



Algemeen Secretariaat • Secrétariat Général • Generalsekretariat • Secretariat General • Secretaría General

EUROFEDOP SEMINAR

**7-8-9—II—2002
Fredericia (Denmark)**

BASIC DOCUMENT

“LIFELONG LEARNING, A CONDITION FOR QUALITY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE”

Introduction

One of the conclusions of the Eurofedop seminar “Impact of New Technologies on Employment in the Public Services” was that lifelong learning is a requirement for further implementation of ICT and a possibility to fight the digital divide. In recent years, the concept of lifelong learning (including eLearning) has become a buzzword not only within the European Union, also companies acknowledge the importance of continuous training.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) was one of the first organisations to recognise the importance of continuous education for adults, as early as 1960. For Unesco, education is an indispensable tool in the creation of a civil society. Social cohesion and solidarity between citizens are keywords in their policies. During several international meetings the members came to the conclusion that lifelong learning is the key to the 21st century. Other organisations put these conclusions into their own perspective.

In 1974 Convention C 140 concerning Paid Educational Leave was signed at the General Conference of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Article 3 of this convention states among other things: “That (education) policy shall be designed to contribute (a) to the acquisition, improvement and adaptation of occupational and functional skills, and the promotion of employment and job security; (c) to the human social and cultural advancement of workers; (d) generally, to the promotion of appropriate continuing education and training, helping workers to adjust to contemporary requirements”. Since 1976 only eight of the current members of the European Union have ratified this convention and the principles laid down in it.

However, in March 2000 the meeting of the European Council in Lisbon affirmed that Europe has indisputably moved into the “Knowledge Age”, with all that this will imply for cultural, economic and social life. According to the European Union this means that individuals must adapt to change; but equally that established ways of doing things must change too. The Member-States did little effort to hide the (economic) motives for their enthusiasm: *“Lifelong learning is essential if Europe really wants to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”*.

Despite the popularity of the lifelong learning concept, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) concluded in its *Education policy analysis 2001* that *“in terms of participation in organised learning activity, lifelong learning for all is far from being a reality in OECD countries”*.

According to the latest World Employment Report by the ILO (spring 2001), lifelong learning is becoming the fundamental source of job security or employability in the digital age. In this seminar Eurofedop wants to put European initiatives on lifelong learning in a “public service” context. Because of the specific organisation and the indispensable role of the public service in contemporary society, the aspect of education in this sector has a specific framework. In short: What is the link between lifelong learning, eLearning, and quality in the public service?

Theme 1: Lifelong learning as a condition for quality in the public service

Lifelong learning is the whole of formal, non-formal and informal education a person experiences throughout his life (*Unesco*). The most important idea being that adults should continually update and, if necessary, upgrade their knowledge, skills and competencies.

In this definition, *formal education* refers to the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal education institutions that normally contribute to full-time education for children and young people, leading to certification. *Non-formal training* comprises any organised and sustained educational activities that do not correspond to this definition of formal education. It can take place both within and outside educational institutions and cater for persons of all ages. Finally, *informal learning* consists of all intended learning activities that cannot be classified as formal or non-formal learning. They are characterised by a relatively low level of organisation and may take place at the individual level or at group level (e.g. workplace). Typically informal learning does not lead to certification.

The link between these forms of education and training is of particular importance. *According to the Secretary-General of the OECD: “Lifelong learning implies above all a systematic view, building strong linkages between learning at different stages of life and in a wide range of settings and partnerships rather than just looking at various forms of education and training provision in isolation from each other. Too often the pieces of the lifelong learning jigsaw remain unconnected.”*

Since the 1980s lifelong learning has been integrated in the educational policies of many governments and international organisations like the European Union and the OECD. There are two important reasons for this interest in adult education and the concept of lifelong learning.

In the first place, the knowledge society needs a higher or different level of basic or initial education. The “new” society is increasingly based on higher education and there are less and less opportunities for low-skilled employees. There is a growing need for higher “potential” in the workforce and the levels of knowledge required are constantly rising. This process is also known as “upskilling”.

