

# **Workshops on VET Teachers and Trainers: Key Actors to Make Lifelong Learning a Reality in Europe**

## **Study-specific background paper 1**

### **“Studies on Trainers in Enterprises (EUROTRAINER)”**

#### ***Background***

The EUROTRAINER study was commissioned in 2006 by the European Commission (DG Education and Culture) and conducted by a project consortium coordinated by the Institute Technology and Education of the University of Bremen, Germany. Its objective was a comprehensive analysis of the situation of trainers in enterprises in 32 European countries with regard to trainers' tasks and responsibilities, competences, continuing professional development and status, and other aspects. Major research objectives the study covered included:

- Identification of central questions and issues related to trainers' work, qualifications, competences, status, professional development and overall situation;
- Identification of areas that require special attention and action;
- Analysis of similarities and differences in the trends of European countries;
- Identification of 'good practice' examples across Europe and their implications at local, regional, national, sectoral and/or European levels.

The study involved a combination of different methodologies to assess recent developments in the area of VET trainers in enterprises across Europe and to formulate guidelines to better support this target group in their work. The methods applied included 1) a literature review and secondary analysis of existing data and materials from different sources, 2) a questionnaire that was distributed among national experts in 30 European countries, 3) semi-structured interviews with national experts (57 in total). For the results of the small-scale survey 280 filled questionnaires were considered. The results of the study were presented in a comparative European report based predominantly on the survey data and in additional country reports. The latter were in the first place based on secondary analysis, but also included results from the qualitative interviews. The outcomes of the survey did not form part of the national-level analysis since the sample sizes by country were too small. Overall, the study produced 29 country reports.

#### ***Key findings***

##### ***Status and role of trainers***

The situation of trainers in enterprises is largely influenced by companies' attitude towards training and human resource development, and by systemic features such as the national tradition of training and the structure of the labour market. The national reports made clear that whether companies value the training they offer and invest in training depends not only on the national tradition and legal frameworks of educational and labour market policies, but also on current economic and overall labour market developments. Where due to the tight economic situation companies are put under pressure for rationalisation, resources for training and the continuing professional development of staff, including trainers, is also limited. The labour market situation in terms of unemployment also has a strong effect on companies' investments in training.

The status of trainers further depends on the status of their work environment in general, such as the sectoral or occupational area in which they work and what status vocational training, the vocational route and skilled workers have in general in society. The reputation and responsibilities of trainers vary a lot according to the location and extent to which the

programmes and qualifications they deliver are perceived as having high or low status. This variability extends beyond organisational policies at the company level, but rather addresses national policies of different areas. In the UK, for instance, government-funded work-based programmes for young people (such as apprenticeships) generally are of a very low status and this also affects the position of trainers in society. In Hungary, the social status of skilled workers is generally low so the vocational route and basic vocational training are also of very low prestige. In Germany and Austria, by contrast, the vocational route has traditionally been well recognised and receives a lot of support at different policy levels.

### *Professional identity*

Most trainers are not recognised as a distinct category, neither in terms of their function nor as an occupational group. In the first place this is true for skilled workers in companies who assume training functions as part of their regular job and thus operate as part-time trainers. But even where full-time trainers exist, they may not be recognised as a particular employee category by legislation or the company. Often the trainer, tutor or instructor is not designated as a *professional profile*, but rather a *functional role*. Employees who assume training functions without obtaining a certain status, recognition or designation as ‘trainer’ or ‘tutor’ are not supported in developing an identity as a trainer. Not surprisingly, part-time trainers typically do not see themselves as trainers but as ordinary workers for whom training constitutes one feature of their regular work. Those trainers will not feel addressed when trainer issues are being raised. For example, courses for trainers will not reach those employees and skilled workers who do not consider themselves as trainers unless management makes them aware of their special role.

The absence of a trainer identity also explains why there exist hardly any interest groups for this occupational category in Europe. As most trainers have a vocational identity as skilled workers that is anchored in their respective vocational background and occupational expertise, some countries pursue a sectoral approach as a way forward to reach out to trainers and training issues at the company level. The sectoral approach is taken, for instance, in the UK with the new Sector Skills Councils or in Denmark where the Trade Committees are in charge of training and the training of trainers.

