

New Perspectives for Learning - Briefing Paper 55

Towards sustainable employability through participation in continuing vocational education and training

Context of the Research

A critical issue for sustainable socio-economic development of all regions of Europe is the ability to ensure that those who are already in employment continue to have the skills and qualifications that are required for continuous changes in the workplace. This requires adequate and effective policies to be designed, developed and implemented for continuing vocational education and training.

This project aimed at analysing the structural, organisational and individual factors that influence employees' decisions to participate in continuing vocational education and training. It has looked at employees using technical skills from industrial small and medium size enterprises in Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. It has also studied the attitudes of employees using technical skills towards their participation in continuing vocational education and training, including the use of information and communication technology skills.

It has aimed at identifying and understanding the factors that influence the decisions of individuals to participate in continuing vocational education and training offerings and to engage in informal and non-formal learning processes. It has assessed and characterised attitudes of employees using technical skills towards participation in continuing VET programmes and engagement in informal and non-formal learning processes.

Key Conclusions

The conclusions of the project are:

1. Participation in continuing vocational education needs to be linked to changes in thinking about how learning and knowledge is acquired. There is now a greater focus towards competence development and the integration of learning with work as well as through the use of informal and non-formal learning.
2. Most continuing vocational learning takes place outside formal training settings. Even in the contexts where the participation in formal CVET appeared to have a more relevant role than "non-formal" learning for competence development, there were some indicators pointing to the need to consider self-directed learning as an important strategy for skill acquisition.
3. Technical employees have the need not only for updating their technical skills but also for developing further a range of more generic skills, including planning, problem solving, communication, IT and management skills. Learning how to

organise knowledge effectively and apply it appropriately is vital for technical workers' development.

4. Although formal continuing vocational education and training measures play a significant role in the IT sector, more informal ways of learning, such as learning at work, learning through self-study and learning from peers are significant. Typically, learners from the IT sector display traits that are orientated towards advancement, coping and self-reliance.
5. In some countries such as UK and Italy, for instance, individuals' competence development through informal and non-formal learning and learning at the workplace plays a very important role. This can happen incidentally as well as systematically integrated within work processes. The outcome is the development of a skill or a competence and the ability to perform a specific function or activity necessary to fulfil a specific job.
6. In Germany and Greece, participation in continuing vocational education and training is strongly influenced by classical indicators of social background and social roles. However, in Greece participation in continuing vocational education and training is particularly low compared to participation in general education and despite unemployment being very high.
7. In the Italian context, job enlargement, team processes, decreasing hierarchies are phenomenon that can be increasingly observed. Therefore, professional experience is rated high as a fundamental pre-condition to successful continuing vocational education and training. Initial vocational education is seen as only a very partial preparation for working life. In the Italian settings a "dialectical" relationship can be identified between the more "formal" and the more "informal" drivers of learning and knowledge acquisition.
8. Within the British context similar results were found, especially in those contexts where the technical work itself is very challenging, whereby most continuing vocational learning takes place outside formal learning settings. In addition, to the requirement for the development of specific technical skills there is also a need for employees to develop more generic skills, such as planning, problem solving, communication, IT and management skills. To make effective use of the potential for workplace learning it seems particularly important that employees become more self-directed and use personal networks for critical reflection on their role in work processes.

Key Recommendations

1. Policies that are aimed at tackling skills deficits amongst technical workers need to take into account the importance of learning through other methods as well as "formal" learning environments.
2. Policies for increasing participation of employees in small and medium enterprises' in continuing vocational education and training should be broadened towards

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3. There is a need for more research in order to develop policies that are focused upon development of individuals' transversal skills, including learning how to learn, rather than just upon the development of their technical skills.
4. Public training institutions should design and implement policies to promote participation in training and learning amongst not only the technical workers but also the owners and managers of small and medium enterprises in order to enhance both professional development and company development. In particular, there is a need for implementing policies for self-learning through e-learning.
5. The need for hybrid skills or competences should also be reflected in modern occupational profiles as well as in policies and measures of accreditation that could improve the quality of training programmes.
6. Better information needs to be supplied to workers in, and managers of, small and medium enterprises so they are more aware of learning opportunities for meeting skills deficits. This should include opportunities for "learning on the job" enabled through greater co-operation with continuing vocational education and training providers.
7. Policies for promoting quality in continuing vocational education and training providers should be developed and integrate incentives to make employers and employees aware of the role of training for job performance and of the need for self-directed learning in work processes.
8. Future continuing vocational education and training policies should be based on new forms of reciprocal recognition between the training world and the productive world. They have to be based on lifelong learning attitudes, which have to be carefully built through learning and education policies and practices. The policies should acknowledge the close relationship between innovation in companies, learning and more effective learning support.

