

# **Early identification of skill needs in Europe**

## **International conference**

**Thessaloniki, May 2003**

### **Summary**

In May 2003, the international conference on ‘Early identification of skill needs in Europe’ (agreed at a preparatory conference of the same title at WSB Berlin in May 2002) took place. Organisers of the May 2003 conference were the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering (Fraunhofer IAO) and the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB). It took place at Cedefop in Thessaloniki during the Greek EU presidency. About 130 researchers, representatives of the business sector, social partners and European political institutions, Member States and accession countries took part.

The event consisted of plenary sessions and three parallel workshops which encouraged exchanges on results, approaches and methods of early identification research as well as needs for further action and research. At the same time, discussion on creating a European network on early identification of skill needs resulted in the establishment of Skillsnet.

### **Workshop I: Good practice/different practice – examples of the early identification of skill needs and policy transfer**

At the centre of this *first* workshop were examples of early identification initiatives and modes of cooperation in Europe as well as the question of transferring results into policy and practice. Early identification approaches range from forecasts to enterprise surveys and scenarios at regional, sectoral and occupational levels. The main subject of discussion were the pros and cons of these approaches and their further development. Participants emphasised three demands for research: first, to consider the question of implementation when choosing the approach; second, to make continuous feedback possible for addressees; third, to combine qualitative and quantitative methods to get accurate results.

## **Workshop II: Early identification of skill needs in selected sectors**

This *second* workshop focused on results of early identification of skill needs in technological innovations and services sectors. These are of great importance in Europe as new businesses and jobs are emerging primarily in these sectors. Discussions confirmed cross-national variants within occupations, skill needs and qualifications could be explained by e.g. different educational systems, structural differences and variants of national institutions. The level of skill needs for dealing with a rising quantity of information is also increasing. In contrast, there is a decreasing level of skill needs in automation and standardisation.

## **Workshop III: Identification of transversal competences and qualifications**

The *third* workshop looked at cross-occupational and cross-sectoral skills and the resulting skill needs for particular target groups: low-skilled and highly qualified people. The workshop focused on new computer-related skills and new challenges for the low-skilled. Participants agreed that across sectors and occupations new skill needs are emerging to cope with penetration of ICT and the Internet. Traditional competences should be replaced by knowledge of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Thus, continuous further training is necessary. For the low-skilled unhindered access to learning opportunities is essential. Abilities such as flexibility and interpersonal skills can be acquired best by combining formal and informal work-related learning.

## **Results of discussions**

Round table and plenary discussions concluded first, a review of existing results and early identification networks is necessary since approaches are heterogeneous and integrated ones are needed. Second, by creating a European network connections between regional and national networks, which could go beyond Internet links, could be established. The following points should be considered: the network design should be as informal and open as possible to ease access for new stakeholders and users. In all probability setting up the network will be less difficult than maintaining it. On the latter, an appropriate network organisation and developing common terminology are important.

## **Considerations for a European network of early identification of skill needs**

Setting up an early identification network at Community level, including links with regional, national and other Community networks, aims at continual Europe-wide information exchange and cooperation within and beyond the research community. As an instrument for compiling and disseminating research results, a European network could contribute to developing educational measures for the future which could be recognised at least throughout the EU. While in Ireland, Italy and Spain networks related to the subject of early identification are being created, at the conference the German network within the BMBF 'Initiative for early identification of qualification needs' (FreQueNz) was presented as an example at national level. To render the aims of European cooperation and common activities more precise further talks between Cedefop and other stakeholders were agreed.

### **Documentation: Internet platform and proceedings**

Conference proceedings will be published in English and German. An electronic link to conference documentation, including agenda, presentation material, and abstracts of all contributions, is available at the Skillsnet homepage ([http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Projects\\_Networks/Skillsnet/events\\_past.asp](http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Projects_Networks/Skillsnet/events_past.asp)) and the English and German homepages of [www.frequenz.net](http://www.frequenz.net).

Bernd Dworschak,  
Susanne Liane Schmidt,  
Helmut Zaiser

Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering (Fraunhofer IAO)