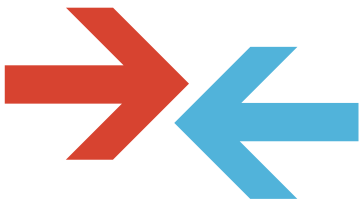




# Learning *while* Working

Success stories on  
workplace learning in Europe







# Learning while working

Success stories on workplace  
learning in Europe

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# Foreword

In the present economic downturn, we are facing unparalleled challenges. These require Member States not only to alleviate the social costs of the crisis but to plan for the subsequent recovery and beyond. Supporting people to acquire the skills that lay the foundations for innovation and match future employment needs is one of the preconditions for surmounting the crisis.

In this context, European citizens need to be supported to manage working life transitions more effectively and have access to opportunities to develop their skills. For lifelong learning to become a reality for all, irrespective of age and qualification levels, ordinary workplaces must become primary places of learning. Achieving a culture in which employers and workers place a high value on skills and continued learning is a shared responsibility. Governments and the social partners must ensure that people have the necessary skills for the job opportunities that will become available once the economic crisis is over.

Adult learning in the workplace brings a fundamental contribution to lifelong learning strategies, flexicurity and employment policies; it also supports policy measures for increasing enterprises' capacity for innovation, competitiveness and adaptation to sectoral changes. How could we provide greater alignment and integration across policies that relate to adult learning and generate enhanced synergy and effectiveness? This report calls for strong synergies between policies and programmes for innovation, research, enterprise development and training, which should go hand-in-hand. It is based on previous research undertaken by Cedefop between 2003 and 2010.

By presenting key achievements on workplace learning, successful solutions, dilemmas, and areas that demand further development, we hope to stimulate further debate, research and action to widen learning opportunities in the workplace. All key partners – social partners, governments, education and training providers, labour market stakeholders, civil society organisations and individuals themselves – need to be aware of their respective responsibility in achieving 'new skills for new jobs'.

The Bruges Communiqué has identified work-based learning as one of the areas that requires increased political attention and strategic action. This report provides a valuable input to the policy debate on how to expand learning opportunities in the workplace and create working environments

that encourage skill development. Consequently, it formulates proposals for developing effective and sustainable strategies on workplace learning. Cedefop thus wishes to open new lines for research and policy action to develop further workplace learning, a key thematic driver for the institution in 2012-14.

In addition to contributing directly to the short-term deliverables 2011-2014 set out in the Bruges Communiqué, this report also supports the implementation of the European Commission's action plan on adult learning.

Christian F. Lettmayr  
*Acting Director*



## Acknowledgements

This report reflects Cedefop's efforts to raise recognition of the contributions that both the workplace and continuing training are bringing to lifelong learning and employment strategies. The analysis draws on previous work carried out by Cedefop between 2003 and 2010 on key topics for adult learning: governance and the learning regions; social partner roles in lifelong learning policies; training in SMEs; cost-sharing mechanisms to support continuing training; VET teacher and in-company trainer emerging roles; changing competence requirements and professional development; older workers' learning needs; lifelong guidance; and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Particular mention should be made of Dr Rocío Lardinois de la Torre (Cedefop), who drafted this report and undertook the desk research and analysis on which it is based.

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# Executive summary

Cedefop's report *Learning while working: success stories on workplace learning in Europe* presents an overview of key trends in adult learning in the workplace. It takes stock of previous research carried out by Cedefop between 2003 and 2010 on key topics for adult learning: governance and the learning regions; social partner roles in lifelong learning policies; training in SMEs; cost-sharing mechanisms to support continuing training; VET teacher and in-company trainer emerging roles; changing competence requirements and professional development; older workers' learning needs; lifelong guidance; and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The report recognises the central role of the workplace in lifelong learning and employment strategies. This review of workplace learning presents and discusses four driving forces for adult learning policies and strategies at the European, national, regional and sectoral level:

- public strategies that combine a range of support measures, services and incentives with the aim of both widening access to learning opportunities in the workplace and increasing adult participation in education and training, with guidance and counselling playing a fundamental role;
- the social partners' contributions to developing and expanding learning provision in the workplace, through collective bargaining and specific actions in the working environment that motivate workers to keep on learning, to move one step up and even acquire a qualification;
- sectoral initiatives and partnerships led by enterprises, in which skill development is a means to stimulate innovation in enterprises and economic growth, and to anticipate and manage sectoral changes and restructuring, with a specific focus on SMEs;
- the professional development of in-company trainers, to expand the quality and relevance of skill development initiatives for the workforce.

In considering key success factors and challenges related to workplace learning, the report examines effective policies, strategic partnerships, structures, and instruments that aim to expand adult learning in the workplace. To increase participation in learning, it is essential to combine a range of incentives, learning approaches, and services, including the validation of non-formal and informal learning and career guidance. The commitment of a broad range of players at national, regional, local and sectoral level is needed to

increase participation, address imbalances in the social, educational and age profiles of adult learners, and expand the range and quality of adult learning provision. The report highlights examples of commendable practice, innovative responses and effective policies in adult learning that can serve as leading examples for regional and national policy-makers, the social partners, and guidance and training providers.

Adult learning in the workplace is at the crossroads of major policy developments in lifelong learning, labour market participation of older workers, and the acquisition of 'new skills' that the 'new jobs' to be created will require, once Europe emerges from the present economic downturn. The report is based on concrete examples of practice and policy, and proposes actions to improve participation in learning opportunities in the workplace. The following section summarises some of the conclusions and key messages.

Company training tends to be strongly focused on the daily functioning of employees in the workplace and not on strengthening their employability through the acquisition of competences that can be transferred across different working environments, enterprises and even sectors and occupations. Further, training efforts in companies usually give priority to those in higher status jobs, who are often those with the highest education and training achievement. Low-skilled adults participate less in training and undertake less learning-intensive working tasks. A key challenge lies in increasing the share of poorly qualified groups taking part in in-company training. Increasingly, challenging labour market environments require that the workforce, independent of the level of education, acquires a broad range of social and work-related competences. On-the-job learning and continuing training must play a central role in lifelong learning and employment strategies.

Social dialogue has an important role in workplace learning and entitlement to guidance and continuing training in key transitions points of working life can be guaranteed in collective agreements. The scope, extent and forms of collective bargaining for lifelong learning within enterprises are greatly affected by national settings of industrial relations: the centrality of lifelong learning in both social dialogue and trade union's agenda; and social partner involvement in the design of occupational standards, qualifications and training systems and programmes. While employers contribute to the process by investing in the competence development of their workers, they can also encourage a supportive working environment, where all employees are encouraged to take part in learning, and where learning opportunities take place on-the-job and are embedded in working tasks. The type of human resources policies and work organisation that companies put into action can contribute to public agendas

for workforce skill development or can do the opposite, by deactivating workers' capacity to learn. Further consideration of work organisation in enterprises needs to be taken in national and sectoral strategies for skill development.

Unions have also a role in developing a culture of lifelong learning in the workplace, by identifying, together with employers, skill shortages and training needs, at company and sectoral level, and helping workers develop transferable skills to increase employability or readiness to progress or change position within their current employment. Unions can develop guidance and learning services to help their members deal with sectoral and organisational change, anticipate redundancy or plan for retirement. Although unions have understood that skill development and career guidance could be a way to renew their constituencies and attract new members, maintaining the employability of their members through skill development is not yet part of the bargaining agenda in all European countries.

Public policies on adult learning and company training actions may serve contradictory goals, where governments aim at aiding, through continuing training, the employability and mobility of workers across enterprises, sectors and eventually occupations, while companies tend to focus on higher ranking employees and on very specific training needs related to work processes. Conflicting agendas between company training plans and government priorities might be doing a disservice to 'middle-skilled' workers who also need to plan their career progression with reference to future skill demands. Apart from upgrading occupation-specific skills, workers need to expand their key competences, including communication, self-management, team working, the capacity to be creative and take initiative, and the ability to keep on learning and manage change.

Subsidies for continuing training and exhortations to employers to train more may not be sufficient to increase the share of enterprises providing training. Lack of awareness on training needs is, at present, a fundamental barrier to skill development in enterprises, which will need to be counteracted by appropriate policy measures. Expanding financial incentives and diversifying training provision will have limited effect on enterprise training behaviour, if they are not accompanied by adequate support to assess skills needs, at enterprise and sector level, and awareness raising activities on returns on investment in training. Further, it is when enterprises deliver new products or services, adopt new technology, production methods and working processes or transform work organisation that the need for training arises. Given that the introduction of innovation in enterprises and skill development reinforce one another, innovation policies and training agendas should be brought together.

Further action needs to be developed to encourage training in SMEs, acknowledging that they were the driver of employment creation and one of the engines of economic growth before the economic crisis. Supporting SMEs to transfer and adapt innovation and technology might raise their awareness of training needs and benefits of skill updating.

Both the quality of the training provided to enterprises and the competences of trainers need to be addressed by any policy on skill development to be successful. This applies to national and sectoral initiatives to promote learning opportunities in the workplace or to prepare the economic recovery through skill development. In less formalised forms of training, such as on-the-job learning, trainers may help transform the working organisation into one in which workers can develop their competences further while working, and opportunities for learning are embedded in working tasks and work organisation. The primary role of trainers is no longer to convey vocational knowledge in all its breadth, but to support workers in learning within work practice, aid learning processes in a broad sense and stimulate learning capacities. In more formalised forms of training, a different range of challenges has to be faced, since participants in continuing training may have a clear picture of what they want to learn, for what purposes, and how learning should be arranged. In a consumerist approach to learning, they want value for money or for the time invested in training. While this puts both training providers and trainers under pressure, it can make training more effective and targeted.

The combination of different policy measures, incentives and services for both employers and workers is essential to encourage participation in learning and enterprise commitment to skill development. Only through better coordination of existing resources would it be possible to customise skill development initiatives to employer needs, while personalising services according to the needs and circumstances of individuals. Improving the relevance and responsiveness of continuing training and less formal on-the-job learning require that diverse policy measures, sources of expertise, financial incentives and learning services are combined, responsibilities shared and partnerships expanded to devise and implement practical training measures in enterprises. The ambition will also be to achieve strong synergies between economic renewal strategies, innovation policies, and employment and skill development agendas. The contributions of adult learning to key policy areas, such as flexicurity, innovation in enterprises and age management policies are widely acknowledged. There is still a need to improve cooperation and complementariness between national policies, regional, sectoral and local strategies, and actions and services that are connected to adult learning.



# Learning while working

## 1.1. Introduction: workplace learning contributions to the economic recovery

Adult learning in the workplace is a building block of lifelong learning and labour market policies in Europe. This chapter introduces the European policy context and focuses on the contributions of workplace learning to economic renewal strategies, flexicurity agendas and lifelong learning policies.

Before the economic crisis, training investment by companies had declined in some European Union Member States, although this was not a common pattern across Europe (Cedefop, 2010b). The workplace had become a major learning provider and almost half of those who received training in the European Union did so with the support of their employers (Eurostat, 2009a). Skill provision was largely responsive to employment needs and employer-led.

There is no research evidence yet across Europe on how the economic downturn is affecting employers' behaviour in relation to continuing training and how current policies that emphasise skill development, as an exit to the crisis, may be influencing the workplace. The economic downturn runs the risk of rendering obsolete pre-crisis analyses on company behaviour and trends with respect to training. A transformed production system may emerge from the economic crisis, as the decline of some economic sectors may accelerate while others emerge stronger. Already, both enterprises and individuals need support and encouragement to adapt to labour market changes and skill development will be fundamental (European Commission, 2010a). At present, it becomes imperative to equip people with the skills that lay the foundations for economic recovery and match future employment needs.

In a period of economic uncertainty, employers may be inclined to reduce and even dispense with training for employees. Simultaneously, economic pressure can have quite the opposite effect and force companies to explore new markets or to change business strategies in ways that lead to new training needs. Companies operating in declining markets may still maintain commitment to training when they consider it vital to compete. By adopting more ambitious business strategies and introducing new production and working organisation models, enterprises become more aware of skill gaps and the need for continuing training becomes palpable. The present economic turmoil

may well increase the receptiveness and responsiveness of governments, companies and individuals to increase skill levels to remain competitive.

Skill development is playing a considerable role in strategies for the European Union to emerge from the economic crisis; these inevitably follow contrasting goals in the long and the short term that may sometimes be difficult to balance. In the short term, countries need to mitigate the most immediate effects of the crisis through active labour-market policies. Simultaneously, adequate resources need to be allocated to the long-term strategies that will lay the foundations of economic growth. The funding of lifelong learning is a crucial issue in a context where both public and private budgets are being radically reduced. Public policies need to balance between minimising the impact of the crisis, protecting social cohesion and the social contract between the State and the citizen, and avoiding that present budgetary constraints that hamper the way to future economic growth and innovation. While the crisis has hit European economies in different ways and requires different national strategies, Member States have defined common employment policy goals that cannot be achieved without strong input from education and training. This is exemplified by strategies that aim to prevent unemployment becoming structural, aid job transitions, better match skills and jobs, better link skills upgrading to labour market requirements and increase labour market participation among young people, women, older workers and immigrants (Council of the European Union, 2010).

Active labour market policies and investment in lifelong learning seem to have contributed positively to the stimulus effort to overcome the current economic downturn. However, having low qualification levels, many citizens and residents of the European Union are in danger of being left behind. Consequently, as stressed in the progress report that reviewed European economic recovery plans, cooperation between public employment services, the social partners and training providers is needed to align training measures better with the changing needs of the labour market, with a particular focus on the labour market integration of recently laid-off workers and vulnerable groups (European Commission, 2009a). In the face of accelerating structural changes, adult learning, in its different forms, may contribute favourably to the employability of those who entered the labour force after having achieved low levels of formal education, but the effects of skill development actions will not be seen immediately.

Before the full impact of the recession, the proportion of jobs requiring higher levels of qualification had been rising, while the proportion requiring low or no qualifications had been steadily declining (Cedefop, 2008b; 2010a;

2010b). Knowledge and skills intensive jobs, such as managers, professionals and technicians, are expected to grow in the next decade, and in 2020 have a share of more than 42% of total employment (Cedefop, 2010a). This trend has profound implications for vulnerable groups and people facing multiple barriers to employment. However, it would be illusory to believe that every job requires a higher level or new skills. The polarisation of the labour market, with knowledge-intensive highly skilled jobs, on the one hand, and more repetitive and unskilled jobs on the other, appears increasingly to characterise our economies (Eurofound, 2008b; Cedefop, 2008a). To be in a relatively safe position, individuals are required to be adaptable and preferably highly skilled. This does not mean that there would no longer be a demand for lower qualified workers but they are more likely to be hired in less stable segments of the labour market, occupying more precarious jobs, in worse-off industries or sectors (Cedefop, 2006). Nonetheless, it should be remembered that high levels of replacement demand mean that a significant number of low skill job opportunities will still remain in the future. Making projections on skills and jobs in a period of economic crisis is a challenging exercise, since the return to employment levels prior to the economic turndown may take several years (Council of the European Union, 2010). The actual number of jobs created will depend on the global economic environment and the current economic downturn makes pessimistic scenarios most probable. Some jobs will not be restored, some skills will become obsolete, some qualifications may be superseded; many industries, sectors and occupations could be experiencing restructuring on a massive scale. It might be difficult also for those qualified at higher and medium level to find jobs that match their qualifications, being forced to accept jobs that used to require lower skill levels. Cedefop forecasts indicate an emerging gap between the supply and demand for skilled people, as well as an increase in the proportion of workers who are overqualified for their current jobs (Cedefop, 2010a). These findings indicate a misalignment between the numbers of skilled jobs and skilled people, between the skills available and those that are in demand, even more acutely in a recession period.

The crisis has engendered the risk of long-term unemployment in the coming years and has reduced the labour market prospects of especially vulnerable groups, such as young people, migrants and low-skilled workers (Council of the European Union, 2010). The economic crisis inflicts policy dilemmas, since unemployed individuals with higher qualifications may also need to expand or acquire a new range of skills to take advantage of future economic recovery. The economic and financial crisis has had a devastating effect on

the EU labour market, with more than seven million job losses expected in the period 2009-10 and unemployment set to reach over 10% by the end of 2010 (European Commission, 2010c). Despite signs of economic recovery in the EU, positive impacts on the labour market will not be felt immediately and employment prospects remain adverse (Council of the European Union, 2010). Although the nature and severity of the crisis differs greatly according to the economic structure and situation prior to the crisis, to pave the way to recovery and economic growth, Member States concede the importance of strengthening and linking tightly together all sides of the knowledge triangle: business, research and education (European Commission, 2009a). To build an internationally competitive economy, policy making will need to invest as much effort in raising employers' ambitions, through highly performing workplaces that produce high quality goods and services, as in enhancing skill supply (UK Commission for employment and skills, 2009).

In the economic downturn, only through 'skill activism' can governments avoid market failures, by making certain that training responds to complex demands for skills in strategic sectors (European Commission, 2009f, p. 13). Europe will likely depart from the crisis with profound changes at sector level and a significant need to reallocate human resources from the least competitive industries to new sources of growth. European economic recovery plans underscore that labour market policies in synergy with lifelong learning and skill development strategies will need to prepare the transition to new jobs once the crisis is over (European Commission, 2008a). It is expected that anticipating, upgrading skills and matching labour market needs will contribute to more and better employment when growth restarts.

## 1.2. Flexicurity agendas and lifelong learning: rebuilding the social contract between citizens and the state

Skill development plays a significant role in 'flexicurity' strategies. These attempt simultaneously to enhance the flexibility of labour markets and work organisation in enterprises, while improving employment and social security, notably for the most vulnerable groups in the labour market. The key idea behind the flexicurity concept is that flexibility and security are mutually supportive and should go hand-in-hand. Flexibility in the labour market, work organisation and job related tasks should then be accompanied by social security, including income, work-life balance and employment security,

through effective transition from job to job and from unemployment to work (Council of the European Union, 2007; Eurofound, 2008b).

‘Flexicurity covers transitions and adjustments within an enterprise (internal flexicurity) as well as transitions from job-to-job and between employment and self-employment (external flexicurity). High quality workplaces with capable leadership, good organisation of work, information and consultation structures and continuous upgrading of skills are part and facets of the concept of flexicurity. This includes measures that maintain and improve work capacity and offer possibilities to reconcile work and family life’ (Expert Group on Flexicurity, 2007, p. 11).

Skill development and continuing training bring a strong contribution to the flexicurity agenda by making worker skills more transferable among employers. Rather than safeguarding a job that will ultimately fade away, the flexicurity concept assumes that it is the worker who needs protection and support for a successful transition within the same or with another employer (European Commission, 2010c). Continuing training and career guidance play a key role in easing labour market transitions and achieving greater employment security. Increasing labour market flexibility without securing job transitions through training and guidance, or without protecting workers’ wellbeing, could ruin social cohesion and damage the social contract between the citizens and the state; governments and social partners need to be vigilant. As mid-career changes become recurrent, public authorities, social partners, VET providers and companies will need to explore new answers to the questions on when, how, where and by whom training provision will be delivered and financed, since flexible access to training will need to be combined with flexible work organisation (European Commission, 2010d).

Flexicurity relies on four components that should be balanced and taken into account simultaneously: flexible and secure contractual arrangements and work organisation; effective active labour market policies; reliable and responsive lifelong learning systems; and supportive and productive social dialogue (Expert Group on Flexicurity, 2007). Adult learning, in a variety of forms, and career guidance are building blocks of the flexicurity agenda. The social partners in Sweden have negotiated a wide range of job security agreements, including transition funds, to manage effectively enterprise restructuring; these have been referred to as ‘transcurity’. Displaced workers may, in addition to individual career guidance, participate in further education, while receiving compensation for their lost earnings. In this context, workers who have not been laid off are also granted training in the event of structural changes to maintain their competences (Cedefop, 2010e).

Practical pathways and strategies for flexicurity, including skill development, need to adjust to national contexts, in particular to industrial relations systems, so a one-size-fits-all approach could not be appropriate. Flexicurity, as an integrated strategy that combines different policy measures, balances the needs of workers – to update their skills, remain in employment or return to employment – and the demand of companies for a better trained workforce capable of coping with changes in the workplace.

‘A high degree of flexibility and adaptability is in the interest of both employers and employees. Workers also need flexibility to be able to combine work and private responsibilities. Companies need flexibility to anticipate and respond to changing market demands and circumstances. At the same time, security, in a dynamic perspective, is not just a matter of protecting the worker against losing his or her job. It is about building and preserving people’s ability to enter, remain and progress in employment throughout the life cycle. It is about security for companies to preserve and improve their market position, the loyalty of their workforce and their productivity and job creation potential within an increasingly competitive environment’ (Expert Group on Flexicurity, 2007, p. 13).

Ensuring both a flexible labour market and high levels of security will only be effective if workers are given the means to adapt to structural changes, to stay in the labour market and to make progress in their working life, through active labour market policies, lifelong learning and equal opportunities (Council of the European Union, 2007). As stated in the 2009 Joint employment report, whether the expected economic recovery will result in substantial creation of new jobs or ‘jobless growth’ will largely depend on successful strategies to equip individuals and companies to meet structural challenges (Council of the European Union, 2010). Being able to adapt to market demands and being innovative are prerequisites for companies to survive in competitive and rapidly evolving environments, for which they need to have the right skills available. This calls for greater synergies between innovation, enterprise development and training policies, and for bringing to the fore continuing training and learning opportunities in the workplace.

