



**Conference “Lifelong Development of Competences and Qualifications:  
Roles and Responsibilities”**

**23-24.5.2003 , Athens**

**CONCLUSIONS**

**Organized jointly by the European Training Foundation, the Federation of Greek Industries, CEDEFOP and the Greek General Confederation of Labour, under the auspices of the Greek Presidency of the EU.**

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The conference was organized jointly by the European Training Foundation, the Federation of Greek Industries, CEDEFOP and the Greek General Confederation of Labour, under the auspices of the Greek Presidency of the EU.

The main objective was to raise awareness and stress the importance of the issue of lifelong development of competences and qualifications of the workforce between the member-states of the EU and the candidate countries as crucial in achieving the Lisbon European Council strategic goals and make *Europe “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”*.

The discussions, the presentations and the working groups meant to provide information and exchange of experiences concerning the level of progress European member countries and candidate countries are making on the topic of development of competences of their workforce and to disseminate good practices.

Furthermore, the conference meant to stress the role and responsibilities of all actors involved in society in promoting lifelong learning, namely the state, the enterprises and the employees.

The conference was attended by 83 participants from 25 EU member-countries and candidate countries representing the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, international organizations (OECD, ILO), European employers and employee organisations (UNICE, ETUC, CEEP) , social partners organisations and officials from the Ministries of Labour and Education from all member states and from the Greek Presidency.

A summary of the conclusions drawn during the discussions is as follows:

*General outlines*

- Lifelong learning is still far from being a reality for all and there’s still a gap in learning opportunities between those with low skills and the higher educated ones, between younger and older age groups.
- There is a need to invest more and invest more efficiently in human capital to provide opportunities for lifelong learning. This must be a priority in order to meet the constantly changing demands of a skilled and adaptable workforce.
- The governments, the enterprises, the social partners and the individual should all recognize that investing in education and training should be a shared responsibility between them with regard to competences development for all.

- An effective cooperation between national governments, the social partners, local authorities and institutions and European institutions is required to promote and improve the quality of the skills' upgrading of the workforce.
- The educational and training systems of all country-members of the EU have to go through radical adaptations in order to meet the demands of the ongoing changes of the labour market and bridge the gap of the mismatches between supply and demand in skills in the economy of knowledge.
- Basic, personal, and social skills are required to equip individuals for their better occupational and geographical mobility. Initiative-taking, problem-solving, learning how to learn, entrepreneurship, team-working are some of the core skills to be integrated in the basic education and initial training system.
- The social partners role becomes fundamental in the formulation of policies and their implementation in enhancing competences and qualifications.

### The working groups

Through the various discussions that took place in the three Working groups interesting conclusions were drawn, concerning needs, gaps and weaknesses. The working groups were organised under three topic-titles and were structured along the lines of the priorities that the European social partners find crucial for the implementation of the lifelong development of competences in their "Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications". These were namely: 1. Mobilizing resources/Investing efficiently in competences and qualifications, 2. Analysis/Anticipation of skill and Training Needs, 3. Guidance and Counselling

### *Mobilising Resources/Investing efficiently in competences and qualifications*

A need for more funds in training is a factor recognised by all member and candidate countries of the EU. *How can more funds be attracted and managed efficiently for lifelong learning initiatives* is a key issue to be tackled by all stakeholders at each country. *What financial incentives will the governments provide equally to employers and employees and the individuals to invest in lifelong training?* Current policies in effect in different countries have shown gaps and deficiencies. Three case studies were presented by Belgium, Poland and Hungary leading to the following conclusions:

- The resources afforded to Lifelong learning are funded from training or unemployment provisions and through collecting contributions from the employers
- The effectiveness of measures depend on how truly efforts respond to national requirements
- Attracting individuals towards investing in lifelong learning remains a difficulty in most countries due to lack of interest (older employees), lack of free time (self-employed) or resources (Sme's)

- Funding for the training of the unemployed lacks the desired level of effectiveness from the part of the state
- Lifelong programmes are administered by central or local government bodies but seldom are social partners involved in the administration of such systems. Their level of bureaucracy is often deterrent to lifelong learning.
- Unless a proper accreditation system is in place, the efforts undertaken in lifelong learning can hardly be ensured for the value attained

