

# New Perspectives for Learning

Insights from European Union funded Research on Education and Training

Issue Three  
June 2002



## Skills, Mobility and Education Issue

This newsletter is the third in a series of occasional issues highlighting for policy and decision makers, some of the key conclusions and recommendations of projects conducted under the EU Targeted Social Economic Research (TSER) Programme and under the Key Action "Improving the Socio-economic Knowledge Base".

Newsletter published by pjb Associates with funding from the European Commission DG for Research



ISSN 1475-6587

## European Research Aids Understanding of Education, Skills and Mobility Issues

In February 2002 the European Commission produced an Action Plan on "Skills and Mobility". This was the culmination of the process launched in February 2001 by the Commission's Communication on the New European Labour Markets, the conclusions of the Stockholm European Council of March 2001, and the work of the High Level Task Force on Skills and Mobility, which submitted its report to the Commission in December 2001.

The Action Plan builds on the conclusions of the Task Force in order to create a more favourable environment for more open and easily accessible European labour markets by 2005. It also draws on existing initiatives, notably the Communication on 'Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a reality'. In so doing, this action plan aims to put forward a coherent political vision to create opportunities for citizens to move around the Union for educational or professional purposes, and make it easier for them to take advantage of the benefits of European integration, including the European Single Market.

**This Action Plan can draw upon European research conducted under the Targeted Socio-Economic Research (TSER) Programme of the Fourth Framework Programme and the Key Action Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base of the Fifth Framework Programme that support European researchers in the social sciences and humanities and include research on education and training issues. The transition from education to work, immigration, social exclusion, educational change, education governance, funding learning and new methods for education**

**and training are some of the activities that have and are being addressed by the research projects and thematic networks.**

Three fundamental challenges are highlighted in the Skills and Mobility Action Plan to promote the objective of European labour markets being made more open and accessible. Firstly, there is the challenge of inadequate occupational mobility, showing up the need to adapt education and training systems more effectively to the labour market, to boost lifelong learning and skills acquisition (particularly skills in information and communication technologies - ICT), and to improve systems to recognise qualifications and competences. Secondly, low levels of geographic mobility within and between Member States suggest that the benefits of the internal market are not yet fully explored, for example in terms of dealing with skills bottlenecks or

labour market imbalances. Many obstacles to mobility still exist, including deficiencies in language skills, family circumstances, as well as in relation to taxes, pensions, social security and related issues. Furthermore, a declining EU workforce due to demographic changes suggests that immigration of third country nationals would also help satisfy some of the skill needs. Finally, deficiencies in access to and the quality of information on mobility and individual sectors deter many people from considering a job move or particular career choice.

**This newsletter describes completed and ongoing European research that could help policy and decision makers better understand issues relating to skills, mobility and education.**

---

*"need to overcome inadequate occupational mobility by adapting educational systems"*

---

# Contents

<b>European research aids understanding of Education, Skills and Mobility Issues</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Relating Graduate Employment to higher education</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Low Skills: A Problem for Europe</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Differing School to Work Transition in Europe</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Helping Young Adults into Work</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Developing Occupational Mobility in Small Businesses</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Ongoing Projects</b>	<b>8</b>

More details at: <http://www.cordis.lu/improving/socio-economic/home.htm>  
or for Briefing papers and an online discussion of the topics go to:-  
<http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/index.htm>

## Relating Graduate Employment to Higher Education

Recent research has analysed the employment and work of graduates from institutions of higher education in nine European countries. The project collected data on the background and career development of recent graduates, explored European and international dimensions of graduate employment and work, identified early career progress, and attempted to identify the impact of higher education on graduate employment and career success. The project also paid special attention to graduates not finding suitable employment, as traditionally conceived, or facing unemployment.

This was an extensive piece of research involving more than 40,000 graduates from 9 countries in the European Region (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom), one EFTA country (Norway), one of the Central and Eastern European countries in transition (the Czech Republic) and one economically advanced country outside Europe (Japan). This is the first time that such a comparative European database has been produced.

The research found that graduates from institutions of higher education in most Western European countries faced relatively positive employment and job prospects. The common concern of employers and politicians that the expansion of higher education will result in over-education, the researchers believe, fails to recognise that qualification requirements inevitably rise as the knowledge society develops. The benefit of a degree is borne out by many of the findings from the research.

