



Working paper

**Lifelong learning  
in public administration**

EN

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## 1) Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning, with respect to European employment policy, means encouraging all individuals to adapt to the socio-economic changes of our post-modern industrial society and to find, or retain, their place and purpose in the world of the information era using *their* knowledge and skills. Knowledge, once acquired, gradually loses its worth, while technical innovations, released in an ever-quicker succession, impose a constant need for further training. Lifelong learning thus endeavours, within the narrower sense adopted at European level, to boost the employability of all individuals. Indeed, lifelong learning as a basis for enhanced employability is being used in Europe as a solution to unemployment. It therefore plays a central role in employment relationships in the world of today and, consequently, is of utmost importance to trade unions both at national and European level.<sup>1</sup>

The civil service is affected by the changes brought by the information age *differently*, but no less severely than *the private sector*. The process of digitisation and administrative networking, which has already made considerable progress and continues to advance at a heady rate, is of significant importance in the public sector. Employees in the public sector are faced with pressure to adapt that should not be underestimated. Of course, this does not imply that this pressure is seen in a negative light. Nonetheless, it does require a measure of lifelong learning. In the workplace of today, and in particular within the public sector, lifelong learning is an essential condition for keeping pace with technological developments and the impact they have on work processes. Alongside lifelong learning, other key words heard often in this respect and indeed repeatedly in the sector-specific social dialogue undertaken by European trade unions and general managers in the civil service are "electronic administration" and "quality management".

The term "lifelong learning" is used at European level in particular with respect to issues of demographic change. "Active ageing", together with lifelong learning, is recommended as a measure that could help counter the practice of early retirement that has become so common in many of the Member States at the least over the last twenty years. In view of rising life expectancies, partially longer training times, dramatically falling birth rates in

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<sup>1</sup> In its basic political programme of July 1993, the CESI demanded that "the idea of lifelong continuous qualification should be introduced and implemented as a basic principle applicable to all labour groups."

many countries and the rising debts of the public purse, this trend has resulted in major funding problems within social security systems. Given its focus on continuous, on-the-job further training, lifelong learning *can and should* be used to help to reduce time spent training before entering the labour market as well as to mark a departure *from rigid entitlement systems*. *It is of course necessary to reliably assess successful use of the knowledge acquired and take this into account for the individual's career development. Otherwise, no incentive exists to strive for productivity when implementing and developing decisions and procedures.*

Lifelong learning has been adopted as an essential stepping stone towards achieving the goals set out by the Lisbon European Council in spring 2000 and according to which by 2010 the European Union is 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. *This goal may reveal itself to be worryingly unrealistic given that the logic behind it and its potential outcomes (which are ever further removed from ethics, solidarity and humanity) have not been sufficiently scrutinised.*

## 2) European policies and programmes

According to Articles 149 and 150 of the EC Treaty, the European Union shall contribute to the development of quality education and implement a vocational training policy that supports and supplements the action of the Member States.

On 14 July 2004, the European Commission submitted an integrated programme of action for lifelong learning to the European Council and Parliament as a proposal for a decision.<sup>2</sup> In this programme of action all existing EU programmes related to both general education and professional training are brought together.<sup>3</sup> The Leonardo da Vinci programme covering all aspects of professional training and further training as well as the "programme of Community action to promote organisations active at European level and support specific activities in the area of education and training", which finances a host of activities in the field of professional ongoing training, are worthy of particular note here.

The European Commission drew up this integrated programme of action, which the USSP/CESI greatly welcomes, within the context of the Bologna and Copenhagen processes. The programme of action, which supports the ability of individuals to adapt to change thanks to lifelong learning, also tallies with the Lisbon process.<sup>4</sup> The USSP/CESI feels that stronger cooperation between the Member States with a view to optimising professional training systems and improving mutual recognition of training certificates *and other proven, successful periods of study*, and in particular professional qualifications, will be essential in promoting cohesion and mobility in Europe, *provided greater political legitimacy is conferred upon this process*. The hurdles faced in Europe with respect to recognition of qualifications, in particular in the public sector, are still *too high to enable greater workforce mobility in Europe*.

*Lastly, the momentum created for lifelong learning by a general education system that helps both to forge the individual's identity and is less fleeting in nature should not be*

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<sup>2</sup> Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning , COM(2004) 474 final

<sup>3</sup> The USSP/CESI refers to the position of the CESI of 18 June 2004, DOC/CESI-157/2004, on the communication from the Commission on "The new generation of Community education and training programmes after 2006", COM(2004) 156 final

<sup>4</sup> The CESI submitted a position on the Communication from the Commission "Education and Training 2010, the success of the Lisbon strategy hinges on urgent reforms", COM(2003) 685 final, on 10 March 2004, DOC/CESI-16/2004.

