



European Trade Unions Strategies on Lifelong Learning

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LO
The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions
2004

Varenr: 4234

Isbn-nr: 87-7735-650-0



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This report is the result of a collective endeavour, coordinated by Anders Vind, with contributions from experts in other member states.

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Foreword

In Denmark, lifelong learning is a key issue to the trade union movement. Workers' possibilities of developing and improving their skills are crucial in order for them to maintain their position in the labour market today.

The Danish trade union movement is an important player in connection with the planning and organisation of continuous and supplementary training for Danish workers. But what is the situation like in other European countries?

LO has asked four persons with knowledge on lifelong learning as well as the trade union movements in Great Britain, France, Germany and Denmark, respectively, to prepare status reports from these countries. How is continuous and supplementary training organised and what role does the trade union movement play in this connection?

At the same time, the four authors have attempted to provide their personal suggestions to which consequences the strategies of the above countries might have on the possibilities of establishing a joint European strategy for continuing training systems and lifelong learning.

The contributions of the authors reflect their own personal opinions and do not reflect the official attitudes of the respective trade union movements.

It has been natural for LO to make use of its international cooperation in the ETUC, (the European Trade Union Confederation), in order to put its own discussions into perspective. LO finds it important to develop national Danish strategies in the field of training and education, including lifelong learning, but we believe that it is unavoidable to do so in an international and, particularly, in a European perspective. Our society, and especially our labour market, is becoming increasingly internationalised - a growing number of our members are moving to other countries for training or work, a growing number of our colleagues have completed their training and education abroad and, not least, the number of multinational employers has grown. There is thus an increasing number of European influences that affect our training and education programmes - even though training and education is regarded as a purely national matter.

With this report, LO would like to see a strengthening of discussions of educational policy and lifelong learning in Denmark - and with the English language version, we hope to contribute to the European development of the trade union strategy in this field. We hope to see a solid European debate on this issue and hereby thank the contributors from the other countries.

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Vice-President of the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions.*

1. Setting the European framework for LLL and the Trade Unions

Lifelong Learning is of great importance in order to meet the objectives of the European Union in terms of the development of the knowledge-based society based on full employment, competitiveness, social inclusion, and social cohesion. These are the shared objectives adopted by the Lisbon European Council in the Spring of 2000.

The knowledge-based society concerns all of us. It's not just about a few high-skilled people – even though this also is a key element – but it affects jobs at all levels, and it concerns the old economy and the new high-tech economy.

Access to lifelong learning contributes to fulfilling several objectives shared by all trade unions in Europe: Individual development and individual fulfilment, the promotion of equal opportunities, the development of active citizenship and it also promotes greater social cohesion and integration in societies that are becoming increasingly multi-cultural and where the pyramids of age are being slowly but steadily reversed; Finally it also stimulates economic development.

On the surface of the discussion, there is a broad consensus on LLL – but at a certain point it does come down to political priorities. LLL must not create new categories of socially excluded individuals and it must ensure that individuals can acquire the knowledge, skills and qualifications – the instruments – to enable them to act in the face of the rapid evolution of society and the labour market, by providing the right response at the right time to each citizen.

Lifelong learning in the knowledge-based society must represent new opportunities for everyone. Europe must construct a new culture of lifelong learning. It must develop innovative and integrated approaches, greater synergies between the different policies and the authorities responsible for their implementation, both nationally and at the European level. This implies defining new objectives, new rights and new responsibilities for the parties concerned.

Trade Unions at the European level are involved in several processes that include policies on LLL:

- The European Employment Strategy, the peer review between member states and the recommendations from the Commission addressed to Member States are good examples, although progress has been slow in the implementation of lifelong learning, with few national objectives being defined.
- In 2000, the EU-Commission launched the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. This memorandum called for comments from the social partners both at the national level as well as at the European level. Based on this discussion, the Commission made the Communication in 2001.
- The Bruges-Copenhagen Initiative that calls for mutual recognition of vocational education and training, closer cooperation and the use of the open method of coordination. As this Initiative was agreed on, not only within the framework of the EU, but as an agreement of individual Ministers of Education from 27 European countries, it is potentially more politically efficient than the previous attempts to create some EU-cooperation despite the exclusion of educational policy based on the specific reference to educational policy as a national, non EU-policy domain in the EU treaty.
- The follow-up on the “concrete future objectives of education and training systems in Europe” that calls for the setting up common goals and a defini-

tion of benchmarks and statistical measures. This follow-up was decided on at the meeting in Stockholm in 2001 and resulted in a detailed work programme "Education & Training 2010" adopted in 2002.

- The structural funds, especially the ETUC, which provide means for developing training programmes of various kinds.
- Other initiatives such as "e-Europe" and the Action Plan on Skills and Mobility.

The political process has shown how difficult this is in the European context: In the beginning, only the employment strategy was on the agenda due to the specific exclusion of education which was not to be a matter for the EU but a specifically national responsibility. However, the ministers of education as well as the EU-Commission have sought ways to put educational policy back on the agenda.

These reasons, held together with growing uncertainties in the labour market and society as a whole, the risks - and not only the challenges - posed by the creation of the knowledge-based society and especially the divide between those who have access to knowledge and those who do not, demand the mobilisation of all relevant players.

Trade unions have a specific responsibility in this respect because one thing is clear: the knowledge-based society cannot be created without all the people, so if Europe wants to make a difference vis-à-vis other parts of the world, it must invest more and better in its human resources.

It is also true that LLL will not happen by itself. Its development requires a change in people's mindset, the promotion of a new culture that allows each and every stakeholder to understand that learning takes place at different moments of one's lives, in different places and settings, that sometimes it is formal but most often informal and that it must take place throughout one's entire life.

Trade Unions all over Europe participate in making this come true - trade unions play a key role in the realization of LLL.

Trade Unions work in cooperation with the Employers in relation to LLL. In February 2002, The European Social partners agreed on a "Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications" (appendix 1), after a long and intensive period of discussions and negotiations. The results of this joint work were presented at the social summit, on the eve of the Barcelona European Council, in the spring of 2002. This document is of specific interest because it is a document describing how the social partners are to contribute to the European process of establishing LLL as a key issue in the European economic development. In the "Framework" the social partners define which elements are to be seen as the most interesting on the labour market.

This general framework has to be supplemented by the promotion of a strong social dialogue at enterprise-, branch-, sectoral- and national levels, as well as strong links with the national systems of education and vocational training in order to raise the level of skills and qualifications of the workforce and the productivity and competitiveness levels of companies.

The involvement of the Trade Unions at all levels is crucial to ensure the dynamics of the processes, and the implementation of LLL is the key to its success.

As one of the tools for the European trade unions, the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions has asked the authors of this paper to provide an overview of the national policies of the trade union movements in Germany, Great Britain, France and Denmark. The presentation of key elements in national policies is the basis for discussions on which key problems can be seen in the different

national settings and the basis for a discussion on future issues of the trade unions at the European level.

This paper is solely the responsibility of the authors - neither the Danish nor the other national descriptions have been formally approved by the national trade union bodies. But the authors hope to have provided a fair description of core elements of national policies as well as some useful elements for future discussions across borders. We are truly convinced that the future of LLL in a European context will be very strongly enhanced by a coordinated and strong trade union involvement - and we hope that this paper can make a small contribution to that.

2. Presentation of national strategies

2.1. Denmark

2.1.1. Context:

Lifelong Learning, and especially Adult education, in Denmark is organised in very close cooperation with the social partners (as the VET system is). The LLL policies of the Danish trade unions reflect the actual structure of Danish adult education very strongly:

In 2000, a reform (“VEU-reformen”) was adopted, which created stronger coherence within adult education and continuing training. Key elements in the reform are described in the following:

The AMU (Labour market training) programmes have a triple aim. Firstly, to give, maintain and improve the vocational skills of the participants in accordance with the needs and background of enterprises, the labour market and the individual persons and in line with the technological and social development, secondly, to alleviate restructuring and adaptation problems on the labour market in the short term, and thirdly, to contribute to raising the general level of qualifications on the labour market, in the long term. The programmes are developed and organised for low-skilled and skilled workers, technicians, and similar types of workers.

Within the AMU system, a National Training Council and training committees have been set up, and local level boards and local training committees are operating in the schools and centres. The social partners play a key role in all these boards and committees, contributing to organising, developing, setting priorities and quality assurance of the training programmes. This ensures that training and education meet the qualification needs of the labour market, enterprises, and the individual. The unions are heavily represented in the various levels of formal bodies in Denmark, and as a consequence, education and training issues are very deeply rooted into the everyday practices of the trade unions.

AMU training primarily provides skills and competencies related to specific job functions, but a majority of training programmes also provide competencies to move upwards within a sector. Many training programmes are also recognised by other basic vocational education and training programmes and there are also vocational training programmes in AMU that provide independent, national competencies within one or several occupational sectors and trades.

The training plans are developed at the national level, and they provide a flexible framework for training, e.g. with open workshop training and distance courses. Thus, the individual training institutions have the best preconditions for organising and implementing training plans to meet the demand for high quality training and education.

The duration of the AMU courses varies and may be between one day and up to 6 weeks. Most of the training provided has a vocational content which is directly targeted at one or several sectors or trades. But there are also qualifying training courses of a more general nature which can be applied across sectors and trades. Sector-oriented vocational training comprises the following sectors, for example: transport, the social sector and health care, iron and metal, trade and services etc.

In 2000, the liberal government introduced fees on courses in almost all sectors of adult education – also in the AMU-programme. During the first half of 2003, there has been a very significant fall in enrolments for the courses. A struggle against course fees for the AMU-courses has been one of the priorities in trade union policies since 2002.

AMU also offers individual assessment of qualifications in order to identify the participant's existing qualifications and needs for continuing training, as well as to prepare the participant for an AMU programme (this program is still on offer for free).

The assessment of qualifications normally lasts between one day and 3 weeks and may be organised individually or in classes. The participants are offered vocational guidance.

A participant in a vocationally oriented adult education or continuing training programme (VEU) will normally be eligible for a so-called VEU-allowance which corresponds to the maximum daily unemployment benefit. For many skilled workers this would mean that they would get an allowance representing between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ of their normal income, but very often there are agreements that ensure that the employer covers the rest of the income so that the individual employee gets the normal income. Agreements are most commonly entered into at sector-level.

In addition to the fact that the AMU programmes are directly coordinated with the needs of the labour market, there are different elements in the VEU-reform connected to the general education of adults. The trade unions have especially worked with PAE, BAE and AAE:

Preparatory adult education

Preparatory adult education (PAE) will be on offer for all persons over 18 who wish to improve their general skills so that they will become better equipped for the labour market and as citizens in a democratic society. This will also greatly enhance their opportunities for undergoing further education or training within the framework of the adult education system. The teaching at PAE-programmes will be organised so that it is integrated with the daily life of the participants. This means that many of the activities will take place at the daily workplace rather than in educational establishments.

The individual levels of adult education

Basic adult education (BAE) includes a framework for education programmes up to the level of vocational education. At this level, the former education and work experience of the individual participants may be further supplemented by courses in order to achieve a skilled level (= vocational education).

The target is the same for basic adult education as for the corresponding youth education with formal qualifications. Adults who complete a BAE-programme pass the same final examinations as young persons in youth education, but a BAE-programme is organised in a more flexible manner and the concrete content of the programme will depend upon the practical work experience of the adult person as well as qualifications attained by participation in various courses, etc. In other words, a BAE-programme is based on the experience and qualifications of the individual in order to make the best possible use of them.

Before embarking on a BAE-programme, participants will undergo a skills assessment during which previous courses and work experience are assessed. The school then draws up a personal education plan which shows what the individual is lacking in terms of having acquired a complete education programme.

The adult education system also entails another three advanced education levels:

Advanced adult education (AAE) corresponds to the level of a short advanced education programme within the ordinary educational system. This means that it is a programme aimed at the needs of people at the level of a skilled worker. The programme typically consists of 5-6 modules, can be studied primarily outside of working hours, and can be concluded in a two year period. Sometimes, there will be company-based agreements which will provide for a sharing of the cost of the time spent on training or that the company pays the course fee, books and the examination-fee – but very often it's the individual who participates at an individual basis.

There are two more levels: Diploma level education, which corresponds to an intermediate level higher education programme within the ordinary educational system, and a Master level education, which corresponds to the level of a long higher education programme within the ordinary educational system.

In respect of the course provision – and the ability of the institutions to provide training and education at relevant levels in relevant subjects – the Danish system has been developed into a quite flexible and rather comprehensive system. And the trade unions have been deeply involved in most of this development – structurally as well in relation to the actual subjects.

2.1.2. TU policies

As can be seen in the above description of the Danish context, the infrastructure provided by the state involves the social partners very extensively, both in relation to IVT and CVT. This means that the focus of trade union policies is mainly put on partnership with the employers. Very often, there has been a very broad consensus on training issues between the social partners in Denmark.

In addition to the role of the social partners provided for by the regulations of the publicly provided CVT, there are a number of training-related issues in the collective agreements in Denmark. The coverage of collective agreements is not completely clear. The scope of an agreement is always defined in the individual collective agreement, namely through a description of the work and training requirements in the field covered, but not in relation to specific persons.

The rate of unionisation is more or less stable around the level of 80 per cent with variations from one occupational field to another. In the public sector, the rate of unionisation is almost 100 per cent.

If the employer is not a member of an employer organisation, the collective agreement is concluded between the employee organisation and the individual employer. Such agreements often take the form of the so-called “adhesion agreements” which refer to the agreement generally applying within that particular branch or industry.

The cooperation of the social partners in training matters is reflected at all levels of policy discussions:

At the national level, the general framework is defined through tripartite bodies involving the national trade unions advising the ministers.

