

Cedefop - In our own voice

Starting with this issue, Cedefop Info will give the floor - in no particular order - to its own in-house experts. As the occasion arises they will provide insights into work at Cedefop and their project activities in conversation with the editors.

We begin this series with Mara Brugia, who heads Area B - 'Reporting and Facilitating a Concerted Approach' - and is also Coordinator of the Training of Trainers Network (TTnet).

Mara Brugia holds a Masters degree in Law, Economics and Politics of the European Union and has been working in Cedefop since 1994.

A specialist in VET trainers and teachers, since 1999 she coordinates the Training of Trainers Network, a Europe-wide network of national networks uniting some 400 local, regional and national organisations. She has co-authored a number of Cedefop publications in this domain and has responsibility for monitoring the virtual collaboration activities of the network.

Mara Brugia is responsible for the overall management of the area B's activities: reporting on VET developments, networking and support to the Commission in the implementation of Education and Training 2010 agenda.

CEDEFOP INFO:

TTnet is now eight years old and has 21 national networks. What is the role and aims of TTnet at European level, and what are those of the individual national networks?

MARA BRUGIA:

Our main purpose is to promote the professional development of VET teachers and trainers to enable them to meet the challenges posed by changing labour market conditions and increasing expectations of their target groups. To achieve this, TTnet promotes the sharing, development and dissemination of knowledge about the training and professional development of VET personnel. One major breakthrough at EU level, which placed our work on a firm institutional footing, was the Maastricht Communiqué of December 2004: this expressly named the continuing further development of vocational teachers' and trainers' skills as one of the priorities in the field of VET at national and EU level.

CEDEFOP INFO:

So how does it work: how do the national networks and TTnet at European level fit together?

MARA BRUGIA:

TTnet is not a centralised structure - the national net-

works decide on their own priorities and collect and disseminate good examples of practice in areas that are priorities for VET teachers and trainers in their own countries. Common activities focus on shared priorities which are also consistent with the EU policy in this field. In this way, Cedefop fosters coherent action and the Community added value of networking. Let me give you an example. In its recently completed PROFF project, TTnet looked at trends in professionalisation of VET teachers in six countries (!). To give another example, the network has examined whether and how elearning and ICT have an impact on teachers' and trainers' activities and competences (?). Yet another TTnet project is analysing 30 examples, drawn from practice, of validation of non-formal learning for VET teachers and trainers. So you see we have our fingers in various pies.

One activity we're excited about this year is the TTnet pilot project to define five VET professions, in line with the European Qualifications Framework.

It is important to say that the outcomes of all TTnet cross-country thematic projects are user-oriented and contain recommendations and tools for practitioners and policy-makers in the specific working field.

Of course good channels of communication are of paramount importance to us. Right now, TTnet maintains a virtual community with around 1300 members. This highlights the work of the national networks and brings everyone together to discuss particularly important topics.

CEDEFOP INFO:

In November of last year, the German TTnet network was set up in Berlin. What do the Germans expect from the network?

MARA BRUGIA:

I think TTnet will be able to highlight major German concerns at a European level. Vocational teachers and trainers are fundamental to the success of the German dual system. Our efforts to make trainers more professional, to capture and record trainer profiles at European level - in short, the whole question of the identity of the trainer, which we place at the heart of our work - will help to enhance the recognition given to this professional group in Germany, as elsewhere. But at the same time we hope that Germany will have much to contribute to the network on the subject of how to make the training of trainers more relevant to new developments in the labour market.

I would expect that the German TTnet will be very active in several European themes with which TTnet as a whole



is concerned at the moment: the training and learning needs of VET teachers and trainers, the identification and validation of non-formal learning, the European Qualifications Framework.

CEDEFOP INFO:

It is interesting that you mentioned the identity of the trainer. Who, in fact, is defined as a trainer?

MARA BRUGIA:

Well, naturally the terms 'teacher' and 'trainer' cover a wide range of activities: they are multipliers, instructors, organisers, judges of character, conflict-solvers... Trainers are today increasingly turning into moderators and coaches, planning, developing and deciding for themselves. It's all very different from the 'traditional' trainer, whose main activity used to be one-directional teaching of specialist knowledge. The emphasis has shifted now to group work, exchanging information, and personal responsibility.

Continued on page 3

Cedefop at Online Educa Berlin 2005

Now in its 11th year, Online Educa Berlin has gained a reputation as the world's leading international conference on technology supported learning. From November 29 to December 4, close to 1900 participants from 73 countries gathered to listen to opinion-makers, to share experience with colleagues and to make contacts and gain the benefits of new stimuli and new ideas.

Mara Brugia, Head of Area B in Cedefop, had the honour of opening the first plenary session of the event. In her opening remarks she outlined that over the past five years Europe has witnessed a visible change in focus in the elearning landscape. The first generation was, unfortunately, marked with the stamp of user dissatisfaction. In the meantime the industry is turning increasingly to the questions of content and pedagogical methods. The initial practice of simply making the traditional classroom experience available online is now being superseded with the realisation that technology and learner-centred technology has much greater implications on the way we learn.

During the three days a host of workshops and seminars attempted to address the many differing issues and fields relating to elearning. There was a total of 4 plenary sessions and 84 parallel sessions. Cedefop, represented also by Ms Virginie Aimard, Mr Franz Gramlinger and Mr Colin Mc Cullough, participated actively in three workshops. Ms Aimard spoke on collaborative elearning and competence development looking at the specificities of Virtual Learning Environments and how they foster learning and language learning in particular. Mr Gramlinger contributed to a panel discussion on e-skills and elearning for enterprises and presented the current efforts for a European e-skills meta-framework. Mr Mc Cullough chaired a session on the implications of elearning for lifelong learning.

Further information on the conference and a fully summary report of the proceedings can be downloaded at www.online-educa.com/pdf/post_conference_report_2005.pdf.

Source: Cedefop mb/vai/cmc

EUROPEAN UNION

Commission urges Member States to modernise training

In calling upon the EU Member States to modernise their education and training (E&T) and continuing training (CT) systems, the Council of the EU and the European Commission see E&T as more than just a factor for economic growth. In a Europe struggling to maintain its social model, the social dimension of E&T is increasingly in the limelight. This explains why 'investment in human capital' and 'adapting E&T systems in response to new workplace requirements' were incorporated into the guidelines for employment. Moreover, as youth unemployment in the EU is on average double the overall unemployment rate, both the European Youth Pact (!) and the Green Paper Confronting demographic change - a new solidarity between generations of March 2005 call for better support for young people in the transition from E&T to working life. But to achieve this aim, we will need to apply comprehensive strategies.

Continued on page 7

Summary of responses received to the Commission's consultation on the EQF during the 2nd half of 2005

This paper ⁽¹⁾ summarising the responses to the EQF consultation process is based on a preliminary report prepared for the Commission by the Pôle Universitaire Européen de Lorraine and an analysis by Cedefop ⁽²⁾.

The Commission consulted the 32 countries participating in the work programme Education & Training 2010, the European social partner organisations (employers and trade unions), European associations and NGOs in the area of education and training, European industry sector associations and DG Education and Culture committees and networks (e.g. Euroguidance, NARIC). The additional 13 countries which take part in the Bologna process were also informed.

The Commission has received approx. 120 responses from 31 European countries (the responses are accessible on the following website:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/eqf/resultsconsult_en.html). The largest group of responses comes from national and regional authorities (35 % of responses), followed by education associations and NGOs (23 %), the sectors (14 %) and the social partners (8 % from employers, 4 % from the trades unions).

It should be noted that responses in most cases build on extensive national and Europewide consultation processes. The number of stakeholders actually involved in the consultation process is therefore significantly higher than the approx. 120 listed above.

Areas of broad consensus

In general, the EQF is seen as a constructive initiative which should contribute significantly to the transparency, transfer and recognition of qualifications within the European labour market. The EQF is also seen as an initiative which should stimulate national and sectoral reform processes. The replies to the consultation show broad agreement on the following issues:

- the EQF is necessary and broadly relevant;
- its implementation and use should be voluntary;
- the EQF should remain a common reference or meta-framework, acting as a translation device at the European level;
- the EQF must be based on learning outcomes;
- the proposed 8-level structure is broadly acceptable;
- the EQF must be underpinned by Quality Assurance principles;
- an operational EQF will require substantial commitment by stakeholders at the national level and, in the large majority of countries, could result in the development of overarching National Qualifications Frameworks. This feedback may be seen as offering a strong mandate for the further development and implementation of the EQF.

The need for clarification, simplification and further development

The broad support to the EQF outlined above has been made conditional on further development and refinement. Many respondents find the proposal complex and abstract and point to the need for clarification, simplification and testing.

Clarification

There is considerable concern as to the clarity of concepts underlying the EQF proposal. This applies in particular to the definitions of concepts like qualification, competence and sector. Many of the respondents underline that conceptual agreement is a prerequisite for practical co-operation. The definitions of (national and meta) qualifications frameworks seem to have been accepted and contributed to the clarity of the responses.

Simplification and focus on key objectives and functions

Many of the responses express concern that the proposal is too complex and that it tries to embrace too many objectives and functions at the same time. A

stronger focus on the crucial translation function is seen by many as a condition for success.

Testing

The emphasis on simplification was in many cases accompanied by a request for a pilot phase and testing (e.g. Slovakia, Germany, Luxembourg, Finland, UNICE, etc.). This reflects the common view that the EQF requires long-term development allowing for improvements based on practical experiences.

Key areas for further development

In addition to the general need for clarification, simplification and testing, responses focus on certain key issues:

- descriptors,
- the link to the higher education framework and the Bologna process
- national qualifications systems and their link to the EQF
- the role of sectors

Descriptors

27 % of respondents agree that the proposed descriptors capture the complexity of lifelong learning, while 44 % agree to some extent and 5.5 % disagree with this proposition. This indicates that the descriptors have to be revised and refined.

Criticism is, in particular, directed towards the third category of descriptors, 'wider professional and personal competences'. While admitting that this category covers many important learning outcomes, many respondents find the proposal to be overly complex (4 sub-categories) and difficult to apply in practice (how to measure personal competences?). This could increase the difficulty of aligning national qualifications to the EQF and reduce the relevance of the EQF as a tool for practical cooperation.

Other respondents (e.g. the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry) believe the Commission's approach is too hierarchical and linear, artificially placing a person at the same level across the knowledge, skills and competences descriptors, when the reality might be that he or she appears at a different level for each of these three. Some stakeholders point to what they perceived to be omissions or imbalances, e.g. not enough emphasis on non-formal learning or professional competences.

Particular attention has been given to the descriptors under levels 6 to 8. Some find them too much oriented towards academic at the expense of vocational qualifications (Austria, Malta). Others are of the opinion that levels 6-8 should be the exclusive responsibility of higher education and the Bologna process.

The EQF's relationship with the Bologna process

Respondents called for more clarity in the EQF's relationship with the Bologna Process (i.e. the development of the European Area of Higher Education). Some stakeholders were concerned that the EQF might run in parallel or be incompatible with the Bologna Process or even supplant it. Universities in particular expressed this concern as did a number of countries including the Netherlands, Ireland, Denmark and Croatia. Others emphasise, however, that high level qualifications should be promoted in all fields of education and training - vocational as well as general. For this purpose levels 6-8 should be relevant to qualifications also outside the academic field.

National Qualifications systems

Certain countries have indicated that they do not intend to establish a national qualifications framework and this is not a prerequisite for linking up to the EQF. However, the large majority of countries intend that a

national qualification framework will eventually be their main 'relational entity' to a future EQF. By this is meant that the process of placing or aligning a particular qualification to the EQF would be carried out through their National Qualifications Framework, whether existing or still to be developed. While differing in emphasis and detail, the consultation responses tend to agree that the following minimum requirements have to be met when setting up an NQF:

- It must be based on learning outcomes.
- It will require a 'self-certification' process supporting consistency and mutual trust.
- It will require the inclusion and acceptance of all national stakeholders, not only in education and training but also involving the labour market.
- It will require integrated systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- It will require robust, transparent and trustworthy quality assurance mechanisms.

Sectors

There is a wide-spread concern by countries that the development and promotion of international sectoral "qualifications" could reduce transparency, threaten quality and undermine mutual trust towards publicly recognised qualifications which are the responsibility of national education and training authorities. The opposite position is represented by a number of sectoral organisations and associations arguing that the rapid changes in markets and in technology require European or international qualifications.

Other issues

In addition to the above issues, which were highlighted in most responses, the following issues attracted less attention:

- The Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications: the limited number of stakeholders who commented on the relationship between the EQF and the Directive underlined the need for complementarity between these instruments.
- Credit transfer and recognition: the majority of those who replied believe that a credit system was necessary for an operational EQF.
- Europass: most respondents who answered this question believe that the EQF should be linked to Europass, with ministries and regional authorities responding most favourably to this idea.

⁽¹⁾ Established by Jens Bjørnåvold on the basis of the national responses adopted on the EQF Conference held in Budapest on 28.2.2006.

⁽²⁾ The analysis of Cedefop is also reflected in the conference workshop issues papers (1-5).

Cedefop - In our own voice

Continued from Page 1

The job of in-company trainers is to bring together the structure of work and the structure of learning and to encourage people to learn from each other. They must successfully incorporate social and economic innovations into training activities and combine learning arrangements with company performance.

Much the same also applies of course to teachers in vocational education. Their teaching is also action-oriented today. It no longer follows a subject-based system but is situation-based. Schools identify and 'take over' areas of activity from enterprises and turn them into fields of learning.

What this all means is that teachers and trainers must constantly train themselves. Having to learn throughout one's career means that fixed curricula are much less useful than flexible continuing training at the workplace. This allows them to keep pace with changes and is invariably situation-based and problem-oriented. This is part of a growing trend: in many EU Member States today we can see that training designs have become much more dynamic and open-ended.

CEDEFOP INFO:

To what extent can common trends be observed in the EU Member States?

MARA BRUGIA:

The context in which trainers are working and learning differs considerably, of course. The degree of tension between interest groups differs, and so does trainers' social status and remuneration. But I wouldn't say they have nothing in common with each other - there are some common trends across Europe, such as a move towards decentralisation and greater autonomy for educational institutions. This greater autonomy in turn requires teachers and trainers to accept more responsibility for the quality of education and training programmes and for the achievement of learning goals. Their range of tasks is therefore expanding, from designing syllabuses to counselling learners. Everywhere, the demands of the economy call for greater integration between specialist and pedagogical aspects. Right now, there is an urgent need throughout the EU for more in-service training, or lifelong learning, for teachers and trainers. This is closely linked to the debate about the 'academisation' of initial and continuing training of teachers and trainers - a trend which has stirred controversy, despite being encouraged by the Bologna Process.

CEDEFOP INFO:

What is the situation in the new EU Member States?

MARA BRUGIA:

Here we have a fundamental restructuring of vocational training in the past 15 or so years, under the pressure of market and globalisation forces. Lifelong learning, the involvement of the social partners, decentralisation, a closer relationship with practice - all of these concepts have found their way into curricula within a very short period of time. On the other hand, problems persist - teaching materials are often outdated, training suffers from too much theoretical teaching, inadequate IT equipment and a lack of national training standards. The other problem is the professional status of teachers and trainers themselves. Low salaries often force many teachers and trainers to take on two or more jobs at once. Overall, in these countries it's really a matter of finding the right balance between EU priorities and national circumstances.

CEDEFOP INFO:

What about the European level? TTnet is a European network after all.

MARA BRUGIA:

Well, as I mentioned, there have been some recent developments in the EU policy for teachers and trainers. The Joint Interim Report of the Council and the European Commission of 2004 on progress with the Education and Training 2010 work programme stressed that success depended directly on the quality of education and training staff. The Report also called for common principles on the competences and qualifications needed by teachers and trainers.

As a result, common European principles for teacher competences and qualifications have been devised by a Working Group on improving the education of teachers and trainers established by the Commission in the context of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. The common principles relate to the subject-specific and pedagogical training of teachers, their continuing professional in-service training and mobility and the encouraging of partnerships between institutions providing teacher education, schools, local work environments, work-based training providers and other stakeholders.

VET trainers are not covered by these principles. But trainers in the VET system are becoming a priority for the Commission - witness the fact that the Commission presented in the last Advisory Committee for Vocational Training in November 2005 a proposal for activities on VET teachers and trainers for 2006 and 2007. So we're getting somewhere there, too.

The Commission has invited TTnet to play an active role in these activities, which also include the establishment of a sub-group of the 'Teachers and Trainers' Cluster, focusing on VET-related issues. We had our first meeting in March.

CEDEFOP INFO:

Clearly TTnet has become more important recently, especially since the Maastricht Communiqué of 2004.

MARA BRUGIA:

Let me just remind you that there's a serious reason for this. The EU expects to need one million new teachers and trainers over the next ten years! That's why the question of the initial and continuing training of teachers and trainers is so very important. And that's why we're coming down so strongly in favour of clearer professionalisation.

Teachers and trainers should have access to initial training leading to a qualification and to continuing training matched as closely as possible to the relevant work situation. But we also need to provide consistent recognition and certification if we are to give teachers and trainers the chance of a professional career with geographical and cross-sector mobility.

CEDEFOP INFO:

What do you regard, all in all, as the most important task for TTnet?

MARA BRUGIA:

Perhaps its broad leverage effect: by addressing the issues and bringing them together at a European level, TTnet is helping all parties understand each other, and is raising the profile of the VET profession. This ultimately raises the group's own perception of its profession and its professional identity.

CEDEFOP INFO:

Thank you for talking to us (3).

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EUROPEAN UNION

Competition focuses on technical skills

EuroSkills is a European competition offering young Europeans from a wide diversity of technical and craft occupations an opportunity to display their skills. It is to be launched in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, in 2008.

EuroSkills represents a new European Commission initiative in response to the Copenhagen process for enhanced VET cooperation, with the active support of 32 European countries. Funds from Leonardo-based Integrated Programme for Lifelong Learning are to be set aside for cross-border EuroSkills preparatory projects from 2007 onwards.

As a European competition, EuroSkills is conceived as a 'regional subsidiary' of the WorldSkills competition, which has been held on a regular basis for over half a century. Since the initial WorldSkills event in Spain in 1950, this world-wide competition has been hosted 38 times by various countries around the globe, most recently by Finland (2005). The next WorldSkills summits are to take place in

Japan (2007) and Canada (2009). The participating countries - including 14 EU Member States - hold annual national preparatory competitions, e.g. Didacta (Germany) and SkillsMasters (Netherlands). These will now come under the pan-European umbrella of EuroSkills.