Secondly, the qualifications of the employees need constant upgrading because of the speed at which the knowledge society is developing and the important role of new technologies. Employees have to adapt constantly to a constantly changing workplace. Among sociologists this process is known as *skill biased technological change*: technological developments lead to more complicated jobs and more demanding customers; which thus requires additional training to deliver more complex services. This model shows the relation between the implementation of new technologies, organisational changes and the quality of services delivered.

Obviously, each profession has its own particular skills and abilities. Determining these skills is one of the first steps in the development of lifelong learning policies. Apart from more specific job related skills, educational experts have defined “key-skills”, which are indispensable for an employee in the knowledge society:

- ICT knowledge and skills

- Learning abilities: learn to learn
- Communicative skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Mathematical or numerical skills

However, there does not seem to be a consensus in this field. The European Union, for example, adds entrepreneurship, foreign languages and a technological culture to this list.

The concepts of “knowledge economy” and “knowledge worker” are based on the view that information and knowledge are at the centre of economic growth and development. The ability to produce and use information effectively is a vital source of skills. Furthermore the introduction of ICTs has led to a demand for specific workplace competencies in the realm of communication and computing skills.

However, in the United Kingdom, employers reported (1996) that communication skills and the capacity for self-management were more important than technical or ICT skills. Employers placed high importance on inter-personal skills and gave less weight to narrower, learned skills. According to the employers surveyed, initiative and communication skills were considered as particularly relevant, because a motivated new employee could easily obtain the necessary specific skills through training or on-the-job experience.

Moreover, the Skill Survey of the Employed British workforce found that apart from those employed in the highly demanding ICT industries, people easily acquire the necessary computer skills. The study goes on to conclude

that a possible over-investment in computer skills may mask shortcomings regarding other skills that can be more crucial for the job. The OECD therefore concludes: *“the competencies needed for the knowledge economy are likely to be more broadly based rather than narrowly vocational”*.

Theme 2: Lifelong learning in a European context

At several occasions the Member States and the European institutions confirmed that lifelong learning is a key element in making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world. As early as 1996 the EU organised a European Year on Lifelong Learning which led to a *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*. Nevertheless a Labour Force Survey in 2000 found only 8% of EU 25-64 year olds participating in education and training.

The most recent document, issued by the European Commission on 21 November, is therefore titled *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* (COM (2001) 678). After consultation with the social partners and NGOs the Commission decided to alter its initial definition of lifelong learning in order to include cultural and social dimensions of learning: “*Lifelong learning is all learning activity undertaken throughout life; with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective*”

Although Member States are fully responsible for the content and organisation of their own education and training system, the EU sees a particular role for itself in enhancing the quality of education through co-operation in this field and the development of European labour markets and the co-ordination of employment and social inclusion policy.

In the above-mentioned document the Commission proposes numerous initiatives and long-term projects. Among the most important are:

1. The acknowledgement that a lifelong learning-policy does not imply a new process, nor can it involve the harmonisation of laws and regulations. It calls for more coherent and economical use of existing instruments and resources.

2. Achieving the vision of lifelong learning for all calls for higher levels of investment. Such increases should be based on shared responsibility between government, public authorities, employers, social partners and individual citizens. Member States should set targets to increase participation in further education and training, indicating the increase in participation that they expect to achieve by gender, age group and target groups.

3. Key points in facilitating access to learning opportunities should include removing social, geographical, psychological and other barriers, for example by promoting ICT, workplace learning and local learning centres.

4. Social partners should work together and with other actors to ensure that the trend towards greater flexibility in the organisation of work is accompanied by adequate investment by employers in their workforce - a key dimension of quality in work.

5. Information and counselling services are a key interface between learning needs and the learning on offer. They are also crucial in helping learners find their place in increasingly complex learning systems.

6. The Commission will initiate by the end of 2002 a systematic exchange of experience and good practice in the

field of identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The European Forum on the Transparency of Qualifications, managed by Commission and Cedefop should co-ordinate this process in close co-operation with the Member States, the social partners, the OECD, etcetera.

7. The social partners are invited to negotiate and implement agreements at all appropriate levels to modernise the organisation of work, with a view to increasing investment in lifelong learning and providing more time for learning. For example, they should work towards the recognition of all learning activities, including non-formal and informal learning, and integrate this into all aspects of human resource policies.