At the sectoral level, there are “trade committees” both in relation to IVT and CVT (this means that in most cases there are two sets of trade committees in the sectors), and very often collective agreements define general principles and common features of skills development in companies. These agreements deal with the following issues, for example: access to learning; resources for learning; establishment and role of employees' representative bodies. An example is mentioned below:

Example

Training issues in General agreements

The following is an extract from the general agreement made in the year 2000 between the Central Organization of Employees in Industry and the Confederation of Danish Industries (the largest of the Danish Employers' organisations):

§ 43, paragraph 2: "It is recommended that there be systematic training planning for the companies' employees. If one of the partners requires it, there is an obligation to start a discussion on the planning of systematic training and its implementation"

§ 44, paragraph 1: "If an employee participates in training as part of the planning under §43 or following a company decision the employee receives the usual pay"

§45: "The organisations agree that updated basic skills are an essential prerequisite for maintaining and developing professional qualifications. It is the responsibility of both the individual employee as well as the company to contribute to the necessary general qualifications."

- and furthermore there are paragraphs on apprentices' salaries

This is not only the case in the private sector. During the latest round of negotiations on general agreements in the public sector the focus was put on issues such as skills development. This has led to very extensive results in the last round of negotiations in the year 2002.

Example

**A skills package in the state sector
in 2002 agreements**

Skills development of state employees and managers will be a central focus area in the coming years. Ensuring that state workplaces are attractive, that state employees perform their tasks efficiently and well requires that the competencies of public employees and managers are continually developed.

In order to stimulate this process and develop specific skills, development measures, and in connection with the Collective Agreement 2002 (OK 2002), the Ministry of Finance and the Danish Central Federation of State Employees' (CFU) have:

- Intensified the focus of the agreement on strategic and systematic skills development by formulating more and more specific requirements for activities in each central government agency and government institution
- Agreed that the Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality management (SCKK) should be carried on as a common knowledge centre of the parties of the agreement
- Agreed that the Change and Development Fund should be carried on by highlighting new focus areas and agreed to establish a new Competence Fund (both under the auspices of the SCKK).

The purpose of the Skills Package of the OK 2002 is to ensure that measures aiming at skills development in central government agencies and government institutions become strategically based and characterised by high quality and effectiveness.

The Skills Package of the OK 2002 supports local efforts to enhance skills development through guidelines and advice, as well as possible financial support from central authorities.

The organisation of the Skills Package reflects the parties' view of skills development as a joint task and a mutual obligation for the management and staff of the workplace.

At company level, different tools are used to ensure co-operation between the social partners. Identification of worker's current competencies and future needs is possible through an annual interview between employer and employee. Surveys show that today, approximately 75% of Danish employees benefit from these interviews, although the rate of interviews of LO-members is around 50%. It's especially the SME's and interviews with the low-skilled workers that are lacking. Once the outcomes of interviews are analysed and the company's competency needs are defined, a learning plan can be developed. Local training committees offer the possibility for management and worker representatives to discuss and plan learning activities.

Example

A company with a strategic approach

Radiometer is a Danish company, which integrates training into production planning. The trade unions represented at Radiometer have negotiated different initiatives to enable the company and the employees to follow production needs better by changing work organisation. Trade unions are involved in all stages of the project, which concerns all employees. The management, especially front-line managers, for whom competence development is defined as part of their job and represents criteria for evaluation of their job performance, are also very involved in the process.

Individual discussions with the employee take place on an annual basis in order to identify competence needs. In this company, a great proportion of employees are blue-collar workers, low-skilled workers and often immigrants with little knowledge of the Danish language.

Different tools are developed, such as:

- The "second job" initiative, in connection with which all employees have the opportunity to qualify for another job within the company, thereby enhancing mobility within the company;
- Different courses, e.g. IT literacy, Danish language but also foreign languages for all employees during working hours;
- A "home PC agreement" enabling employees to keep a PC at home after participating in a distance learning course in IT;

The local trade union branches also participate in tripartite boards with education/training institutions. These partnerships enable the business and technical colleges as well as labour market training institutions to anticipate competence needs and to define training activities in the local labour market in a more accurate way.

This global approach, combining training and non-formal learning and promoting the participation of all workers and managers, appeared to be highly motivating for employees. Co-operation between social partners and education/training institutions also contributes to ensuring an effective implementa-

tion of learning plans and the positive impact of learning on companies and individuals' development.

These structures are still functioning in relation to the public infrastructure but have been put under political pressure due to the attempts to create more market-mechanisms in the system especially in CVT. At the same time the cooperation between the social partners has been inadequate in terms of ensuring the required number of apprentices within an industry so there is a political debate on how the VET system can provide enough educational places and who has what responsibility.

One of the strengths of the Danish structure is the very strong emphasis on training issues this framework has created in the practical work of shop-stewards and local trade unions. A lot of trade unionists work with issues such as guidance and counselling, in local training committees (both in companies and in relation to public training institutions), with apprentices and sectoral training committees, etc... This means that there is a very broad concept of education and a sense of the importance of learning among the trade unions.

Example

The Women Workers' Union in Denmark (KAD) & Guidance Corners

KAD organises women (mainly with few formal qualifications and low pay) in a number of industries and in different parts of the service sector. Over the last decade, KAD has launched several guidance activities in order to reach out to its members in the actual workplace. One such outreaching guidance activity of KAD is the Guidance Corner (Vejledningshjørne). The concept is simple: a person from KAD offers person-to-person guidance in a corner of the canteen or a similar assembly room. She brings a small number of educational/training pamphlets and a portable computer containing guidance and information programmes.

The visits to Guidance Corners are conducted on a 6-week basis which is scheduled at the outset. In the case of Ringkøbing Amt, (the westernmost county in Mid-Jutland), permanent Guidance Corners are established on this basis in 3 enterprises (factories, slaughter houses), and another 5 are more ad-hoc and mobile. The guidance activities are carried out during working hours, including different shift times, i.e. day or night. Thus, Guidance Corners consist of two persons (a KAD representative and a worker), two chairs, a table, and a computer.

KAD sees this type of activity as a mainstreaming member service. KAD has a long-term strategy of upgrading the skills of their members. Formal, informal and non-formal education and training are seen as vehicles for this overall strategy. Guidance is part and parcel of this strategy. Most importantly: it has to be proactive guidance of an outreach nature, actively promoting the concept of lifelong learning. This will reach the KAD members in the work-places: Workplace Guidance.

This has also resulted in an effort from the trade unions to ensure CVT through collective agreements - as well as fundamental conditions for apprentices. In many of the collective agreements there is a framework for participation in labour market training programmes. This covers a very big part of the employees on the labour market. But in reality, not many members use these parts of the collective agreements - especially in the small and medium-sized enterprises typical of Denmark. Discussions among several of the national trade unions evolve around this issue; how do we improve both the rights to participate as

well as improve the provision of training so that we can motivate a much larger proportion of the members to participate in CVT?

This debate parallels discussions within the trade union movement about the need for a more differentiated approach (from workers in danger of being excluded from the labour market - to workers that do well in terms of the knowledge-economy and who have good possibilities of further educational achievements). As it appears from the above descriptions, there is a much differentiated provision of training and education for adults in Denmark - with programs on literacy, on how to move from the un-skilled to the skilled qualification level and on further education based on previous VET experience.

Example

CVT should include management training

In the resolutions adopted at the Congress of The Metal Workers' Union in September 2003, it was described how the trade unions now recognise that new elements have to be integrated into CVT. The Metal Workers' Union will work to ensure that IVT takes into account that companies change work organisation and distribution of responsibility. It becomes more and more common to work in teams, as the need for knowledge increases. The traditional, hierarchical forms of organisation are changing towards flatter forms of organisation in order to give the employee more scope for actions and influence. Basically all employees would, from time to time, have to take on a managerial responsibility, partly through increased independence but also as project leaders, leaders of a maintenance team or in relation to knowledge sharing.

In such a "diversified environment" there is a need for developing tools for the trade unions - and tools to be applied in collective agreements - that reflect the very different situations and needs that these initiatives are envisaged to solve. And in this respect, the discussion of further individualization becomes a very concrete debate. In some of the trade unions, this has been the starting point for discussions on providing individualised possibilities for choosing elements within the general agreements - i.e. days off, higher pensions, higher wages or more training.

Furthermore, it is quite clear that issues like skills development and providing information and guidance in relation to training for members is becoming increasingly important as a service. Most Danish trade unions have already organised, or are in the process of organising, different offers for their members - often web-based - these years. And as a basic feature, most of these services are related to the individual member

Example

The Danish Union of Electricians offers all members a web-based assessment of qualifications

The Danish Union of Electricians has developed a new tool for their members called IKV. IKV works in the way that each individual member records his or her own technical, general and personal skills in a form. He/she answers a range of questions by self-evaluation on a scale. The responses are kept in a database that is accessible only for the individual, the shop-steward, the union branch office and the trade union. It's possible to update the profile at any given time.

The system automatically gives an evaluation of the profile compared to the sector's needs. At the same time, it suggests a relevant CVT so the member can get a profile matching the need of the sector.

This system can be used by the electrician to validate their own training needs and plan CVT. It can strengthen the union's ability to guide electricians in relation to CVT. This may give the union a clearer picture of the needs for development and CVT offers. It can be used for matching jobseekers and employers seeking electricians, and it can transfer data to the unemployment services

2.1.3 Analysis

As it appears from the above, the Danish trade unions have been very heavily integrated in the national educational structures, both at IVT and CVT levels. The system of social partnership has a long and deeply rooted tradition in both the educational as well as in the general industrial relations field. This is both a strength and a potential weakness in a period of very profound changes in the economy and in society as a whole. This has become very clear during the last couple of years with a liberal right-wing government that in many ways challenges this system - and especially the public sector support to areas of IVT and CVT, which are governed by the social partners.

In general terms, it is possible to identify four crucial tasks for the Danish trade union movement in the near future in order to meet the challenges. If these challenges are met with new measures there will be a potential strengthening of the trade unions' position by a closer connection between trade union policies, the individual members and the local workplace activities.

The four tasks are:

- New financial mechanisms ensuring sufficient economic resources for CVT and general adult education. It is obvious that on the one hand, trade unions should pursue a strategy by which public sector involvement should be kept at a high level - to ensure a strong national component, the quality and the equality in the provision of training and adult education and to ensure broad and general qualifications to be included in CVT and general adult education. On the other hand, there is no doubt that there is a need for raising the level of financial contributions from industry - and with that issue, the link to what is included in the collective agreements will be on the agenda. This is a big challenge for the trade unions - and so far no clear strategy has emerged.
- Mobilising local and regional involvement to ensure the trade union involvement in policy-making and implementation which is becoming increasingly decentralised. In connection with the traditional ways of conducting the social partnership in Denmark, it has for many years been based on rather centralized structures at national and/or sectoral levels. For some years now, there has been an increasing amount of open regulation by which framework setting has been up to the individual educational institutions and this has provided increasing room for local design of course delivery and course structures. This calls for an involvement at the local level and, in some cases, workplace level in connection with the formulation and implementation of trade union policies.
- The ability to find measures and ways of implementation that makes LLL a reality for the low-skilled workers and those persons that are threatened by the structural development processes on the labour market. Several statistics and surveys have shown that even with a very broad and very well suppor-

ted (financially and political) CVT-structure, such as the Danish AMU-program, it is very difficult to reach the disadvantaged groups on the labour market. The trade unions will have to take on some of the responsibility in terms of ensuring that the CVT provision is based on both solidarity (and not just the offering of courses for the most qualified workers) and motivation/involvement by which the struggle for improving working conditions is linked to motivating the individual worker to take up learning possibilities when they are provided.

- Finding new balances between the need for more individual possibilities and collective structures ensuring the right to LLL for all. Especially in relation to LLL, the tendency towards more individualisation is very strong. The Danish trade union should further develop the existing structures of local cooperation with the management based on individual interviews, training planning in companies, etc. to ensure the individual's rights as well as providing more collective agreements and legislative structures that provide the individual worker with rights that support his or her LLL activities.

2.2 France

2.2.1 The national context

Relatively late industrialization, the persistence of small, paternalistic businesses, and the continued importance of agriculture all contributed to the slow growth of unions during the formative years in France. Union density has always been low and the absence of a mass base is exacerbated by ideological division into five main confederations, confirmed by the 1950 law on collective agreements as representative bodies (having rights to administer welfare bodies with employers' associations and to negotiate collective agreements). The Confédération générale du travail (CGT), aligned with the Communist Party, is the oldest and was the largest trade union, but its membership base declined with the restructuring of heavy industries, so it is now the second largest. The Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens (CFTC), originally a union of workers adhering to Catholic social doctrine, was the second union formed but has a small membership. The Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT), formed by a radicalising minority in the CFTC, is now the largest confederation. Force ouvrière (FO), which began as a breakaway from the CGT, grew to become the third largest confederation. Finally, there is the Confédération générale des cadres (CGC), a managerial union of about the same size as the CFTC.

Despite increased legal rights under socialist governments, the French trade unions experienced a crisis in the 1980s, in terms of membership, representation and legitimacy. The crisis of membership is evident in the decline of overall union density from about 25 per cent in 1976 to about 12.5 per cent by the end of the 1980s and by 2003 to an estimated 7 per cent. The crisis of representation is apparent in the falling number of votes for union candidates and a corresponding rise in votes for the non-union lists in elections to works council (comités d'entreprise). The crisis of legitimacy has been linked to the politicisation of the unions, which are often unpopular with the general public, while at the same time criticised by militants for failing to adequately represent their interests in specific disputes.