### *Qualifications and skills*

In most countries trainers in companies are not expected to have a particular trainer qualification, but need to be skilled workers with a certain period of work experience (typically several years). In fact, considerable practical work experience was found to be important in most countries. Thus, countries tend to focus on trainers’ vocational background and expertise as a prerequisite for becoming a trainer, while only a minority of trainers are also expected to have received some pedagogical training. In countries where the IVET tradition is strong (such as in Germany and Austria) certain standards for trainers also apply in terms of providing evidence of their capacity to work with young people, and pedagogical competences typically are a requirement to train young apprentices.

The study revealed that the *vocational competences*, which are in almost all European countries a prerequisite to become a trainer, are well developed among trainers throughout Europe both in terms of quality and quantity. In contrast most trainers lack *pedagogical and social competences* as well as *management competences*. As concerns pedagogical and social competences, most countries have realised the increasing demand for such competences and are struggling with strengthening the pedagogical component in trainers’ basic and further qualification. In terms of management competences, these anticipate the future role of trainers and do not yet form part of trainers’ training agenda in most countries. With a few exceptions, companies and training institutions are not (yet) aware of the changing role of trainers and therefore do not realise that coordinating and management

skills are key competences in the effective organisation and delivery of training.

### *The changing role of trainers*

Essentially, the changing role of trainers seems to refer to two aspects: one is an *internal role re-definition of the trainer* from 'instructor' to 'coach' or 'facilitator', questioning the former authoritarian position of the trainer and requiring new forms of communicative and social competences to engage in team working, mentoring and facilitating new, innovative forms of learning. The other aspect addresses the *changing responsibilities of the trainer* as the nature of the training itself is changing with more elements of project-oriented learning, new aspects of quality assessment in the learning process and more complex coordination with other training facilities and institutions.

The country reports and expert interviews predict that the decreasing number of skilled workers and overall workforce shortages in most European countries combined with efforts towards implementing lifelong learning strategies will *increase the importance and recognition of training staff* in the mid and longer term. While training personnel in large and multinational companies in most contexts have already gained a prominent role this trend is also expected to trickle down to SMEs in the future, even if in many countries the quality of training and skills development are have not yet been acknowledged as key factors that enhance a economic performance.

### *Possible routes of intervention and innovations*

#### ▪ **Quality management and quality assurance**

Introducing quality management and monitoring of training in enterprises is one way forward to address the role, recognition and qualifications of trainers and can be followed via a centralised approach (i.e. introducing quality monitoring as a compulsory element for all companies that provide training) or decentralised, voluntary approach.

#### ▪ **Competitions between companies of good practice examples of training and skills development and support innovative initiatives**

Support companies in establishing good practices of training and introduce competitions, which recognise and take account of the role of trainers. This could be at the level of skills competitions at local, regional and national level. Promising and effective initiatives and practices to enhance the role of trainers and support them in their work should be financially supported.

#### ▪ **Regulation and standardisation**

Some countries seek to enhance trainers' status and work situation through different forms of regulation and standardisation. These can be realised at different levels, affecting in the first place **companies, trainers** or the **training of trainers**. They include:

- i) Establish minimum standards/requirements for **companies who offer training places** to young trainees;
- ii) Establish minimum requirements in terms of **trainers' basic skills and competences** which are considered necessary to effectively deliver training. The standardisation/regulation of trainers' basic skills in some countries is linked to *profiling the training profession* and aiming to establish a *professional profile for trainers* and/or to defining the required basic competences of trainers in relation to the establishment of a *National Qualification Framework*;
- iii) Establish qualification standards /certification for the **continuing training of trainers**.

▪ ***Accreditation of prior (informal) learning***

Most trainers in enterprises have acquired their knowledge, skills and competences through non-formal and on-the-job learning. Accrediting those competences and transforming them into forms of formal qualifications can be a key aspect to enhancing the role of trainers in companies. The formal recognition of prior learning is also regarded important in order to enhance trainers' mobility.

