

## **ETUC resolution: Supporting Workplace Learning to tackle unemployment in Europe**

Adopted at the meeting of the Executive Committee on 22-23 October 2013

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Workplace learning is defined as activities to promote learning and training and personal development for workers in the workplace. It provides workers with an opportunity to develop as active citizens, to acquire and update their knowledge, skills and competences and to improve their employability. Equally it provides employers with skilled workers to boost competitiveness, develop innovation and increase productivity. Workplace learning is not to be confused with work-based learning, which is generally associated with apprenticeships for young people and dual systems of vocational training as part of the transition from school to the labour market. Workplace learning is for those already in work and contributes to ensuring that they remain so.

Because of the crisis and high unemployment levels in several Member States, particularly among young people, the current European narrative on education and training is neglecting the workplace dimension and is mainly focusing on work-based learning and the transition from school to the labour market.

The current debate on youth unemployment has led European institutions and social partners to launch important initiatives, such as the Youth Employment Initiative and the Youth Guarantee, as well as the European Alliance for Apprenticeship. In the meantime the attention given to issues such as lifelong learning, continuous training and workplace learning has decreased, although these policies are fundamental to tackling and preventing long-term and adult unemployment, as well as managing restructuring, dismissals and the transition to a green economy.

For these reasons the current European narrative, which currently mainly focuses on work-based learning and the transition from education and training to the labour market, should be revised, implemented, and given greater balance by paying more attention to workplace learning. Adequate research should be carried out at all levels, particularly by governments, to examine market trends across all spheres of industry and services, in order to design more and higher quality work-place training activities.

### **Recent trade union action in relation to workplace learning**

The ETUC has recently supported a 1-year European project, developed by Unionlearn, the Education Department of the TUC (UK), in cooperation with DGB (Germany), FNV Format (the Netherlands), CITUB (Bulgaria), LO-S (Sweden), UIL (Italy), and ZNP (Poland), entitled "Building Trade Union Support for Workplace Learning throughout Europe".

The project has compiled a complete picture of the existing trade union and social partners' activities in the field of workplace learning in the countries involved.

The overall objective of the project was to increase the capacity of trade unions at the European and national levels, so that they are in a better position to encourage, advise and guide workers in making informed choices as regards the take-up of education and training opportunities, and to engage with employers, by social dialogue and collective bargaining, in a process to improve workplace learning and to enhance workers' skills.

The final recommendations and future strategy priorities were agreed on 25 June 2013 in the final conference of the project in London, in the framework of the so-called London Manifesto for Workplace Learning. The Manifesto summarizes the results of the project

and provides recommendations to the project partners on improving workplace learning in Europe; it provided orientation as a basis for the present resolution.

### **Implementation of Workplace Learning throughout Europe: actors and tools**

Many different actors have a shared interest in and responsibility for the successful provision of workplace learning:

- Workers themselves, who put in the time and the effort to participate in the learning process, and companies that can improve their productivity and competitiveness through continuing training;
- Training centres and schools that provide appropriate training;
- Governments that create the legal and operational frameworks for training;
- The key to success the social partners at the national or regional levels – who, together with training centres and governmental agencies, design and deliver relevant programmes;
- Social partners at the workplace level, employers who value training and provide the access and funding required to enable it to take place, and trade unions and workplace representatives who motivate workers and provide them with guidance and support throughout the process.

Clearly, successful workplace learning requires adequate funding: from the employer; from governmental training funds at the regional or national levels; from funds managed by social partner organisations, mutually or separately; from the European Social Fund; or from a combination of these different sources.

To improve the overall framework for workplace learning throughout Europe, there are a several steps for the European social partners to take:

- There is a need to mobilise the major actors concerned: the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the representative employers' organisations, BusinessEurope, the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME) and the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services (CEEP); and the European Commission;
- Their aim should be to improve the quality of workplace learning within the context of Social Dialogue; to launch a European Alliance for Workplace Learning, modelled on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships; and to push the European Commission to launch a Recommendation on Workplace Learning in Europe, modelled on the Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning;
- There is also a need to mobilise the members of the ETUC and to strengthen their ability to support workplace learning throughout Europe. For this reason the ETUC will create networks for workplace learning within the ETUC Lifelong Learning Working Group which will provide opportunities for exchanging information and experience on workplace learning initiatives and advise on ways to obtain funds for training and for capacity-building within its own movement.

### **Commitments for future ETUC work at the European level**

- Engage in Social Dialogue with employers' representatives so as to reinforce the contribution that trade unions can make to the general enhancement of workers' skills throughout Europe and to launch a European Alliance for Workplace Learning;
- Lobby the European institutions in order to produce a Recommendation which would establish certain minimum rights for trade union support for workplace learning;
- Ensure that trade unions are involved as full partners at all levels of the governance structures of the European Social Fund in all Member States, with the aim of funding workplace learning among the other ESF's objectives;
- Ensure that part of the resources of the European Social Fund are earmarked to support workplace learning and to produce capacity-building tools advising trade unions on how they can access ESF funds for workplace learning;
- Call on the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) to investigate examples of good workplace learning practice;
- Mobilise the ETUC Lifelong Learning working group to provide support for workplace learning and to raise awareness of the benefits that it can bring to all workers;
- Set up further projects to highlight the role that trade unionists play in supporting workplace learning, with an emphasis on the exchange of best practices and the establishment of online networks.

#### **Recommendations for future trade union work at the national level**

- Continue to investigate ways in which trade unions support workplace learning;
- Engage in projects to improve trade union support for workplace learning;
- Raise awareness about the importance of collective bargaining as a tool to develop and establish better regulations about workplace learning, continuous training and lifelong learning
- Continue to raise awareness of the importance of workplace learning, with workers, employers and union leaders, and of the role that trade unions are playing to support it;
- Campaign to provide funding for workplace learning and also for trade unions so that they can continue to support workplace learning;
- Campaign to ensure that all workers, full-time and part-time, have access and financial support to participate in workplace learning;
- Train trade union representatives so that they have the knowledge and skills to support workplace learning.