Membership density is a poor measure of the unions' influence in France. The unions' relative neglect of collective bargaining is partly explained by employer reluctance to negotiate, which reappeared when the 1997 Socialist Government initiated a negotiating process and destabilised the pro-bargaining wing of the unions. Such hostility from employers often led the unions to take direct action to influence government, with the paradoxical result that governments embedded the trade unions in social dialogue structures that provide substantial political influence. The widespread industrial action and social disorder in support of political and industrial reforms in May 1968 is representative of the French approach. The resultant Grenelle Agreements, while increasing wages and social benefits, also granted legislative support for union delegates at the workplace to encourage enterprise-level agreements.

For many years, negotiation at enterprise level remained informal and rarely resulted in collective agreements, a major deficiency of the French collective bargaining system, which the Auroux laws of 1982 were designed to remedy. During the past 10 years, however, company-level bargaining has increased significantly, so trade union influence could now be measured by the number of agreements signed, rather than the level of unrest, notwithstanding the periodic return to militant direct action with the 1995 road haulage dispute and the 2003 public service conflicts over retirement benefits and decentralisation of education. As a result of the possibility of extending collective agreements throughout

a sector, the coverage of collective bargaining has always been substantially higher than the coverage of union membership or employer recognition, but with the crisis of membership, some employers, needing a negotiating partner, have resorted to providing employees with a 'trade union voucher' to spend with the union of their choice.

Vocational training in France is highly regulated by the state and predominantly designed within the formal educational system, with the bulk of IVT undertaken in full-time vocational schools despite the existence of funds for in-company apprenticeships financed through an employer tax. Since VET is largely administered by educational institutions rather than enterprises, even though a high proportion of young people are qualified to craft or technician level, they are not guaranteed employment in a skilled job and there is a lack of adaptation and coordination between the education and employment systems.

Government policy on lifelong learning derives from Book IX of the Labour Code and more particularly article 900-1, which defines the administration of VET, both in respect of IVT and CVT. CVT is implemented and administered in France by a plurality of actors, including the state, local government, public bodies, public and private educational establishments, trade unions, professional organisations and companies. Whereas IVT is a public utility, in which the State has a determining role, CVT is more a 'national obligation', based on the intervention of multiple actors, collective bargaining, joint management and the market. The origins of this approach are in Michel Crozier's analysis of a society hindered by state omnipotence, the 'new society' project introduced by the Government of Jacques Chaban-Delmas in 1969 and in the principles of social policy promoted by Jacques Delors.

The framework for CVT evolved from the Grenelle Agreements of 1968, which invited the social partners to open interprofessionnel (inter-occupational, national level) negotiation on this subject. The law of 16 July 1971, from the inter-occupational agreement of 9 July 1970 on training and professional development, defines the main principles:

- Social advancement and adaptation of workers to technological change
- Plurality of actors, in particular those financing and providing training
- Policy coordinated and arranged between the State and the social partners
- Agreement as the sole instrument of contractualisation with training providers
- Training leave for employees
- State finance to assist training in the form of subsidies
- Participation of employers in financing training
- Grants provided to trainees participating in vocational training
- Extension of policies, with a degree of autonomy, to the regional level

During the past 30 years, successive policies diversified VET policy but the general principles established by the law of 1971 still define the framework of intervention. The 1970s was dedicated to constructing principles and tools of intervention in CVT and in assisting insertion of young people in the labour market, since the period marked the end of economic growth and increasing youth unemployment.

The 1980s was characterised by development and diversification of VET policies and the responsibilities of actors, increasing the role of the regions and the involvement of the social partners. The law of 26 March 1982 prescribed guidance and training measures for job-seekers and young adults and established information, advice and guidance bodies (Permanences d'accueil d'informa-

tion et d'orientation) in partnership with local government. Article 82 of the decentralization law of 7 January 1983 introduced a responsibility for CVT and learning to the regions. The law defined the relative responsibilities of municipalities, departments, regions and the state, and determined the principles and modes of transfer of competence over CVT and lifelong learning. Regions assumed responsibility for collecting and managing the funds for vocational training and social advancement (FFPPS, Fonds de la formation professionnelle et de la promotion sociale), which included training for ancillary medical workers, social workers and the farming sector, as well as certain higher education, and training associated with the Institute for Engineering Studies (CNAM, Conservatoire national des arts et métiers). The law of 24 February 1984 increased state support for the development and training activities of companies, creating the Engagements de Développement de la Formation. The law of 23 July 1987 made it possible for the state, the regions, and the social partners to conclude agreements with the objective of improving coordination between different training activities.

The 1990s were characterized by a will to rationalise and optimise the performance of the system. The law of 4 July 1990 aimed to improve the quality of training, while that of 20 November 1993 centred on employment. The quinquennial law of 20 December 1993 was designed to widen the field of competence of the regions to include youth programmes, with a regional development plan for vocational training of young people aged 16 to 25 years (Plan régional de développement des formations professionnelles des jeunes). The law of 20 December 1993 sought to reform the management of training in three respects: financial, functional and social. The financial reform introduced a threshold of collection, while the functional reform introduced the principle of incompatibility between the activities of collecting and disbursing funds. The social reform established the requirement of a collective agreement for the creation of joint collection bodies.

The inter-occupational agreement of 5 July 1994 added two new principles. Priority was given to the sector level Accredited Joint Collection Bodies (OPCAs, Organisations Paritaire Collection Accréditées) to make decisions relating to in-house training, while the Fund for Administering Individual Training Leave (FONGECIF, Fonds pour la gestion du congé individuel de formation) was given responsibility for protecting employees' rights in regional and inter-occupational training. These capacities have decreased the number and diversity of OPCAs and created a coherent logic and identity. To improve their regulatory effectiveness, initiatives were developed by the social partners at the sectoral and inter-occupational (national and regional) levels. This was the origin of the National Joint Committee for Vocational Training (CPNFP, Comité paritaire national de la formation professionnelle), the Association for the Management of Alternance Training Funds (AGEFAL, Association pour la gestion des fonds des formations en alternance), the Joint Committee for Individual Training Leave (Le comité paritaire du congé individuel de formation), and the Joint National Fund of Management of Vocational Training (FNPGFP, Fonds national paritaire de gestion de la formation professionnelle). The law of 4 February 1995 established the principle of state accreditation of training bodies.

The diversification of responsibilities during the last 30 years modified its role, but the state retained an important place in the system of training, especially in relation to regulation with the social partners, provision of support and expertise, facilitation of partnerships and preservation of social and economic equality. The main employers' association, MEDEF (Mouvement des Entreprises

de France), much more than its predecessor the CNPF (Conseil national du patronat français) has in recent years promoted a competence-based approach to training and development in an effort to modernise the VET system in line with enterprise needs, and this has opened the way for accreditation of experiential learning and adaptive training.

Following the publication in November 2000 by the European Commission of the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, the French Government launched a comprehensive consultation exercise in 2001. The consultation involving all the national actors resulted in a report presented by Minister of Education that enabled the Government to make an assessment of the state of lifelong learning in the country. Convinced of the relevance of the key messages of the Memorandum, the Government nevertheless raised certain questions concerning the content and methods proposed. The links between policies on VET, employment, regional development and the struggle against social exclusion and inequality were not sufficiently taken into account. The relations between policies on lifelong learning, work and employment, organisation and finance of alternance training, and policies on quality of employment, active ageing, social advance and working time needed further elaboration.

The Government validated several of the principles of the Memorandum, notably its recognition of the diversity of routes in education and training, including informal learning; the development of partnerships at all levels involving the different actors; and the development of motivation to learn and the role of information, advice and guidance. Their principal areas of disagreement were in relation to the idea of an 'autonomous individual', taking a major responsibility for their own learning, including the costs of learning, in order to promote their employability and adaptability. This was seen as a collective responsibility between the individual, the education system, enterprises and social partners as well as the actors associated with informal learning. Certain issues remained to be further elaborated for the French Government. Firstly, it was seen as necessary to improve the quality of education and training, which was mainly limited in the Memorandum to aspects of new technology. Secondly, there was seen to be a need to develop specific action plans for those disadvantaged or at risk of social exclusion, for which the public authorities should have a major responsibility.

2.2.2 Trade union policy on lifelong learning

Historically, labour representative bodies were marginalized and excluded both by employers and the state until concessions were won following the industrial and political unrest of 1968. Nowadays, one of the specificities of the French system of VET is the active role played by the social partners, in both conception and operation, through collective bargaining and joint management. The involvement of the social partners in VET policy making is defined in Book IX, Article 910-1 of the Labour Code, which states that ‘vocational training and social advancement form the basis of a concerted policy coordinated chiefly with employers’ and employees’ organisations.’ The social partners meet the authorities at national level to discuss vocational training issues in the National Council for Vocational Training, Social Advancement and Employment (CNFPPSE, Conseil national pour la formation professionnelle, le progrès social et l’emploi), which examines government priorities in education and vocational training. Trade unions are not formally consulted before laws are drafted, but virtually all legislation pertaining to initial and continuing vocational training is approved in inter-occupational agreements prior to adoption.

Joint management has therefore been an important principle of VET in France since 1971. The social partners contribute to elaborating the right to training through collective bargaining, which determines training policies for the occupations they represent. They create and jointly manage the institutions charged with the application of this right and these policies. Companies play a central role in the application of training as an integral part of their strategies, and a part of the funds contributed by companies to the development of CVT is administered by the social partners within joint bodies created by collective agreements and agreed with the State. The law of 31 December 1968 created a fund to pay trainees undergoing vocational training (Fonds d’assurance formation), while the law of 16 July 1971 introduced a legal obligation for companies to finance CVT and established joint bodies to collect and administer funds for CVT (Fonds de la formation professionnelle continue). The social partners sit on Joint Advisory Boards (CPCs, Commissions professionnelle consultative) attached to the various ministries responsible for establishing technical and occupational diplomas and certificates. They are also involved in the National Education Commission, which creates diplomas awarded by university institutes of technology (BAC + 2) and the National Assessment Commission for Vocational Degrees (BAC + 3). They play a major role on the National Council for Higher Education and Research (CNESER, Conseil national de l’éducation supérieur et recherche), which deals with all higher education diplomas. The social partners can propose new curricula and qualifications under the auspices of the joint advisory boards, the various higher education commissions and the sectoral Joint National Employment Boards (CPNEs, Commissions paritaire nationale de l’emploi). They can also propose amendments to existing programmes to the various ministries with joint advisory boards (Education, Employment, Youth and Sport, Agriculture). In the case of compulsory general education, the unions are consulted within the Supreme Education Council and the National Council for Higher Education and Research. Consultation on vocational training courses and qualifications takes place within the CPCs and the relevant higher education committees.

As the vocational training system became progressively more decentralised, through legal changes (Law 83-8 of 7 January 1983; Quinquennial Law No. 93-1313 of 20 December 1993; and the Labour Code, Article L. 910-1), the social partners at regional level became more implicated in the regional vocational training development scheme, regional employment and vocational training

coordination committees. Joint National Employment Boards (CPNEs) and Regional Joint Inter-occupational Commissions on Employment (COPIREs, Commissions paritaire interprofessionnelle régionale de l'emploi) exist at sectoral level on a national and regional basis, respectively.

Collective bargaining over training features in negotiation at inter-occupational (i.e. national, inter-occupational, cross-sectoral) level, sector level and company level. At national level, there is a highly developed system for social dialogue over vocational training involving equal representation of employers and trade unions, negotiations on vocational training every 5 years and mechanisms for integrating agreements into legislation. The main bodies are the Joint National Committee for Vocational Training (CPNFP), which regulates contractual training stipulations; and the Joint Committee for Individual Training Leave (COPACIF, Comité paritaire pour les questions liées au congé individuel de formation), established in 1992, which coordinates issues related to individual training leave. At regional level, the social partners meet with the authorities in Coordination Committees for Regional Apprenticeship and Continuing Vocational Training Programmes (CCPRs, Comités de coordination des programmes régionales), which oversee the harmonisation of regional continuing training and apprenticeship policies.

At sectoral level, social partners can dictate funding volume and prioritise certain types of training or courses (e.g. favour apprenticeship over alternance, give preference for training to the low-skilled). These agreements apply to enterprises belonging to signatory employers' associations so are not necessarily generalised throughout the sector. The social partners may be involved in administering apprenticeship tax (collection and allocation at the discretion of the enterprises) and establish collection agencies for the mandatory corporate financial contribution which finances training for young people benefiting from alternance work contracts. Collective agreements entitle OPCAs created by the social partners to increase the legal minimum payment from employers in each sector.

National level general agreements are interpreted through detailed sector level negotiations, but social dialogue over vocational training at enterprise level was traditionally rare. The statutory framework that generalises collective agreements throughout a sector was to some extent designed to compensate for weak local institutions of collective bargaining. The national inter-occupational agreement on training and development of 9 July 1970 marked a key turning point. The collective agreement of 1970 included the droit de formation, a right to continuing training and an obligation on employers to finance this, but organisational regulations to put it into effect were only established in 1982 with the congé individuel de formation. In addition to training leave, since the 1990s, individuals have been entitled to have a bilan de compétences undertaken by educational organisations to provide a basis for personal development in their occupation. Several sectors also have specific vocational certificates that are recognised through agreements between the social partners and these can be made equivalent to formal qualifications under the state education system by the Labour Ministry (homologation), although this does not mean that they are formally recognised within the education system.

Until the mid-1980s, sector and company level negotiation over training was under-developed, but the Auroux and Rigout laws brought training onto the bargaining agenda, first at sector level and then at enterprise level. The law of 24 February 1984 introduced sector level negotiation on vocational training, which steadily became an important level of regulation of VET policies as well

as management of access, finance and development of training. This law also imposed on companies with at least 50 employees and union representation, an obligation to negotiate on training where not already covered by a sector agreement. The law of 31 December 1991 subsequently established the superiority of sector agreements. The 1991 agreement that was incorporated into national labour legislation recognised that company-based CVT had previously only been geared towards adaptation to technical change. As a result, the unions demanded supplementary regulations for training to promote individual advancement (élévation) and employers secured in return a commitment to co-investment whereby up to 25 per cent of vocational training is undertaken in leisure time. Significantly, the 1991 agreement identifies issues for determination at sector level but only mentions the possibility of company agreements. As a result, the unions still have little influence over vocational training at local level. Sector agreements provide a right to vocational training, but trade unions had difficulty building upon these at enterprise level because trade union membership is low and workplace organisation is insufficiently developed.