### 1.3. Skill development and workplace learning: transversal policy priorities

Major European and international policy initiatives on lifelong learning, such as the European Commission’s Communication on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001) and UNESCO declarations on adult learning

(Unesco, 1997; 2009) seek learning opportunities outside classrooms and training institutions, in ordinary places where adults interact, such as leisure clubs, cultural settings, and also the workplace. The fact that we spend a third of our daytime, and more than thirty years of our lives, in successive working environments emphasises the significance of the workplace in making lifelong learning a reality, by stimulating the motivation to learn and the participation and retention of adults in education and training. We learn through work tasks, from colleagues and work mentors, through trial and error, by solving challenges and changing job positions, as well as through the continuing training that employers may provide. Employers, trade unions and public authorities have a major responsibility for creating the conditions in the workplace for workers to continue learning and broaden their competences. As the policy debate on lifelong learning was gaining momentum, the social partners committed themselves at European level to cooperate in developing workforce competences and qualifications as major aspects of lifelong learning, within the Framework of actions for the lifelong learning development of competences and qualifications (European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) et al., 2002).

The importance of workplace learning has been highlighted by a range of other, and even earlier, EU policy papers: the Commission's 2001 *Communication Making a European are of lifelong learning a reality*; the 2002 Council Resolution on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001; Council of the European Union, 2002); and the 2010 *Communication A new impetus for European Cooperation in VET to support the EU 2020 strategy* (European Commission, 2010d). Recently, the European Commission's *Communication It is never too late to learn* recalled the contribution of adult learning to employability, mobility in the labour market and the acquisition of key competences which are indispensable for social and labour inclusion (European Commission, 2006). While the consequences of low basic skills extend over individuals and communities, adult learning for both professional and personal purposes is also crucial for the medium and high-skilled people who are also required to keep developing their competences. The 2007 Action plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn* prompted Member States to improve adult learning opportunities for all and raise skill levels of the workforce in general; particular emphasis was given to the low skilled and the older members of the population, given that participation in learning decreases after the age of 34 (Cedefop, 2004a; Eurofound, 2007a). At a time when the average working age of the population is rising across Europe, there needs to be a parallel increase in adult learning provision for older workers.

Lifelong learning strategies received a further stimulus when the Lisbon Strategy was relaunched in 2005, with the priority of achieving ‘more and better jobs’ (European Commission, 2010a; 2010b). The renewal of the Lisbon strategy in 2005 helped clarify its scope and aims, with the establishment of four priority areas (research and innovation, investing in people and modernising labour market, unlocking business potential, particularly of SMEs, as well as energy and climate change) that have a strong relevance for education and training systems. Within the New skills for new jobs initiative, which aims at reaching a better match between the skills that workers have and available jobs, skill upgrading features as a key measure to keep people in, or bring them back to, employment. This policy initiative takes into account the growing importance of transversal skills in maintaining employability: problem-solving, self-management and communication skills, plus language skills, digital competences and team working. Finally, the European Strategy 2020 for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth gives emphasis to improving the quality and relevance of education and training to empower people for career shifts, engaging in further learning and fully participating in society through skill development (European Commission, 2010a).

In these European strategic documents, which have set some guidelines for developing lifelong learning policies, individuals are increasingly requested to take responsibility for their learning to keep their skills up to date and maintain their value in the labour market: they need appropriate support. They need proper guidance and learning support to navigate in an increasingly complex labyrinth of education and training provision and to interpret the demands of insecure labour environments in which a job no longer lasts for a lifetime, as stressed in the Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies (Council of the European Union, 2008a). The uncertainties of the present economic circumstances, together with the complexity of labour market changes, generate an acute need for high quality information and guidance services for adults to manage their transitions from work to unemployment, training or another employment.

While European policy documents recall the responsibility of individuals to go on learning, the lifelong learning paradigm needs to be well understood, and a recent comparative analysis of changing patterns of work and learning in Europe draws attention to the fact that:

‘It is important that the message about lifelong learning does not convey that “we all need to be engaged in substantive learning all the time”. This message could easily be seen as unachievable – it is out of alignment with how people actually learn across the life-course. Rather than engaging in continuous learning at an even pace year after year, people are likely



to have periods of more and less intensive learning. (...) So the lifelong learning rhetoric about “learning all the time” may be insufficient, because although continuing adaptation can keep individuals employable in their current roles, it is periods of intensive learning which tend to be decisive for individuals’ career direction. Most people with successful careers display episodic learning: periods of intensive learning interspersed with “quieter” times, which nevertheless can involve learning through challenging work. (...) It is also interesting to note that where individuals have had one or more episodes of substantive learning mid-career and these episodes have been used as a platform for career change, then, they often feel reinvigorated and are willing to remain in the labour market for a longer period of time’ (European Commission, 2010f, p. 38-39).

In the context of continuing career transitions and rapid changes in the workplace, in which acquiring transversal competences may be more critical than job-specific skills linked to working procedures, should vocational training prepare for ‘working life’ and not narrowly for an occupation (Cedefop, 2010f)? We all need to maintain our knowledge and skills, upgraded in increasingly demanding working environments and changing labour markets. Similarly, we all may need to shift and even reshape our professional life from top to bottom, when new developments make our professional knowledge and skills obsolescent, we face redundancy following business restructuring, need to move to another region or country, or we simply decide to change sector in quest of a more fulfilling job. Transitions are now an ordinary pattern of our working life. Continuing learning should not be seen as the privilege of the most educated, nor is skill upgrading the sole obligation of the low-skilled, who are the most fragile in the labour market, but a necessity and a responsibility for all.

#### 1.4. Structure and concepts underlying the report

This report presents an overview of key trends related to adult learning in the workplace, using previous research carried out by Cedefop between 2003 and 2010, and with reference also to other European and international organisations. The report recognises the central role of the workplace in lifelong learning and employment strategies. This review of workplace learning, presents and discusses four driving forces for adult learning policies and strategies at the European, national, regional and sectoral level:

- (a) public strategies that combine a range of support measures, services and incentives with the aim of both widening access to learning opportunities in the workplace and increasing adult participation in education and training, in which guidance and counselling play a fundamental role;

- (b) social partner contributions to developing and expanding learning provision in the workplace, through collective bargaining and specific actions in the working environment that motivate workers to keep on learning, to move one step up and even acquire a qualification;
- (c) sectoral initiatives and partnerships led by enterprises, in which skill development is a means to stimulate innovation in enterprises and economic growth, and to anticipate and manage sectoral changes and restructuring, with a specific focus on SMEs;
- (d) the professional development of in-company trainers, to expand the quality and relevance of skill development initiatives for the workforce.

In considering key success factors and challenges related to workplace learning, the report examines effective policies, strategic partnerships, structures, modes of delivery and instruments to expand adult learning in the workplace. The analysis aims to encourage debate on the contributions of the workplace to lifelong learning and employment strategies. What kind of policies and strategies need to be put in place to support employers developing the skills of their employees? How to develop workplaces that are conducive to learning? It highlights examples of commendable practice, innovative responses and effective policies in adult learning that can serve as leading examples for policy-makers at regional and national level, the social partners, and guidance and training providers.

The following definitions underpin the analysis of adult learning in the workplace. For the purpose of this report, adult learning refers to all types of learning, whether formal, non-formal or informal, undertaken by adults after they have terminated initial education and training, however far this process may have gone, whether they have acquired or not a certificate. In this context, non-formal learning does not lead directly to certification, it is intentional, aims at achieving certain learning outcomes and is generally not provided by a formal education or training body. It can be provided, for example, by peer workers through mentoring, by trainers working in the company or by external training providers. Informal learning results from daily working activities; it is embedded in working processes and tasks; it is not structured and typically does not lead directly to certification. Both non-formal and informal learning can be validated, recognised and lead to certification, generally, by granting exemptions from parts of a training programme, which the worker could later on complete to acquire a recognised certification or qualification.

More specifically, workplace learning is used as a synonym of 'on-the-job learning' and encompasses both non-formal and informal learning embedded in the working place, in job related processes and tasks, both for introducing

new staff members to the company's work processes, and for the continuous development of experienced workers. On-the-job or workplace learning is considered an effective form of training as it allows the immediate application of acquired knowledge and skills to the workplace. Workplace learning is based on the principle of learning by doing and includes demonstrations by a more experienced employee, performance under supervision, and coaching, job rotation and participation in specific projects.

This introductory chapter on learning while working is followed by an overview of workplace learning and continuing training in Europe. To train or not to train? To be trained or not to be trained? These are the underlying core questions of the second chapter, in which the main obstacles, challenges and motivations to learning are discussed from the perspective of both employers and employees.

The third chapter calls for combining different kinds of incentives in any policy strategy or programme that intends to broaden access to learning opportunities in the workplace. Besides financial incentives, the chapter highlights the positive incidence of career guidance, validation of learning and basic skills acquisition in motivating workers to keep learning.

The fourth chapter addresses the role of collective bargaining in promoting lifelong learning and discusses a series of good practices that trade unions have been carrying out in the workplace to increase adult participation in further education and training.

The fifth chapter argues that strategies that encourage lifelong learning and skill development in the workforce should pay attention to the specific needs and challenges of SMEs and their employees. The chapter highlights key success factors in adapting learning provision to the working practices and requirements of SMEs, in particular through partnerships that integrate a broad range of stakeholders at local level and through consortia led by enterprises.

The sixth chapter discusses the contributions of adult learning, continuing training and career guidance and counselling to socially restructuring practices in enterprises. It presents key policy issues that need to be considered to minimise the tragic effects of restructuring processes on individuals and local communities, support worker transition to other employment, and pave the way for future growth and job creation in local communities.

The final chapter acknowledges the key role of trainer in promoting high quality continuing training opportunities that take into consideration the needs of both employers and employees. It discusses trends related to competence requirements, training and professional development of in-company trainers, based on examples of commendable practice.

# To train or not to train?

## 2.1. Introduction

Not all categories of worker benefit from training and learning opportunities in the same way, whether these are provided by employers or by adult learning providers. The Adult education survey (Eurostat, 2009a) indicates that the probability of participating in continuing training and other learning opportunities increases with skill and occupation levels. Similarly, the European working conditions survey (Eurofound, 2007a) points to higher participation in learning for employees with jobs entailing complex tasks, team work, and the implementation of quality standards, as well as for those who make use of a variety of working methods in their jobs. In contrast, employees who undertake repetitive working tasks are less like to participate in continuing training and have almost no opportunity to improve their skills while they carry out their working duties. Some factors influencing training strategies and practices are specific to sectors, such as technological progress and the introduction of new products, while others depend on the company's characteristics, or are linked to government policies and regulations. Certain studies have shown that companies that adopt new forms of work organisation, which encourage innovation, employee autonomy, on-the-job learning and quality management, tend to provide higher training opportunities to their staff (Tamkin, 2005; Eurofound, 2007a).

The training provided by employers brings positive benefits, including increased job satisfaction and lower absenteeism, and improves the chances of business survival, greater productivity and innovation (European Commission, 2010b). This chapter discusses some facts and figures related to participation in learning activities in the workplace and for work-related purposes, based on the findings of past surveys. Inequalities related to participation in learning are explained from the perspective of both employers and employees. Whom are enterprises training? For what purposes is training organised? What are the preferred modalities for skill development in connection to the workplace? What obstacles hamper participation in learning by certain categories of workers? The chapter draws on four different surveys: the third continuing vocational training survey (CVTS3), the Adult education survey, and the fourth European Working conditions survey, which were launched before the economic crisis, plus the Fifth European Working conditions survey.

## 2.2. To train or not to train: the company perspective

The proportion of enterprises providing some kind of training is a key indicator of the contribution of the workplace to lifelong learning. According to the Eurostat third continuing vocational training survey (CVTS3), in 2005, the countries with the highest share of enterprises providing continuing training were Denmark (85%), Austria (81%), Sweden (78%), Finland (77%), the Netherlands (75%) and France (74%). A North-South divide in terms of enterprise commitment to training is confirmed, with Greece (21%), Bulgaria (29%), Italy (32%), Poland (35%), Latvia (36%), Romania (40%) and Portugal (44%) among the lower performers (Cedefop, 2010b). Although the share of enterprises providing training was in general lower in Eastern Europe, in 2005, in some of the newer Member States, as a response to positive trends in the economy, companies had started to shape human resources strategies, slowly acknowledging training as an important business development factor, partly influenced by training models of transnational companies in the countries (Unesco, 2008). This trend was further encouraged by national policies which promoted training activities and stipulated mandatory training in specific areas, such as health and safety.

Patterns of enterprise investment in continuing training differ greatly across Europe, sectors and enterprise size. Overall, in 2005, in most northwest and south European countries, enterprises invested less in training, as a share of total labour cost and per employee, than five years before (Cedefop, 2010b, p. 92-96; p. 99-100; p. 103). In Western and Northern Europe, lower expenditure in training, together with a deterioration of training indicators, such as participation by employees and intensity of the training provided in terms of hours, calls for action at policy and sector levels. By not investing adequately in training we may miss a gate to the economic recovery. More recent research findings give a less pessimistic picture of employer investment in training. According to the first results of the 5th European working conditions survey, in 2010, training funded by employers reached its highest level in the last 15 years, with 34% of employees participating in training within the 12 months prior to the survey (Eurofound, 2010). The negative trend observed between 2000 and 2005 was reversed, with an increase in on-the-job training from 24% in 2005 to 30% in 2010.

The third survey for continuing vocational training had already provided valuable information on training policies, processes and infrastructures in enterprises. The survey covered key components of training agendas in enterprises (e.g. training plan, specific budget, assessment of skill needs), organisation (e.g. the existence of a training department or team, collective agreements covering training issues) and quality approaches (e.g. evaluation of training provided). In-company trainers were not explicitly considered in the survey among the indicators that proved how formalised or professionalised training is in enterprises, and how developed their training practices and infrastructures are. Full-time trainers and training consultants are playing a valuable role in enterprises with more than 250 staff members, which tend to have stronger training infrastructures, formalised training arrangements and quality mechanisms for the training they provide. Among larger enterprises providing training, 73% have training units or have allocated training responsibilities to a staff member, 70% have established training plans, and 69% have a training budget (Cedefop, 2010b, p. 32-40). While large enterprises are more used to establishing human resources units and training policies, small and medium-sized enterprises have limited capacity to develop the key features of a training strategy. This calls for public authorities and sectoral organisations to develop services to assist a broad range of enterprises in assessing training needs, elaborating training plans, choosing relevant training providers and evaluating the outcomes of training.

Whatever the size, enterprises provide two main reasons for not training their staff: either the skills and competences of employees match current needs (EU-27, 74% of enterprises that did not provide training) or gaps in competences are filled through recruitment policies (EU-27, for 53% of enterprises that did not provide training). Size is a factor in training behaviour, since small enterprises are more likely to assert that their staff is proficient in their job and there is no need for training; larger enterprises are less inclined to do so. Therefore, barriers to training, eventually linked to work organisation, lack of relevant training offers or limited capacity to assess training needs do not feature among the main deterrents for organising training. While costs seem to be an obstacle for a third of large enterprises (250 or more staff), staff workload and limited time available impede training provision in a third of enterprises, independently of their size (Cedefop, 2010b).

There are also other real or perceived barriers to training, such as fear of poaching from other companies, lack of information about available training and incentives, and difficulties in allowing time for training. However, the findings of CVTS3 suggest that as enterprises become aware of their

training needs, they start paying attention to external and internal factors that could constrict training provision, such as limited relevance of training offer, costs or workload impeding employee release. Then there is the fear that trained workers may leave the company, with two conflicting arguments: either training may increase worker mobility, in particular when it leads to a recognised qualification; or it may strengthen the worker's loyalty to their current employer, when training is supported by the enterprise, so reducing labour turnover (Tamkin, 2005).

CVTS3 corroborates previous research findings indicating that enterprises face difficulties in estimating their skill and training needs (Cedefop, 2010b). The lack of awareness of training needs is currently a fundamental barrier to skill development in enterprises, which will need to be counteracted by appropriate policy measures. Expanding financial incentives and diversifying training provision will have limited effect on enterprise training behaviour if not accompanied by adequate support to assess skills needs, at enterprise and sector level, and awareness raising activities on returns on investment in training.

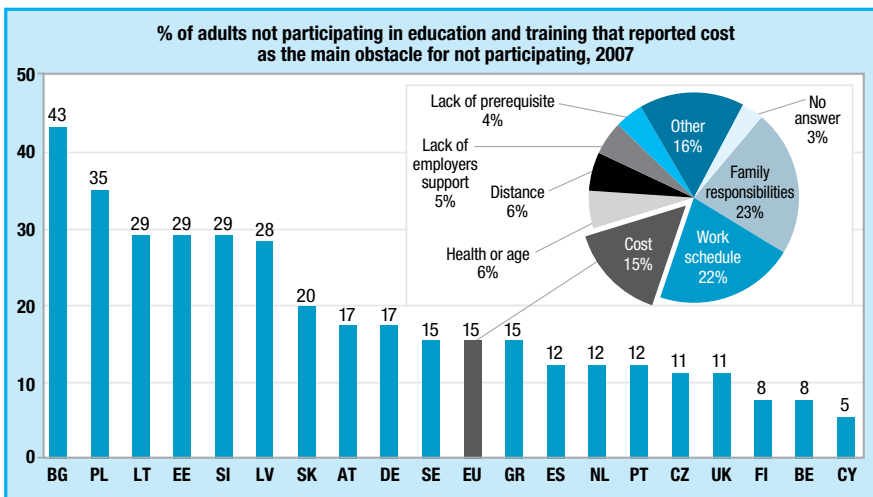
However, for enterprises to be more strongly committed to the skill development of their staff, it would not be enough to raise awareness of the benefits of training. When enterprises adopt new production processes and organisation models, and when they integrate technology and innovation, or improve the goods and services they provide, they are more likely to become aware of skill gaps related to business development priorities and be committed to training. However, the present economic downturn may predispose enterprises to be more conservative in their business development and limit risks. The decision to train is very much linked to employers formally planning for the future growth and development of their businesses. The report *Ambition 2020: world class skills and jobs for the UK* establishes a close relationship between innovation in enterprises and the professional development of staff (UK Commission for employment and skills, 2009). Since the introduction of innovation in enterprises and skill development reinforce one another, innovation policies and training agendas should be brought together.

## 2.3. To be trained or not to be trained: the employee perspective

### 2.3.1. Who participates in formal or non-formal education and training? Facts and figures

According to the last Adult education survey, which covers participation in lifelong learning, including job-related activities, nearly two thirds of the European Union population could not participate in learning opportunities, either formal or non-formal (Eurostat, 2009a). In the survey, interviewees were asked to report the main obstacle for not participating in education and training during the last 12 months. Family responsibilities were the main barrier to participation for 23% of individuals, and conflict with work schedule for 22%. The third most frequent impediment was cost (training was too expensive or difficult to afford), which was reported by an average of 15% of adults in Europe, with country differences ranging from 5% in Cyprus to 43% in Bulgaria, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Main obstacles for not participating in education and training, 2007



Source: Eurostat, Adult education survey 2007, date of extraction 1.2.2010.

Note: National figures are currently available for 18 countries.

Data for Slovenia are provisional. E.U: estimation.

Only 28% of those in low-skilled blue-collar professions participate in learning activities, as shown in Table 1. Adults with the highest level of education attainment tend to participate much more in education and training.



**Table 1. Participation in education and training by labour status and occupation, age 25-64 (%), 2007**

Country	Total	LABOUR STATUS			OCCUPATION			
		Employed	Unemployed	Inactive	High-skilled white-collar	Low-skilled white-collar	High-skilled blue-collar	Low-skilled blue-collar
European Union (27 countries)	34.9	42.1	24.1	16.6	57.6	44.5	27.4	28.4
Belgium	40.5	48.9	34.4	17.6	61.7	50.7	26.0	27.4
Bulgaria	36.4	50.2	7.1	6.5	57.9	41.5	50.4	48.4
Czech Republic	37.6	47.6	12.6	9.9	63.2	42.0	34.4	41.5
Denmark	44.5	48.5	30.1	26.5	64.5	49.9	40.6	31.6
Germany (including former GDR from 1991)	45.4	53.0	29.3	26.2	68.8	48.8	38.3	33.7
Estonia	42.1	49.2	17.2	14.6	68.5	50.6	30.0	30.1
Greece	14.5	17.8	13.2	5.4	27.5	21.1	7.4	7.7
Spain	30.9	35.9	25.0	16.6	52.9	37.6	24.4	22.1
France	35.1	42.3	28.6	12.4	56.4	39.1	27.0	29.0
Italy	22.2	27.7	16.9	11.4				
Cyprus	40.6	48.0	31.1	15.7	67.1	50.2	27.6	22.4
Latvia	32.7	40.1	16.3	10.9	64.6	34.2	19.4	20.7
Lithuania	33.9	43.4	16.7	8.0	69.2	40.6	22.9	18.8
Hungary	9.0	12.1	5.5	3.4	19.8	10.0	6.1	7.5
Malta	33.7	46.0	18.6	15.0	67.0	39.5	16.7	29.5
Netherlands	44.6	52.7	41.1	24.7	59.8	47.4	39.1	36.4
Austria	41.9	48.3	41.4	23.8	64.5	53.0	31.3	21.5
Poland	21.8	30.1	13.9	4.5	52.1	25.6	13.0	16.5
Portugal	26.4	31.5	21.0	9.9	55.2	34.7	14.5	18.1
Romania	7.4	9.8	3.3	2.3	14.0	16.6	3.0	3.9
Slovenia	40.6	47.7	27.5	21.5	65.6	47.4	31.9	25.6
Slovakia	44.0	54.0	15.7	11.0	64.3	45.2	41.6	49.5
Finland	55.0	62.0	34.7	36.3	73.6	65.0	43.2	43.7
Sweden	73.4	79.3	58.6	51.8	91.1	77.5	64.0	57.6
United Kingdom	49.3	56.6	33.5	29.8	63.6	58.7	43.2	41.3
Norway	54.6	60.3	45.8	29.9	68.8	57.9	45.5	38.7
Croatia	21.2	32.3	5.0	6.0	62.1	34.0	17.0	17.1
Turkey	14.1	22	13.4	6.3	36	28.5	11.5	12.9

Source: Eurostat, Adult Education Survey 2007, date of extraction 13.12.2010.

