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To get the right skills for its economy and citizens, Europe must integrate education and employment policies

The need to develop fully integrated skills policies for education and training, employment and innovation at all levels was a dominant theme in the workshop *Skills and competence to overcome the crisis*, which Cedefop co-organised with MEP Ole Christensen on 2 March at the European Parliament in Brussels.

Besides presentations by Cedefop Director Aviana Bulgarelli and Ole Christensen, Member of the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee, the workshop featured contributions by László Andor, Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs and Inclusion; Odile Quintin, Director-General for Education and Culture; Jorgen Ronnest of Business Europe; and Jozef Niemiec, Secretary of the European Trade Unions Confederation.

The audience, which contributed several questions and criticisms to the panel, included MEPs Rosario Crocetta, Sylvana Rapti and Elisabeth Schroedter; and many members of European and regional social partners organisations, including the CEEP and the European Economic and Social Committee.

The importance of anticipating skills needs and the role that forecasts such as those undertaken by Cedefop was recognised by all parties. But as several participants said, general forecasts need to be fleshed out by sectoral and regional studies in order to establish the precise nature of the changes in skills demand and supply and to find the most appropriate ways of financing and designing the necessary upskilling for various target groups, such as older workers, migrants or early school leavers.

Ole Christensen said that the present crisis, which has affected all European countries, has raised some questions about how much further structural reforms need to go. The concept of flexicurity championed by Denmark, despite significant successes, is now coming under criticism. "In some instances, the effect of flexicurity policies has been to lower mobility. But mobility between countries and sectors is crucial if we are to fill job vacancies. The new term we are hearing now is "mobication" – mobility and education."

Mobility was a theme also raised by **Odile Quintin**. "We must invest in initiatives that have stood the test of time. That is why President Barroso presented to the Parliament the large-scale 'Youth on the Move' initiative, which aims to make

learning mobility a standard part of every degree and every career, and of lifelong learning.” She also drew attention to the issue of financing, pointing out that Europe is lagging behind its competitors. Noting particularly the large drop registered in in-company training between 1999 and 2005, she said this puts European competitiveness at risk. “We need investment in high-quality education and skills development even in times of financial constraints”.

Commissioner Andor particularly emphasised the value of integrating policies. “Skills are a cross-cutting priority. It will not make any sense to design education and training without knowing what skills people will need in tomorrow’s labour market. And we will not be able to tackle current unemployment without including education and training for all our citizens.” For this, he said “we need to integrate policies on long-term employment, social inclusion and global economic competitiveness”. This is the idea behind the Europe 2020 Strategy, launched by the European Commission on 3 March in Brussels. The Strategy, as Commissioner Andor underlined “has the development of skills at its heart”. Referring to the New Skills for New Jobs initiative, to which Cedefop also contributed, the Commissioner noted that it was launched just before the crisis hit our economies and labour market. “In hindsight”, he said, “the renewed emphasis on skills could not have come at a better moment”.

Aviana Bulgarelli presented findings from Cedefop’s forthcoming forecast on the supply and demand for skills up to 2020, observing that the figures show consistent features of likely changes across Europe. The crisis has affected employment but not at all qualification levels: low-qualified people have suffered disproportionately from the effects of the crisis, with employment of high-qualified people remaining high. We are seeing from our forecast that jobs employing highly-qualified people will rise by 2020 to one third of the total, and jobs requiring medium-level qualifications will rise to 50% of the total. These findings, along with demographic developments, are important for industrial policy, but clearly also for education, training and social policies”.

Speaking on behalf of the employers, **Jorgen Ronnest** stressed the need for more flexible learning paths for workers. “Employers do their part to retain and improve skills, but SMEs in particular need more support to find funding for training and locate training providers, and have less bureaucracy to deal with when offering apprenticeship programmes”.

The issue of financing was picked up by **Jozef Niemiec** of the ETUC who said there is little point in stressing the importance of skills unless we are willing to devote the funds necessary for training. “If there is no investment, then skills development is simply not a priority”. Particularly if we look at developments in the BRIC countries – how much they are devoting to skills development - we will see that “the issue of financing training is crucial if Europe is to leave the present crisis behind”.

Cedefop’s complete forecast on skills, including national forecasts, will be published in the spring.

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