The 35-hour week introduced by the Aubry 2 law in 2000 and the reduction in working time (RTT, réduction du temps de travail) had an impact on the CVT system, since the system is based on precise definitions of working time and further training time, establishing rights and obligations for employees and employers. The Aubry 2 law distinguished two types of further training time: further training for the adaptation of employees to developments in their workplace (formation d'adaptation) and further training aimed at developing individual skills (formation de développement des compétences). The first is the duty of the employer and takes place during working hours, whereas the second takes place outside working hours. Individual working time accounts, which already existed, were dedicated to further training outside working hours, whereas previously they had been used to establish collect overtime credit for time off in lieu.

Regulation of the times of the different types of further training is left to agreement between the social partners at sectoral and company level. The idea is to regulate co-investment in time for further training by employers and employees. The few agreements concluded so far indicate that this leads to a restriction of further training during working hours to measures aimed at adapting individuals to their current jobs and a shift of further training that goes beyond this into leisure time. In the past, at least some of this further training had been defined as working time. The 35-hour week is resulting in greater use of working time for actual work itself, which the unions have criticised, and to reducing the rigidity of company regulations on working time.

In 2001, under the slogan modernisation sociale, the question of recognition and certification of experience acquired at the workplace was discussed (validation des acquis professionnels), since the large number of different sectoral vocational certificates resulted in a lack of transparency and portability of qualifications. In January 2002 a law was passed to simplify the system of vocational certificates and make them more transparent, thereby improving access to higher qualifications without the need for school leaving qualifications. A new National Commission for Vocational Certification was established to implement the changes.

The inter-occupational agreement of 20 September 2003 marked an important development in the law relating to lifelong learning. The new agreement is a comprehensive text of 27 articles running to 50 pages in all, covering:

- information and guidance on lifelong learning
- establishment of lifelong learning for all employees

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- training and development for young persons, job seekers and certain public employees
 - specific access to training for certain employees
 - in-company training and development
 - training at sector level and in the regions
 - evolution of training actions
 - financial arrangements
 - nature of contributions linked to the development of continuing training.

The different trade union confederations expressed varying opinions on the new agreement, but overall it is viewed as a major breakthrough. For FO, the final contents are seen as positive, the key arrangement being the possibility for every employee to benefit from the DIF. The CFDT also judged the agreement to be 'well-balanced', and the CFTC approved the text for giving 'new breath' to vocational training. The CGT was more reserved, but after consulting their local organizations and employees, recognised that it constitutes a 'positive beginning', while suffering several weaknesses.

Example

**Inter-occupational Agreement on Lifelong Learning
of 20 September 2003**

Among the most important innovations in the agreement is the right (article 1) to an appraisal interview at least every 2 years to identify training and development needs, with opportunities to have a bilan de competence drawn up and experiential learning validated and accredited. The mechanisms for this include a training passport (article 2) and a new system to be developed at sector level for validating experience and issuing certificates (article 3). An important new right is granted to training (droit individuel à la formation, DIF) amounting to 20 hours per year, cumulable over six years (article 6). Specific actions are directed at training for employees who have not completed education to the first level of the cycle supérieur (BAC+1) (article 10) or who have not obtained a recognised qualification (article 12), including the right to the equivalent of a maximum of one year study leave to gain qualifications. The agreement also provides for employee representatives to play a major role in the development of lifelong learning and in elaborating training needs at works council level (article 15) and defines the responsibilities of the CPNE at sector level (article 18), of the COPIRE at regional level (article 19) and the CPNFP at national level (article 21) in making lifelong learning a reality.

2.2.3 Analysis and assessment

The state continues to play a major role in relation to lifelong learning, but the social partners have increasingly become involved both in policy formulation and implementation, so that social dialogue is now a governing principle of VET and lifelong learning. Even though the role of the social partners has become much more important, the state has not totally delegated the direction of lifelong learning policy. The social partners' role appears to be more one of providing a technical, social and financial framework. The state remains very important in a diversity of institutional initiatives relating to training and in relation to changes in public policy. The mutual engagement of the state and the social

partners enables a political exchange, where the state constructs the instruments for action and the social partners give their authority and expertise on behalf of their members.

The plurality of organisations of employers, the variety of their cultures and their strategies influenced the development of the structure of the system of VET. For example, there are two networks of collection at the inter-occupational regional level: the AGEFOS (Association pour la gestion des fonds de formation sectoriel) associated with the CGPME (Confédération Générale des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises) and the OPCAREG (Organisation paritaire collecteur agréé régional), associated with MEDEF. Paradoxically, trade-union pluralism has had less influence on the structure of the system of VET. Trade union plurality is more evident in operational strategies, the priorities shown in negotiation over training. During the formative years of the French VET system, the different conceptions of training that developed within the CGT, CFTC and CFDT, especially during the 1960s, were influenced by political changes in organizations. Workers were concerned with the socio-political implications of VET, whereas managers saw training as a way of adapting to technical changes and providing protection from unemployment.

The evolution of the VET and lifelong learning system in France has been a difficult one and this is nowhere more evident than in relation to the role played by the social partners, and particularly the trade unions. While the development of VET between 1945 and 1970 is often presented as a workers' victory, it has been argued that it was the result of a wider social movement involving political, professional and cultural elites that weighed in with adult education activists to present arguments of 'common good', although the production of laws between 1959 and 1971 shows that this was not without conflict and confrontation.

The law of July 1970 represented the first major turning point, since it brought training into the scope of social dialogue even though the state remained the principal actor. Up until the 1970s, qualifications featured in collective bargaining only in terms of their recognition in occupations and wage scales, although there were important differences between the sectors.

The law of 1983 on decentralization introduced a supplementary actor, the region, with the objective of improving individual access to training. The introduction of a regional dimension into this architecture was the consequence of a public decision translated into law, since the region is not a level where social negotiation occurs naturally. Both for the employers and the different unions, organisation at regional level is very uneven. It has been argued that the development of a regional dimension did not weaken sectoral negotiation, but put in question the extent to which social partners were sufficiently engaged in territorial regulation since their regional structures, especially for the unions, are inadequately developed and public bodies dominate the regional structures for CVT and lifelong learning.

The 1990s was mostly marked by the attempt to clarify the law and to bring about a qualitative improvement in training through the introduction of the bilan de compétence, and finance for enterprises with fewer than 10 employees. At the same time, the principle of co-investment appears for the first time in an agreement proposing training during working time. According to one CFDT official, the quinquennial law of July 1993 marked another important turning point because 'the social partners were for the first time invited to enter into negotiation.'

The new inter-occupational agreement of 20 September 2003 on lifelong learning undoubtedly represents another key turning point, guaranteeing a solid

foundation of equal rights to training. For the first time, it brings qualifications and experiential routes to their acquisition to the centre of collective bargaining and provides an opportunity for the unions to play a major role in making life-long learning a reality for all. The question is whether the trade union institutions, especially at enterprise and regional level, are up to the task and whether the employers will see the benefits of engaging with the pro-bargaining elements to develop a social partnership approach.

2.3 Germany

2.3.1 The national context

Neither the situation of organisation of lifelong learning nor the situation of industrial relations and trade unions in Germany is typical for the situation in Europe. Nevertheless, a comparative view on this country can enable one to identify similar or different strategies for organising lifelong learning in other countries.

An understanding of lifelong learning as (company-based) further vocational training

Lifelong learning is in the German discussion largely regarded as consisting of further vocational training. Training is seen in its function related to employment and employability. This general approach of thinking is based in the tradition of the dual system of apprentice training, which in fact is company-based. In the past, this has been regarded as one-off training for an individual's entire working life with only occasional need for updating. With some exaggeration, one can say: Lifelong learning consisted of participation in apprentice training and sporadic skills updating.

For many years, this approach of perception was strengthened by the trade unions who play an important role in shaping initial training regulations, and by the works councils who play an important role in the implementation of enterprise training measures. Workplace-based learning is thus part of the logic of the specifically German system of vocational training and industrial relations, and this gives it a special status within Europe.

A patchwork of further training regulations

In brief, the situation in Germany can be characterised by the absence of an overarching framework regulation on further training and lifelong learning.

For initial vocational training, Germany has a predominantly "dual", highly regulated, system of apprentice training in which companies play a crucial role, whereas the vocational schools play a collateral role. Approximately 60 % of an age cohort participate in the different schemes of apprentice learning, a figure which has been declining for several years. This is caused by the fact that the offer of apprentice places by the enterprises is not in line with the number of age cohorts and is even rapidly declining in the last two years. Nowadays only a quarter of companies offer places in the apprentice system, whereas in 1985 the figure was one third. The trade unions play an important role in the regulation of the apprentice system as they are highly involved, on tripartite basis, in the establishment of training rules to which the companies are bound when providing initial training.

The reverse side of the relatively high proportion of participants in the apprenticeship system is the very small proportion of students and degrees at universities, compared with other countries.

In the case of further training, there is a patchwork of approaches but no coherent and regulated system. There are only two areas where there is state regulation of further training: one is for the individual further training examinations that build on apprentice training (e.g. the master's degree, "Meister"). The other is the training leave regulations in 11 out of the 16 single states (Länder) providing the right of one week off per year for participation in recognised courses of general and vocational training. The participation rate in this form of further training is less than 1.5 % per year of those who are entitled. The most

important sector of further vocational training is that of the companies. According to the recent European Continuous Training Survey (ECTS) 32 % of the workforce participates in in-company further training. This kind of training consist of adaptation to new technologies and changing organisational structures, apart from the growing number of measures related to human resource development. The company based training measures usually do not lead to qualifications that are recognised outside the company and on the labour market. In the last ten years, the proportion of companies which offer or organise further training has declined from 85 to 75 % - in contrast to other European countries.

Dual system of industrial relations

Also industrial relations in Germany are characterised by a dual system of articulation and representation of interests: trade unions and works councils - or in the case of public administrations, personnel committees. The unions negotiate with the employer associations on the most important variables related to working conditions - in particular on pay and working time - and they do so on a broad front, for an entire industrial sector (e.g. metalworking industry, retail trade, chemical sector etc.), and within these in some cases on a regional basis. Strictly speaking, the resulting agreements only formally apply to trade union members and members of the employer associations, but in the past they have effectively determined working conditions in the entire sector concerned.

Unions in Germany traditionally are based in industrial (or service) sectors. Due to several mergers in recent years, there are seven unions in the DGB, the federation of trade unions of trade unions. Unionisation has declined since the German reunification to not more than 23 % of the active workforce on average in industrial, service and public sectors. Nevertheless, membership of trade unions is strong in the large industries, e.g. automotive and chemical industries and public, or until recently public, enterprises like Telecom and Post and Railway.

Also on the other side of industry, in recent years, there has been a tendency for companies to withdraw from employer associations, particularly in the eastern states of Germany. The result of this development is that an increasing number of companies are no longer bound by such collective agreements. Whilst in Western Germany collective agreement coverage decreased from 53 to 48 % of enterprises and 75 to 71 % of the workforce, the figures for the Eastern Laender are 33 to 28 % of enterprises and 63 to 56 % of the workforce.

Works councils and personnel committees established under German law are elected at regular intervals by the entire workforce of a company. They are answerable to the workforce and, according to the law, have to work together with the employer on a basis of mutual trust. However they also work closely with the trade unions.

They are responsible for regulating working conditions in the company within the framework laid down by statutory or collectively agreed regulations, and they do so by concluding agreements or arrangements with the employer. In principle, such local works agreements can cover all aspects of company life, but according to the law, collective agreements of the organisations have priority: pay and aspects of working conditions regulated by the parties to collective agreements are therefore not permitted to be the subject of company-level agreements.

One problem for workforce representatives is the decline in the number of

companies that have works councils. Over the last twenty years, the proportion of employees in private industry represented by works councils has shrunk from 50% to 40%.

Nevertheless, in recent years, works councils and personnel committees have managed to use their co-determination rights to conclude agreements on many company issues and thus improve social standards for employees. In many cases in-company co-determination has even been extended beyond the statutory minimum.

Works councils' co-determination in enterprise training policies

Under the German system of co-determination, works councils play a role in shaping training provisions in the company. The Industrial Constitution Act (Works Councils Act) lays down far-reaching co-determination rights for the works council in the field of in-company vocational training. The decision as to whether or not to offer initial or further training lies still at the employer, but the works council can exert influence on implementation of such measures: selection of participants, recruitment of trainers, scheduling of training, materials as well as the content of further training itself. Co-determination means that the works council and employer have to agree on the issues involved, with an arbitration body or industrial tribunal deciding in case of conflict.

Over and above this formal influence, the works councils have also at times exerted a strong informal influence. In companies with a highly-developed co-determination culture, training issues are dealt with on a basis of close collaboration between employers/management and the works council.

The revised Industrial Constitution Law of 2001 creates even greater scope for works councils to take the initiative and implement ideas on company-based further training: they can demand that employers identify vocational training needs, co-determine measures for further training and make suggestions on vocational training in the context of securing employment.

2.3.2 Trade union policies in lifelong learning

Further training and lifelong learning require time, monetary and organisational resources. The traditional basic programmes of German trade unions focused on

- general claims for time-off for individual further training, paid by the employers and guaranteed by legislation
- a legislative framework for securing transparency on the training market and quality of training providers and training offers

In practice, trade unions had no success with the implementation of these ideas. Neither conservative nor social-democratic governments have set this on the political agenda. Nevertheless, there was a continuous policy of initiatives in improving access to further training, quality and transparency – but not on legislative basis but via promotion of a variety of projects. They aimed preferably at enterprise level, strengthening the identification of lifelong learning with company further training, as mentioned above.