The Commission hopes that EuroSkills will help raise the value of technical and vocational education, not least against the background of the ambitious goal set by the Lisbon summit several years ago to make the European Union the world's most dynamic and competitive economy by 2010. The initiative will include the new EU Member States, none of which have so far attended WorldSkills.

Further information: www.worldskills.org/site/public/index.php

Source: Cedefop/cf

(1) These project results have also recently been published: Professional development of VET teachers and trainers (Cedefop Panorama series, Cat. No. TI-AF-04-006-EN-C).
(2) The results can be found in: elearning for VET teachers and trainers (Cedefop Reference series, Cat. No. TI-57-03-451-EN-C)
(3) This interview took into account discussions held at the Agora Conference in Berlin in November 2005 at which the German TTnet was launched.

Letter from the director - Cedefop's contribution to Education and Training 2010



Dear Readers,

Supporting the Education and training 2010 (E&T 2010) process to implement the Lisbon agenda is central to Cedefop's activities. Cedefop is committed to this task and took the Copenhagen-Maastricht goals as a basis for its medium-term priorities 2006-08 and work programme 2006.

In the second half of 2005, the structure of the E&T 2010 process was changed to improve coherence and efficiency. Those changes affect the way Cedefop organises and delivers its support.

As a result of the changes in the E&T 2010 process, eight thematic clusters will be started by the European Commission early in 2006, their purpose being to strengthen the implementation of E&T 2010 initiatives and instruments at national level. The clusters met in March 2006 to review the results achieved to date, define their specific focus and objectives and select the most effective working methods to meet those objectives. Other measures, such as networks and ad hoc groups, will work on transversal themes such as quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET), lifelong guidance, the European qualifications framework (EQF), credit transfer, and sector-level initiatives

Cedefop's specific contribution to this process includes:

- where its research and development work was advanced, as in areas like the validation of non-formal learning, credit transfer and the EQF), Cedefop played a key role in shaping the conceptual framework, policy focus and operational methodology of the expert and technical working groups;
- through its dissemination mechanisms, Cedefop raised awareness of E&T work, and used its networks, study visits and electronic media to broaden the debate,

giving stakeholders from the wider VET community the opportunity to feed their views into the process;

- as an EU agency, Cedefop helped innovate and acted as a testing ground. For example, in 2004, Cedefop financed and organised peer learning meetings on quality assurance in VET, which helped to inspire the move towards clusters and peer learning activities;
- financial resources provided by Cedefop supported E&T 2010 activities enabling some aspects of the work to be examined in more depth, for example by commissioning new research;
- up-to-date and relevant Cedefop research, combined with the investment of time through the participation of in-house expert staff, accelerated progress towards concrete outputs, such as common reference tools like the common aims and principles for lifelong guidance;
- Cedefop representatives ensured the inclusion of a VET perspective in Groups which had a predominantly education focus, for example by the creation of sub-groups on quality assurance and VET teachers and trainers, and drawing participants from Cedefop-run networks;
- identifying gaps and initiating measures to meet needs. As an example, Cedefop created mutual learning meetings on key aspects of guidance as no cluster on this topic was proposed);
- Cedefop also drafted the synthesis report for the Maastricht ministerial meeting and conference in December 2004, the findings of which were reflected in the Maastricht communiqué.

All these contributions enabled Cedefop to have a positive impact on the E&T 2010 process. This impact needs to be reinforced under the process' new structure.

Cedefop's strengths include internal expertise in key themes, its research and analysis capacity, networking, data resources and dissemination tools (electronic media, publications, study visits, seminars). This enables Cedefop to make

proposals to develop policies, target research, provide scientific advice, moderate discussions, report on and disseminate results, and give technical and practical support such as hosting meetings.

Using these strengths, besides the role it plays in the clusters, networks and ad hoc groups, in 2006 Cedefop will support the E&T 2010 process in several ways.

Cedefop will prepare a synthesis report for the ministerial meeting in Helsinki in December 2006, as part of the second review of the Copenhagen-Maastricht priorities. The report will be based on the findings of a comprehensive study, managed by the Commission, analysing progress in the priority areas of the Maastricht communiqué, namely vocational education and training's image, attractiveness and links to higher education, its role in promoting labour market and social integration, and its financing and investment. Cedefop, with ETF, will also contribute to the study.

As additional background for the Helsinki ministerial meeting, Cedefop, with the Commission and ETF, will monitor progress at national level in implementing the Copenhagen-Maastricht priorities through a survey of directors general for vocational training.

To support further reviews of the E&T 2010 process, Cedefop will study vocational education and training policies in EU competitor countries, demographic perspectives and implications for vocational education and training, and how it can foster integration of immigrants and their descendants. Further, Cedefop's fourth research report, 'Modernising

vocational education and training', to be published in 2007/08, will examine the Maastricht priorities and emerging issues which might shape the policy and research agenda beyond 2010.

Overall, Cedefop has provided comprehensive expertise and substantial resources to support the E&T 2010 process. To improve the impact of its contribution Cedefop will further concentrate on themes where it possesses in-depth expertise and can bring value added knowledge to EU VET developments,

Working together we will realise the Barcelona objective of making EU education and training systems a world reference for quality by 2010.

Aviana Bulgarelli



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CEDEFOP/CYPRUS

Workshop on Skills Forecasting

The Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, in the framework of its participation in the European Network on Early Identification of Skill Needs (Skillsnet), hosted a two-day European Workshop attended by experts in Skill Needs Forecasting. Co-organisers of the workshop were the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA) and the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market at the Maastricht University (ROA).

The workshop, which took place in October 2005 in Pafos, was attended by 30 experts from European countries (Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, United Kingdom) and international organisations.

The workshop aimed at exchanging views and making suggestions concerning the adoption of a common approach to European skill needs forecasting in terms of methods and data. It was concluded that the convergence of methodologies

being used by different countries is feasible and that Cedefop should continue with this initiative and coordinate further steps. These will aim at creating the necessary mechanisms for the launching of a European skill needs forecasting exercise as well as enhancing the existing infrastructure for forecasting in the Member States.

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Source: Human Resource Development Authority

Summary of responses received to the Commission’s consultation on the EQF during the 2nd half of 2005

Continued from Page 2

What is the state of play across Europe with regard to NQFs?

Country	Stage of development	Stated purposes	Structural detail
Austria	A single, overarching NQF is proposed While no particular time-frame is indicated, it is stated that a sequenced development may be possible, moving from vocational education and training towards general education. A test phase is deemed necessary.	A NQF should support quality, access and permeability of education and training and promote a better balancing of VET and academic qualifications. A NQF could facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning.	A NQF must be based on learning outcomes, include all stakeholders and improved co-operation between ministries.
Belgium (Flanders)	A NQF is being developed and is seen as a necessary prerequisite for the EQF, future planning depends on national consultation	A NQF should improve access, support the development of quality and strengthen overall permeability in education and training	A NQF must be based on learning outcomes, include all stakeholders in education and training as well as social partners. The NQF will support credit transfer processes
Belgium (Wallonia)	A NQF is presented as an requirement for a functioning EQF. Decision has yet to be taken as regards the concrete developments of a NQF		Requires a concerted effort by all stakeholders, a strong element of quality assurance. Experiences from Bologna process should be built in.
Bulgaria	A NQF is considered to be of great importance and can be developed on the basis of existing legal provisions. Bulgaria indicates that a NQF could be in place 1 year after a final decision on the EQF has been made at European level.		A NQF would have to link to a credit transfer system, would facilitate the link to sectoral developments and be the main decision making tool for the referencing of national qualifications to the EQF.
Croatia	First steps towards the development of a NQF have been taken. Time for development is indicated to 5 years (from 2005/2006).	NQF will provide higher mobility.	
Cyprus	Cautious to the development of NQF		
Czech Republic	A NQF is being developed, deadline set for 2007.	A NQF is crucial to parity of esteem between VET and academic qualifications.	A NQF must be based on learning outcomes, requires inclusion of and acceptance by all stakeholders
Denmark	Considering the establishment of a NQF. The framework for higher education will be implemented in the period 2007-2010. The inclusion of other systems, in particular VET, will be considered.		The development of the EQF is expected to intensify the work in Denmark on learning outcomes thus providing a basis for measuring and comparing qualifications.
Estonia	The legal basis for the education and training system is under review. It is intended that a new qualification system will be inclusive of all contexts of learning.		Developments must take into account the need for study programs based on learning outcomes.
Finland	Do not see the need for an overarching NQF and will continue work on a framework for higher education as well as the competence based VET system.	Finland states that it should be possible for member states to relate to the EQF without one single, overarching framework. Afraid that the extensive extra work related to the development of a NQF could slow down (take focus away from) other necessary developments in education and training	Even without an overarching NQF Finland see the need for countries to develop a shared view on quality assurance,
France	The idea of a NQF is already realised in France; it is therefore considered to be relatively simple to link the French framework to the EQF.		
Germany	Germany states the intention to create an overarching NQF covering all areas of education and training. Since this must be developed from scratch it is considered premature to give any statements on form, time of adoption or relation to the EQF.		It seems possible in principle to establish comparability of qualifications on the basis of reference levels or descriptors defined in the EQF
Greece	An overarching framework is considered as instrumental for achieving a better relation between different national sub-systems of education and training. The decision on when and how to develop a NQF is yet to be taken		
Hungary	Commitment to develop a NQF. Part of a national development plan 2007-2013	An NQF is seen as an inevitable initiative to strengthen political commitment and to increase the efficiency of policy coordination at national level.	Learning outcomes a prerequisite. Will require more efficient quality assurance systems
Ireland	NQF exists		
Italy	No explicit commitment to a NQF. Emphasises, however, that recent (2004-2005) efforts to increase national and regional coherency in the field of validation and certification is very much in line with the objectives set by the EQF.		Learning outcomes important, as is inclusion of stakeholders at national, regional and local level. Regional stakeholders play a particularly important role in Italy.
Latvia	Proposal to combine existing VET (5 levels) and HE (3 levels) systems into one comprehensive NQF.	Priority is given to a new framework as current structures are considered inadequate.	
Lithuania	Ongoing work to develop a NQF Development takes place in a 3-year project (2006-2007. Pilot phase starts in 2007.	Find the existing 5-level qualifications structure inadequate	Will be based on learning outcomes. Necessary to include all stakeholders.
Luxembourg	The question of a NQF is currently being discussed. The national education and training ministry will prepare a proposal to be discussed with the social partners.		
Malta	The functions of a NQF shall be met through a National Qualifications Council.		
Netherlands	Will attempt to strengthen coordination between the different education and training systems and increasingly refer to learning outcomes		National quality assurance systems will be necessary
Norway	The Ministry will follow up the Bologna decision to establish a NQF for higher education making sure that this will be compatible with a possible future overall NQF. The question of an overarching NQF will; however, need further discussion at national level.		

Country	Stage of development	Stated purposes	Structural detail
Poland	Poland is prepared to undertake work on an NQF but acknowledge that this will require substantial effort as a framework would have to be built from scratch. Work will be linked to the national reform plan 2005-2007 and will start in 2006. A 2 year development is foreseen.		Requires clear principles, involvement of all stakeholders and an integration of the higher education framework
Portugal	A single, overarching NQF is recommended. It is estimated that a development of 3-5 years will be necessary		A NQF should be simple and avoid bureaucracy, build on existing legal and institutional basis which have been created (for example related to validation of non-formal and informal learning). Involvement of stakeholders is deemed essential, as is a test and pilot stage.
Romania	A development plan for a NQF exists (during the period 2004-2006). The resulting proposal will require a validation and implementation phase of 5-8 years.		Coherence between EQF and EHEA will be necessary.
Slovak Republic	Will develop a NQF. Work will take 3-4 years.		
Slovenia	Positive towards the development of A NQF, a project team established, no time-frame indicated		A NQF would have to be based on the principles outlined in the EQF. The learning outcomes approach is important, as is the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders, in particular higher education.
Spain	A NQF for vocational and professional qualifications already exists.		An overarching NQF will have to be based on learning outcomes.
Sweden	The question of a NQF will be discussed in spring 2006. To early to say what the result will be as several design options exist	A NQF would contribute to labour market mobility. The levels may have the effect of stimulating participation in further education.	A NQF needs to be linked to sectoral developments and be inclusive to all stakeholders. The placement of national qualifications to the EQF must be taken within the framework of the national quality assurance system. A validation system is an important part of the framework.
Turkey	The main elements of a NQF is in place in Turkey and its further development will involve drawing various elements together. Estimated time for development of a NQF 3-5 years.		Learning outcomes an essential part of the development of a NQF, considerable amount of work already done in VET and HE. Coherence between EQF and EHEA necessary.
UK England and Northern Ireland	NQF exists		
UK Scotland	NQF exists		
UK Wales	NQF exists		

NETHERLANDS
Yes to international comparison via the EQF

The Dutch national consultation on the European Commission's proposal for a European qualifications framework took place over the last few months. It involved representatives of educational institutes, employers’ and employees’ organisations, sectoral organisations and researchers and experts in education and employment.

The education community in the Netherlands identified two national objectives in relation to the EQF:

- 1. stimulating international comparison of national qualifications;
- 2. testing individual skills for the benefit of lifelong learning.

It became clear that agreement will be reached on the first objective. The Dutch stakeholders are willing to use the eight levels as a point of reference for international comparison of national qualifications, and the idea of describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes has been welcomed.

The second objective, however - testing individual skills on the basis of these reference levels - seems not to be feasible at this stage; further differentiation at national and sectoral level is needed. It is felt that testing and recognition of individual skills should be based on national standards. Recognised skills (i.e. qualifications) can then be compared to other countries using the EQF. This can be made easier by using instruments

such as the Europass. Creating an effective link between the reference levels and Europass will be a major challenge for further development of the EQF.

Linking EQF and practice

Given the objective of the EQF to provide added value for the European labour market, Dutch stakeholders stress the importance of creating links between the EQF and professional practice. It has been proposed to do this by:

- fine-tuning the descriptors for the eight reference levels taking account of their relevance for the labour market;
- asking countries to integrate professional requirements into their national qualifications;
- asking various sectors at European level to apply the EQF principles into their sectoral qualifications.

This would contribute to the understanding of the EQF by the labour market while preventing it from becoming a purely bureaucratic instrument.

Further information:
www.minocw.nl/documenten/European_Qualifications_Framework_letter_to_Figel.pdf

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture/Cinop

Older workers and lifelong learning

An ageing Europe

The population of the European Union is ageing at a pace that will dramatically change the balance among the different groups. This implies growth among older age groups, both absolutely and as a proportion of the population. The results of this - an increasing population of older workers, and a changing older/younger balance - are already apparent, and the trend will continue over the next 25-50 years.

The ‘ageing Europe’ issue is a complex problem that needs to be tackled from different perspectives. From a working-life perspective, new thinking is required regarding the position of older people in the workforce. Traditional views are that older people are less productive and less able to learn and/or adapt.

For these reasons, in the past, many companies were glad to adopt policies of early retirement that entailed replacing older people (50 years +) with younger people. In many cases, older people felt that they had no option but to accept early retirement, as their contribution was no longer valued in the firm. However, today, as well as the demographic reality new thinking about learning being a lifelong development process is challenging traditional assumptions about the contribution and learning capacity of older workers.

Enhancing the potential of older workers in the context of lifelong learning policies

Traditional approaches to retraining often do not take the experiences and resources of learners into consideration. This is particularly true for older people who, in any case, are seen to be ‘past their best’ or ‘out of date’. However, new thinking about learning inspired by the concept of ‘lifelong learning’ is challenging traditional perspectives about the potential learning capacities of older people. This entails a shift from seeing learning as a passive - ‘being trained’ process - to a continuous active one in which one engages in different forms of learning in the different periods of one’s life.

Thus, it is pointed out that while one’s physical capabilities may decline with age, other intangible strengths tend to increase due to experience. Therefore, there is no evidence to say that in an overall sense the learning capacities of older people are in decline. While there is some indication of older workers having negative views about retraining, this is something of a self-fulfilling prophecy as organisations often tend to disregard their competences in the first place.

So, according to lifelong learning principles, instead of seeing older people as being less able than younger people to perform new tasks and adapt to new situations, they are seen to have distinctive resources and strengths and distinctive learning capacities.

In an organisational context, this can result in major learning benefits for younger people in the form of intergenerational learning.

The Cedra project

The policy implications for lifelong learning as far as older workers are concerned are vast. As well as the introduction of new actions related to learning through work, there is also a need to create a variety of continuing education and training programmes in education and training institutions that promote lifelong learning values.

It is essential to design and implement policies at different appropriate levels - EU, national and organisational. It is equally important to recognise the differences between large and small/medium sized enterprises (SMEs) keeping in mind that over 90 per cent of workers in the EU are employed in SMEs.

Taking into consideration that awareness about this issue is still not very widespread, it is important to foster debate, to propose scenarios for the future and try out different types of experiments. Researchers and innovators have a key role to play in this, through capitalising on the current knowledge base, proposing new thinking and supporting actions and initiatives. It is for this reason that Cedefop is supporting this project entitled ‘Older workers and lifelong learning’ within the framework of Cedra - the Cedefop Research Arena.

The goal of the project was to establish a network of researchers to examine this subject. The International Research Institute of Stavanger (IRIS) - formerly named Rogaland Research - is moderating this network in collaboration with Cedefop. Dr. Tarja Tikkanen was designated by IRIS to take responsibility for this project.

The first product of this network in phase 1 (2004-2005) is a book - a reader on older workers and lifelong learning. The title of the book to be published in late Spring 2006 is: Promotion of lifelong learning for older workers - an international overview. Although this book focuses mainly on European experiences, through contributions from Australia, Japan and the US, the European perspective can be reviewed in a broader international context.

This project has been extended to carry out additional activities in phase 2 (2005-2006). One of the highlights of this phase will be a symposium based on the research papers in the above named book at the 7th International Conference on HRD Research and Practice across Europe. This will take place in Tilburg, The Netherlands on 22-24 May, 2006. For information about attending this conference see www.tilburguniversity.nl/faculties/fsw/departments/HRS/hrdconf/

For more information about the Older Workers and Lifelong Learning project contact bn@cedefop.eu.int or tarja.tikkanen@irisresearch.no. More information on Cedra: www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Projects_Networks/Cedra/

Source: Cedefop/bn

Commission urges Member States to modernise training

Continued from Page 1

E&T policy lies at the crossroads between economic, employment, social and youth policy, and lifelong learning is now seen as the principle way to ensure a competitive and socially cohesive Europe. So much for the theory. But what is happening on the ground?

This question is addressed by the Commission’s Communication to the Council, *Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe*. The Communication is based on the joint draft progress report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, which in turn draws mainly on national reports, and is to be adopted by the Council in the spring of 2006. Its key message: the pace of reform and the adoption of new priorities in the Member States need to be stepped up.

