



# Sectoral partnerships











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# Foreword

Sectoral approaches are a basic element of lifelong learning policy that includes initiatives such as the European qualifications framework (EQF), the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) and the related issues of learning outcomes and validation of non formal and informal learning.

The Helsinki communiqué states that to improve the attractiveness and quality of vocational education and training, more emphasis should be placed on good governance of vocational education and training systems and providers, through active partnership between different decision makers and stakeholders. In particular all engaging social partners and sectoral organisations in all stages of the work and feeding national experiences into work at European level.

Modernising initial and continuing vocational education and training is essential to a knowledge-based society and a central pillar of Member States strategies for lifelong learning and EU strategies for long-term competitiveness and social cohesion. The European employment strategy for more and better jobs, the joint approach for active social inclusion and the partnership for growth and jobs all call for more investment in human capital. Developing sectoral partnerships is a response to these challenges and is based on ongoing dialogue between different stakeholders with common interests in lifelong learning. These partnerships should be able to monitor trends and translate them into training needs in ways that can be communicated to education authorities and practitioners.

The main challenges are how sectoral partnerships can help develop more responsive qualification systems, and how sectoral strategies can develop, fund and strengthen qualification development processes, and models.

Aviana Bulgarelli  
*Director*



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# Introduction

## Responding to change

Change is everywhere. Although change is not new, the nature of change today and its effect on our daily lives – families, societies, work, education – is very different from a few decades ago.

The European population is ageing. Migration is increasing the number of foreign workers on the labour market. Globalisation has led to worldwide competition, outsourcing, mergers and takeovers. New technologies, new materials and new work organisation are changing production methods.

In the past, to respond to changes presented in the labour market, a solution would be sought to overcome transition from one static situation to a new, relatively static, situation. Now, change is such a complex and continuing phenomenon that is increasingly accepted as permanent.

For companies and organisations, anticipating change is essential for survival. But only large multinationals can afford internal structures to monitor future trends and respond with appropriate HRD (human resources development) strategies. Smaller companies need to bundle their resources with others that have similar needs. Well-organised sectors are more capable of anticipating change.

By understanding what type of changes will affect them in the future, sectors can define common responses. As such, they can reduce job losses during industrial restructuring and compete better for human resources and skills in a tight labour market. Responding to change requires the ability to adapt to changing borders between sectors (for example, agriculture and tourism or food industry). This calls for partnerships that establish new sectors or mergers.

Developing sectoral partnership – the ongoing dialogue between different stakeholders with shared interests in lifelong learning – takes time. It is a gradual process of learning to respond collectively to changing circumstances. Partnerships need to develop, adapt, be able to monitor trends, translate them into training needs and communicate training needs to education authorities and practitioners. Further down the road, they need to acquire the

capacity to develop transparent qualifications and integrate these qualifications and qualification systems into qualification frameworks for lifelong learning.

Although these processes may vary among different sectors, the outlines of sectoral partnership for qualification development are the same. Much can be gained by learning from others, nationally and internationally, who are facing similar challenges, or have already worked towards solutions. Closer European integration means that European developments should be closely monitored and considered.

Sectoral partnerships are not new. Cooperation among professionals in similar crafts dates back to the 13th century with the development of guilds and is very characteristic of European vocational training.

The guild system represented the vocational education and training (VET) system of the past. It operated in most European countries until the 19th century, until circumstances were changed by mass industrialisation. With industrialisation companies became larger, leading to greater specialisation and divisions of labour. Trades became industrial sectors. To be less dependent on the whims of individual employers, skilled workers from sectors organised themselves and, in response, employers did the same.

Dialogue among the two groups focused initially on pay and working conditions, but with technological changes, workers' skills needed to be updated and education and training became a topic for bargaining. Special bodies were established to fund and organise such training.

Today vocational education and training systems in Europe are very different and diverse. To promote the free movement of workers' European cooperation has focused on the transparency and quality of these diverse vocational education and training systems. This cooperation is stimulating convergence.

Convergence started with the establishment of Cedefop, reflected also by the establishment of the ETF. Recently, in the Lisbon process, cooperation has intensified. Europe aims to be a world reference in education. Both higher education and vocational education and training have seen important European developments. The ultimate aim of this convergence is not some sort of European harmonisation. Each Member State is responsible for its own education and training system and responds to its own circumstances.

## Sinaia

To support development of sectoral partnerships in the then acceding and candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Turkey), in September 2006 Cedefop and the European Training Foundation (ETF) organised a conference in Sinaia, Romania. The conference brought together some 100 representatives from the world of work to discuss how sectoral partnerships can anticipate changes in the labour market and translate these into improved qualifications.

Most participants came from sectors in the then acceding and candidate countries. Presenting EU experiences with sectoral partnerships, colleagues from Germany, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK confirmed that each sector and country responds differently to common circumstances.

The conference had three objectives to:

- gather representatives from the world of work and education to discuss why partnerships are important. Without involving the world of work, relevant education and training cannot develop. Changes in the philosophy that underpin our education systems means that this holds even more true today than ever before. The emphasis on lifelong learning implies a strong mix of work and learning experiences in people's lives, which is not possible without support from the world of work. Such support needs to be structural, going beyond the individual company level, Sectors have an important role to play here.
- discuss the role of sectoral partnerships in supporting more responsive qualification systems. Qualifications need to reflect the actual needs of a developing labour market. Sectors must play a role in their development.
- exchange experience among participants in order to see how sectoral partnerships can be strengthened.

## This publication

This publication draws on the results of the Sinaia conference. It is a reference tool for those who attended the conference and others who share an interest in sectoral partnership development.

The first chapter explains the general principles of sectoral partnership for lifelong learning. The second chapter takes a closer look at some of the challenges the different sectors face, such as international competition, free trade and technological advancement. It considers how these changes and

challenges can be translated into HR priorities and how to design strategies from these priorities.

Guided by practical examples from around Europe, in the third chapter we look at how these priorities and strategies can be translated into qualifications. Chapter 4 discusses the practicalities of establishing sectoral partnerships, asking who should be involved, who should take the lead, and who should be responsible for what.

Drawing on practical examples from around Europe, in Chapter 5 takes a close look at ways in which sectoral partnerships can be funded, discussing training funds, individual contributions and the role of collective bargaining. Information is also given on the role that the European Social Fund can play in funding sectoral activities.

Finally, in Chapter 6 we look at the international perspective highlighting European developments related to the Lisbon and Copenhagen processes. It looks at areas where closer European integration is desired and how this can be achieved, as well as at the resources available to support development of sectoral partnerships in Europe.

The document is completed by the Sinaia conference conclusions.

# 1. Main principles of sectoral partnership for lifelong learning

Change is central to our world. We cannot avoid it, but we can prepare ourselves to deal with it. To prepare, we need to predict it. Professionals, employers and people on the workshop floor are best at predicting such change. They can anticipate the need for new skills that typically follows introduction of new technology, legislation, or security situation. For this reason, it is important to involve them in developing programmes that train their future employees.

This is not always easy. Large companies and multinationals often go it alone. They have the capacity to retrain people according to their precise needs. They can recruit people with the right soft skills – leadership, the ability to cooperate, communication aptitude – and train them in-house according to their requirements.

Small companies cannot afford this. The base cost for training is too high. Employing trainers is too expensive for one or two employees. Developing training materials is costly. Small companies are far more dependent on the public vocational education and training system to meet their needs. Consequentially, they must be involved in developing courses, programmes and qualifications, but they are often hard pressed for time to spend on such cooperation.