A number of recent developments at various policy levels of trade unions (and government as well) have given a new impetus to the regulation of time, money and organisation as basic resources for lifelong learning.

Collective sector agreements

In collective bargaining, the original field of trade union policy, trade unions also launched ideas of general claims for guaranteed access to company further training, but also with minor success. Training was not a priority of trade union bargaining policy and so sectoral collective agreements on regulating and shaping company-based further training have played a relatively minor role in Germany in the past. Only a small number of sectoral agreements have contained any provisions for career-related, non-company further training or for encouraging individuals to choose their own form of further training. And even some collective sector agreements with provisions for works councils and management how to proceed in training matters had not much impact on practice in the enterprises. Thus the development of further training has been largely untouched by any attempts to establish overall provisions.

The collective agreement on further training in the metal and electrical industries

In the summer of 2001, a collective agreement on training was signed in the metalworking and electrical industries in Baden-Württemberg which represents a new paradigm in training policy for the parties concerned.

It does not contain any quantified rights to further training for employees, but gives them the right to have a regular consultation (at least once a year) with their superior to discuss training needs and agree on measures to be taken. If no agreement is reached on needs or measures, the works council and the employer make the decision - in companies with more than 300 employees a special committee based on parity representation is used.

This move towards consultation between an employee and his/her superior represents a fundamental change in approach: training needs are now being partly defined from the bottom up - by the individual employee - and not just exclusively from the top down. The model for this approach was developed in practice at company level - the collective agreement is thus derived from provisions in some works agreements mentioned above.

The same goes for the provisions on time and money: the collective agreement on training differentiates - like many company agreements - between company and personal training. In the case of the former, the principle applies that time spent on further training is working time and therefore has to be remunerated accordingly. In the case of personal further training, the situation is different: this is defined as further training that has been personally determined by an individual but at the same time must prepare that individual to take on an activity within the company. Employees in large companies (more than 300 employees) wishing to receive further training of this kind have a right to up to three years' time off (provided they have worked in the company for five years), combined with a claim on return to work, to a job that is at least comparable with the post previously held. However, as personal training is concerned here, the individual has to fund it himself.

A change of paradigm is also revealed by the extension of obligations of employees: the collective agreement states that employees are obliged to help identify their company training needs, to take part in agreed training measures and to use the newly acquired qualifications at work.

Example

Pacemaker: The local agreement at Debis

The regulations of this agreement are rooted in practical experience in the enterprises of the sector: Annual consultations or interviews on employee's training needs are in practice in many companies though not yet state-of-the-art in the sector. A company agreement at Debis - the former industrial and ICT services provider of Daimler Chrysler - in 1998 fixed this kind of consultations with an individual training accordance and the individual right to claim for personal training (which nevertheless has to be in line with the needs of the company). With the latter, thus company agreement (and some more in other companies as well) goes beyond that of the sector.

The further training agreement in the chemical industry

A change of paradigm can also be seen in the collective agreements signed for the chemical industry in May 2003. As part of a far-reaching package, an agreement on training was signed that is intended above all to provide a framework for company level agreements.

The agreement provides a framework for company further training that can be fleshed out by company agreements. It contains two central elements: company training planning - for which open requirements are laid down - and an individual training agreement which is intended to enable company training to meet both company and individual needs and also lays down an employees input in terms of time. The agreement bases its approach on the use of working time accounts to generate the necessary time for further training. In other words, the parties to the agreement are involved in a new form of co-investment in training. Time spent on training is not regarded exclusively as working time, but rather also incorporates individuals' leisure time as well. The idea is that the parties achieve agreement on "a fair division of costs taking into account the benefits for the company and individual".

Example

Pacemaker: The Shell local agreement

The working and learning time approach of the agreement was prepared by experiences in some of the larger corporations in the chemical industry. One of the "pacemakers" was the 1988 agreement at Shell oil company: it provides for all employees the opportunity of individual choice between reduction of working time and participation in further training which is offered by the company - under co-determination of the works council - and goes beyond the actual training needs of the workplace; in other words: which provides more transferable and key competencies. Experience with the practice under this agreement shows an enlargement of participation in training in the company.

The enterprise level

Regarding the situation within the enterprises, for some time now, changes in the competitive situation within the European Single Market and the global economy as a whole have resulted in the emergence of different types of company- and workplace-based further training. In addition to providing specialist qualifications, these focus increasingly on personal skills, integration of training in business and human resource management strategies. In this context, training was to some extent “de-formalised” and becoming part of the daily routine. Working and learning are beginning to merge with one another: “learning at work”, “competence development”, “workplace-based learning”, “informal further training” are some of the terms used to describe this.

The German system of co-determination encourages the conclusion of internal company agreements between management and works councils (works agreements). This forms an important field of training activities by the labour movement. An evaluation of such agreements reveals a large number of provisions related to the financial and organisational resources for further training, but these are relatively fragmentary, and no consistent pattern emerges.

Time and money: company regulations

The predominant assumption that vocational and company-based learning are one and the same thing is traditionally matched by the view of the trade unions that company-based further training of employees is in the direct interests of the company and therefore should be paid for by the employer; similarly, the time devoted to further training should be regarded as working time.

Company regulations on time and money resources, however, reveal a different approach: agreements usually differentiate between company (necessary) and personal (individually determined) further training. The former is in principle part of normal working hours and is paid for by the company. However, as further training increasingly also satisfies personal interests that go beyond the company’s actual needs, more and more arrangements are being made for the individuals concerned to provide some input either in the form of time or money. In addition to this, there are also regulations on the conditions under which companies will provide financial support for measures selected by individuals or at least release those individuals for a limited period on an unpaid basis.

Organisational resources: access to further training at company level

Local works agreements between works councils and management show that for the organisation of continued vocational training five gateways for access to company further training have been developed in recent times:

- The traditional purpose of further training is aimed at sporadic adaptation to new technologies. Because this is targeted at specific cases, it cannot offer stable conditions for lifelong learning – on the contrary it needs to make use of the framework conditions of lifelong learning.
- Access to further training programmes in major companies. For the vast majority of employees in industry this is nowadays untypical.
- Procedures for identifying further training needs in companies. Such procedures can encourage or restrict access. Newer, “communicative” forms allow for participation and involvement of employees in identifying needs.
- Access via personal development records in interviews between employees and superiors as part of modern staff development schemes. Here, individu-

al development potential is identified and action taken in the form of agreements on personal goals.

- Organisational projects within companies - for example group work, project work or quality assurance - requiring participation in parallel or ongoing further training and involving the development of forms of work organisation conducive to learning.

Monitoring of works agreements by Hans-Böckler-Stiftung shows that organisational resources for lifelong learning are regulated at enterprise level. Facilities and regulations at this level are important for access to training as overall regulations are lacking.

Money: Individual learning accounts

One approach to implement lifelong learning is centred on the learning individual that encourages the development of an individual learning biography. For such a change of approach, one solution could be financial training accounts - an idea that is being strongly promoted by the OECD. It is an issue that is also being discussed in Germany, but unlike in other European countries, there is only little evidence of action being taken. A detailed proposal for learning accounts was put forward by the Hans Böckler Stiftung Council of Experts on Education and was more recently taken up by the Committee of Experts of the Federal Government on the Financing of Lifelong Learning: Both committees recommend to establish individual learning and training accounts for financing not only further vocational training but also learning in the course of life - "life-long learning" in a literal sense.

Example

Pacemaker: The Fraport Q-Card

There are, however, examples of such learning accounts in some major companies. One example is Fraport AG, the company that operates Frankfurt airport, Germany's largest civil airport. The company at present has a workforce of some 13,000. "Mobility in the minds of our employees" is the motto under which a new scheme was introduced in 2000: the "Fraport Q-Card". "Q" stands for "qualification". The Q-Card is a bonus card on to which the company annually puts a sum of 600 €. With this money, employees can attend courses offered by the company's Airport College that are not directly required by their present occupation. To do so, they also have to invest their own free time or draw on flexi-time credits from their working time account. At present, topics like information technologies, media skills, languages, behavioural training and work techniques as well as business studies are covered by the programme. The cost of courses varies between 200 € (example: one-day course entitled "Developing new energy for yourself") and 600 € (example: six day course entitled "Basic business skills"). Participants in the courses are issued with a certificate. Whilst the company pays the costs of the training, the employees have to invest their own free time or draw on flexi-time credits from their working time account. The Q-Card is thus an instrument for sharing the costs and time required for life-long learning.

Time: the idea of working and learning time accounts

A relatively new development forms the idea of so-called “learning time accounts” which are a variation on the working time account systems established in many companies in Germany for organising and managing working time. The various time account models used include flexitime accounts, collectively agreed “bandwidth” or “corridor” models, overtime accounts or savings models. In return for the time “saved”, employees can either receive time off in lieu or monetary payments. Working time accounts enable companies to plan production or the provision of services flexibly in line with levels of orders received.

To a lesser extent, working time accounts are also used to “save” time for early retirement or - more recently - for further training. This specific form of learning time accounts enables employees to accumulate time credits from overtime, flexitime or working time reductions and use these later for vocational training. In other words, the time input is derived from work already carried out which the employee has a claim to and now uses for the purpose of vocational training. In practice, however, such learning time accounts have been slow to establish themselves: it is estimated that learning time accounts at the moment are found in only 3% of all companies in Germany, preferably in larger ones.

An attempt to push the idea of learning time accounts was made in the context of the tripartite National Alliance for Jobs, Training and Competitiveness of chancellor Schröder in 2001: The partners agreed to use time credits in companies to help co-finance company-based further training. According to this agreement, working time should also be used - in other words, time used for further training should be financed by both employers and employees. Implementation of this agreement has, however, not progressed very far; apart from some company solutions, the only collective agreement so far was made in 2003 in the chemical industry. This recommends to the social partners on enterprise level (works council and management) the use of working time accounts for further training (see below).

Joint bodies of the social partners

In some sectors, joint agencies for promoting vocational further training were set up in recent years. Whilst in the construction sector this approach is run since longer for financing initial training in the apprenticeship (as in many European states), social partners in the chemical industry set up, ten years ago, a joint foundation for promoting projects and disseminating best practice. The above-mentioned agreement in the metal and electrical industries took up this idea for the implementation of the collective agreement regulations: an agency funded by both parties to the agreement and managed by parity-based bodies, is to support companies in implementing the collective agreements and acts as an arbitrator in cases of conflict.

New further training provisions for ICT occupations

In 2002, on the basis of an agreement between the two sides of industry, the German government introduced new examination regulations for further training in the ICT occupations. It creates for the first time a coherent system of career occupations within a company - nevertheless, it is a company external training preparing for an examinations administered by the Chambers of Industry and Commerce. It assumes that initial training has taken place under the dual system in one of the ICT occupations, but is also open for lateral entry by individuals with other qualifications. The system is based on modular qualifica-

tions at two levels of which the upper is supposed to be comparable, in the long run, to Bachelor and Master degrees at university level. However, university recognition is not yet guaranteed.

This system represents a change of paradigm in German training regulation: modularisation and a linking of initial and further training constitute an innovative move towards lifelong learning that enables further training in Germany to link into other European developments

The “Learning Regions” programme

The federal government programme entitled “Lifelong Learning for All” focuses on developing organisational resources for lifelong learning at the interface between companies and the region they are located in. The main aim is to bring together training providers and users as well as other interested parties and create “learning regions”. The idea is above all:

- To enhance motivation and levels of participation in training – in particular in the case of disadvantaged individuals with little experience of the education system – and also to promote individuals’ ability to learn autonomously
- To achieve qualitative (and quantitative) improvements in the structure of provisions and orient these more towards the user.

The “Learning Regions” programme adopts a distinctly different approach to lifelong learning compared with the collective agreements described above. It assumes that the regions have a differentiated range of learning on offer that is oriented towards the needs of various different target groups – in particular disadvantaged individuals with little experience of the education system – and is moreover networked and close to the reality of people’s lives. These networks usually take the form of public-private partnerships in which the local or regional administrations take on an important role for the allocation of responsibility. The federal government’s support is confined to providing start-up and supplementary funding, so these programmes can only be sustained at regional level if separate financial resources can be found.

Unlike the learning activities covered by the collective agreements, the main focus of the “Learning Regions” programme is on learning outside the company. These are usually provisions located at the interface of a region and company. As a result, little interaction has developed between company-based further training as regulated, for example, by the collective agreements mentioned above and activities in the “Learning Regions”. Though this programme does not affect the core of trade union further training policy, they are involved in the implementation on a non-formal basis, what means that it depends on personal commitment of trade unionists in project at regional level.

2.3.3 Analysis – concluding remarks

As the idea of lifelong learning in Germany is strongly focused on vocational – and in particular company based – learning, this approach brings **lifelong learning close to the needs of the labour market and workplace**, but at the price of little interchange between company training and general education.

The emphasis on company based learning is connected with the specific form of industrial relations in Germany with a strong position of works councils on enterprise level. Nevertheless, emphasis only on this level of action produces the danger of social exclusion: Training policy following only company needs tends to constrict access to lifelong learning. Widening access for all groups of employees (and unemployed persons as well) is **reliant on complementary**

offers and mechanisms outside the individual company.

It is the lack of an overall architecture for further training which is constitutive for the German situation. The decrease of individual participation in further training and in company training offers may be caused also by this lack. Nevertheless, the existing patchwork of regulations and good practice may form basis for further developing of an integrated system.