Although the EU Member States (along with the EFTA/EEA and accession states) subscribe to the joint Work Programme and increasingly apply a coordinated approach, the Communication points to the need for closer cooperation and diverse learning partnerships between all levels (E&T institutions, public authorities, social partners, sectoral and local organisations, enterprises), with the involvement of teachers and trainers as the main agents of change.

One of the major shortcomings identified by the Communication is the absence of a comprehensive and balanced overall lifelong learning strategy - with the sole exception of the Scandinavian region. Other countries merely implement individual measures, rather than a strategy covering everything from lifelong guidance through the validation of non-formal learning to the development of national qualification frameworks.

The figures speak for themselves: only about 10 percent of 25- to 64-year-olds take part in lifelong learning in Europe ⁽²⁾. Not enough attention is paid to better access to learning op-

portunities for adults, especially for older workers and the low skilled. Increasing participation in lifelong learning is a particular challenge for southern European countries and the new Member States. Despite a slight increase in investment in human resources since 2000, Europe still lags behind its competitors. More private investment is required, particularly in areas offering a high private rate of return. Whereas e.g. training vouchers and tax incentives have succeeded in stimulating individual investment in initial and continuing training, company investment in the continuing training of their employees - i.e. their human capital - appears to be stagnating. On the other hand, universities are now beginning to deliver continuing training and widen access to non-traditional learners, a trend which marks a step towards the recognition of non-formal and informal qualifications.

The ‘Bologna process’ has evidently become a driving force for reform and quality assurance in the field of higher education. But although collaboration between higher education and industry is recognised as a basic requirement for innovation and competitiveness, there is a dearth of targeted strategies in this field. A number of EU Member States are adopting new approaches by setting up advanced research and high-tech centres; meanwhile, modern management structures, funding mechanisms and instruments for resource allocation are becoming increasingly widespread. The Communication nevertheless points out that private sector investment stands no comparison to that of e.g. the United States. At the same time, it warns against playing off cost efficiency against equal opportunities: success in education and training must not be thwarted by the learners’ social or economic background.

This brings us to the other end of the spectrum: the low skilled, currently numbering no less than 75 million in the EU. A persistently high number of young people leave school with low qualifications. Only 77 % of 18- to 24-year-olds complete upper secondary edu-

cation and they often lack key qualifications. Educational efficiency and equal opportunities will therefore be a major focus of the progress report on the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme.

The Communication has little new to offer on the VET front. This is hardly surprising, as the survey conducted for the purposes of the interim report was carried out only a short time after the survey for the Maastricht study. National priorities seem to broadly reflect those of the Copenhagen process. Although the status of VET is improving throughout Europe, much remains to be done. Improving the quality and the attractiveness of VET continues to be a key challenge. A particular focus is on upper secondary education, especially apprenticeship. The demands for a better match between training and labour market requirements remain. Increased provision of and more targeted guidance and more flexible opportunities for the transition to higher education are regarded as crucial to make VET more attractive. The report also emphasises close co-operation with the social partners and the involvement of the various branches of industry as one of the essential factors of success, in particular with respect to forecasting skill requirements and developing VET and qualification standards - a trend observed in an increasing number of countries.

All in all, therefore, the communication confirms that the Maastricht communiqué pointed in the right direction. Progress towards the implementation of the Maastricht priorities is to be examined in greater detail at the ministerial conference in Helsinki in December of this year.

Although the interim report and the communication address a series of further areas, the sphere which actually provides the foundation for lifelong learning - pre-school, along with primary and lower secondary education - is perhaps not given the attention it deserves.

The conclusion of the Communication is that if the EU Member States wish to achieve the Lisbon objectives and the targets of the

2010 work programme - which, after all, they set themselves - they will have to accelerate the pace of reform. This conclusion runs in the same direction as the communication of the Commission based on the analysis of the national reform programmes on the employment strategy whose key message was: ‘Time to move up gear!’ ⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ European Council meeting (Brussels, 22 to 23 March 2005) Presidency conclusions, Annex I = European Youth Pact (p. 19 ff.)

<http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/05/st07/st07619.en05.pdf>

⁽²⁾ These figures are based on the period of four weeks prior to the survey.

⁽³⁾ http://europa.eu.int/eurex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com_2006_0030en01.pdf

Further information: Communication of the Commission COM (2005) 549 final/2, 30 November 2005: Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe. Draft 2006 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the ‘Education & Training 2010 work programme’ Commission staff working document SEC (2005) 1415, 10 November 2005 Annex to the Communication from the Commission: Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe. Draft 2006 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the ‘Education & Training 2010 work programme’ (COM (2005) 549 final)

National reports: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/nationalreport_en.html

Source: Cedefop/ews, cf

Entrepreneurship, which includes creativity, innovation, risk taking as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives, is specifically addressed by a communication of the European Commission. On the basis of concrete examples from the Member States - ranging from primary education through general secondary and upper secondary vocational schools to higher education - the communication describes how education and training can promote entrepreneurial mindsets and entrepreneurship.

Further information: Communication of the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM (2006) 33 final, 13 February 2006 Implementing the Community Lisbon programme: Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and training http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com_2006_0033en01.pdf

‘It is much too late if the problems of youth only become apparent at the level of job placement’ was one of the conclusions of the Vienna conference on innovations in labour market policy hosted by the Austrian Council presidency in February 2006. Early intervention and enhanced cooperation between E&T and labour market policy are necessary. Commissioner Spidla called upon Member States to increase their efforts to reach the targets for childcare places and prevent youth long-term unemployment. A detailed report on the conference is to be published in June of this year.

More on this subject: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/eit/index_en.html (discussion on the language indicator, key qualifications, entrepreneurship, EIT) http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/workersmobility2006/index_en.htm (presented at the launch of the European Year for Workers’ Mobility).

Logbook of a railway conference

In October 2005 BBJ (¹), a German consultancy firm, organised a railway conference on EU entry and vocational integration of young people in Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. The purpose was to provide as much information as possible on youth policies in Romania and Bulgaria, and especially Turkey, to German representatives of NGOs and ministries and to other BBJ stakeholders working with youth. The conference also aimed to encourage partnerships and networking between German participants and those based in the other three countries.

The railway conference started in Sofia, where participants boarded the BBJ train (the so-called *Train d'Europe*), for a journey that was to end in Ankara, Turkey.

When I decided to take part, I hadn't anticipated it would be such an adventure. Imagine travelling in a train, for 5 days, sharing the same space 24 hours a day with people that you've just met - people who by the end of the trip will have become friends - meeting new people from different countries, exploring different cultures. And how fascinating and pleasant Bulgaria and Turkey turned out to be!

Romania and Bulgaria on the eve of accession

In Sofia, the starting point of the journey, the conference focused on Romania and Bulgaria. Taking part in the discussions were representatives of the ministries for education and labour, youth authorities and NGOs from Bulgaria, Romania and Germany, and representatives of the German Embassy in Sofia.

The transition to a market economy in Bulgaria and Romania has meant far-reaching changes for the previously largely sector-based vocational training system. But the two countries' systems today are not identical. The Bulgarian education system is very much based on the classroom, with few links to the labour market and with narrowly profiled curricula. In Romania, initial VET, while still school-based, offers two main pathways: the 'technological route' offering general secondary education (leading to the Matura certificate) but also including a large vocational component at technical high schools, and the 'vocational route' which prepares students for the labour market or for further studies at Arts and Trades Schools. What was emphasised in the meeting was the high proportion of students in technical fields (10 % of the total - higher than the EU average. Overall, in 2005 Bulgaria registered a high growth rate, about 8 % (similar to the Romanian rate of growth) and showed that it has the potential to achieve a highly functioning economy.

Part of the discussion focused on structural funds in Bulgaria: current EU Structural Funds objectives, the complex functions of the ministry itself in terms of regional development and its coordinating capacity in carrying out sectoral policies with a regional impact. One priority is to improve quality across the board: in school-based education, in labour market services and in social services. At the

same time, some lifelong learning projects have also been implemented. These aim to develop apprenticeship schemes and to allocate grants to young people in order to develop entrepreneurship skills and to allow them to set up businesses.

During the conference, theory and policy issues were discussed alongside practical initiatives and projects. Two of these, initiated by German partners in Bulgaria, concerned alternate training in the 'Pazardshik German-Bulgarian Vocational Education and Training Centre' and in the 'Znanie Center for Vocational Training', in which the employers provided vocational training for unemployed youth, following the German model.

According to the representative of the Romanian National Authority for Youth, Romania's population is ageing: by the year 2016, the number of young people aged 15 to 24 will decrease by 30 % (from approximately 3 900 000 to around 2 700 000). This will have an important bearing on future employment and youth policies. For the moment, the Romanian Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family is concentrating on programmes for the vocational integration of young people. The programme for 2005-2008 aims to help young people join the labour market by providing incentives to employers to facilitate workplace learning; by creating closer links between the educational systems and skills sought on the labour market; and by making it easier for young people in rural areas to acquire qualifications via a credit system applied within regional and agricultural programmes.

Turkey: heading towards the EU

Travelling in Turkey has always been an opportunity to discover fascinating cultures, traditions, people, history...after all, Istanbul is Europe's gateway to the Orient. We enjoyed the hospitality and openness shown by the Turks - from bazaar people debating Turkey's accession into the EU to ministry representatives discussing the socio-economic issues facing Turkey.

Our first stop was Istanbul; the main topic, 'Turkey and the EU-The Vocational Integration of Young People in Turkey'. A particular topic of interest was the reintegration into the Turkish labour market of returning migrants (usually minorities) from Germany. But Turkey's youth policies and the labour market challenges that young people at risk - especially those experiencing marginalisation - face were also extensively discussed. The focus of the discussion was on young people at risk, particularly in connection to migration into the cities, and the measures adopted by Turkey in order to improve the social status of migrant youths and ease their integration into the labour market. Turkey sees vocational education and training, and particularly apprenticeships schemes, as a major means of achieving social and economic integration for these groups.

There is an enormous number of young people at risk in metropolitan areas, mainly migrants from rural areas and street

children. At present, the government is cooperating with non-governmental organisations in order to protect street children and other young people at risk, and to help them join the labour market though various vocational education and training schemes. We were able to visit one of these projects helping street children in Istanbul (Beyoğlu).

The Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SHCEK), which is under the direct supervision of the Prime Ministry, is the main agency organising social services for youth, focusing on those who are economically, socially, psychologically and physically marginalised. The government provides limited scholarships for pupils attending 5th-8th grade of primary education, and at secondary level for both general education and vocational and technical schools.

On the following day we arrived in Ankara where we learned more about the MEGEP project, the pilot project implemented in secondary schools as part of the SVET Programme, 'Strengthening the Vocational Education and Training System in Turkey'. This is implemented by the Ministry of Education and co-financed by the European Commission and the Government of Turkey. The project's staff conduct workshops, studies, interviews and meetings to gather relevant information that will allow improvements to the overall vocational training system.

In Turkey, as in Bulgaria, we able to visit several vocational training projects, mainly in Ankara and Eskişehir, our final destination. These projects are carried out within the Leonardo da Vinci programme and involve, among other things, skills-building for small enterprises.

Some final thoughts

This conference-journey was a real adventure. All of us - practitioners, researchers and policy-makers - learned a lot from each other; but were also able to appreciate the historical and cultural depth of Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey and to begin to understand the lifestyle and circumstances of the people of these three countries today.

The conference stressed the importance of strengthening vocational education and training in achieving the Lisbon goals, especially in terms of improving/modernising the VET system and of achieving social inclusion through education. The conclusion was that vocational education and training really does contribute to the social and professional integration of disadvantaged young people - principally the Turkish minority in Germany, the Roma of Bulgaria and Romania and groups at risk in Turkey. At EU level, one of the main concerns of the Austrian Presidency is to 'pave the way for a resolution on the Europe-wide recognition of informal and non-formal education', an issue of particular importance in all three countries. It was also clear that social inclusion and social cohesion must be considered top priorities for the EU, and that social protection and inclusion policies should be much

more closely integrated into the revised Lisbon strategy.

The future of the three countries, as the future of Europe generally, depends largely on today's young people. The Union, the Member States and the future Member States must ensure that any reforms help to give all young people a fair chance and to equip them with the skills they will need throughout their lives.

(¹) BBJ Company Group grew out of a German non-profit association founded in 1982, the Registered Association for the Promotion of Culture and Vocational education of Youths and Young Adults. In 2004, this association was converted into a non-profit foundation entitled 'BBJ International'. Internationally, BBJ, since the end of the 1980s, has branch offices in Belgium, Italy, Russia, Poland, Slovenia, and Vietnam. Clients of the BBJ Company Group include public administrative authorities, companies and private individuals. More info at: www.bbj.de. Further reading: www.bbj.de, <http://europa.eu.int/youth>, www.youth-knowledge.net, www.youthforum.org, www.gsgm.gov.tr, www.ua.gov.tr, www.eurotib.ro, www.e-tineret.ro, www.youthprog.bg

Source: Cedefop/Raluca Brinza, Raluca.Brinza@cedefop.europa.eu



Photos: BBJ

EU Youth Policies:

The European Commission's White Paper of November 2001 entitled 'A new impetus for European youth', which was endorsed by the Council in its conclusions of 14 February 2002 and its Resolution of 27 June 2002 establishing a framework for European cooperation in the youth field.

The European Pact for Youth, adopted by the Spring European Council on 22 and 23 March 2005, as one of the instruments contributing to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives of growth and jobs.

The Pact focuses on three areas: Employment, integration and social advancement; Education, training and mobility; Reconciliation of working life and family life.

The Community instruments that support the Lisbon partnership for growth and jobs, such as the 'Education and Training 2010' Work Programme and the Employment and Social Inclusion strategies, have a key role to play in achieving the aims of the European Pact for Youth.

Source: Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States: (2005/C 292/03)

How social partners can contribute to lifelong learning

The social dialogue on the road to EU accession

Since the celebrations marking the signing of the treaty of accession of Bulgaria and Rumania to the European Union on 25 May 2005, the two sister nations have faced a whole series of economic, legislative, political and social challenges on their path towards full integration into our common European area.

To meet these challenges, social dialogue plays a key role in the accession process by connecting citizens’ demands and government positions. It leads to a better operation and greater transparency of the democratic system. In industrial relations, too, social dialogue leads to complementary actions, which as a rule lend dynamism to the functioning of both the labour market and companies.

The participation of the social partners also plays a major strategic role in promoting lifelong learning. Social partnership in training is of major importance in improving industrial relations and building social security and welfare systems, both of which underpin social cohesion, a determining factor in reinforcing and accelerating the accession processes.

The Bulgarian social partners and lifelong learning policies

As in other central and eastern European countries on the road to accession to the EU, the Bulgarian social dialogue model is based on tripartite rather than bipartite co-operation.

Over the past decade or so Bulgarian policymakers have gradually institutionalised the scope of the social partners in tripartite participatory structures (1), which have been fleshed out and consolidated by successive governments.

This is also the predominant trend in structures representing the social partners in em-

ployment and lifelong learning: the tripartite formula is the rule at national, regional and local level.

Tripartite social partnership in education and training has also been adopted at municipal level when negotiations are funded through the public purse. This means that the only levels of collective bargaining with full autonomy on both sides (employers and unions) are at sectoral and enterprise level.

A seminar organised by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in Sofia (Bulgaria)

Bulgaria presents numerous challenges from the bipartite perspective of the social dialogue. To familiarise themselves with requirements on the ground and thus put themselves in a better position to provide adequate support, our colleagues from the European Training Foundation (ETF) organised a seminar in Sofia on 15 / 16 December 2005: Social Partnership in VET: the way forward to achieve lifelong learning in Bulgaria.

As part of its collaboration with ETF, Cedefop was invited to contribute to the seminar alongside other European experts and social partners. The main objective was to strengthen the commitment of the social partners to the development and promotion of lifelong learning policies in Bulgaria.

This event was also designed to familiarise social partners familiar with ways of identifying sectoral training requirements, training quality and the creation of more solid collaboration networks for the better management of these needs.

The seminar constituted a forum in which the exchange of knowledge, opinions and debate was meant to generate a climate of understanding and mutual confidence among the stakeholders. This dimension was fur-

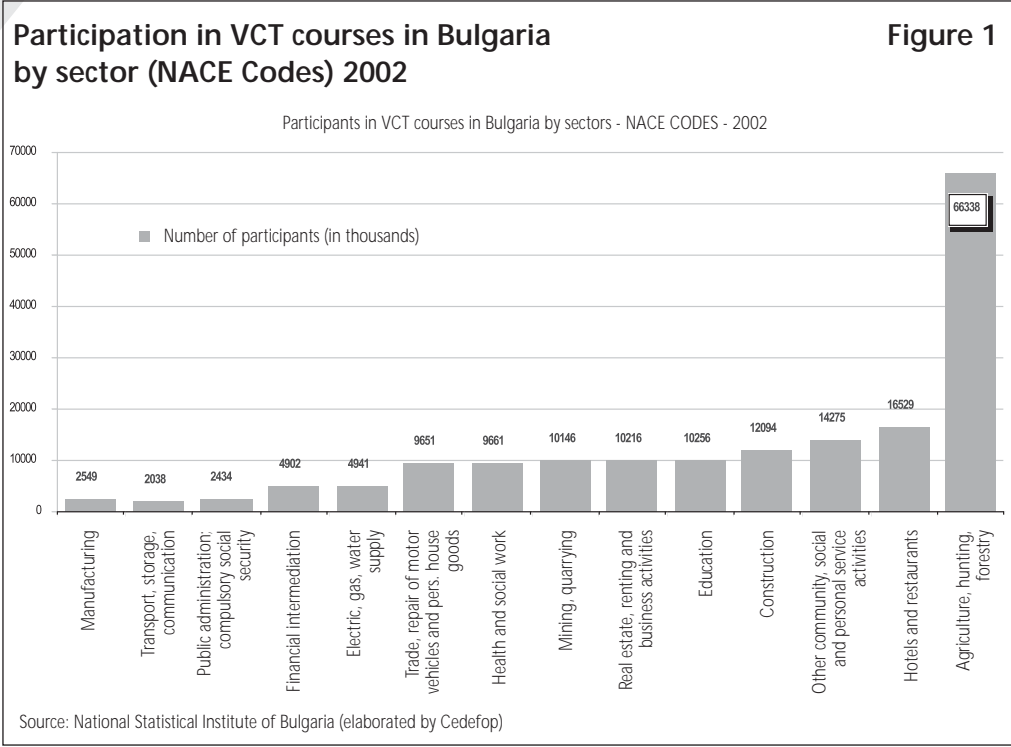
ther reinforced by a series of workshops bringing together Bulgarian social partners and the participating experts in an active search for joint solutions to the issues at hand.