*underestimated. It is this cultural asset which provides people with their ethics, with stable reference points and, on this basis, with the ability to adapt and specialise in professional life.*

The action programme strives to promote modernisation of education and training systems in Europe and to this end a series of measures have already been implemented at European level, including Decision No. 2318/2003/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council adopting a multiannual programme for the effective integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe ("eLearning" programme).<sup>5</sup> Dealing with ICT is a central issue above all for government authorities and in terms of the types of training on offer in this sector. This also applies with respect to the future plans to link up databases across Europe within different administrative areas.

It is essential that government authorities across Europe are also included in the aforementioned programmes in their capacity as employers. It is the view of the USSP/CESI that the administrative authorities of the new Member States in particular must be involved in the measures to be implemented as part of these European programmes. It is clear that added value must be created at European level, *based not only on efficiency, but also on tangible value awareness*, so as to justify the project funding provided by the EU. Cross-boarder further training initiatives in individual administrative areas, or in other words further training partnership projects involving European border regions, are, in the eyes of the USSP/CESI, of particular value and therefore particularly worthy of funding.

The USSP/CESI welcomes the enhanced efforts of the Commission to create greater synergy between existing, separate programmes in the field of training. All initiatives undertaken to promote lifelong learning must aim to reinforce social cohesion within the Union. With respect to the programme of action, the Commission has upheld the principles of both subsidiarity and relativity: the programme does not impinge upon the content and structures of the education and training systems of the Member States. Rather, the express aim of this programme is to improve cooperation between the Member States.

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<sup>5</sup> OJ L 345 of 31.12.2003, p. 9.

It is *hoped* that this in turn will have a positive effect on the mobility of employees who participate in lifelong learning.<sup>6</sup>

The USSP/CESI supports the goal set out by the Barcelona European Council<sup>7</sup> to ensure the education and training systems of the European Union become a worldwide reference in terms of quality by 2010 and would also call to mind in this respect the importance of learning modern languages in Europe.<sup>8</sup> *Indeed there would seem to be some contradiction here between the desired efficiency and the ability to harness our differences as enriching and as a strength.*

### **3) Problems related to ongoing training in public administration**

In theory, it is a recognised fact that further training, or *lifelong* learning, provides added value for organisations. Indeed, let us not forget that the highest-placed civil service employers, within the EU Council of Ministers, support the idea of lifelong learning. Nonetheless, in some of the Member States there is a considerable gap between theory and practice. Further training measures can often be difficult to implement within government authorities and civil services. In many cases, the enthusiasm of employees wishing to participate in ongoing training is thwarted by the formalities related to the time needed off work. *Indeed such time off must not be allowed to disadvantage those who temporarily cover the work done by the training employee.* The USSP/CESI *nonetheless* supports the EGÖD in its call to award all employees the right to participate in further training after a specific number of days of service in each year. *It is of course important to note that a right such as this must not lead to an increase in potentially counter-productive expectations and workloads placed on other staff; rather must serve to increase their motivation.*

Over recent years, in particular in the private sector, there has been a significant trend towards squandering human resources. Further training measures for the long-term employed have been few and far between. Despite considerable professional and general

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Position of the CESI of 28 April 2003 on the mobility of students and apprentices.

<sup>7</sup> Meeting of the European Council of 15/16 March 2003

<sup>8</sup> Position of the CESI of 12 December 2003, DOC/CESI-654/2003 on the Communication from the Commission "Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004 - 2006" COM(2003) 449 final

life experience, older employees are still considered to be excessively expensive, have been replaced by a younger workforce that overwhelmingly comes at a lower price as a result of labour market tensions and have been invited to take advantage of available state subsidies to take early retirement. The pension insurance systems of some of the Member States, whether funded by taxes or contributions, and which are already labouring heavily under the impact of demographic change are thus being placed under additional strain.

As a general rule, no comparable processes can be found within public administrations. But, here, further training is hampered by the aforementioned problem related to leave, a *lack of willingness and ability to pass on useful knowledge effectively*, as well as by tight public budgets. Contrary to private companies, which promote further training in order to enter new markets and prepare for the future, the funding basis in the public sector is often determined by specific budgets that have short validity periods. This makes it very difficult to invest in the future of human resources. Lifelong learning does not only face *constraints related to corporate policies within the private sector*. In the *public sector it also comes up* against, in particular, budgetary limitations, restrictions set out on the basis of principles of hierarchy and the constraints of short-term policies.

#### **4) Trade union solutions**

*Lifelong learning must be considered first and foremost against the backdrop of technological change and demographic development. Within the foreseeable future, demographic change is set to result in a lack of qualified workers in many of the Member States of the EU. The public and private sectors are already competing today for the best talents and the former can only be sure to win if it continues to offer attractive employment opportunities.*

*Possibilities for lifelong learning offered and supported by public-sector employers can enhance the attractiveness of posts in public administration.*

The core problems of further professional training as an essential element in lifelong learning within the public sector lie, as shown above, in issues related to funding and the organisation of time off work. It is the view of the USSP/CESI that management and unions hold to key to solving these problems. These two groups are in a position to seek

out suitable concepts for securing and further developing ongoing training measures within the framework of their partnership structures. Solutions could come in the shape of wage contracts or agreements reached between public service employers and employees. *But any flexibility gained must be available to both sides, i.e. also to the employee.*

One possible solution may come to light in connection with working times. The world of work is undergoing far-reaching changes in general and with respect to parallel modernisation procedures being pushed through by corresponding administrative reforms in particular and this in turn has resulted in greater flexibility in terms of working times and a debate on working times in almost all of the EU Member States. Offsetting overtime against training periods could contribute to meeting with the demands of civil servants for further training.