### *Analysis/Anticipation of skill and training needs*

Employers, as well as their employees and their representative organisations are the primary sources of focus on the changing business environment and its impact on the skills, knowledge and aptitudes needed by companies to survive, remain competitive and grow. They have continuously emphasised the need for the workforce to have a broad range of skills and competences beyond a narrow range of occupationally specific skills. Basic skills have been identified as a major priority for action at EU level. In addition, there is a general shift upwards in skill levels in most occupations as a result of the global market and the knowledge economy. All these factors lead to the need of an ongoing process of anticipation of skills and training needs. *What needs to be done and how to do it*, is the key question that was raised and through the case studies that were presented from Greece, The Czech Republic and France, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The social partners must be active in the field of anticipation of qualifications changes
- Competences in a given work situation must be recognised for each worker and considered in some cases equivalent to formal training
- The definitions of qualifications must be broadened to assure mobility within the sectors and between sectors
- Initial education must be a solid foundation for lifelong learning
- Each enterprise must make the development of its employees' competences a crucial issue
- Each employee must manage the development of his/her competences

### *Guidance and Counselling*

To promote lifelong learning, career information, guidance and counselling systems have to be developed to provide a wide range of guidance functions to help all adults maintain employability and flexibility to change. Career guidance services are provided mainly at schools or to the unemployed adult and tend to be remedial in nature. What is truly needed is a proactive approach addressing a wide group of individuals. Public authorities and the social partners could form closer links and partnerships to provide ways of promoting better access for workers and employers to information, guidance and counselling services in order to enhance occupation mobility, workforce upskilling, individual

competence plans and corporate strategies. Different roles can be played and initiatives can be generated and implemented by the public authorities, the employers, the trade unions. The case studies presented by the UK, Latvia and Lithuania led to the following conclusions:

- Career guidance and counselling is crucial in achieving lifelong learning goals, meeting the needs of the labour market and promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion
- Social partners' networks have proved to be highly efficient in the implementation of work opportunity programmes, including guidance for the long term unemployed
- Trade unions have been very effective in developing workplace guidance models aimed at disadvantaged groups, in particular low-paid and low-skilled workers
- Partnerships developed between education providers and the social partners prove very fruitful in making the educational institutions more responsive to the needs of the employees and the labour markets in general
- Exchange of experiences between member countries can lead to the development of networks of services that will help remove barriers and obstacles to information provision and increasing employability
- Appropriate financial models are yet to be developed. All players need to seek new and diversified sources of financing career guidance and counselling.

### *Roles and Responsibilities in the promotion of lifelong development of competences and qualifications*

It has been widely recognised in this Conference that, in order to reach the goals of the European Union in the promotion of lifelong learning, there is an urgent need to *encourage partnerships between all actors involved to generate initiatives to improve the quality of the employees' skills.*

The *roles and responsibilities of the social partners* in policy formulation and in investing and providing learning opportunities and training become very important as well as effective as case studies in this conference have shown.

With their "*Framework of actions for the development of competences and qualifications*" they have taken a joint initiative and have already made progress implementing an action plan.

*Recognising that investing in education and training can be a shared responsibility between governments, enterprises, the social partners and the individual is a key issue to meet the challenge.*

### *The governments' role*

Investing in basic education and initial training.

- Cooperating with the social partners organisations for matching provided education with the future needs of the labour market
- Sharing the responsibility for investment at groups that run the risk of social exclusion
- Ensuring that education and training are accessible to all
- Creating an economic environment and incentives for enterprises and individuals to invest individually or jointly in education and training
- Developing a career guidance and counselling system accessible to all

### *The enterprise's role*

- Making the workplace a major source of Lifelong learning
- Main responsibility to train their employees
- Sharing the responsibility in initial vocational training of young people to meet their future needs

### *The individuals' role*

- Managing their own education and training
- Investing in their personal career development, supported by public and enterprise investment in lifelong learning

### *The employers' organisations role*

- Encouraging learning within enterprises
- Influencing training policies drawing attention to the need for long term investment in training
- Training their own members through their own institutions

### *The workers' organisations role*

- Promoting a learning culture among workers, including those who are not formally employed
- Ensuring access to broad-based and portable skills training to enhance mobility and prevent social exclusion

### *The social partners' role*

- Strengthening social dialogue on training
- Sharing responsibility in formulating education and training policies
- Engaging in partnerships with each other or with governments for investing in, planning and implementing training.