Cedefop's contribution was twofold: the analysis of the margin of manoeuvre for European social partners in the field of training practices, and the classification and identification of the principal training needs of various sectors with reference to branch/sectoral agreements signed by the European social partners in recent years.

The debates and discussions over the two days in Sofia addressed the problems of the labour market and of ways of expanding and improving training participation in Bulgaria, especially in certain sectors. As Fig-

Whereas Bulgaria currently shows a high proportion of young people with higher education qualifications (30 %), there is a shortage of middle-level vocational training qualifications. Intensifying bipartite social partnership at national and sectoral level, to identify measures which could subsequently be negotiated at tripartite level, could prove an adequate response to the current situation, in which the dearth of public and/or private funding is one of the main obstacles to the lifelong learning system in Bulgaria.

Other experiences presented in the course of the seminar - e.g. the negotiation of sectoral training funds, the establishment of joint industrial training centres in the most dynamic sectors, motivation of individuals



ure 1 shows, 176 030 persons took part in continuing training in Bulgaria in 2002; this represents a mere 6 % of the workforce.

One of the most traumatic consequences of the transition to the market economy in Bulgaria has been the sharp decline in the country's activity and employment rates, which fell almost 10 and 20 percentage

and enterprises to participate in training, the development of sectoral training plans or financial aids and tax incentives for workers and enterprises - were received with interest and debated by the Bulgarian social partners.

The inclusion of the Bulgarian social partners in the Joint Strategy Framework of ac-

Tripartite bodies on employment and LLL in Bulgaria		Table 1
Bodies	Key tasks	
National level		
• National Council for Tripartite Cooperation	Permanent committees in social and labour matters.	
• National Employment Promotion Council	Development of employment policy and National Employment Action Plan (NAP).	
• National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET)	Licensing and coordinating VET institutions.	
• National Council for Vocational Training	Coordinating VET and qualifications policies and strategies for unemployed and employed people in a LLL wide perspective.	
• Advisory Committee for Equal Opportunities	Focussing in employment for men, women and disadvantaged groups	
• National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ)	To approve state requirements for vocational qualifications and training for labour force.	
• National Working conditions Council.	Advising and consulting body encouraging legislation and regulations on working and living conditions.	
Regional level		
• Tripartite Cooperation Bodies	Monitoring programmes and advising on funding	
• Permanent and Interim Employment Committees (District Council for Regional Development.)	Organise and control employment and VET Government policy's.	
Source: ETF, Eurofound ,ETUI (elaborated by Cedefop)		

Bulgaria: Participation and employment indicators 1990-2005 (average annual)									Table 2
	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002*	2005	
Labour force -'000	4 145,2	3 773,3	3 778,6	3 708,4	3 619,0	3 662,9	3 332,0	3 341,8	
Activity rate - %	59,7	54,9	55,7	53,7	51	52,8	49,4	50,1	
Employed - '000	4 096,8	3273,6	3241,6	3285,8	3152,6	2980,1	2739,6	3 008,9	
Employment rate - %	59,1	47,7	46,9	47,6	45,8	42,8	40,7	45,1	
Source: National Statistical Institute, National Social Security Institute, various years and Cedefop (own elaboration).									
* Preliminary data based on LFS data calculated as average for January, March, September and December. For 2005 second quarter.									

points respectively in the period 1990 to 2002 (cf. Table 2).

Although these indicators are now showing signs of improvement, factors such as the balance of labour force absorption between the public and private sectors and the decline of heavy industry alongside an expanding services sector will have a strong impact on the socio-economic future of Bulgaria. Moreover, both elements are influenced by a productivity index at the bottom rung of the EU ladder.

What kind of action is necessary? Some possibilities for social dialogue with the aim of achieving lifelong learning

In this landscape, the training agendas of the social partners must include the promotion of negotiating strategies which will match sectoral and company skills requirements with the skills levels of the Bulgarian labour force.

tions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications (2) adopted by their European counterparts, as well as deployment of the expected resources from the European Social Fund (ESF) will make an enormous contribution towards the transformation of the current situation.

(1) General Agreement of 15 March 1990 (on the basis of National Tripartite Council for Agreement).
(2) Agreed in March 2002 as a contribution to the Lisbon Agenda, the third annual follow-up report was published in March 2005. This joint action is to be evaluated in the course of the first half of this year.
Source: Cedefop/J. Manuel Galvin Arribas
(josemanuel.galvinarribas@cedefop.europa.eu)

Other information sources:
www.etf.eu.int/, www.nsi.bg/Index_e.htm,
www.hrdc.bg/eng/default.htm, www.eiro.eurofound.ie/,
http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/social_dialogue/,
www.resourceetuc.com/, http://etuco.etuc.org/in/, www.bcci.bg/



EUROPE

Budapest conference sets new targets

EVBB members confer on the inter-relationship between internationality and regionality in vocational training

The Ore Mountains on the German-Czech border are characterised by high unemployment among women and young people on both sides of the national divide. German and Czech organisations have devised a joint integration project in the towns of Annaberg and Kadaň called *Wegweiser Leben* (Signpost for Life) for disadvantaged young adults. It offers participants the chance to acquire a qualification in a recognised profession such as IT assistant, wood technician or carpenter, and provides comprehensive supervision, psychosocial counselling and integration support. Building bridges between people is the concept motivating the members of the youth organisation Christliches Jugenddorfwerk Deutschland (CJD) and its Czech partner AMOS Kadaň.

Discussion underlines new standards

This example was only one of many initiatives presented by 34 private and non-profit educational establishments in the 18 European countries belonging to the European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB). The EVBB conference on 'Internationality and Regionality', held in Budapest in autumn 2005, provided insight into the impressive diversity of projects and the range of EVBB undertakings across Europe, from France to Russia and from Finland to Israel. It emerged that EVBB members' decision to set homogeneous criteria for vocational training activities and insist on their implementation was both sensible and timely. The progress the association has made was clearly reflected in the results of practical ventures. Uniform standards of quality have now been accept-

ed as norms. Enhancing the internationality of initial and continuing vocational training is a major new target.

Two projects, both of which receive funding from the EU's Leonardo da Vinci programme, serve as examples.

Szilvia Lengyel of the Nemzeti Gyermek és Ifjúsági Közalapítvány (National Public Foundation for Children and Young People) in Budapest presented a Leonardo pilot project offering comprehensive vocational training to blind youngsters. They receive IT qualifications and subsequently have prospects of working in a call centre. All partners are developing the project at the same time, tailoring it to the situation in their own country. Two Hungarian partners have been joined by the European Association for Vocational and Social Education from Germany and Italy's CSCS. Following extensive research in the participating countries, the Nemzeti Gyermek és Ifjúsági Közalapítvány developed special software for transforming writing into speech. The language synthesis system, available on CD-ROM, enables blind people to install teaching content onto their PC instead of having to rely on special audio software. The new products are available to all project partners.

The paper presented by Prof. Kurt Kohn of the University of Tübingen was particularly salient, given the increasing significance of foreign language knowledge. He presented a Leonardo project which is developing multimedia and web-based language learning material for acquiring the communication skills needed to prepare and organise international projects. These include: corresponding by telephone, e-mail and fax, speaking at meetings, participating in informal get-togethers and conferences, holding presentations and composing background information and documents on the EU

and specific projects. The project group includes institutions from Slovakia (co-ordinator), Denmark, Germany, the UK and Poland.

Eminent guests commend impressive results

Some of the many speakers at the Budapest conference were Hungarian Labour Minister Gábor Csizmár, the German ambassador to Hungary Ursula Seiler-Abring, representatives of the European Commission and a delegation from the Peoples' Republic of China. They explained their different perspectives on the topics of internationality and regionality. It became clear that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive; instead each determines and influences the other. We

must think globally and act locally; internationality is inconceivable without regional colour and idiosyncracies.

The prize for the project most deserving of support went to the project group in the Ore Mountains, bringing the story full circle. Presenting the award, Prof. Gerd-Bodo von Carlsburg expressed satisfaction that the project had been as important for the acquisition of social skills as for knowledge of a particular subject area. Deliberately coupling these two aspects is the only way to guarantee our disadvantaged young people good prospects for the future.

Further information: www.evbb.de

Source: Martin Dilger, Harald Muhle

SLOVENIA

Removing obstacles to researcher mobility

Official surveys of Slovenian researchers have shown that, despite lingering difficulties, Slovenian researchers feel mobility has become part of their work. Nevertheless, some administrative obstacles remain to the mobility of incoming and outgoing researchers.

With this in mind, CMEPIUS (the Republic of Slovenia's Centre for Mobility and Educational and Training Programmes) launched its operations in January 2005 by opening the ERA MORE Centre, part of the European Network of Mobility Centres. The Slovenian Researcher's Mobility Centre aims to provide foreign researchers and their families with comprehensive assistance and useful information upon their arrival in Slovenia.

The Centre offers relevant information on administrative and legal matters, such as visas, work and residence permits, taxation, social insurance, and other practical matters such as schools.

But the Centre is not the only service offered by the Slovenian Research Area. CMEPIUS also recently launched the Slovenian Researcher's Mobility Portal (www.ercareers.si), part of the broader Pan-European Researcher's Mobility Portal.

The portal, based on two databases (one devoted to job vacancies and the other containing researcher CVs), operates as an online job market for researchers and research bodies alike.

Public research institutions, all three universities and the private sector can use the first database not only to advertise their vacancies free of charge, but also to consult online CVs of researchers who are interested in opportunities across Europe. Researchers can use the second database to upload their CVs and consult job offers, as well as to get information on grants and training opportunities offered by research bodies.

Source: Refernet Slovenia, no other source given.

Vocational education and training



HUNGARY

Educatio 2005

Educatio International Education Exhibition and Review, held annually, is the most important professional showcase for Hungarian education. On 2-4 December 2005, the Budapest Fair Centre hosted more than 150 exhibitors at the event. Several vocational education institutions and nearly all Hungarian universities and colleges set up a stand, while visitors were able to sample services from a range of teaching tools providers, textbook publishers, language teaching schools, quality management and IT businesses. Many of the over 50 thousand people attending the exhibition were secondary school students about to choose a career, along with parents, teachers and heads of educational institutions.

As part of the various professional lectures and presentations delivered, attendants were able to learn about the present and future of education, the two-tier secondary school leaving examination, lifelong learning, teacher training, the European Union, scholarships, the introduction of Bologna-type training in Hungary, the available vocational qualifications, integration issues and admission opportunities in the various institutions. The exhibitors included among others the Ministry of Education together with its supporting institutions, such as the National Institute of Vocational Education.

Source: ReferNet Hungary

SPAIN

WEBPOL - Virtual training for European local police

Valencia and its metropolitan area, with a population of a million and a half, boasts a particularly active local police force of 1500 that owes its high standard to a record of continuous technological innovation. To transfer this know-how, Valencia Police has put forward a project, 'Webpol - a virtual learning environment for European local police', for inclusion in the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The project involves setting up a virtual environment for the vocational training of European local police

and combines training content, an Internet-based training centre and an innovative training management system. Webpol is aimed at local police corps, and training centres and educational institutes that cover local policing, but with the right technical support it could also be transferred to other kinds of police bodies.

Source: José Bigorra, Fundación Comunidad Valenciana-Región Europea
Tel. (34-963) 86 98 45, bigorra_jos@gva.es, www.uegva.info



UNITED KINGDOM

Cutting crime by building skills: training for offenders

The UK government has unveiled plans to reduce re-offending by improving training and education for prisoners. The plans, announced in December 2005 and involving partnerships with employers and high-quality training providers, aim to help offenders into jobs when they leave prison.

The plans are outlined in a new Green Paper: Reducing Re-Offending through Skills and Employment, published jointly by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). A series of consultations will be held around the country in 2006.

Key proposals include a stronger focus on jobs, with more relevant skills training, designed by and responding to employers’ needs; a new ‘contract’ for offenders, with incentives for participation; and a ‘campus’ model for offenders to ensure continuity of education from prisons into the community.

The Green Paper came ahead of the government’s five year strategy for reducing re-offending and protecting the public, to be published in 2006. Launching the Green Paper, Education and Skills Secretary Ruth Kelly said:

‘Half of all prisoners have no qualifications at all (*) and more than a third have reading skills below the level of those expected of an 11 year old. Two thirds were unemployed before prison and many have no prospect of finding jobs when they are released.

There has been a great deal of progress in the provision of offender training and education in recent years, with increased investment and improved basic skills training for offenders in the community. Since 2001 qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy have more than doubled (?). But we must do more. We need to be providing opportunities for education and training which lead to skills and qualifications that are meaningful for employers and lead to real jobs. We know from evidence from a range of existing employer-led training and employment schemes, that when ex-offenders are given the right training and opportunities for sustained and satisfying employment they can be turned away from crime. ’

Home Office figures show that released prisoners are more likely to continue to offend than they are to

be rehabilitated, with up to one in five crimes committed by ex-prisoners. 67 % of all prisoners were unemployed at the time of imprisonment. It is calculated that re-offending former prisoner costs the criminal justice system an average of EUR 91 000 up to the point of re-imprisonment and EUR 52 500 each year in prison.

The Green Paper proposals are focused on four main areas: Focusing strongly on jobs, with employers driving the design and delivery of programmes: Training and qualifications should be meaningful to employers so they can, in turn, offer job opportunities. There will be new alliances with employers, targeting specific industrial sectors with labour shortages, and mentoring and other support arrangements will be developed to help offenders get jobs and keep them.

Ensuring training providers and colleges are better able to provide the skills offenders need to get a job: Education and training for offenders has improved in recent years, but more needs to be done to ensure consistently high quality across the country. Key proposals include: piloting a new model for delivery to develop better links with mainstream education and training.

Emphasising skills and jobs for offenders across prisons and probation: Previous efforts in this direction have been hampered by a lack of continuity through the system, with some people ‘falling through the net’ on moving prison or on release. We will ensure that prison and probation services work together so that helping more offenders get qualifications and jobs is seen by all as vital in reducing re-offending. New Regional Offender Managers, working with the Learning and Skills Council (see Cedefop Info 3/2005), will help match training to job openings.

Motivating and engaging offenders, with the right bal-

ance of rights and responsibilities: We will combine a range of incentives with other influences (such as sentencing powers), along with high quality training and other support to help more offenders into jobs. One proposal includes the testing of a new ‘employability contract’ to motivate offenders.

The responsibility for planning and funding learning for offenders in custody (‘prison education’) is transferring to the Learning and Skills Councils. Currently, most prison education is funded through contractors with providers that are arranged and funded centrally by the Home Office. A minority of establishments, such as private prisons, make their own arrangements for education from their own funds.

Press copies of the Green Paper are available from the DfES Press Office, or online at www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning/init_p.cfm?ID=45. Copies are also available from: The Stationery Office, PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN. General Enquiries 0870 600 5522. Order through the Parliamentary Hotline Lo-call 0845 7023474; Email: book.orders@tso.co.uk, Internet www.tso.co.uk/bookshop
(*) 52 % of male prisoners and 71 % of female prisoners have no qualifications at all.
(?) The number of nationally-recognised qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy achieved by prisoners has risen from 25 300 in 2001/2002 to 63 500 in 2004/2005.

Source: ReferNet, United Kingdom

Case study 1:

Aylesbury/Toyota Motor Company

HM Young Offenders Institution Aylesbury has had great success in establishing a partnership with Toyota, the car manufacturer. Previously at Aylesbury, learners in motor vehicle engineering worked on old cars and trained in poor facilities, and few went into related work after leaving prison. The head of the motor-vehicle training section helped the prison to secure funding from Toyota to convert the existing workshop facilities into a modern, fully equipped training garage. New tools, testing equipment, cars and training materials provided by Toyota allowed the staff to develop a training programme that matched the one Toyota offered its own staff. Toyota’s apprenticeship-training resource material includes tutor notes, videos and learning support material covering all qualification requirements. Most learners needed help with numeracy, and about half with literacy and to develop social skills.

Instructors receive a two-week skills annual updating course by the manufacturer. A representative from Toyota visits the prison every two or three months to review the course and learners’ portfolios of evidence. The prison also receives an annual sponsorship of £30 000 from Toyota to maintain the facilities and resources.

Case study 2:

National Health System Employability scheme, West Yorkshire

This scheme gives disadvantaged groups, including offenders in the community, the opportunity to gain work experience within West Yorkshire Hospitals, in non-clinical support roles, such as porters, cleaners, catering and administration workers.

The scheme offers taster days and weeks, shadowing, voluntary work, work placements, ‘buddying’ and mentoring, to see if individuals are suited to work available. If successful, they are put forward for job vacancies and given help and support in preparing job application forms and for interviews.

Daniel was sentenced in June 2005 and was placed on a Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Order for 18 months, with a requirement to perform 70 hours of unpaid work. He had no formal qualifications.

Daniel asked to be referred for the Employability scheme. He attended a joint meeting with his case manager and the Employer Liaison Officer to discuss requirements and opportunities. He was able to provide an employment reference, and his application was forwarded. The case manager also referred Daniel for advice on interview techniques and how best to disclose his conviction to an employer.

The case manager kept Daniel informed about the progress of his application to the scheme, and, in turn, talked to the Employer Liaison Officer. In due course, Daniel was asked to complete an occupational health questionnaire, and attended an interview at the local hospital. Daniel is due to start work as a hospital porter at the end of 2006.

Case study 3:

National Grid

John, now aged 23 years, was serving his third prison sentence when he applied for and was selected for the gas network operative (GNO) training led by National Grid. He gained his NVQ GNO level 1 qualification in July 2004 and on his release a month later, started work in the gas industry.

John spent most of his teenage years in and out of trouble. He was nearing the end of a three and half year sentence when he heard about the National Grid scheme that offered training, mentoring and a guaranteed job on release. After a rigorous selection process, John was accepted for the thirteen-week course, which, because it is approved by the company offering employment, gives successful candidates the basic level entry into the gas industry.

The course, funded by National Grid and delivered by a gas industry registered trainer, included five weeks’ classroom-based training and eight weeks at a work placement with one of National Grid’s contractors. This gave John the opportunity to put into practice skills learnt in the classroom.

As John did not want to return to his home area he moved into rented accommodation in a different town. National Grid worked with the prison resettlement team to find a property near John’s workplace and funded the required deposit. Moving to a new area and a new job was a challenge. The 24 hour, 7 days a week mentoring support National Grid provide has helped John through opening a bank account, understanding and paying council tax and registering with a doctor. With National Grid’s support, he took driving lessons and passed his driving test.