To bundle their resources, they can operate in groups. As training needs vary widely a logical way for small companies to group is by sector. Sectors, in this context, are defined as areas of economic activity, such as banking, hospitality, construction or the food industry. Sectors can collectively appoint professionals as the interface between the workshop floor and other partners that are (or should be) involved in developing education and training, such as public authorities and schools. Sectors can also work with existing social partner structures to establish a link with collective bargaining. Finally, activities/initiatives at sector level should consider the competition between companies. Sectoral partnerships are important for more efficient training of general and sector specific skills at a collective sector level. However it is important to note the skills and competences that should be trained in-house as a competitive asset at company level.

Such cooperation among employers, trade unions, training providers and relevant authorities in one limited area of economic activity defines a sectoral partnership in education and training. It is important that the sectoral needs interests and requirements of the world of work prevail in these partnerships.

The extension towards lifelong learning follows automatically from the increased need for continuing learning and retraining that change brings about. In a knowledge-based economy, sectors must become learning sectors that identify human resource challenges, assess the relevance of policies to their sector and develop appropriate education and training strategies.

The practical implications of setting up sectoral partnership structures are discussed in Chapter 4 and funding of their activities in Chapter 5. However, first it is important to look at their aims: the development of sectoral skill strategies and the translation of these strategies into transparent and relevant qualifications.

## 2. Towards sectoral training strategies

The general challenges faced by different sectors in Europe are remarkably similar. They include globalisation, rapid advances in technology, harmonisation of European legislation, and establishment of free-trade zones across Europe and beyond. To these, some sectors can add the growing environmental concern and international security issues.

Albeit to differing degrees, all of these challenges have implications for human resource development. People at work, generally, need a better command of foreign languages, more control over new technologies and better social skills. They need to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances means people need the ability and will to keep learning. Companies as a whole need to be more aware of international legislation in fields with quickly changing trends, such as the environment and security.

Companies operating in societies that focus on knowledge development rather than production have strong demands from national education systems. They need an education infrastructure that supports lifelong learning. Geographically clustered sectors in high technology, such as the biotech and telecom industries, have very specific demands of education systems that can hardly be solved through simple retraining efforts. They need a constant flow of graduates with a bias towards the sciences.

Challenges imposed by change education and training policy need to be addressed in three stages. First, challenges need translating into priorities. Second, priorities need shaping into strategies and, third, strategies need turning into policies. While the latter may largely be a political task, the former two must be addressed in close cooperation with all stakeholders. Together they must find answers to key questions related to employment in their sector. What happened in the past five years? Where is the sector heading? What issues will influence employment and skills in our sector in the next five years?

To translate general challenges into priorities, first there must be an analysis of changes and resulting deficiencies or expected shortcomings in available skills. For example, a market that has traditionally served national tourism and expects a sudden influx of international tourism, an IT sector that finds IT graduates increasingly out of step with current trends, a metal sector with

falling numbers of apprentices. This is part of the process of identifying skill needs.

Skill needs must become priorities. In the above examples, the tourism sector must prepare its professionals for the specific demands of foreign tourists, the IT sector must act to improve IT education, the metal sector must join forces to make metal work more attractive to young people. Priorities can only be defined effectively in close partnership among all stakeholders (employers, trade unions, authorities and education and training providers).

Together they must define a strategy to tackle these issues. They must assess the current training supply, its contents and methods, how effectively it reaches potential trainees and the expected output of graduates in the short term. Where these do not match the needs they must find ways of matching them better. Training content may be updated to increase its relevance. Training methodologies may be reviewed for effectiveness. Employment in the sector as a whole may be promoted to attract more people.

## 2.1. A strategic plan for human resources development in tourism in Portugal

In Portugal, tourism is a strategic sector that employs some 10 % of the population. Employment in the sector is generally characterised by low qualification levels where most workers developed their competences through informal learning in the workplace.

Development of a Portuguese plan for human resources in tourism was based on the need to raise quality levels in tourism services, and recognition that human resource development and qualification is vital to ensure the sector's sustainability and provide high quality services.

A partnership was established and protocol signed between those parts of the public administration working vocational education and training (including the public education and training providers), employers' representatives, and workers representatives.

They worked together aiming to structure training provision to meet current and future training needs identified for the tourism sector. They wanted to raise workforce qualification levels continuously, and increase transparency and mobility of qualifications in the labour market through professional certification, based on competences and qualification standards.

The partnership working on these aims brought together different stakeholders with shared objectives. Its method brought about changes in the

public administration culture, making it adopt the philosophy of shared responsibilities and more result-oriented

In 2004, the partnership set out to formulate a short-term (three year) vision and a long-term (10 year) vision. It agreed a working method to develop a sectoral qualifications system and established lines of communication between partners. It then devised priority action plans. The second development stage covered operation of the priority action plans. A third stage will merge these into a multi-annual training plan for 2008-13.

### 2.1.1. First stage

Short-term needs were defined first and responsibilities divided among partners. A start was made by harmonising training provision and standards through a modular approach to which all training providers must adhere. Recognition, validation and certification system of academic and occupational competences was improved and opportunities to use ICTs for training purposes were researched.

The group's 10-year vision included: making a secondary school diploma the minimum standard for entering tourism related occupations; linking formal and non-formal learning modalities in an open and flexible curricular model allowing for mobility between different training systems; organising competence-based continuing training; and increasing participation in training to the European average by promoting a lifelong learning culture.

Priority action plans covered seven critical areas, each with its own objective:

AREA	OBJECTIVE
Competences, certification and training standards	To design a common training and certification framework, based on competence standards.
Communication	To promote communication between the different training providers and certification entities by mapping the entire provision of training and certification and by establishing national, regional and local communication channels.
Tripartite regulation of the training and qualification system for tourism	To create the structure and instruments for the regulation and operation of the training and qualification system for the tourism sector.
Consultancy and in-company training	To help companies to raise their level of organisation, management and human resources qualifications to EU standards.
Social valorisation of tourism occupations	To increase the social image of tourism occupations through an awareness raising campaign.

Promotion of training	To reinforce qualifications through vocational education and training, emphasising mechanisms related to collective bargaining, job progression, and the recognition and validation of competences.
Multi-annual training plan for tourism	To develop a multi-annual training plan that covers the development of methodologies for gathering information and analysing this information, for establishing annual objectives, and for defining financial needs and allocating sources.

### 2.1.2. Second stage

During the second stage, sectoral scenarios were developed following a future-oriented methodology. Sectoral scenarios are tools used to anticipate competence needs in different activity sectors. They can help to improve the effectiveness of training and the competitiveness of the sector as a whole.

To accomplish this aim, the Portuguese developed scenarios representing possible future outcomes for each sector's activities to provide guidelines for each company's competitive performance against the total sector development. They also aimed to anticipate competences for the next 10 years and provide guidelines for innovation in training.

The scenarios are not actual forecasts; they are much more than that. They represent the total of all possible outcomes. The aim of a scenario is not to predict, but confront decision makers with possibilities. It simulates what could or should occur in the future, helping to answer two questions:

- what should be done now to prepare for a possible scenario?
- what must be done in the future if a certain situation does occur?

In their scenario development, the Portuguese defined 'key forces' for qualifications trends, and 'given elements', 'uncertain elements' and 'scenario variables'. Key forces included sector specific elements, such as the type of tourism and the key markets. They also covered technological forces, such as the use of ICTs by prospective clients and within the sector. Finally, they included organisational issues such as hotel chain developments and specialisation trends.

Using these, they identified different configurations and chose the most relevant to shape a framework. From this framework, they deduced the actual and potential skill needs for 11 sector-specific occupational profiles (hotel managers, cooks, guides) and another six general profiles that were relevant but not exclusive to the sector (child minders, cleaners, drivers).

Sectors in many European countries follow similar initiatives. Methodologies may differ, but they all gather stakeholders around the table to agree priorities and actions to anticipate change in sectors.

The UK sectoral skills councils have sector agreements, in which such actions are cofunded by public sources (see Chapter 4). In France and Flanders sectoral conventions cover similar activities. In Turkey, the metal and engineering sector is developing its strategic training policy. In the Netherlands, such policies have been developed at the initiative of sectoral training and development funds. Under a Dutch government initiative to boost working and learning, special sectoral conventions have been developed to support participation in apprenticeship schemes and in validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## 3. From strategies to qualifications

Strategies and priorities need translating into tangible learning processes. In this context reference to 'learning processes' is in their broadest sense. Simply upgrading courses and programmes in isolation is not enough. The eventual aim of innovative measures is a flexible and coherent system of lifelong learning as skills in a curriculum today may be obsolete tomorrow. This is where qualifications come in.

### 3.1. Definitions

Some basic definitions are important because qualifications and competences are sometimes confused.

What defines a qualification? A qualification is a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process and is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

What is a competence? Competence means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal and/or methodological abilities in work or study situations and in professional and/or personal development.

A competent person is not necessarily a qualified person, but a qualified person should be competent and a competent person could be qualified.

### 3.2. Stakeholder expectations

Different stakeholders in education and training have different expectations of qualifications.

Employers use them to identify competences during the recruitment process. They expect qualifications to be relevant and specific. They use them to assess adaptability, accountability, return on investment and meet legal obligations.

Individuals have their own expectations. They want their qualification to improve their mobility, career progression, personal development and

recognise their competences. In contrast with employers, they expect their qualifications to be portable and broad, making it easier to change jobs.

Society and a country's authorities (as the prime financiers of education and training) want something too. They want to develop educated and active citizens, people who contribute to society, with basic numeracy and literacy skills. They may want qualifications that confirm a country's cultural identity. They want to see their investment rewarded and may use qualifications to increase the accountability of institutions. Further, they want a qualified, employable, and mobile workforce.

### 3.3. Lifelong learning

It must be borne in mind that qualifications are negotiated social constructs that change. One development that has particularly affected the perspective on qualifications is the drive towards a lifelong learning culture.

Just a few decades ago, there was a general emphasis on solid basic education where qualifications focused on the need for education and the entry level in the labour market. Employers used qualifications to select new labour market entrants. Education ministries were the main financiers and owners of qualifications. There was focus on delivery control and education was input-based. Initial education and continuing training qualifications were not closely linked.

In an environment that promotes lifelong learning, qualifications play a significantly different role. Today, there is more emphasis on mobility and progression. The role of continuing training has increased and, therefore, that of continuing training qualifications. Also as a result, initial and continuing training are being driven closer. As mobility increases, qualifications are becoming a labour market tool for job changers as well as job entrants. New constructions of jointly funded qualifications and coownership are appearing among various public and private stakeholders. There is increased focus on employability and qualifications are becoming outcome-based to support and even promote alternative learning routes.

### 3.4. Parallel systems

These new qualification constructions and alternative learning routes mark the emergence of parallel qualification systems where the national education

system is no longer the sole issuer of qualifications. The world of work is designing its own certification systems that are often linked to industry and control standards.

Companies and organisations increasingly use competence management systems in their human resource development. Elaborate examples of company-based systems can be found in multi-national companies such as McDonalds, Telefonica and Swiss Life that want to stimulate their large pools of talent to develop themselves through competence-assessment systems linked to career development opportunities.

Often standards are developed at sectoral level in times of skill challenges, typically when a sector cannot wait for the national education system to come to its rescue. The IT industry is a good example of a sector where developments move so fast that traditional education systems cannot keep up and industry standards supplement basic training in regular education. Good examples also come from the building sector, where sectoral certification systems were set up in many countries to respond to needs for better recycling of building materials. Specialised training providers also develop their own qualifications and offer them to specific sectors, for example, in banking, most notably in the UK.

Using modular training for employable skills, national labour ministries and employment services have been developing their own competing certification systems to recognise short intensive training programmes for unemployed people.

Finally, there appear new (inter)national norms for certification by bodies that are specialised in standard setting and certification, such as the EN/ISO/IEC17024 on personnel certification procedures or specialised ISO standards developed for specific groups of personnel.

### 3.5. Frameworks

This free development of alternative certification methods obviously has implications for how 'systems' are regulated, and quality and relevance assured. The policy response has been to develop national qualification frameworks. These can provide an operational framework for providers with new methods of qualification and certification. For those needing qualification, they can improve trust and transparency. By safeguarding comparability without hampering diversification and development of new learning pathways, they can ensure that qualifications gained in a limited environment are broadly

recognised. This results in better opportunities for progression for workers and supports labour market mobility.

Qualification frameworks generally move the focus of the authorising partner in the certification process from narrowly defined inputs to broadly descriptive results. Such frameworks generally refer only to minimum learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Levels of qualifications, as assessment and certification requirements are defined. Introducing a national qualification framework implies a move from a situation where certification is a consequence of attending a defined form of instruction to a situation where certification is a consequence of successfully passing an assessment. The philosophy is that there are many alternative ways of learning and it does not matter that much how you learned it, as long as you can prove that you can do it.

The latter increases the value of the outcomes to be evaluated and the assessment procedures require closer involvement of the world of work. This is where groups of sectoral partners, representing the worlds of work and learning, come back into the picture.

### 3.6. A role for sectors

Partnering sectors can provide better and more current insight in the changing demands of their section of the labour market than training providers or education authorities acting alone. This allows for a more relevant definition of learning content and a more accurate assessment of competences. Sectors can also provide a structural input in the development and maintenance of qualifications, that individual employers can not offer.

Their potential role is not limited to identification and evaluation. Key issues to agree among sectoral partners include the relevance, level, breadth and content of education and training. Even in financing and governance, sectoral partnerships can form a strong and constructive force.

If sectors, with their intimate knowledge of skill needs, are the preferred partners in qualification development, then why are national qualifications still preferable over sectoral qualifications?

Obviously, nationally defined and recognised qualifications are in the interest of workers who seek to progress through their working lives beyond the confines of one restricted sector. National qualifications facilitate and can even encourage mobility. National qualifications as opposed to sectoral qualifications have great advantages for sectors too, because, although

qualifications from different sectors are not always linked, they often are related. Many competences required in one sector are equally in demand in others. National coordination of qualification structures can filter general from specific needs and streamline learning processes in general education.

National qualifications also allow some level of comparability among different sectors. As such they can better safeguard workers' rights, access to benefits and privileges. They also increase people's opportunities for progression along an individual track.

Below are some examples of sectoral qualifications in France, developed to meet the needs for updating and continuing education.

### 3.7. Translating French sector strategies into improved qualifications

The two largest sectors in France are the metal manufacturing industry, which represents two million workers, and the building sector, which recruits 100 000 people each year, 15 000 in newly created jobs. In both sectors social partners develop sectoral qualifications.

#### 3.7.1. Joint qualification certificates

Joint qualification certificates (JQCs) are pivotal to vocational qualification in France. A joint qualification certificate is a certification issued by professionals that someone masters the required skills for a particular activity.

JQCs reflect the qualification needs of the sector and are developed for specific activities for which there is no equivalent degree or professional title. They enjoy sector-wide recognition. There are about 210 JQCs in the metal manufacturing industry, used by more than 15 000 companies in the sector.

New JQCs are typically proposed by one or more sector unions. Their content is developed by joint technical groups that have social partner representatives from all sectors. The final decision to create the certificate is taken by the national joint committee of employment of the sector, whose role is to promote vocational training to match labour market developments.

The advantage of JQCs is the speed of the system. It takes three to six months to create a new JQC compared to three to five years to create a new degree with the Ministry of Education. Creation also includes an updating process so that JQCs always reflect the reality of the activity in companies.

### **3.7.2. An example from the building industry: initiating a certificate**

In 2006, the national joint committee of employment for the building sector decided to create a JQC 'craftsman in flooring and carpeting'. The work was initiated and led by two employers' unions because there was a lack of certification for this specific activity. There were no matching degrees from the Ministry of Education. Neither was there a matching vocational title from the Ministry of Labour.

To create this JQC, the two leading employers' unions had to fill in a request proving the need for it. This preparation work was validated by the joint technical group. Finally, the national joint committee for employment agreed to create the JQC. It is being registered at the national registry of vocational certification.

### **3.7.3. An example of the metal manufacturing industry: maintaining sectoral qualifications**

In the metal manufacturing industry, the first JQCs were created in 1987. There is a need to adapt and renew the oldest JQCs to take into account evolution in the market, technology and manufacturing process. There have also been many changes to the method of describing activities, competences and how to evaluate them. The maintenance process focuses on three issues.

This work is done by the metal manufacturing industry union. It concentrates on the 70 most frequently used JQCs of the sector. The request to renew a JQC can be issued either by the joint technical group, which believes it needs to be updated, or from a union wishing to formalise companies' needs. The updating activity and evaluation of the frames of reference is done in working groups with professionals carrying out the activities in companies led by a union expert. After formalisation, the request to update is examined and validated by the joint technical group before submission to the national joint committee for employment.

### **3.7.4. New trends in sectoral qualifications**

Currently, JQCs are recognised only in their sector of creation, except for the few accepted by the Ministry of Education as fully cross-sectoral. This is acceptable because JQCs correspond to specific activities in their sector of origin. There are some activities common to several sectors, such as those relating production lines, logistics or maintenance, so there is need for multi-sectoral recognition of qualifications similar in nature. Such multi-sectoral recognition benefits the employees and employers. Employees can use a qualification acquired in another sector. Employers could more easily access

a larger pool of potential employees without lengthy assessment procedures.

For these reasons, four sectors (drugs, metal manufacturing industry, textiles and paper and cardboard) in France signed a multilateral agreement to develop inter-industry joint qualification certificates. With their agreement they hope to build common definitions and terms of reference for similar professional activities, recognise inter-industry JQC validity, facilitate employee mobility and increase employability.

Three inter-industry JQCs have been created so far. They cover the skills and competences required for industrial equipment machinists, logisticians, and technicians in industrial maintenance.

Multisectoral working groups are set up to identify common professional activities and then define the activity and its evaluation reference framework. These groups comprise professionals from the different sectors, led by an expert in methodology to create the reference frameworks. Once they have been created, each sector goes through the standard process of creating a JQC until the different national joint committees of each sector agree to create and recognise the new inter-industrial JQC.

The French example shows that sectoral qualifications and qualifications from the national initial vocational education system can coexist in harmony. It also shows that developing sectoral qualifications is followed by their maintenance. The maintenance process for qualifications is an excellent opportunity to review their relevance and adapt to changing needs as most changes in the labour market are in existing jobs, not in newly created ones.

Acknowledging that sectoral and national qualifications can coexist raises the question of the extent to which they are related and whether they should be linked. Mechanisms are being created to incorporate different qualifications in common frameworks. Such a framework can help clarify the relationship between qualifications. It can also help to recognise common parts among different qualifications, in turn promoting progression and mobility.

Romania is currently developing such a framework.

### 3.8. Developments in Romania

Romania has been reforming its vocational education and training system since the middle of the 1990s. In the past decade it introduced demand-led competence-based qualifications.

Technical and vocational education (TVET) is training for labour market entrants or students who want to continue their studies at a higher level. In initial vocational education, training standards are broader than the requirements of any one single occupation. They normally build on several occupational standards, as well as general requirements to progress to higher levels.

More such progression routes to higher levels have been created in Romania. Changes are being implemented by the National Centre for the Development of Vocational Education. Supported by the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family – an alternative work-based apprenticeship route – is under development. In adult learning a certification system has been introduced based both on occupational and training standards used in initial vocational education and training. The National Adult Training Board is in charge of this system.

Quality assurance mechanisms are being strengthened to ensure more emphasis on quality by providers and increased attention being given to assessment and the role of assessors. Two new quality assurance agencies for pre-university and university education were established last year.

Since 2000, there have been experiments with validation of non-formal and informal learning in several sectors. In 2003, the option to obtain a qualification or certificate through validation of non-formal and informal learning was widened to all sectors. Some 32 assessment centres have been established all over the country, accredited by the National Adult Training Board.

### **3.8.1. Towards a national framework**

Since 2003, the Romanians have been working on a national qualification framework. Originally this focused on integrating the TVET and continuing vocational training (CVT) qualification systems, but recently the Romanians started work to improve the links between higher and vocational education.

Romanian sectors play an important role in developing the framework. Before 2004, there was ad hoc involvement in validation, development and maintenance of qualifications, although some sectors had been quite active since the late 1990s. In 2004, the National Adult Training Board was nominated as the national qualification authority and a tripartite agreement signed between the government and social partners to establish sectoral committees. Since then, 21 sectoral committees have been established involving the main employers' organisations, trade unions in each sector and, in some cases, other expert organisations from the sector.

The Bologna process provided a clear European framework for qualifications in higher education. The three cycle structure was fully implemented and the

definition of higher education qualifications, based on learning outcomes and a credit system is under development. Quality assurance has been strengthened and special attention is paid to developing relevant higher education qualifications that meet labour market needs, since most university graduates enter the labour market. In 2005 the APART agency for university enterprise cooperation was established as the new national agency to support the development of higher education qualifications. Under a modified name, Acpart, the agency develops and maintains a national register of higher education qualifications.

During the European Commission's consultation process on European qualifications framework, Romania committed itself to establishing one integrated framework. In 2006, the technical development requirements were identified by the National Adult Training Board, Acpart, sectoral committees and national education and labour authorities.

### 3.8.2. The road ahead

Although there is consensus about the development needs, there is no official national vision laid down in a policy document. Existing levels need reviewing, as there are parallel systems used in higher education and vocational education and training. The outcome will be a new national eight level system.

Qualification and certification systems need to be aligned, but respecting the requirements for different types of qualifications. Registers need to be developed and integrated and made accessible to learners, providers and employers. A credit system for vocational education and training and higher education should be established.

One of the main achievements of Romanian efforts is the recognition that the national qualifications framework (NQF) is a partnership. Roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and institutions have become much clearer during the past two years. However, to consolidate progress, the roles and responsibilities of the National Qualification Authority, sectoral committees, educational standards development bodies and quality assurance bodies need to be formalised and funding sources identified to ensure sustainability of the system.

Successful implementation of the Romanian NQF is no longer a technical issue, but a social one. Only the need for coherence based on consensus among the various stakeholders can drive progress. Further, developing the role of sectors must be prioritised to ensure that the system is sustainable and demand-led.

## 4. Establishing sectoral partnerships

Previous sections covered the general principles of sectoral partnership, but may raise more questions than answers. After all, how can we put all these principles to practice within sectors? How are sectoral structures established and developed? Who is involved? Who takes the lead? Who is responsible for what? What are appropriate organisational and legal frameworks?

Such questions are best answered by looking at examples of how sectoral partnerships work in practice in countries that have mechanisms supporting them. We open this chapter with a case study from the UK where the Skills for Business network comprises 25 sector skills councils operating around the Sector Skills Development Agency.

### 4.1. Sector skills councils in the UK

In the UK, the Sector Skills Development Agency has been responsible for funding, supporting and monitoring a network of sector skills councils since 2002.

This Sector Skills Development Agency is a non-departmental public body whose chair and chief executive are appointed by the secretary of state for education and skills. An employer-led board provides additional strategic support and advice.

In brief, the Sector Skills Development Agency's responsibilities are to:

- fund, support and monitor the performance of sector skills councils;
- ensure quality standards across the Skills for Business network;
- ensure that qualifications and training are designed to meet sector needs;
- provide minimum cover for sectors without a sector skills council;
- ensure that generic skills are effectively covered in the work of the sector skills councils;
- promote best practice sharing and benchmarking between sectors;
- gather and disseminate labour market intelligence.

Each of the 25 sector skills councils is an employer-led, independent organisation that covers a specific sector in the UK. Their key goals are to:

- reduce skills gaps and shortages by making sure that the workforce has updated skills that meet labour market needs, and so reducing bottlenecks where specific jobs have too many open vacancies;
- improve productivity, business and public service performance;
- increase opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce,
- improve learning opportunities, through apprenticeships, higher education and national occupational standards.

Sector skills councils are a forum for employers to express the skills and productivity needs pertinent to their sector. Through sector skills councils, employers engage in dialogue with the government and devolved administration departments across the UK. They have greater impact on policies affecting skills and productivity and increased influence with education and training partners. They also have access to substantial public investment.

All sector skills councils are licensed by the secretary of state for education and skills, in consultation with ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Together, the sector skills councils cover approximately 85 % of the UK workforce. The Sector Skills Development Agency provide cover for those industries outside the sector skills councils (around 15 % of the UK workforce) and actively engages with trade unions and professional bodies in this role.

#### **4.1.1. Sector skills council licensing procedure**

Sector skills councils are licensed for periods of up to five years. Groups of employers interested in forming a sector skill council work with a Sector Skills Development Agency business consultant to prepare a formal expression of interest. This stage takes approximately six weeks, including a vetting procedure by public bodies in England, Wales and Scotland. The expression of interest must make a convincing case for the new council.

After approval, the prospective sector skills council enters the development phase. This takes around six months. They are supported by the Sector Skills Development Agency which issues a six-month development contract and agrees the scale of development funding available.

During the development stage, the sector skills council must produce a full business case, showing how it will satisfy the requirements for licence, its priorities and targets. The main components of this case are a comprehensive

market assessment of the essential skills and productivity needs of the sector, a five year strategic plan, and an 18-month business plan.

An important element to note is that the licensing procedure scrutinises how representative the proposed sectoral skills councils are. It is deemed essential that they are employer-led and have direct employer involvement in their management. They must also be able to demonstrate their lines of communication with employers in all parts of the sector. They must also demonstrate that they follow excellent governance standards, a professional and detailed understanding of their sector's skills needs and how meeting them will contribute to continuous improvement within the sector. They must prove extensive and active engagement with employers in all parts of the sector across the UK. They must be actively engaged in cooperation with the government and its agencies to influence policies, leading to a shared understanding of skill needs and joint action and resulting in improved productivity and services. Finally they must demonstrate sound management of all their work.

Assessing this full business case normally takes 11 to 13 weeks and needs to be approved by Sector Skills Development Agency Board, after an independent assessment report. If the board approve the proposal, a recommendation for licence is sent to the secretary of state for education and skills, and a contract is negotiated with the sector skills council. The whole procedure from starting the initiative to obtaining a license for five years and subsidies takes about 10 months.

As we can see from this example, in the UK employers take the initiative to establish sectoral partnerships for training, with a central coordinating body – the Sector Skills Development Agency – providing the link between the sector skills council and the government.

In other EU countries, the sectoral partnership mechanisms are similar. A centrally-operating agency is the reference point and often the quality watchdog for a large group of sector councils. The nucleus can be placed within the central administration or slightly outside it, as in the UK.

Its responsibilities need to include support to the different partnerships and maintaining an overview of their activities to avoid duplication and defend national and individual interests. This overview puts them in a position to set benchmarks for all sectors.

In Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Poland, Slovenia and Switzerland, chambers of commerce and industry or chambers of crafts play an important role in organising sectoral partnerships in vocational education and training. In Austria, Germany, Poland and Switzerland the chambers oversee the dual training pathways. In several new Member States, chambers were organised

among sectors. Where competing independent employers' organisations did not develop or lacked interest in human resource development issues, the chambers become a leading force for sectoral partnerships.

Social partners' representatives from sectors lead the sectoral committee structures in Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Romania and Finland. This allows for links with sectoral dialogue through collective bargaining. It also means that sectoral bodies may take a different look at qualifications. Employers tend to focus on productivity gains and a better deployment of human capital, while trade unions may defend the interests of individuals in career development and the portability of qualifications. This may be reflected in the breadth of qualifications and skills.

It is, however, always important that sectoral partnerships have good business links.

A closer look at the composition of partnerships in the Netherlands shows how responsibilities are divided and who exactly participates.

## 4.2. Dutch centres of expertise

In the Netherlands, 18 centres of expertise are grouped under one umbrella organisation, the Association of Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (COLO). COLO monitors socially relevant developments and regional, national and international education and labour market policy. The governing body of COLO consists of representatives from the centres of expertise and delegates from employers' organisations and trade unions. It is a typical example of the Dutch 'polder model' where COLO is accountable to its members and social partners, rather than to the central government, for its services.

One of these 18 centres, Processing, Environmental, Laboratory and Photonics Technologies (PMLF) is the centre of expertise for vocational training in the processing industry and laboratories and covers the entire processing industry, from paper mills to pharmaceutical plants. It is responsible for development and maintenance of a transparent qualification structure in its sector. For these activities PMLF receives financial support from the Dutch Ministry of Education.

PMLF is part of the VAPRO-OVP Group that also manages a sectoral training fund for the processing industry. This fund is partially maintained through contributions from all enterprises in the processing industry, based on the collective labour agreement. The training fund has been successful in

attracting substantial European Social Fund subsidies for training and retraining of adults.

A third part of the VAPRO-OVP group is an international consultancy company VAPRO-OVP plc. This consultancy branch assists individual companies in developing tailor-made training programmes, and identifying training development needs.

The VAPRO-OVP group was developed by social partners from the relevant sectors. On its board it has representatives of the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers, the two largest Dutch federations of trade unions and the Association of the Dutch Chemical Industry.

VAPRO-OVP employs some 100 staff, represents 700 processing companies and 750 laboratories, covers 15 000 students at any time of whom 9 000 are adults and 6 000 young people. It works with 65 schools, of which 30 are public the rest are private. Its annual turnover is around EUR 15 million, of which only one quarter comes from the Dutch authorities.

Work on PMLF and other VAPRO-OVP related tasks is mainly performed by contracted experts. Apart from these, professionals from the companies and social partner organisations in the relevant sectors can be involved in the qualifications development and maintenance processes, examinations and the in-company training that is part of the dual training pathways. Moreover, sector representatives in the group's board strongly influence the strategic lines and the new initiatives that the sectoral organisation develops.

In the Netherlands, several other sectors combine the functions of expertise centres with management of sectoral training funds and consultancy services. Others are smaller in size and focus only on the expertise centre function. Exceptionally, sectoral bodies may have their own training centres. Recently some of the smaller expertise centres and those in sectors in decline have merged. Many have been in existence for over 50 years and have changed roles overtime. The Dutch model for sectoral partnerships does not offer a standardised formula for sectoral partnership that is identical for all sectors, but rather a framework that responds to changing needs within sectors.

The Dutch coordinating institution COLO stands closer to the sectoral partnerships than the UK's Sector Skills Development Agency, which is closer to the central authorities. In Denmark, the monitoring of sixty professional committees overseeing vocational education and training in different sectors is entirely in the hands of the education ministry. While the partnerships tend to be steered from the world of work, the overall monitoring and to some extent quality control of sectoral partnership activities can be positioned anywhere – often closer to or even within the public administration.

In the Netherlands and in Denmark, the partnership bodies license and support host companies for apprenticeships. These are an important part of vocational education in both countries.

The complex nature of partnership mechanisms in various EU countries betrays one important characteristic. They have developed organically. Sectoral partnership is a gradual process of sharing responsibility between government and social partners that needs time to evolve into a mechanism that suits the industry, employment and social cultures of the country in which they operate.

Mutual trust is therefore imperative in sectoral partnership and it is important to involve all stakeholders in education and training. Much of the potential for success of sectoral partnerships lies in the level of organisation of those represented in partnerships.

A sectoral partnership cannot function if companies, employers or employees in a sector do not organise themselves sufficiently to entrust their representation to one or more representative organisations. In a continuously changing and developing labour market a sector that cannot get its act(ors) together will have more difficulty to attract and keep skilled labour within the sector. Companies will have to compensate for this with higher wages and higher training investments.

Finally, sectoral partnerships normally deal with issues covered by different ministries (education, labour, finance, and other line ministries). Different line ministries with different agendas and lacking mutual trust can bring any promising sectoral partnership to a grinding halt.

## 5. Funding sectoral partnerships

The examples in the previous sections show that sectoral partnership involves many people and involves considerable funds.

They all indicate a transfer of what was traditionally in transition countries government responsibility into the hands of sectoral partnerships. This transfer of activities should free some funds that can function as core funding for partnerships.

This is, however, unlikely to be sufficient. First, because the role of the government (and thus the finances allocated) was far more limited in a static environment than in one of constant change today. Second, because learning paths are becoming increasingly individualised. Third, the philosophy of lifelong learning brings a considerable increase in time spent in training per head of the population.

### 5.1. Pooling funds and individual levies

To start with the latter two points above, it can be argued that the relationship between cost and benefit of learning today is becoming so clear that beyond initial education some form of beneficiary payment can be levied. Although the public authorities benefit from an educated tax-paying workforce, so too do individuals and the sectors themselves.

It is important to remember that sectors comprise enterprises whose competitive environment demands they invest in updating the skills of their employees lest they simply perish.

As both individuals (employees) and companies (employers) have a direct monetary interest in effective training, they can be asked to commit themselves financially to developing skills. Discussing the precise rationing of contributions could be part of the process of collective bargaining. It must be remembered that the demand for efficiency and on-the-job training increases as contributions are charged because the opportunity cost<sup>(1)</sup> of leaving work for education and training can be high.

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(1) Opportunity costs are indirect costs, mainly in lost income due to lost opportunities.

Although beyond the scope of this publication, sectoral training funds that share the burden of training in companies proved effective in labour market training. One type of sectoral training fund is in the Dutch example above. Many countries charge employers a national levy, typically on wages and not turnover, that is then redistributed among the different sector, giving the public authorities leverage to respond to priorities. For individuals, training credit methods are widely considered as a serious future option for rationing training time among citizens. Once they have used up their credit they will be asked to contribute financially.

## 5.2. Cooperation

As activities are splintered for efficiency among sectors, it is imperative to identify and recognise the areas where fragmentation is not very cost-effective. In the British and Dutch examples, there is a clear central element – a nucleus, a central agency or an umbrella organisation, that monitors duplication and, as in the UK example, ‘ensures that generic skills are effectively covered (in the work of the sector skills councils)’.

Finally, the EU, mainly through the European Social Funds, the Leonardo da Vinci programmes and its successor, offers many opportunities for cofunding training activities and the structural development of sectoral partnership. Cofunding here implies that access to these funds is conditional on sectoral partnerships matching the EU financial support with own funds. The details of these are also beyond the scope of this document. Much can be learned from EU peers and partner organisations. This alone is a good incentive (along with others discussed in Chapter 6) for developing horizontal links, not just with other sectors in the same country, but also with those in other European countries.

## 6. The international perspective

Some of the core arguments for sectoral partnership – employability, mobility, growth – are also top priorities in EU policy development. In recent years, the European Commission has capitalised on this convergence of European national and industrial agendas with the principles of its Lisbon process.

In higher education, the European Commission has fully endorsed the initiatives coming from the multilateral Bologna agreement. This aimed at aligning better European national systems of higher education and increasing graduates' employability and mobility across the continent. A European credit transfer system for higher education students is now widely used.

In vocational education and training, such international cooperation was largely lacking until, in 2001, a meeting of European directors general in vocational education and training in Belgium, began what would become the Copenhagen process, after the city where its first declaration was signed. On 30 November 2002, under the Danish Presidency, ministers from 31 European countries, the European social partners and the European Commission agreed collective priorities and strategies in European vocational education and training <sup>(2)</sup>. The main aims of the Copenhagen process are to increase labour mobility across Europe and improve access to lifelong learning through transparency and recognition of European qualifications.

Four priorities for enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training were identified:

- strengthening the European dimension in vocational education and training,
- improving transparency, information and guidance systems,
- recognising competences and qualifications,
- promoting quality assurance.

In the two years that followed, the Council of European education ministers came to some important agreements. These included a resolution on lifelong guidance, principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, a common framework for quality assurance in vocational

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<sup>(2)</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/copenhagen/copenhagen\\_declaration\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/copenhagen/copenhagen_declaration_en.pdf) [cited 1.2.2008].

education and training and the Europass single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences.

The latest and perhaps most significant offshoot of the Copenhagen process was a recommendation for a European qualifications framework (EQF) probably the most significant development for sectoral partnerships for education and training.

EU countries that have established mechanisms for sectoral partnership are aligning their practice with the general principles of these new Europe-wide agreements. EU countries and future Member States where sectoral partnership is still in its infancy have an arguably easier task priming their activities for broader European alignment. Future sectoral partnerships would be wise to familiarise themselves with European developments before moving on to the actual definition of qualifications.

## 6.1. The European qualifications framework

The EQF <sup>(3)</sup> is a translating mechanism for European qualifications. It is a neutral international reference point. Importantly, it is based on learning outcomes – not on curricular inputs. In practice this means that it takes into account the knowledge, skills and competence acquired through all forms of learning – formal and informal. It describes eight generic qualification levels.

To avoid misunderstandings, it may also be helpful to describe what the EQF is not. The EQF cannot define new qualifications and the EQF is not meant to replace national or sectoral qualifications frameworks. It is meant to turn diversity from a disadvantage into a strength. As such, it serves a function not dissimilar to the European credit transfer system (ECTS) in higher education. It is a tool to connect a multitude of different sets of qualifications. It is different from ECTS as it aims is also to make systems more transparent in terms of quality statements and levels.

The EQF is a cooperative tool. Its use and implementation is strictly voluntary and without legal obligations for Member States or sectors. Having said this, the EQF responds to a real need and has been welcomed by Member States. For obvious reasons, these would much rather see one overarching European framework than individual bilateral agreements between all countries. The latter would easily become very complex.

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<sup>(3)</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html) [cited 4.2.2008].

In 2007, the EQF was adopted as a Recommendation of the European Parliament and the European Council. Many EU national governments have already committed themselves to using the EQF as a reference tool to compare the qualification levels. According to the Recommendation, Member States should have operational qualifications frameworks linked to the EQF by 2010 at the latest. By 2012, all new qualifications and Europass documents must contain references to the EQF levels. National governments will use learning outcomes when defining qualifications and promote the validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning. They will designate national coordination points to coordinate links between their national qualifications system and the EQF. They will also ensure participation by all relevant national stakeholders including social partners, sectors and experts.

This is obviously important for new sectoral partnerships wanting to work in qualifications development. To ensure international transparency, they must relate all new qualifications to the EQF. New sectoral partnerships should familiarise themselves with the specific demands of the EQF from the outset.

## 6.2. International qualifications and frameworks

More and more European companies operate in different countries. It is not only larger multinational companies that have been transformed into truly international corporations, but also a growing number of SMEs. In Romania, for example, 18 000 Italian companies are registered. For such reasons, companies and sectors are interested in development of competences and qualifications that are valid beyond the borders. European-wide cooperation is increasing.

There is a growing number of international qualifications, a trend that started in higher education, but has since spread to vocational education and training. The advantage of an international qualification is obvious: it responds to an international need and gives the holder access to the international labour market, offering more career possibilities. However, there are also disadvantages. Development costs of international qualifications are substantially higher and it is difficult to link them to national qualification systems and endorse them among international partners. Moreover, they do not offer the same value (in currency or civil effect) in professional life or the pursuit of further studies. International qualifications are difficult to link to national progression requirements or wage levels. They do not always respond well to local needs. Another disadvantage is that they need to be maintained,

but since they are often the result of a project and not part of a system with arrangements for maintenance it is difficult to ensure that the qualification is kept up to date.

However, in spite of these disadvantages, the number of international qualifications is growing. Apart from international qualifications, international sectoral qualification systems are developing as well. The Leonardo da Vinci programmes played an important role in these developments.

Below are some examples of what is currently being developed at the European level.

- **ICT sector**

The ICT sector is very international and developing at high speed. At the initiative of the ICT industry the European Committee for Standardisation is developing an information society standardisation system and has launched a European e-competence framework. The idea is to create a European language for ICT competence descriptions. A catalogue is being developed that includes typical ICT competences (like project and risk management, enterprise architecture) as well as wider competences (such as communication skills, innovation ability). Cooperation is focusing on ICT practitioners, rather than ICT users. Proficiency profiles are being developed and include common descriptors for network administrators and web administrators. The European e-competence framework is linked to the EQF.

In Germany social partners and ICT centres of expertise have already established a certification system for ICT occupations (Cert-IT) that covers 27 (international) ICT profiles. It could be seen as an embryonic model of the European framework.

- **Marketing**

The European Marketing Federation worked with providers and marketing associations from different Member States for many years, as training in marketing differs from country to country. The federation is promoting a European marketing qualification framework, as a tool to evaluate, compare and link local sectoral qualifications belonging in marketing, sales and communications management using EQF level descriptors and a professional mapping of functions developed in a Leonardo da Vinci project.

- **Logistics**

European social partners from the logistics sector, leading research institutions, companies and training providers have developed a European framework for

logistics which covers a range of jobs and sectors related to the transport sector.

This Novalog competence framework describes six logistics jobs – forklift driver, order picker, warehouse operator, logistics analyst, logistics controller and logistics engineer, analysed in 16 countries. For each job, tasks, activities and associated technical or relational competences were described. The jobs are grouped into two main functions: warehousing and logistics assistance.

- **International cooking certificate**

The International cooking certificate has been developed by a European network of training providers as a tool to qualify cooks working across Europe in restaurants but have no formal qualifications.

### 6.3. European (sectoral) social dialogue, an important link

Few companies in Europe make sufficient effort to develop the existing workforce. This may hamper opportunities for growth and development in the medium-term. Statistics show that while 80 % of equipment used in companies is less than 10 years old, 80 % of the workforce finished education and training more than 10 years ago.

Making Europe more competitive requires a bigger effort and European social partners to support and monitor efforts of national social partners in skills development. They focus on four priorities: identification of skill needs; recognition and validation of skills; better information, support and guidance; and more resources. A ‘framework for action’ <sup>(4)</sup> for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications was established in 2002 and social partners report progress on a yearly basis.

The framework for action is a product of the European social dialogue, which can include discussions, consultations, negotiations and joint action at European level.

European social dialogue can either be bipartite, involving employers and trade unions, or tripartite, including the European Commission. The latter is largely restricted to cross-sectoral discussions.

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<sup>(4)</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/social\\_dialogue/docs/eval\\_framework\\_III\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_dialogue/docs/eval_framework_III_en.pdf); [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/social\\_dialogue/docs/framework02\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_dialogue/docs/framework02_en.pdf) [cited 4.2.2008].

The European social dialogue complements national social dialogue in Member States and is regulated through the EU treaty <sup>(5)</sup>. According to Article 138 the European Commission must consult European social partners before submitting proposals in the social policy field. According to Article 139, European social dialogue may lead to contractual relations, including agreements.

Of particular interest for sectoral partnerships is the sectoral dialogue at European level. In 1998, the European Commission supported establishment of sectoral dialogue committees promoting dialogue among social partners in different European sectors. Currently 35 sectoral dialogue committees are in operation. Social partner organisations must apply jointly to the European Commission to take part in the European social dialogue. European organisations representing employers and workers must:

- relate to specific sectors, and organised at European level;
- consist of representative organisations which are part of several Member States' social partner structures, and have the capacity to negotiate agreements;
- have adequate structures to ensure effective participation in the work of the committees.

European sectoral social dialogue offers an opportunity for social partners to share common sectoral concerns with colleagues from Member States. European organisations involved in the European dialogue may have members in Member States, but also in candidate countries. To illustrate how the European dialogue can influence the work of sectoral partnerships at national level, below are a few examples from European sectors.

#### • **Agriculture**

After adopting a white paper on vocational training in 2001, the social partners signed a European agreement on training in agriculture in 2002 containing proposals to involve the social partners in organising vocational training and validation of skills. The agreement includes proposals for drawing up 'skills assessments' by employees and for recognising skills and experience gathered 'in the field', harmonisation of qualifications, and creation of a 'qualifications and skills booklet' to facilitate greater mobility.

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<sup>(5)</sup> Articles 138 and 139. In *Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and of the Treaty establishing the European Community*, p. 108-109. Luxembourg: Publications Office, 2006. Available from Internet: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2006:321E:0001:0331:EN:pdf> [cited 4.2.2008].

- **Chemical sector**

In 2005, the social partners adopted a joint declaration underlining the skills shortage in the chemical industry. It stated the mutual interest of employers and employees in investing in human resources. A working group was set up to analyse the situation relating to skills, qualifications, vocational training and lifelong learning and exchange good practice.