Participation in learning activities decreases with age, particularly in the countries where overall participation in adult learning is lower, and there is not a strong tradition of lifelong learning. Consequently, there is commonly low participation in learning in the age group 55-64, with the exception of countries in which the adult population as a whole tends to have a stronger commitment to lifelong learning, as shown in Table 2. Sweden differs greatly from the other countries with a participation rate for this age group of 60.6%, followed by Norway (41.2%), Finland (37.8%), United Kingdom (37.0%) and Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark with more than 28%.

**Table 2. Participation in formal or non-formal education and training by country, sex and age, 2007**

	GENDER			AGE		
	Total	Males	Females	25-34 years	35-54 years	55-64 years
European Union (27 countries)	34.9	35.4	34.4	44.2	36.3	20.9
Belgium	40.5	41.2	39.8	56.3	42.3	23.5
Bulgaria	36.4	37.9	35.0	44.7	39.7	20.3
Czech Republic	37.6	41.6	33.6	44.1	43.0	21.7
Denmark	44.5	43.9	45.1	57.2	47.4	28.6
Germany (including former GDR from 1991)	45.4	48.3	42.4	53.3	48.7	28.2
Estonia	42.1	36.9	46.7	52.5	42.6	27.5
Greece	14.5	14.3	14.6	22.7	14.0	5.1
Spain	30.9	30.8	31.0	39.7	30.8	17.0
France	35.1	36.4	33.8	48.2	35.9	16.2
Italy	22.2	22.2	22.2	30.5	23.0	11.8
Cyprus	40.6	43.0	38.2	53.2	41.1	20.1
Latvia	32.7	25.9	39.0	39.0	34.3	21.8
Lithuania	33.9	28.7	38.7	42.7	35.1	19.0
Hungary	9.0	8.3	9.6	15.8	9.0	2.5
Malta	33.7	34.6	32.8	50.4	34.6	16.2
Netherlands	44.6	47.5	41.6	59.7	44.9	28.7
Austria	41.9	44.0	39.9	47.1	45.7	25.4
Poland	21.8	21.3	22.4	34.1	20.7	6.8
Portugal	26.4	27.0	25.9	40.3	25.5	10.9
Romania	7.4	6.9	7.9	14.0	6.8	2.5
Slovenia	40.6	38.1	43.1	52.1	42.6	22.2
Slovakia	44.0	45.3	42.8	51.0	48.3	23.8
Finland	55.0	48.9	61.3	66.0	58.6	37.8
Sweden	73.4	70.8	76.1	81.0	76.4	60.6
United Kingdom	49.3	47.2	51.3	58.8	50.3	37.0
Norway	54.6	53.3	55.9	65.0	55.5	41.2
Croatia	21.2	21.4	21.1	33.5	20.2	9.0
Turkey	14.1	17.7	10.5	21.1	12.0	4.4

Source: Eurostat, Adult education survey 2007, date of extraction 13.12.2010.

There are striking disparities in training provision not only across economic sectors but also across different occupational or age groups and types of contract (see Table 3). Employees in service branches receive training more, at 37.2%, than those working in industry (25.8%). Across sectors, the survey results confirm that highly skilled staff receive more training than lower-skilled. Older employees are inclined to receive less training paid for by employers (29.7%) than those aged less than 50 years. By type of contract, permanent staff (39.4%) benefit more from employer-paid training than employees with other contract arrangements (26.0%).

The workplace plays a fundamental role in lifelong learning, as a provider of learning opportunities, and as a stimulus for undertaking further learning. In the Adult education survey, 'to do a better job and/or improve career prospects' were the most frequently quoted reasons for participating in non-formal education and training, ranging from 87% in Denmark to 48% in Italy. For all the countries surveyed, most of the participants were undertaking job-related learning. Employers were the most important provider of non-formal learning in many countries, with a European average of about 38% of learning activities (Eurostat Adult education survey, online database).

**Table 3. Participation in training by economic branch, occupation and age groups, and type of contract (%)**

Sector	Provided and paid by employer or by self-employed	Paid by employee
Industry	25.8	6.0
Services	37.2	9.9
<b>Occupation group</b>		
High-skilled clerical	47.0	16.7
Low-skilled clerical	36.4	8.0
High-skilled manual	21.6	5.1
Low-skilled manual	21.7	3.2
<b>Age group</b>		
Under 30	33.1	8.3
30 to 49	36.0	9.4
50 or more	29.7	7.8
<b>Type of contract</b>		
Permanent	39.4	6.0
Other arrangement	26.0	7.7
Self-employed	22.1	-

Source: Data extracted from Eurofound, Fifth European Working Conditions Survey, survey mapping tool. Available from Internet: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/surveys/ewcs2010/results.htm>. Date of extraction 13.12.2010.

### 2.3.2. Is the workplace reinforcing learning participation inequalities?

As shown by the Adult education and the Fifth European working conditions surveys, training provided by employers is unevenly and unequally distributed. Low-skilled employees receive measurably less training, as do employees in small firms and in a number of sectors of the economy. Expecting high returns for investment in training, enterprises tend to concentrate on employees who are already highly qualified or those who may assume a technical or a supervisory role in the enterprise; at the same time, they neglect low-qualified, older employees and part-time or in temporary contracts workers.

The incidence of training declines with age, which partly reflects shorter expected pay-back periods on training investments for older workers as well as their lower average education attainment (OECD, 2006). The term older workers should nevertheless be used carefully since it embraces a broad variety of age groups, starting from the age of 45 to retirement, diverse education levels, as well as life and work experiences. It is, nevertheless, accurate to say that older workers face cumulative disadvantages, in particular, when they possess a low level of formal education, since they participate less in lifelong learning and they are less likely to be offered learning opportunities in the workplace (Cedefop, 2008h, p. 86). Employers would tend to invest less in training for workers beyond the age of 45, who bring shorter periods of return from investment in training, and are deemed to be less flexible and more reluctant to adapt to changes in work organisation and technological innovation (OECD, 2006; Cedefop, 2006; Cedefop, 2008i).

Employees in short-term work conditions also have unequal access to learning in the workplace, since they tend to be excluded from companies' training provision. In Austria and Germany, specific training programmes, which combine different sorts of financial incentives, target employees with short-term contracts, in the context of the present economic downturn.

In Austria, in 2009, short-time work provisions were amended to offer skills enhancement to workers under short-term contracts. The Austrian public employment service offers assistance with skill needs assessment to both employers and employees keen to take up this measure. The social partners must subsequently agree a training concept which will be submitted for the approval of the employment service together with the application for a short-time work allowance. Within well-defined quality standards, the training provided must improve overall employability, not just employee performance in the current job. An allowance covers 60% of training costs and augments the short-time work wage paid to the individual. This approach aims to encourage companies to invest in training and retain their employees during the economic crisis (Cedefop, 2010f).

In Germany, as part of a wider effort to promote skills-building for short-term work periods, the Federal Employment Agency will cover a share of further training costs and, at the request of the employer, reimburse 50% of social insurance contributions, when the company engages in measures to improve skills of those under short-term contracts (Cedefop, 2010f).

In some countries, national programmes or social partner agreements have been specifically targeted at certain groups of workers who may, for various reasons, face difficulties in accessing training opportunities, due to both their personal circumstances and human resources policies, where companies judge that they will not gain a sufficient return on their investment in training. If public policies and social partner commitment did not remediate it, they would be missing the chance for self-development, which could also benefit their employers through improved skill levels, motivation and performance at work.

In Germany, the programme *WeGebAU (Weiterbildung Geringqualifizierter und beschäftigter älterer Arbeitnehmer in Unternehmen)*, further education for low-qualified people and older employees in enterprises) was launched in 2006 by the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA) to provide training that may lead to new vocational qualifications for low-qualified and older workers. Companies participating in the programme are granted a wage subsidy from the employment agency to cover training costs, while employees receive a training voucher which can then be redeemed for approved training offers. However, a recent UNESCO report on Germany suggests that there is a lack of awareness of the programme; evaluations indicate that only one in eight of the individuals who are eligible to take part in the programme have done so. As a result of the economic crisis, the scheme has been opened up to other categories of workers, particularly those on short-time work arrangements (Federal Minister of Education and Research, 2008; Cedefop, 2010f).

The most vulnerable in the labour market, particularly older, low-skilled and migrant workers, have difficulty in accessing existing forms of workplace learning and training, due to external constraints imposed by human resources management priorities, scarcity of suitable training provision, lack of information and guidance; these are in addition to their life situation, poor self-confidence and low self-esteem, learning or language difficulties, or negative previous education experiences. Further, low-skilled workers can be less aware of the potential benefits of training, more uncertain about what they would like and need to learn, and not have the capacity to formulate training needs and negotiate with their employers the content of training. Neither are they likely to find themselves in work positions that encourage skill development.

Given that learning cultures in workplaces are rarely supportive to older workers, it becomes even more difficult for them to acquire new skills and become motivated to take up learning. In this regard, cultural perceptions can curtail learning opportunities, because people are undeniably less likely to think they are too old to learn in societies where participating in some form of learning throughout life is a longstanding tradition (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004). Human resources policies may send the wrong signals and reinforce older workers' perceptions that there is little to be gained from engaging in continuing training, given that they have reached the ceiling of their career prospects, they receive limited encouragement from employers, and training is not tailored to their specific circumstances.

## 2.4. Learning in the workplace: for what purposes?

### 2.4.1. Informal learning versus more formalised training: how to train?

Continuing vocational training surveys include more formalised forms of continuing training as well as less formal sorts of learning, such as on-the-job training and particular work organisation practices, like job rotation. The last survey (CVTS3) indicates that traditional forms of training prevail at the workplace, with courses being the preferred means of upgrading competences, while other forms of training of a more informal nature are not widespread, and have even decreased or stagnated between 1999 and 2005. How can non-formal and informal learning in enterprises be quantified and typified? The task is even more challenging when learning is anchored in work processes, is project-based or embedded in team working. When it comes to non-formal and informal learning, differences in learning traditions and terminology may hamper cross-country comparisons. Some of the concepts included in CVTS may be culturally biased, such as 'learning circles', which have a long tradition in Northern Europe but may not be found much in other European regions. It is difficult in quantitative surveys to capture non-formal and informal learning in enterprises, which is often not viewed as training and therefore difficult to monitor in terms of hours and participants. Mentoring and tutoring by more experienced colleagues is a good example, since it tends not to be considered by companies as a training activity; skilled workers who mentor other colleagues and are in charge of the induction of new recruits may not even consider themselves as trainers, as chapter seven will argue.

However, recent international policy reviews suggest that a fundamental bulk of adult learning takes place at the workplace (Keogh, 2009), through informal processes, as working tasks are carried out in everyday problem-solving contexts; this is not quantifiable. A recent analysis of changing patterns of working, learning and career development across Europe confirms that informal learning is a central component of skill development at work (European Commission, 2010f). The study lays emphasis on the breadth and diversity of learning at the workplace, through engagement with challenging tasks, involvement in activities that imply decision making, problem solving and exercise of judgement, as well as peer learning – such as team working and communities of practice – supporting the learning of others and job changes. The analysis concedes that learning acquired while working, through informal processes, need to be combined with more structured, systematic and formal learning pathways to enable employees make a significant leap in terms of knowledge, proficiency and performance in a particular field (European Commission, 2010f, p. 61-64). Alternative forms of learning, mainly non-formal, do not compete with more formal forms of training, which enterprises may organise, but rather complement them (Cedefop, 2010b, p. 65).

How far have we gone in the establishment of working environments that encourage learning? The level of learning demanded in a job and the degree of intellectual challenge are indicative of a work organisation in which workers can develop their competences on the job (Eurofound, 2008a). The Fourth European working conditions survey selected five indicators to assess the extent to which workers can broaden their competences at work; while two concern the use of quality standards in the work process (meeting precise quality standards and assessing the quality of own work), three others refer to the complexity of work and the need to acquire new knowledge for work performance (solving unforeseen problems, carrying out complex tasks and learning new things). In contrast, a working environment that hinders workers in developing their skills while working is one that imposes low cognitive demands and comprises monotonous tasks.

'Those workers who carry out complex tasks and learn new things at work are much more likely to feel that they need further training, whereas the opposite is the case for those carrying out monotonous and repetitive tasks (who are actually more likely to consider themselves over-skilled for the work they do)' (Eurofound, 2007a, p. 48).

Workers carrying out routine working tasks may assume responsibilities in the workplace through which they use a wider variety of transversal skills and take on further learning, such as acting as health and safety delegates, trade

union representatives or ‘learning ambassadors’ who stimulate colleagues to take on learning (European Commission, 2010f, p. 57).

The Fourth European working conditions survey also explores work organisation and autonomy at work, which have a major incidence in workers’ ability to learn. This is found in freedom to exercise control over work processes (e.g. the ability to choose or change the order of tasks, the method of work and the speed or rate of work), as well as the choice of working patterns. While a high proportion of workers enjoy some control of work processes, only a third of European employees have any influence over the choice of working patterns. Nordic countries and the Netherlands display the highest levels of worker autonomy in the workplace, and Southern and Eastern countries the lowest. The Fourth European working conditions survey suggest that levels of flexibility and teamwork are high in European workplaces: around 50% of employees on the EU-27 rotate tasks with colleagues and 60% do part or all of their work in teams (Eurofound, 2007a, p. 50-53). Through team working, workplaces in Europe are taking steps towards turning into working environments in which it will be possible to learn while working, but national differences show that there is still a long way to go.

How can the working culture be transformed into one which stimulates individual learning processes and derives benefits at company level? How can workplaces become conducive to learning? Informal and non-formal learning depends on ‘the design of workplaces that provide quality work, in which people learn by having to undertake challenging tasks and learning from others’ (Cedefop, 2006, p. 59). In patterns of work organisation that stimulate learning, jobs should be designed to encourage responsibility for autonomous decision making and interactive problem solving within teams. These modalities of work organisation that stimulate skill improvement, in which learning is embedded in the working tasks, may create a learning culture in the enterprise that motivates those groups of workers who are less inclined to participate in learning and are given fewer opportunities to take part in continuing training. Significant attention should be paid to deploying people in a way that recognises and uses their ideas, provides opportunities for creativity and encourages the exchange of tacit and explicit knowledge (Cedefop, 2007b; Ashton and Sung, 2002). Implementing such changes in work organisation is difficult, and sharing knowledge on working processes that encourage learning is even more limited in small companies, which need targeted support to change their working practices into ones that stimulates autonomy and learning, as chapter four explains.

While the life span of qualifications diminishes, companies may find it difficult to take workers from their jobs to receive training, so off-the-job training is



inevitably restricted to short periods. It is argued that the transfer of knowledge acquired in formal training to daily working practice can be problematic, and companies, particularly SMEs, may consider that training offers are not always relevant to their specific business needs and work organisation (Cedefop, 2009g). Much of the knowledge and skills required for new work tasks can be acquired on the job, but this does not mean that learning through working tasks is an unorganised, spontaneous and non-supported way of learning (Cedefop, 2004b, p. 194; p. 186-187). Learning through working or while working implies that the work environment is organised in a way that encourages workers to take some degree of responsibility to solve problems by themselves. On-the-job learning is dependent on workplaces that provide quality work, in which people learn by having to undertake challenging tasks, by using their judgement, applying new knowledge and learning from their peer workers (Cedefop, 2004b, p. 168-172). More informal ways of learning in the workplace, by working and while working, do not supersede more formal continuing training but rather complement it, and may stimulate motivation to further learning. Nevertheless, on-the-job learning presents a number of challenges that go beyond work organisation, such as the validation and certification of learning. Competences acquired at work are often not documented and therefore are not validated in the event of an employee changing company, in, for example, a company undergoing restructuring.

#### **2.4.2. Why do enterprises train? Innovation versus safety requirements?**

Competence development is necessary for enterprises and workers to manage change effectively and produce innovation. However, instead of seeing learning opportunities as a strategic response to business success, sectoral changes, new production or work organisation trends, they are often viewed purely as an answer to legislation requirements. In a Cedefop study on training in SMEs, a common concern voiced by the food sector was that the burden of health and safety regulations may prevent companies from investing in training for innovation purposes (Cedefop, 2009g, p. 64). Much of the training may be delivered to meet legal requirements in health and safety for the induction of new employees, and less frequently for enhancing the productivity of the company as a whole (Cedefop, 2008h; 2008f; 2009d). However, this is not a general trend in Europe and existing policies bridging innovation and training in companies may have a positive effect on the scope of training provided and the perception of skill development as a strategic business tool.

Technological innovation, sectoral changes and new work and organisation processes create a demand for higher skilled people across all occupations,

including elementary. To meet emerging challenges in working life, the adult population must have opportunities to develop continuously knowledge and skills, in the broadest possible sense. Apart from upgrading occupation-specific skills, workers need to expand their transversal skills, including communication, self-management, team working, the capacity to be creative and take initiative, and the ability to keep on learning.

However, company training seems to be largely focused on the daily implementation of working tasks and processes, and not on strengthening employee competences for further learning and employability. Training tends to be reactive, ad hoc, tailor-made and narrowly defined, with limited or no relevance beyond one particular company. Many technical competences have value only for the specific enterprise in which they were acquired and cannot be transferred between employers, whereas transversal competences, such as problem-solving, can be transported to other work settings. Fearing that newly trained employees may be recruited by other companies, employers may invest in firm-specific training or even avoid investing in training altogether, in sectors where skills can be easily transferred to other enterprises. A recent analysis of policy initiatives that support the acquisition of key skills in the workplace suggests that employers are principally after the ‘right skills’, and are not as focused as policy-makers on qualifications and raising worker levels in formal education (Cedefop, 2010f).

## 2.5. Conclusions and policy messages

Public policies and company training actions may serve contradictory goals, with governments wishing to aid the employability and mobility of workers across enterprises, sectors and eventually occupations, while companies may concentrate on specific training related to their production needs and working arrangements. While employers tend to focus their continuing training and professional development opportunities on the most talented employees, governments have concentrated their efforts on those segments of the population more vulnerable in the labour market, such as low-skilled and older workers. Conflicting agendas between company training plans and government priorities might be doing a disservice to ‘middle-skilled’ workers who also need to plan their career progression with reference to future skill demands.

It is sufficiently proven statistically that the likelihood of participation in continuing education and training increases in line with the qualification levels. This applies to both formal education and training and to non-formal

and informal learning in the working environment. Educational disadvantage is thus carried over into the workplace, since the low qualified are less likely to receive any workplace training and to undertake tasks that promote skill development. The low-skilled have more limited career progression prospects and reduced opportunities for further education and training throughout their working life. Older workers and those with low levels of formal education tend not to participate in learning, confuse lifelong learning with returning to school, and can be more uncertain about what they would like to learn and what learning opportunities are available. A critical challenge lies in increasing the share of poorly qualified groups taking part in in-company training. This is particularly important, since low-skilled workers may find themselves in jobs characterised by repetitiveness, with low levels of autonomy and limited options for learning as they carry out their tasks. This raises an important question, given that skill upgrading should not only be about increasing skills, but also about ensuring that these are used in the workplace.

The latest continuing vocational training survey indicates that the most formalised types of training are preferred when updating staff competences. Work-based learning, embedded in working tasks, complements more formal forms of continuing training. Work-based learning is therefore decisive for maintaining, activating and developing skills, though enterprises may lack the expertise to transform their working organisation into one that stimulates learning, and may require external support. A company can be described as a learning organisation when, in addition to continuing training, it creates learning opportunities in the way work processes are organised, giving employees' the chance to develop professional and social competences. An essential feature of learning organisations is collaborative work in which one learns from others, acquiring social, communicative, negotiation and organisational skills which could be useful for any workplace. The type of human resources policies and work organisation that companies put into action can contribute to public agendas for the skill development of the workforce, or achieve the opposite, by deactivating the capacity to learn. A work organisation which fails to provide incentives to learn, coupled with reiterative work patterns about which there is nothing new to learn, inhibits learning capacities and, in the long run, has a deskilling effect. Further consideration of work organisation in enterprises is needed in national and sectoral strategies for skill development. However, it should not be forgotten that informal and non-formal learning in the workplace generate a number of challenges, the most important being the validation of learning outcomes.