John said, ‘I’ve learnt a new trade and am still learning every day. I can see myself in this career for life. This chance has given me my life back.’

Contact: Sarah Newth, Regional Communications Adviser, National Grid - Tel. (44-7866) 488894
• Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2003 (2004) Home Office - found that of all offenders starting community sentences in the first quarter of 2001, 59 % were reconvicted within two years.
• Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Prisoners (2002) Social Exclusion Unit

Trainers in the textile sector join forces

Political memoranda issued by the Ministry of Employment and Education will end the current fragmentation of textile industry training in Eastern and Western Flanders, where training is provided by the Flemish Public Employment Service - VDAB - centres (catering for those in, or seeking, employment), the educational channels and schools (vocational, technical and upper secondary education). All these training bodies have their own infrastructure, teachers and trainers, which are not shared for financial, organisational or administrative reasons. The partners would now like to set up a system for the efficient, systematic use of each other's training infrastructure, trainers and expertise. This means that when there is a perceived need to acquire new machines or equipment the parties can come together to decide which one will make which purchase, and what resources it will draw upon to do so.

This project, which is for the benefit of students and jobseekers in the textile industry, is intended to promote cooperation on training in the sector. Sponsored by the non-profit association COBOT (the Centre for basic training, further training and retraining in the textile industry - Centrum voor Opleiding, Bijscholing en Omscholing in de Textiel- en breigoedsector), the scheme is in several phases starting on May 2005 and running to 30 April 2007. It is also financed by the European Social Fund (ESF).

The project is in the form of a consortium of the following partners: COBOT asbl, the Institut technique provincial (PTI) of Courtrai, the Institut technique libre (VTI) and the Institut libre d'enseignement secondaire spécial (VIBSO) (both in Waregem), the Haute École de Gand in Ghent, Ghent University, and VDAB. Within this framework, VDAB hopes to optimise the use of its

stock of machines and employ its trainers more effectively, given the downward trend in vocational training in the textile sector. VDAB would also like to allow participants to acquire experience with other machinery and thus increase their chances of obtaining employment.

Preparations are currently being made for phase 3, when a review will be conducted of the sharing of expertise, trainers and infrastructure among the partners. This will also allow all partners to specify their own needs.

Contact: R. Van Weydeveldt / VDAB Gestion de la bibliothèque

Sources: http://cobot.skynet.be/eprisma/pagina_10.htm, www.vdab.be, www.vibso.be/startpagina.htm, www.vtiwaregem.be/, www.pti-kortrijk.be/

Praktikum: bringing training and the workplace closer together

A new initiative in Denmark called Praktikum is already creating excellent links between companies and schools. Having been implemented for 1 1/2 years on a pilot basis at Copenhagen Technical College, it has now been adopted for wider implementation.

Copenhagen Technical College is a large vocational school (4500 students) offering vocational education and training programmes, technical upper secondary education and higher technical education. It also has a continuing education department. As instruction at the college is planned in cooperation with trade and industry, the school has been successful in creating close contacts with the world of work. It

has also succeeded in introducing greater coherence between theoretical and practical education periods. This has been one of the positive results of the Praktikum initiative.

This initiative makes it possible for students undergoing theoretical training to work on a specific project, which is proposed by a company and defined in detail through cooperation between student, school and company. This allows the students to combine theory and practice, while the results of the project itself can be used by the company.

Up till now, 30 students have completed a Praktikum project: industrial technicians specialising in plastic,

toolmakers and cabinetmakers. Among manufactured products are: a wood chair produced according to a plastic prototype, a hydraulic vice, a CD-Rom cover and a corkscrew.

Both the students and the companies are very enthusiastic. The impression is that Praktikum creates very satisfied students who benefit considerably from this opportunity. The companies also benefit from the enthusiasm of students who are able to develop usable products.

Further information: Mr. Søren Lundsgaard, Copenhagen Technical College (slu@kts.dk)

Source: Cirius

Reforming access to the professions

On 22 December 2005, following a proposal by the Minister for Education, Universities and Research, the Council of Ministers approved the preliminary review of the reform of access to the professions and of the State examinations for professional accreditation. This reform incorporates the new regulations governing admission to the State examination and entry in the lists of the professional bodies and boards pursuant to article 1(18) of Law 4 of 14 January 1999. It is expected that after the Council of State has delivered its opinion, the regulations will need to be converted into a Presidential Decree. An ad hoc committee, whose members have included representatives of the Conferences of Heads of Faculties and the professional bodies, has contributed to the drafting of this reform.

The reform will update regulations governing acceptance of the State examination and of the forms it takes. It will also cover the composition of examining boards and the procedures for the conduct of examinations leading to the professions of agronomist and forestry expert, architect, landscape planner and conservationist, social worker, actuary (statistics), biologist, chemist, labour consultant, pharmacist, surveyor, journalist, engineer, psychologist, statistician, food technologist and veterinary. According to the latest survey published by CENSIS (the Italian institute of so-

cio-economic research) in its 2005 annual report on the social situation in Italy, the total number of professionals concerned is 868 351.

This, then, is a complete overhaul of the State examinations for all the professions formerly covered by Presidential Decree 328/2001, plus those of statistician, food technologist, journalist and labour consultant. In the latter two cases, and for agricultural technicians, surveyors, agrarian experts and industrial experts, the level of qualifications for access has been raised. The criteria for access to the professions in question are now a three-year degree and mentored practical work.

It is established that practical training is a basic prerequisite for access to the professions. There has been a sweeping review of its regulation, with new arrangements for such training to take place in a public- or private-sector entity accredited by the professional bodies. These are now entrusted with its management and responsibility (exercised through the supervision of a mentor who has been listed in the relevant professional register for at least five years), as well as with auditing of the training route, if this occurs during the period of studies.

The council of the professional body in the local area verifies that the placement has in fact taken place, in part by trainee reports or interviews. The duration of

the placement may vary, most professional bodies setting it at six months. For engineers, psychologists and labour consultants, it is one year, as this practical training may take place at university by agreement between the professional bodies and universities under a framework convention between the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research and the National Council.

For journalism, one of the professions affected by the reform, there will be a change in the existing system, under which only an 18-month traineeship is required. From now on, the only people allowed to sit the State examination will be those holding a three-year degree or a degree plus two years' specialist studies - at least 50 % of which will consist of practical work geared to the profession of journalism and regulated according to conventions with the professional body - or a two-year university master's degree, also conducted on the basis of convention with the professional order, or again a two-year course offered by a journalist training institute recognised by the journalists' professional body. Pursuant to agreements with the professional order of journalists, the examination may be taken only at a university.

Further information: www.istruzione.it, www.governo.it

Source: Alessandra Pedone / ISFOL ReferNet Italy

Initial vocational training

Proposed reforms get mixed reception

Secondary-level vocational education is about to change in Greece. Today's Technical-Vocational Schools are to be replaced by two new institutions: Vocational *Lykeio* (upper secondary school) and Technical School. The school-leaving certificate from the Vocational *Lykeio* will be equivalent to that of the General *Lykeio* and allow pupils to take part in the university entrance examinations. But Technical Schools, which will be open to pupils completing the first year of either General or Vocational *Lykeio* and issue vocational certificates, will

only allow access to Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK).

The Union of Technical-Vocational Teachers welcomed the proposed bill, considering the division of pathways an improvement over the present system. However, they said the system needs to offer wider access to tertiary education. Teachers in general education, on the other hand, disagreed with the proposed reform, arguing that it will contribute to a higher dropout rate and lead a greater number of young

people to choose private IEKs over public education. This goes against the General Secondary Teachers' Union consistent stand in favour of 12-year compulsory education and universal access to tertiary education.

According to Minister of Education Marietta Ghiannakou, the changes will be phased in gradually, starting from the next academic year.

Source: Anghelloforos, 9 February 2006/cedefop/ine



POLAND

New initiatives to improve continuing training

Continuing training in Poland is in need of a number of changes, mainly to legislative and organisational arrangements.

One problem is that the three pieces of relevant legislation in force (the Education System Act, the Promoting Employment and Labour Market Institutions Act and the Labour Code) do not fully embrace the concept of lifelong learning set out in the Lisbon Strategy. To tackle this, various legislative initiatives are now being considered, such as drafting a new Act on the educational system to cover all issues related to lifelong learning.

Another outstanding issue is that of the links between institutions involved in continuing training, particular problem areas being vocational placements organised by employers or training and job opportuni-

ties for people with disabilities and learning difficulties. This situation calls for a speedy implementation of the priority measure, 'Cooperation and Partnership', identified in the 'The Development Strategy of Continuing Education up to 2010'.

Another area of concern is the issue of quality assurance in relation to continuing training institutions which are not part of the formal education system. To improve the situation, the Superintendent's offices have launched an accreditation system for providers. Training institutions entitled to seek accreditation now include non-public establishments operating under the Education System Act and other legislation (such as the Freedom of Economic Activity Act).

Quality in continuing training also in-

volves such issues as increasing worker mobility, improving the transparency of qualifications, and recognising certificates and diplomas. These are expected to be enhanced by the Europass portfolio.

The system supporting distance learning in Poland is still emerging. According to 'The Concept of Distance Learning Implementation in Poland', a document prepared by the Ministry of National Education and Sport, it is planned to set up a National Distance Learning Centre, as well as regional and local centres.

The last issue which needs to promptly addressed is recognition of vocational qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning. This can be achieved using the recently developed national model of vocational qualification standards,

which are linked to existing examination and curriculum standards. In fact, modular vocational training curricula are beginning to replace set curriculum standards. This new system is supported by an electronic database giving access to modular vocational training curricula and to the national vocational qualifications standards. Cf: www.standardyiszkolenia.praca.gov.pl.

Although usually seen in the context of the labour market and unemployment lifelong learning is in fact addressed to society at large, including children, youth and older people. These are the next areas to which both the state and the citizens themselves should pay particular attention.

Source: Ireneusz Wozniak, Ph.D., Institute for Terotechnology, Radom
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UNITED KINGDOM

Further Education Colleges look to the future

In November 2005 'Realising the Potential', a review of the future role of further education (FE) colleges in England, was published a year after the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and Chair of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) invited Sir Andrew Foster to advise on the challenges facing these institutions over the next five to ten years. The remit of the review was to identify how FE colleges contribute to their local economies and to social inclusion, what their particular mission is and how they should be transformed.

In the report Foster sets out a vision for FE colleges and a clear set of values. He outlines the many achievements FE colleges highlighting (i) over 3 million learners, (ii) a breadth of activity including diversity, employment skills, basic skills, second chance and higher education (HE) and (iii) their role in facilitating social inclusion.

He also draws attention to the symptoms indicating that 'all is not well' in the system, such as: 200 000 16-18 year olds not in employment, education or training; 14 % of adults of working age with no qualifications; over 5 million adults with literacy and numeracy skills below level 1; too many students failing to achieve the qualification for the course on which they enrol.

The need for innovation and the drive to put the 'user' at the centre of policy and practice through a 'learner focus' is a key element of Foster's vision. Key actions include:

- ensuring that students receive impartial advice;
- financial incentives are used to steer students onto courses valuable to the economy;
- strengthening in learner advocacy at the national and local LSC level and college level;
- offering greater choice between courses and learning modes;
- streamlining qualifications and learning pathways.
- At the centre of Foster's vision lies a quality imperative which seeks to deal with underperformance at the course and college level and to encourage specialisation as a means of improving retention, results, value for money and industry support.

The review draws attention to the fact that FE colleges are only one part of a system, which includes key players such as the Department for Education and Skills, Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and schools and that the further education system has suffered from 'too many initiatives'. The Department for Education and Skills are encouraged to provide a coherent and man-

aged framework spanning schools, further and higher education. Foster also argues the case for a funding method that makes sure any given learning activity is aligned with the national learning requirement and local components. The Foster report concludes that 'there is no single "magic bullet" solution to FE. Rather through a comprehensive set of reforms across the whole of the FE system, its power to fuel economic achievement through helping individuals realise their personal potential will provide the basis for progressive enhancement in FE's standing and esteem in the nations eyes.'

- The findings of the review have been broadly welcomed by government, the various agencies involved in the post compulsory education agenda and the social partners. Commenting on Sir Andrew Foster's review of the future role of further education colleges, TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: 'the commitment to address the workforce development needs that the report highlights as a priority... is to be welcomed. The report acknowledges the powerful role trade unions play in promoting training in the workplace.'

- The emphasis on employers is of key interest to the Sector Skills Development Agency and the Skills for Business Network (www.ssda.org.uk) (see Cedefop Info 2/2005). The Sector Skills Agreements, which map out the skills employers need their workforce to have and how these skills will be supplied, are already providing a framework to bring together employers and colleges and to encourage employer-led provision. Another key strand of work is to develop robust analysis of data through which colleges can map skills needs and shortages and so ensure that they meet the needs of local learners and economies. These examples highlight the role of the Skills for Business Network in this agenda and the implementation of the Foster review provides further opportunities for the Sector Skills Development Agency to work with the LSC and its partners to deliver its recommendations and to improve the development and delivery of policy and practice in this arena.

You can download the report from www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation/fereview/index.shtml. Further copies of these documents (Reference code: 1983-2005DOC-EN) can be obtained from DFES publications orderline, Tel. (44-845) 6022260, Fax (44-845) 6033360, Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com, DFES publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottinghamshire, NG15 0DJ. For more details on scope, purpose and underpinning evidence of the report, please contact via email foster.review@dfes.gsi.gov.uk or by post: Andy Heath, FE Review Secretariat, Department for Education and Skills, Moorfoot, Sheffield, S1 4PQ, Tel. (44-114) 259 4498, E-mail: andrew.heath@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

Source: ReferNet, United Kingdom

UNITED KINGDOM

Employers to drive new Skills Academies

In the Skills White Paper, 'Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work' published in 2005 (see Cedefop Info No 2/2005) the UK government publicised one of its latest weapons in the battle to raise the skills levels of workers in the UK: Skills Academies. With the aim of providing various industries with skilled employees, the 12 Skills Academies will be established in partnership with employers and the Sector Skills Councils (www.ssda.org.uk) by 2008. Each academy will be designed for a different sector of industry or business.

In early November 2005, it was announced that four industries in the UK were to get National Skills Academies (NSA), to open by September 2006, which will transform their skills base and competitiveness. Education and Skills Secretary Ruth Kelly and Trade and Industry Secretary Alan Johnson announced that manufacturing, construction, food and drink, and financial services stand to benefit from a share of up to EUR 56 million of investment for the skills academies from both the government and industry.

The academies could train tens of thousands of young people and adults each year and will play a key part in creating jobs, tackling skills shortages and driving up productivity. For example:

Manufacturing - This will need many more people trained in engineering and manufacturing skills and leadership and management. Figures aggregated from the National Employer Skills Survey (NESS) in 2003 suggest this sector currently has around 48 000 vacancies. 13 000 are skill shortage vacancies. A key role of the manufacturing academy led by the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance (SEMTA) would be to encourage more young people and adults to consider a career in the industry by offering real opportunities for progression and skills development, linked closely to the vocational learning offered through schools.

Construction - The construction industry needs around 88,000 new entrants per year in craft, technical, professional and management roles and estimates it will need 250 000 people skilled to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 (equivalent to five good GCSEs) by 2010. An NSA will contribute to the training of 20 000 workers a year in 2006 growing to 70 000 workers a year at level 2 and above in 2010. Developing construction skills will be vital for major projects associated with the 2012 Olympics. Current vacancy figures taken from NESS 2004 suggest there are just over 32 000 vacancies of which 13 700 are skills shortage vacancies.

Food and Drink manufacturing - Over the next eight years 150 000 new recruits are needed to fill vacancies, especially technical operators and food scientists. Approximately 1 in 10 employers report skills shortages within their workforce; this adversely affects productivity, morale and new product development. According to NESS 2004, current levels of vacancies are around 8 600 of which 1 900 are skills shortage vacancies.

Financial Services - The Financial Services sector has continuing difficulty in recruiting young people and adults with suitable skills from entry level to professional. Employers report they currently have around 25 000 vacancies of which 4 100 are skills shortage vacancies.

This initiative is being driven by well-known companies in each industry. These will now work with the Learning and Skills Councils (LSC) to develop detailed business plans.

Further information: <http://senet.lsc.gov.uk/> and www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/nsaprospectus/

Source: ReferNet, United Kingdom



UNITED KINGDOM

Skills in the UK: the long-term challenge

In 2004, the UK government commissioned an independent review chaired by Lord Leitch to forecast the UK's optimal skills mix in 2020 to maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice, and to consider the policy implications of achieving the level of change required.

The Leitch Review of Skills published its interim report 'Skills in the UK: The long-term challenge' in December 2005 and a final report and recommendations to the government will follow in 2006.

The report finds that, over the last decade, the skills profile of the UK has improved due to the excellent higher education system; reforms to vocational training and an increasingly effective school system. On the other hand, the author of the report warned that Britain's long-term prosperity is facing a growing threat from the poor skills of the nation's workforce.

The review found that

- half of all British adults do not have the functional numeracy expected of 11-year olds;
- more than a third of adults of working age in the UK do not have a basic school-leaving qualification;
- five million adults have no qualifications at all, and
- one in six adults does not have the literacy skills expected of a 11-year olds.

- The review team commissioned research to examine what the trends are on the basis of existing government skills targets and concludes that they are very ambitious and will be difficult to meet in themselves. However, if the current targets are achieved, Leitch estimates the following outcomes by 2020:

- proportion of working-age adults without any qualification will fall from 13 % to 4 %
- proportion without a Level 2 qualification will fall from 31 % to 16 %
- proportion with either a Level 2 or Level 3 qualification will increase from 42 % to 46 %
- proportion with a degree will increase from 27 % to 38 %

The report argues that even if these challenging targets are met the UK will still not have a world-class skills base in 2020 compared to its international competitors. So Leitch says there must be an even greater step-change than this and recommends that the following additional targets should be considered:

- enabling an additional 3.5m adults to gain basic skills and reducing by 3.5m the number of 16-year-olds coming into the workforce without basic skills
- enabling an additional 3.5m individuals to achieve a Level 2 qualification (lower secondary) and an additional 3.5m

to achieve a Level 3 qualification (upper secondary)

- enabling an additional 3.5m to achieve a degree (or other Level 4) and increasing the HE participation target from 50 % to 65 % of those aged 19-30
- The final report, due in spring 2006, will finalise what the review team believes is the skills profile required by 2020. The Interim report concludes by identifying three key elements of the next phase of the review. These are:
 - to consider the skills profile that the UK should aim to achieve in 2020 in order to drive growth, productivity and support social justice over the longer-term;
 - to consider the appropriate balance of responsibility between government, employers and individuals for the action required to meet this level of change; and
 - to develop the policy framework required to support this.

