

**JOINT STATEMENT OF EURELECTRIC, EMCEF AND EPSU AND FINAL REPORT ON
THE STUDY ON LIFE-LONG LEARNING IN THE ELECTRICITY SECTOR**

Introduction

In the race towards recruiting and retaining the best available workforce in the European electricity industry, continuous training of staff and a proper matching of the skills of workers with the demands of a changing environment are of the utmost importance. In order to preserve itself as an attractive employer, and to maintain its competitiveness, the electricity sector must find suitable ways to ensure that its personnel retains its skills at an appropriate level.

Training policy is an issue which is discussed at the European-level electricity sector social dialogue. This dialogue brings together the social partners EURELECTRIC, representing employers, and EMCEF and EPSU, representing employees.

During 2001, the electricity sector social partners decided to launch a number of common activities to find out more about the area of skills and training of the workforce, in order to reflect on the challenges the industry will face for the future.

The concept of life-long learning was seen as an interesting issue to investigate. Life-long learning is a key tool for the training policies of the electricity sector. It allows company specific policies to be used to tackle the issue of continuous training of staff.

In order to concretise this growing interest, the social partners decided to launch a study on Life-Long learning in the electricity sector. The study was undertaken as a survey among electricity companies in several countries. As a joint effort, the partners drafted a questionnaire to investigate the various aspects of life-long learning and the associated policies. The questionnaire was sent to European electricity companies and answers were collected during 2002. The analysis of the questionnaires was outsourced to Syndex SA, a French labour relations consultancy.

Conclusions

In a separate process, the social partners have drawn conclusions for the future on the basis of the study. According to those conclusions the main outcomes of the study are.

There is agreement on the importance of life-long learning between the social partners. The following statement was widely supported:

“All learning "from cradle to grave", from the early years through adult life - including the Third age - encompassing a common core of knowledge and skills which goes beyond basic numeracy and literacy. Not only about employment-related skills, but also about updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and understanding throughout life. All kinds of learning, including non-formal, such as acquiring vocational skills at the workplace or language skills from participating in a

study circle organised by an NGO and informal skills, such as learning how to play football or an instrument together with friends. Therefore, lifelong learning can be defined as "all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence".

- Changes in the electricity sector (liberalization, competition, introduction of new technologies, etc) have produced changes which have impacted on employees.. Transformation is seen in emerging skill gaps between qualifications of employees and new needs of the companies.

Not only older employee populations are faced with this problem since the younger employee population have fewer professional skills; and the female population are not often encouraged by formal equal opportunities policies.

The skills gaps, focus – among other things – on the issue of training in a new broader framework.

- One other conclusion is that specifically concerning the older part of the employee population. Less than 30 percent of the companies in the survey have special programmes to encourage the older employee population to get involved in mobility programmes.

From the Ecotec survey we have learned, that up until now, companies in the sector have managed staff reductions in a socially responsible manner. The social partners agree that restructuring in the European Union electricity industry should continue to take place with respect for social standards as laid down in relevant legislation and collective agreements and be realised in a socially responsible manner. This strategy has in some countries been supported by government policies concerning solutions involving early or partial retirement.

It is clear that in the future there will be far less resources to support early retirement. This is due to the high costs resulting from the evolution of the age pyramid. The strategy might also contribute to an erosion of certain skills and expertise with workers leaving the sector.

The question of internal and external mobility of older employees is therefore becoming a major challenge for companies in the sector and requires investment supporting mobility through programmes for skills and learning both formal, non-formal and informal. This type of investment supports not only mobility but also employment security.

- The impact of change and restructuring in the European electricity sector on the social and professional situation of women is not clearly identified although there is a joint study: “The Impact of Restructuring on Women in the Electricity Industry (1998)”

The industrial electricity sector is marked by a very low level of female employment and this rate does not seem to have changed for several years. The professional sector is still heavily based on the inequality of the sexes, women being employed mainly in HR management, administration, secretarial and sales.

The facts show that men still have easier access than women to internal and external training. In many companies in the sector there is a growing awareness that the under-representation of female employees could adversely affect the performance of the industry, particularly as in the near future, electricity companies will be faced with a growing need to adapt to the increasing pressures of competition when it comes to recruitment.

- The study indicates that young workers entering the industry while being well qualified in certain respects, often lack skills in areas important for the electricity companies. The opportunities for young workers to commence as apprentices remain important. Not many collective and other agreements deal with this however. A effort of the social partners to examine this is recommended.
- The results of the study show that there is a lot of good practice at the European level on the implementation of action for lifelong learning and training. Particularly on the following main aspects: optimisation of access conditions for the target populations to lifelong education and training and the development of efficient teaching and training methods. A genuine interest is shown from all parties in improving the status, quality and recognition of learning on the job and in the community. There is also an awareness of the need to support the introduction of new learning methods.

It is necessary to compensate more theoretical methods of teaching and training through the acquisition of skills, making it possible to act with full knowledge in their professional as well as social and personal lives.

Learning is first of all an interactive, group activity, in which learners take personal responsibility for the gaining of knowledge, with the support of resource providers; teachers, instructors or colleagues. This type of learning is nothing new, but its appropriateness and value remain underestimated.

According to the study training has commenced in a minority of companies through a process of collective agreement. . There is a clear task for companies together with local trade unions to consider training and life-long learning in their joint approaches to the challenges facing the sector.

Recommendations:

On the basis of the study report and the above conclusions the social partners will continue to monitor the needs for life-long learning. EURELECTRIC, EMCEF and EPSU are, for the benefit of companies and employees, committed to explore jointly ways to provide information concerning those needs. As a part of those efforts the social partners propose a joint workshop to explore the needs for life-long learning focusing on learning from good practices.

EPSU, EMCEF and EURELECTRIC recommend that the social partners at local, sectoral and national level explore what is possible to improve situation and establish further frameworks on training and life-long learning.

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