# Broadening access to learning in the workplace

## 3.1. Introduction

The European Commission and the Council of the European Union have stressed in a series of recent resolutions and conclusions that we all need to update our skills throughout life. However, the specific needs of adults at risk of exclusion, because of their low literacy levels, or inadequate skills for successful integration into society and working life, should receive further attention (European Commission, 2006; 2008b; 2010b; Council of the European Union, 2008a; 2008b). The Action plan on adult learning (European Commission, 2007a) *It is always a good time to learn* reminds that it is not enough to engage adults in education and training, if these do not give them genuine opportunities to raise their qualification level. Rather than a focus on qualifications, it appears that low-skilled learners require small steps to persist in learning, such as building self-confidence (European Commission, 2009f). Time is fundamental for those with low education levels in achieving their learning goals, because they need to gain confidence; progression in learning tends to be irregular, with numerous starts and stops to accommodate life constraints.

Work organisation can have a strong motivating or demotivating effect on learning. The experience of being able to learn in and through work has a positive effect on the quality of working life, expands one's competences and enhances the motivation to learn. It is essential that, irrespective of the complexity and level of qualifications, learning opportunities are improved within jobs. A strong learning culture in the workplace makes employees more receptive to change, regardless of age (Cedefop, 2006). If workers are not motivated to learn and do not believe in the necessity of training, no kind of formal or non-formal training would have any effect. Similarly, if enterprises are not aware of new market demands and changes at sectoral level and they do not feel the need to adapt their work processes or transform their work organisation, the call for increasing continuing training will have limited impact.

The learning potential of a company depends on the interplay of various dimensions: human resources policies and training provided; participation of the company in innovation; learning opportunities offered on the job; worker

motivation to learn; and the opportunities that the working environment gives them to use newly acquired knowledge and skills. This chapter focuses on strategies that aim at widening access to continuing training in the workplace, in particular for the the most vulnerable groups of workers. The analysis considers how financial incentives should be designed, the development of key competences in the workplace, and the role of validation of learning and career guidance and counselling in motivating workers to take on further learning. It suggests that a combination of policy measures, learning initiatives and incentives is needed to expand learning opportunities in the workplace.

### 3.2. Taking on board the interests of employers and employees when designing financial incentives

Findings from the third European survey on continuing vocational training (CVTS3) indicate that financial incentives tend to have a higher impact on large and medium-size enterprise training provision and are less influential for smaller enterprises (Cedefop, 2010b, p. 12). Smaller businesses seem to encounter difficulties in acquiring information on available subsidy programmes for training and training incentives, as well as in meeting the administrative requirements of training subsidies. Unintentionally, cost-sharing mechanisms on continuing training may end up funding training measures that enterprises would have delivered anyhow to their employees, with limited added value.

It is a challenge for funding mechanisms on training to avoid reinforcing inequalities related to participation in training, by specific types of enterprises or categories of employees. For instance, although sectoral training funds improve training by bringing it closer to sector needs, specific groups of employees seem to be underrepresented in the subsidised training activities and SMEs still do not take full advantage of the funds, despite training levies being compulsory for enterprises. It is currently being debated in Italy whether sectoral training funds should provide resources to large enterprises, or whether they should specialise in funding the training provided by SMEs or enterprises located in disadvantaged geographic areas (Cedefop, 2008f, p. 112). In general, however, different forms of cost-sharing mechanism, including sectoral training funds in which funding comes from the compulsory contributions of enterprises, strengthen enterprise awareness and commitment to training. As

an example, the experience of the UK demonstrates that training investment dropped significantly in sectors where compulsory levies were removed in the late 1980 and early 1990s (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2009, p. 177).

Training vouchers encourage participation in learning and may require varying joint funding by learners. Financial incentives are also a powerful motivating tool for workers to resume their education and training, where they allow individuals to lead their career development and learning and to choose their training. Further training in some countries, while being voluntarily chosen by the employee, must be relevant to actual employment and fulfil certain quality standards. Joint funding mechanisms, such as training vouchers, seem to contribute to increased quality, relevance and diversity of training provision, where they cover the costs of training delivered by recognised training providers. A wide range of learning providers is essential to offer flexible training, suited to the needs of both employers and employees, while encouraging learner choice within accredited quality standards. Financial incentives are helping create an education and training market, which can lead to greater innovation and flexibility among providers and hence more customer-focused provision for sectors, companies and individuals (Cedefop, 2007a; 2009b). Not all the incentives are of a financial nature: some forms of training leave encourage employees to participate in education and continuing training in areas not necessarily related to their current job. Whatever the situation, employees need guidance in identifying their learning needs and in finding suitable training.

However, whether they target enterprises or learners, financial incentives by themselves are not sufficient to widen access to learning opportunities. They need to be combined with a range of other instruments that stimulate continuing training, such as support services providing advice to enterprises and guidance initiatives for employees, since funding is no more than one of the factors that determine adult participation in learning (Cedefop, 2004b; 2009d, p. 63; Keogh, 2009). Skill brokers and training advisers with specific knowledge of sectors are effective in reaching reluctant employers who have not trained their workforce in the past twelve months or more; they contact enterprises directly and assist them to assess their training needs, find adequate training providers and access funding (Cedefop, 2010f). Other factors that may hamper participation in further education and training are workload, family obligations, lack of motivation or low self-esteem, current human resources policies, the scarcity of appropriate learning opportunities, or difficulties in gaining access to information and guidance. Financial incentives do not instantaneously lead to wider involvement

in learning by groups with lower participation patterns in education and training. Consequently, incentives that encourage low-skilled adults to participate in training differ from those targeting workers with high formal education attainment and are combined with an assortment of learning support services, in which guidance and counselling play an important role (Cedefop, 2009d; 2009f). Information and counselling are critical in bringing learning-disengaged adults into education and training, improving retention rates and helping them achieve their learning goals.

Sectoral training funds may involuntarily reinforce existing patterns in training participation and human resources policies, when the beneficiaries are well educated staff in technical positions or workers employed in large enterprises (Cedefop, 2008f, p. 123-134). The fact that the groups benefiting most from subsidised training activities are those with the highest skill levels is no surprise, since training funds support activities initiated by the companies. To give access to learning opportunities to a broader range of staff through training funds, individual workers may directly request financial support for training-related activities independently of the enterprises' interests, to increase their personal and professional development in Spain France, Italy and the Netherlands (Cedefop, 2008f, p. 171). Ideally, both employer and worker interests should be considered in the design of incentives and training offers. To avoid focusing narrowly on specific sector-related skills and the short-term needs of employers, some sectoral training funds explicitly encourage worker employability through transversal competences that may aid mobility across enterprises, sectors and even occupations (Cedefop, 2008g, p. 16). Several sectoral funds also pay special attention to vulnerable groups of employees with lower training participation rates, such as the low-skilled and older workers, and those in danger of being made redundant because of restructuring plans.

Communication and marketing strategies are needed to ensure that both employers and employees are familiar with incentives and training opportunities. However, communication campaigns alone may not be sufficient to increase enterprises' commitment to training, if there are no support services in place to help employers formulate their training needs in line with their business development plans, conceive and put into action training strategies, and organise training activities at company premises. To encourage training in enterprises, national and sectoral policies, services and funding mechanisms need to tackle the following challenges:

- (a) given that enterprises may not be aware of sectoral changes and skill needs associated to technological change and innovation, some employers may not realise the need to adapt their business approach and the

contributions of continuing training to change management (Cedefop, 2010b). Information gaps on sectoral and business changes need to be filled from a broad perspective that covers new market demands, innovation in production and in work organisation processes;

- (b) work organisation and on-the-job learning have a key role in the competence development but the benefits of changing working and management processes may not be immediate. Given the difficulty of anticipating and managing change, some employers may be reluctant to act because they lack sufficient know-how. There may be a lack of management and leadership capacity or a resistance from employees to changes in the workplace (UK Commission for employment and skills, 2009, p. 73; p. 130). Some enterprises may need support to conceive their work organisation differently;
- (c) the benefits of investing in skills may be only visible in the mid-term. There is little value in a company having a better skilled workforce, if these skills are not used. Joint funding mechanisms for training need to advise employers on how to develop proper business and human resources development strategies together;
- (d) enterprises may have limited understanding of both the training market and available incentives for employers and employees. They may also lack the competence to choose the guidance or training services that are more suitable to their needs and constraints (Cedefop, 2009g);
- (e) excessive bureaucracy, heavy administrative rules and reporting requirements may curtail access to national and sectoral training subsidies (Cedefop, 2008f), more strongly even in the case of SMEs.

Within subsidy mechanisms for training and financial incentives, setting up targets both in terms of types of company and worker that should be given priority could contribute to tackling participation inequalities in training and to expanding the range of learning opportunities in the workplace.

### 3.3. The foundations for learning: key workplace competences

Changing workplace requirements make new demands on key competences, which are generic and transferable to a wide range of work settings, such as communication skills and team working. Current policies for upgrading workforce skills pay attention to the acquisition of key skills, also at the most basic levels, which provide the base for further learning and for acquiring other



skills. To cope with changes in work organisation and in working processes, it is critical to nurture the capacity to keep on learning. As the recommendation on 'key competences for lifelong learning' rightly points out:

'Learning to learn skills require first the acquisition of the fundamental basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, that are necessary for further learning. Building on these skills, an individual should be able to access, gain, process, and assimilate new knowledge and skills. This requires effective management of one's learning, career and work patterns, and in particular, the ability to persevere with learning' (European Parliament, 2006).

Traditionally, employers neglected key or transversal competences, as there was no immediate measurable benefit in increased productivity, but the situation may reverse with the adoption of working methods that favour team working and increased worker autonomy. A number of national programmes and sectoral initiatives are encouraging enterprises to provide their staff with the key competences that open the way to further learning and help in adjusting to changes in work organisation. In these initiatives, the distinction between adult learning for personal development and for employment and employability is fading away, as learning for key competences becomes rooted in the workplace and in job-related tasks (Keogh, 2009, p. 55). Programmes aiming at widening access to workplace learning and encouraging the acquisition of key competences usually combine different kinds of financial incentives, support services to both employers and employees, and learning strategies in the workplace, including project-based learning, as illustrated below.

Starting from the principle that 'every talent counts', the Flemish Government and the social partners jointly approved a competence agenda on 14 May 2007 for upgrading the competences of the workforce. A strategic literacy plan (*Strategisch Plan Geletterdheid*) promotes the acquisition of basic skills at the workplace, endorsed by a broad range of key partners, such as the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB), the Flemish Agency for Training in Enterprises (SYNTRA), as well as training and education providers, employer and employee representatives, and welfare organisations. Numerous sectoral agreements support the development of key competences in the workplace, especially literacy for low-skilled workers (Ministry for Education and Training, 2008).

Similarly, Denmark's strategy for education and lifelong skills requires all relevant players jointly to maintain high participation levels in adult education and continuing training, as well as sustained competence development at work. Systematic competence development in small and medium-sized enterprises is part of the national strategy to promote lifelong learning. Programmes to upgrade key competences at the workplace reflect developments and demands of sectors and enterprises, covering job-related competences, more technical in nature, as well as more generic ones, such as ICT and job-related mathematics, social communication, organisation and management (Ministry of Education of Denmark, 2008).

To reach, motivate and engage low-skilled adults in learning, their work environments need to be turned into learning places, to make learning relevant and in tune with their life experiences and their immediate environment, embedded in their work. As shown by the good practices compiled by Cedefop on the acquisition of basic skills in the work place, literacy and numeracy should be embedded in vocational programmes and not addressed in a vacuum, while providing opportunities to acquire other key competences such as learning to learn or problem-solving. Examples are given below.

In Finland, the NOSTE programme (2003-09) aimed at improving poorly qualified adults' key competences, career prospects and satisfaction at work, and was implemented in cooperation with the social partners to carry out practical learning processes in the workplace. The programme has shown that low-skilled adults expect training to have a close connection with their work tasks and take into consideration their earlier work history. Employer involvement in the training arrangements and social support from the learners' peer group are factors in successful learning (Cedefop, 2008h).

Several national programmes intend to turn workplaces into learning environments, such as in Sweden, where subsidised learning initiatives in the workplace are based on work team projects and problem-solving and are coached by a mentor (Ministry of Education and Research, 2008). Since 2006 in Norway, the Programme for basic competences in working life promotes the acquisition of key competences, such as literacy, numeracy and digital competence, in the workplace and in relation to the job (Cedefop, 2010f). Learning is combined with working tasks with the aim of strengthening participant motivation to learn the activity, while learning basic skills is linked to other job-relevant training. The purpose of the programme is to ensure that adults acquire the basic competences they need to meet the requirements and rapid changes in working life and avoid unemployment due to the lack of basic skills. Employers who agree to provide basic skills in the workplace receive financial compensation for the time workers spend on structured learning.

The promotion of transversal competences in the workplace is key to enlarging access to learning opportunities. As the examples illustrate, public and sectoral training agendas need to assist low- and medium-skilled, employees in coping with changing working-related demands, by upgrading and acquiring technical and enterprise-based competences linked to specific work processes, as well as personal and social skills, which are increasingly demanded.

### 3.4. Empowering and motivating workers to take on learning

The validation of learning, personalised learning and training plans, together with career guidance and counselling, are cornerstones of national and sectoral initiatives that seek to up-skill workers, take stock of their life and work experiences to bring them back into learning, and even impel them ‘one-step-up’ through the acquisition, for example, of a qualification.

#### 3.4.1. Making competences acquired on-the-job more transparent

Through the competences that they have acquired in their work experience, many workers are able to perform well at work though not possessing the formal qualification that the job may require. For instance, low-skilled workers may have acquired a wealth of knowledge and skills on-the-job, which have not been validated and have therefore not led to certification. The challenge is to provide workers with accredited competences and qualifications that are portable from one job to another (Cedefop, 2009b). Migrant workers illustrate the challenge of achieving qualification transparency: their competences may exceed those of the local population, but their occupations do not match their education profile due to lack of comparability of international qualifications and insufficient language skills (Cedefop, 2009g, p. 54). Taking formal qualifications as a proxy for learning does not do justice to the range, depth and variety of forms of learning while working, and knowledge and skills people possess (European Commission 2010f, p. 69). For this reason, it can be claimed that the pool of qualifications held by the workforce does not equal the stock of available skills (OECD, 2010). Therefore, the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning makes the human capital of employees, in terms of knowledge and skills, more visible and valuable to employers and society at large.

By allowing adults into fast-track pathways to formal education and granting exemption from parts of a study programme, validation contributes to a virtuous circle that makes further learning more attractive. Validation can increase the value of learning outcomes acquired on the job, making it more worthwhile and advantageous for workers and employers to invest in on-the-job training, in particular informal and non-formal types of learning, knowing that the outcome of that investment can be recorded, valued and built upon. The validation of learning and the transfer of personal capital require public agencies, training agencies, and social partners to work together, so that the skills mapped and validated are recognised and accepted by other employers (Cedefop, 2007a; 2009f). Validating learning can aid enterprise

structural adjustment through recognising the competences of displaced workers so they can be applied in other companies and even sectors.

Even when they do not lead to certification, validation processes can improve self-assurance and be a stimulus to take on various forms of learning: for young people who have disengaged from education and training, older workers who did not enjoy opportunities for formal learning, and experienced workers who do not have a formal qualification despite possessing the skills and knowledge required for their post. Validating prior learning may provide credits to undertake formal learning but, more important, it increases self-esteem and motivation for learning, and planning further learning having identified strengths and skills (Cedefop, 2009c, p. 50-52). However, validation processes may sometimes appear heavy, complex and even inaccessible to low-skilled adults, those most in need of having the competences acquired through work and life experiences validated. Flexible and cost-efficient ways of validating and valuing learning, which do not necessarily imply certification, like portfolios of achievements, are being piloted through European, national, and sectoral projects. While validation processes may be time- and resources-consuming, the OECD highlights two additional outcomes to the social benefits of making knowledge and skills tangible:

- by helping adults learn about their competences, be aware of their capacities and full potential, and plan their education, training and work paths within a lifelong learning perspective, validation brings educational and training benefits. Validation processes make people aware of having learned in various ways and contexts in the workplace, in different transition points of their lives, even if the process does not lead to certification;
- validation of learning may bring economic benefits in the long run by reducing the costs that are associated with formal learning, by shortening the time required to acquire qualifications and helping access jobs that better match real competences (OECD, 2006).

Validation of learning has been integrated into strategic programmes that intend to upgrade the skills of the population through workplace learning.

The Work-based learning (WBL) project launched by Fachhochschule Aachen, Germany, was awarded the BIBB's Continuing education innovation prize in 2005 because it offers workers who previously had no access to higher education a chance to do so, through recognising skills and competences acquired at work. The institution of higher education drew up individual learning projects with employees and their employers, which stipulated the learning targets, the curriculum and the credits to be earned. The training focused on the specific learning-oriented work in the company itself (Cedefop, 2010f).

In the private sector, validation or ‘competence measurement’, in the jargon of human resources, makes it possible to identify skill gaps and to tailor training according to this information (Cedefop, 2009c, p. 39). However, European guidelines for validating learning indicate that company’s involvement in validation is often driven by short- and medium- term human resources needs, usually upgrading working practices. Despite this, the commitment of employers to validating learning brings positive outcomes for both companies and employees:

- increasing motivation and interest in the work on the part of employees;
- reducing the time needed to complete a qualification and eventually diminishing time away from the workplace;
- generating new developments in the workplace as a result of a reflection process on competences possessed and working practices;
- improving employee retention and, as a result, reducing recruitment and training costs (Cedefop, 2009c, p. 40).

European guidelines for validation make clear that any conflict of interest between the company and the employee should be avoided, through process transparency and the involvement of external actors, such as employee representatives or learning providers.

Currently, many European Union Member States are making progress in developing national qualifications frameworks, linked to the European qualifications framework (EQF), which cover all levels and types of education and training, and are likely to enhance flexibility to engage in learning and boost validation of learning. Better integration of validation of learning into existing qualification frameworks would also reinforce its place as part of a coherent lifelong learning strategy (Cedefop, 2009c, OECD, 2010). National qualifications frameworks may support the accreditation of learning at basic levels, which allows low-qualified adults to move a step up in learning. For instance, the Irish National qualification framework provides progression roots below lower secondary education, by enabling the recognition of basic skills; at the same time, it encourages a more tailored adult basic skills provision, and promotes accountability on the part of providers through measuring outcomes and returns on investment (European Commission, 2010e, p. 14).

Validation of learning and credit systems allow providers to devise flexible training programmes more suitable to low-skilled adults, thus improving retention and progression in learning by recognising ‘smaller steps of achievement’ (European Commission, 2009f, p. 15). Validation of informal and non-formal learning is expected to increase interest and participation of the adult population

in lifelong learning, where it is combined with an expansion of tailored-made training opportunities and different types of incentives.

### **3.4.2. Career guidance for better choices in learning and working**

While many policy initiatives were designed to make training offers and systems more flexible, responsive to individuals and enterprises' needs, and demand-led, the overall effect has been increased complexity of training provision and an even more acute need for information, guidance and counselling. While helping adults to navigate in complex learning and working contexts contributes to smooth career transitions, supporting them to reflect on and review their own learning and the competences acquired at different life stages reinforces learning to learn and career management skills. Guidance must be integral to any strategy to promote skill development in the workplace, in particular, for the low-skilled. Examples of good practice in workplace guidance are provided in subsequent chapters of this report, highlighting social partner commitment to adult learning and the contributions of career guidance to socially responsible restructuring practices in enterprises.

Most individuals require support for their career planning to manage labour market transitions successfully and find their way within different learning pathways, including opportunities for the validation of learning, and training options. In the context of enterprises undergoing restructuring, career guidance aids transition into employment through a series of interrelated building blocks, such as the development of career management and other transversal skills, the opportunity to familiarise oneself with the world of work, and assessment of previous on-the-job learning. It should be stressed that for individuals to secure employment may not simply mean updating skills, but possibly acquiring a completely new range of skills, for which they will need information, advice and guidance. Despite these challenges, employed people are one of the groups least likely to gain access to guidance provision (Cedefop, Sultana, 2008). Career information, advice and counselling for adults were largely developed within active labour market policies for unemployed people and, as a result, career guidance for those in employment is still lagging behind (Cedefop, 2008a).

Through career development opportunities and, more specifically, career guidance, employees can become more aware of changes in the workplace, within their job or in the organisation and be more keen to keep their skills current (Cedefop, 2008a, p. 36). However, the case for providing guidance in the workplace still needs to be made. Employers may fear that career guidance at work may raise employees' expectations of career progress or

continuing training that the company may not be able to satisfy; this may make them wish to change employer. In a period of economic downturn, or when a particular sector is in decline, such initiatives may seem superfluous, especially if employers are freezing recruitment or making people redundant. When a company is successful or faces a competitive labour market, employers are more likely to be interested in providing guidance and career development opportunities, combined with training, as part of a broader human resources strategy for attracting and retaining proficient employees.

Despite potential benefits, a number of challenges hold back the development of guidance services specifically adapted to employed adults. First, in a working context, guidance related activities tend to be short-term and narrowly conceived, leading to the acquisition of formal qualifications or skill development for the current work tasks; there is no real focus on maintaining employability and keeping the ability to learn. Second, to provide appropriate services for companies and their employees, public employment services, which are still a major guidance provider for adults, need a broad spectrum of knowledge, including specialised knowledge of the labour market and the sectors prevailing in the local economy. Finally, career guidance professionals are not used to working in companies and lack specific knowledge of human resources processes, changes in sectors, occupations and work organisation, and new skill demands.