▪ ***Decentralisation of responsibilities for training implementation and policies***

The decentralisation of responsibilities to regional, sectoral and/or local authorities and institutions including chambers of commerce and industries to structure, organise and implement training and the training of trainers is an observed trend in some European countries.

▪ ***Establish or revitalise apprenticeship programmes/Strengthen the practical part of vocational training***

Revitalising, newly establishing or strengthening apprenticeship programmes can be a means to give a stronger role to practice-oriented training in companies and thereby strengthen the trainers' position. An alternative could be strengthening the practice component of vocational training systems that are predominantly school based. Finland, for example, has increased the practice part of vocational programmes through skills demonstrations, generating a stronger work practice orientation of the Finnish vocational education system and fostering the training of trainers and the cooperation between vocational schools and enterprises.

▪ ***Support effective collaboration and partnership between different institutions responsible for training***

Bringing the different stakeholders of training together in order to facilitate cooperation, partnership and networking between the different actors can be an important step forward to making vocational training programmes more effective and strengthening the trainers' role as key actors in this area. This concerns for example the cooperation between vocational schools, enterprises and public administration in the implementation of training and the training of trainers and better cooperation with research institutes.

▪ ***Introduce or integrate training and trainer issues into other policy areas***

Aspects of training, trainers and the training of trainers can be integrated systematically into different policy areas. Some countries address, structure and strengthen the field of training and trainers in enterprises by making it form part and strategically a focus of

1. Lifelong learning policies;
2. Sectoral policies for skills development;
3. Human Resources Development policies at the company and national level;
4. Policies on workplace health and safety regulations with which companies have to comply.

***Trends and recommendations***

There is a growing interest in basic and additional qualifications for trainers and more offers for the academic training of trainers and recognition of their prior (informal) learning. Also, a trend towards the sectoral monitoring of trainers' qualifications can be observed (for example in Romania, Germany, UK, France and Hungary). In addition, the recognition of the overall skills and competence portfolio of trainers extending beyond their formal qualifications is growing. It is expected that trainers will increasingly need to fund and structure their own continuing learning instead of relying on initiatives and support from management or public initiatives. It could further be observed that the continuing learning

of trainers is becoming increasingly individualised.

From the results of the EUROTRAINER study, the following five general recommendations or areas of intervention were derived:

- **Raising awareness:** Raising awareness about the key role training and trainers assume in knowledge economies needs to be prioritised. While raising awareness is important at several levels, such as at the national level, and can be pursued using a variety of available policy frameworks, the study indicates that the most effective way is through awareness raising at the company and management level.
- **Support the continuing professional development of trainers to optimise their skills and competence profile:** This applies to the three levels of competence discussed above that are relevant to trainers, namely, vocational competence, pedagogical and social competences and management competences. Especially the lack of pedagogical, social and management competences that was revealed by the study needs to be overcome.
- **Develop, share and ensure accessibility to effective and innovative training tools:** In all countries it was found that trainers in companies need to be supported in their work with new tools and ideas for delivering innovative training, coaching, training assessment and engaging young people in the training process. The majority of trainers have not been trained and still work quite traditionally, applying instruction methods which are based on their own experience. The development of alternative training materials and their easy distribution, exchange and application should be one priority in the future.
- **Support for SMEs:** In almost all countries large companies often have developed good practice in training and have the resources to employ full-time, well qualified trainers and to support the continuing learning of their training personnel. SMEs, by contrast, were mentioned as disadvantaged at many levels. Very small companies can only offer basic training if they cooperate with other companies. Thus, SMEs would largely benefit from more support for inter-company cooperation in the area of training. In such kinds of exchange, cooperation and knowledge transfer external trainers and training providers should also be involved.
- **Support research and data generation on trainers and training providers:** Research addressing the situation of trainers is largely underdeveloped in all European countries. Due to the lack of recognition of trainers as a distinct occupational group, hardly any statistical data are being generated on trainers. Lack of background information and data makes it extremely difficult to assess the situation of trainers and to predict future developments and needs. Accordingly, more research and data generation on trainers should be promoted, encouraged and supported at the regional, national and European level.