Not surprisingly, one fifth of graduates employed four years after graduation state that they make little professional use of the knowledge acquired in their course of study.

### Further information: -

Project Title: *"Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Europe"*  
(November 2000)

Contact: Prof. Dr. Ulrich Teichler  
Universität Gesamthochschule  
Kassel, Germany

Tel: +49 56 18 04 24 15  
Fax: +49 56 18 04 33 01  
Email:  
[teichler@hochschulforschung.uni-kassel.de](mailto:teichler@hochschulforschung.uni-kassel.de)

or get the Briefing Paper at: -  
<http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/bp10.htm>

*"first European database on the careers of young graduates after leaving higher education"*

ISSN 1475-6587  
(Print version)

ISSN 1475-6595  
(Online version)

## Low Skills: A Problem for Europe

The relentless fall in the demand for low-skilled labour is a matter of serious concern for European society. Since the beginning of the 1990's the gap between the earnings of high skilled and low skilled workers has widened and in many countries the unemployment rate for people without qualifications is four times higher than for university graduates.

Research covering mainly France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Portugal has been conducted into new job skill needs and the low skilled. It focused on the low-skilled individuals who have left full-time education after the completion of their period of compulsory education and has looked at the reasons for the changing situation of the low skilled on the labour market. It also investigated the extent to which employers' demand for the low-skilled was falling and why, and explored the factors affecting the supply of skills, particularly low-skilled adults in the workforce.

The research reached the following conclusions:

1) Despite a sharp decline in the supply of low-skilled individuals on the labour market, their labour market situation has deteriorated over the last decade, as the supply of low-skilled individuals continues to exceed demand at current labour costs.

2) Demand for those with low skills has declined as a result of technical change, which requires more advanced skill levels. Demand for those with low-skills will continue, but only in certain sectors of the economy. Demand will vary from country to country but largely as a function of relative labour costs.

3) The employment sectors in which the low-skilled groups are concentrated are either contracting or not expanding low-skilled employment relative to other skill groups.

4) In most European countries it will take at least a decade to reduce the low-skills group at current rates of progress.

5) Young people should be encouraged to aspire to achieving at least an ISCED 3 (upper secondary) level qualification as a minimum educational requirement for coping with the future demands of the workplace.

6) Employers claim that unskilled jobs now require better communication and social skills, and that many low-skilled individuals lack these skills.

7) A certificate to demonstrate personal qualities, skills and abilities could benefit those who have not achieved traditionally recognised qualifications.

8) Employers do get a high return on investment in work-based training, but incentives for the low-skilled group to participate in workplace training are insufficient.

9) Wage subsidies for older low-skilled workers who are soon to reach retirement age may be necessary to counteract labour market exclusion.

10) A number of current policy failures in education and training were identified.

The study makes the key recommendation that a 'minimum learning platform' should be established, which would set an agreed level of knowledge, skills, and personal qualities that all individuals would be entitled to and expected to acquire.

### Further information: -

Project Title: "New Job Skill Needs and the Low-Skilled" - 1996-1999.

Contact: Dr Hilary Steedman, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 207 955 7789  
Fax: +44 207 955 6971  
Email: h.steedman@lse.ac.uk

or get the Briefing Paper at: -  
<http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/bp13.htm>

*"will take at least a decade to reduce the low-skills group at current rates of progress"*

*"unskilled jobs now require better communication and social skills"*

*"supply of low-skilled individuals on the labour market, continues to exceed demand at current labour costs"*

## Differing School to Work Transitions in Europe

*“in ‘vocational’ systems, young people tend to make a smoother transition into the labour market”*

*“those in southern European countries find it more difficult to achieve a stable employment position”*

*“early educational failure has serious negative consequences for young people across all systems”*

Recent decades have witnessed rapid educational expansion and labour market changes across European countries. Such changes have had the greatest impact on those entering the labour market for the first time. As a result, the period of transition from school to work has become more prolonged and less predictable. It is therefore crucial that policy-makers understand the way in which education, training and labour market systems interact to shape the transition process in modern Europe.

In order to help this understanding, research has been conducted with the aim to develop a more comprehensive conceptual framework of school to work transitions in different national contexts and to apply this framework to the empirical analysis of transition processes across European countries. The research utilised two complementary data sources for these analyses: the European Community Labour Force Survey and integrated databases based on national school leavers’ surveys in France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden.