Those who could benefit most from guidance services, because of their lower education and more vulnerable position in the labour market, are often the least likely to receive guidance support. As with continuing training, guidance and career development opportunities in enterprises tend to focus on individuals in managerial positions or belonging to 'talent groups' of employees, who tend to be those with higher qualifications, reinforcing the assumption that ordinary employees do not have a career (Cedefop, 2008a, p. 36-40). Most other employees are expected to take responsibility for their own professional development, and manage by themselves their learning and working pathways. Given that guidance and counselling are a stepping stone for adults to return to education and training, and to achieve their learning goals successfully, human resources policies can reinforce inequalities in participation in learning, qualification levels and age. Employers justify their focus on a small cohort of employees, quoting scarce resources and the need to obtain a return from investment, despite the fact that broader provision of career development opportunities could allow them to retain a more skilled and motivated workforce. It is through national recovery plans to overcome the present economic downturn, and within strategies for skill upgrading, that

governments are encouraging employers to support the most vulnerable cohorts of the workforce, with a broad range of learning opportunities, including guidance.

### 3.5. Building consistent policy and enterprise learning strategies

Adult learning in the workplace is at the crossroad of policies related to age management, flexicurity and managing sectoral changes by gaining 'new skills for new jobs'. With the commitment of the social partners, public policies can help transform workplaces into age-friendly and learning-facilitating environments, in which different categories of employees could eventually be given opportunities to develop their competences, either on-the-job within normal working processes or through more formal training.

#### 3.5.1. Policies to increase older worker participation in learning

Age-discrimination legislation will not improve participation in training or the employment prospects of older workers if employers are not sensitive to the benefits of age diversity in the workplace. Work organisation is crucial to developing a favourable environment for learning in the workplace, within work teams of diverse age, which take advantage of younger workers' current theoretical knowledge and familiarity with new technologies and older workers' wide-ranging knowledge of work processes and experience in problem-solving (Cedefop, 2008h; 2010d).

There are three approaches to reducing inequalities in participation in training by older workers. First, there should be increased investment in lifelong learning at mid-career to stimulate the ability and motivation to learn, as well as the readiness to cope with new situations at the workplace. Second, the attractiveness and relevance of training and its potential returns for older workers can be improved by adapting teaching methods and content to their needs, through short and modular courses, and the validation of prior learning. Raising older workers' education and training participation requires a combination of measures, such as marketing strategies for learning and guidance provision, advocacy with employers, confidence building among older workers in the workplace, adapted training methods, a rethinking of employment and lifelong learning policies, and specialised training for guidance and training providers to adjust their offer to older workers' needs and circumstances. For instance, caring responsibilities for senior family members might be a barrier



to continuing learning and labour market participation; this would need to be reflected in the design of employment and training policies. Third, promoting later retirement might encourage greater investment in older worker training by raising the potential return on this investment through longer expected pay-off times (OECD, 2006; Cedefop, 2008a; 2008h).

### 3.5.2. Working environments that assist learning

For individuals, returns on the time and resources invested in learning are not immediately visible and do not lead instantly to increases in wages or job stability. Working towards a better balance between working and living conditions throughout active life is one of the preconditions for opening access to lifelong learning for all. Time constraints, lack of support services, such as guidance, and lack of flexible training arrangements are important barriers for adults participating in training. Possible solutions include flexibility of training provision, training during working hours, and compensation in the form of paid or unpaid educational leave or financial incentives.

Different measures, from which only a few are financial, can be combined to motivate workers to take part in learning:

- a) bringing learning opportunities close to potential learners, at the workplace, on the job, through work practice itself, so that workers can use the new knowledge and skills in life and work (e.g. through situated knowledge in the working context and individualisation to answer specific needs and expectations);
- b) relevant learning provision that meets specific needs and circumstances, including appropriate learning and teaching approaches for adults, from needs analysis to learner-friendly assessment practices;
- c) flexible organisation and sequencing of learning, granting learners the capacity to choose when, how and what they would learn (e.g. adopting learning modules);
- d) continuing learning support and guidance, even of a non-formal sort, such as the ones provided by role models and peer-workers;
- e) qualified trainers who, in addition to a supportive social network and role models, are one of the most influential factors in enjoying learning, persisting and achieving individual learning goals;
- f) negotiated learning objectives and curriculum through individual learning plans;
- g) validation of prior learning, helping learners to take stock of their competences and strengths, to be aware of their full potential, and progress to a qualification;

- h) financial and non-monetary incentives adapted to specific age groups, such as training leave and learning vouchers;
- i) social recognition of learning, through career prospects, including pay rises, promotion and shifts to other job positions in the same enterprise (Cedefop, 2004; 2006, 2008c).

Motivation to invest time and energy to pursue further learning largely depends on the flexibility of available training provision. Many Member States have taken initiatives to strengthen the role of higher education in the continuing professional and personal development of the workforce and broaden their programmes for non-traditional older students. However, higher education institutions still need stronger incentives to develop more flexible curricula and programmes that suit the needs of both workers and employers, and to expand the use of the validation of learning to get credits and shorten training programme duration (European Commission, 2010d). In addition, flexibility across education and training, valuing prior learning to build up meaningful learning pathways, together with guidance support and appropriate teaching methodologies that take the specific circumstances of adults into consideration, are all needed to increase participation. Within this, flexible learning opportunities can suit the particular circumstances of learners and reduce time constraints, whether due to family responsibilities or conflict with the work schedule: options include in the evening or through units corresponding to small steps of learning and modules that can be accumulated and built upon to acquire partial qualification. The CONFINTEA national reports on recent developments in adult learning in Europe highlight the need to help learners 'own' the learning process, and develop their confidence to use their own judgement to identify both strengths related to skills and eventual gaps in learning (Keogh, 2009). Prior to and throughout a training programme, it is important to clarify with learners the goals and motivations for learning, how they expect to use new skills in their daily life, in particular in working life, ascertain strengths and any potential barrier to learning (OECD, 2008). Participation and persistence in learning depend on the degree of support adults receive before and during the learning process, starting with the definition of learning interests and specific goals. Clarifying what they want to learn, why they want to learn it and how the learning process meets their interests and goals are motivating factors (European Commission, 2009g, p. 53).

Although, ideally, employees should be the drivers of their own development, in practice there should be agreement between personal goals and business objectives (Cedefop, 2008h, p. 23). In an effort to tailor learning pathways to

individual needs and increase motivation and commitment to further learning, skill development programmes may make use of individual learning plans, which take into account circumstances and prior learning, in which learning goals are negotiated, and are combined with adult learning delivered in a flexible manner. Finally, different sources of feedback need to be collected to improve the relevance for workers and employers of on-the-job learning practices and continuing training.

More recently, policies seem to turn attention to the quality of training provision and learning progression, holding training programmes and activities accountable for results, when they are joint publicly funded. There is a challenge to move from training supply-led to more demand-side approaches to training through policies and practices that support individuals to persist as learners (European Commission, 2010e). A policy dilemma may arise when balancing and aligning policies that tend towards greater standardisation of training to guarantee quality and those that promote greater individualisation of teaching and learning to motivate adults to continue learning (OECD, 2008). The need for accountability means providers must achieve a balance between developing flexible learning provision – since the same strategies do not work for all learners – and achieving the targets and performance goals of funding programmes.

### 3.6. Conclusions and recommendations

Low participation in education and training among low-skilled adults and older workers is due to a mixture of factors, including a shortage of relevant learning programmes, adapted to their needs and life and work situations. To increase participation in learning it is essential to combine a range of incentives, learning approaches, and services, including the validation of learning and career guidance. This entitlement to career guidance and to have learning validated and accredited could be secured by law, such as in France or Portugal, or through collective agreements. Both learning pathways and work transitions are greatly influenced by gender, social and ethnic background and age. Strategies and services that aim at broadening access to learning opportunities in the workplace need to be responsive to distinct needs and avoid uniform training provisions, despite budgetary constraints on individualisation of services. Further, the design of training incentives and learning provisions should ideally take into account the interests, demands and constraints of both workers and employers. Public policies that encourage workplace learning

and continuing training should avoid reinforcing inequalities between large and smaller enterprises in accessing training incentives, support services for skill development and training programmes.

Tailored career guidance and workplace learning, the acquisition of transversal competences that provide the foundation for further learning, the validation of learning acquired on the job, and the design of workplaces that value learning at various levels and occupations within the organisation are decisive in increasing motivation for further learning and widening access to learning in the workplace. These ingredients of lifelong learning strategies should not exist alone but need to be combined, given that the obstacles for taking on learning are of a diverse nature and cannot be reduced to financial costs.

# Social dialogue for adult learning

## 4.1. Introduction

The social partners' Framework of action for the lifelong development of competences set down four cornerstones of the social dialogue for lifelong learning: forecasting skills and qualification needs; validating and recognising learning; developing suitable information, guidance and counselling; and funding mechanisms for training (European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) et al., 2002). In the present economic crisis, building a skill agenda is of mutual interest and importance to both trade unions and employers.

Social partners may act in a tripartite way by actively bargaining on the national design of training and by implementing training agendas at national and sectoral levels. Conflicting issues are likely to arise in relation to sharing the costs of training, whenever budgetary constraints cause revision of the established framework for joint financing of continuing training. Trade unions tend to resist employees having to part fund the costs of training to respond to structural change and keep workers' competences updated; they seem more concerned about the risk of reinforcing inequalities in access to training (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2009, p. 11-14). A widespread form of social partner involvement in the development of continuing training is the validation and certification of learning outcomes, especially at sectoral level, and the accreditation of training providers.

Social dialogue has an important contribution for workplace training agendas. Employers can support the process by creating the conditions for on-the-job learning in the workplace and providing continuing training to their employees through actions such as collective agreements and their involvement in the design and implementation of training policies and training funds. They can encourage a learning-supportive working environment for all categories of employees. Trade unions can negotiate and provide learning opportunities for employees, while union representatives act as 'learning ambassadors', encouraging workers, particularly the low-skilled, to take part in training. Unions also play a role in developing a culture of lifelong learning in the workplace, identifying, together with employers, skill

shortages and training needs at company and sectoral level, and helping workers develop transferable skills to increase employability or readiness to progress or change position within their current employment. Unions are also developing guidance and learning services to assist their members to deal with sectoral and organisational change, anticipate redundancy or plan for retirement.

The scope, extent and forms of collective bargaining for lifelong learning within enterprises are affected by national industrial relations settings, in particular, the centrality of lifelong learning in both social dialogue and the trade union bargaining agenda and social partner involvement in the design of occupation standards, qualifications and training systems and programmes. Factors that determine the scope and outcomes of social dialogue in relation to providing workers with learning opportunities include the number of SMEs and non-unionised workplaces in a sector, training incentives available for employers and employees, and how the interlinking between skill development, productivity, adaptation to sectoral change and innovation is perceived (Cedefop, 2008a, p. 45-49).

The chapter briefly addresses the incidence of collective bargaining in employer training provision and discusses commendable examples of practice in which trade unions and employers develop lifelong learning strategies in the workplace.

## 4.2. Widening access to learning through collective bargaining

Skills development is an important commodity for collective bargaining, as discussed in a joint publication by Cedefop and Eurofound on the contributions of social dialogue to lifelong learning (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2009). Collective agreements may bring substantial developments in national and sectoral lifelong learning agendas, expanding learning opportunities to collectives of employees that tend typically to be excluded from training and education, either because fewer opportunities are available to them or because they are less inclined to take on learning; examples are given below.

Collective bargaining on continuing training has significantly increased in the UK, as a result of the government strategy to encourage lifelong learning. Continuing training is a topic for employee consultation. Considerable financial support has been given to the expansion of trade union 'learning representatives', while sectoral skills councils have provided wide support to companies investing in continuing training. The social partners have been actively involved in the implementation of the UK agenda for skill development (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2009, p. 14). Sector skills agreements provide the basis for developing qualification strategies to secure the range and level of skills needed and are involved in identifying the skills required for future industrial growth, in relation to new working practices, processes and technologies. For example, they provide advice on training-related activities to individual enterprises to increase commitment to training and they participate in industry skill forecasting that provides evidence for identifying training needs for subsequent planning of training actions. Sector skills councils are involved in developing occupational standards for each economic sector and the corresponding training services (Cedefop, 2008f, p. 146-149; Eurofound and Cedefop, 2009, p. 10).

In Denmark, sectoral bargaining sets the framework for training policies in companies. The social partners generally devolve the design of interventions to joint 'competence development' or 'vocational training' committees at sectoral and company level, in both public and private sectors. For instance, the sectoral agreement for industry recommends a 'systematic education and training plan for the company's employees' and devolves to the 'education committee' the decision about the type of continuing training needed at company level (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2009, p. 15).

The cornerstone of collective bargaining on continuing training in Belgium is the interprofessional agreement that social partners sign every two years, which regulates key conditions for continuing training, such as paid educational leave, and defines a set of objectives in relation to employers' contributions to sectoral bilateral funds, workforce participation in training programmes and the target groups who should deserve special attention, such as older workers. However, collective agreement provisions on vocational training are formulated in terms of objectives and not obligations or mandatory requirements. Through sectoral bargaining, these issues are further developed according to sector specificities. Within companies, the employer and worker representatives negotiate an annual training plan (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2009, p. 15).

Although there is little national evidence of the impact of social dialogue on training participation, employees in unionised workforces seem to benefit more from training activities. The proportion of agreements on continuing training increases with the size of the company. According to the last available European survey on continuing vocational training (CVTS 3), participation in training sponsored by employers is significantly higher in companies with a joint agreement on continuing training, and training hours are more intensive (Cedefop, 2010b, p. 56-58). Workers' representatives, if at all involved in training issues, tend to take part in the objective setting, while the training budget and the selection of training providers usually rests elsewhere.

Social partners are also mobilising resources and sharing responsibilities in relation to training provision, the analysis of qualification shortages and employment forecasts through jointly governed bipartite or tripartite sectoral training funds, built on compulsory training levies. For instance, sectoral training funds cover a wide range of areas, such as core-specific sector competences, as well as more transversal skills that can apply to different sectors, as discussed in the previous chapter. Sectoral training funds can shape the analysis of skills needs and strategies for human resources development, as well as align learning provision to specific sector needs in different ways. First, training funds may support preparatory activities on skill forecasting and training needs at both enterprise and sectoral level. Second, some sectoral training funds are already covering activities related to the training of trainers, who have a key role in ensuring quality and relevance of training, making them aware of changes in work organisation and occupational profiles, as well as of emerging training needs (Cedefop, 2008f). Further, certifying training providers and courses, in particular those to be subsidised by sectoral funds, is likely to make training provision more responsive to sectoral changes.

### 4.3. Motivating employees to pursue workplace learning

The career guidance and learning initiatives that are featured in this section were all developed in dialogue with employees, employee representatives, human resources specialists, management and experts in continuing education and training, taking the needs of employees into consideration without losing sight of employers' demands for skill development. They can be considered as 'success stories' in developing flexible learning opportunities and support services to increase worker participation in continuing training.

Although trade unions on the whole tend not to recognise career guidance for employed workers as part of their overall aims and responsibility, unions have developed innovative and transferable practices to motivate workers to take on learning. However, there is little evidence that trade unions are raising guidance related issues in collective bargaining (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2009; Cedefop, 2010c). Despite its importance in widening access to learning at the workplace, guidance is the pillar of the social partners' framework of action that has received least attention and both employers and trade unions could do much more in this area. The success stories described in this



section show that trade unions can play a major role in creating workplace learning opportunities, but these initiatives are not widespread in all Member States. In quite a few Member States, trade unions have not yet broadened their role in learning and have not considered their responsibility in relation to maintaining their membership's employability. By providing guidance, either themselves directly or through guidance providers, they can make a considerable contribution to workplace learning.

In some countries a new role is developing for trade union activists who provide front line guidance in working hours and negotiate with employers to open access to workplace learning opportunities. In Austria, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and, the UK, trade union representatives are acting as 'learning ambassadors', encouraging employees to take on learning and fill their skill gaps, and advising companies on their training needs (Cedefop, 2008a, p. 45-63; Keogh, 2009). Learning ambassadors raise awareness of training opportunities, as well as aiding access to them, especially for the low-skilled. Learning ambassadors are recruited directly from employee representatives, who are well-placed both to identify the workers needing training and to advise companies on their potential training needs. These are rooted in the local community and understand well the social, cultural, and economic environment in which they operate.

In the Austrian region of Steiermark, the Career coaching initiative was put into practice over a three year period to promote professional continuing education and training in companies. Selected employees acted as career coaches in four districts within Steiermark, advising and supporting micro, small and medium-sized companies and their employees on education and training matters. The aim of Career coaching was to promote the continuing professional development of staff, help companies to access information about education and training opportunities, arrange such opportunities, and further develop adult education in the region (Cedefop, 2010f).

In another Austrian programme, works council members act as a route to low-qualified employees. The Opportunities through education programme (*Chancen durch Bildung*) seeks to reduce barriers to education, as well as to raise awareness among the educationally disadvantaged of how further education and training can improve their job situation. The proactive involvement of works councils is one of the programme's key strengths, since they are well placed to encourage workers to participate in training. This project was first designed and implemented by the social partners: the Austrian Chamber of Labour, Arbeiterkammer, and the Austrian Trade Union Confederation, Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund, ÖGB. For the last 10 years it has been implemented by the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (Wiener ArbeitnehmerInnen Förderungsfonds, WAFF) (Federal Ministry for Education, the Art and Culture (BMUKK), 2008; Cedefop 2010f).

The Noste programme, which ran in Finland from 2003 to 2009 with the aim to increase qualification and skill levels of low-qualified employees, recruited and trained employee representatives of SAK (the main trade union for blue-collar workers) as learning agents, who successfully encouraged many low-skilled employees to undertake training. With their help, the programme managed to involve workers who would have otherwise been unlikely to participate in learning activities, for example, due to low self-confidence or learning difficulties. Learning agents were also acting as contact points between education establishments, programme participants and enterprises. The programme was initiated by one of the major trade confederations and implemented on a tripartite basis. Validation of prior learning was also an important element as it allowed the programme to shorten the study periods of learners who wanted to pursue full qualifications. It also allowed programme organisers to tailor learning provision to participant needs (Ministry of Education, Department of Education and Science, 2008; Cedefop, 2008a).

Other workplace training programmes also make use of the potential of learning ambassadors. In Norway, within the Programme for basic competences in working life, 'motivation agents' are recruited to stimulate adult learning and to encourage companies to provide learning and training opportunities for key competences (The Royal Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2008).

Learning representatives or learning ambassadors are well positioned to engage with workers who do not wish to disclose their learning needs to managers and employers, and who would have otherwise been unlikely to engage in learning due to poor self-confidence, basic skill gaps, and lack of awareness of education and training provision, or are not inclined to use conventional guidance and training services.

According to Cedefop analyses, trade unions were the most active social partner in seeking ways to offer career information and guidance to adults in employment, and encouraging employees to take up more learning opportunities than they would have had otherwise (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004; 2008; Cedefop, 2008a). Existing projects are often small-scale, but the TUC UnionLearn project in England and the guidance corners in Denmark and Iceland received considerable government support, and were progressed within national strategies for skill development. The concept of guidance in the workplace has been subsequently included in collective agreements and government initiatives that acknowledge the role of trade union learning ambassadors in reaching out and motivating workers with low formal education. The sustainability of many trade union initiatives depends on funding available for guidance and training services, even if they rely on union representatives, as volunteers. These success stories confirm that, with statutory back-up, through collective agreements and funding opportunities, the workplace can become a cornerstone of lifelong learning strategies. The idea of accessing learning

opportunities, as well as information and guidance, through trade unions is prominent in the UK, through UnionLearn <sup>(1)</sup> representatives (Niace, 2008; Cedefop 2008a). Trade union activity and participation in skills development strategies is now recognised as an important feature of workplace learning and career guidance.

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) established UnionLearn to provide a high-profile strategic framework and support for union work on skill development. UnionLearn promotes collective action to increase learning in the workplace. Although UnionLearn representatives were well-positioned to deliver information and advice and other support to colleagues, they were themselves volunteers and full-time workers. As a result, UnionLearn did not seek to become a specialist provider of information, advice and guidance, and cooperated with specialised agencies to broker learning opportunities in the workplace.

Another catalyst for trade union involvement in learning was the Union learning fund that aimed to build union capacity to sustain work on learning issues and make this a core activity in trade union agendas. Unions were encouraging employers to provide for the learning needs of their staff and sign up to a 'skills pledge', which committed them to training their staff to a specific qualification level. UnionLearn argued the case for social dialogue around the way in which costs for raising skill ambitions should be shared between the state, employers and individuals, for increased collective bargaining over training, secured with a statutory framework, and for sustained capacity building for unions to enable them to take this agenda forward. (Cedefop, 2010f) <sup>(2)</sup>.

Trade unions have an important role to play in reaching new learners and overcoming barriers to learning in the workplace: increasing awareness, confidence and motivation to learn; helping workers fill their skill gaps; identifying learning and training needs; setting up learning opportunities and reaching learning agreements with employers. As shown by the UnionLearn scheme, unions can form active partnerships with employers and conclude learning agreements to tackle both company and individual skill needs and address wider lifelong learning issues. They can also establish cooperation with learning and guidance providers to deliver services together in the workplace and ensure that learning opportunities are customised, relevant and delivered appropriately. Union learning ambassadors are in the front line of outreach strategies to promote learning in the workplace for those most in need of developing their skills.

<sup>(1)</sup> Further information on UnionLearn can be accessed at the following website: [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk) [cited 10.12.2010].