For such an integration, the **three institutional pillars** of lifelong learning: company regulation and practice, collective sector agreements and public regulation (by the federal state, the Länder and the local municipalities) must develop mechanisms of co-operation, relationship and mutual adaptation. The learning region programme of the Federal Government is such an attempt, bringing local actors together.

Characteristically for the situation in Germany is the **pacemaker role of regulations and practice in the companies for later collective sector agreements**, as it was shown in the case of the metal and the chemical industries. These two collective agreements now open up new possibilities for action in the German context.

In both sectors, the parties made the assumption that a **schematic definition of training time would lead nowhere if it ignored the specific conditions in individual companies**. This experience was also made in the case of the training leave legislation in 11 of the 16 federal Länder, where the formal right of paid training leave is used only by a very small - and decreasing - number of those who are entitled. The new right in the metal sector to **define one's own training requirements during the course of a personal interview** plays a crucial role in realising individual needs compared with the requirements and constraints imposed by the company. The extent to which training interests overlap between an individual and his company and individual needs can be realised depends on negotiation and therefore on the ability of individual employees to recognise what their needs are and to articulate these. It is in this context that the works council acquire a new role - as a sort of training advisor.

Similar can be shown in the case of the chemical industry: the framework laid down by the collective agreement has to be implemented by company agreements - which means again an important and strengthened role of the works councils. In both cases, the **two levels of industrial relations in Germany - company and sectoral - complement one another**.

In this context, one important question is whether the partners on company level are able to implement the sector agreement. The setting up of joint social partners' agencies and foundations in the chemical and in the metal industry is based on a realisation that qualitative collective regulations can only be effective if the companies concerned - in particular smaller ones - receive ongoing support and advice on implementation from the parties to the agreement.

The **shift towards individual interests** in further training that emerges from the collective agreements described above indicates a change in perspective. The targeting of specific groups under the "Learning Regions" programme also indicates an increasing awareness of personal learning biographies. What is largely lacking so far is any link between "training activities" during the course of individuals' careers. The individual training time and financial learning accounts can be seen as an adequate approach to solve this problem. A central question in this context will be whether and how there can be an integration of company-based and extra-company learning account systems. Underlying this is an important question regarding the integration of company-based training into

any future system of lifelong learning.

Last but not least, the new regulations on further training in ICT occupations offer new modes **organisation and recognition of further training**. They are a strikingly innovative approach to the organisation of lifelong learning that could constitute the core of a possible system to link initial and further training.

2.4 United Kingdom

The national context

Trade union organisation reached a peak in 1979 at over 50 per cent and has fallen steadily ever since, partly as a result of hostility towards the unions during the Conservative era (1979-1997) but also because of restructuring, which has continued to affect both union density and the coverage of collective agreements. Union density fell by 10 percentage points between 1989 and 2001, according to the autumn 2001 Labour Force Survey, when it stood at 29.1 per cent compared with 39.0 per cent in 1989. The drop in union density over the past 12 years occurred mainly in the traditional union strongholds. In 1989 density in the production (manufacturing and energy) industries was 45 per cent, but by 2001 this had fallen to 28 per cent. In 2001, 48 per cent of all employees worked in workplaces where there were trade union members present and 36 per cent said their pay was affected by collective agreements.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the UK economy was described as having a 'low skills equilibrium', associated with a preponderance of unskilled 'bad jobs'. The flexible labour market created during the Conservative era was inadequate to deliver long-term investment in training, especially compared with other Member States where more regulated labour markets and state support for collective bargaining promote higher levels of training and qualifications.

Nevertheless, there were initiatives under the Conservatives to increase involvement in learning. In 1991, on the recommendation of the National Training Task Force, which involved representatives of the CBI, TUC and Institute of Personnel and Development, the Employment Department launched Investors in People (IiP) as a national Standard setting a level of good practice for training and development of people to achieve business goals. Investors in People UK was established in 1993 to provide national ownership of the IiP Standard and is responsible for its promotion and branding, quality assurance and development. Since that time, tens of thousands of UK employers, employing millions of people, have become involved with the standard. The pursuit of this Standard by employers provided the impetus for much of the bargaining over training that occurred before the change of government in 1997 and it continues to play a major role in establishing links between organisational strategies and human resource development.

The election of 'New Labour' in May 1997 was an important turning point because the Blair Government recognised both the necessity of updating workforce skills to support the modernisation agenda and the potential of European Lifelong Learning policy to deliver this while promoting social inclusion. The Government established the Skills Task Force (STF), to assess the existing skills base within the UK and develop a national agenda for skills development, and the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (NAGCELL), to advise on developing a culture of lifelong learning, and on widening participation in learning.

The Skills Task Force highlighted serious skill shortages and skills gaps in the UK economy. Estimating some 20 per cent of British adults to be functionally illiterate, and a higher proportion to have significant deficits with respect to numeric skills, the STF identified six major areas of skill deficiency within the workforce: basic skills; generic skills; intermediate level skills; specialist ICT skills; adult basic skills and mathematical skills. The third STF report, Tackling the Adult Skills Gap, proposed a new strategy to develop an effective workforce through informal learning and new work practices and emphasised the need for

a partnership approach to promote workplace learning.

The two reports produced by NAGCELL emphasised the need for collaboration between the social partners to develop workplace learning, where efforts should be concentrated on upgrading skills, especially amongst those groups of workers with low levels of participation in learning. In 1998 the Government addressed many of the NAGCELL recommendations in formulating the lifelong learning Green Paper *The Learning Age*, which announced the Government's intention to establish the University for Industry (an organization for open and distance learning to stimulate demand and promote access to learning) and committed the Government to work with business, employees and their trade unions to support and develop skills in the workplace. In England, the DEE established the Union Learning Fund (ULF) in 1998, with the aim of using trade union influence to increase the take-up of learning at work, while boosting union capacity for delivering learning among trade unionists.

In March 1999 the Government announced a wide-ranging consultation exercise on the structures for education and training for people over 16 years of age, excluding higher education. Following that exercise, the Government published a White Paper, *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning*. The key argument of *Learning to Succeed* was that too many people are excluded from the benefits that learning can bring and that the post-16 education and training system must be reformed to increase participation in learning and raise the skills of the working population. To achieve the necessary changes, the Government announced the creation of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for England to deliver all post-16 education and training (excluding higher education).

Individual Learning Accounts were introduced in September 2000 and by October 2001 2.5 million individuals had registered with the Learning Accounts Centre as eligible for subsidized learning and 9,000 organisations were registered as learning providers. ILAs became a focus of social dialogue as employers made additional contributions (over and above the state finance) on the basis of individual or collective agreements. Unfortunately, the programme was closed down on 23 November 2001 after an investigation found evidence of abuse and fraud by a small minority of providers and the Government decided not to introduce a successor scheme to ILAs as part of the new Skills Strategy. In place of ILAs, new entitlements to free learning to level 2 have been established in England for those with few or no qualifications. However, in Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government launched ILA (Wales) as a mechanism for providing free access to learning.

In April 2001 the LSC assumed responsibility for funding further education colleges, Modern Apprenticeships, National Traineeships and other government funded training and workforce development. A network of 47 local arms of the LSC was established to plan and co-ordinate provision locally, with sufficient autonomy to address local needs through local Learning Partnerships. The local arms of the LSC are responsible for developing, in partnership with Local Education Authorities (LEAs), arrangements for Adult and Community Learning (ACL) and for providing information, advice and guidance to adults. ACL has a vital role to play in widening participation of hard-to-reach learners, promoting social inclusion and community renewal, and developing the basic skills that individuals need to be active citizens and to enhance their employability and quality of life. As *The Learning Age* noted, learning enables people to play a full part in their community; strengthens the family, promotes citizenship, equality of opportunity and democracy; enables a love of the arts and a civilised society

and develops the spiritual side of our lives. In principle, the more strategic approach - with the LSC taking a leading role in planning, together with Learning Partnerships and the LEAs themselves - should lead to a more prominent role for community-based and voluntary organisations, including trade unions. Such provision is particularly effective in reaching those parts of the population currently under-represented in learning, according to an independent evaluation of the ACL Fund.

At the time of the introduction of new arrangements with the LSC, the ACL sector had already entered a period of profound change because of the expansion of adult learning opportunities arising from Government initiatives and the development of open learning. In addition to the policy emphasis on Lifelong Learning, there is growing recognition of the role of learning in promoting social inclusion, and especially in confronting the 'digital divide'. In a recent comprehensive study of ACL in England, irrespective of the mode of delivery or extent of local deprivation, all LEAs were found to be involved in extensive partnerships for the delivery of ACL, yet none mentioned trade unions among their partners even where unions were represented in Local Learning Partnerships.

In July 2003, following an extensive review and consultation exercise, the Department for Education and Skills published a White Paper outlining the Government's skills strategy, *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential*. The TUC felt that the consultation document had underestimated the role of unions in promoting learning, but this was rectified in the White Paper and the TUC welcomed the central strategy of establishing a Skills Alliance, comprising a high-level Social Partnership Board with representatives from key government departments (the Departments for Employment and Skills; Trade and Industry; Work and Pensions; and the Treasury) and the social partners (TUC, CBI and Small Business Council), and a Delivery Partners Board led by the LSC, which will deal with practical implementation and operational matters. The White Paper also contains new measures at regional and sector levels, again including a strong role for the trade unions. The new Sector Skills Councils, building on the Sector Skills Foresight initiatives and Workforce Development Plans, are encouraged to broker Sector Skills Agreements between trade unions and employers' associations to develop workforce skills in line with sector needs. Significantly, the White Paper also recognises the need to develop intermediate skills (level 3), where the UK is particularly deficient, as well as continuing to address the basic skills needs at level 2.

2.4.2 Trade union policy on lifelong learning

During the Conservative era, there was substantial evidence that trade unions were having a positive influence on workplace training and development, and that a greater proportion of trade union members received training than their non-unionised counterparts. Whilst there was little evidence of formal collective bargaining over training and learning, informal arrangements for consultation in relation to such matters were evident, and informal workplace level partnerships between trade unions and employers emerged in some areas, bringing tangible benefits for both employees and employers.

In order to remedy the low level of investment in skill formation in the UK, the leadership of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) called upon affiliated unions 'to bargain for skills'. The Bargaining for Skills (BfS) initiative, formally launched in 1995, involved the TUC and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and was a key part of the 'new unionism'. The framework for BfS involved the TUC calling for employers to work in partnership with the unions and TECs at local

level to promote vocational education and training (VET). Since take-up of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs, and SVQs in Scotland) had been inadequate to meet the National Targets for Education and Training, the TUC was able to obtain funding via the TECs to promote bargaining over training and the acquisition of skills. The role of the TECs was taken over by the local arms of the LSC in April 2001.

Assessing the role of the trade unions in the workplace and the extent to which local representatives are able to engage management within the new agenda is difficult because of the informality of workplace industrial relations in the UK. Thus, while full-time trade union officials report formal policy at national level to promote training for members, they are often unaware of specific collective agreements with employers. Sometimes VET is dealt with separately, but it may also be dealt with as part of discussions on other issues, such as pay, hours and new technology. In the past, such bargaining as took place over VET was ad hoc and arose out of other issues, rather than as part of a conscious strategy to promote skill formation.

There appear to be relatively few formal training agreements in the UK, which partly reflects the decentralisation of collective bargaining and the informality of workplace relations. At leading edge sites, there were model examples of successful Training Agreements, even under the Conservatives, but these were far from typical and, since the overall scope of collective bargaining had substantially contracted since 1980, trade unions made little headway with most employers in securing agreements over VET. For example, there has been a training agreement at European Gas Turbines (EGT) in Lincoln since the early 1990s based on a partnership designed to improve the company's competitive position and maintain job security. The agreement included comprehensive changes in working practices and a pay structure that rewarded acquisition of additional skills as well as a guarantee of job security in return for flexibility. The AEEU, GMB and TGWU negotiated a similar agreement to EGT with United Distillers and Blue Circle Cement, with job security guarantees linked to an employee development scheme and more flexible working practices.

The only sector agreement specifically relating to training known to the TUC national officer with responsibility for this area is in the printing industry, between the Graphical Media and Print Union (GPMU) and the employers' association, the British Federation of Master Printers. This is a general 'framework agreement' designed to promote learning at work, but there are apparently considerable difficulties with its implementation at local level. In common with much sector bargaining, management at individual workplaces are not obliged to adopt anything from this facilitation agreement, it merely deals with how such arrangements may be put in place if the parties locally so desire.

Between 1998 and 2000, TUC Learning Services developed the idea of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs), active union members, normally lay officials, who provide advice, guidance and support to colleagues in activities related to learning and may negotiate with employers or providers to increase access to learning opportunities. As the role has developed, ULRs have become involved in initiatives to develop learning partnerships with employers, to establish workplace learning centres, to broker provision with local educational institutions and, working with employers, to identify learning needs and secure funding for workforce development initiatives. Typical of this approach is the Learning Agreement developed by the trade unions Amicus and USDAW at McVitie's biscuit factory in Harlesden. The agreement supports the activities of ULRs and is designed to develop a partnership approach to learning, promote

lifelong learning within the plant and provide access to learning opportunities for employees.

There are different views within the unions as to the role of learning representatives, with some seeing them as advocates or 'champions' for learning and others seeing them as having a wider remit including, especially, negotiating with employers and providing advice and guidance for members. Clearly, the definition of this role determines what training must be given to ULRs themselves, as well as the facilities that are needed from employers. The Public and Commercial Services union, for example, is currently developing its strategy on ULRs and envisages that they will act as a point of contact for the branch on training and development issues, negotiate greater access to learning opportunities and encourage members to take them up, as well as having an input to the union's national project under the ULF.

The Employment Act 2002 provided statutory backing for ULRs, a development that may be of pivotal importance for improving trade union effectiveness in influencing VET and lifelong learning opportunities in the workplace. Early evidence suggests that ULRs are having a very positive impact on the creation and take-up of learning opportunities at work. Extrapolating from data provided in a recent survey of ULRs, it was estimated that in 2000 alone, ULRs were able to promote learning to 178,000 people, and facilitated access either to workplace based courses, or external learning opportunities for 96,000 people, many of whom were new learners. One reason for this success is that ULRs, unlike management representatives, are known to, and trusted by, their colleagues, so are able to promote learning and provide advice and guidance, particularly to new or reluctant learners, in a non-threatening way that emphasises the benefits of learning for the individual.

Such support from local union representatives has proved crucial in the case of unskilled workers and workers at risk. Trade unions have an important role in defending the interests of low skilled workers and those at risk through negotiating access to learning opportunities tailored to their needs. The threat of job losses has led to some significant innovations in this respect. Redundancies at UGI Meters, a gas meter manufacturing company in Streatham Vale, prompted management and the unions on site (AEEU, GMB and MSF) to organise a retraining and job search programme in collaboration with local agencies. The Ceramics and Allied Trades Union (CATU) has developed a more responsive, customised, comprehensive package of assistance to individuals made redundant, or under threat of redundancy, in the ceramics sector, which is undergoing massive restructuring. The Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) established Steel Partnership Training, which contributed to union renewal through extending the services offered to members and encouraging former members to re-join the union on finding new employment outside the sector.

Example

ISTC – Steel Partnership Training

The UK steel industry has undergone a rapid restructuring and those made redundant lack appropriate skills for the new economy. Steel-making work processes have undergone substantial transformation, so there are new training needs for those remaining in the sector. In response to these needs, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) established Steel Partnership Training (SPT) to explore opportunities for funding and to encourage former and present steel workers back into learning. In addition to training learning representatives, SPT developed a system for rapid response to redundancy, providing information, advice and training free of charge to workers under immediate threat of redundancy, as well as developing basic skills to increase the employability of steelworkers and ex-steelworkers.

Several initiatives have been designed for workers with few qualifications and little experience of learning. The UNISON courses designed to bring individuals into learning, such as Return to Learn and Women, Work and Society are good examples of what the trade unions can contribute, since they are as much concerned with overcoming barriers to learning and building confidence as with developing study skills. The UNISON Return to Learn programme is probably the most extensive trade union initiative designed to attract workers with limited educational achievement into learning. Since 1995, the union has been providing learning opportunities in partnership with employers, and hundreds of partnerships have been established in local authorities, health trusts and universities, to provide the Return to Learn programme. Under these arrangements, the learner receives the equivalent of 10 days paid release from work, and the employer pays a per capita fee for tuition, whilst UNISON facilitates contact between the employer and the Workers' Educational Association as the training provider, subsidising development and training costs, as well as course materials. Unlike the internally provided Return to Learn programmes, which are restricted to UNISON members, programmes provided through the UNISON-employer partnerships are available to non-members.

Other unions have also developed arrangements to facilitate learning for workers with few qualifications or recognised skills. For example, USDAW in the mail order sector and the health service unions at Guy's Hospital.

Example

USDAW – Mail Order sector

Many members of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) are poorly qualified and are in unskilled and poorly paid occupations, with little opportunity for career advancement or training, especially in the mail order sector, where employment has contracted as a result of Internet commerce. USDAW and management in Littlewoods and Great Universal Stores collaborated to provide educational opportunities for workers, establishing open learning centres equipped with computer access points and arrangements for in-house accreditation by a local training provider. Take-up of learning was promoted by the partnership between the companies and the unions, formalised in agreements to develop joint lifelong learning policies, making learning as accessible as possible and encouraging take-up by providing facilities for ULRs.

Joint health service unions – learning agreement at Guy's Hospital

Excluding qualified medical and nursing staff, many workers employed in the health service have few qualifications and have not accessed formal learning, despite having acquired significant competence experientially. The joint health service unions negotiated a learning agreement with Guy's and St Thomas NHS Trust and established a joint union/Trust learning partnership committee responsible for introducing, implementing and monitoring learning initiatives. Regular training needs analyses are undertaken, an on-site learning centre was established and trade union representatives were trained to provide support, advice and guidance. The Trust is working towards the Investors in People standard and building a training partnership at the hospital was viewed as the best way to encourage all staff to participate in lifelong learning.

Example

The effectiveness of the TUC approach is evidenced by recent agreements and the model agreement promoted by TUC Learning Services. Among agreements negotiated recently, the Learning Agreement between Remploy and the recognised unions is significant for the facilities afforded to ULRs, which include:

- A reasonable period of paid time off within working hours to carry out these activities as a union learning representative
- A reasonable period of paid time off within working hours to visit training providers, colleges etc, by agreement in advance with the local site manager
- Access to an office which will allow a union learning representative to conduct interviews in strict privacy and confidentiality
- The use of a telephone, fax, printer and photocopier
- Access to a PC with email account, linked to intranet and internet

The Lifelong Learning Agreement negotiated between Demag Delaval Industrial Turbo Machinery is interesting because it establishes a joint union/employer learning partnership committee, responsible for introducing, implementing and monitoring learning initiatives through:

- Identifying the learning and skills needs of employees and employers.
- Prioritising learning needs at work.
- Identifying groups and individuals who will benefit from better access to learning and skills.
- Producing a realistic Learning Plan, setting goals and targets for learning provision within the workplace, including establishing a virtual learning centre.
- Ensuring that the Learning Plan is effectively implemented.
- Setting appropriate quality standards for learning opportunities.
- Monitoring provision of life long learning.
- Monitoring of any contract with outside education and training providers.
- Evaluating progress against agreed objectives.

Learning opportunities are often made available through workplace learning centres, especially where the company and union are agreed on the need to introduce training to support product or process changes, such as the Employee Development Scheme at Elida Fabergé.

Example

Elida Fabergé Employee Development Scheme

The UK's largest manufacturer of mass-market toiletries invested heavily in new technologies to update its manufacturing process but production workers at the Leeds site typically had few qualifications and were rarely involved in learning. To support changes in work organisation, a joint management-union review recommended an Employee Development Scheme to introduce continuous improvement while improving workers' employability and adaptability. A network of 15 'learning advisors', half of whom were shop stewards, provided advice and guidance and the company established a workplace learning centre equipped with multi-media distance learning materials. Barriers to learning were overcome by identifying personal development issues, such as a foreign language or basic computer skills and take-up of learning opportunities increased significantly.

In some cases, the learning opportunities are extended beyond the workplace to involve relatives of employees or members of the wider local community, thereby having the potential to contribute directly to social cohesion and community renewal. Some observers see this as marking the beginning of a renewal of trade unionism, built on community, rather than simply workplace, issues. Certainly, extending learning from the workplace into the wider community is essential for displaced workers, as in the SPT case, but also can have the potential for making lifelong learning a reality for all and not just those working in an environment which supports ULRs.

Example

Bird's Eye Walls

When Bird's Eye Walls reorganised its operations in Humberside, the company agreed to support the trade union GMB in developing the Springboard project, which provided a one-day course to give all employees confidence and ideas for learning and following which ULRs were trained in the Bird's Eye Walls plants in Humberside. From among the 40 ULRs, some were selected as learning champions, to staff two community-based learning centres, equipped with desktop and laptop computers. Jointly funded by Bird's Eye Walls and the trade unions, through ULF funding, the learning centres can be accessed by Bird's Eye Walls staff, family members and friends of company employees, thereby opening up wider learning opportunities in the community.

2.4.3 Analysis and assessment

The trade unions have been the major advocates of learning in the UK since the late 1980s, at which time they were a lone voice arguing the need to raise the level of skills in the workforce. Since the return of Labour Government in 1997, the state has played a facilitating role in promoting lifelong learning opportunities, while at the same time emphasising the individual's responsibility for their own learning and development. This individualisation of responsibility for learning is perceived to be the major weakness of UK policy on lifelong learning. It has been argued in relation to the UK's deregulated training system, where employers are not obliged to invest in training and individuals have no guaranteed right to training, that an emphasis on individual responsibility for learning might be expected to reinforce patterns of inequality in access.

Unskilled workers usually have lower levels of qualifications and are less likely to be involved in vocational training. Learners tend to be younger people; those in non-manual occupations; those who stayed in full-time continuous education longer; and those who left with higher qualifications. Indeed, adults who have previously engaged in learning are always far more likely to be current participants than those who have not, the so-called 'Matthias Principle'. Therefore, workers at risk of social exclusion, including those with low skills, older workers and those facing redundancy are frequently confronted by structural and personal barriers to learning, which is a serious weakness in emphasising the individual's responsibility.

The recognition by the Labour Government of the important role of the TUC in increasing participation in learning represents a major strength of the UK strategy for lifelong learning. This is especially the case in relation to government support, including statutory backing, for ULRs. The union role is also especially important for increasing learning among low skilled and other workers with little prior or recent experience of learning. Indeed, ULRs are arguably the most important social partner led innovation focused on increasing the take-up of learning opportunities, and it is significant that this initiative has come out of the UK, where statutory support for social dialogue is absent. If such a system were to be introduced in member states where there is a legal right to training and statutory support for social dialogue, the results could be even more impressive.

The importance of an appropriate environment for workplace learning has been demonstrated by the increased take-up of learning opportunities in establishments where open learning centres have been established, especially where these have involved learning partnerships between unions and employers. UNISON officials see the unions' role as central to the construction of workplace learning partnerships because they enable it to extend its influence within the sphere of industrial relations. In some cases, these learning opportunities have been taken into the community, raising the question of whether involvement in promoting lifelong learning beyond the workplace enhances or compromises the unions' role in representing members. The activities of SPT raise questions about whether the workplace or the community is the most appropriate locus for trade union activity in the field of learning. These community based initiatives have provided learning opportunities for displaced workers that would not have been possible within the workplace, and the community is arguably less of a contested terrain for learning.

Taking learning partnerships out into the community from the workplace has enormous potential for building a stronger foundation for sustainable trade unionism, but also offers a means for 'joining up' adult learning in the workpla-

ce and the community, a major requirement for creating the sort of seamless lifelong learning envisaged for achieving the Lisbon objectives. In this respect, recent evidence suggests there is a weakness in the UK strategy for lifelong learning since the trade unions appear to have insufficient influence in and Local Learning Partnerships. Moreover, the local arms of the LSC, perhaps because of the 'TEC legacy', have been more effective in establishing working partnerships with employers than with the unions, suggesting that the unions need to make more effort towards engagement with the other partners developing lifelong learning at local level.

3. Common issues and challenges

In the national trade unions in the EU-countries covered in the previous chapter there are big differences in the LLL policies. This is due to the very different general political settings and the specific educational and labour market settings of the individual country as well as the specific political traditions that differ in the national trade union movements.

But at the general level, there are similarities between the different challenges for trade unions in the different countries. Some of the common features are:

The increasingly differentiated workforce and interests of trade union members

In all European countries, there are huge changes taking place in the labour markets. A number of factors – the increased competition, globalisation, increased use of ICT, etc. – create changes in the qualification structures and in the traditional industrial relations of the different countries. One of the general features of this process is, that there are “winners and losers” within the workforce. There are – especially but not exclusively among the skilled and more qualified workers – new opportunities for parts of the workforce to join processes involving skills development and the extension of possibilities for individual development at the workplace. But there are also – especially but not exclusively among the uneducated or low-skilled workers – new risks of social exclusion and still lower chances for finding good and steady employment. This puts a political pressure on the trade unions because it seems to be a difficult task to develop political demands as well as practical solutions that appeal to both groups of union members. European unions face a demand for a still more diversified political agenda – but in a common or single framework based on the same core values of bridging the gap between the needs of those workers that are advantaged in terms of the modernisation of European workplaces and those workers that risk being excluded from the good jobs during this process.

The differentiation also goes for the employers. At this point, only a few employers can and want to discuss individual development plans for the employees and are able to ensure that skills development is a core element in the overall strategic plans for the company. And this is both a question of a lack of will to do so and a lack of the necessary competencies. But of course, there are employers who have a proactive attitude and who are open-minded in connection with the discussions on LLL – and the trade unions also have to take the very broad spectrum of employers and workplaces into consideration when making their strategies.

The need for a more individualised approach to members' rights

At the same time, it seems quite obvious that political issues in relation to life long learning have to include not only the general rights of the individual but also different ways to express the interests of the individual trade union member in accordance with his or her specific experiences, needs and position on the labour market. The traditional tools of the trade unions – the fight for general rights either by legislation or collective agreements – has to be supplemented or complemented with tools that provide room for the individual member and

his/her specific “route to LLL”. This is dealt with in different ways, but there is a common interest in the different countries in getting closer to the individual member either by including individual elements (e.g. individual development dialogues at the workplace) or by introducing measures to reach the individual member (e.g. ULR’s in UK).

The need for new definitions of core values and tasks for trade unions

This process of both building a bridge between “winners and losers” as well as recognizing the individual as the core element of trade union policies call for a new wording of some of the traditional and basic trade union values. Of course, all countries have a common interest in securing certain basic social possibilities through employability as such for the members.

But as a general feature, this is not necessarily regarded as a specific trade union point of view or interest. This is also in the interest of the states and employers at a general level of politics. In all European contexts, there is a need for more explicit discussions and definitions of the aspects of democratisation and solidarity in relation to the right to skills development on your own terms as well as the path towards more and better jobs for all. The trade unions should be the strong voice that provides a perspective for more and better jobs – that there is a qualitative dimension to the economic development which is the goal of the European Union.

The general trend towards individualization carries the risk of becoming a way of blaming the individual if he or she isn’t able to finish an education, to secure his or her own employability or to handle radical shifts in labour market structures. The trade union movements are to be able to demand that society takes on the responsibility for creating frameworks that may secure the individual in this process.

Motivation of individual workers and trade unions

In all the European countries, all stakeholders recognise that there is a lack of participation in LLL. It is generally considered that the activity is too low - especially among the most vulnerable parts of the workforce (unskilled, older, etc. workers). It is also a general problem that there is a Matthews-effect in this connection – i.e. that those who got a good initial education are also the ones that are most likely to benefit from adult education, while those that didn’t succeed in getting an initial education are most likely not to participate in adult education. And this has an immediate effect on employability and the capability of keeping up with the demands of an increasingly changing working life.

In all countries, the trade unions have specific responsibilities for motivating and encouraging their members to engage in the current processes on the labour market and participate in skills development. Some of the most creative new trade union practises have been specifically oriented towards this issue of motivating and “campaigning” for LLL among the members (e.g. ULR’s and “Guidance corners”).

Recognition and validation of workplace learning

In all European countries, it has been accepted that learning is not the same as formal education and training. Especially in relation to skills development in working life, it’s evident that the formal education system and the formal educational institutions are not the only factors. The learning that is taking place in all work settings has to be taken into account and the recognition and validation

of the learning based on experience from the workplace (and other social settings) is a crucial part of making LLL a reality - Especially if one of the aims is to motivate some of those with few formal qualifications but who have had a long working life with experience from a lot of different work situations. In this case, this working experience could represent a stepping stone for entering the relevant levels in the formal education system. Many of the European trade unions play a key role in developing systems for this recognition and validation of previous experience. It is crucial that the social partners are the driving force behind this development due to the fact that, to some extent, it will work as a “counter-balance” to the power of the educational institutions.

Financing LLL

There is a common understanding in both the international forums, (the EU Commission as well as the OECD), that all stakeholders (normally seen as the state, the employer and the individual - but sometimes also including the social partners represented by the organisations) have to contribute to the process in order for there to be sufficient resources for an increased effort in the field of LLL. And in all countries there is a specific discussion going on about the actual balance between the stakeholders - their contributions as well as their influence over LLL possibilities. Generally, it's a common feature that it is very difficult for all trade unions to get employers to contribute to LLL and when the employers do contribute this tends to be through very narrow approaches that are closely related to the actual job, and very often for a selected and small number of the workforce.

At the same time, all European states face some kind of problems with still more scarce resources for education - due to an aging workforce, increasing expenditure on health systems, etc.. This calls for trade union responses to the question of financing - and especially to the development of systems that ensure a democratic perspective on the allocation of resources - meaning that those with the biggest needs and smallest resources of their own are those that are most likely to benefit from the system of allocation of resources.

But it seems like that there are some common political positions in relation to the financing of LLL: Basic skills and training aiming at the specific needs of the individual company cannot be regarded as the financial responsibility of the individual! It has to be either the responsibility of society or the company - or in special cases - a mixture of the two. And the trade unions all recognise that there are groups of employees that are doing quite well for themselves in connection with education and their position on the labour market and whose own interest in further education may take on such a personal dimension that individual participation in the financing seems quite fair.

It also seems to be an emerging issue that “time” could be one of the most important “currencies” that is used in LLL. In Germany, this has led to the establishment of “time accounts” as one of the measures to find a mechanism for providing opportunity for joint financing of LLL.

The duality between legislation and collective agreements

In all countries, it's seen as a future objective to include elements of skills development in the collective agreements. In all countries, the trade unions have a clear opinion that this kind of question is very central to the future work of the trade unions and that it would be of great importance to include it in still more practical and active ways in the agreements.

The different national settings establish very different conditions for this

strategy and this provides different points of view in terms of the balance between legislation and agreements. But it's a common feature that within this policy field all trade union movements recognise that there has to be an extensive use of state support (legislative as well as financially) – supporting the social partners' own negotiations and agreements within LLL.

Redefining the role of the trade unions

As can be seen from the discussion of the issue of financing, the role of the trade unions is often debated. In some cases, it's a central part in terms of creating balanced systems of getting resources that the social partners have mechanisms for creating national or sectoral solutions. In other cases, some of the new mechanisms (e.g. learning accounts, vouchers, etc.) are rather techniques for distributing learning/training opportunities directly to an individual. In these cases, the trade union isn't regarded as an active partner in the process.

In all countries, the trade unions are very actively seeking new roles and new modes of operation to get to the core of the LLL process. Some of the means of developing this are:

- New elements in the collective agreements at sectoral or company level that are especially efficient in relation to creating practical LLL-procedures (e.g. time accounts).
- The role of being “intermediaries” between individuals and educational/training opportunities (ULR, Guidance and counselling, etc.).
- Being a stakeholder in the process of quality insurance in relation to IVT and CVT.
- Being actively engaged in expanding the social acceptance/ the learning culture in our companies and in society as such.

It could also be described as a general trend towards the process by which trade unions are not only becoming part of policy-formulation and decision making but also becoming part of the implementation of LLL.

The difficult task of defining the “learning” aims and contents of adult education

Finally, it seems like a common difficult task to find practical and understandably ways of defining what this is all about in more practical terms. What kind of learning does a trade union support – all? What are the individual and social goals of the specific political measure within the field of LLL. There are big differences in the trade unions' views on this issue – whether it be basic skills, continuing vocational training in relation to specific needs on the labour market or further education for employees? But in connection with the everyday work, it can be very difficult to give very precise definitions.

At the same time it's essential to the trade union goals that the trade unions are able to both see LLL as part of “the employability” and the “more and better jobs” – issues – and as part of a broader holistic perspective on the development of all the potential of the individual human being. Meanwhile, both issues aim at seeing LLL as a necessary tool for developing the European economy and at all times keeping in mind the fact that there are much wider benefits of education and training for society than just short-term economic gain.

4. Ideas for a future European policy

Based on the national descriptions and the discussion about the cross-national features within LLL-policies we want to finish the paper with a discussion on how we could imagine that ETUC and the European trade union movement could further develop the LLL-policy. It has become clear during the discussions of the national trade union policies that these are very different due to the national conditions (political, traditional and socio-economical). This means that there is no easy solution to the question on how to develop a more specific trade union policy on LLL at the European level, because there are no specific core elements that are the same across the countries – because the core political challenges differ from one country to another.

A LLL-policy has to be developed as a European policy project based on discussions of the specific European dimension in the different aspects of LLL. If the trade unions do not engage in such a European project, there is a genuine risk that this field will become dominated by national contributions based on the concept of national cooperation being more valuable than transnational solutions.

By describing and raising these issues, it is our aim to set out some initial points for discussion in order to help this European process to progress.

We need to develop more European answers to the questions in connection with LLL

The development within the EU during the last decade has made the possible paths for Europe to take quite clear. On the one hand, Europe can, without any political ambitions other than creating an even more neo-liberal free market than the US and Japan, try to be a competitive force in the global market. Or Europe can, on the other hand, have an ambition of being able to combine a competitive position with political priorities that include creating better jobs, social inclusion and democracy and expanded welfare in our countries. The European Trade union movement (ETUC) has actively supported the goals mentioned in the second option. Since the Lisbon process in particular started to put emphasis on political measures used to ensure, for instance a European employment policy, the ETUC has actively been lobbying for creating a “social Europe” with an acknowledged position for the social partners.

This has been a success in a number of areas – and among these is the issue of LLL. Since the discussion on the Commission’s Memorandum on Lifelong learning references have been made to the importance of having the social partners at European level engaged in the process. And the LLL concept can be found at the heart of a number of political priorities in the process based on The Lisbon declaration. If we want to create more and better jobs, and if we want to fight social exclusion and ensure employability for all citizens, we have to use LLL as an offensive tool in this process. But we must also be very aware – and have a voice that expresses this – that the process of making Europe a knowledge-based competitive economy will create winners and losers, and we must find political solutions to avoid this.

Through the “Framework of action for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications” (created together with UNICE, CEEP and UEAPME) the trade unions have established a platform for promoting their influence in the process of implementing LLL-policies at European level. But the Framework, as well as the LLL-positions of ETUC, has a very general at not very precise

scope that may pave the way for more specific actions at the European level – and the ETUC has to find ways to develop the LLL-policies further.

Trade unions support worker mobility and transparency of national qualification structures

As a very basic interest of the trade unions is the question of mobility within the European Union. Mobility is a crucial means of ensuring the individual worker's possibilities of finding relevant jobs, wages according to the qualification level, etc. and it is important that the different national qualification structures are transparent. Vocational education and training should not be homogenized in Europe – because that would neglect the close links between VET and different labour market structures, cultural differences, historic background etc. But if the individual is to have a chance of “navigating” on transnational labour markets he or she has to be able to understand them – and, furthermore, the employers and the new colleagues have to understand the background of a worker coming from another European country. This should not only facilitate geographical mobility but also occupational or professional mobility.

The trade unions must develop instruments together with the employers that can meet these requirements – and that can ensure that this process is based in the labour market and in the individual's need for mobility on the labour market. This means that it's not primarily the education system but also the labour market that should define how the transparency should work and be organised.

The European political agenda can support the development of new national strategies for trade unions on LLL

We have found many good cases on innovative practices in relation to develop new approaches to LLL in the respective countries. As discussed in chapter 3, it is clear that the individual trade union movement is struggling with some of the same issues – even though the settings and the practical possibilities can be very different – and this indicates that there is a lot of potentially good experience to learn from in the other countries and which can be used for discussing good (and bad) practices.

A closer co-operation, unilateral and bilateral discussions and further exchanges of experiences could be fruitful ways to develop this policy area. It's obvious that a transfer of concrete methods and modes of operation from one country to another is seldom possible – because the conditions are often to different. But the discussions of the approaches and the definitions of policy measures and implementations strategies could provide inspiration for new and concrete actions in other countries.

In particular, the discussions at sectoral level have to be further developed. At the sectoral level, the actual problems are often better defined in the sector specific trades and crafts and it is often easier to define a common understandable structure here – but there is also the potential danger that it becomes an inward-looking and very narrow discussion about the sectors very specific problems. All sectors are undergoing great changes – and it is sometimes difficult even to agree on how to define a given sector. Furthermore, there are many cross-sectoral issues of great importance – ICT being an example of this.

But of course, at a certain point, it must be assessed whether there still is a reasonable connection to the overall perspective and cross-sectional dimensions.

The “Framework of action” is the starting point for developing a trade union strategy for LLL

Even though “The Framework of Action” is not an agreement with the employers, we find it to be a very central point in the development of trade union policy on LLL. The framework is based in an understanding of the independent and pro-active contribution from the social partners. It's not only an agreement on how the partners will influence The Commission and the EU-activities, but it states that the partners will carry out certain activities based on their own agreed priorities. But the centrality of the document does not ensure its practical effect and implementation.

First of all it must be assured that the implementation and the progress in relation to the framework are being monitored. It would be wise for the social partners to convince the Commission that it ought to finance a monitoring process based on “neutral” reporters in the individual countries and an expert (group) to make an annual report to the social dialogue committee that discusses the LLL issue.

With minimal efforts, it would be possible to give the monitoring process a much more focused and structured mode of operation, and it could be led by the four priorities of the “Framework”.

We have to be ambitious in relation to training/education policies at a European level!

It will be a difficult task to create a more shared LLL-policy at the European level as it appears from this paper. At the moment, there is no extensive transnational trade union cooperation in the field of LLL and it's difficult to establish forms of co-operation that can ensure a real and immediate benefit for each of the national trade unions. But if the trade unions want to play a role in this field, we have to be ambitious and work very targeted with the task of creating a common European trade union strategy for LLL. Only if we have this overriding goal, are we able to surmount the narrower, nationally based different conceptions that could bloc a wider reaching and visionary policy

It has to be an aim for the ETUC to ensure that the work in relation to the Copenhagen/Brugge-process (and the “Future objectives of education systems”) leads to progressive results from a trade union point of view and that the process is also used for a work with developing trade union European policy as such. The ETUC must integrate work in the different fields of policies: LLL and employment- and workplace policy. To this end, the ETUC should develop a support structure of consultants and researchers operating transnationally on this basis.

In more specific terms, we think that special attention should be given to the following three issues:

- 1) Transparency and recognition - based on the labour market and not solely on the educational institutions

Transparency and recognition is a basic need for creating more opportunities for those workers that wish to work in another country than the one in which they received their education or training. As such, it has to be supported by the trade unions and be closely linked to labour market structures - more than to formal principles of comparison between educational systems.

Besides, this it should be clear that a common understanding of structures and skills-levels across the European countries would also be a benefit for the

trade unions. It will provide the basis for a common understanding of the organisational principles in the different countries and may help developing cross-boarder guidelines on how the different groups are organised – and it will help the individual to clarify how skills levels and labour-markets structures are in different countries.

2) Resources/financing of LLL

In all European countries, the trade unions will face problems with ensuring enough resources for the ambitious goals that we all set in relation to a broad level of skills development for the entire population of the European Union. At the same time, there is an increasing amount of transnational sharing of experience among the national governments in connection with the different policies in these areas, (in close cooperation with the EU, the OECD runs a major programme for discussion finance running). It's evident that in this crucial issue, the trade unions should also exchange experiences and try to develop new models and answers.

3) LLL as part of combating social exclusion and working towards “more and better jobs”

In the discussions both at national levels, as well as on the European level, there is a tendency to narrow the discussion down to only focusing on the here-and-now employment-related subjects and how we ensure that the individual employee has access to this type of training. Trade unions should continue to be the foremost advocate of a broader concept of LLL. LLL is a key element in combating social exclusion, in creating more and better jobs and in the project of increasing the possibilities of developing the human potential of all citizens in Europe.

Europe can make a difference

It is part of the strategy to keep the Lisbon process on track. Trade unions should support the broad and progressive goals defined in the Lisbon documents from 2000. Reaching the objectives from Lisbon must be based on the inclusion of all citizens in the knowledge-society and the trade unions are key players in this process.

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