It was found that transition processes and outcomes vary significantly across European countries with three broad types of national system being identified. There were countries with extensive vocational training systems at upper secondary level, linked to occupational labour markets such as Germany and the Netherlands. Other countries have more general educational systems with weaker institutional linkages to the labour market like Ireland. And southern European countries had less vocational specialisation and lower overall attainment than the other groups.

Each of these three systems has distinctive patterns of labour market integration among young people. In ‘vocational’ systems, young

people tend to make a smoother transition into the labour market while those in southern European countries find it more difficult to achieve a stable employment position.

Across European countries, educational level is highly predictive of transition outcomes; those with lower levels of education have higher unemployment risks and greater chances of entering low skilled, lower status and/or temporary jobs. Those who have taken part in vocational education/training (especially apprenticeships) tend to have a smoother transition into their first job and achieve more stable employment. Other dimensions of education are also significant with examination grades having a greater effect in more general education systems.

---

*“diverse systems require diverse interventions”*

---

Transition outcomes are found to vary by gender, social class background and national origin. There is no evidence that such differences have become less important in shaping the transition process over time. Early educational failure has serious negative consequences for young people across all systems.

The following key recommendations were made:

- 1) Given the diversity in education, training and labour market systems across Europe, the same policy interventions are unlikely to be equally effective in different contexts. However, early educational failure has serious negative consequences for young people across all systems. There is a need, therefore, for policy intervention to reduce such failure and/or to provide alternative routes to skill acquisitions for young people.
- 2) There is also a need to monitor differences among groups of young people in terms of gender, social class and ethnicity and pursue policies to address these inequalities.
- 3) The project highlighted a number of areas which should be prioritised in future research.
- 4) An overall recommendation is that a European-wide longitudinal survey should be initiated, covering young people from around

*Continued on Page 5*

## Helping Young Adults into Work

In the rapidly changing conditions of a “globalising” labour market, changes will be needed in the way professional intervention enhances social and economic participation for unemployed young people. This is particularly so in an era of the widening of employment choices and empowerment opportunities for unemployed 18-25 year olds.

Through research conducted in six European countries, - Portugal, Germany, Denmark, England, Holland and Flanders/Belgium - the limitations and opportunities resulting from EU policies in education, training and guidance programmes have been explored.

### *Continued from Page 4*

the age of fifteen and following them over a ten-year period.

5) Alternatively, a mechanism should be put in place to encourage agreement on a ‘best practice’ template to facilitate the partial harmonisation of existing transition surveys.

6) In addition, the use of, and access to, the transitions module of the Labour Force Survey should be enhanced.

### **Further information: -**

Project Title: “A Comparative Analysis of Transitions from Education to Work in Europe” (January 2001)

Contact: Dr Emer Smyth, Senior Research Officer, Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin, Ireland

Tel: +353 1 667 1525  
Fax: +353 1 668 6231  
Email: emer.smyth@esri.ie

or get the Briefing Paper at: -  
<http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/bp16.htm>

The research found that young adults have a variety of diverse and individualized views and attitudes when it comes to work. These can be loosely identified as: -

a) Traditional wage earner identity - see a long-term job as a way of gaining money and self-respect.

b) Eroding wage earner identity - want a long-term job but have a low endurance and rarely stay in work and education for a significant length of time.

c) Abrupt and disorientated wage earner identity - confused about the purpose of work and unsure about what they want from it.

d) New labour identity urged by desire and self-fulfilment - consider job fulfilment is more important than the wage.

These identities often clash with those held by professionals, projects and the labour market. Therefore, young adults need greater choices when meeting with projects, professionals and the labour market, in order to shape “working identities” that can match current developments on the labour market. Professionals also need to pay attention to these different “working identities” and plan trajectories and training in co-operation with each individual’s working identities.

In addition, young adults need the capacity to weigh up the risks and uncertainties of different jobs, and need to be valued as equal and competent decision-makers, who have a right to control their own career. Disadvantaged low qualified young adults also need help facing existing barriers, like bottleneck policies; labour market traps; growing demands for flexibility and the small number of boring and badly paid jobs.

There are two big groups needing extra focus and support. Young people in need of basic support like emotional binding, orientation, rules and continuity would benefit greatly from long-term projects, individual counselling and finance. It is likely such projects would pay off financially and biographically in the long run. Support is also needed for young people experiencing societal discrimination because of race and/or gender need projects that concentrate on sexual or racial discrimination.