<sup>(2)</sup> UnionLearn, case study prepared by Lesley Haughton, UnionLearn for Cedefop conference on Guidance for workforce development, 25-26 June 2007.

Awareness of the benefits of learning and available learning opportunities is problematic for the less qualified. Outreach, mediating and mentoring activities are important to lower barriers and provide an environment in which workers feel comfortable and secure to discuss openly their skills, training gaps and learning prospects. The involvement of peer workers, who are trade union representatives, in providing access to guidance and learning opportunities has challenged guidance practices and broken moulds. Besides career guidance specialists, it is increasingly acknowledged that other actors have a role in guidance-related activities due to their immediate knowledge of the individuals and their working environments, and their particular skills in engaging hard-to-reach people in learning. Learning representatives need professional back-up, since some requests for information and advice will go beyond their remit and ability to respond effectively (Cedefop, 2008a; 2010f). This calls for new forms of cooperation between professional guidance experts and trade union representatives, to launch appropriate guidance methods in workplace settings. The initiatives briefly presented in this section bring strategic messages for effective guidance to employees with little formal education: it is crucial to bring guidance at the workplace and within working hours, in convenient locations where participants feel comfortable and at safe. Personalised support and outreach strategies, with the involvement of peer workers in the front line and the back-up support of guidance and human resources experts, in cooperation with employers, is also important.

#### 4.4. Conclusions and policy messages

Employers and trade unions contribute to shaping and implementing life-long learning and, more specifically, training agendas. The commitment of both employers and trade unions is needed to increase adult participation in learning, and address imbalances in the qualifications and age profile of adult learners. Employers play a major role in skill development through the continuing training they provide or fund. They can also promote a supportive working environment and human resources policies that encourage employees, irrespective of their function in the enterprise, to take on learning, and in which learning opportunities are embedded in working processes. The commendable practices discussed in this chapter were all implemented in cooperation with employers and trade union representatives, through consensus building on goals and work organisation; they all attempted to balance the learning interests and needs of both the companies and the employees.

While the next two chapters address employer contributions to skill development, and challenges facing SMEs and company restructuring processes, here trade union activity was discussed as an important feature of workplace learning. Union representatives are helping members to access learning opportunities and to overcome barriers to learning, and progression at work. They can often reach those who cannot or will not use conventional training or career guidance services or who do not wish to disclose their learning or training needs to managers or to their employer. Although much trade union activity has been targeted at low-skilled workers, these experiences could also be extended to mid-skilled workers. They confirm the importance of advice and guidance prior to engaging in learning, and the centrality of social partner commitment to lifelong learning strategies, through joint projects and collective agreements. Social dialogue should also aim at securing the entitlement to validation of learning, skill development and career guidance and counselling in key working life transitions and beyond.

# Supporting skill development in SMEs

## 5.1. Introduction

Prior to the economic crisis, SMEs were the main drivers of economic growth. In 2007, the non-financial business economy comprised almost 21 million enterprises of which 99.8% were SMEs which provided approximately two thirds of employment (Eurostat, 2009b). SMEs are not surprisingly referred to as the backbone of the European economy. While employers generally need support to develop strategies for skills upgrading, starting with an analysis of their needs, as well as to take advantage of a whole range of training incentives and identify relevant training providers and offers, this is even more the case of SMEs.

According to the European SME Observatory's last survey, the lack of skilled labour is a problem for more than one third of SMEs in the European Union; they struggle to fill their job vacancies and find the necessary human resources <sup>(3)</sup>, because young graduates tend to gravitate around larger enterprises. Not only do they encounter difficulties in finding qualified staff but also in providing them with adequate learning opportunities. Depending on the sector, SME capacity to innovate may require that they master new production and organisation processes, and that their staff possess a complex set of skills. Internationalisation makes competence development a necessity for SMEs to seize opportunities in foreign markets and to resist global competition; acquiring competences in languages, marketing and communication become decisive for business survival and success (European Commission, 2009e, p. 69).

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<sup>(3)</sup> The European SME Observatory survey 2007 can be downloaded from Internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/facts-figures-analysis/sme-observatory/index\\_en.htm#h2-2007-observatory-survey](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/facts-figures-analysis/sme-observatory/index_en.htm#h2-2007-observatory-survey) [cited 17.12.2010].

Technological innovation and the trend towards a more knowledge-based economy have considerably deepened the challenges that SMEs face today. While multinational and large companies have the capacity to design and implement human resources strategies, for SMEs, developing learning strategies at the workplace increasingly requires partnerships. In 2008, the Small business act for Europe was adopted as a comprehensive policy framework for European Union Member States, in which skill development features among the five priority areas, and skill upgrading to support innovation is one of the ten guiding principles proposed within a package of policy measures specially conceived for SMEs <sup>(4)</sup>.

However, initiatives that promote lifelong learning are having difficulty gaining hold in small and medium-sized companies. In many cases, SMEs lack systematic human resources and business strategies, primarily focus on their day-to-day business or simply do not have access to current information on sector developments, new work processes that could improve their productivity, and training opportunities available. Lack of human resources management expertise within small enterprises, and of proper training structures, makes it difficult for them to identify skills deficiencies, undertake appropriate training interventions and evaluate the effectiveness of training provided. Nor do they have the means to send their experienced staff and workers on longer training courses. Guidance and information services are particularly important to raising awareness among SMEs of funding and training opportunities.

This chapter makes a case for linking competence development, even in its most informal forms, with policy agendas to promote innovation in SMEs. It discusses some of the key challenges to skill development and possible solutions, illustrated with examples of measures that promote competence development of staff in SMEs. It is argued that constraints on training in SMEs are multidimensional and only through partnerships bringing together a variety of enterprises, is the response likely to be comprehensive and effective.

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(4) The European charter for small enterprises was approved by the EC leaders at the FERIA European Council on June 2001. Member States and the European Commission committed themselves to take action. [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/files/charter/docs/charter\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/files/charter/docs/charter_en.pdf) [cited 17.12.2010].

Informal guidelines for its implementation can be found at:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/ct/itemshortdetail.cfm?item\\_id=3381](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/ct/itemshortdetail.cfm?item_id=3381)  
[cited 17.12.2010].

## 5.2. Developing training approaches that suit SMEs

Although statistical evidence indicates that small companies are less likely to provide training for their employees than larger ones, wide variation in types of smaller employers argues against generalisations. Patterns of SME investment in training vary across Europe and, in some countries, total monetary expenditure on training equals those of larger enterprises: Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Hungary, and Finland (Cedefop, 2010b, p. 105). Statistics on adult learning and training only partially reflect SME reality. In small enterprises, training tends to take the form of on-the-job competence development and non-formal sorts of training, such as mentoring, none of which is properly reflected in official statistics (European Commission, 2009c).

SMEs face a number of practical organisational problems when it comes to providing training. How to identify a training programme suited to the company's specific needs? How to organise the work and share tasks in a way that allows employees to follow training without disrupting normal business? Due to their limited human resources, SMEs are more burdened than larger enterprises by the administrative requirements of programmes and incentives that promote continuing training and the transfer of technological innovation in enterprises. In addition, training content and methods may not match specific constraints linked to workload and task organisation. SMEs tend to judge that courses organised by colleges and private providers are not entirely relevant to their training needs and constraints (Cedefop, 2009g; European Commission, 2009c). There is an inevitable tension between SME desire for customised training programmes and more standardised or harmonised training provision that addresses general sectoral challenges (Cedefop, 2009g, p. 38). Small enterprises very often do not see their staff as a source of competitive advantage, and rarely make mid-term business and training plans, since they look for more immediate business solutions that continuing training may not be able to provide. The absence of business and training plans among small firms does not necessarily imply that no training is taking place but rather that it is not formalised (European Commission, 2009c). However, SMEs are not a homogenous group and some have well-established and elaborated training strategies.

SMEs tend to be more informal and unstructured in their approaches to workforce development. The acquisition of new skills and knowledge occurs as a natural part of day-to-day work in SMEs, often in an incidental way in



the workplace. Generally, informal training based on coaching for specific working tasks suits the purposes of many small companies, without interfering with daily business. Mentoring, supervision and coaching of employees by an experienced manager or staff member are commonplace. The European Commission's handbook on training in SMEs stresses that the most informal forms of workplace learning, such as skill development on the job, with which enterprises are familiar, can be adapted and used to address new competences linked to changes in technology, work processes and methods. However, proficiently organised, following well-identified needs and clearly defined objectives, imaginative solutions need to be tested to dismantle specific barriers faced by SMEs. Flexible organisation of learning allows work not to be disrupted, for example, by dispersing several training days into a period of several months, making use of mentors or through e-learning (European Commission, 2009c, p. 24-28). If an employee's absence is anticipated, job rotation can offer a solution when organised jointly with other companies, and coordinated by a local governing body (Ibidem, 24). However, small companies need to be helped to identify the most effective forms of workplace learning to integrate them better in the work organisation and to promote them more widely to other SMEs, within programmes that foster innovation in enterprises and continuing training (UK Commission for employment and skills, 2009, p. 71-73). Given the prevalence of informal forms of learning in SMEs, validation of learning acquired on the job plays a significant role in opening further education and training opportunities for SME workers.

Anticipating change is a success factor, since SMEs may sense the negative effects of structural change more than other companies; they can become the casualties of bigger enterprises' restructuring, being part of the supply chain. Training programmes and support services for companies, funding mechanisms and local networks that raise awareness of training benefits, should make certain that SMEs are not excluded from existing opportunities for lifelong learning and for adopting innovation (Cedefop, 2010e). Small companies will most likely need external support and specific expertise to analyse their situation with regards to skill needs, and establish suitable training arrangements, cooperating with other companies as appropriate. Therefore, through specifically targeted actions, company owners and managers need to be prepared for their training functions and assisted, since the burden of training needs analysis and training provision itself usually falls on their shoulders.

For many different reasons, which sometimes arise from the specificity of the sector, a lack of information on training provision and incentives, in many

SMEs training is not perceived as important by managers and workers alike. Within funding programmes or sectoral training funds, external assessment of training needs linking to broader changes at sectoral level, including raising employer and employee awareness of the benefits of training and the importance of developing both transversal and technical skills. Coaches, skill brokers or mediators can have a positive effect on business development in connection to training, by identifying company needs, offering tailored solutions and developing flexible training for micro and small enterprises (European Commission, 2009c, p. 21).

### 5.3. Partnership approaches to training in SMEs

Many SMEs may need encouragement and support to adopt business development plans, participate in innovation projects and take full advantage of technological innovation or new production processes. A supportive policy environment is needed to transform their working processes or introduce more efficient work organisation with the help of continuing training. A framework to foster business development and training in SMEs should combine an array of policy measures, funding opportunities, and external advice, while encouraging partnerships between enterprises and a variety of local actors, 'to create a learning-based process of innovation, change and improvement' (Cedefop, 2007b, p. 188).

Given the constraints that limit the training capacity of SMEs, partnerships, and networking between companies and a range of local actors are ways to develop tailored solutions. Within these partnerships,

'information flows, experiences are compared and new solutions worked out by extracting the best out of a broad range of ideas and experiences. Such coalitions can be formed on many different levels, from small workplaces, to both small and large networks and regions. Networks can support sector strategies for key local industries, focusing on the types of restructuring required to sustain competitiveness and employment in the medium to long term, and skill development agendas' (Cedefop, 2007b, p. 223).

Regional consortia associating training providers, research institutions and SMEs provide a platform for consultation, knowledge sharing and developing common strategies to respond to sectoral changes, and innovation transfer, in which skill development is critical (Cedefop, 2003, p. 65) Local partnerships allow economies of scale through common needs analysis and joint training provision. A strategic vision and a coordination body are needed for the

joint development of support services, such as guidance, and learning opportunities for employees, given that enterprises do not normally work in partnership with other public and private entities.

Such local and sectoral SMEs partnerships can contribute to the anticipation and management of sectoral change and result in snowball effects, like boosting business opportunities, supporting affected workers, and helping them make the best of their competences. To anticipate and manage sectoral change and restructuring efficiently, SMEs belonging to the same sector can be brought together to share knowledge on sectoral developments and challenges, from different perspectives of the industry's supply chain. In Member States where micro-enterprises prevail, partnership approaches could play a part in expanding training provision, as in the examples below.

'There has been a significant policy emphasis in Ireland on a network approach to training involving small enterprises. Industry-led partnerships, known as Skillnets, conceive and deliver training programmes across a broad range of sectors nationwide. In each Skillnet, three or more enterprises cooperate to carry out a training project that individual companies would be unable to undertake alone. Each network is designed to specific industry needs and delivers training, upskilling and professional development programmes. (Cedefop, 2009b, p. 71). A recent Cedefop analysis on the acquisition of key competences in the workplace concluded that 'the Skillnets model has been more successful than other approaches in engaging SMEs, which have accounted for 95% of the total number of funded companies in 2008, with 63% of the total number being micro enterprises. Since the networks are led by the enterprises, these decide what training they need, as well as how, where and when it should be delivered. As a result, the model is very flexible and can be adapted to stimulate the skills that are presently required' (Cedefop, 2010f).

In the Austrian composite skills training model (*Qualifizierungsverbund*) at least three independent enterprises develop a tailored skills training scheme for their staff and coordinate its implementation. The measures are conducted by external providers, with one enterprise taking over the central project coordination. To implement these training models, the PES provides intensive process support and financial assistance (Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK), 2008).

Learning networks for competence development have been established with similar objectives, in Flanders (Ministry for Education and Training, 2008). Similarly, regional skills partnerships in the UK bring together government agencies, employers, and education and training providers to develop coherent approaches to skill development in the regions (Niace, 2008). Combined with enterprise-led partnerships, in a number of countries, different support initiatives have been established to help enterprises identify their training needs, develop a working environment that stimulates learning, and design and deliver learning opportunities.

In partnerships for skill development it is important to involve other key players besides enterprise managers and owners to represent the interests of SMEs: chambers of crafts and commerce, and employers and trade union federations play an important role in raising awareness of the benefits of continuing learning to manage change in enterprises (European Commission, 2009c; Eurofound and Cedefop, 2009). Although small companies are not that often represented by trade unions and employers' organisations, the social partners are well aware of sectoral changes, training needs and available resources for training.

Existing financial incentives have been adapted to the training needs of SMEs and their employees. It appears that the most obvious advantages of training vouchers to encourage the training of SME staff are their simplicity, their positive impact in raising awareness of training needs, and their efficiency in meeting supply and demand, while respecting freedom of choice (Cedefop, 2009d). However, introducing training vouchers or other cost-sharing mechanisms is not sufficient to increase continuing training in SMEs. It needs to be accompanied by different kinds of support and guidance for SME owners with regard to financial incentives, training provision, and the establishment of a work organisation that stimulates on-the-job learning, as well as to their employees on the range of learning opportunities and incentives available to them. It is challenging for SMEs to provide training during working hours that innovative incentives and returns on their efforts may need to be considered to motivate and compensate workers who undertake training in their free time.

#### 5.4. Conclusions and policy messages

When companies introduce new working processes or technological innovation the inadequacy of skills becomes apparent. Raising SME commitment to training is a *sine qua non* for subsidising mechanisms for skill development opportunities to achieve the goal of expanding the provision of continuing training. In the case of SMEs, cost-sharing mechanisms, such as the sectoral training funds, need to develop specific actions targeting company owners and managers, whether it is awareness raising, training or advice, which may in turn lead to increased demand for training. As shown by the examples that illustrate this chapter, support services are crucial in helping enterprises to analyse their training response to sectoral and technological changes. Through public programmes that stimulate continuing training, enterprises

can be persuaded that if they do not invest in training, they risk being badly prepared for current market changes and may even run out of business.

Training networks are a powerful means of addressing the complex training needs of SMEs, and developing a new range of training services that match their specific constraints and requirements. Although for staff working in SMEs, training may not have an impact on career progress and salaries, any package to support innovative working processes in SMEs through training, should include both financial and non-monetary incentives for employees, such as the accreditation and certification of training and skills acquired, integrating training and mentoring within the working environment and compensating for training undertaken outside working hours. Both training organisation and methods need to acknowledge the constraints of enterprise size, and adopt alternative solutions such as flexible training and learning opportunities of a more non-formal and informal nature. Non-formal and informal learning, when integrated into working tasks, might not abolish completely the need for more organised and structured approaches to training. On-the-job learning is well suited to the constraints of SMEs, and it is worthwhile taking full advantage of it to meet both pressing and more customary training needs.

# Adult learning in socially responsible restructuring

## 6.1. Introduction

Restructuring of companies and economic sectors is an unremitting process that has kept going for decades, as economies are transformed and demand for certain goods and products flows and ends. Companies are being affected by the widespread effects of a globalising market, shortening product cycles, the arrival of new competitors, relentless pressures on cost-efficiency, and adjustment to new forms of work organisation. Since restructuring plays a role in the adjustment process by which businesses remain competitive, it can be argued that the question confronting companies is no longer whether, but how, to restructure (European Commission, 2005a). The European Commission defines restructuring as a modification of a company's workforce in terms of skills and qualifications required, and the number of jobs, following changes in the company's structure, and the evolving nature of work organisation and production processes (European Commission, 2009a).

While the pace and pressure for change may intensify in recession, large-scale job losses from both large and smaller employees occur at any time in the economic cycle (Cedefop, 2010e). Adaptation to change is now a constant feature in the lives of companies and workers. In the current economic turmoil, job losses have affected sectors where previous economic crises had have limited effects on employment, such as the financial and business-service sectors. Regardless of occupation and educational background, all sorts of employees may be affected. However, the risk of redundancy is higher for vulnerable groups, who are less likely to be readily reabsorbed in the labour market, as a result of skill levels and age.

Although restructuring has been seen as a negative phenomenon, appropriate policies, support mechanisms and strategic partnerships can reverse negative impacts and create conditions for growth and local job creation, by developing new businesses and services that can be more sustainable and provide higher quality jobs (European Commission, 2005a). Is that potential for growth realised in the same localities and regions as the declining economies? The attention attached to the negative consequences of restructuring is due to the

fact that job losses are visible immediately, whereas benefits appear only after a certain time and are not perceived as direct consequences of restructuring (OECD, 2007). Restructuring can underpin economic and social progress, if companies can manage the necessary change quickly and effectively, and as long as public action ensures that enterprise restructuring is carried out in sound conditions.

Career guidance and skill development are a key component of both restructuring processes, and preventive measures that attempt to avoid enterprises making workers redundant. With respect to training systems, an anticipatory approach to the effects of restructuring should comprise education and training system responsiveness to sectoral and regional needs for skills upgrading (Cedefop, 2010e). Enterprises that invest in their workers' employability, with greater emphasis on skills that promote labour market mobility across sectors, can support the adaptation of companies and workers to anticipated changes in work organisation and production methods. It is important not to underestimate the need to develop transversal skills, such as self-management, team working, or communication skills. A sound human resources development strategy can make restructuring either unnecessary in the first place or alleviate its impact to a considerable degree.

The social costs associated with restructuring can be high, leading to large-scale redundancies, and the decline of particular sectors or regions affected by a reduction or cessation of operations at a specific location. It is essential to accompany restructuring in a way that minimises the immediate negative effects on employment, in particular on those already experiencing difficulties in the labour market <sup>(5)</sup>. The impact of restructuring needs to be anticipated and managed well in advance, jointly with representatives of workers and company management, as well as governmental agencies and training providers, to define relevant support services for both employers and employees and pool together the necessary expertise and resources.

In the present economic downturn, adult learning is at the crossroads of key policy agendas for the economic recovery, related to employment, and the acquisition of 'new skills' that 'new jobs' to come will require. The chapter discusses the conditions that need to be met to assist workers affected by company restructuring in their transition to new employment, in the best possible way, through skill development and career guidance. The chapter follows two

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<sup>(5)</sup> EQUAL, Emerging lessons and insights on restructuring, September 2006. Available from Internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equal/data/document/etg3-0609-restruc.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/etg3-0609-restruc.pdf) [cited 17.12.2010].

main arguments: establishing partnerships is a suitable means to offer both companies and employees the range of learning services they require, so that restructuring is handled in a socially responsible way; and both career guidance and learning activities need to be tailored to the needs of employees and pay specific attention to the most vulnerable groups of workers.

## 6.2. Partnership approaches in socially responsible restructuring

The Cedefop report on *Socially responsible restructuring: effective strategies for supporting redundant workers*, looked at restructuring processes that attempt to minimise the negative effects on employees and local communities. In particular, it considered the extent to which enterprises and local partnerships have provided equitable and personalised support to employees trapped in restructuring situations to reintegrate the labour market (Cedefop, 2010e). Social dialogue is crucial in providing access to career support and learning opportunities to a broad range of employees.

The guidance and training services that need to be made available to affected employees go beyond the resources and expertise of all but the largest enterprises. Socially responsible restructuring requires ‘choreographing’ different services, to provide adequate forms of support, in partnership between companies, public employment services, guidance providers and training institutions (Cedefop, 2010e; OECD 2007; Eurofound, 2008c). Building up an in-depth knowledge of current and expected skill and occupation demands in local, regional, national and European labour markets is a prerequisite to guiding redundant workers back into employment. In fast-changing labour markets, the currency of labour market knowledge is not only dependent on research but also on a wide range of local and sectoral partnerships to get real time understanding of where job opportunities are, including emerging occupations.