8. The social partners are invited to conclude agreements on the promotion of access to learning opportunities, in particular for workers with low levels of skills and older workers, to meet the objective of giving every worker the opportunity to achieve information society literacy by 2003 (see eLearning Action Plan)

Theme 3: eLearning: theory and practice

In May 2000 the European Commission adopted the eLearning initiative. Hereby the Commission defined eLearning as *“the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration”*. Within the framework of the eEurope Actionplan 2001-2004 it is a tool to change educational systems as well as support lifelong learning on a different level.

Apart from more theoretical aspects such as a discussion on the future of education, the eLearning initiative aims to:

- step up training at all levels
- promote universal digital literacy
- promote appropriate training for teachers
- create multipurpose places of learning accessible to all

One of the objectives of the Commission is that schools, universities and training centres should become “local knowledge acquisition centres” which are versatile and accessible to everyone. eLearning, in this context, implies the development of a virtual infrastructure or internet based knowledge centres.

However, in order to be able to participate in eLearning, people have to be digitally literate. An important initiative in this context is the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) which is based on experiences in Finland since 1994. The ECDL is aimed at raising the level of knowledge about IT, and the level of competence in using personal computers and common computer applications. ECDL con-

sists of seven modules and when all these modules are completed the candidate receives the European Computer Driving Licence. This concept has been implemented in 22 European Countries and it has had a considerable impact in especially the Nordic countries where it seems to be a rather popular certification among employers and employees.

eLearning is not limited to Commission proposals. PostEurop, for example, a sectoral organisation uniting post operators in Europe, has far reaching plans for a virtual post@academy. The changes in this sector and the introduction of new technologies have made continuous training necessary. Since most of the operators have had similar difficulties, a virtual training institution will be set up to cooperate in training, improve the employability of the employees and improve the service of the operators. After an assessment it became clear that eLearning is the most effective tool in reaching these objectives. However it remains to be seen if the post@cademy will be a success and whether or not this experience can be used in other sectors.

Theme 4: Role of trade unions and the social dialogue regarding lifelong learning

During the last decades, organisational and management reforms were seen as the primary tools for the modernisation of the public services. Meanwhile it has become clear to everybody that introducing new forms of work and new technologies can only be successful when the employees are given the possibility to adapt to the new working environment. The concept of lifelong learning and the knowledge society put into question the top-down approach.

It is the employee, or rather his or her skills and competencies which determine the effectiveness of an organisation. Lifelong learning is therefore a formidable argument in the social dialogue or to put it more blunt: no eGovernment without (e)Learning. Of course this is only a limited approach. Also the individual employee has a responsibility for his own professional and personal development, but to which extent? What are the priorities in lifelong learning and how can the interest of the employer as well as the interests of the employees be reconciled? Differences and inequality will not disappear in the knowledge society, to the contrary. All reports so far indicate that those who have had the most education benefit the most and are the most eager to learn.

Thus it is of the utmost importance that trade unions clearly define the needs of all employees and defend these interests on a national, but also more and more on a European level.

Secondly trade unions should determine their role in lifelong learning. Professor Richard Freeman, Faculty Co-Chair of the Harvard University Trade Union Program, has argued that the internet is the only way in which trade unions can survive in the 21st century. Moreover he concludes that in an era of individualism of employees, the principles of collectivism and solidarity are best served by the new technologies. According to him the electronic cyber-unions should provide services to their members such as training.

If training is one of the functions of the trade union how could this be organised within the framework of the public service and what are the responsibilities of trade unions regarding lifelong learning?

Conclusion

We hope that the input of the speakers as well as the participants will make it possible to answer the following questions during this seminar.

1. What is lifelong learning and what are the most important elements for the Public Service?
2. What are the initiatives in Europe (including the EU)?
3. How is lifelong learning organised in the Public Service?
4. What is the criticism of the trade unions?
5. What are the possibilities of eLearning for lifelong learning in the Public Service?
6. What are the initiatives regarding eLearning in Europe?
7. Which elements should trade unions emphasise in the social dialogue?
8. What role do trade unions play in lifelong learning?
9. Who is responsible for which training?
10. What should be done on a European level?