*“work - young adults have a variety of diverse and individualized views and attitudes”*

*“work identities often clash with those held by professionals, projects and the labour market”*

*“young adults need the capacity to weigh up the risks and uncertainties of different jobs, and need to be valued as equal and competent decision-makers, who have a right to control their own career”*

*Continued on Page 6*

*“there are problems with current professional intervention as it focuses on “adapting” low qualified young adults to the needs and demands of the labour market”*

*“Performance indicators and target pressures also force professionals to stick to traditional methods of education, training and guidance”*

For all groups, professionals have to establish an emotional binding with the young adults to ensure the young adults stay in projects and remain interested in learning. However, there are problems with current professional intervention as it focuses on “adapting” low qualified young adults to the needs and demands of the labour market, which excludes any participation from unemployed youths and can reinforce their disadvantaged position. Performance indicators and target pressures also force professionals to stick to traditional methods of education, training and guidance. This removes the possibility of working intuitively.

It was recommended that policy should concentrate on diverse learning programmes that support alternative initiatives to gain contact with the most marginalized group of “hard-to-help” young adults. Professionals need to work with young adults to help individuals understand and critically reflect on their own situation and connect it in a meaningful way to the reality of the labour market. Young people and professionals together should continually interpret and reinterpret the possibilities and limitations of the young person’s biography and the reality of the labour market.

**“policy should concentrate on diverse learning programmes that support alternative initiatives”**

Professionals should also be paid accordingly and resources for further training and supervision are required. Policy must offer some freedom for education, training and guidance professionals to explore the possibilities and difficulties of working in an interpretive way and promote an exchange of know-how and experience between professionals on both organisational and inter-organisational levels. This know-how should also be made explicit and refined, and translated into flexible ‘guidelines’ that are continuously reviewed.

Policy should also create the possibility for practitioners to constantly gain insights into general changes in the “working identities” of young adults today. A theoretical knowledge of such

changes is crucial to the future integration of young adults at risk.

Concerted efforts should be made to provide flexible environments that allow approaches to be adapted to individual clients; these include flexible procedures and instruments. Therefore, policy needs to take into account both the needs and demands of the labour market, and the needs and competencies of unemployed young people.

Policy makers need to balance between social and economic concerns that are assessed through indicators that clearly express the social output of economical policies. Education, training and guidance initiatives should empower young adults to use their own initiatives to find their own options. Exploration into the factors that keep someone alienated and excluded is needed. Starting with the assumption that people are not lacking abilities but choose how and where they use their abilities.

**Further information: -**

Project Title: *“Enhancing the participation of young adults in economic and social processes: Balancing instrumental, social and biographical competences in post-school education and training”*  
(December 2000)

Contact: Dr Danny Wildemeersch,  
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven,  
Belgium

Tel: +32 16 326205  
Fax: +32 16 326211  
danny.wildemeersch@ped.kuleuven.ac.be

or get the Briefing Paper at: -  
<http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/bp14.htm>

## Developing Occupational Mobility in Small Businesses

Considerable attention is now being given to the importance of European small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to increase their competitiveness and contribute to the employment generation within an increasingly globalised context. However, this depends on their ability to combine flexible production with the continual innovation of products and production processes. In order to achieve this, enterprises must learn to compete in a fast changing environment thus employees need to have occupational mobility in order to adapt quickly to the needs of their company.

Research, involving twenty-four small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Austria, Italy, Norway and Spain was conducted with the aim of identifying the learning processes that lead to increased competitiveness of SMEs. The work also looked at how these learning processes are shaped in different European cultural contexts. A number of observations were made and conclusions reached: -

1) It was found that SMEs find training courses too broad in scope, failing to meet their specialised needs. This issue is especially important for new employees with a need for specific technical knowledge/skills.

2) SMEs have low expertise in accessing training funds resulting in a lack of specialised training courses.

3) Universities and training centres do not always meet the training needs for new skills and knowledge derived from innovative processes.

4) Managers in some SMEs tend to work on many operational issues and do not plan their training needs.

5) Training serves not only to acquire new skills/knowledge, but also as a means of widening their network of market specialists.

6) There is an increasing need for multi-skilled employees.