While restructuring in large companies tends to monopolise the interest of the media, when it is associated with large scale redundancies and social costs, SMEs can bear the impact of restructuring effects, as supply-chain producers (OECD, 2007; European Commission, 2009c). Being disadvantaged at several levels, SMEs are often not able to plan ahead (Cedefop, 2009g). In normal circumstances, it is through cooperation with other companies and institutions that they can offer basic training to their employees; this is even more so in the context of restructuring. Managers



of very small businesses may not have the experience, the financial and human resources to anticipate changes and access support, including skill needs analysis and training delivery, so they can still be part of the supply chain (European Commission, 2009c). Yet SMEs are the engine for change and growth in the EU, so it is particularly important to assist them when the sector in which they operate and the companies that subcontract them undergo restructuring. Policy initiatives that intend to outweigh the negative impacts of restructuring should, therefore, support networking of SMEs and other partners, so they can anticipate difficulties early and plan joint solutions, including career guidance and training for their employees.

### 6.3. Tailoring training and career guidance to needs

Career guidance brings an important contribution to front-line restructuring, within strategies that support redundant workers. Career guidance can aid the transition into employment through a series of interrelated building blocks; these may include the opportunity to familiarise oneself with the labour market and validate previous on-the-job learning, weighing up strengths related to competences owned, as well as testing and tasting potential job prospects, to build up a new life and work project. Also, career guidance cannot be developed in isolation from other related services, such as work brokerage and work tasters, support for enterprise start-ups and learning and training activities that tone with individual circumstances.

The sooner workers are provided with an adequate combination of support and learning services, tailored to their needs, the sooner they are reactivated in the labour market, the more successful their return to employment (Eurofound, 2007b). The longer they remain unemployed, the more difficult it becomes to reintegrate the labour market and reconstruct a professional and life project. However, career guidance and counselling and other supporting interventions need to be carefully targeted to prevent raising unrealistic job expectations that would damage the self-esteem, the motivation to learn and the search for new employment. Many support services to redundant workers involve being close to those affected to understand how they see their future and how they think they can use their skills in new ways, in professional contexts and even occupations they had not envisaged before, and assist them in the preparation of a personal development plan, for life, learning and work.

Workers at risk of dismissal are not a homogeneous group that would lend themselves to a one-size-fits-all approach. Individual circumstances are important factors in shaping aspirations and abilities to manage work transitions; these depend on gender, age and skill level (Cedefop, Sultana, 2008). There is a need to develop further career advice and guidance for the most vulnerable groups, in particular longer-serving employees who have not experienced a working-life change of this sort in many years. In the current economic downturn, limited availability of alternative jobs may allow laid-off workers to consider longer term objectives, enhance their skills and opt for retraining and consider career shifts, such as self-employment, provided that they have adequate guidance and financial support throughout this period (Eurofound, 2009; Council of the European Union, 2010).

As shown by the practices detailed in the Cedefop study on socially responsible restructuring, the effectiveness of career guidance, and of further education and continuing training, is improved where affected workers have the opportunity to receive continued support, as long as they are in the company, and after being dismissed, and where the services are genuinely tailored to their needs. Career guidance helps employees manage life changes (from employment to retirement) and employment transitions (from one job to another or further learning), and take informed decisions on continuing training, based on realistic opportunities for re-employment, including enterprise start-up. Counselling and training on self-employment and business start-ups may be provided to those for whom this prospect seems feasible from their occupational background and motivation. The transition from being employed to running a business is a complex career step that requires not only initial guidance but continuing support as well. Best examples of practice extend support to staff under short-term contracts, employees of SMEs in the supply chain and family members of affected workers.

#### 6.4. Policy challenges of adult learning in socially responsible restructuring

Career guidance in restructuring situations is affected by different countries' variable starting points: the capacity and professionalism of career information, advice and guidance services for adults in employment; the way employers' social responsibilities are interpreted; and how extensive is the tradition and infrastructure for lifelong learning. When restructuring occurs in Member States where publicly-funded career guidance for adults is struggling to

develop, this can leave employees trapped in a situation that exceeds the company's capacity, according to the Cedefop study on socially responsible restructuring (Cedefop, 2010e).

Even in larger companies, which are better resourced to provide career guidance-related support and training to affected employees, services may be patchy and biased in favour of the most well-off employees in terms of qualifications and job positions. Support services for learning and work remain essentially reactive and not used to foster individuals' abilities to manage their careers and work transitions, rarely going beyond statutory requirements. Following redundancy, tensions may arise between guidance emphasis to support skill development for employability and those driven by rapid reintegration in the labour market, rather than empowering individuals to manage their own careers and learning (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004; 2008). Initiatives rarely follow long-term goals, such as helping workers develop enduring capacity to cope with change in the labour market and the workplace.

The use of career guidance as a socially responsible measure in managing restructuring remains discretionary; it is rarely included among workers' legal entitlements in restructuring situations. Statutory notification periods may even impair personalised career guidance interventions, where redundancies are announced within short notice. Further, narrowly conceived guidance support is usually provided in rapid response programmes, following short-term goals, with limited customisation and aftercare once the worker has left the company (Cedefop, 2010e). Where there is a formal requirement to provide guidance, individuals are often referred to public employment services, which tend not to be well-matched in their activities to the challenges of restructuring situations; since differentiation of services in employment offices to address workers re-employment prospect who are still in employment, but are soon to be made redundant, is uncommon. Collaboration between enterprises and public employment services is still insufficiently developed, possibly due to the fact that public employment services are sometimes slow in responding to changing labour market demands and in adjusting their qualification programmes accordingly. The career guidance needs of individuals at work are not being met effectively and successfully, potentially leaving the most vulnerable individuals poorly prepared to cope with labour changes (European Commission, 2005b). Not surprisingly, the 2009 Joint employment report insists on the need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public employment services, so they can provide a more personalised approach in pre-redundancy job search assistance (Council of the European Union, 2010).

The restructuring practices collected by Cedefop suggest that guidance and training are often conceived as a reaction to an immediate restructuring situation, when workers are already threatened by redundancy (Cedefop, 2010e). The opposite is required, with lifelong learning understood as an anticipative action and a continuous effort to readjust competences to labour market needs, changes in work organisation and production processes. Workers need to be given the opportunity to broaden their competences and be open to the idea of continuous learning, for which it is crucial to support enterprises creating the conditions in which the workplace can stimulate learning. Employee representatives can play the role of change agents and contribute to promoting a learning culture in companies.

## 6.5. Conclusions and policy messages

The present economic downturn draws attention to the urgency of continuing reforms in education and training systems, investing in the skill development of the workforce and ensuring a better match between skills and labour market needs. Local partnerships between employers, trade unions and public authorities are crucial to creating the conditions that will open new prospects for local labour markets and contribute to successful transition of redundant workers into new employment. Sectoral approaches to restructuring encourage joint efforts between companies that operate in different segments of the same economic sector so they can determine their common and complementary training needs, as well as jointly provide training.

Both successful practices and shortcomings in using career guidance and competence development in socially responsible restructuring offer lessons for companies, local and regional authorities, public employment services and the social partners, when designing strategies to anticipate and manage sectoral change. Effective practices to support laid-off workers and those soon-to-be made redundant have been developed within broad partnerships, bringing together complementary expertise on competence development, guidance, skill forecasting, labour market integration and business creation. In particular, addressing the challenges of socially responsible restructuring, by moderating the effects on local communities, demands that SMEs are mobilised, given the fact that they lack the capacity and expertise to offer their workers the full range of services, in particular guidance and competence development.

One target group deserves special attention: older workers, who may not have experienced working life transitions for a long time. Despite possessing

a wealth of employment experience, older workers might lack the vocational qualifications and practical skills that the labour market requires, making them more likely to be displaced by structural changes in the economy. In some sectors, the skills and knowledge of older workers are an asset, and some companies are looking at ways to retain them, while in others their competences are becoming obsolete and the challenge for older workers is either to acquire a new set of skills or to change job or sector. Not having the confidence for a new professional start that will imply having to learn new skills, older workers will have no option than claiming benefits, or taking part-time or lower paid jobs. In the case of older workers made redundant through company restructuring, it is important to engage with enterprises to address some of the stereotypes of older workers' ability to gain new skills. Guidance and training offers that are tailored to their specific needs and consider their former working experience, for example, through the validation and recognition of learning, are also needed.

# In-company trainers as key drivers of quality

## 7.1. Introduction

As stated in the Communication *New skills for new jobs* (European Commission, 2008c), upgrading skills is not a luxury for the highly qualified: it is essential for all of us. Trainers in enterprises and training consultants are in the front line of current initiatives aiming to upgrade the skills of the workforce and promote lifelong learning. National and sectoral initiatives that stimulate training and attempt to reinforce its relevance for enterprises – through subsidies, training levies and support services for enterprises to plan and deliver training – are having a profound effect on the competences required from trainers, particularly, when training should be delivered by accredited providers. In some Member States, remarkably little attention is paid to the ‘professionalisation’ of trainers of adults in enterprises. While national strategies for lifelong learning, incentives and subsidising mechanisms for continuing training are stimulating a training market that offers a broad choice to companies and workers, through tailored training solutions, the continuing professional development of trainers is crucial to respond to the changing demands of both employers and employees.

For the purpose of this analysis, trainers are working as freelancers or within institutions for continuing training that deliver training to enterprises, or they can be staff members who carry out induction, continuing training and education functions. While trainers are increasingly seen as the guardians of quality training in enterprises, this chapter argues that insufficient opportunities and incentives for professional development are open to them. Within enterprises, a large part of on-the-job training is provided by skilled workers, who do not have a professional identity as trainers. The chapter discusses current challenges and dilemmas related to trainers’ competence development, as well as opportunities to strengthen their professional status. Based on examples of commendable practice, the chapter gives some indications on how to enhance the training and professional development of in-company trainers.

## 7.2. Guardians of quality training with low professional status

In most countries, trainers of adults are not required to hold a particular training qualification, but need to be skilled workers with a certain period of work experience (Cedefop, 2007a). However, the basic competences and qualifications of trainers are receiving increased attention in a number of countries in the context of current lifelong learning and employment strategies, for which skill development and increased learning opportunities in the workplace are founding stones. At national and sectoral level, professional standards and competence frameworks for in-company trainers have been developed or are under consideration to enhance their status and basic qualifications. In several Member States, trainers of adults now need to acquire professional certification and be registered with a professional body, following a certification process that considers the validation of prior on-the-job learning and defines training pathways, which allow them to meet competence demands.

In-company trainers are not considered as an occupational group, given that, with the exception of full-time trainers in large companies or training consultants, training tends to be more a task than a job position. In very many cases, the training of colleagues is not clearly identifiable as a separate occupation but is a role combined with many other tasks. As a consequence, in-company training is not always provided on a full-time basis by people who possess specialised and officially recognised qualifications. A supplementary distinction has to be made between large companies, where training is specialised and carried out either by specifically appointed staff or by external training providers, and small companies, where the owner himself or a trusted employee is in charge of training and the induction of new employees.

Part-time trainers who train their colleagues, through mentoring or coaching, for example, and introduce them to the company's production and working processes, tend not to perceive themselves as 'trainers'. Since they do not have a strong training professional identity, only in exceptional cases, they take advantage of available opportunities to further improve their training competences. Although, the continuing professional development of trainers should be viewed as a lifelong enterprise, only in a few cases is it compulsory and it does not usually lead to salary increases or better career development prospects. For many reasons, in-company trainers do not engage in continuing learning: lack of incentives (for example, financial incentives, improved career

prospects, higher professional status); insufficient recognition and support by employers; and limited training opportunities <sup>(6)</sup>. Taken together, scarce opportunities for continuing training, meagre competence requirements, and the fragmented nature or absence of organisations representing training practitioners, indicate that in-company training is weakly formalised and professionalised in many countries.

For a long time, individual trainers were left very much on their own to cope with changes in the workplace: new forms of work organisation, technological developments, and age and cultural diversity of employees. In many countries, insufficient or inappropriate training, or both, are significant barriers to meeting the needs of diverse groups of learners and the changing demands of employers, handling very different learning situations, and making use of repertoires of training tools, methods and strategies. Recent Cedefop analyses of quality in training practices for SMEs in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia bring to light important shortcomings in trainers' understanding of specific sectors, enterprise needs and training methods (Cedefop, 2009g; 2010h). It was found that:

'while both public and private sector training providers claim to operate a policy of continuing training of trainers, in practice this is done merely on an hoc basis and in a rather fragmented manner' (Cedefop, 2009g, p. 52).

The European Commission's Communication on 'a new impetus for European cooperation in vocational education and training' suggests that trainers will need to develop further their pedagogical competences (European Commission, 2010d). In particular, there is a need to pay attention to the relevance, quality and attractiveness of training provided, especially among trainers of low-skilled adults in a workplace setting, where the trainer places the learner at the centre, stimulates motivation and provides a flexible learning environment (European Commission, 2009f; 2010e, p. 13). Both the quality of the training delivered to enterprises and the competences of trainers need to be addressed by any policy strategy on skill development to be successful. This applies to national and sectoral initiatives to promote lifelong learning opportunities in the workplace or to prepare the economic recovery through skill development.

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<sup>(6)</sup> European Commission (2008). Eurotrainer, making lifelong learning possible: a study on the situation and qualification of trainers in Europe. Available from Internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/eurotrainer1\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/eurotrainer1_en.pdf) [13.12.2010].



### 7.3. Expanding roles and changing competences for trainers in companies

According to a recent study carried out by the Cedefop TTnet network <sup>(7)</sup>, trainers' responsibilities are broadening; they may include training needs analysis, guidance and counselling, quality assurance and networking with a broad range of private and public institutions, to different degrees depending on the country and enterprise size.

'From the perspective of organisational development, trainers' familiarity with modern approaches to learning methods and didactics offer them a possible role of 'change agents' within the companies' innovation processes. All this points to the crucial need for continuing training giving the trainers the needed competences to solve the challenges at hand and meet the demands from the company, the industry, and local labour markets. Nowadays, the trainer has an increasingly personal tutoring role with guidance, support and counselling functions. This attaches great importance to the pedagogical skills of the trainer. As such, it seems quite alarming that only a few trainers have a pedagogical knowledge to plan alternative educational approaches and use pedagogical tools to support the learner' (Volmari et al., 2009, p. 34).

Particular challenges are the individualisation of learning, empowering and motivating learners, and addressing specific needs, expectations and circumstances. Trainers may have to support different stages of careers: coaching young adults at the start of their professional lives, training mid-career employees who need to update or expand their competences, upskilling or reskilling older workers, and even supporting transition into retirement. Meeting the needs of migrants, older and low-skilled workers require that trainers adjust their training skills and methods, in terms of social and pedagogical competences to stimulate learner autonomy, and help them own the assessment and learning process (OECD, 2008). As the trainers' role broadens, pedagogical competences become increasingly important in supporting workplace learning. In less formalised forms of training, such as on-the-job learning, trainers may help transform the working organisation into one in which workers can develop their competences further while undertaking working tasks and learning opportunities embedded in work processes. Here the trainers' primary role is not to convey broad vocational knowledge but to support colleagues and trainees to engage with applied tasks, and learn within work practice. In more formal forms of training, a different range

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(7) The TTnet is a Pan-European forum for practitioners and policy-makers, dealing with the training and professional development of VET teachers and trainers. Further information on the network can be found in: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/networks/teachers-and-trainers-network-ttnet/index.aspx> [cited 17.12.2010].

of challenges has to be faced. Participants in continuing training may have a clear picture of what they want to learn, for what purposes, and how learning should be arranged. In a consumerist approach to learning, they want value for money or for the time invested in training. While this puts both training providers and trainers under pressure, it can make training more effective and targeted (Cedefop, 2009b).

There is a call for trainers to widen their range of competences to assume broader tasks and responsibilities, which blur the lines and distinctions between different professional profiles, such as trainer, guidance counsellor and training manager (Cedefop, 2009a; 2009b). The unsolved dilemma is whether trainers should be generalists and, as in a one-man show, perform diverse roles, meet different training needs and possess a broad range of competences. Alternatively, they could specialise and cooperate instead with different types of learning providers and specialists, or work within multidisciplinary teams. The ultimate choices will depend on the size of the enterprise and how elaborated its training policy is. The ideal attitudes and competences of in-company trainers today could include:

- (a) being acquainted with specific sectors and understanding current developments and competences needed;
- (b) understanding the business drivers, priorities and demands of the enterprise, to establish a clear vision for the competence development of employees;
- (c) being responsive to changes in technology and work practices in the enterprise, by keeping abreast of new technology and innovation, and acquiring knowledge of the enterprise's working processes and organisation, different tasks and functions;
- (d) having subject matter and pedagogical expertise and skill assessment, as well as softer skills, such as flexibility and empathy;
- (e) understanding the starting point, expectations and needs of learners and adjusting training activities accordingly; using learner-centred approaches and on-the-job learning techniques;
- (f) selecting training processes and tools, such as coaching and e-learning, appropriately, taking into consideration the needs and constraints of both the enterprise and the workers;
- (g) evaluating learning outcomes and returns on investment to demonstrate added value;
- (h) engaging with different departments or cooperating with external organisations, and possessing good communication and organisation skills (OECD, 2008; Cedefop, 2009g, p. 52-57; Cedefop, 2010c).

Whereas trainers in the past were mainly playing the roles of instructor and mentor, full-time trainers may be required to undertake broader and more complex training-related functions, such as identifying training needs, designing training plans, and establishing synergies with a diverse range of partners. Cooperation with many other actors, including other enterprises, public employment services, universities and research institutes, is gaining significance in training, in particular for SMEs to train their staff. Still, in many countries networking is not yet perceived as a fundamental component of trainers' roles (Volmari et al., 2009). In large companies that run their own training departments, in-company trainers tend to assume a range of planning and organisational tasks related to the competence development of staff rather than just delivering training. Also, the improvement of learning opportunities in the workplace does not concern only trainers: a wide range of professionals – managers, human resources specialists, supervisors, mentors, working coaches and 'key workers' acknowledged for their experience and proficiency – who support the learning of others at the workplace may require support to do so effectively (European Commission, 2010f).

#### 7.4. Successful practices in training the trainers

Whether companies value and invest in training as a means to consolidate their business depends on a number of factors: the national tradition for lifelong learning; how corporate responsibility in competence development is understood; policy frameworks, incentives and support services for employers; and economic and labour market developments. Where the tight economic situation puts companies under pressure for rationalisation, resources for continuing training of staff – including in-company trainers themselves and in who undertake training functions for their colleagues – might be one of the areas affected by budget cuts, rendering imaginative and cost-effective approaches to trainers' training most needed. In Norway, the Akerhus University College has developed a training programme for in-company trainers, which intends to transform the practices that enterprises apply to training their staff.

The programme Vocational pedagogy in enterprise, which combines theoretical learning and day-to-day work in the workplace, has proved to be an efficient way to overcome employers' unwillingness to invest in the professional development of in-company trainers, particularly in the context of global economic crisis. In-company trainers become familiar with different training practices and techniques by developing a training project that is linked to the priorities of the business for which they work. In agreement with their employers, programme participants develop in the workplace a training solution for the competence gaps of the company as a whole or a specific department. Training projects may even transform the company's general learning environment. Through networking with trainers working in different sectors and types of enterprises, in-company trainers get alternative views on their own work and share resources and strategies. In the companies, training projects raise awareness of the importance of trainers' professional and personal development. The final evaluation considers the extent to which the expectations of both the employer and the employees have been met and whether the project has improved the learning environment in the company: this means that the initiative is taken very seriously by employers. Trainers receive a certificate from Akershus University College, stating the ECTS received, which opens the way to further education, through bachelor or masters programmes at the college. The involvement of the Association of Norwegian Process Industries in the design helped building a programme that would be relevant to sector and company changing needs (Cedefop, 2010c).

When in-company trainers return to their workplace following a training programme, new knowledge and skills acquired are not always fully exploited because this would demand organisational changes, in particular, rethinking training policies and working practices in the company. The Norwegian initiative suggests that when in-service training of trainers takes place on-the-job, the newly gained skills and knowledge are passed into the company and can eventually bring changes in its training policy and practices. Further, the success of any training initiative set up at national, regional or sectoral level for the professional development of trainers will depend on both in-company trainers and employers being involved at different stages of the process to ensure that the programme is relevant to company and trainer needs.

Continuous professional development, either through more formalised training or in a non-formal way in communities of practice, enables trainers to respond to new challenges in companies, related to work organisation and technological innovation. Networks of trainers and communities of practice promote a knowledge-sharing culture and encourage a shared repertoire of training methods, resources and strategies that have been developed over time. Much effort has been invested at national level in developing ICT tools and virtual platforms to assist trainers in continuing learning. Although e-learning has the potential to expand training opportunities in the workplace, specific

constraints and preferences for organising training according to company size need to be taken into consideration. Small businesses place a higher value in a learning environment that makes direct interpersonal contact possible, where learning is embedded in the working setting and tasks, which could be secured through blended learning (Cedefop, 2009b, p. 57).

## 7.5. Raising the quality of in-company training

In most European Union Member States, possessing a formal qualification is not a requirement for becoming a trainer in an enterprise, though mandatory qualification will occur in certain sectors, particularly where health and safety regulations are prominent. Some countries have established quality standards for training providers that might affect the qualification requirements of full-time trainers and training consultants and raise current standards of practice by establishing clear competence criteria. Professional standards, accreditation systems and registers of training practitioners contribute to raising the status of in-company trainers and aiming to ensure quality training in companies.