The TUC reacted as follows on the interim report:

'Lord Leitch's interim report quite rightly concludes that current targets to up-skill the nation, ambitious as they are, will not be enough to secure economic prosperity and social justice over the long-term.'

It is welcome that the report recognises the need to build consensus between government, trade unions and

employers on how to radically transform our skills base by 2020.

However, it is difficult to see how a skills revolution along these lines can be achieved unless Lord Leitch's final report proposes a genuine post-voluntary framework for skills policy.

Such a framework should be based on a consensus around the obligation of employers to train their employees to meet the requirements of their present job and for a joint responsibility between employers, employees and government to meet the wider needs of the workforce. Collective agreements between employers and unions would do much to help deliver such a strategy.'

The report can be downloaded from www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review/review_leitch_index.cfm

Further information is available from Review Team contact details. The contact details for the Leitch Review of Skills project team are: Leitch Review of Skills, Zone 4/E1, HM Treasury, 1 Horse Guards Road, London SW1A 2HQ, Email: leitch.review@hm-treasury.gov.uk, Fax (44-20) 7270 4414

Source: ReferNet United Kingdom

Lifelong learning



PORTUGAL

Evaluating lifelong learning policies

In the past seven years, Portugal has approached issues of employment and unemployment within the framework of the European Employment Strategy (EES) and has sought to build meaningful responses to the specific features of the Portuguese labour market.

Since 2001 the development of the EES has largely been geared toward lifelong learning, especially in implementing the Lifelong Learning Strategy (EALV) using the policy measures concept and structure set out in the Annex to the National Employment Plan (PNE) for 2001.

The evaluation study, carried out by the Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IESE) on behalf of the Directorate-General for Planning and Statistical Studies, Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity, involved various dimensions of analysis, in particular:

- a global qualitative assessment of the changes in the National Employment Plan's approach to the EES as regards lifelong learning;
- a global qualitative assessment of how education and training and employment policies can work together;
- an evaluation of the effectiveness of lifelong education and its effects on the organisation of the labour market;

- an evaluation of the effects of measures taken under the Lifelong Learning Strategy on end beneficiaries, employability and the labour market.

The study closes with a set of recommendations relating to policy measures for education, training and employment to improve indicators of individual demand for training and businesses' participation in promoting continuing education, these being the main lines for putting into practice the guidelines set out in the approach to lifelong education.

For additional information: www.dgeep.mtss.gov.pt/edicoes/cogitum/17.php
Price: EUR 7.50, ISBN: 972-704-267-8

Source: CID/DGEEP, Fátima Hora (fatima.hora@dgeep.mtss.gov.pt)
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GERMANY

Learning throughout life

Young researchers look into an ageing society

Lifelong learning is becoming an increasingly important factor for the working population. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is supporting young researchers who are examining the theme of 'education and training in working life'. 16 research teams, all of which participated successfully in a competition organised by the Council for Social and Economic Data (RatSWD) at the request of BMBF, will each receive 20 000 Euro to examine the role of education and training in working life from different angles.

Among these, an economist is studying the question whether and how continuing training can help older employees to stay longer in their jobs. A team of sociologists is trying to find out what role education plays in overcoming difficult situations in life. An educationalist is dealing with the continuing training of teachers.

The goal of these young social scientists is to make better use of available statistics for empirical analysis. In an ageing society their work is increasingly relevant. With the help of their findings it will be possible to develop strategies enabling employees and enterprises to successfully master the challenges of a rapidly changing working world.

The researchers will present the first results of their work at the 3rd Conference for Social and Economic Data to be held in Wiesbaden in May 2006.

Source: BMBF



FRANCE

When the baby-boomers retire...

On 7 December 2005 the General Plan Commission and DARES - the Directorate for Research, Studies and Statistics within the Ministry for Employment, Social Cohesion and Housing - issued a joint report entitled 'The impact of the retirement of the baby boom generations'. Its authors are pessimistic about the number of jobs that this exodus can be expected to create. Despite so many people taking retirement in the near future, it is possible that unemployment in France will not shrink proportionally, due to the mismatch between skills offered by job-seekers and those sought by employers. Recruitment difficulties are likely to co-exist with a high unemployment rate. The pressing need for training and information must be met if this opportunity to bring down unemployment is not to be wasted.

The report estimates that the number of people taking retirement between 2005 and 2015 will be 600 000 a year, compared with the net annual creation of just 150 000 new jobs.

A worst-case scenario is also possible, 'so long as the mismatch between employers' requirements and the training of individuals persists'. It is vital, then, to 'establish active measures now to support employers and individuals in anticipating the tensions to come and thus avoiding such a scenario'. The report points out that these recruitment problems will be aggravated in the case of

the less desirable jobs, 'and ways will have to be found to secure the loyalty of the work force engaged on them'. On the other hand, companies able to offer career prospects to their employees will face fewer difficulties.

Fifteen occupations alone account for half of the jobs to be filled over the next ten years(see box). For the first time since the 1970s, the number of jobs that fall vacant as people retire will be the same as, or even higher than, the jobs being sought by school-leavers. This trend will amplify the changes taking place in the French occupational landscape. The development of the service sector is likely to continue, with growing polarisation of jobs: there will be more and more executive staff, but also an increasing number of low-skill service jobs. Companies will have a greater need for expertise (market research, auditing, legal advice) and to acquire this they will have to recruit more computer operatives, technology experts, administrators, and commercial, financial and accounting staff. At the same time, the rise in new demands (support care for dependent people) and demands that are not adequately met (child care) will lead to a sharp increase in the number of 'low-skilled' jobs in the home care sector. On the other hand, the volume of jobs in industry and agriculture and those offered by small traders and craft firms will decline.

The priorities set by the General Plan Commission and DARES are to encourage job mobility within sectors of industry and enterprises, in particular through internal promotion or redeployment. The authorities are urged to provide more information to employees, young people and the unemployed on trends in career prospects, to promote training and to support employers in defining their requirements more clearly and keeping older people on in employment.

Sophie Boissard, the Plan Commissioner, feels that employers must acquire the resources for training and supporting their employees in the move to new-

ly emerging occupations and to the jobs that the employers will need most in the future.

Source: Stephane Heroult / Centre INFFO, from the article by S. Zadunayski published in INFFO Flash no 671, 16 December 2005-15 January 2006, under the title of 'Pour que 'départs à la retraite' rime avec 'baisse du chômage' [so that retirement will rhyme with 'lower unemployment'].

See also: Presentation of the report on the General Plan Commission website www.plan.gouv.fr/actualites/fiche.php?id=273, with link to: • press dossier www.plan.gouv.fr/intranet/upload/actualite/Dossierde-pressePMQ.pdf; • Press officer: Caroline DE JESSEY caroline.dejessey@plan.gouv.fr, tel. (33) 1 45 56 51 37 - (33) 6 21 80 35 63; • 'Les Métiers en 2015: l'impact du départ des générations du baby-boom', Premières synthèses Premières information (December 2005, no ° 50.1, 8 pages): www.plan.gouv.fr/intranet/upload/publications/documents/lesmetiersen2015.pdf

Fifteen occupations will account for half of the jobs to be filled:	
mother's helps and home helps	411 000
service and maintenance providers	364 000
teachers	360 000
administrative and managerial staff	304 000
carers	257 000
vehicle drivers	239 000
category C civil servants	221 000
administrative workers	219 000
skilled process industry workers	211 000
IT operatives	207 000
nurses and midwives	198 000
commercial executives	190 000
skilled maintenance workers	188 000
domestic staff	162 000
representatives	156 000
Source: Commissariat général du Plan and DARES.	

CZECH REPUBLIC

Economic Growth Strategy focuses on human resources

In July 2005 the Government of the Czech Republic adopted a strategy that defines a vision for the country's development in 2007-2013 and outlines priorities for growth and competitiveness.

The Strategy is the first policy document since the Czech Republic adopted the market economy to sum up the major priorities of the state's economic policy.

The Strategy sets out to make the Czech Republic into a European centre of knowledge and technology, with a growing standard of living and high rate of employment. Expressed in economic indicators, the strategy aims to achieve the EU-25 average in GDP per capita and to help the Czech Republic meet convergence criteria for the planned adoption of the single European currency. In addition, it aims to create the best possible conditions for clients of the public

sector, i.e. citizens and business organisations, and to contribute to an efficient use of public resources, including EU funds.

To build up the competitiveness of the Czech economy, the Economic Growth Strategy focuses on five priority areas: the institutional environment, sources of funding, infrastructure, human resources development (education and employment), and research, development and innovation.

Human resource development a priority

The 'Human Resources Development - Education and Employment' section of the Strategy is divided into six objectives: flexibility of the education system; increasing educational attainment levels among older citizens; ensuring sufficient numbers of the workforce; enhancing

labour market flexibility; providing incentives for work; and developing a system for the strategic management of human resources. Based on the 'Human Resources Development - Education and Employment' section, the implementation programme was drawn up and afterwards approved by the government of the Czech Republic on 21st December 2005.

The Economic Growth Strategy proposes the introduction of State scholarships to provide disadvantaged individuals with easier access to higher education, including vocational education, and recommends expanding the provision of secondary general and technical education completed by 'maturita'. Furthermore, the Strategy recommends supporting co-operation between employers on the one hand and secondary schools and higher education institutions on the

other, to provide work placements for students. It also recommends the introduction of training in presentation and management skills, teamwork and entrepreneurship, in addition to learning foreign languages and improving ICT skills. All these proposals aim at supporting key skills.

Responsibility for the 'Human Resources Development - Education and Employment' section of the Economic Growth Strategy primarily lies with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Source: Jiri Havel
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PORTUGAL

A new operational programme for public administration

The government is interested in helping young people enter employment, especially those who have recently left the education and training systems. Successful entry requires concerted and coherent action involving - among other things - educational policy and vocational training policy.

Public administration is Portugal's biggest employer overall, and the sector offering the widest diversity of occupa-

tions; it cannot afford to stand aloof from national employment policy.

This is enough in itself to justify a specific contribution by the public service to employment policy. This takes the form of paid traineeships in public administration, divided by operational areas, allowing full benefit to be drawn from the nation's investment in training qualified human resources. The Operational Programme for Public Administration (POAP) has been

approved against the background of the Second Community Support Framework III. The regulation defines the terms for financing from the European Social Fund (ESF) for traineeships in public administration falling within type 2 'Traineeships' of measure 1 'Training of human resources and taking full advantage of their skills under the POAP'.

These traineeships are governed by the Traineeship Programme within pub-

lic administration, established by Decree-Law no. 326/99 of 18 August 1999 and Ministerial Order no. 1256/2005 of 2 December 2005.

Further information: Diário da República, II série B, no. 231 of 2 December 2005; Diário da República, I série B, no. 231 of 2 December 2005

Source: C/ID/DGEOP
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BELGIUM

Language learning: The first concrete effects of a 'Marshall plan' in Wallonia

More than just an asset, knowledge of languages is a 'must' on today's jobs market. The Region of Wallonia has 260 000 jobseekers, and Flanders is its leading trading partner. Yet according to a survey by UWE (Union wallonne des entreprises - the Walloon employers' union) and its partners, 14% of employers are not finding the multilingual job applicants they are looking for on the labour market.

Should all Walloons then become polyglot? Not likely!

Through the priority actions for the future of Wallonia (the 'Marshall plan'), the Walloon Region, under the wing of the Training Minister, has developed a new scheme for stimulating the competitiveness of Walloon enterprises: the *Chèque-Formation Langues*. This language learning voucher, aimed at SMEs and the self-employed, will enable French-speaking Walloon workers to improve their language skills (in Dutch, English and German), and thus boost the performance of their businesses.

To encourage Walloon enterprises to invest in language courses a 15 million euro budget has been set aside, spread over four years.

A language learning voucher is equivalent to an hourly lesson per worker. The Walloon Region grants a subsidy of 15 euro for each voucher ordered. For this reason, the charge to the employer for each language learning voucher with a face value of 30 euro is set at 15 euro.

The employer or self-employed person will be reimbursed if the hourly cost

of the lesson, inclusive of VAT, is lower than 30 euro, but must pay the balance to the training provider if that cost exceeds 30 euro.

For further information: www.leforem.be, www.Wallonia.be, www.chequedeformation.be

Source: Sigrid Dieu / FOREM, Département des Relations internationales (sigrid.dieu@forem.be)

SLOVAKIA

Investing in education: is the timing right?

It's election year in Slovakia. But has the reformist Prime Minister left educational reform too late to show results?

The National Lisbon Strategy, aiming to improve Slovakia's competitiveness and support the development of a knowledge economy by 2010 was approved on 16 February 2005. The Strategy focuses on four areas: The information society; science, R&D and innovation; education and employment; the business environment. Four action plans corresponding to each area were approved in July 2005, specifying measures, responsible actors and funding. Furthermore, the Minerva programme (*) emerged from this strategy. The aim of Minerva is to pursue activities and support coherence within and between each of these four areas.

The Strategy represents a concrete step forward in a country which has long been told that increasing investment in education and R&D must wait until struc-

tural reforms are completed. Indeed, structural reforms have been successfully introduced, meeting with the approval of leading economic institutions and analysts. Now the government seems to be getting serious about reforming education in Slovakia, which has the lowest investment in human resources in the EU. After years of broad 'strategies' and policy declarations unaccompanied by efficient measures, the difference is eye-catching: the concrete measures announced signal a real change from rhetoric to action. The involvement of the Ministry of Finance could also improve policy coherence.

The question however remains: why so late? Was it really inappropriate to implement structural reforms aimed at achieving macroeconomic stability, reforms aimed at creating a knowledge-based economy, at the same time? Why did curricular reform and the development of the information society have to wait?

Leading economists, in explaining falling investment in R&D and education during the late 1990s and early 2000s, have argued that economic growth (a respectable 6.2 % GDP in 3Q of 2005) was a precondition for raising such investment once more. But the future will show how much damage has been caused by the long period of underinvestment in education, the controversial decision to put macroeconomic stabilisation before investment in human resources. But as 2006 is an election year, it may be too late for the government to show results in this field. Ambitious goals with deadlines set a month before the September 2006 elections may prove impossible to achieve. Moreover, lack of time may lead to inefficient spending and eventually to a break in continuity, should a new government decide to set different goals and promote different measures.

Premier Minister Dzurinda, loved and hated as reformers usually are, and no doubt an important political figure of

modern Slovak history, is famous for taking bicycle tours around Slovakia to promote his party and policies. However politicians choose to campaign, and however the people of Slovakia choose to vote, there is a lesson for all: Timing matters. There is an investment cycle, and there is an election cycle. Everyone - not just cyclists - should think hard about how best to harmonise these cycles. It is to be hoped that the HRD investment deficit in Slovakia will not jeopardise the country's future competitiveness or lead to a period of inefficient spending in an effort to make up for former restrictions.

(*) Not to be confused with the EU programme of the same name - the acronym in Slovak stands for Mobilisation of Innovation in the National Economy and the Development of Scientific-Educational Activities.

Source: Juraj Vantuch
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VET quality



SWEDEN

Validation commission develops standards and methods

In January 2004 the Swedish government set up a national commission in order to develop quality standards and validation methods during the coming four years. Its mission covers both the labour market and the education field.

In the first two years, the focus has mainly been on establishing a solid basis for cooperation with employees' and employers' associations, trade and industry, regional stakeholders, and training providers.

The approach adopted by the commission involves establishing steering groups for broad economic sectors (e. g. healthcare, construction), consisting of representatives from employers' and employees' associations, guidance counsellors, professional VET assessors, and a project manager from the commission's secretariat.

The steering groups in turn appoint those who will provide methods to

identify general, transferable skills and to guarantee the quality of these methods.

In addition to the steering groups, the commission has granted financial support to a number of generic pilot projects in different sectors, such as trans-

port trades, heating/ventilating/plumbing trades, motor trades, etc.

The skills framework established so far will help to set the quality and validation criteria. It can be represented as follows:

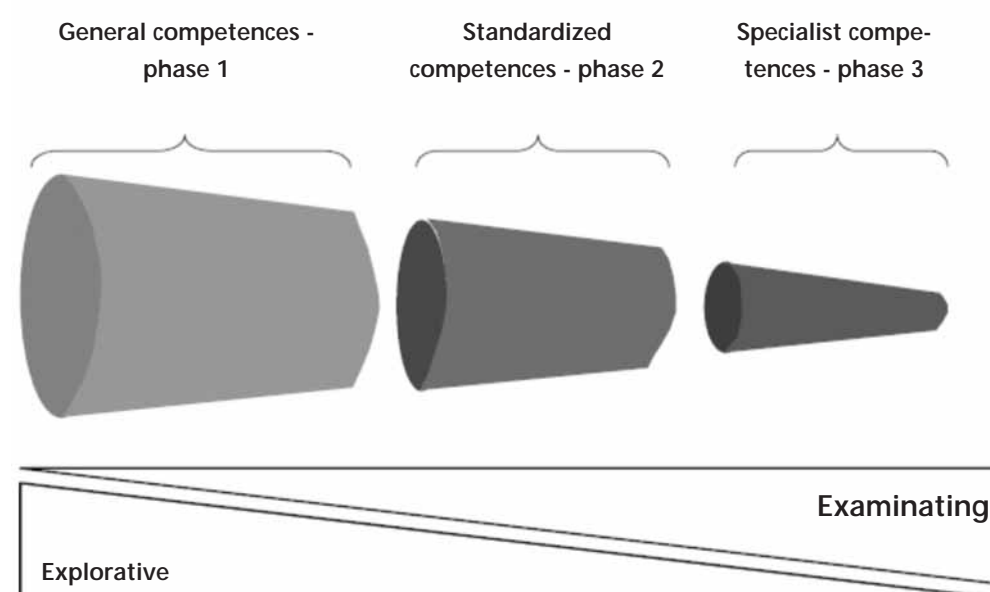
The first phase of the model focuses on the individual, phase 2 is more about

employability from the employer's perspective or about reaching the level of a certificate in training. Whereas in these two phases the process of recognising competences is explorative, in phase 3 it is more examination-oriented. By working with phase 1 and phase 2, and leaving phase 3 to the social partners, the commission's long-term goals are to deliver high-quality, legitimate and nationally equal methods for the two first phases.

This can, in turn, contribute to higher quality in recruitments and improved chances for career moves between different sectors, by identifying transferable skills at an early stage. It may also lead to a reduction of course modules in vocational training.