7) Many SMEs appreciate language and basic software training (commodity training).

8) Projects involving customers, companies and universities foster innovation in SMEs.

9) Entrepreneurs with low technical skills use their network of colleagues and university faculty to evaluate company risk.

10) Some managers and entrepreneurs have stereotyped ideas about training courses. Lack of contextualization, cost and time lag before results appear contribute to this stereotyping.

11) The involvement of universities and research centres helps to create, store and disseminate knowledge, while SMEs bring flexibility, market orientation and creativity to foster innovation.

12) There is a risk that valuable, specialised knowledge will be lost if firms fail to get sufficient funding.

13) Some of the enterprises have had problems in accessing a skilled labour force.

14) Some SMEs are not aware of EU institution efforts to cut down red tape for improved interaction with local/regional/national/EU administrations.

15) Trust in markets facilitates the development of knowledge, the relationship among organisations and individuals and the creation of networks that facilitate knowledge storage.

16) SMEs acquire innovative ideas through trade fairs.

*Continued on Page 8*

### Further information: -

Project Title: *"Small Business Training and Competitiveness: Building Case Studies in Different European Cultural Contexts"* (2001)

Contact: Prof. Alfons Sauquet,  
Escuela Superior de Administración  
y Dirección de Empresas  
Departamento de Dirección de  
Recursos Humanos, Barcelona,  
Spain

Tel: +34 93 280 61 62  
Fax: +34 93 204 81 05  
Email: sauquet@esade.es

or get the Briefing Paper at: -  
<http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/bp26.htm>

*"enterprises must learn to compete in a fast changing environment"*

*"small and medium enterprises find training courses too broad in scope, failing to meet their specialised needs"*

*"involvement of universities and research centres helps to create, store and disseminate knowledge, while SMEs bring flexibility, market orientation and creativity to foster innovation"*

*“programmes that combine multi-functional skills should be promoted for SMEs in innovative markets with new processes”*

*Continued from Page 7*

Programmes that combine multi-functional skills should be promoted for SMEs in innovative markets with new processes. In SMEs with low training levels, there is a need to promote courses that maximise network opportunities. Also, promote “commodity training” since it increases the future employability of workers.

There should be support for collaborative projects involving customers, SMEs and Universities in order to create “relational capital” There should also be University-level exchange programmes between technical and business schools which focus on helping entrepreneurs in their start-up phase, in order to increase likelihood of their business surviving and becoming successful. Business schools and universities should mentor entrepreneurs,

with an emphasis on personalised, practical education in the implementation of start-up business plans.

It was also felt that the development of venture capital funding markets for high tech SMEs should be supported as a way to increase funding possibilities and also to foster knowledge creation. There should also be the creation of the contextual conditions to ensure trust in market relationships to facilitate the development of knowledge, the relationship among organisations and individuals and the creation of networks with strong knowledge storage capabilities. In addition there is a need to promote the role of “pioneering clients” among public institutions to facilitate access to financial assistance and consulting services to SMEs.

These are ongoing projects which have been funded under the Key Action “*Improving the Socio-economic Knowledge Base*” of the Fifth Framework Programme.

Further details can be found at: - <http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/ongoing.htm>

#### **Ongoing Projects**

Education & Training for Governance & Active Citizenship in Europe: Analysis of Adult Learning & Design of Formal, Non-Formal & Informal Educational Intervention Strategies

Gender and Qualification. Transcending gendered features of key qualifications for improving options for career choice and enhancing human resource potential

The Education of the Gypsy Childhood in Europe

Ways of Organisational Learning in the Chemical Industry and their Impact on Vocational Education and Training

Children In Communication About Migration

The role of language in mobilisation processes

Students as “Journeymen” between communities of Higher Education and Work

Youth Policy and Participation. The role of participation and informal learning in the transition of young people to the labour market. A comparative analysis in 10 European regions

Employment and Women’s Studies: The Impact of Women’s Studies Training on Women’s Employment in Europe

Legal Framework of New Governance and Modern Policy in Education throughout Europe

European Network on Human Mobility

Participation in Continuing Vocational education and training: a need for a sustainable employability

Towards the European Society: challenges for education and training policies arising from the European integration and enlargement

Higher education reform network: a collaborative partnership to explore, disseminate and advise on the university of tomorrow in relation to societal change and lifelong learning needs and in the context of European enlargement