The potential benefits associated with nationally agreed or sector-specific core competences for trainers are:

- (a) identifying a legitimate set of core competences that provide the ground for delineating continuing training programmes for trainers;
- b) setting reference lines for the self-assessment of professional effectiveness and identifying professional development needs;
- c) establishing competence-based recruitment processes for trainers and for contracting training providers;
- d) setting the ground for validating and recognising learning acquired on-the-job;
- e) professionalising further training providers through benchmarks for assessing performance and prioritising areas for individual trainer and institution development;
- f) contributing to the long-term quality of training and ensuring a maximum return on training investment;
- g) improving the visibility and the professional identity of trainers and opening career progression routes (Volmari et al., 2009; Cedefop, 2010c).

Since many in-company trainers have developed their training competences on-the-job, the validation of prior learning has been integrated in certification

processes or qualification programmes. Validation makes trainers discover untapped career potential and become more aware of their professional strengths and ways to further improve their skills.

At the Austrian Academy of Continuing Education, adult educators and trainers in companies can achieve the recognition of competences gained throughout their professional practice, through a two-tier qualification structure, based on a certificate and a diploma. In France, the Association for Vocational Training of adults has created a national certificate for CVET trainers that trainers can obtain by attending formal courses or through the validation of the experience acquired on-the-job. The trainer prepares a portfolio of achievements and work experience and presents it to a committee that will decide to validate the work experience on a partial or complete basis. Five years are granted to pursue further training and acquire new experience that can then be reassessed. Attempting to build career prospects for trainers on former professional experience is important, since many in-company trainers acquire training competences on-the-job (Cedefop, 2010c, p. 41-47).

In recent years, in-company trainers have been the focus of policy initiatives aimed at certifying their training competences and bringing their qualifications forward. In several countries in-company trainers have the possibility to acquire professional certification either at national or sector level (such as in Denmark, Greece, Cyprus, Austria, Portugal and Romania) and be registered with a professional body (Greece and the UK), which means a commitment to continuing professional development. Certification processes usually include training pathways allowing VET trainers to meet established competence levels. It is too early to assess the benefits of certification processes, in terms of career development, salary incentives, and enhanced recognition and status, as these initiatives are relatively recent. These developments go hand- in-hand with the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms and the accreditation of training providers.

## 7.6. Conclusions and policy messages

High quality training in enterprises is both a policy objective and a means to make skill development opportunities in companies more effective, equitable and efficient. Training and professional development of trainers is an area that requires increased strategic action at policy level. Current policy agendas for upgrading skills and promoting lifelong learning are increasingly drawing attention to the competence development needs of in-company trainers.

While in-company trainers tend to have a strong vocational identity as skilled workers in a specific domain, they do not usually possess a strong identity as trainers. As a result, policy initiatives on continuing vocational training have difficulty in reaching trainers in enterprises as a target group. Further, there are very few interest groups for this occupational category in Europe. Where there are no minimum training standards for companies, obligatory basic workplace health and safety regulations are an indirect approach to improving the quality of in-company training, since they have resulted in higher levels of responsibility and recognition of trainers. Across Europe, minimum requirements and professional profiles for in-company trainers are being introduced to define the basic competences they need. Competence standards, qualification requirements and certification processes may well lead in the future to a redesign of 'training professions'.

The complexity of trainers' working environments, in particular in fast-moving sectors, requires innovative and cost-effective strategies for their continuing professional development, which will not constitute an additional burden or an unbearable demand. Flexible arrangements for continuing learning by trainers can be informal and non-formal, being project-based and organised on-the-job, or through peer learning. Communities of practice led by sector organisations or training providers themselves have been successful in offering advice, assessing training needs, encouraging knowledge sharing and shaping training opportunities tailored to trainer needs. Trainers in companies are facing new challenging tasks for which they need to be supported. They will have a decisive role in the design of working environments and work organisation that encourage learning, such as work processes in which skill development is embedded.

In-company trainers are key drivers and sine qua non conditions for high quality continuing training and on-the-job learning in enterprises. Trainers are also a key partner in strategic policies that encourage lifelong learning and age-friendly working environments, as well as those that attempt to secure employment, through successful life and work transitions, and by providing the right skills for the new jobs that will emerge in the future. By failing to attract and retain the right trainers, and by not offering them opportunities for professional development, we run the risk of building castles in the air. Strategic policy developments are acknowledging the contributions of trainers and the need to support them in their increasingly demanding tasks. A lot has been done to improve the status of trainers and much more needs to be done to improve their competences, status and recognition.

# Conclusions

## Key policy messages to develop further workplace learning

Widening learning opportunities in the workplace does not require only that continuing training opportunities are increased and better tailored to the needs of both employees and employers, but also that working practices in enterprises are transformed in a way that stimulates learning. It is equally important to offer workers opportunities to develop their competences and to make sure that these are later applied on the job and beyond. On-the-job learning is dependent on the design of workplaces that support quality work, and in which people keep active the capacity to learn, and acquire new knowledge and skills while carrying out their working tasks and in cooperation with others.

Employers may not be able on their own to build up working environments that ensure both quality work and active learning. There is a need for integrated policies bridging training, employment and innovation agendas, as well as for pooling together different sources of expertise and resources to devise and implement practical measures in enterprises that encourage different forms of learning, such as continuing training and less formal on-the-job learning. Human resources specialists, management, employee representatives and a broad range of outside partners have a contribution to make to efforts for transforming work processes so that they encourage on-the-job learning, while enhancing productivity and innovation. It is also imperative for training and education providers to adopt a customer-led approach, to organise training in a flexible and relevant manners that meet the needs of enterprises and employees, overcomes constraints linked to size and work organisation, and responds to emerging skill demands and sectoral changes.

Skills brokers and training advisers with specific knowledge of sectors are effective in reaching employers reluctant to train, since they contact enterprises directly, provide tailored advice, in particular to assess training needs, determine the kind of training specific enterprises will need, in terms of content, methodologies and organisation, find adequate training providers and



access funding. Continuing training provision needs to respond to dramatic changes, which were exacerbated by the present economic crisis, across industries, sectors and occupations. Medium and small-sized enterprises tend not to have human resources policies: in these, employers need even more help to develop strategies on skill development, in a variety of domains.

Adult learning in the workplace is at the crossroads of major policy developments in lifelong learning, labour market participation of older workers, and the acquisition of 'new skills' that the 'new jobs' to be created will require. The following section proposes some suggestions for action to improve participation in learning opportunities in the workplace.

## Raising employer awareness and bringing together innovation policies and skill development strategies

Incentives to promote continuing training will have limited effects, as long as enterprises are not aware of how skill requirements may develop in the future. Most enterprises that do not provide training do not see the need for investing in skill development and believe that staff is adequately skilled for work duties. How can awareness in enterprises of the benefits of skill development for anticipating and tackling sectoral changes be stimulated? This calls for chambers of commerce and trade and employers' representatives to raise awareness of emerging trends on skill requirements and occupations, changes in specific sectors linked to innovation in technology, and adjustments in production and work processes. National, regional and sectoral mechanisms and programmes that foster innovation in enterprises and continuing training, such as sectoral training funds, can help shape a shared analysis or understanding among enterprises of current developments and anticipated skill needs. On the premise that enterprises will only invest in training to sustain competitiveness, it is critical to publicise the benefits of training, through quantitative figures and also case studies based on specific enterprises that illustrate a range of benefits, for example, improved work organisation, efficiency, productivity, innovation and adaptation to sectoral changes or increased commitment of staff.

Getting the right skills is fundamental for enterprises to be innovative, and adopt new technologies, work organisation, and production processes. A fundamental question needs to be raised: is limited investment in continuing

training the result of lack of awareness of training needs or is it due to limited innovation and stable business strategies in enterprises? Enterprises are not likely to invest in training when there is a status quo in their working practices and they do not foresee changes in their technology, production processes or work organisation. The adoption of quality standards, new services and products, and the improvement of work organisation are all ingredients of business competitive advantage and stimulate employer demand for skills.

In contrast, narrow business strategies and routine in work organisation may lead to limited demand for further learning and skill development from both employers and employees. Policy initiatives need to encourage employers to leave behind this equilibrium position and raise their game in terms of technology, innovation in goods and services, market services and work organisation. Changes in work processes and more ambitious business strategies would lead to new skill requirements in enterprises and boost training demand. The economic downturn further increases the need for synergies between policy measures that promote continuing training in enterprises and strategies that support innovation and business development and raise awareness of the benefits that work-based learning can bring. Innovation and training policies should go hand-in-hand. Policy actions and incentives need to encourage employers to leave behind this equilibrium position, and raise their game in terms of technology, innovation in goods and services, market strategies and work organisation, and as a result, increase skill requirements. However, the present economic downturn may predispose enterprises to be more conservative in their business development and limit risks.

## Networking and shared responsibilities supporting workplace learning

For lifelong learning to become a reality, ordinary workplaces should become learning environments. This raises important aspects of employer and trade union roles in promoting lifelong learning and worker employability. Within the social dialogue, as part of tripartite consultations, formulating an agenda or a policy framework of action for managing economic change could ensure all parties' commitment to skill development and bring concrete efforts and steps. Public authorities, employers, trade unions and workers need to share the responsibility for skill development but, in the long run, the benefits will most probably outweigh the costs, as labour market participation

increases, skills are upgraded and expanded, and transitions between jobs are better secured. Within local and sectoral strategies for economic development, networks between enterprises and other key partners are valuable in anticipating changes and planning joint solutions, among which are flexible training and career guidance and counselling to help workers develop new skills on demand.

Despite progress in building up lifelong learning strategies at national, regional and local level, strong inequalities in access to learning for the adult population remain and need to be specifically addressed. The task of widening learning opportunities cannot be carried out by public authorities on their own: responsibility has to be shared by a broad range of partners, including the social partners. In the present economic turmoil, budgetary constraints could be more reasonably met through coordinated and multidisciplinary approaches to the design and delivery of both learning provision and appropriate support services, such as guidance and counselling. Synergies between different providers would allow delivery of learning opportunities in a differentiated manner, according to specific needs and circumstances. Barriers to the expansion of continuing training and on-the-job learning need to be considered from the perspective of both employers and employees, and multifaceted solutions put into action.

For enterprises, it is crucial to achieve flexible and strategic training provisions, capable of anticipating and meeting employers' evolving skills and job requirements and emerging economic opportunities. We should aim for increased cooperation among government agencies, enterprises, sector organisations and training providers, in an effort to improve the scope of training and make the best use of available incentives, support services for both employees and enterprises, and mechanisms for valuing learning. Only through better coordination of existing resources it would be possible to customise skill development initiatives to employers' needs, while personalising services according to the needs and circumstances of individuals. Improving the relevance and responsiveness of continuing training and less formal on-the-job learning requires that diverse policy measures, sources of expertise, financial incentives and learning services are combined, responsibilities shared and partnerships expanded to devise and implement practical measures in enterprises.

The reproduction of inequalities in learning participation according to individual qualifications (the highly qualified receiving most training) may also be observed among sectors, with knowledge-intensive sectors being more inclined to provide training. Lifelong learning policies should also address

sectoral inequalities related to training. Special attention should be paid to the specific needs and circumstances of SMEs. Not only do their employees have fewer opportunities to develop their competences, but SMEs are also decisive in achieving the goal of creating more and better jobs, knowing that before the crisis they were the main source of new jobs in Europe. Given that training challenges exceed SME capacities and resources, partnership approaches bring the opportunity to develop flexible training solutions adapted to their organisation constraints. Training providers, such as higher education institutions, need to tailor further their training programmes, in terms of content, methods and organisation, to meet the needs of employers and employees in small enterprises.

The ambition is also to achieve synergies between economic renewal strategies, innovation policies, and employment and skill development agendas. The contributions of adult learning to key policy areas, such as flexicurity, innovation in enterprises and age management policies are widely acknowledged. There is still a need to improve cooperation and complementarity between national policies, regional, sectoral and local strategies, actions and services that have a linkage with adult learning.

## Lifelong guidance for lifelong learning

Guidance is a key ingredient in lifelong learning policies and strategies that attempt to expand learning opportunities in the workplace. Career and life pathways develop as a continuum of transitions from education to working life, from employment to training or unemployment, from a long-lasting job to another company and even a different sector or occupation, from working life to retirement. As qualifications become volatile and workers face intensified work transitions, career guidance and counselling becomes increasingly important, although guidance provision has not been sufficiently extended to employed adults. Local, regional and national governments, the social partners and guidance providers must make sure that adults get the right information and advice to make informed decisions on learning and working, to navigate in a complex labour market and acquire the skills and qualifications that will allow them to remain in employment and progress in their working life.

Tailored information and guidance on working and learning could contribute to increased participation in education and training for low-skilled workers, whenever it is part of comprehensive lifelong learning strategies which

integrate diverse support services and incentives to promote learning, and make use of non-formal and informal learning in the workplace. Guidance may channel individuals into validation processes for the competences they have gained through life and work, bringing a positive impact on their personal and career development, and increasing motivation for continuing learning. Within lifelong learning strategies, governments, social partners and enterprises should increase efforts to make guidance and validation arrangements available to employees.

## Trainers ensure the quality of continuing training and should not be neglected

The success of lifelong learning strategies and employment agendas require expanding access to learning opportunities in the workplace and demand that trainers are supported throughout their careers to upgrade their specialist and pedagogical knowledge and skills. Factors influencing training include technological innovation, changes in work organisation within companies, the demand for more efficiency, effectiveness and quality assurance, and the policy objective to support learning for an increased variety of target groups who have specific needs, such as older workers. Trainers in companies are changing roles and might need to possess a new set of knowledge and skills to cope with an enlarged range of challenges and demands. At sector and national level, a number of initiatives are being taken to increase the status and define minimum competence requirements for trainers, in an open and flexible manner, through competence standards and continuing training, or through more formalised processes that can lead to trainers certification. Subsidising mechanisms for continuing training in enterprises are already considering in-company trainers as one of their targets, to familiarise them with emerging changes in particular sectors, which could be considered as good practice in ensuring the relevance of training. Professionalising trainers is a challenging enterprise, given that many employees who undertake training tasks in enterprises do not have a strong professional identity as 'trainers'. The training and professional development of trainers require further strategic action, as well as imaginative and flexible approaches, since trainers are the champions of quality in continuing training.

## Key competences provide the foundations for further learning

Whatever knowledge and skills we acquire, we will have to upgrade them and 'relearn' them throughout life. Specific attention should be paid to key competences, which lay the foundations for further learning. Company training is often strongly focused on the daily tasks of employees and not on strengthening their employability. It is important to invest also in skills that are generic to a wide range of jobs and provide the foundations for further learning. Since employers are more interested in developing talented employees and governments target workers with low skill levels, current actions might be doing a disservice to 'middle-skilled' workers, who also need to plan their career progression and learning with reference to future skill demands.

Low participation in education and training among low-skilled adults and older workers is due to a combination of factors, including a shortage of training and learning programmes adapted to their needs and life situations. To increase participation rates in learning, joint efforts should be made towards improving less formal types of learning opportunities, on the job, as well as more formalised forms of training in the workplace, for those who are more vulnerable in the labour market. It is imperative to ensure that adults possess a platform of skills of both general and technical nature, which will help them to remain in employment. Cooperation between employers, public institutions and a broad range of learning providers is again necessary to offer improved choice and opportunities for learners.

A number of challenges arise in relation to the acquisition of basic skills, not least the fact that adults with basic skill gaps do not necessarily recognise them and are frequently reluctant to look for assistance. As a precondition for attending a continuing training programme, low-skilled adults may need to have their prior learning validated or to acquire the key competences that provide the foundations for further learning, such as literacy or language learning. Combining the acquisition of basic competences with vocational training or on-the-job learning may offer an efficient solution. Training providers will need to tailor further their training provision for these target groups, whereas enterprises need to foster the right climate to encourage employees with basic skills gaps to participate in learning. Outreach strategies in the workplace are effective in attracting and motivating low-skilled workers to take on learning; and trade union learning ambassadors may have a key

role to play. To reach reluctant adults who are not motivated, their needs, expectations and difficulties need to be considered in the design of training provision and methods, as well as learning services.

A pitfall to avoid is allowing workers with the most urgent need for training (the less qualified, older workers, employees in restructuring companies) to remain underrepresented in training programmes and financial incentives that stimulate participation in training. The continuing development of competences should not be seen as the sole province of the low-skilled, nor as the privilege of the best qualified. Given that transitions are now an ordinary part of our working life, continuing learning should be viewed as a necessity and a responsibility for all, for which we will need to be assisted by appropriate incentives, guidance and training services.

# Definitions

**Adult learning** encompasses ‘all forms’ of learning undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training, however far this process may have gone. Depending on the purpose, intentionality, location, timing, structure, teacher-learner relations and outcomes, learning will be defined as ‘formal’, ‘non-formal’ or ‘informal’. Formal adult learning is generally organised by institutions, is intentional, structured (in terms of learning objectives and outcomes, programmes, time and support) and leads to certificates and diplomas. Non-formal learning is structured and intentional from the learner’s perspective but is generally not provided by a formal education or training body and typically does not lead directly to certification. Informal learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure, is not structured and typically does not lead directly to certification. It may be intentional but is mostly non-intentional or incidental (European Commission, 2001).

**Career management skills** play a decisive role in empowering people to shape their learning, training and career pathways. Career management skills comprise ‘learning about the economic environment, business and occupations’, ‘being able to evaluate oneself, knowing oneself and being able to describe the competences one has acquired in formal, informal and non-formal education settings’; and understanding education, training and qualification systems” and act upon that (Council of the European Union, 2008a).

**Continuing training** is understood as ‘education and training after initial education or entry into working life, aimed at helping individuals to improve or update their knowledge and skills; acquire new skills for a career move or retraining, or continue their professional development’. Terminology of vocational training policy. A multilingual glossary for an enlarged Europe (Cedefop; Tissot, 2004).

**Informal learning** results from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is mostly unintentional from the learners’ perspective. It typically does not lead to certification. Terminology of vocational training policy. A multilingual glossary for an enlarged Europe). (Cedefop; Tissot, 2004).



**Key competences**, following the European Reference framework of key competences for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2007b), these cover key knowledge, skills and attitudes ‘which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. The Reference Framework sets out eight key competences: communication in the modern tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competences; digital competences; learning to learn, social and civic competences; a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and cultural awareness and expression’. Critical thinking and career management skills fall within ‘social and civic competences’ and a ‘sense of initiative and entrepreneurship’.

**Lifelong guidance** refers to a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make decisions related to education, training and occupation, and to manage their individual life paths in learning and work. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, and support to acquire decision-making and career management skills (Council of the European Union, 2002; 2008a).

**Lifelong learning** embraces all learning activity undertaken throughout life for the continuous development and improvement of knowledge and skills needed for personal fulfilment and employment. The term ‘lifelong’ learning draws attention to time: learning throughout life, either continuously or periodically. The term ‘lifewide learning’ underlines the spread of learning, which can take place across the full range of life activities. The lifewide dimension brings the complementary nature of formal, non-formal and informal learning into sharper focus, according to the Memorandum on Lifelong learning (European Commission, 2000).

**Learning to learn** is the ‘competence to pursue and persist in learning, to organise one’s learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. It includes awareness of one’s learning processes and needs, identifying available learning opportunities, and the ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully. This competence means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills, as well as seeking and making use of guidance’, according to the European Parliament’s recommendation on ‘key competences for lifelong learning’ (European Parliament, 2006).

**Literacy** refers to having the skills to understand and process information featuring in documents. It also comprises multimedia and digital literacy.

**Low-skilled workers** are defined as workers who have basic educational levels (ISCED-0-2). They can also be defined according to occupations, in which case, they work in elementary, operating and sales occupations, requiring first and second skills levels (ISCO sub-groups 5-9).

**Skill development**, in the particular context of this report, refers to any work-related learning or training activity that results in enhanced skills, knowledge and aptitude to perform a job.

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European Centre for the Development  
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# Learning while working

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# Learning *while* Working

## Success stories on workplace learning in Europe

This report presents an overview of key trends in workplace learning and takes stock of previous research carried out by Cedefop and other European and international organisations.

Company training tends to be focused on the daily functioning of employees in the workplace and not on strengthening their employability through the acquisition of competences that can be transferred across different working environments, enterprises and even sectors and occupations. Much of the training provided by companies relates to the induction of new employees or mandatory training required to comply with law, such as health and safety. Beyond this, training efforts in companies usually give priority to those in higher status jobs, who are often those with the highest education and training achievement. Adults with low education achievement participate less in training and undertake less learning-intensive working tasks. A key challenge lies in increasing the share of poorly qualified groups taking part in in-company training. Increasingly challenging labour market environments require that the workforce, independent of the level of education, acquires a broad range of social and work-related competences. Workplace learning aims to play a central role in lifelong learning and employment strategies.

How can the workplace support skill development throughout life? How can the low skilled be motivated to take on learning? How can workplace learning attract more adults into education and further training? What kind of policies, services and incentives need to be put in place to encourage employer and worker commitment to lifelong learning?

Can the potentially conflicting goals of enterprises (developing job-oriented competences) and states (acquiring transferable competences that support employability) be balanced? Can the working culture of companies be transformed into one which stimulates individual learning processes and derives benefits on a company level? How can workplaces become conducive to learning?

Success stories illustrate some of the responses that national, regional and local governments, together with the social partners, have produced to meet these important challenges.


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