For further information: website of the national commission, www.valideringsdelegationen.se, Ms Eva Nordlund, director of the commission eva.nordlund@valideringsdelegationen.se

Source: Kansliet, Sara Petersson





CZECH REPUBLIC

Employers influence examination standards

The *Kvalita I* project within the European Social Fund has led to new final examinations for three-year secondary vocational programmes. Their standardised administration and content is expected to result in higher standards and comparable outcomes. As employers now play a greater role in determining exam content, it is also expected that these programmes will better correspond to industry needs.

Vocational programmes are ripe for a change as far-reaching as that affecting 'maturita' (1) programmes. The current practice of letting each school determine the content of final examinations separately results in widely varied requirements. The urgency of addressing this situation is documented by data provided by labour offices. Individuals who hold only vocational certificates are more likely to be unemployed than graduates of other upper secondary programmes (see graph). Moreover, the number of basic school leavers who choose the vocational route without 'maturita' has been constantly decreasing.

The new standardised examinations are being developed by teachers, employers and the staff of the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NÚOV). Due to the involvement of the business sector, the content of the exams should more closely match industry needs. Weaker schools will be forced to improve their quality and technical resources. Graduates should then face better chances of finding good employment.

Standardised examinations in practice

The schools where the standardised exams were piloted last year above all appreciated their objectiveness and the new-found comparability of results between schools. The exams also covered work-related issues to ensure that graduates are better prepared to enter the labour market. Including independent work in the exams also met with approval as it increases the motivation and responsibility of students who must now learn to use various sources of information. Some schools report that the new exams have led them to upgrade equipment or consider providing further training to their teaching staff. These are exactly the effects that standardised assessment is expected to have.

Industry experts recommend that cooperation between schools and enterprises in the regions be improved, and that practical training move to the workplace. But teachers point out that a vocational programme should not focus just on training for a particular job. Graduates should emerge from the programme with comprehensive knowledge and wide-ranging skills in their field in order to be able to work for various employers and to respond to modernisation and change in the labour market.

Reform of vocational branches also necessary

The work on standardised final examinations goes hand in hand with the development of 'framework educational programmes' which are being gradu-

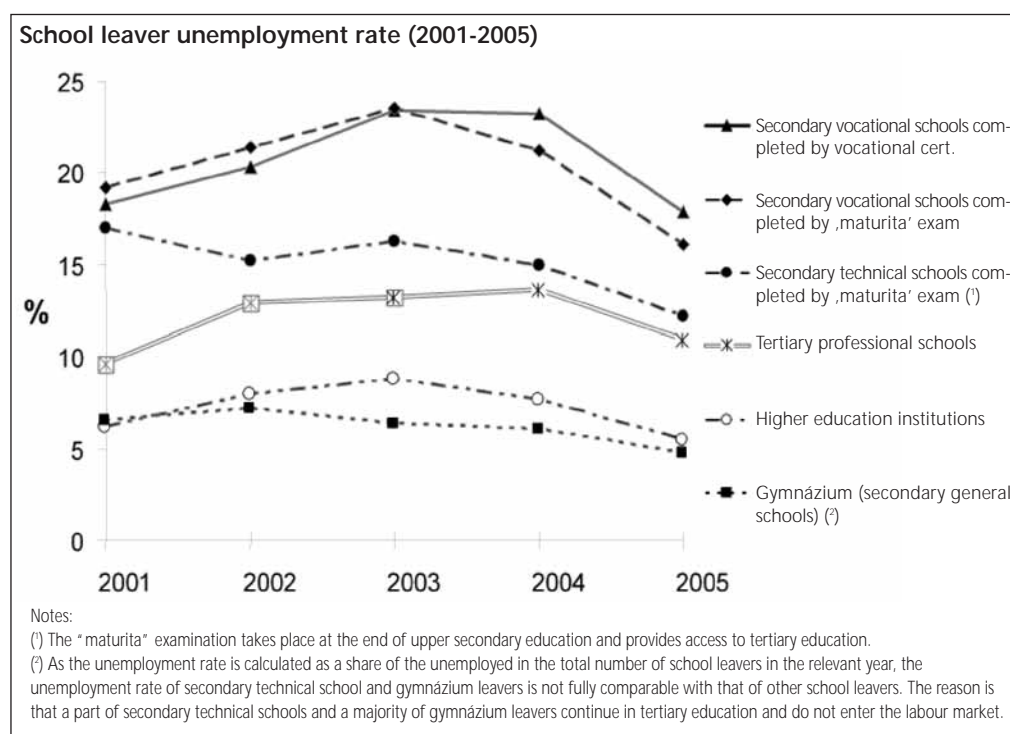
ally introduced into all types of schools in the Czech Republic. At the same time, the number of occupational branches is being considerably reduced. It is expected that the process will produce 60 broadly conceived three-year programmes. For example, a single programme and framework educational programme for electricians will replace the two existing programmes (heavy-current and light-current). A single programme for cooks will replace the existing specialised programmes 'cook' and 'cook in the catering industry'.

Some of the same experts are working in both the standardised examination and the curriculum streamlining teams. As a result these new principles are also being incorporated into the new examinations. In the next two years,

more schools and programmes will be testing the new standardised examinations, after which they are to be introduced into all secondary vocational programmes granting a vocational certificate.

Further information: www.nuov.cz

Source: Zoja Franklová, NÚOV, franklova.z@nuov.cz



FRANCE

President Chirac hails social partners

Jacques Chirac proposes banking the Individual Right to Training in a 'personal account'.

On 5 January 2006, Jacques Chirac, the President of the French Republic, addressed his New Year's greetings to the 'key forces of the nation', the unions and employers' associations.

Revaluing work, investing in the future

In his greetings, the President of the Republic spoke of the priority placed on employment. Since 2002, he pointed out, the Government 'has reset its goals' through its social cohesion plan, the greater flexibility offered by the 35-hour week, the liberalisation of employment in services. But there is a need for further measures.

Recalling his desire to see the establishment of a 'true public employment service, bringing together at grass-roots level the bodies responsible for allowances and those responsible for job placement', Jacques Chirac said: 'We need to enrich even further every person's right to vo-

cational training'. The Droit Individuel à la Formation - the individual right to training - represents 'real progress', but we need to 'go further'. The President proposed that provision be made for 'banking' the right in a 'personal training account', which employees could then 'freely administer' throughout their careers, complementing the 'time savings bank' (the compte épargne-temps, or CET) that employees can use to bank their entitlement to time off earned as a result of the shorter working hours (RTT). It is a way for all individuals to 'map their own route, administer their working time as best suits them and plan ahead more effectively'.

This concept would be in line with the thinking underlying the individual right to training for employees on fixed-term contracts, introduced by the new collective agreement on unemployment insurance. The social partners decided that personal training rights acquired during a fixed-term contract of employment would, in certain cases, be transferred to OPACIF (*Organisme paritaire agréé*

pour le congé individuel de formation - Accredited Joint Body for Personal Training Leave).

The proposal met with mixed reactions. Laurence Parisot, the President of the employers' confederation MEDEF (*Mouvement des entreprises de France*) felt that it is a 'pity that we have not left it to the social partners to move forward on training issues' at their own pace. For their part, the unions highlighted the new opportunities open to employees.

Towards greater security of working life

President Chirac also stressed the need to continue to work for the 'genuine security of working careers'. 'In today's world, true security does not mean giving people a guarantee that they will always hold on to their jobs,' said the President. 'It is enabling everyone to find appropriate employment, or to find new employment. With the personalised re-deployment agreement, the provision of aid for returning to work and the creation of Maisons de l'emploi - employ-

ment centres - we have started to construct a system under which working life can be made truly secure.' He sees this as 'protecting and supporting each employee throughout his or her career, providing help with further progress, not just in the workplace but also during periods of unemployment'.

Source: Stéphane Heroult / Centre INFFO, based on article by S. Zadunayski in INFFO Flash, n° 672, 16-31 January 2006.



GERMANY/EU

Intercultural dialogue in vocational training and guidance

Europäische Bildungswerke für
Beruf und Gesellschaft e.V.
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Whether the topic is the results of the PISA studies, the wave of youth violence that hit French cities last November, or the terrorism debate, intercultural dialogue is undeniably one of the most important, complex and controversial phenomena currently engrossing Europeans.

A March 2006 conference of the European Association for Vocational and Social Education (EBG) and the Turkish Union in Berlin-Brandenburg (TBB) focused on intercultural dialogue. The intention was not to fuel disputes, but to gather ideas for concrete, innovative and transferable Leonardo da Vinci projects and to discuss the outcomes of projects in the fields of initial and continuing training and careers guidance.

A Dutch project called Integration-Citizenship is attempting to improve the integration of immigrants and refugees by promoting civic involvement. Delegates to the Berlin conference also learned about three major educational projects in Finland: 'Softimmigrants'

attempts to develop, in the workplace, the sociocultural skills of immigrants and their employers. 'Aito' focuses on improving immigrants' language abilities. 'Rainbow', the third Finnish project, has been cited as an exemplary model by various bodies. Its goal is to heighten the cultural sensitivity of careers advisors. Furthermore, two German initiatives were presented. One was a project to 'overcome intercultural and linguistic barriers through continuous, accessible vocational orientation and guidance'. It culminated last year in the publication of a multilingual handbook for professional careers advisors.

The projects and products were showcased in two simultaneous workshops. One concentrated on initial and continuing training and the other on vocational counselling, occupational guidance and advice on setting up a business. All projects were illustrated in an exhibition.

Speakers included Berthold Kuhn, President of the European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB), Susanne Ahlers, State Secretary with the Berlin Senate of Economics, Labour and Women's Issues, Andreas Germershausen from the staff of the Ber-

lin Senate Commissioner for Integration and Migration, Paola Geleng from the European Commission's Education and Culture Directorate-General, and Ahmet Ersöz of the *Türkisch-Deutsche Unternehmervereinigung* (Union of Turkish-German Entrepreneurs).

The sometimes animated discussions in an especially good atmosphere showed that there is still a considerable need to exchange project outcomes and make them useable for future projects. A preliminary assessment of the evaluation sheets showed that many participants were able to find concrete points of departure for the further development of projects. The mixture of completed and ongoing projects was also considered helpful, and this became evident not only during the 'networking buffet' with Turkish specialties which closed the conference.

Contact for further information on the project: Martin Dilger, EBG, Tel. (49-30) 88 55 14 64, e-mail: m.dilger@ebg.de, Project website: <http://dialog.ebg.de>
The valorisation project is sponsored by European Commission Leonardo da Vinci funds.

Source: Martin Dilger/Cedefop/cf

SWEDEN

Embedding *Idea Schools* more securely in their environment

During spring 2006 around 20 *Idea Schools* for multicultural education in different parts of Sweden will set up networks of up to 100-200 schools to speed up development efforts in vocational education and training.

These pilot schools have been doing outstanding innovative work in integrating immigrant children. The new networks are part of a wider effort by the Swedish government, in cooperation with the trade unions and employers in the private and public sector, to further improve quality in this field. The goal is to get more pupils to apply for vocational education and training

and to lower the dropout level. This will be done by improving collaboration between schools and the world of work and by strengthening regional cooperation between municipalities. The point is to concentrate resources into fewer but better training programmes for every region.

This work, which is being coordinated by the government's Commission for Vocational Education and Training, began in late 2004. The Commission analyses and identifies the factors that promote or restrain positive developments and advises the government ac-

cordingly. The results of the commission's work along with notable examples will be disseminated to the schools at the beginning of next year. This is the first time that the Swedish government carries out such a large-scale development programme in the area of vocational education and training.

More information: sven-erik.wallin@educult.ministry.se

Source: Skolverket

AUSTRIA

Integrative training shows signs of success

Integrative vocational training, introduced in Austria in 2003 for disadvantaged youths who are difficult to place on the labour market and in the education system, shows noticeable signs of success. This initiative aims to integrate this target group into the system of apprenticeship contracts.

According to a survey conducted by SME Research Austria, 89 % of the inter-firm training establishments financially supported by the Austrian Labour Market Administration (AMS) and 77 % of all training enterprises are very satisfied with these training measures for disadvantaged youth. Similar rates of satisfaction have been recorded by part-time vocational schools and parents.

The success of the initiative is evidenced by its increasing use by the target group itself. At the end of 2004, 1 114 young persons benefited from integrative vocational training, six months later this figure had

risen to 1 575. 60 % of these youths undergo a longer period of apprenticeship training (at least one year more) while 40 % obtain a partial qualification. Company, parents, young people and experts all get together to set up an individual learning objective. Achieving this goal is considered to be the completion of a partial apprenticeship.

Almost half of the apprentices are trained in enterprises on the free market, above all in small industrial firms and crafts enterprises (74 % of these also train regular apprentices). 51 % train in an independent establishment supported by the AMS. They all receive practice-oriented training, which prepares them thoroughly for the requirements of economic life and gives them access to the labour market. The course of training is accompanied by a support service provided by the labour market service, the Federal Social Welfare Office or the regional and local authorities. This

service supports training providers and young people alike in social, pedagogical and psychological matters, or when the training objective or content is to be set or changed. This is always done in cooperation with all parties involved (parents, training enterprises, part-time vocational schools).

Apart from the successful introduction of this training model in the educational set-up and the high degree of acceptance by the employers, this initiative is also a good example of cooperation between enterprises, employers and education and labour market policy-makers.

Further information: Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour (presseabteilung@bmwa.gv.at)

Source: Helmut Hafner

Vocational guidance



ESTONIA

Youths contemplate their future careers

For the three past years Euroguidance Estonia has been organising essay contests on the topic of Future and Career. Pupils of upper secondary schools and VET institutions across Estonia as well as recent school graduates (within the past 12 months) were invited to participate. The aim of the organisers was to focus the attention of young people on the importance of making well-informed career choices and planning for the future.

What do young people think?

The submitted essays reveal that young people in Estonia believe that their careers depend above all

on themselves. Several essays questioned the widespread social belief that career success should be measured mainly by income and social status. It was encouraging to see that young people are eager to do something that is important and relevant not only to themselves but also for the sake of their people and country.

Results

Altogether 60 pieces of writing were submitted, mostly from upper secondary pupils. The general level of essays was good, writers had thought the topic through and set their goals for the future. Participants

included a number of Russian-speaking students whose work exhibited correct usage of the Estonian language and richness of content. First prize was awarded to a 17-year-old pupil from Tartu - the first female winner.

Source and further information: Katrin Malksoo, coordinator, National Resource Centre for Guidance, Foundation for Lifelong Learning Development Innove. Email: katrin.malksoo@innove.ee, tel. (372) 6998 068.

Innovations in guidance and counselling

Latvia has been spearheading innovative activities designed to modernise its guidance and counselling system. Riga was the first capital of the new EU Member States to organise a peer review seminar within the framework of the European Commission's Employment Programme. This resulted in recommendations of good practice and proposals for the further development of guidance and counselling in Latvia. A working group for the development of the guidance and counselling system was established in August 2005 by the Ministry of Welfare after high-level consultation. The working group brings together representatives from 3 ministries (the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Economics, Ministry of Regional Development), the Association of Local Governments, social partner organisations and practitioners' representatives. This working group recently presented proposals for a new conception of the guidance and counselling system in Latvia.

The Ministry of Education and Science launched an ESF-funded national project, 'Fostering the implementation of vocational guidance provision and careers education in the educational sector', in order to improve accessibility and quality of vocational guidance provisions and careers education in the perspective of lifelong learning. The project is implemented by the State-run Vocational Education Development Agency.

Focal points of the project include: the professional upgrading of guidance practitioners. (development of training modules for trainers of guidance practitioners who, in turn, work with different groups, training of trainers/multipliers, subsequent training of 3700 guidance practitioners/teachers); the development, testing and introduction of specific training materials (students' resource books and facilitators'/teachers' kits); the development of information (national data base on learning opportunities) and

self-assessment tests for e-guidance; the development of a national qualifications framework and a study programme/ curriculum for the training of guidance counsellors.

If successfully implemented, the project is expected to encourage people to choose the right education for them and ably develop their personal careers; it is also expected to raise the employability of graduates and their motivation for lifelong learning. The project will support the involvement of qualified professionals in the counselling and guidance sector.

Five working groups comprising 68 experts have already started work under the project: they have analysed the experience of other countries and started developing course and methodological material for guidance practitioners/ teachers. Catalogues of education facilities are being prepared. Occupational standards for guidance specialists/counsellors have been finalised and approved by the au-

thorities and a short-cycle training programme for guidance practitioners/teachers has been developed and licensed by the Ministry of Education and Science. A study programme for guidance counsellors' education and training is under development.

Further plans concern setting up a national database on education opportunities, which should be a widely accessible electronic information tool for different target groups - youngsters, adults, and people with special needs. It is foreseen to connect this database with the European Commission's portal Ploteus II by the end of 2007, thus supporting unified information exchange in Europe.

Further information: www.piaa.gov.lv/Euroguidance/kipnis

Source:
Aleksandra Joma, Head of Guidance Information Division, Vocational Education Development Agency, NRCVG (aleksandra.joma@piaa.gov.lv),
Brigita Mikelsons, Head of Project Implementation Unit, Vocational Education Development Agency, NRCVG (brigita.mikelsons@piaa.gov.lv)

In brief

Isfol 2005 report: is the Italian training system moving towards the Lisbon objectives?

Statistics compiled by Isfol over the past two years show that participation in the education and training system is approaching the European average: the proportion of young people in the 20-24 age group who have been in upper secondary education has reached 70 %. There are still substantial goals to be attained, however: 30 % of this age group had no more than their middle-school leaving certificate in 2004, and about 23 % of young people aged 18-24 had only low-level educational qualifications and had not gone on to another education or training channel. The number of dropouts is gradually falling, but it is still about 4.5 % for youngsters aged between 14 and 17. Today the figures on young people in education and training are more encouraging: almost all pupils now take the middle-school leaving certificate; nine out of ten go on to upper secondary school education, of whom over 75 % pass their school-leaving certificate at that level; and the percentage of this group that goes on to university is 76 %.

There has been a clear increase in the proportion of youngsters in the vocational education and training system: in 2003-04 more than 200 000 enrolled in the 10 000 or more first- and second-level courses.

The vocational training provided by the Regions and Provinces has been taken up by close to 800 000 young people; approximately 60 000 courses are offered, particularly in Northern Italy.

Young people have taken part in different types of training. After the initial trials of 'IFTS' courses (higher technical education and training), with 10 000 students enrolled in the first year, the preliminary reports revealed their success in terms of their employability: one year after the end of courses, almost 60 % of the youngsters are in jobs.

Over 300 000 employed adults have attended regional training courses, as well as over 100 000 unemployed people.

The latest Isfol survey has shown that a high proportion of course providers are private training firms (55 % nationally and 70 % in Southern Italy), whereas only 10 % are training bodies set up by the regional and other local authorities.