The USSP/CESI sees further training as a long-term undertaking binding both parties, i.e. the employer and the employee. The working time debate could provide unions and management with an opportunity to earmark greater resources for ongoing training. Working time 'accounts' could be used at least in part in conjunction with further training measures. Of course, this in no way alters the fundamental principle that the employer in each case must pay the costs of all further training, although it does make sense to limit such training to qualifications that are relevant to the post held, albeit without being overly restrictive. An organisation will gain in terms of both mobility and flexibility by ensuring its workforce has a broad range of qualifications and can therefore be deployed in other organisational units if need be. *Furthermore, the USSP/CESI believes that the public sector must be more accessible in order to allow for modern employment trends. Today, changing jobs several times in a career is the rule rather than the exception. Lifelong learning, and the ability to adapt to change that this brings, is one factor that determines accessibility and renders it possible.*

Where systems according to which applications for time off to participate in further training are granted and funded in view of overtime served are already in place, *these should neither be excluded, nor made compulsory.*

It is important to bear in mind that the USSP/CESI views training as valuable per se. Both education and training policy must of course take account of the situation on the labour

market and *focus insofar as possible on the needs of the companies offering the training*, but must not focus exclusively on momentary market needs. Training, in the most comprehensive sense, must be more than a simple tributary of competitiveness. The value of training for the individual concerned is unfortunately losing ground in some current perceptions in favour of what are seen to be more pressing economic concerns, such as those that characterise the Lisbon Process.

The USSP/CESI is firmly convinced that broadly based education and training hand in hand with ongoing further training measures covering both the depth and breadth of all professional development possibilities are the optimum starting point for continued survival on the markets of the future within the private economy and that the necessary level of flexibility and adaptation to new social conditions must also be guaranteed *within the public sector so as to enable state bodies to continue to complete their ever-changing tasks to the satisfaction of the citizen and the democratic community*.

In addition to school and professional training and the formal further education offered by courses of different types, the USSP/CESI feels that organisational arrangements should be optimised so as to ensure that *learning at work* becomes the norm. Within public-sector administrative authorities as well as in the private sector, it is necessary to promote suitable employee guidance structures that create a climate of motivation, willingness to perform and readiness to learn.

There is no doubt that it does not fall to the state to finance professional further training in the private sector. It is the responsibility of individual companies to safeguard their own human capital for the future. Nonetheless, policy-makers must provide the right framework conditions for lifelong learning. In the public sector, naturally, the state is also responsible for providing funding for further training for its own staff. Europe is in a position to make a positive contribution in this respect and set out incentives with respect to good governance. The USSP/CESI would point out that some of the Member States are no longer able to complete this task satisfactorily as a result of budgetary problems.

In order to create dynamic, self-modernising administrative authorities that are able to adapt to new developments over time for the citizens of the EU Member States, the issue of funding must be dealt with first. The public sector is increasingly being subjected to an

endless series of austerity measures. But by implementing such measures, the Member States are gradually dismantling their own infrastructures. Ultra-liberal attitudes coupled with further fragmentation of political parties are fuelling this process.

The frustration experienced by the great majority of civil servants keen to enhance their efficiency when their requests *to learn and take part in* further training are turned down on grounds of lacking personnel resources which makes it impossible for them to take the necessary leave, or again on grounds of budgetary deficits, is far-reaching. The USSP/CESI calls for the implementation of consistent and binding Europe-wide further training plans with guaranteed entitlements for all posts within public administrations. Funding solutions could be found, as already mentioned, within the framework of social dialogue in each Member State. The issue of working time could also play a role here through the use of working time, or training time 'accounts'. It is time for the social partners to act. And Europe must assist them in this through constructive social dialogue.

Europe supports *lifelong* learning. As part of the transition to a digital, knowledge-based economy, Europe is determined to develop its human capital in an optimal manner so as to give a strong boost to growth, competitiveness and employment possibilities, but must *also ensure that within the working environment individuals are not only called upon to compete with one another, rather also to develop a team spirit and work towards common results and goals. A further set of challenges is inextricably linked to this aim:*

A learning, self-modernising public service can act as a pioneer in promoting cohesion, equal opportunities, *democratic lessons* and integration.

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Christian Chapuis

USSP/CESI Chair

Helmut Müllers

CESI Secretary-General