Further Information

The full title of the project is: "Participation in Continuing Vocational Education and Training: a need for a sustainable employability". Final report December 2004.

The project web site can be accessed at: - <http://www.academus.pt/public/EstudosPlanmnt/ProjCurs/PARTICIPA.doc>

Key Publications

Brown, A., Grollmann, P. and Tutschner, R. (2004) "*Learning while working in the aerospace industry in England and Germany*", Paper produced for the VETNET Symposium: Technical workers' participation in Continuing Vocational Education Training and Learning - Comparisons of practice in England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain,

European Conference on Educational Research (ECER 2004), Crete, September 22nd-25th, 2004

Brown, A. (Ed.) and PARTICIPA Project consortium (2004). *“Participation in Continuing Vocational Education and Training (VET): a need for a sustainable employability. A state of the art report for six European countries”*. ITB-Arbeitspapiere Nr. 38. Bremen: ITB, Universität Bremen.

Brown, A., Grollmann, P., Tutschner, R., and PARTICIPA Project Consortium (2004). *“Participation in Continuing Vocational Education and Training: Results from the Regional and Sectoral Surveys*. ITB-Arbeitspapiere Nr. 51. Bremen: ITB, Universität Bremen.

Brown, A., Grollmann, P., Tutschner, R., Figueira, E. and PARTICIPA Project Consortium (2004). *“Participation in Continuing Vocational Education and Training: Results from the Case Studies and Comparative Conclusions*. Bremen: ITB, Universität Bremen.

Figueira, E., Blázquez, F., and Lucero, M. (2004). *“Participation in Continuing Vocational and Training (PCVET): a need for a sustainable employability in some Regions of Spain and Portugal”*. Paper presented at the VETNET Symposium: Technical workers' participation in Continuing Vocational Education Training and Learning - Comparisons of practice in England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, European Conference on Educational Research (ECER 2004), Crete, September 22nd- 25th, 2004.

Figueira, E., Brown, A., Entonado, F., Alves, M., Tomassini, M., Patiniotis, N., Grollmann, P. (2002). *“Active adults' participation in Continuing Education in Alentejo”* Paper presented in XV World Congress of Sociology, Brisbane – Australia, 7-13 July 2002, Published in the Proceedings.

Figueira, E., Silva, S. and Rainha, L. (2004). *“Participação na Formação Contínua: Uma necessidade para uma empregabilidade sustentável na Região do Alentejo”* Paper presented in V Congresso Português de Sociologia, Braga, Portugal, 12-15 May 2004, Published in the Proceedings.

Kaminioti, O. and Patiniotis, N. (2004) *“Participation in training of technical workers in Greece”*, Paper presented at the VETNET Symposium: Technical workers' participation in Continuing Vocational Education Training and Learning - Comparisons of practice in England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, European Conference on Educational Research (ECER 2004), Crete, September 22nd- 25th, 2004

Tomassini, M. (2004) *“Learning at work in the radio, TV and software production sectors in Rome”*, Paper presented at the VETNET Symposium: Technical workers' participation in Continuing Vocational Education Training and Learning - Comparisons of practice in England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, European Conference on Educational Research (ECER 2004), Crete, 22nd- 25th September, 2004

Research Institutions

Academus - Consultadoria, Formação e Investigação, L.da, Portugal
ITB, Universitaet Bremen, Germany
ICE, University of Extremadura, Spain
Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione dei Lavoratori, Italy
Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick, United Kingdom
University of Patras, Greece

Contact Person

Eduardo Figueira
Academus – Consultadoria, Formação e Investigação L.da.
P.I.T.E – Rua Circular Poente, n.º56
7000- 171 Évora
Portugal

Tel: +351 266 742 672

Fax: +351 266 769 501

Email: edufigueira@academus.pt

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