It was expected that, as a result of the new joint employer-union funds, the greatest progress would be in continuing training. But early findings from the 2005 national sample survey on adult training show a 4 % reduction in the numbers of people trained, both private-sector employees and self-employed. The salient figures on those taking part in continuing training are: 24.4 % of workers employed by private undertakings, 25.4 % of self-employed workers and 53.2 % of public-sector employees.

A significant finding on the subject of equal opportunities is that the gap between adult men and women employed by continuing training companies has narrowed considerably.

Continuing training is benefiting from the joint funds being promoted and administered by the social partners. Following the calls for tender in 2004 these funds, together with co-funding by employers, will contribute 124 million euro towards the implementation of over 800 training plans for more than 800 000 concerns and 240 000 workers. The bulk of the resources will go to the major sector and local plans: one of the funds (Fondimpresa) has financed plans with an average value of 1 million euro, involving a large number of companies.

In addition to the large-scale sector and local plans and the in-company plans, these funds offer an opportunity to finance individual training plans. There was little recourse to this instrument in the first few projects to be set up as a result of the calls for tender in 2004, but from 2005 on, with the rise in overall resources - perhaps to over 500 million euro - the funds allocated to SME managers will favour individual plans.

Despite the successful launch of the new funds, total investment by smaller firms in continuing training in 2004 in fact fell from its 2003 level (from 24.7 % to 20 %) throughout the country.

Large companies, on the other hand, have made better use of the opportunities provided by public funding, not only for mandatory further training for their employees but also in order to foster development, competitiveness and management skills. The figures show that in

large companies a 10 % increase in the number of training hours is reflected in a rise in productivity equivalent to 7 900 euro per worker.

Source: Alessandra Pedone / ISFOL ReferNet Italy

Info: www.isfol.it

Launching Europass

The Minister of Labour and Social Security Mr Christos Taliadoros, officially launched Europass in Cyprus on 13 December 2005.

While the European Commission launched the Europass initiative in February 2005, the Cyprus launch was one of a series of similar events that have been taking place right across Europe over the past year, bringing together the

key organisations responsible for implementing the Europass initiative in each respective country. The Cyprus Productivity Centre is the designated National Europass Centre.

Further information:
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Source: Human Resource Development Authority

On the road to achieving Lisbon goals

The preparation of the National Lisbon Programme of Cyprus, aiming to advance the targets set out in the Lisbon strategy, provided a much-needed platform for dialogue with all stakeholders on the broad educational reform agenda. Social partners, political parties and the private sector were informed and consulted extensively. After consultations were completed the final version was approved by the Council of Ministers.

The proposed national Lisbon Strategy aims at creating a dynamic economy delivering high growth and living standards for the citizens of Cyprus. Sound macroeconomic policies, structural reforms in labour, product and capital markets are imperative for a more dynamic and well-functioning European

Monetary Union (EMU). The enhancement of productivity and competitiveness will help raise long-term growth but also make the transition to the Euro zone easier.

In terms of the Lisbon objectives, the key challenges are, among others, to improve human capital development by linking the educational system more closely to labour market needs, developing a comprehensive national framework for lifelong learning, and improving social cohesion.

More information from:
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Source: Human Resource Development Authority



Bringing the banking sector's training issues to the fore

The Community Study Visits Programme held a training seminar on the banking and finance sector in Frankfurt on 24 October 2004. The purpose of the seminar was to exchange knowledge and information among Cedefop Study Visits team, National Liaison Officers (NLO), Technical Support Agencies (TSA) and experts in the field, and to take stock of developments in the sector and how they affect training, in order to most effectively prepare and implement the upcoming study visits on this topic.

The seminar was organised jointly by the Cedefop Study Visits team and the InWEnt (German TSA). The reason for choosing Frankfurt for the seminar was the opportunity to visit the European Central Bank and get a better overview of developments in the banking sector in Europe.

The seminar started with a presentation of Dr. J. van Uum (Netherlands) on trends in banking and implications for training. Mr S. Boyle (UK), the President of UNI Europe Finance, elaborated on the issue of lifelong learning and its links to social dialogue. Speaking from the perspective of the employees, Mr S. Petersen (Denmark) presented the Danish experience in implementing the Financial Service Act in collective bargaining and on the provision of training to bank employees.

Several case studies concerning training in the banking and finance sector were discussed. Ms M. Szymanska-Koszczyk (Poland), Vice President of the European Banking Training Network, spoke about the European Foundation Certificate in banking as a tool for recognition of basic qualifications among the member states and for promoting mobility of bank employees. Ms E. Stylianopoulou, head of planning section, and Mr G. Avdeliodis, elearning trainer, from Alpha Bank (Greece) showed how training policies tied into bank strategy and how various kinds of learning were provided to the employees.

The afternoon session was devoted to the issues of the practical organisation of sectoral study visits. Former participants of the study visits, Mr M. Luck (UK, visit to Cyprus, 2005), Ms K. Stefanova (Bulgaria, visit to Athens, 2004), and Mr T. Pineau (France, visit to Athens, 2004) were invited to bring the participants' perspective regarding the expectations and preparation for a visit, the actual run of the visit and reflections after its completion.

The discussions and presentations revealed the main issues in banking that would be of interest to participants in study visits devoted to the sector. First of all, the need to focus on a purely sectoral approach avoid-

ing more general presentations of the training system of each country was underlined. The changing nature of the banking sector was also stressed, with participants showing that traditional boundaries no longer apply; boundaries between banking and insurance, for instance, are being dismantled. Other points related to ways of ensuring that HR investments work to improve the banking sector and the relevance of minimum standards and professional qualifications.

During discussions, participants referred to the sectoral study visits already completed on this topic. The continued practice of lifetime employment in Greek and Cypriot banks raised the question of how to motivate employees to engage in training: is training, one asked, a way of developing skills, or is it simply a 'bonus' for employees? The issue of the scope of training was also raised. There was debate between those who believed that training should be to the benefit of the entire sector, and those who felt that each bank should primarily guard its commercial secrets.

The seminar was completed by the visit to the European Central Bank where the participants were provided with a general overview on the role and functions of the ECB.

Source: Cedefop/Irina Jemeljanova

GREECE

Elearning at Alpha Bank

Alpha Bank is the largest privately-owned bank in Greece, with about 7 000 employees in 360 branches across Greece and in most countries of SE Europe, Cyprus, and the United Kingdom. It was a Grand National Sponsor of the Olympic Games of 2004. It is involved not only in financial services but also in information technology, insurance, training, real estate services and hotels.

Mr Avdeliodis of the bank's training division takes lifelong learning seriously. He describes the bank's activities in this sector for Cedefop Info:

'Keeping employees' skills sharpened ensures they are better able to respond to their extremely competitive working environment, and thus to continually improve the services offered by the Bank. But traditional classroom-based training no longer suffices. Bringing our employees to the Training Centre in Athens is costly and time consuming. With elearning we could save time and space, update knowledge rapidly, cut operational costs and ensure greater equality of access: age, gender and family responsibilities, which often have a bearing on whether employees can follow a course of training, need not be impediments.

In 2001 Alpha Bank introduced an elearning scheme. The pilot phase of implementation involved 12 branches and 5 central divisions of the bank. About 50 users followed the elearning courses in specially designated areas in their workplace. Our very first courses included off-the-shelf courses on Information

Technology & Soft Skills and a tailor-made course on Europe and the Euro. During pilot implementation we tracked the trainees' progress through the platform (courses selected, time spent, scores etc). Success was complete: elearning was fully adopted by the 50 users without any major problems. This phase also allowed us to improve course content and platform functionality, the network infrastructure, and how all these worked together.

Nowadays, the platform is hosted by the IT division of the bank. Users can access it from their workplaces, through our fast Intranet, or from their homes via the Internet. For practical reasons, elearning takes place outside of working hours, during employees' "free time" unlike classroom-based training which largely takes place on company time. Most of our courses are now tailor-made. Each division of the Bank identifies its training needs and helps the Training Division design the course. But employees who have completed a course can also sug-

gest subjects for future courses on the evaluation sheet provided.

Today, with full implementation of the original project, elearning has made significant progress in Alpha Bank. The number of courses has increased from 6 to 45, covering the entire range of financial services and products offered to our customers. But a more important measure of success is employee interest. In this too, elearning is a success: applications for attending courses have increased drastically within the last two years (fig.1), and courses completed per year have risen by 36 % (fig. 2).

Fig. 1. Applications per year

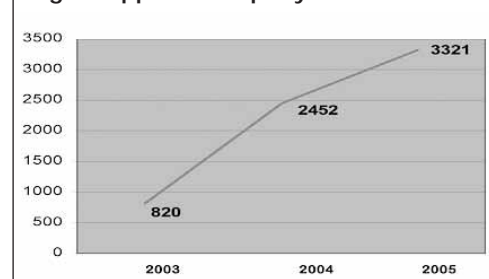
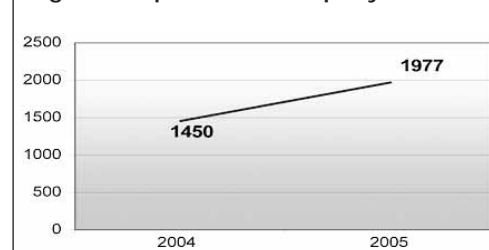


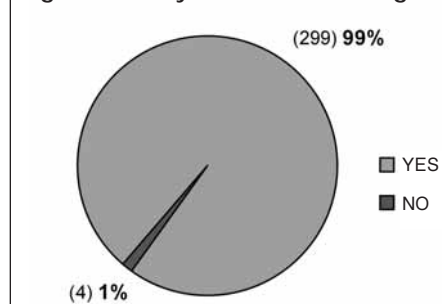
Fig. 2. Completed courses per year



Feedback from our users (via the evaluation sheet) shows that their impressions are generally 'very good' to 'excellent'. The courses are their own best advertisement: 99 % of employees who

have completed at least one elearning course state that they are very likely to apply for another one (fig.3)

Fig. 3. Would you re-use elearning?



But Alpha has not abandoned classroom training; rather, it tries to achieve a good blend of both forms. We have found, for instance, that soft skills are best taught in the classroom. For courses offered at our Training Centre, relevant elearning courses are often prerequisites. This allows greater homogeneity in the classroom and a better use of time (i.e. less time spent in the classroom); it also allows trainers to be more attuned to the needs of participants. This system also allows employees to fill in gaps and ask questions about the course they have completed online.

We feel that this blend is close to ideal, and that elearning at Alpha Bank is only set to grow further, helping us to become a true knowledge organisation.'

Source: G. Avdeliodis, Alpha Bank Training Division, education@alpha.gr



Go, see, understand ...banking in Europe

Thierry Pineau, who took part in the study visit on vocational training in banking in Germany (Frankfurt, 5-8 December 2005), has sent us an account of his experience and his thoughts on the subject.

From free state education to private fee-paying training - outside working hours!

In France, education is provided in non-sectarian, state, non-fee-paying schools; even pre-school maternelle education, provided by each local authority, is free of charge. In Germany, the system is less egalitarian, as fees are charged for children aged from 3 to 6. The cost is set by each Land and is about 100 Euro a month per child, a very high charge for families in modest circumstances with several small children, especially immigrant families who are most in need of integration and social, civic and linguistic inclusion.

The long-awaited, innovative French reform of vocational training

This reform goes beyond merely placing an obligation on employers to fund training, given that certain employers, especially small businesses, prefer to pay up but not to train their work force, in order to avoid the problems of absenteeism and loss of production. The reform gives employees a new right to training. The main innovations it has introduced are:

‘Professionalisation’ - this is close to the German concept of dual theoretical and practical training, with the option of designating a tutor - consisting of:

- either a contrat de professionnalisation on recruitment (very similar to an apprenticeship contract) for the under-26s or jobseekers, with theoretical learning taking up 15% to 25% of the period of this work training, under a fixed-term contract of employment (6 to 12 months) or an open-ended contract. The relaunching of dual training would be desirable. Apprenticeship does not yet have a good image: the word still has a pejorative connotation and is associated with low-level qualifications. By enhancing its image and describing a contract of this type as ‘professionalisation’, dual training could at last be developed in France.
- or a period of ‘professionalisation’ for those already working in an enterprise, so that training measures can be deployed in order to retain certain employees with low levels of qualification within the enterprise. If the employee agrees, the training may take place outside working hours.

A new classification of training measures:

- type 1 schemes: workplace adaptation. This is a training obligation placed on the employer. Training must take place during working hours, without loss of pay for the worker;
- type 2 schemes: development or retention in employment. This training is provided in working hours; if, however, it extends beyond normal working hours it is paid as overtime, being limited to 50 hours a year under an in-company collective agreement or by agreement with the employee;
- type 3 scheme: skills development. This training takes place during working hours, or outside those hours if this is agreed in writing between the employee and employer, backed by an undertaking as to access to the corresponding posts and a higher grade.

If type 2 or 3 training is held outside working hours, the time spent training outside work is restricted to 80 hours a year and entitles the employee to a taxable training allowance corresponding to 50% of net earnings pro rata temporis.

The merit of this new classification is that it defines the rights and duties of the employer and employee more clearly, and means that the employee:

- knows when the training is held (within or outside working hours);

- knows if he is entitled to extra pay on top of his wages for type 2 or 3 training, for example, conducted out of working hours;
- with a type 3 scheme (skills development), can obtain recognition of training that leads to a diploma, as part of his career development and advancement.

Individual right to training (*droit individuel à la formation* - DIF)

All employees are entitled to an ‘individual right to training’; the new personal entitlement is to 20 hours’ training per year for six years. When proposed by the employee, the employer may give its agreement. If a course takes place after working hours, a training allowance is to be paid to the employee, corresponding to 50% of his net earnings, which is taxable but not liable to social security contributions.

Training courses outside working hours are to a growing extent being developed more under the training plan, either during the period of professionalisation or as an individual right to training, but they are permissible only if the written consent of the employee is obtained.

Training leading to European banking diplomas - a system to be devised

In France, the diplomas in question are:

- the BP - *Brevet de Banque*, or banking diploma, recognised as being at baccalaureate level;
- the BTS - *Brevet de technicien supérieur*, or advanced technician’s certificate, at the level of baccalaureate + 2 years;
- the *licence Banque Assurance*, of degree in banking and insurance, at the first degree level;
- the ITB diploma (diploma delivered by the Technical Banking Institute) at the level of baccalaureate + 4 years.

An important factor in France is that vocational diplomas, recognised by the industry or sector in question, are also approved at national level by the Education Ministry. From now on, in order to be recognised all diplomas, certificates or titles delivered by schools, training centres, universities or public- or private-sector enterprises must be listed in a single national record called the national register of occupational certifications (RNCP - *Registre national des certifications professionnelles*), so that they can be validated.

In Germany, apprenticeship is widespread and is held in higher regard than in France: in 2004, for instance, there were 1 500 000 apprentices, compared with 1 900 000 students. Another difference is that vocational diplomas awarded by the chamber of commerce are not recognised by the State. It is rare for vocational diplomas to be accredited, except perhaps in the case of the *Sparkasse-Akademie*, whose internal diplomas are about to obtain accreditation with a view to wider recognition. This course of action is bound to promote employability and therefore job mobility, so it is surprising to see a growing number of young people embark on mixed curricula, such as apprentices studying for the *Bankkaufmann* - the banking diploma awarded by the Chamber of Commerce - while also enrolling in university to study for an Abitur. It should be pointed out that in Germany apprenticeship is open both to Abitur holders (as it is to holders of a baccalaureate in France) and to non-holders. Apart from the *Bankkaufmann* course, three other Chamber of Commerce courses are offered: in specialist banking, the *Bankfachwirt* (costing 2 500 EUR over approximately two years); in banking management, the *Bankbetriebswirt* (2 500 EUR over about a year); and the further one-year course in banking management leading to the *Bankbetrieb* diploma (5 000 EUR). The cost of these courses to employees seems to be high, and the rules on their funding, which usually have to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, need to be more clearly defined by the employee and employer under a collective agreement.

The first thing that should be achieved is a common sense rule. It would be a good thing for all banking

diplomas to be recognised and listed in a single official public register, as in France, leading to employability and job mobility outside the banking sector as well; in other words, there should be twofold recognition, by employers and by the State. In addition, these diplomas should be reviewed, pending the European harmonisation of LMD (licence, master, doctorat - first degree, master’s, doctorate) degrees and diplomas. Lastly, it would be a good thing to introduce many new diplomas geared to different occupations, offering a better response to the needs of the growing number of occupational groups in the commercial system. These could include diplomas for special client advisers, financial advisers and advisers to specific groups of clients: professional, business, agricultural and associations, a degree in social economics, and at a higher level a master’s degree for international client advisers, asset management or private or corporate banking advisers. Curriculum content would be defined, validated and labelled at national, binational and then European level. The courses would have a common content: tax, languages, economics, law, banking products, etc., as well as common teaching methods. Anything would be possible with a bi-national diploma with a similar programme of studies, recognised first in two and then in three countries before becoming a European diploma under the label of the European Banking Federation, the European Association of Co-operative Banks or the European Savings Bank Group. European banking diplomas based on similar studies for each main family of occupations could be established and recognised by all, throughout Europe, with due regard for the European harmonisation of MLD degrees and diplomas. This would open the way for greater mobility of employees within European banks and guarantee their status and grading.

Another initiative could be adopted by the European Bank Training Network (EBTN), which has established the European Foundation Certificate in Banking. This first instance of European certification has been taken up in most European countries, where no such certificate of foundation studies as yet exists. We should give more resources to EBTN to establish other European banking diplomas that reflect the LMD levels for the main banking careers.

To be defined: plans, ambitions, priorities

The banks, the European Trade Union Confederation, the Commission and other European authorities could come together to build more for Europe.

- a one-year period of top-up education could be provided for youngsters who have left school very early, at the age of 16, without qualifications, directed towards a diploma that is recognised in all sectors of activity. This new right of integration with an aim to combat exclusion, currently under discussion in France, could be extended to other countries and to the rest of Europe. A learning resource bank could be set up, offering within each country and at European level a wide choice of training courses, delivered in the format of elearning or blended learning, on all the banking occupations in different languages in Europe;
- a national law or a national collective agreement on banking, finance and insurance could unify these comparable sectors, pending a European collective agreement, by establishing: 1) a mandatory social audit listing the Human Resource and Training statistics; 2) a reference framework on jobs/skills, based on the same key occupations, to an increasing degree indicating the level of language skills in a common European reference grid such as that of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE); 3) classification grids for diplomas/classification/earnings; and 4) common binational and then European diplomas.