheme, employees do not have to make a contribution (although, since there is a maximum amount offered for learning, some presumably top up the grant to access more expensive courses). Again, guidance is offered without charge.

The Social Partners

In the official terminology of the European Union, the social partners consist of employers' and trade union federations. Ideally, social dialogue could lead to social partnership with a view to helping lower-paid workers improve their situation, which was envisaged in our project. Several problems were, however, discovered. The extent and type of social partnership and even social dialogue varies throughout the countries in the project. For example,

- In the Czech Republic, social dialogue is at a very early stage and social partnership is non-existent;
- In Germany and the United Kingdom, relations between employers and employees are historically opposed and based on a recognition of conflicting interests;
- In Denmark, Iceland and, until recently, Spain, relations between the social partners are reasonably cordial and positive;
- Trade unions in some countries (e.g. Italy, France and Luxembourg) are organised into two or more ideologically opposed federations.

There are also problems at the level of individual unions and employers:

- Not all workers are trade union members, even in the Nordic countries which have rates of union membership of over eighty per cent; one of the lowest rates of union membership was found in the Czech Republic, where unions still struggle against the negative image they acquired as instruments of the former communist state - the higher the rate of union membership, the greater the potential and even necessity for social partnership;
- Many lower-paid workers, especially those working part time, in sessional work, on a casual basis or self-employed, are non-unionised (the Danish union HK and the Italian union Cgil-NIdiL are

exceptional in that they cater for self-employed as well as employed people);

- Not all trade unions represent lower-paid workers (Efling trade union, one of the project partners, is one that does); some do not represent them at all (for example, professional associations); and others are industry-wide (such as IG Metall in Germany, SKAF and Metal Workers in Sweden) and are concerned with the generalised interests of their members, without focusing on the lower-paid;
- The majority of employers are small- and medium-sized enterprises, and not all are represented in employers' federations or local chambers of commerce.

As far as dissemination was concerned, we took a much broader definition of the 'social partners' and included central, regional and local government departments and committees, single large employers and trade unions, relevant campaigning organisations and charities, as well as providers or potential providers of useful services (such as guidance, education, crisis care).

The extent of social co-operation in the pilot project

The pilot project demonstrates the possibilities of trade union / employer co-operation in guidance for lower-paid workers. It is usual in employee development schemes for the union or unions representing the employees to be fully involved in their design and implementation, and this is certainly the case in the University of Glasgow and Glasgow City Council (this does not mean that there is no conflict on other matters, such as pay). Social co-operation is very visible in the Icelandic pilot, where two employers agreed to allow trade union-provided guidance to take place in the workplace and in work time.

Social co-operation is also apparent in the Danish cases. Furthermore both the Danish Employers' Federation (DA) and the Confederation of Danish Trade Unions (LO) are important members of Rådet for Uddannelses- og Erhvervsvejledning (RUE), the Danish Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance. Another example of social co-operation in Denmark is VUS Kontakt, set up by the social partners to carry out in Greater Copenhagen the law (VUS) that provides education at work for the low-skilled. It also provides telephone guidance to individual low-paid workers who are eligible for vocational educational grants under the law.

On the other hand, one of the social firms evaluated in Luxembourg had very little contact with trade unions, principally because it considered them too 'political', since they are organised into ideologically-based and competing federations. There is very little evidence of social partnership in the Czech Republic and the trade unions are facing difficulties in recruitment. The enthusiasm and commitment of the South Moravian unions, however, is a hopeful sign for the future.

The basic vocational qualification model in Germany (whether supported by guidance or not) is unpopular with unions such as IG Metall, which not unnaturally prefers the apprenticeship model leading to high skills and good pay, even though this discriminates against the more vulnerable in society. Recently, however, IG Metall surprised expert observers by negotiating a collective bargaining agreement on training in Baden-Württemberg. Part of this involves the right of employees to have a training needs interview with their line manager at least once a year. A joint agency has been established, whose remit includes improving information about external training provision. To assist the process, especially in SMEs, a project funded by the Land and the European Social Fund will, inter alia, document the skills of older employees on the basis of which new skills will be developed.

The pilot project in Finland succeeded in arousing interest but not participation on the part of the unions. They have requested the Finnish report. More positively, trade unions in Östersund and Alicante have taken an active interest in the project and future co-operation is to be hoped for.

Endnote

This brief report describes some of the concepts and issues addressed in this project and summarises the work of the partnership. The richness of the data, the findings, the evaluations and the recommendations, however, can best be appreciated by reading the reports by the partners (Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom) which are all available in English from the project home page at:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/wg/index.htm>

References

Printed materials

CBI/TUC (2001). *The UK Productivity Challenge: CBI/TUC submission to the productivity initiative*. Confederation of British Industry and Trades Union Congress.

Clark, J. (1999). 'Adult guidance: not just a signpost', *Concept*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp 10-12

Clayton, P. M. (2000) 'Was it worth it? A comparison of the role of adult education and training in the labour market insertion and progress of men and women in the West of Scotland: results of qualitative research', *International Journal of Lifelong Learning* Volume 19, number 3

Law, B. and Watts, A. (1977). *Schools, Career and Community*. London:
