

cedefop info

Vocational training in Europe 1/07

CEDEFOP/EU

Building a European VET area: a follow up to Helsinki

Taking as its starting point the conclusions of the December 2006 ministerial conference, which produced the Helsinki Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in the field of vocational education and training, Agora XXVI, *Building a European VET Area* (Thessaloniki, 26-27 April) organised by Cedefop in close cooperation with the European Commission and the German Presidency aimed to address some of the outstanding issues in the field. This conference brought together ministers and other policy makers, social partners, and practitioners from across Europe, with Commissioner Ján Figel' summing up the event.

Vocational education and training lies at the crossroads of several policy areas that are of increasing importance in today's demographic, economic and social circumstances. The Agora focused on three of these important policy questions: Which skills will be needed in the future? Why does Europe not invest more in training? How can vocational training tap the potential of older workers, migrants and the low-skilled - groups that at present have access to few learning opportunities?

The conference looked at evidence in order to support policy making in these fields, to prepare the ground for the next reviews of the Copenhagen process in 2008 and 2010, and to look beyond.

Further information:
www.cedefop.europa.eu/index.asp?section=3&sub=1&read=2339

CEDEFOP

Vocational universities, general training?

Agora conference reveals increasing but uneven integration between educational pathways

Even as recently as ten years ago, higher education seemed distant from the world of vocational training. But recently the idea of closely linking higher education with vocational education and training has been gaining momentum. The Agora Conference on this subject, held at Cedefop on 22-23 February 2007, highlighted the challenges inherent in successfully integrating general and technical knowledge in the future 'knowledge society'.

Most European countries are today facing the common challenge of providing all future

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Social partners get involved in developing the ECVET

In a conference held in Cedefop last February, social partner representatives from all over Europe were able to share information and views on how the new credit transfer system for vocational education and training should operate and in what ways it is expected to encourage mobility.

The European Social Partners Conference on ECVET (Thessaloniki, 12-13 February) co-organised with the German social partner organisations BDA and DGB, provided 93 participants from 24 European countries - representatives of European and national social partner organisations, ministerial and training bodies, the European Commission, Cedefop and the ETF - with detailed information on the technical specifications of the new system, the intention of which is to recognise vocational learning outcomes in vocational education and training across the EU. The conference is part of the formal consultation process launched by the Commission in November 2006.

The conference focused on the objectives of the consultation process and the practical consequences of the implementation of ECVET in the Member States and in the EU as a whole. Beyond the strictly technical side of the issue, the conference highlighted existing credit practices and devoted attention to pilot projects that are currently exploring ways to implement the system. The implications of ECVET on vocational education and training policies and lifelong learning strategies were discussed at some length, and separate sessions were devoted to issues of mobility and social dialogue.

The conference found that we are very close to a general consensus on the need for an ECVET system - or rather, that there is a consensus about the need for such a system, but debate continues on what precise form it should take. ECVET is based on units described in terms of learning outcomes. Credit points are a supplementary rather than an

essential part of the process of recognising these outcomes, but this point requires further discussion and elaboration. The challenge is to develop a simple tool of assured quality based on transparent procedures. After all, the ECVET is not simply a means to foster cross-border mobility; it will also make it easier to move within national systems, e.g. between VET and higher education. In terms of setting up the system, however, this 'internal' role may prove to be the greater challenge.

Another issue examined was the relationship between the development of the European Qualifications Framework and the ECVET. The purpose of both initiatives is to promote the transparency, comparability and recognition of qualifications and skills between countries and levels of qualifications and thus to provide a common currency through which all national and sectoral qualifications and competences could be compared, valued and converted. ECVET plays a particularly important role in this joint strategy, which was launched in 2002. The levels and learning outcomes defined within the EQF provide the basis for the ECVET, as a practical tool, to make it possible for individuals to transfer and accumulate learning outcomes across geographical and institutional borders.

The aim of the ECVET system is to make it easier for people to build on work and training experience acquired beyond national borders. To achieve this, all stakeholders, including the social partners, must commit themselves to working out the details.

Further information on the ECVET:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/ecvet/index_en.html

Source: Loukas Zahilas/ine

You will find articles on the development of the ECVET in the Member States on page 5.

CEDEFOP/EU

Cedefop/Photomuseum Award 2007



Photos: Sirio Magnabosco

Cedefop is pleased to announce the winners of the Cedefop/Photomuseum Photography Award 2007, organised in conjunction with the Thessaloniki Museum of Photography.

In its first year, the award attracted considerable attention, with 196 participants

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by extension, the labour market was discussed in some detail.

One of the bones of contention between higher and vocational education is the uneven push toward 'parity' between the two pathways. While there is an increasing vocational component to general education, higher education in most Member States remains closed to vocational students. Only Australia seems to offer a model of parallel but equal pathways, in which traffic moves in both directions.

As always, this Agora conference brought together policymakers, social partners and researchers for an open debate on this topical

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Letter from the Director



Dear readers,

At the Ministerial meeting of last December, which produced the Helsinki Communiqué on continued cooperation in VET in Europe, it was decided that Cedefop should

take on the responsibility of monitoring and reporting on policy developments across Europe that are related to the Copenhagen-Maastricht-Helsinki process.

The Helsinki Ministerial meeting allowed Cedefop the opportunity to take an inventory of what has been achieved and which major challenges remain. In my presentation at the meeting, I pointed out that basing qualifications on learning outcomes, as is the present trend, implies the responsibility of ensuring quality: it must be clear what these qualifications represent if we are to generate trust among countries, but also among learners and employers. The validation of work experience - of learning through working - is now understood to be a major factor for improving employability, according to the country reports. But it should not just be seen as the way to a career, but as a path to excellence, for both individual and society. In both these fields - of validation and quality assurance - we can now report that the Member States have made considerable progress over the past four years.

In fact, in some ways things have swung full circle. Apprenticeships, which may have been seen as a thing of the past, have acquired new meaning. They are no longer targeted only to the young, non-academic learner but to everyone - including the adult unemployed and students in higher education. Access to learning is now the key issue dominating the debate on vocational education and training. Demographic changes mean that more and more of the active members of society in the future will be older workers or migrants. We need to make sure that these groups are not left behind. This is also where guidance provision takes on a new importance: no longer a feature of upper secondary school, it becomes a lifelong accompaniment to learning.

The conundrum Europe has yet to solve is how to raise the proportion of high-skilled workers - a proportion in which it continues to lag behind its competitors. High-skills require both higher education and continuing vocational training, and Europe must find a way to provide both to workers who tend to drop off the learning trail after their 40s.

The priority to modernise vocational education and training remain valid. From now on, we need to focus on creating the right tools that will lead us to evidence-based policy, and which will lead to the right kind of investment in vocational education and training for Europe.

Aviana Bulgarelli
Director

CEDEFOP

Which skills for the future? Skillsnet goes beyond the crystal ball



Policy-makers, employers, employees, students, teachers, trainers, apprentices - all of these groups have their own interests, agendas and concerns. But there is one thing they all want to know: Which skills will be needed in the future?

This is not an easy question to answer. Cedefop, along with other European organisations, has repeatedly been asked to provide information on future needs. In today's economic environment, the need to 'jump the gun' - to anticipate skill and occupational needs - has become an expressed priority of most important policy documents in this field.

The need for more information about the future development of skills and competences feeds into many different policy areas affecting the society and economy of Europe: improving the transparency of European labour markets; increasing the skill levels of the population; preventing skill mismatches between supply and demand. In fact, successful forecasting of skill needs in Europe could help the EU achieve objectives set in its strategies for employment and lifelong learning (the Lisbon Agenda) and is thus of considerable importance for the development of an advanced knowledge-based society.

Cedefop is currently working on two related strands of this issue: on the early identification of new and emerging skills; and on forecasting future qualification and occupation needs.

Early identification of new and emerging skill needs

This strand investigates emerging needs for skills that have not yet been registered in related policies and statistics. Research on this issue, carried out within countries, regions, sectors, occupations and companies, addresses a number of questions, such as whether these new skills are durable or not; whether they cover a broad field of the labour market or only particular niches; whether there is a requirement for completely new skills, or for further development or enhancement of existing skills or for a combination of different skills. This information is of great use to policies that attempt to define and validate skills and knowledge and to embed these within curricula, training regulations and qualification standards - and, of course, to use them for vocational guidance and counselling.

Cedefop has been collaborating on this issue with the research institutions of several European countries since 2001. In 2004, in response to policy-makers' and social partners' demands that it coordinate future activities, Cedefop established Skillsnet, the international network on early identification of skill needs (www.trainingvillage.gr/skillsnet). Its aim is to raise the profile of relevant European activities and to provide a platform for the exchange of information.

To help turn findings into policy, Skillsnet actively involves policy-makers, social partners, practitioners and researchers in discussions about research methods and outcomes. Apart from encouraging the implementation of appropriate measures, this method of work also ensures wider recognition for Skillsnet itself.

To date, Skillsnet has gathered a broad spectrum of information about research and methods used for the early identification of skill needs. Furthermore, Skillsnet has co-organised several conferences and workshops that focus on emerging skill needs in particular sectors, including tourism, nanotechnology, agri-food and forestry, and has published background papers, proceedings and information sheets related to these events.

Forecasting future skill needs in Europe

Forecasting skill needs on the labour market - in the short, medium or longer term - refers to the expected future demand for certain occupations in an economy and its sectors and for their particular skill and/or qualification requirements. Such forecasts are carried out in several countries, nationally or regionally. They are mostly based on macroeconomic projections of sectoral production, productivity and employment and break these down by occupation and/or skill/qualification. In many cases, several variants or scenarios are calculated, based on alternative assumptions, which provide a range of future jobs/skills expected to be required. Every forecast must clearly state its assumptions and limitations. Although forecasts are of particular value for employment and education/ training policies, they should

be seen as a complement for other qualitative and (semi)-quantitative analyses.

A European system of skill needs forecasting does not yet exist. National forecasts are undertaken by several European countries but cannot be aggregated and are generally not comparable as they use different methods and classifications. Responding to the demand of EU policy-makers, and on the suggestion of national experts, Skillsnet organised a workshop (Cyprus, October 2005) to explore the feasibility of a European skill needs forecasting system, attended by experts in the forecasting of occupations, skills and/or educational fields from 14 European countries. All participants agreed on the feasibility and indeed the urgency of a European forecasting exercise, and asked Cedefop to coordinate further steps.

In the short term, a pan-European forecasting model should be elaborated, to be modified and refined in later stages. The model should use comparative data for all Member States, such as the European labour force survey. It was agreed to start with the demand side.

A medium-term forecast of the sectoral and occupational skill needs in Europe is already being developed and will be available in winter 2007/2008. This will develop macroeconomic projections and alternative scenarios for each Member State and aggregate results to EU-25 level. It will be broken down by economic sectors, occupations and/or skills/qualifications. The timescale is the next 5-10 years.

In the longer term all European countries may be involved in the forecasting exercise. Agreements will have to be reached to align sources used nationally. Despite differences, there are also similarities between countries; establishing a European core forecasting system on occupational and skill needs is thus a realistic goal. Providing a broad picture for the whole of the EU such a system would not replace the national forecasting systems.

Last year Skillsnet, in cooperation with the Warwick Institute for Employment Research (IER) in the UK and the Dutch Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA) organised a workshop aiming to start elaborating the European forecast system. A common approach to European skill forecasting is now being explored, including ideas for the gradual involvement of all European countries.

The agreement of all countries is a prerequisite for this exercise - particularly the support of those bodies and organisations, including national Ministries and the European Commission, that are responsible for carrying out or commissioning forecasting studies. This agreement will be achieved by regular exchange of information, discussions of outcomes and presentations at various EU and national events.

Skillsnet's upcoming events across the EU include:

- Technical workshop on European skill needs forecasting (by invitation only): Maastricht, 7-8 May 2007
- Expert workshop on exploring the common European approach to enterprise surveys: Bucharest, June 2007
- Sectoral workshop on health care and social services: autumn 2007
- Skillsnet Agora conference: early 2008 (Jan-Feb)

Further information: Skillsnet webpage: www.trainingvillage.gr/skillsnet
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Source: Cedefop/M. Tessaring, A. Zukersteinova, Olga Strietska-Illina/ine

Informing the policy changes that affect the status of trainers

The 9th Annual Conference of the Training of Trainers Network (TTnet) (1), 'VET teachers and trainers: key players for achieving the Education and Training 2010 objectives' was held in Thessaloniki on 7 and 8 December 2006, immediately after the adoption of the Helsinki Communiqué. (2)

The Communiqué provided an important policy backdrop to the conference: it confirmed that 'highly qualified teachers and trainers who undertake continuous professional development' are necessary to achieve the priorities of the Copenhagen process since trainers play a key role in improving the attractiveness and quality of VET systems. The aim of the conference was to examine the progress Member States have made in implementing the EU priorities for VET teachers and trainers, and to debate what TTnet's own priorities should be within the reviewed EU policy framework.

The issues debated at the conference - how to build a coherent framework for VET professions based on competences, and how to ensure the continuing professional development of VET teachers and trainers as lifelong learners - were inspired by the Member States' record of implementing the EU priorities set in Copenhagen, and on the outcome of the TTnet's own activities. Some common trends emerged among the variety of practices in the Member States.

Growing social demand and labour market needs are affecting what is required from VET teachers and trainers. In essence, teachers and trainers are now expected to provide a bridge between training and the world of work. Thus, some of the new tasks they have taken on integrate learning with working (i.e. helping young people make career choices etc.). As Ms E. Tsambazi, MEP, pointed out, they are also called to play a wider social role, such as helping people with disabilities, among other groups, to find appropriate training and working solutions. In the ensuing discussion about the new activities of trainers, mentoring emerged as a fitting method of ensuring professional development, both in initial and in continuing training, pairing experienced teachers/trainers with new entrants to the profession.

This shift towards a wider social role, and towards an evaluation based on learning outcomes, requires a review of the initial and continuing training options available to VET teachers and trainers. Action, particularly at national level, should focus on developing competence frameworks and implementing professional standards for trainers, and on offering them better access to real training opportunities in all areas - within the enterprise, in training organisations or by any other means - that will allow them

to update their skills and therefore achieve the higher new standards. This greater professionalisation, in turn, should generate greater trust in the professions involved and between areas and countries where VET teachers and trainers are employed, thus helping to achieve parity of esteem between VET and general education.

The conference concluded that the primary role of the Training of Trainers Network should not be merely to identify the issues affecting the professional development of VET teachers and trainers, but rather to provide responses to these issues that can be useful to policy-makers in this very complex field. Consequently, the Network should be used primarily to support and inspire national and EU policy-making in this area and, for the teachers and trainers themselves, to promote mutual learning. Specifically:

- The development of a European framework of competences and qualifications for VET teachers and trainers, in connection with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), is expected to operate as an 'observatory of VET professions'. It will allow the changing roles of VET teachers and trainers in the changing environment of classes and workshops to be studied; it will also allow a better understanding of VET professions.
- TTnet should provide examples of national/regional practices in training for teachers and trainers, allowing experiences in one country to inform developments in others. Working methods should focus on creating closer links between clusters of national networks, such as peer-learning activities on shared objectives.

The conference attracted 50 participants from 27 countries, representing governments, social partners, training providers, VET teachers and trainers, universities and VET colleges. The European Commission's DG Education and Culture and the European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs were also represented.

(1) The Training of Trainers Network - TTnet - is an overarching network of national networks set up by Cedefop in 1998 as a pan-European forum for key players and decision-makers involved in the training and professional development of vocational teachers and trainers. Through its activities, including its cross-country thematic projects on commonly agreed VET priorities, TTnet contributes to the implementation of the EU policy framework for VET teachers and trainers. For more information, consult the networks' website at: www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Projects_Networks/TTNet/
(2) www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/vet2006/pdf/Helsinki_Communique_en.pdf

Source: Cedefop/Mara Brugja/ine

draft articles, the final versions of which, including discussions and conclusions, will be included in a special issue of the European journal of vocational training dedicated to this topic, to be issued in 2008.

Source: Cedefop/ine

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Cedefop/Photomuseum Award 2007

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from 31 countries. The theme was 'People at work, people in training'.

An international jury chose the winning portfolios.

First Prize (EUR 5 000) was awarded to Italian photographer Sirio Magnabosco for his work *The Wait*. Second prize was awarded to German photographer Ingar Krauss for

Birds of Passage. Third prize went to Mark Curran of Ireland for *The Breathing Factory*.

The awards were presented by Greek Minister of Education Marietta Giannakou on 25 April 2006 in Thessaloniki.

The Thessaloniki Museum of Photography is currently producing an exhibition of the winning portfolio.

For more of the winning photos, see www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Information_resources/Bookshop/publication_details.asp?pub_id=461



Photos: Sirio Magnabosco

Vocational universities, general training?

Continued from page 1

issue. Because of the obvious socio-economic importance of the topic under debate, contributions to this Agora were structured as



SLOVAKIA

Driving instructors look beyond borders

One of the most widespread VET programmes in Slovakia is rarely taken into account in when discussing VET. Yet driving school is officially considered part of continuing training, and it is certainly a large field, with 620 schools, over 3000 instructors, and more than 60 000 graduates a year.

A prime example of the meeting of public and private concerns in a vocational field, driving instruction in Slovakia has in the past two decades years swung between being totally unregulated to being over-regulated, and has involved different legislative frameworks and government entities. For example, while at one point formal conditions for providing driving instruction were no longer set by the Trades Licensing Act, transport bodies in each district continued to examine conditions in driving schools on the

of driving instruction and the conditions of trainee pre-selection, qualifying examinations and refresher training opportunities in participating countries, the project produced common curricula, training material, proposals for the pre-selection of applicants and for monitoring instructors' work, as well as ways to update and refresh instructors' skills. Training material has been made available in English and other languages; the organisational module is accessible online in English and Slovak at www.ifd.szm.sk/el.htm (username: zas, password: zas).

During the conference on the follow-up to the Copenhagen process, held in Helsinki on 4-5 December 2006, an exhibition was organised to promote successful innovation projects of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme. The European Commission awarded the Quality Award to ten projects, from a pool of 157 projects nominated by national LdV agencies. The project Instructor for driving was among the ten Quality Award winners. Moreover, the Leonardo da Vinci Sectoral Programme Thematic Group on transparency of qualifications, validation of non-formal and informal learning, decided to promote this project as an example of good practice within the 2007 thematic monitoring background study. It is to be hoped that the Ministry of Transport, Post and Telecommunications of the Slovak Republic will also be able to capitalise on this project's results. After all, it is usually necessary to be recognised abroad before one can become a prophet at home.



From the LdV Quality Award ceremony, Helsinki



basis of a Transport Ministry decree; the relevant legislation was not harmonised until 2005. But even this recent legislation is based on traditional models of training. Rather than set training output standards it focuses on the training process itself, prescribing theoretical education and practical training in detail.

Instructor for driving, a Leonardo da Vinci project involving 12 partners from nine European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Slovakia and Spain) and coordinated by the Association of Driving Schools in the Slovak Republic, is aimed at harmonisation of training for driving instructors. Based on an analysis

Further information:
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Source: Juraj Vantuch

POLAND

Summing up Leonardo da Vinci II

The past year marked the end of the second phase of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. By that time, nearly 30 000 Poles had participated in the Programme - secondary and tertiary students, as well as people from a variety of occupations and sectors.

In Poland the programme dates from 1998, when the Association Council, a body overseeing the country's efforts to join the EU, issued a decision that enabled Poland to take part in the programme. Poland was a full participant in the entire second Programme period (2000-2006) to which two new measures were added, language skills and transnational network projects.

Joint actions to support initiatives extending beyond the Programme's scope and implemented as part of other EU programmes such as Socrates and Youth, were also made possible

Over this second period, more than 20 000 people took part in placements and exchanges abroad, the largest group (47 per cent) being students of various types of secondary vocational schools. Other participants included people in work, the unemployed, university students, research staff and teachers. For many, the opportunity to go abroad and get to know different cultures and languages led to employment or to a more satisfactory job.

The Leonardo da Vinci programme significantly contributed to the modernisation

of the VET system in Poland; it has also helped improve the status of vocational education, fostered the development of vocational guidance and counselling and promoted the concepts of distance and e-learning. Participation in the Programme and collaboration with European organisations which are active on the VET scene has enhanced the reputation of Polish institutions and improved their competitive advantage in the European market.

The Leonardo da Vinci Programme gave Poland, a country in transition, an opportunity to develop a well-educated and mobile society that not only works to promote its own welfare but can also cooperate with other nations of Europe as part of the integrated political and economic area that is the European Union.

From 2007 the Leonardo da Vinci becomes part of the new Lifelong Learning programme. Polish institutions and citizens fully expect the Programme in its new form to remain a valuable tool for vocational training and development in many occupations and sectors.

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Source:
Biuro Koordynacji Kształcenia Kadr

FRANCE

The *Départ* project: working together to develop apprentice mobility

The French government's objective is to give apprenticeships a more prominent place within the vocational training system. There are almost 380 000 apprentices in France today; the Ministry for Employment has set itself the aim of increasing this figure to 500 000 by 2009.

The European Union and national policies encourage mobility by means of training schemes and programmes with a European dimension. Nevertheless, a survey of institutions - the Socrates- Leonardo da Vinci Agency in France, the Franco-German Youth Office, the Franco-German Secretariat and the regional councils - has revealed a low level of participation by French apprentices. No more than 2% undertake part of their training in another European Union state.

In view of these findings, Centre INFFO (Centre for Information on Continuing Vocational Training) and ONISEP (National Information Office on Trades and Training) decided to collaborate on a joint project as part of the European Year of Workers' Mobility. Financed by the European Commission, the aims of the *Départ* project (Develop Europe through apprenticeships and transnational networks) are the promotion and encouragement of mobility of French apprentices with the various players involved: heads of CFAs (Apprentice Training Centres), teachers, apprenticeship masters and young people.

The publicity materials created for this purpose demonstrate the enormous benefits of mobility, both to the apprentice and to his or her employer. The following materials have been distributed or made available free of charge:

- a promotional information booklet aimed at apprenticeship masters and the heads of companies with one or more apprentices;
- a leaflet aimed at young people, secondary school pupils, students and appren-

tices, which will be made available to them in all CIO's (Information and Careers Guidance Centres) and distributed at fairs and conferences;

- a video, in which apprentices explain the benefits of mobility and, most importantly, demonstrate the ease with which they have overcome what they perceived as obstacles to that mobility.

These publicity materials can be viewed on the project's website - www.centre-inffo.fr/depart -, which also contains useful practical information on how to achieve apprentice mobility.

Centre INFFO and ONISEP work in partnership with the three large French networks of local chambers, the Association of the Regions of France and two major economic sectors (Public Works and Construction and motor vehicle services). Together, they ensure the broadest distribution of the deliverables of this project to all parties involved with apprenticeships, namely young people and apprentices, their employers and all CFAs.

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Source: Article by Graziana Boscato, careers advisor with the Euroguidance CIO at Strasbourg, and Régis Roussel, head of the Europe-International initiative at Centre INFFO, appearing in a supplement to INFFO Flash, No 693, 1st-15th January 2007



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Unsolicited manuscripts, books and other material will be carefully examined and assessed. Requests for contacts, news of forthcoming conferences and other information would be welcomed. For the ac-

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HUNGARY

Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey launched

After completion of a pilot phase, the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) survey began in earnest in Hungary in January 2007. The pilot research project involved a sample of 400 individuals in 2006, whereas the ALL survey will be based on a sample ten times that number.

The Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey is an international comparative study involving government agencies, national statistical offices, research institutes and multilateral agencies. It is developed and managed by Statistics Canada, in cooperation with OECD (among others). The first stage of the ALL survey produced summary reports by participating countries (Italy, Norway, Switzerland, Bermuda, Canada and USA) by 2003. Hungary joined the project in 2005.

The key objectives of the ALL survey are to describe and explain the distribution within the adult population aged 16-65 of prose and document-reading literacy, numeracy, problem-solving skills, and skills in information and communication technology, including in relation to other skills. The survey also aims to discover how various skills covered by the testing exercise are linked to individual economic and social success, and to identify sub-groups at risk of social and economic marginalisation by their performance levels.

The ALL survey builds on earlier studies, primarily the IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey), the first major international comparative survey of adult literacy, which was implemented in 20 countries and in three stages between 1994 and 1998. The OECD project PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies), to be launched as a regular survey of adult

competences from 2011, will in turn build on the experiences of the ALL.

The first results of the 2007 main survey in Hungary will be published early next year. Like the pilot phase, the main survey is financed and coordinated by the Fund Management Directorate of the Ministry of Education in close cooperation with all ministries involved in education and labour market issues, social partnership and regional development. The main survey will use an improved method and control and regulation procedures based on the experience of the pilot phase.

The results and conclusions of the survey will inform the implementation of the New Hungary Development Plan (Új Magyarország Fejlesztési Terv, ÚMFT) which governs the use of EU Structural Funds assistance in 2007-2013. The four basic skills covered by the ALL - prose reading, document reading, calculation and problem solving skills - will be used as indicators in monitoring the newly launched Development Programme. The main results and conclusions of the ALL survey will also be compared with those of earlier surveys conducted by national agencies. These results are expected to contribute significantly to improving areas such as education, labour market policy and human resources development, and thus to the development of society as a whole.

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Source: Fund Management Directorate, Ministry of Education and Culture, Hungary (observatory@omai.hu)

NETHERLANDS

A new system ensures seamless learning careers

The introduction of new ideas and practices in the Netherlands, such as competence-based education, has made it necessary to devise a more efficient method of exchanging information about learners between various sections of the educational system. In 2008, the ELDvo project will answer to this need in Dutch secondary education by setting up the Electronic Learning Dossier (ELD).

The aim of the project is to ensure a seamless transition throughout each person's educational career by making it easy to exchange related information within the educational chain. The ELD is expected to reduce the administrative burden while encouraging continuing education and training. But the main beneficiary of the system will be the individual: schools will now have a tool enabling them to track each person's learning history and thus to provide tailor-made educational guidance

The basis of the information exchange will be nationally validated agreements. The exchanges are set to take place at the main 'crossroads' of the educational system, i.e. between different pathways of secondary general education; between secondary general and secondary vocational education; between

secondary and tertiary education; and between secondary education and the labour market. By August 2008, schools are expected to have access to all necessary data with one click.

The ELD is based on the international metadata standard 'IMS Learner Information Package (LIP)'. Privacy issues are an obstacle for the wider dissemination of LIP in European education systems, as US has stricter privacy legislation. Future LIP applications in Europe would be better served by a European implementation of LIP by CEN.

Further information (in Dutch): www.eldvo.nl

Source: CINOP



FINLAND

Test phase for ECVET reaches positive conclusion

The project launched two years ago by the National Board of Education to test the application of the European Credit Transfer System for VET (ECVET) in Finnish upper secondary school has ended on a positive note. FINECVET has demonstrated that Finland is well placed to implement the credit transfer system across the board.

The specific objectives of FINECVET were to test the functionality of the credit transfer system in five qualifications; to define the concepts of the ECVET system and apply them to the Finnish education system; and to prepare a national information and guidance plan for education providers and social partners concerning the implementation of the ECVET model. Four VET providers and the vocational qualifications in Forestry, Construction, Business and Administration, Hotel and Restaurant Services and Social and Health Care were involved in the project, as were partner schools from Sweden, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland and the UK.

An important task of the project was defining the ECVET concepts. Some of these concepts, such as mutual trust, memorandum of understanding, unit, credit point, enrichment, knowledge, learning agreement and certification, were chosen to be examined in the context of Finnish education terminology.

In the Finnish VET system, vocational study units are defined on the basis of functions in working life, their titles describing real-life activities. Studies for each vocational qualification are defined in units and credit points, and learning outcomes for each unit described in terms of knowledge, skills and wider competence. The scope of studies in

VET is expressed in credits (study weeks), representing an average of 40 hours; one school year is equal to 40 credits. As both upper secondary and higher education in Finland apply the same type of study week/credit system, credit points were described on the basis of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

Student exchange made a considerable contribution to the project, including discussions on the content of the revised Europass Mobility document, which is now set to become a tool for credit documentation. Project participants tested completing the Europass Mobility document and submitted comments to the person responsible for Europass at the Finnish National Board of Education.

The FINECVET project showed that there is a positive attitude towards the ECVET system in Finland, and that implementing the system across Finnish upper secondary vocational qualifications should be relatively straightforward. A lot of material has been produced, which can be used for the further development of the system. The elements of ECVET (i.e. accumulation, credit points, KSC, validation) are likely to be taken into account in the reform of upper secondary vocational qualifications by 2010. But for information and guidance a follow-up project is necessary, which should include competence-based qualifications.

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UNITED KINGDOM/WALES

Regions discuss what credit frameworks mean for them

Regions across Europe were recently given an opportunity to discuss what practical role they could play in the development and implementation of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning and in a European Credit System for Vocational Education and training (ECVET).

The seminar, held on 19 October in Brussels, was hosted jointly by the Welsh Assembly Government, the Scottish Executive and EARLALL (the European Association of Local Authorities and Regions for Lifelong Learning). The hosts showcased the work they themselves are undertaking on regional level credit and qualification frameworks, which has put them in the vanguard of developments in this area.

The seminar explored the role of credit and qualification frameworks in linking together all forms of learning, and in supporting pro-

gression through informal and work-based learning. Participants also discussed practical ways for national and sub-national frameworks to align with the European Qualification Framework.

Michael Graham from DG Education and Culture, European Commission, noted that the biggest challenges in the Commission's eyes were quality assurance and compatibility with the descriptors for higher education.

For regional governments, the key challenge is particularly compatibility with European, national and other regional frameworks. For example, as highlighted by the host countries, education policy has developed differently across the four nations of the UK. Trevor Clark, Head of Credit Framework Development, Welsh Assembly Government, explained that the picture for qualification frameworks in the UK is complex, with a lot of players and a significant amount of recognised learning outside traditional areas. The message imparted to all participants was to build bridges and trust between the different sectors, including employers.

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3s **AUSTRIA**
**Helsinki Award for
the VQTS project**

Innovative projects addressing the Copenhagen and Maastricht priorities were presented with the Helsinki Awards during the Finnish presidency. The Leonardo da Vinci project, VQTS (vocational qualification transfer system), coordinated by the 3s research laboratory (Austria) received this award in the category 'Recognition of skills and qualifications, including ECVET'. The Helsinki Award was presented by EU commissioner Ján Figel¹ along with the Finnish Minister for education and science Antti Kalliomäki on 4 December 2006 in Helsinki.



Photo with the Helsinki Award
From left to right: Peter Krejml, Austrian Ministry of Education and Training; Karin Luomi-Messerer, 3s; Theodor Siegl, Austrian Ministry of Education and Training

THE VQTS model, developed within this pilot project, offers a solution for the transparent and structured description of work-related competences and their acquisition (incl. credit points). The VQTS model maps an individual's competence profile at different stages of their education and training careers, thus tracking the process of skills development in a transparent manner. This renders skills acquired at school or in a company setting in different countries comparable, and therefore easier to recognise in the home country. The VQTS model thus makes an important contribution to enhanced cooperation in VET, in particular as far as facilitating mobility is concerned. Moreover, the VQTS model aids recognition and mobility not only

at transnational level, but also across different educational or training streams within the same country. It also serves to render skills acquired outside formal education or training in the context of non-formal or informal learning transparent - a basic condition for their recognition.

Further information on the VQTS model and project from:
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The practical application of the VQTS model can be tested on the project website: www.VocationalQualification.net.

GERMANY
**Employment in 2050: senior workers
will be in great demand**

The German population shows an ageing and declining trend in the decades ahead. According to data from the Federal Statistics Office, some 50 million people aged 20 to 64 currently live in Germany but this age cohort is expected to fall by up to 30 percent by 2050 (depending on the extent of migration). This changing demographic structure will pose enormous challenges, not only to the employment system as a whole but also to individual enterprises. Faced with this situation, it will be necessary to extend the employability of older workers, e.g. by providing timely and customised continuing vocational training. However, small- and medium-sized enterprises, especially, are so far ill-prepared for this challenge and therefore require support. This is the background to a European research project with the participation of the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB) and the University of Erfurt, which developed two sets of guidelines addressed to companies, educational and training agencies and senior employees.

European-wide surveys show that relatively few employees in German firms engage in continuing vocational training (and those who do are mainly skilled workers and management-level staff). Yet timely, regular and continuing vocational training provision can decisively support the employability of senior workers and lengthen their working lives.

Case studies in Thuringian firms showed that small- and medium-sized enterprises rarely implement systematic, medium-term measures to retain the employability of older workers; any measures of this kind tend to be targeted towards individual employees. A set of guidelines was therefore drawn up for firms and senior employees. The guidelines start out from the workplace as a central level of analysis and ac-

tion and examine both job requirements and the potential of the employees. Since small- and medium-sized enterprises rarely have the means to implement systematic, ageing-oriented personnel development, the support instruments and structures developed within the project were tested and applied in close collaboration with 'qualification counsellors'.

A second set of guidelines is specifically addressed to educational and training agencies identified as having an interest in skilling programmes for senior workers. It provides information on the target group and tools to evaluate the relevant programmes. All the instruments developed in the context of the project were tested in companies in the pilot region of Thuringia.

The research project 'Continuing vocational training for older employees in SMEs and the development of regional support structures (Age-Qual)' was sponsored by the European education and training programme, Leonardo da Vinci. Alongside the BIBB and Erfurt University, institutions and organisations from Belgium, Denmark, Austria and the Netherlands were involved in the project. While most European countries are facing declining demographic trends, Germany is expected to be one of the countries most affected by this development.

Further information can be found on the BIBB website at www.bibb.de/de/19230.htm

Source: BIBB

Educational policy

IRELAND
Towards a National Skills Strategy

Over 500 000 people within the labour force will need to be upskilled if Ireland is to achieve a knowledge-based, innovation-driven, participative and inclusive economy by 2020. This is the conclusion of research into the skill needs of the Irish economy which will form the basis of a National Skills Strategy⁽¹⁾, as recommended in the social partnership programme Towards 2016 (see Cedefop Info 3/2006). The following diagram illustrates the current Irish educational profile and the target for 2020.

Tertiary	32 %	38 %	48 %
Upper secondary	40 %	44 %	45 %
Lower secondary	28 %	18 %	7 %
	2005 Now	2020 Trend	2020 Vision

According to the report, the country's success to date has been based on above-average output from the education and training system. Although Ireland performs well in terms of many skill-based indicators, notably in terms of the number of graduates in science and engineering, some significant indicators need to be improved on if the country is

to maintain its current economic success. This report identifies the changing skills needs of the Irish economy and proposes action to meet those needs.

In the years ahead labour productivity will be the key determinant of growth in Ireland, and increasing productivity will depend to a large extent on education and training. Ireland, as a small open economy, must be able to respond rapidly to changes in the global economic and technological environment, which requires a well-educated population and a flexible workforce. World-class skills, education and training have been identified in the Enterprise Strategy Group report (see Cedefop Info 3/2004) as an area in which Ireland can foster potential competitive advantage. Sustained investment in education is thus necessary and desirable for the foreseeable future.

The changing skills needs are identified by sector, occupation and skill type. The greatest increases in employment are predicted in the professional, associate professional and personal and service sector occupational groupings. All occupations will become more knowledge-intensive,

resulting in many cases in a rise in the requirement for qualifications and technical knowledge. Workers will be expected to acquire a range of generic and transferable skills, but the promotion of science, engineering, ICT and R&D skills remains important.

The report notes that a significant proportion of the existing workforce, particularly older workers, are educated only to lower secondary level. Ireland's rate of participation in continuous learning (7 %) lags significantly behind the EU's Lisbon target (12.5 %). Only 14 % of 25-64 year olds in Ireland engaged in non-formal learning in 2002, compared with 16.5 % in the EU-25. Ireland also ranks poorly in terms of adult literacy. Increasing the rate of female participation in the workforce, currently at 52 % compared with the male participation rate of 72.8 %, will add to the level and skills of the workforce. Many people today are reluctant to participate in education and training because they are not aware of the benefits, or because of financial constraints. The report looks at the role of the state in encouraging participation,

particularly in supporting the low-skilled.

In the absence of policy change, a significant proportion of Ireland's workforce will remain low-skilled in 2020. The result will be an under-supply of skills at the higher levels and an over-supply of those at lower levels. The Expert Group concludes that if Ireland is to compete effectively on the global marketplace, it must enhance the skills of the resident population, increase participation in the workforce, and continue to attract highly skilled migrants.

(1) Tomorrow's skills: towards a National Skills Strategy/Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. Dublin: Forfás, 2007.

Source: FÁS

A time of reform – but will Pericles' message be heeded?

Slovaks voted for a change of government last June. The new government has stated explicitly that building a knowledge-based society is its priority. In fact, the official title of the second-ranked minister is Deputy Prime Minister for the Knowledge-Based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities. In its election manifesto, the government committed itself, among other things, to raising the salaries of teachers, providing multi-source financing for education, and making the management of the education system more efficient. With regard to vocational training, the new government also committed itself to coordinating VET and the labour market, creating new fields of studies, and supporting a continuum of education and training programmes. An encouraging development indeed.

Based on this manifesto, the Ministry of Education has now set the following priorities and deadlines:

- the establishment of a two-level model of educational programmes in VET by 31 May 2007;
- the creation of a system of coordination of vocational education for the labour market by 31 March 2007;
- the elaboration of a proposal for criteria for the participation of employers' and employees' associations in vocational education, also by 31 March 2007; and
- continuous and permanent cooperation between employers' and employers' associations, professional guilds, and the central bodies of state and local administration for the implementation of new study and training branches.

All tasks related to the fulfilment of the objectives of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme and the Lisbon Strategy will be permanently monitored and coordinated by the Section of European Integration of the Ministry of Education.

Furthermore, according to the 2007 plan of legislative tasks, a demanding schedule of legislative work is envisaged; four new acts and two amendments of acts, covering lifelong learning, youth, the status of teaching staff in schools, etc. In addition, the act on higher education was amended in February to bring the higher education system more in line with the Bologna Declaration; amendments related to Council Directives on the admission of third-country nationals for study and for scientific research will follow.

No doubt the plan is very ambitious. It is not clear whether lawmakers and decision makers will manage to respect these deadlines while also allowing for fair debate of the issues. Hopefully, the message of Pericles (from his Funeral Oration) will be heeded: 'instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all'.

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Source: Juraj Vantuch

Society debates tertiary education changes

In a society which values general education far above vocational education, and which considers access to free public tertiary education a right, it was inevitable that proposing the establishment of privately-funded universities would be highly controversial. But with 65 000 Greek students studying abroad, the issue has also become that of limiting the vast sums of money (estimated at 114 million Euro) being spent on education outside the country. Addressing the issue has also become urgent as Directive 36/2005 of the European Parliament and the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications comes into effect in Greece in September 2007.

Despite overt political differences, both the government and the greater part of the main opposition party, as well as the country's academic community, wish to revise Article 16 of the Constitution (which stipulates that university education must be publicly funded) in order to make privately-funded universities a reality. But for private universities to contribute to the improvement of tertiary education, three important

parameters need to be taken into account: a clear definition of the not-for-profit character of these institutions; the establishment of a mechanism to ensure quality; and the revision of laws governing the taxation of not-for-profit institutions.

While the debate continues, at least fifteen universities from other EU Member States seem poised to enrich the Greek tertiary education landscape as soon the relevant legislative framework comes into effect. Of these, more than ten are expected to operate in Athens and two in Thessaloniki. Most of these new universities will be annexes of existing universities in other Member States.

Source: OEEK/line

Vocational education and training

Taking stock of vocational training reforms

The General Delegation for Employment and Vocational Training of the Ministry for Employment (DGEFP) published a report at the end of 2006 outlining the main drivers of training reforms and the issues still unresolved. Five sections analyse in detail each key point of the reforms: review of collective negotiations, the DIF (Individual right to training), training contracts, VAE (Validation of Knowledge acquired by Experience) and decentralisation.

Summarising in its preamble the major challenges of the reforms, the report clearly emphasises that two years after the introduction of these reforms we can 'take stock of the current situation, but not yet assess the results'. This is because changes to the system are too recent, while quantitative information, which would make it possible to measure the extent of their implementation, is not yet available. A further factor is the necessary period of adjustment for staff and businesses at a time when changes are still taking place.

Thus, only the 'key success factors' have been examined. This preliminary assessment shows that the various reform

initiatives have got off to a good start. The sectors have seized the opportunity they have been offered to set guidelines for training development and for the allocation of the corresponding funds; significant progress has been made as regards training contracts, and the period of professional training seems to have met with 'genuine success'; and the DIF is becoming 'better known': in 2005, 1.3 % of workers took advantage of this right. Finally, validation (VAE) has attracted a following. The General Delegation emphasises that the reforms have taken effect more quickly in the professional sectors and within businesses already using provisional human resource planning (GPEC) - these have found that GPEC tools lead them to define and implement strategies. Others have seen the reforms merely in terms of the availability of new resources or have preferred to manage (or continue to manage) training as just another expense to be budgeted for.

The General Delegation indicates that there are four 'unresolved' issues. First, it observes that the tools for shared financing are not tailored to the aims of the reforms and that the latter have sought neither to remedy deficiencies observed previously nor to anticipate the difficulties which they may cause, notably in gaining acceptance of the Individual right to training. Secondly, it reiterates that the duties entrusted to the professional sectors call for genuine management ability. Another issue is the security of professional careers, a specific provision of the reforms providing for deferred skills training that was to be the subject of consultation with the public authorities. The report considers that future negotiations on the subject or on the 'operational interpretation' of such a provi-

sion would presuppose that a response had been provided to three issues: the aims of the provision, the ability of the training system to meet those aims, and the role of the public vocational training apparatus. The final area of doubt is the territorialisation of policy, which juxtaposes the role of the sectors and the central role of the Regions with no further breakdown. 'This creates an area of tension' in the relationship between public authorities and the socio-professional actors, and impedes the development of formalised policies and of a project dynamic. These difficulties are exacerbated by the 'fragmentation of the professional sectors'.

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Sources:
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This document may be downloaded at: www.centre-info.info/IMG/pdf/Rapport_bilan_FP.pdf



Employers help design new vocational Diplomas

As part of the education reform for 14 to 19 year olds outlined in the government's White Paper in February 2005, the next ten years will see changes to the education system. Vocational routes are being revised, with employers and universities having more input into what is studied: students will soon be able to choose from 14 new employer-designed Diplomas, five of which – in ICT, engineering, health and social care, the creative and media industries and construction and building – will be introduced in England in 2008.

The new Diploma is a composite qualification, covering newly-defined sector-generated material together with existing units. The Diplomas use an industry-driven curriculum as the foundation for an education programme designed to build higher-order cognitive thinking and problem-solving skills. As such, they are the key to raising participation and attainment in post-16 education to the highest rank of OECD countries.

The Sector Skills Councils have convened Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs), which determine the learning outcomes for each Diploma at each level. There is or will be a DDP for each of the 14 Diplomas; these include representatives of employers, higher education, relevant professional bodies, awarding bodies, and schools and colleges. Once this process is complete, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) as a regulatory body looks to the awarding bodies to

develop units and qualifications that meet the regulatory criteria. These must have the support of DDPs before being submitted to QCA for accreditation.

The Diplomas will give young people a fully rounded education, which equips them for both higher education and entry to employment. However, they are not designed to provide job-specific training; that is the function of an apprenticeship or an occupational qualification. Diplomas will not meet national skills shortages directly, but they will provide a sounder platform than at present on which the skills needed to meet those shortages can be built.

The design and development of the Diplomas requires highly technical work on the definition of content; on sequencing the acquisition of learning outcomes; on defining assessment criteria and methods; on determining a common grading system and standards for all 14 lines of learning; on the development of appropriate pedagogy and support materials. At the same time, the introduction of the Diplomas must address a set of strategic and logistical issues which are equally complex and demanding, such as achieving support from employers, recruiting teachers from the appropriate background, and ensuring that the Diplomas attract students from across the full range of ability.

Further information: www.qca.org.uk; www.dfes.gov.uk

Source: QCA

What happens to unsuccessful training placement applicants?

Many young people help relieve the burden on the training place market by opting for alternative arrangements to their preferred option - a course of in-company training. For instance, they engage in practical training, take on a casual job or return to school. A recent study by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) shows that young people rarely take this step voluntarily. Although officially classified as 'placed', many of the applicants who opt for a different route are in fact still looking for a training place. It can only be said for just under one third of these young people that their alternative arrangements largely match their own training aspirations. A further third has come to terms with the situation in which they now find themselves, although it is not what they wanted. On the other hand, the remaining third generally see themselves as being in an 'emergency situation'.

According to preliminary reports issued by the chambers, approx. 560 000 to 570 000 young people were expected to have concluded a training contract by the end of September 2006. Some 365 000 of these successful applicants were among the total number of 763 100 applicants registered with the employment agencies. More than one half of these young people - almost 400 000 - were unable to find a training place on account of the difficult situation on the apprenticeship market. 49 500 of these are classified as 'not yet placed', whereas the remaining approx. 348 000 applicants had already opted for alternative arrangements by the end of September 2006.

In conjunction with the Federal Employment Agency (BA), BIBB regularly conducts representative surveys to identify the behaviour, motives and status of training place applicants. The most recent study, conducted at the end of 2004, highlighted inter alia the situation of applicants who ended up making alternative arrangements. Then, as now, almost one half of the youngsters opted for an alternative to an apprenticeship.

• Approx. one in three had dropped out of the education and training system entirely: 5 % had

entered employment, 6 % had taken on a casual job and 19 % were unemployed. Many of those on the dole were young people who had been looking for a job to tide them over, but had failed to find employment.

• Many had embarked on further educational activities: around 30 % were taking part in vocational orientation and basic training courses (mainly at vocational schools and in the context of vocational preparation schemes), 9 % had returned to general education, and 4 % were involved in work experience.

• Some of the young people had succeeded in finding a training place: 11 % were engaged in an apprenticeship scheme, a further 5 % had commenced purely school-based vocational education and training and 3 % had entered higher education. This means that some 19 % had commenced a fully qualifying training course.

The study found that only those young people engaged in a fully qualifying course of training were really content with their situation. Returning to school was also largely viewed in a positive light. In contrast, participation in vocational preparation schemes, a school-based pre-vocational training year or industrial placements were seldom rated as young people's first choice. Nevertheless, at least after some time, many of the young people concerned accepted that these alternatives represented a sensible way of tiding themselves over.

On the other hand, all the alternatives outside the education and training system are given a very negative rating. For example, some two thirds of young people who had found regular employment merely saw their jobs as a stop-gap solution or as a dead end.

Further information: www.bibb.de/de/27460.htm

Source: BIBB

Report on employment: is the training system too compartmentalised?

In a report to the Prime Minister, the CERC (Council for Employment, Income and Social Cohesion) expresses the view that the vocational training system is overly complex and suffers from a certain degree of corporatism.

The CERC, chaired by Jacques Delors, delivered its report to Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, in the presence of Jean-Louis Borloo, Minister for Employment on 17 November 2006. The report on employment and incomes, commissioned on 28 August 2006, formed the basis for the work of the conference on employment and incomes held on 14 December 2006, to which the Prime Minister invited Jean-Louis Borloo, Gérard Larcher, Minister Delegate for Employment, and the social partners. Among other issues, the report, entitled France in transition: 1993-2005, addresses the issue of vocational training.

On the subject of initial training, Jacques Delors focused particularly on the integration of the 190 000 or so young people leaving the education system without qualifications and 'with no means of making a living'. He also commented to

a radio station (BFM) that such integration could only be achieved via a significant continuing training drive, involving 'costly training courses of 400 to 500 hours'. To this end, the CERC recommends 'the immediate implementation of a national scheme' for young people who leave school or university every year without formal qualifications. 'Even if these failings cannot be attributed solely to the education system, and arise also from general social circumstances, we must question the effectiveness of teaching methods, the adequacy of careers guidance and the distribution of resources', states the report in its final chapter.

The report also emphasises the importance of vocational training in France. One out of every two French people was involved in adult education, in its broadest sense, in 2003. Nevertheless, 'the education system seems to be highly segmented' by target group and by sector. 'The compartmentalisation of the various sections prevents coherent individual schemes being set up.' As regards inequality in access to continuing education, which can also be seen in the oth-

er European countries, 'France is conspicuous by the low number of apprenticeships in the workplace and by a preponderance of educational qualifications over qualifications obtained during continuing vocational training.' As a result, continuing vocational training does not - save in exceptional cases - iron out inequalities arising from initial education. On the contrary, vocational training (whether aimed at workers or the unemployed) is usually directed more at people who already possess a good basic education. Moreover, the CERC believes that 'the content and duration of training, as well as the methods of acquisition of knowledge and qualifications, need to be reviewed, particularly in the case of people who do not have the benefit of an adequate basic education'. Additionally, training initiatives cease at too early a stage in a person's working life, thereby preventing the necessary re-training from being carried out. Opportunities have been opened up by VAE (Validation of Knowledge acquired by Experience) and training contracts. 'Nevertheless, VAE has proved to be a com-

plex procedure', requiring an application to be submitted and defended before a diploma can be wholly or partially awarded. For the least qualified employees with experience of only low-skilled jobs, the submission of an application based on written information or abstract concepts may constitute a deterrent, especially because securing a suitable counsellor 'is, in certain cases, the financial responsibility of the applicant'. Moreover, the non-transferability of the Individual Right to Education (DIF), which 'can be more closely likened to a system of study leave', together with the fragmentation of the French system, 'renders the organisation of training schemes for persons with an unstable career path problematical'.

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Sources:
- INFFO Flash, n° 691, 1-15 December 2006, article by Philippe Grandin, page 28.
- France in transition: 1993-2005, report n° 7 of the CERC, November 2006, 242 pages. Document may be downloaded at: www.cerc.gouv.fr/rapports/rapport7/rapport7cerc.pdf

BELGIUM

VDAB healthcare training a great success

Job seekers who follow a VDAB training course in the non-market sector subsequently tend to find work very quickly. This is what stands out from the figures communicated by the Flemish Minister for Employment and Education.

The vast majority find work within six months. Virtually the entire non-market sector is in need of workers. Hospitals are desperately seeking nurses at all levels. The Federal Minister for Public Health also wishes to employ nurses in certain home care services.

In order to fill the vacancies and encourage job seekers to work in the healthcare sector, the VDAB has developed several courses. Three out of ten participants are job seekers under 25 years of age. Half are under 30 years of age, while a small minority (2 %) is over 50. Despite the annual rise in participants, the number of those who find work in the six months following the end of their training is also on the increase.

In the 'Non-specialised care' sector, 1 129 new participants enrolled in 2005, while for qualified nurses the figure rose to 1 192. Courses for assistants in general daily activities had 70 new participants. This section offers the fewest jobs after training, but here, too, 50 % (for those over 50 years of age) to 68 % (25-49 years of age) of participants found work within six months. The best results among job seekers having followed a training course were obtained by trained nurses.

Prospects

All this shows that the VDAB is reaching its target: to train or retrain unemployed persons and help them find a job with long-term prospects. The number of people over 50 following a course is obviously lower, but the subsequent occupancy rate is higher. The VDAB has shown it is a key player in the partnership formed with the healthcare and wellbeing sector - a sector with a considerable demand for workers, which, what with the ageing of the population, is not expected to diminish in the future.

Contact: Reinald Van Weydevelde, Library Management, VDAB.

Sources:
- De Standaard, 8 January 2007
- De Tijd, 8 January 2007
- Het Belang van Limburg, 8 January 2007
- www.vdab.be

PORTUGAL

Government earmarks EU funds for education and training

The Portuguese Government has identified the development of human resources, via education and training, as one of the top priorities for the deployment of EU funds. This is reflected in its plans to invest nearly 10 billion Euro in this field.

The focus of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) is 'to increase the number of Portuguese who possess formal qualifications, thus upgrading knowledge, science, technology and innovation'. It also singles out 'competitiveness factors to stimulate productive skills' and 'regional development to strengthen economic and social cohesion'.

In the next seven years, the Government anticipates investing a total of over EUR 44 billion in the economy, society and national territory, almost half of which will come from European Community funds. Having established its agenda of three priority themes (human potential, competitiveness factors and regional development), the government is now preparing to change the method used to manage European Community funds. Instead of the proliferation of Operational Programmes which characterised previous budgets, the Government wishes to establish only one OP for each of the themes on the agenda.

The agenda for human potential, aimed at raising the qualification levels of the Portuguese, will correspond to an OP which, with support from the European Social Fund, will not only fund vocational training in secondary education (up to the 12th grade of schooling) but also promote the acquisition of certified skills by adults. Particularly prominent in this field is the 'New Opportunities' programme, which will be stepped up. This programme will also devote attention to scientific knowledge and innovation, and will aim to guarantee that advances in this area help business and create quality jobs.

Further information:
www.qca.pt/home/index.asp
www.portugal.gov.pt/Portal/PT/Governos/Governos_Constitucionais/GC17/Conselho_de_Ministros/Comunicados_e_Conferencias_de_Imprensa/20060202.htm

Source: Jornal de Negócios, January 16, 2007
Claudia Arriegas (claudia.arriegas@dgeep.mtss.gov.pt)



PORTUGAL

Agreement with MIT aims to develop technological education

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)-Portuguese Programme was officially launched and publicised in October 2006. The Programme covers research centres, lecturers, researchers and students, by forming consortia between schools of engineering, faculties of science and technology and schools of economics and management in seven Portuguese universities. Also included are businesses, associated laboratories and State laboratories. The programme's major areas of action are engineering and management.

In accordance with the cooperation protocol signed in February 2006 between the Portuguese Government and MIT, the action areas and institutions to be involved

in this Programme were identified through an assessment exercise conducted by a large team of MIT lecturers and researchers, which mobilised teams at several national universities and R & D centres. In this way, MIT identified hitherto little-known but important opportunities for scientific and technological cooperation with Portugal, and for stepping up the capacity, in terms of R&D and postgraduate studies, of national institutions.

The MIT-Portuguese Programme seeks to stimulate national consortia which are interested in placing of Portuguese higher education institutions on an international footing. This will allow partnerships to be formed which

BELGIUM

New agreement with chemicals sector creates need for more training

In December 2006, the Flemish Government approved the new sector agreement on chemicals. Agreements have been reached with this sector regarding links between education and the labour market and on training and diversification policy, with around a hundred consultants ensuring that these agreements are respected.

Chemicals account for 70 000 jobs in Flanders, of which 13 % are in industry. The sector will draw up an action plan which will formally commit it to implement, within the next two years, the agreements included within the new sector agreement; these will differ from the previous, less demanding, generation of sector agreements on many levels. The sector will commit to creating 500 in-service training posts and to increasing by 20 % the number of Individual Vocational Training Courses (Formations professionnelles individuelles - FPI) to approx. 130.

A budget of EUR 255 000 has been set aside for the new agreement. The Flemish authorities have now reached an agreement with all 26 sectors in Flanders. The sector agreement for chemicals includes measures aimed at improving the status of technical and vocational education and at reducing the 'cascade' system to increase the number and quality of work-experience and in-service training places, to improve the development of skills acquired and support in corporate restructuring. The agreement covers the period from 1 September 2006 to 31 August 2008 and involves collaboration with schools, improvement of technical and vocational education, alternance training, stimulation of basic skills, increase of quality in-service training, growth in the number and quality of training courses, certificates of experience and apprenticeships, and support during restructuring and diversification.

Further information: Reinald Van Weydevelde, Library Management, VDAB.

Sources:
- Cabinet of the Flemish Minister for Education and Employment:
www.ministerfrankvandenbroucke.be/
- Press release from the Flemish Government of 15 December 2006



will extend the range of international programmes and boost the recruitment of lecturers and researchers. A further intention is to stimulate economic growth via science-based innovation, attracting new talents and generating activities with greater added value, and to offer Portuguese companies with a technological basis access to new markets.

Further information: Claudia Arriegas (claudia.arriegas@dgeep.mtss.gov.pt)

Source: CID / DGEEP

Immigration found to have positive effect on economy

In less than a decade Ireland has changed from being a country of emigration to a country of immigration. Because of a booming economy and Ireland's decision to open its labour market in 2004, the country attracted a disproportionate share of the mobile, relatively educated, workforce from the ten new Member States. Of the immigrants to Ireland in 2005, 58 % came from the EU-25.

The social and economic effects of this immigration have been the subject of two recent studies (1), which also propose ways in which Ireland could manage migration more effectively. The key finding is that immigration has had a broadly positive effect: it has increased economic activity, enhanced skills and widened the range of services available, according to the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). But the report acknowledges that there is still uncertainty about the medium-term effects and future scale of immigration.

The NESC report stresses the importance of labour market policy: the success or failure of immigration depends largely on how well the labour market works for both immigrants and Irish citizens. Immigration is most likely to contribute to Ireland's economic and social well-being when it supports an upgrading of the economy, skills and work, and is characterised by mobility and integration. While many European countries have met

labour shortages by using migrant labour, few have achieved the successful long-term social, political, cultural and economic integration of migrants.

The report endorses the Government's policy on sourcing low-skilled workers from within the EU-25. Future new immigrants from outside the EU, the Council asserts, should possess particular skills needed by the Irish economy. It recommends that migrants engaged in low-skilled work, should, on certain conditions, have the opportunity for education and training. The Employment Permits Act 2006 puts a comprehensive statutory framework in place upon which a new managed, skills-based, economic migration policy will be based.

The Council warns that the 'potential for immigration to generate adverse labour market impacts is likely to increase significantly during economic downturn. The Irish government should develop an explicit policy statement that provides guidance for employers, unions and civil society regarding immigration.' The report rejects the belief that immigrants have forced Irish people out of jobs, though it admits that in some areas it has led to more moderate wage growth.

The NESC report states that integration requires a long-term approach, the thrust of which should be adaptation of mainstream policies and services, rather than creation of separate services for migrant groups.

Language competence should be a cornerstone of integration policy. So far, free language classes have been confined to asylum seekers and refugees. Finally the Council urges that steps be taken to prevent low-skilled migrants being trapped in low-paying and vulnerable positions.

(1) Managing migration in Ireland: a social and economic analysis / International Organisation for Migration. Dublin: NESC, 2006. ISBN 0-75571-72-95
www.nesc.ie/dynamic/docs/Full%20IOM%20report.pdf
Migration policy / National Economic and Social Council. Dublin: NESC, 2006. ISBN 0-75571-72-87
www.nesc.ie/dynamic/docs/Full%20NESC%20report.pdf

Source: FÁS

Employment policy

Flexicurity – a European answer to globalisation?

The challenges facing the EU in reconciling its social model with the competitive requirements of globalisation were discussed at a recent labour market conference in Dublin, and in the latest FÁS Annual Labour Market Review (1).

The conference was addressed by Dr Paul Swaim, one of the authors of the OECD's Jobs Strategy. He said that for the Irish labour market to adjust to globalisation, policy-makers need to concentrate on 'protecting jobs, not workers'. But he added that there is no consensus among OECD countries as to how this should be done. One approach, the Danish model of 'flexicurity,' was outlined at the conference by Mr Leif Christian Hansen, a senior policy adviser with the Danish Government. This system aims to combine 'hire and fire' employment legislation with

high rates of social welfare. Significantly, the European Commission in 2006 began promoting flexicurity as a way to reconcile social objectives with the realities of globalisation.

In the Annual Labour Market Review, Mr Brian McCormick of FÁS-Training and Employment Authority analyses the flexicurity model, examining its main elements: high mobility between jobs; a comprehensive social safety net that guarantees a high level of unemployment insurance (up to 90 % of previous earnings for a maximum of 4 years); and a strong emphasis on active labour market policies. The latter makes it easier for people to move between jobs by motivating them to look for work and by upgrading the skills of unemployed people through training.

The Review also examines Austrian moves toward increasing flexicurity, especially the 'backpack' principle for redundancy payments. This is a severance scheme introduced in 2002 to increase job mobility for employees and financial predictability for employers. Under the scheme, employees acquire entitlements to severance payments after two months with the same employer. These entitlements are kept when a worker moves on to another employer regardless of whether they change jobs voluntarily or are dismissed, and can be built up over the entire working life. Pointing to an unemployment rate of less than 5 % and an employment rate of 68 %, Austrian proponents of flexicurity argue that the system has been successful.

The Review suggests a shift in the balance of current Irish employment protection legislation towards more temporary workers and says the Austrian 'backpacking' approach could offer greater flexibility to employers while increasing financial security for temporary workers.

Continued efforts are required in Ireland to achieve a flexible labour market while providing adequate social support. 'The forthcoming European Commission's report on flexicurity, due out at the end of 2007, should provide a clearer understanding of whether or not improvements are needed to improve Ireland's current balance between flexibility and security policies.' (1)

Is flexicurity relevant to other countries?

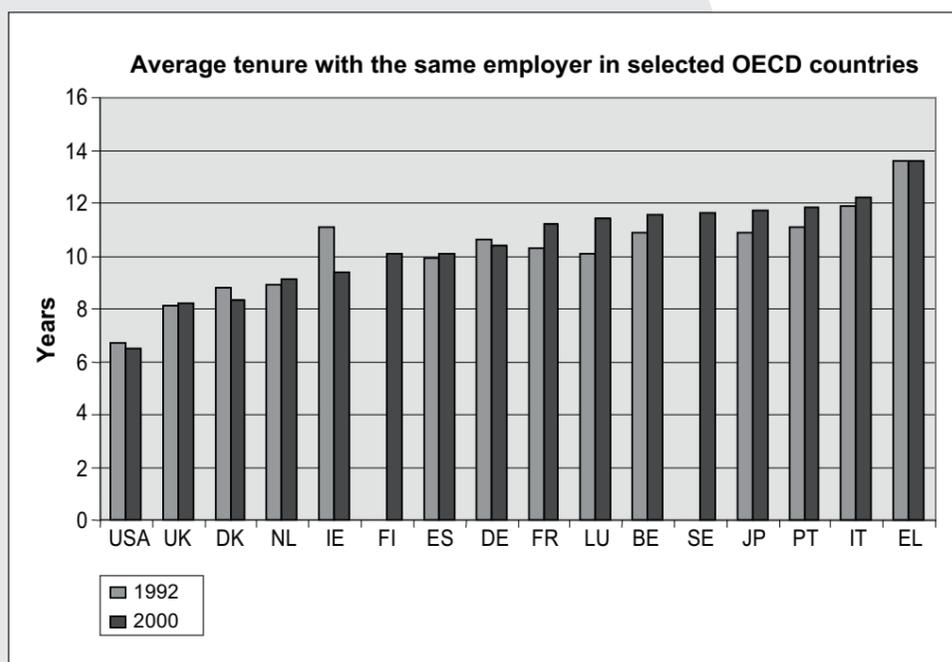
The Review points out that the success of the Danish system depends considerably on strong public-spiritedness, which is absent in many other countries, and that it is extremely expensive to fund. In 2004, Denmark spent the highest proportion of GDP on unemployment compensation and labour market programmes of any EU-25 or OECD country.

The report finds that some aspects of the Danish model are either present in, or seem destined to be incorporated into, the Irish model. These include strong social consensus, relatively loose employment protection laws, a greater emphasis on job search requirements for unemployment payments and higher rates of social welfare payments. The levels of social welfare payments in Denmark, however, would not be feasible in Ireland.

(1) Fifth Annual Labour Market Conference. Dublin, 29 November 2006
Annual Labour Market Review 2006 / FÁS. Dublin: FÁS, 2006. ISBN 0-907776-69-9
www.fas.ie/information_and_publications/publications/labour_reports/Labout_Market_Review_2006.pdf

Further information: Mr Brian McCormick. E-mail: brian.mccormick@fas.ie Tel. (353-1) 6070517

Source: FÁS



Auer, P. & Casez, S. (2003), *Employment stability in an age of flexibility. Evidence from industrialized countries*, Geneva: International Labour Organization.

Making offenders employable

In December 2006, Education Secretary Alan Johnson announced a new drive to cut crime. This involves getting offenders into training and jobs by funding EUR 700 000 pilot schemes to improve offenders' skills and jobs prospects. This is part of the government's Next Step programme, following on from the 2005 Green Paper 'Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment', which continues the cross-government approach under which three Departments - Education and Skills, Home Office and Work and Pensions, work together to a common agenda on reducing re-offending.

Under the new proposal, more help will be given to offenders who are prepared to take action to turn away from crime, and employers will be encouraged to start offender job schemes. Offenders undertaking training packages will be offered interviews, and employers will get extra support to give work trials leading to jobs. The pilot regions will be selected following a competition by Spring 2007. An employability contract, with customised packages of interven-

tions, and support to help more offenders develop marketable skills and get into sustainable jobs, will be concluded. In return for more support, offenders would need to commit to actions and standards of behaviour expressed in the contract.

The programme aims to engage more employers through a Reducing Re-offending Corporate Alliance, which works directly with employers of all sizes from the private, voluntary and public sectors. Through the alliance, as well as offering employment, businesses are encouraged to help to improve the employability of offenders by providing mentoring, sponsoring training workshops, donating equipment or helping to improve the job search skills of young offenders. The alliance promotes the message to the employers that taking on offenders can benefit business, fill labour gaps and support their corporate responsibility programmes.

There are signs of the programme working. John Foster works for Foster's bakery in Barnsley. Offenders arrive at the bakery with the NVQ bakery skills achieved in Lindholme

prison. Three prisoners achieved level 3, and two of these have been offered employment at Foster's. In all, Foster's have offered eight employment places to offenders leaving Lindholme; one of them is in supervisory management, and is now in the process of moving to retain his employment. John Foster himself said 'I have no regrets. I had to overcome my risk-averse nature but I'm happy to say that the offenders I have taken on have been model employees'.

See also: Cedefop Info 1/2006, 2/2006 and 3/2005

Further information:
www.bitc.org.uk/take_action/in_the_community/employability/exoffenders/corporate_alliance
www.lsc.gov.uk
www.dfes.gov.uk
www.dwp.gov.uk

Source: QCA

Continuing vocational training

BELGIUM

A first in Europe: using simulators for bus driver training

New top-of-the-range bus/coach driving simulator acquired by the passenger transport sector

Close collaboration between the private sector, the FOREM (Walloon Agency for Employment and Vocational Training) and the VDAB (its equivalent in Flanders) has seen this ambitious project come to fruition.

The concept consists in combining training on the SIMBUS simulator with interactive training, using computer-assisted training programmes, so that a trainer can simultaneously supervise ten trainee drivers, one at the wheel of the SIMBUS and the other nine in front of the computer.

These new methods, using the latest technology, have been put in place to prepare for the forthcoming European directive on the qualification and continuous training of drivers. This will require all professional drivers to have a qualification certificate and to complete 35 hours' continuous training every five years.

The simulator method has been chosen as it offers a number of advantages over traditional training in the vehicle. Its features include traffic situations with gradually increasing difficulty levels, programmable weather conditions, the simulation of extreme situations, etc., all in a safe and cost-effective environment. SIMBUS faithfully reproduces the visual, audio and dynamic environment (effects of braking, acceleration, etc.), while allowing interaction with passengers, thanks to the inclusion of ten seats in the cab. It also offers educational advantages, as it allows objective evaluation of the driver's performance.

While it is not intended to replace on-road training, the simulator is a high-quality complementary tool, enhancing the training experience.

Further information: Sigrid Dieu, FOREM, International Relations Department, sigrid.dieu@forem.be

Source: FOREM Formation, Francis Lefebvre, francis.lefebvre@forem.be

SPAIN

Carers offered opportunity to turn professional

A new law, aiming to help foster personal autonomy and care for people in a situation of dependency, Law 39/2006 (enacted 15 December 2006) is expected to boost the professionalisation of informal carers.

This law creates an Autonomy and Dependency Care System (Sistema para la Autonomía y Atención a la Dependencia (SAAD), with the collaboration and participation of central government and the Autonomous Communities. The system, which constitutes an important step in improving social services in Spain, responds to the need to provide dependency care and to promote personal autonomy, quality of life and equality of opportunity for these groups. It will be rolled out between 2007 and 2015, and will be financed by central government along with the autonomous communities, as well as by user contributions, according to income.

It is expected that the system will generate more than 400 000 jobs. More than 100 000 informal carers will become part of the social security system: of these, 83 % are women with an average age of 52, 60 % have a low level of education and 73 % do not carry out any paid work. Thanks to the specialised training they will receive, these women, who are currently outside the

labour market, will be able to access the labour market as professional rather than informal carers, and to work in residential homes or day centres. For this purpose, the public authorities will determine the most suitable professional qualifications required to perform the duties set out in the catalogue of services.

To ensure the quality of the system, collaboration will be encouraged between the various departments of central government and the Autonomous Communities responsible for education, health, labour and welfare, as will cooperation between these departments with universities, trade unions, employers' and tertiary sector organisations.

The social partners have asked that the training of professionals who are to be involved in the care of dependent people be developed as soon as possible and that professional profiles be established in line with the national system for qualification and vocational training, within which the catalogue of qualifications is being prepared.

Further information: Law 39/2006 on the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care for People who are in a Situation of Dependency. www.boe.es/boe/dias/2006/12/15/pdfs/A44142-44156.pdf

Source: Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal, INEM

PORTUGAL

Improving qualifications among the adult population

The recent launch of the Benchmark for Key Skills in Adult Education and Training - Secondary Level (Referencial de Competências-Chave para a Educação e Formação de Adultos - Nível Secundário) by the Ministry of Education represents a major step towards this level being accepted as the entry point for Portuguese adult qualifications via the Skills Recognition, Validation and Certification process; as such, it is a landmark in terms of raising the qualifications of the adult population.

As of January 2007, around 50 of the 270 Skills Recognition, Validation and Certification Centres currently in operation are in a position to start this process, which is aimed at adults aged 18 and over with a minimum of three years' professional experience but

who have not completed secondary education.

Taking into account the Benchmark for Key Skills at secondary level, the candidates begin by demonstrating the skills they have acquired throughout their life, both in education and through personal and professional experience, in three key skills areas: citizenship and professionalism; society, technology and science; culture, language and communication.

The whole process complies with European Community recommendations on the valorisation and validation of learning acquired in different contexts as part of lifelong learning.

Further information: www.min-edu.pt/np3/231.html

AUSTRIA

New training model aims to attract more apprentices

A new training model in industry combines training at work and education at college, allowing apprentices to become industrial engineers.

An increase in requirements for the training of apprentices, a trend towards college training and population decline are only three of the many factors making it more difficult for industrial undertakings to find suitable apprentices for vacant trainee positions. To counter this development, in the past year a working group has been set up (under the leadership of Mr Johann Weigand) by the management board of the Industriellenvereinigung Steiermark [IV Steiermark, Styrian Industrial Federation] to pursue the objective of making industrial training more attractive and identifying new pathways for vocational training.

A training model which satisfies these requirements was finalised in November 2006. It provides for both modularised training of apprentices and for dual training after the final apprenticeship examination. In principle, the model is open to all apprentices working in technical positions in industry and aims to inspire enthusiasm for industry among more young people by allowing interchangeability with the Matura [Austrian university entrance examination].

Training to become an industrial engineer begins as soon as the apprenticeship contract is signed. During the apprenticeship, particularly during the major module and additional

module (the third and fourth years of the apprenticeship), training results in the workplace and at college are documented and - along with a pass in the final apprenticeship examination - allow the apprentice to continue training after the end of the apprenticeship period. Objective criteria are used to select young people who have completed their apprenticeship and to offer them additional attractive training opportunities. Over the course of 3.5 years, the Unternehmerprüfung [entrepreneur's examination], Lehrlingsausbilderprüfung [apprentice trainers' examination], Meisterprüfung [master craftsman's examination] and the Matura are offered in the form of evening classes, successful completion of which marks the end of the training course leading to a qualification as an industrial engineer. Those completing the course then have career opportunities within the company, while careers in higher education are also possible.

This model allows training firms to be in the vanguard of quality and transparency, by offering young people who aspire to a Matura an interesting training path which - in contrast to university education - also includes vocational training.

Further information: Companies wishing to offer this training option from Autumn 2007 are asked to contact Mr Gernot Pagger in the IV Steiermark office, g.pagger@iv-net.at



GERMANY

Quality – the best recipe

Despite the difficult situation in the training place market, Prof. Reinhold Weiss, Deputy President and Head of Research of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), in an article in the BIBB journal *Berufsbildung in Wissenschaft und Praxis* (Vocational training in research and practice - BWP), insists that quality must not be neglected in vocational training. While conceding that the overriding priority must be to provide an adequate number of industrial training places for young people, Prof. Weiss contends that quantity and quality of training need not be a contradiction in terms. 'The more in-company training meets quality standards, the more likely it is that training places will also be provided.'

By the same token, a BIBB study shows that most firms believe that the issue of quality development will continue to grow in importance for their companies. The quality issue is also a main focus of the BIBB research programmes for the years 2006 and 2007.

The BIBB head of research takes a sceptical view of the enterprises' growing interest in preparing future skilled workers who are as 'customised' as possible for specific company tasks, 'in order to make training worthwhile for the company'. Although these requirements may be perfectly understandable

in terms of in-company acceptance of vocational training, Prof. Weiss rejects any implied dissociation from, or renunciation of the principle of the recognised occupation on grounds of quality. The objective of training remains to provide occupational qualifications for broadly based fields of vocational deployment. 'The task for the future will be to open up increased opportunities for differentiation and in-company structuring without calling the principle of the regulated occupation into question.' But if this is to be achieved it will be necessary to curb interest in specialised occupations that have a narrow field of deployment and little opportunity for development.

Further information: December 2006 issue of the BIBB journal BWP on 'Quality in VET': www.bibb.de/de/360.htm

Source: BIBB

ESTONIA

New standards approved for VET teachers

The Professional Council for Education of Estonia recently approved new professional standards for teachers in VET levels III, IV and V, covering over 1 425 teachers working in Estonian VET institutions.

Professional associations and experts in vocational education have pointed out that on the basis of skills requirements and work experience, teachers in vocational education are more like university lecturers than like general education teachers - hence the need to set out separate requirements for teachers in vocational education.

In Estonia, aspiring general education teachers tend to follow a clearly defined path: after graduating in pedagogical studies they immediately begin working in general education. But vocational education teachers bring a more varied background to their jobs, involving various combinations of studies (vocational secondary education or higher education), work experience, teaching experience and pedagogical training. Becoming a vocational teacher directly after completing studies is the least common scenario.

The key qualification for a vocational teacher is a high degree of competence in the relevant area of specialisation; this is generally acquired through work experience. Pedagogical training is necessary, but unlike in

general education it is common for teachers in VET to take up pedagogical studies after beginning to work as teachers.

The new standards for vocational teachers were prepared by the Estonian Qualification Authority on the basis of a new model. This allows the employees, employers and trainers to describe in a more detailed and precise manner the skills and qualifications required in each area of specialisation.

The list of competences described in the standards also allows teachers to assess their own strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the new professional standards can be used not only by trainers for curricula development and by employers for job descriptions and assessment purposes, but also by the teachers themselves - for self-evaluation, taking stock, and for setting and achieving their own goals.

Source: ReferNet Estonia

New training programmes



AUSTRIA

Innovative forms of learning in cyberspace

The Leonardo da Vinci pilot project, POOL (Project Organisation OnLine), sponsored by the European Commission, was implemented in cooperation with eight project partners from different European countries over a period of two years under the coordination of the Salzburg University of Applied Sciences and Technologies (FHS), Austria. The aim of the project was to impart project management skills in the field of telecommunications in a virtual environment, combining technical skills with soft skills.

The main thrust of the project, addressed to students of engineering, was to implement a concrete telecommunications project involving both Finnish and Austrian students and develop a transnational curriculum and handbook. The curriculum serves as a guide for trainers and gives an overview of expected learning outcomes. It shows the methodical

and pedagogical approach and contains an interdisciplinary training plan, jointly developed by the partners. The handbook presents effectively imparted learning content and highlights the challenges and opportunities observed by the project partners within the pilot project.

Intercultural skill has become an important factor of success in international business, and plays a significant role in virtual environments. Recent years have seen a growing interest - particularly in the IT field - in project forms partly or even entirely implemented in a virtual setting. Approximately one third of all IT employees now work on a virtual project at least once a week. The advantages are obvious: virtual projects offer a whole raft of opportunities to cut costs and save time, e.g. by eliminating travel and removal costs. This means that the most suit-

able employees can become involved in a project, regardless of where they happen to be; moreover, working on a 'digital' project also saves time. Web conferencing tools and special online software programmes help to overcome the barriers of space, bringing together project partners who may be scattered all over the globe. By using the Internet, a headset and a web camera, international projects can be implemented with countries as far away as e.g. India or Pakistan. Such virtual projects are also increasingly striking a chord within Europe.

Acquiring intercultural skill

Cyberspace now offers a whole series of opportunities to acquire intercultural skills. Case studies analysing specific comparative situations, e.g. from within daily business routine, video analyses of negotiations be-

tween representatives of different cultures or computer-based tests, can help to sharpen the individual's awareness of cultural differences.

The POOL project picks up on these new trends in the world of work and learning, thus making a contribution to the transnational development of innovative forms of learning and to the design of modern curricula.

Further information: www.pool.fh-sbg.ac.at/
Manfred Mayr, FH Salzburg: manfred.mayr@fh-salzburg.ac.at
Karin Luomi-Messerer, 3s: luomi-messerer@3s.co.at

Special target groups



BELGIUM

Recommendations emphasise need to provide key skills to all

The EUNEC (European Network of Education Councils) conference held in Lisbon in June 2006 resulted in a number of observations and proposals on the subject of key skills and the education of vulnerable people.

In French-speaking Belgium, the Conseil de l'éducation et de la formation (CEF), a member of EUNEC, has examined these proposals and decided to adopt them as its own recommendations. They are directly in line with the CEF's own work on basic knowledge and competences, the transverse competences.

The Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on

key skills for lifelong learning is a major step, allowing consistent dialogue at European level and in each Member State. A few criticisms and proposals were made with a view to ensuring its effective implementation and avoid any adverse consequences.

The following should be considered two of the fundamental principles:

- nobody must be left behind; every country, every sector, every community must establish realistic objectives and criteria for to their own situation, while striving towards the same goals;
- everybody must acquire key skills during compulsory education. Everyone, especially

the vulnerable, must have access to lifelong learning.

The reference framework, as it stands, risks making the short-term needs of the labour market and of society at the expense of personal achievement. The CEF would stress that those responsible for education and training at all levels must ensure that all tools and policies they develop are consistent and clearly linked together.

It is essential to take on board the eight key skills defined by Europe and use them as the basis for collective discussion. This will ensure that the individual and collective needs of all citizens of Wallonia and the Brussels

French Community will be taken into account in making the necessary adaptations, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable groups.

Further information: www.cef.cfwb.be/index.php?m=biblio_doc_view&do_id=332

Source: Sigrid Dieu, FOREM, International Relations Department:



BELGIUM

Multi-party agreement aims to steer Walloons towards technical jobs

The authorities and social partners plan to encourage young Walloons to opt for jobs in the technical and technological sector

With over 50 000 people employed in some 1500 Walloon companies, the metal manufacturing and technology sector plays a major role in the economic development of Wallonia. It is also one of the five 'centres of competitiveness' promoted by the Walloon Region through the Marshall Plan (Priority actions for the future of Wallonia).

This sector has major recruitment needs. There is therefore an urgent need to offer tailored solutions by providing guidance and training to job seekers, including young people, in the various, and constantly changing, technical trades (mechanic, tool-maker, welder, etc.).

Hence the need to define, with all partners involved (social partners, the Walloon Region, French community, FOREM, IFAPME, etc.), common objectives and targeted actions in the area of education, training and getting people into employment.

This is precisely where the agreement signed on Tuesday, 9 January 2007 between the main parties (including the Walloon Ministers of Education and of the Economy, Employment and Foreign Trade) comes in.

The agreement focuses on ten key areas:

1. Promoting and enhancing the image of jobs in the sector

Close collaboration between the sector and education should allow students to learn more about the technical jobs on offer in the sector and related career prospects. Students will be given the opportunity to complete refresher courses in skills centres, as well as work placements in companies.

2. Investment in updating the CCPO (Professions and Qualifications Agency of the French Community in Belgium)

Common job benchmarks will be created for jobs in the sector. To ensure efficient and effective training, care will be taken to develop training and education programmes that genuinely meet the requirements of the sector. Qualification tests are planned with a view to harmonising assessment standards.

3. Company work placements

Refresher courses in skills centres equipped with the latest technology and company work placements will allow young people to acquire

work experience. Company training for young people will be encouraged.

4. Development of language training

Language learning grants are planned for technical and vocational careers paths. These grants will also be available to job seekers who want to improve their language skills.

5. Labour market analysis

This will be intensified in response to the qualification shortfalls currently detected through the "Job Focus" plan.

6. Job seeker training

A range of training options are proposed for job seekers. Particular attention will be paid to ensuring they are accessible to all without any discrimination (people with low qualification levels, young people, women, older workers, immigrants, the disabled, etc.). The employment success rate is currently 60 % to 80 % in the technology industry, depending on the job in question.

7. Training of workers in the sector

Due to a number of problems with recruitment linked to a shortage of skills, companies in the sector are significantly increasing investment in continuous training. The agreement will encourage this further. Skills centres now offer a range of innovative training options (micromechanics, digital imaging, distance learning, etc.).

8. Involvement of sectors in the development and enhancing of skills centres and advanced technologies

Skills centres, of which there are currently around 20 in the Walloon Region, are modern training venues as well as centres dedicated to knowledge and know-how. Although they are essentially aimed at vocational training, these centres also monitor job trends and training needs, participate in research and development in the area of education, and assist job seekers in finding employment. The investment approved and collaboration with skills centres specialising in metal manufacturing and the technology in-

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LITHUANIA

Developing the guidance system

The occupational guidance and counselling field has been receiving increasing attention in recent years. The most recent initiatives include the establishment of network of occupational information centres (PIT) in general education schools (2002); the creation of the Open Information, Counseling and Guidance System (AIKOS: www.aikos.smm.lt, 2002); the development and approval of the Strategy for Vocational Guidance (2003) and its action plan (2004). Since 2003, Ministry of Education and Science has been commissioning research to better monitor the system.

The most recent research project, 'Occupational information, guidance and counselling of pupils in schools' (2006) investigated the extent to which guidance and counselling services suit the needs of pupils. It revealed that occupational guidance in schools is not covering young people's needs. School-based guidance came from teachers rather than counsellors, due to the lack of training for guidance and counselling specialists. A majority of pupils did not know about the occupational information centres (PIT) in their school. Two-thirds of pupils and students were unaware of the existence of extramural counselling services, and lacked information on further education opportunities, career options and the labour market. Only a small proportion of schools organised occupational guidance events, such as meetings with employers and with students from vocational schools, visits to higher education institutions and study visits in enterprises.

In their recommendations, the researchers highlighted the need for more active establishment of occupational information centres

(PIT); for awareness-raising about occupational guidance and counselling services among parents; for appointing occupational advisors in schools; for organising professional development events for teacher in the field of occupational guidance and counselling; and for the introduction of a occupational guidance and counselling module in all teacher training programmes.

Actions addressing the issues raised by researchers have already been implemented. The training of occupational guidance and counselling specialists, for instance, began in earnest in 2006. Moreover, European structural funds have allowed a number of new activities that should help improve the system quickly, such as the development of a occupational counselling model, the creation of occupational guidance standard and training programmes, the training of specialists, the further development of AIKOS system and others.

Further information:

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Reference documents:

'Occupational information, guidance and counselling of pupils in schools' (Mokiniu profesinis informavimas, konsultavimas ir orientavimas mokyklose). Ministry of Education and Science: www.smm.lt
Ministry of Education and Science: www.smm.lt



Web-based counselling goes to the next level

For people who need vocational guidance and orientation there are numerous information tools available in the internet – but these are seldom integrated. To overcome this, a Leonardo da Vinci project involving seven partners from Austria, Denmark, Finland, Romania and Slovenia developed a new information system. The main aim of 'Jobtutor' is to combine the often dispersed areas of vocational information and counselling and give the user easy access to all relevant information. Within the project, Jobtutor was to become a comprehensive information tool for occupations in which IT skills are essential.

The project started in October 2004. By now, the first 'Jobtutor' is already available on the web in Austrian, Finnish, Romanian and Slovenian versions (please note the links at the end of the article).

The design for the information system developed comprised four main functions:

1. Up-to-date information on labour market demands: For more than 20 professional fields, the system provides information arranged by branches, regions, formal and informal education and particular skills requirements. Thus, users find out quickly which jobs are offered in particular regions and areas of economy. Additionally, an overview on the demand for particular skills is provided. The data base of Jobtutor is very large, e.g. for the Austrian version the data base contains more than 45 000 job offers which analysed since 2002.



Fig. 1: Labour market information in Jobtutor (German version)

2. Descriptions of occupational demands: Jobtutor contains in-depth information on concrete job tasks, working conditions, work relations, work-life-balance and interviews with role models across Europe. Here, the project team considered it important to develop stimulating, gender-sensitive descriptions which motivate users to make detailed examinations of their personal wishes and the particular challenges.

3. Skills Test Centre: Users can take a series of skills tests to find out which skills they should develop in order to become fit for the job of their interest. Jobtutor provides an aptitude test as well as a wide range of test modules for soft and hard skills. At the end of each test, the users get a personalised test report which shows the particular skills in need of further training.

Schlüsselkompetenzen	Nicht relevant	
Belastbarkeit (Mehr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Zum Test
Eigenständigkeit (Mehr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Zum Test
Flexibilität (Schließen)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Zum Test
Flexibilität ist die Fähigkeit von Personen unter ständig verändernden Bedingungen zu arbeiten. Diese geistige Anpassungsfähigkeit kann sich auf unterschiedliche Arbeitszeiten, Arbeitsumgebungen aber auch Tätigkeiten beziehen. Personen sind flexibel, wenn sie sich schnell an neue Gegebenheiten anpassen, und ihnen unvorhergesehene Änderungen keine Probleme bereiten.		
Führungsmotivation (Mehr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Zum Test
Kommunikationsfähigkeit (Mehr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Zum Test
Leistungsbereitschaft (Mehr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Zum Test
Organisationsfähigkeit (Mehr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Zum Test

Figure 2: Soft Skills Test – Test Selection (German version)

4. Training planner: At the end of the course, Jobtutor shows an overview on the next training steps. Here, users get detailed information on all courses they are to take, based on their individual test results. This comprises information on course subjects, duration, costs, provider contact and more.



Fig. 3: Overview on education pathways for 'System/Network Administrator' (in German)

Jobtutor: Automatic for the people

A particular feature of Jobtutor is that large parts of its contents are generated by the system. Based on the initial data base containing labour market information, Jobtutor selects the right test modules once the user has selected a job. When the user has finished the tests, the system suggests a combination of courses for further training based on the individual test results.

Jobtutor covers the entire process: information-seeking, testing and decision-making, making the first concrete step towards education and training. The system can be used for planning individual pathways at schools as well as for identifying continuing training needs and in the context of counsellor-client interaction. Thus, the transnational project team aims to provide an easy but very reliable tool for all stages of life-long learning.

The system will be developed further on two levels. New features can be integrated easily as Jobtutor is based on a highly flexible Content Management System (CMS). All features are easily scalable and ready for further development. In terms of content, the system will grow through continuous integration of new occupational fields and thus of a greater range of users, including new partners.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

Jobtutor is now available for examination - log in and take a tour!

Jobtutor is available in four country versions (please note that according to national roll-out, the range of functions may vary):

- Austria: www.jobtutor.at (all functions available)
- Slovenia: www.poklicni-vodic.si
- Romania: www.jobtutor.ro
- Finland: www.jobtutor.fi

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Source: Dietmar Paier, ZBW Forschung & Beratung, Graz

Multi-party agreement aims to steer Walloons towards technical jobs

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industry (Technifutur, Technofutur, Campus automobile, Wan, Design et innovation, Pigments) reflect the benefit of close collaboration with well-equipped training and/or skills centres.

9. Development of skills validation

It is now possible to have one's skills validated in around thirty jobs, including some specific to metal manufacturing and technology industry.

10. Support in finding employment

The sector is in favour of individual training within companies. The aim of the 'Plan Formation-Insertion'(PFI) is to help job seekers find employment through a training programme tailored to the needs of the employer. Pre-training is offered in sectoral training centres to provide the basic skills. This will be followed by training in the company in order to develop experience in the field. Financial incentives (both for trainees and companies) should encourage this type of training. This is a real alternative, combining both training and on-the-job learning, which should also help solve the sector's recruitment problems.

Following the signature of the framework agreement, sub-agreements will be drawn up very shortly between the various partners (FOREM, IFAPME, education). These agreements will define the targeted actions to be taken over the coming months.

Further information: Sigrîd Dieu, FOREM, International Relations Department; sigrîd.dieu@forem.be

Source: Jennifer Wuilquot, spokesperson for Marie Arena, Minister-President of the Government of the French Community of Belgium; <http://arena.wallonie.be>.

Social partners

Tax breaks for taking on the long-term unemployed

Tens of thousands of long-term unemployed people could soon be companies' preferred candidates for recruitment. From the beginning of this year, by recruiting unemployed people who have been out of work for more than 12 months businesses could increase wage costs by 50 %, thereby considerably reducing the amount of corporation tax (the tax on profits) paid to the government.

Up until the end of last year, this tax benefit was restricted to 'young people with an open-ended contract,

aged 30 and under', for a period of five years. This covered a total of just under 66 000 young people seeking their first job.

Starting this year, in accordance with the State Budget, the measure is extended to cover the long-term unemployed irrespective of age, provided that the employer's intention is to sign an open-ended contract. Unemployed workers with 'fixed contracts for a period of less than six months' also qualify.

In the third quarter of 2006, nearly 204 000 unem-

ployed had been out of work for over 12 months - almost 50 % of the total jobless population, according to Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE)'s records for the third quarter of 2006.

Further information: Diário de Notícias (2007/01/09)

Source: CID / DGEEP
Cláudia Arriegas (claudia.arriegas@dgeep.mtss.gov.pt)



Mobility – a building block for Europe



Last December Marie-Jeanne Maurage left Cedefop after 11 years at the helm of the Study Visits Programme. Thanks partly to her successful stewardship, the new Lifelong Learning Programme has assigned the integrated study visits programme to Cedefop.

Cedefop Info met her a few days before her departure from Greece - a country whose culture she has thoroughly explored - to record her parting thoughts.

How studies in medieval history lead to work in VET

I studied history with Jacques Le Goff and Michel Mollat. What we were studying at that time was the relationship between urban growth and the phenomenon of how poverty is drawn to wealth. With this background as a researcher into urban poverty issues, I responded to a Ministry of Employment request to analyse the phenomenon of long-term unemployment in France - this at a time when 100 000 people in France had been unemployed for over five years. This was how I began a professional journey which brought me from the recognition of the skills of people deemed to be 'unqualified' to action on behalf of the long-term unemployed, to the continuous training of work psychologists, and finally to European affairs - including study visits - at the French Directorate-General for Vocational Training. When I was invited to come to Cedefop on secondment as an expert, I was tempted by the adventure - both by the idea of living abroad and of coordinating study visits, a programme in which I was already very interested.

On what VET can accomplish

Training cannot patch things up where there's been a crisis, crises usually being signs of a fundamental break. Training can achieve a lot if it's situated within the social dialogue: for example, it can help recognise informal skills, it can help provide basic skills and flexible thinking. But vocational training cannot be expected to deliver short-term solutions to fundamental problems or changes brought about by globalisation.

On establishing the terms of the debate

If you want to hear a real debate, sit around a table with a group of British, German and Italian people and ask each of them the meaning of 'continuous training' or 'skills'! These terms are linked both to the structure of the country's education and training system and to the way work is organised within companies. It goes further still: the structure of work and education is itself linked to a country's main products and to how its society is organised. I am very grateful to Philippe Méhaut and Kenneth Abrahamsson for drawing my attention to the fact that if we wanted a debate - which is the aim of a study visit - we would need, above all, to avoid defining the terms in advance. But if everyone is asked 'what does training mean?', then we can find out why everyone defines vocational training in a particular way - and only then can we hope to understand one another.

On whether there is a rapprochement between European education and training systems.

It became evident that the countries with the lowest rates of youth unemployment, or in any event where the young are unemployed for the shortest periods of time, are those operating the 'dual' system. This meant that we would have to introduce practices which would both offer theoretical train-

ing and begin to get people into work, giving them a taste for working. So yes, there has been a rapprochement. I am not sure now whether, with EU enlargement, we are likely to see the gulf widen again, followed perhaps by another rapprochement, but, then, what kind of rapprochement will that be? The meeting of these different cultural systems, of the legacy of the past and of economic upheaval may perhaps lead to a different outcome.

On the balance between flexibility and quality

The success of Erasmus, among other schemes, is proof of the willingness of young people to incorporate practical experience and travel in their studies. But we run the risk of going too far with accelerated training programmes. We need both to maintain high intellectual standards, in view of the competition between Europe, China and India, and to offer everyone the opportunity of gaining solid foundations - upon which they can then develop a professional profile which is sufficiently flexible, but also sufficiently rewarding...

On whether the new direction of lifelong learning is an opportunity or a threat

It's true that the older section of the population has a fear of job insecurity, but I don't believe that young people feel the same way. Of course, one can't drift continually from one job to another - that's not a serious approach. But when you see how the world operates, and what's in store for us in the medium term with the competition coming from India and China, you realise that we must be creative and innovative, we must have solid foundations and an element of flexibility in our attitudes. On the other hand, people cannot be subjected to such working conditions and insecurity as to leave them devastated and desperate, mortgaging both their present and their future. As Jordi Planas and our friends at the London School of Economics have said, any discussion of lifelong learning requires a review of the relationship between initial training and continuous training.

On training as a business

There is also another aspect we should give serious thought to: training has become a commodity. It's true that training cannot be said to be a product like any other - it's a "cultural exception". Still, we live in a world where everything can be bought and sold. Whether or not we agree with this principle, it's a fact of life. So let's not pretend it doesn't exist - let's analyse it, think about it, have a proper debate and take the necessary political decisions. Cedefop should take a lead on this issue.

On Study Visits and 'thinking outside the box'

Study visits offer a 'journey within a journey'. Participants travel, say, to the United Kingdom - but at the same time they are members of a team which is itself multinational and multidisciplinary. A Spanish boss, a German trade unionist, a Swedish researcher and a member of a Polish NGO will look together at the British approach, but

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The consolidated study visits: a new role for Cedefop

The Study Visits Programme, part of the Leonardo da Vinci II Programme until 2006, has become part of new generation of education programmes of the EU: it now falls under the Lifelong Learning Programme of the EU (LLP), 2007-2013. The LLP incorporates all previous education and training programmes in order to better respond to the growing integration of education and training systems in a lifelong learning context, and to further develop the proven value of European cooperation programmes in spreading innovation and good practice that would otherwise remain locked within national borders.

In this lifelong learning perspective, the two study visits programmes - the Arion study visits for education specialists and decision makers, and the LdV II Mobility study visits for those responsible for vocational training - will merge into one programme under Key Activity 1 'Policy Innovation and Cooperation' of the Transversal Programme of the LLP as of 1 January 2008.

The groups targeted by the consolidated study visits are: experts and officials designated by national, regional and local authorities; directors of education and training establishments, guidance, counselling and experience-accreditation services; and social partner representatives.

The consolidated programme will be managed by Cedefop, following a proposal by DG Education and Culture which recognised Cedefop's methods and its successful management of the Leonardo da Vinci Study Visits Programme. Cedefop will coordinate the programme at the European level, concentrating on the qualitative aspects of the programme.

The main activities of Cedefop for the coordination of the programme on behalf of the Commission will be:

1. preparing the programme catalogue and schedule;
2. coordinating calls for candidates;
3. monitoring the composition of the groups;
4. ensuring the quality of each study visit;
5. assessing and evaluating the implementation and results of the programme;
6. disseminating the results to stakeholders.

Specifically, based on the analysis and evaluation of the results, Cedefop will disseminate relevant information (including information on selected themes) to the various stakeholders and to the general public via hard-copy publications, web-based information and related events.

The support to the social partners which Cedefop has always provided will continue, through seminars and workshops focusing on themes of common interest. Cedefop will also work with the national agencies to raise awareness of social partner needs.

In addition, Cedefop will continue to provide background documentation related to the European perspective on the themes of the study visits. For this the Centre will rely on in-house expertise, but also involve external experts, especially in the field of general education.

Decision establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning: Official Journal L327, 24.11.06, p. 45. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_327/l_32720061124en00450068.pdf

Source: Study Visits Programme/line



Mobility – a building block for Europe

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obviously each will look at it from their own perspective and each will ask their own questions. By cutting all our usual moorings, this process leads to an understanding of why 'they' do things a certain way or look at reality from a certain standpoint but also forces us to understand why 'we' do things in our particular way. Ultimately we are forced to reconsider our opinions. During a study visit, one also has great freedom of speech: the Spanish boss will never have to negotiate with the German trade unionist - well, at least not for the time being! More to the point, a study visit is not the beginning and the end, it is a stage in a project, an incitement to reflection which will then be put into action...

On assessing the effects of study visits

We've put evaluation mechanisms into place - for instance, when participants register, they're asked what their aims are and what changes they expect to make after the visit. A few months after their visit - never less than six months - they're asked what they've done in the intervening period. But from time to time discussions also take place outside the official assessment: it can happen that during a meeting of Directors General someone will say 'we used such-and-such idea because we saw it during a study visit to a certain country, and we realised how we could use it in our country'. A study visit is a study of attitudes: after going home, a participant will think 'yes, this is how we do it, but the way the Spaniards do it could also be interesting' or 'the Finns have asked this question in a very thought-provoking manner', etc.

On the origins of the Study Visits Programme and her contribution

The visits were already running before I came to Cedefop: it was Duccio Guerra who had set up the programme, following the feasibility study carried out by Jean-Marie Luttringer at the Commission's request. The idea was that policymakers and social partners alike needed to understand the workings of other systems because they had to take joint decisions on vocational training. Now there is no longer a joint policy, but joint objectives are still being set. My role was to mark the 20th anniversary of this programme, to oversee the history of the study visits project - which an Italian researcher completed under my supervision - and above all to make arrangements for the change in scale with the accession of the new countries.

On her most memorable period at Study Visits.

The enlargement! When I arrived, the programme was extending from 12 to 15 countries, but we then moved quickly from 15 to 30, due to the addition of the associated countries from the European Economic Area. The diverse economic conditions, the diverse structure of society, working life, legacy of the past... these are some of the things I found most enriching. It was an opportunity to discover countries undergoing a historical transition. I think we should encourage people from Western Europe, from 'established' Europe to visit these countries, so that they might understand what's happening and develop a more modest approach toward them, more tolerance and respect. These countries have a cultural and intellectual background of which we are ignorant. I have always emphasised that 'familiarisation' is not just a process of enabling them to get to know us. Certainly not! We have to make the same effort and take the same steps in the opposite direction.

On future changes to the Study Visits programme under the Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme

The first and most fundamental change is becoming attuned to the lifelong learning perspective, which will require us to look at things afresh and ask new questions. The second change is the change in scale. There will be a three-fold increase in the number of participants managed by Cedefop. It's important to note that under previous programmes like Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci, everything related to mobility was successful, demonstrating that mobility was really one of the building blocks for Europe. This led to the idea of developing activities that help people to get to know Europe, that encourage them to visit places away from home, that build networks and open people's minds. As the study visits still remain squarely within the scope of our mission, and moreover, Cedefop has proved its know-how, the ship can now set sail with more passengers on board!

On leaving Study Visits and Cedefop

What will I miss? Working on a daily basis with people from many different countries! I will no longer have the opportunity to spend every day in a team in which everyone thinks, speaks, eats, dances, structures their time in a different way... I think this is what everyone at Cedefop most enjoys.

Certainly I hope Cedefop and the Study Visits Programme grow and bear fruit, just like the olive tree that I planted on my balcony when I arrived in Thessaloniki. I think the challenges the world faces today are of a sufficient magnitude that this work must be done seriously, and with humility. Training means preparing for and investing in the long term. Time will be the test, history the judge...

Lifelong Learning: are we there yet? Reflections of an HRD manager

For over five years, I have worked as a Human Resources Development Manager in a chemical production plant in Flanders, and thus have witnessed at close range how quickly organisations must adapt in order to stay alive. But a company's success in implementing the necessary changes very often depends on the learning power of its employees. Even in a highly technical field like the chemical industry, organisational innovation has become no less important than technological creativity, and the ability to learn quickly is now a vital skill for all. These developments are what led to my interest in lifelong learning, and in the Study Visits Programme. What follows is a personal appreciation of how I feel lifelong learning is developing across Europe, based on my observations at work and on what I have experienced during these study visits.

In general, 'lifelong learning' is still fragmented between planned education, formal training and employment. Career guidance is similarly fragmented, involving various bodies. Some of these are private, some not; they may or may not have responsibility for implementing initiatives; they aim at different target groups; and their work is variously linked to other forms of counselling. As a result of all this variety, people often experience a substantial gap between the guidance they receive as pupils in compulsory education, and career guidance in the labour market.

Nevertheless, the recent trend towards cooperation between various stakeholders shows that, when obstacles are removed, natural synergies between learning and working emerge. Thus, rather than centralise all these services governments should concentrate on helping people make their own way. The major areas of improvement I witnessed as a participant in study visits involve the

cooperation between several stakeholders and the increasing autonomy of scholar and trainee. In fact, the features that struck me as particularly successful in the three countries I visited with the Study Visits Programme all shared a focus on the expressed needs of the trainee.

Norway (Bodo, 2005)

In Nordland County, teachers and trainers have succeeded in making learning attractive to students, employees and unemployed people. The main strategy, based on the concepts of entrepreneurship and autonomy, is 'learning by doing'. Both teachers and students told us they saw fundamental progress in their attitude to learning. A secondary-school English teacher of 25 years' standing told me that, after the introduction of project-based learning, 'I never saw students work so hard to learn English'. In addition, a lifecycle approach is used as an optimal guiding technique, together with mentoring and coaching. This makes the Norwegian system one of the most progressive and innovative I have seen in Europe. I interpreted the low dropout rate (4.5 %) as proof of the wisdom of their approach.

Germany (Berlin, 2006)

The Berlin study visit stressed the advantages of the high status associated with 'being a professional' in Germany. We studied the dual system that links training and work, an important feature of which is that responsibility for training is shared between government, school and company. The exchange of knowledge between instructor and trainee is perhaps closest to the old 'master-pupil' relationship, with a contemporary twist. One automobile-repair instructor explained the success of the programme thus: 'The big car manufactur-

ers provide our training centre with the latest technology. It is challenging for me to work and learn alongside young people in a high-tech environment, while preparing them for service'. I interpreted his pride as a sign of their good approach and methods.

Lithuania (Vilnius, 2006)

A new Member State, with a relatively short independent history, Lithuania demonstrated a marked ambition to make progress. Lithuanians are rapidly developing forward-looking systems based on (and sometimes adding to) research on European guidance tools. High-quality materials in different formats, including multimedia, are being produced as information and educational aids. Employer and employee organisations are closely involved in educational services through partnerships. Full of enthusiasm, one teacher told us she worked hard with her pupils, wanting them 'to be the best!'. What struck me was the will to sustain excellent communication between all active players and the common drive to translate vision into reality in the near future.

Back to Flanders...

Observing these developments in Europe, I realised that 'lifelong learning' has arrived. Of course every country has its own agenda, its own gaps to fill. But seeing what is already in place gives us all the impetus to make necessary changes.

Every participant in a study visit takes away some learning points - and these are mine:

- The evolution to greater autonomy of schools and training centres is a major shift in the management paradigm for both government and the social partners;
- the role of trainers has become very demanding as it moves increasingly towards coaching and mentoring activities;

- to maintain the connection between working and learning and the (necessary) autonomy of trainers and trainees, all stakeholders must develop a more cooperative mentality.

To make this happen in a country like Flanders, where the educational system is believed to be 'one of the best in the world' is a considerable challenge. The more established a system, the harder it is to change it! Yet more and more activities and organisations now link education and the labour market. Pilot projects have been developed on new ways of providing guidance and counselling. The recent Regional Technology Centres are making competence transfer easier. Having had, in these three study visits, a glimpse of what is happening in the rest of Europe, I feel that Flanders is moving in the right direction - after all, it is well placed to do so as it has built considerable social capital over many years of open communication between stakeholders in the learning and training fields. The trick is to avoid 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater': to bring about useful changes while retaining what works well in our system.

About the author: Roland Spaenhoven (54) is the Human Resources Development Manager at Lanxess NV, a company producing chemicals, rubber and plastics in Antwerp, Flanders, Belgium. The company is part of the international Lanxess Group, with 18 600 employees in 18 countries. Spaenhoven, who started working as a mechanic at 17, holds a MSc in Human Resources Development (2004) from the University of Twente, Netherlands.