- **Commerce**

Since 2004, the social partners have joined a European project that designs practical training schemes for vocational schools and certifies specific qualification modules for the retail trade.

- **Electricity**

In a declaration adopted in 2000 on the social implications of the internal electricity market, the social partners highlighted the importance of training, retraining and redeploying workers following restructuring. In 2002, the social partners conducted a study to identify the future skill needs of the sector. They adopted a declaration in 2004, encouraging development of training plans, increasing the number of apprenticeships and plans for monitoring and evaluating actions.

- **Inland shipping**

Social partners in inland shipping are developing an inventory of professional qualifications in the EU. Their aim is to enhance mobility and to reach equivalence in professional qualifications. The final objective could be the definition of EU-wide professional qualification requirements.

- **Personal care**

Development of the workforce through training is a key topic in the personal care sectoral social dialogue committee. It created CD ROM-based training materials disseminated in 1999. Since 2002, the social partners have been working to increase quality standards through the mutual recognition of qualifications.

- **Private security**

In 2003, the sectoral social dialogue committee adopted a code of conduct for the sector, in which they agreed to promote basic, specialised and ongoing vocational training. In 2001, they developed a European vocational training manual for basic surveillance and in 2004 they published a European training manual on the prevention of occupational hazards.

- **Shipbuilding**

A finding of the 'LeaderSHIP 2015' group was the need to ensure development of a skilled workforce to meet new skill requirements. The social partners are working on skills and qualifications shortages and the image of the sector to attract highly qualified workers. They have created a dedicated working group on qualification and training to exchange good practice, promote recognition of qualifications throughout the EU and support development of skills, in particular concerning the openness to change of workers and firms.

### **Cedefop's Skillsnet and its activities**

In 2004, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) launched an international network on early identification of skill needs called Skillsnet <sup>(6)</sup> to provide a platform for dialogue and information exchange among experts and relevant stakeholders on new and changing skill needs as well as medium- to long-term outlook for skills in the labour market. Particular attention is paid to skill needs in sectors, companies and occupations. Skillsnet actively involves policy-makers, social partners, practitioners and researchers in discussion about research methods and outcomes. This ensures the acceptance, legitimacy and transfer of findings into policy and to foster the implementation of reforms.

Skillsnet organises regularly thematic workshops and conferences on innovative approaches and research methods as well as on skill needs in selected sectors. To date, three conferences on methods, systems, institutional frameworks and processes for early identification of skill needs were organised, while sectors of interest were tourism, nanotechnology, agri-food and forestry-wood. The health care sector will be tackled in 2008. The network's research results are published and disseminated by Cedefop, both electronically and in hard copy. Skillsnet also publishes newsletter and 'sector flashes' to summarise the main trends in a sector and related skill needs.

The most challenging Skillsnet project is establishing European skill needs forecasting system. A medium-term forecast of occupational skill needs was carried out in 2007 using comparative data available for 25 Member States, Norway and Switzerland. The forecast is based on macroeconomic projections and alternative scenarios and aggregates the results to which can be broken

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<sup>(6)</sup> Skillsnet has a website on Cedefop's European Training Village under the section 'Projects and networks' ([www.trainingvillage.gr/skillsnet](http://www.trainingvillage.gr/skillsnet)). For more information you can also contact Cedefop Skillsnet team: [skillsnet-team@cedefop.europa.eu](mailto:skillsnet-team@cedefop.europa.eu).

down by economic sectors, occupations and/or skills/qualifications. The timescale is the next 5-10 years. However, the model still needs modifying and refining. The initial stage deals with the demand side only and the complementary model for forecasting supply side will be developed in 2008.

In 2007, Skillsnet launched a new initiative to find a common European approach to enterprise surveys as a tool for identification of skill and occupation needs, shortages and gaps. To broaden and validate the knowledge base, it is necessary to complement the data from forecasts by other information. Enterprise surveys might be one of the possible sources. The main objective is to develop a set of tools to reliably identify future needs of occupations, skills, competences and qualifications in public and private enterprises in Europe.

Skillsnet has members from all over the world and from various target groups, research institutes, universities, policy-makers, ministries, social partners, businesses, training institutions, consultancies, and European and international organisations. Skillsnet welcomes all experts, active or interested in research and policy on early identification of skill needs to join the network. Applications may be submitted online on the Skillsnet website.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

The essence of sectoral partnership is in developing ongoing dialogue between different stakeholders with shared interests in education and training.

- Developing sectoral approaches is a gradual process. Sectoral committees become effective over time, generally through a process of learning by doing. This process teaches participants to work together and what initiatives are most effective in improving education and training in their sectors. Individual and groups of sector committees may evolve through a series of stages. Policy-makers and practitioners should expect change and for committees to adapt over time. The capacity to adapt should be built into committee structures and procedures.
- Making sectoral committees work is a shared responsibility between social partners and the public sector. It involves the development of partnerships and collaboration between different groups and stakeholders. The quality of people involved is important in determining how effective the sectoral approach is. Policy-makers and sectoral representatives need to look carefully at the people involved in the process – in some cases capacity building or training in the issues involved would help both employers and unions to make the best use of sectoral groups.
- Partnership through sectoral committees is an international practice used by many countries as a reform instrument to make training more relevant while developing lifelong learning systems. Different countries use different models. In some cases they may be bipartite, in others tripartite. Developing policies involves looking internationally to see how patterns and trends have developed in other countries. Awareness of problems commonly associated with sectoral partnership will help implementation.
- Sectoral committees can look to the future, not only the current state of training and education in their industries. Sectoral committees can help with forecasting or anticipating skill needs and monitoring trends in their industry. Policy-makers can use sectoral committees to identify solutions to training and education problems.
- Effective sectoral committees need to have a clear understanding of their role and purpose and strategy and priority setting are important. A clear perspective on the competence of sector committees can be developed

through regular planning processes, such as strategic and annual working plans to clarify objectives and monitor processes.

- A critical aspect of the work of sectoral committees is coordinating public bodies. In all systems, the government's attitude towards the committees is important. Similarly, there is a need for some horizontal coordination of sector committees to avoid the unnecessary duplication of activities. Conflicts of interest will occur between sectoral committees and public authorities. Public and sectoral representatives need to work with each other to understand each other's strengths and weaknesses with respect to education and training policy. Sectoral committees need to share information and experience. They must also understand their boundaries and overlapping activities.
- Funding is critical for sectoral committees. Various options are available, including complete and partial government support, industry levies, or mixed models involving contributions from all stakeholders, including trainees. Developers of sectoral committees must look at funding models as part of their strategic planning. They must be realistic about what they can undertake.
- In an increasingly international labour market, sectoral partners must be aware of international developments that may influence the relevance of their decisions.









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# Sectoral partnerships

This publication draws on the general principles of sectoral partnership for lifelong learning. Looking at some of the challenges different sectors face, such as international competition, free trade and technological advancement it asks how changes and challenges can be translated into human resource priorities and strategies.

Guided by practical examples from Europe, it considers how priorities and strategies can become qualifications and focuses on the practicalities of establishing sectoral partnerships. It discusses how sectoral partnerships can be funded, including training funds, individual contributions and the role of collective bargaining.

The international perspective and the European developments related to the Lisbon and Copenhagen processes are highlighted, examining areas where closer European integration is desired and how this can be achieved. Finally, it considers the resources available to support the development of sectoral partnerships in Europe.



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